

= Ravenloft ( module ) =

Ravenloft is an adventure module for the Dungeons & Dragons ( D & D ) fantasy role @-@ playing game . The American game publishing company TSR , Inc. released it as a standalone adventure booklet in 1983 for use with the first edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game . It was written by Tracy and Laura Hickman , and includes art by Clyde Caldwell with maps by David Sutherland III . The plot of Ravenloft focuses on the villain Strahd von Zarovich , a vampire who pines for his lost love . Various story elements , including Strahd 's motivation and the locations of magical weapons , are randomly determined by drawing cards . The player characters attempt to defeat Strahd and , if successful , the adventure ends .

The Hickmans began work on Ravenloft in the late 1970s , intent on creating a frightening portrait of a vampire in a setting that combined Gothic horror with the D & D game system . They play @-@ tested the adventure with a group of players each Halloween for five years before it was published . Strahd has since appeared in a number of D & D accessories and novels . The module has inspired numerous revisions and adaptations , including a campaign setting of the same name and a sequel . In 1999 , on the 25th anniversary of Dungeons & Dragons , two commemorative versions of Ravenloft were released .

Ravenloft has won one award , been included on two " best of " lists , and was generally well received by critics of its era . In 1984 , it won the Strategists ' Club Award for Outstanding Play Aid , and it appeared second in Dungeon magazine 's list of the top 30 D & D adventures . Several reviewers liked the included maps , and White Dwarf magazine gave it 8 out of 10 overall . A Dragon magazine review praised the module , but felt that the D & D elements detracted from the Gothic horror atmosphere .

= = Plot = =

The story involves a party of player characters ( PCs ) who travel to the land of Barovia , a small nation surrounded by a deadly magical fog . The master of nearby Castle Ravenloft , Count Strahd von Zarovich , tyrannically rules the country , and a prologue explains that the residents must barricade their doors each night to avoid attacks by Strahd and his minions . The Burgomaster 's mansion is the focus of these attacks , and , for reasons that are not initially explained , Strahd is after the Burgomaster 's adopted daughter , Irenea Kolyana .

Before play begins , the Dungeon Master ( or DM , the player who organizes and directs the game play ) randomly draws five cards from a deck of six . Two of these cards determine the locations of two magical weapons useful in defeating Strahd : the Holy Symbol and the Sunsword . The next two cards determine the locations of Strahd and the Tome of Strahd , a book that details Strahd 's long @-@ ago unrequited love . In this work , it is revealed that Strahd had fallen in love with a young girl , who in turn loved his younger brother . Strahd blamed his age for the rejection , and made a pact with evil powers to live forever . He then slew his brother , but the young girl killed herself in response , and Strahd found that he had become a vampire . All six possible locations are inside Castle Ravenloft .

The fifth and final card selected determines Strahd 's motivation . There are four possible motivations for Strahd . He may want to replace one of the PCs and attempt to turn the character into a vampire and take on that character 's form . He may desire the love of Irenea , whose appearance matches that of his lost love , Tatyana . Using mind control , Strahd will try to force a PC to attack Irenea and gain her love by " saving " her from the situation he created . Strahd may also want to create an evil magic item , or destroy the Sunsword . If , during play , the party 's fortune is told at the gypsy camp in Barovia , the random elements are altered to match the cards drawn by the gypsy .

As the party journeys through Barovia and the castle , the game play is guided using 12 maps with corresponding sections in the book 's body guide . Example maps and sections include the Lands of Barovia , the Court of the Count , five entries for each level of the Spires of Ravenloft , and the Dungeons and Catacombs . Each location contains treasure and adversaries , including zombies ,

wolves , ghouls , ghosts , and other creatures . The main objective of the game is to destroy Count Strahd . The DM is instructed to play the vampire intelligently , and to keep him alive as long as possible , making him flee when necessary . In an optional epilogue , Ireena is reunited with her lover . They leave the " mortal world " as Ireena says , " Through these many centuries we have played out the tragedy of our lives . "

= = Publication background = =

Tracy Hickman and Laura Curtis married in 1977 . Soon after , while living in Provo , Utah , they wrote the adventures Pharaoh and Ravenloft . When they began work on Ravenloft , they felt the vampire archetype had become overused , trite , and mundane , and decided to create a frightening version of the creature for the module . They play @-@ tested it with a group of players every Halloween for five years before it was published in 1983 by TSR . The plot combined elements of the horror genre with Dungeons & Dragons conventions for the first time . At the time of Ravenloft 's release , each Dungeons & Dragons module was marked with an alphanumeric code indicating the series to which it belonged . Ravenloft was labeled I6 : the sixth in a series of intermediate @-@ level modules for the first edition of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons ( AD & D ) . It consisted of a 32 @-@ page book , with separate maps that detailed locations in the adventure scenario .

Tracy Hickman once ran the adventure as a Dungeon Master . According to him , the experience was like an old scary movie , with " the obligatory castle high on the craggy cliff with the wolves howling in the woods . Sure enough , the vampire was up there in the castle . To most of the players it seemed like a straight forward task : find the vampire and kill him . " One player discovered Strahd 's backstory and was so affected by it that when it came time to kill the vampire at the end of the adventure , despite having a sword capable of dispatching Strahd , he refused , and his companions were forced to complete the task . Afterwards , Hickman asked him why . " He deserved to die better than that , " his friend said , to which Hickman replied " Yes [ ... ] But that is how it is with people who fall from greatness . He chose his end when he first chose to kill his brother . How could it be any different ? "

According to a Wizards of the Coast article , Strahd has become one of the most infamous and well @-@ known villains in the Dungeons & Dragons game , and he has appeared in a number of novels and rulebooks since his debut in Ravenloft . In an introduction to an online edition of Ravenloft II , author John D. Rateliff described Strahd as a then @-@ unusual fusion of a monster with the abilities of a player character class ; that is , a vampire magic @-@ user . This design enables him to combine his own powers with the surrounding environment , making him a difficult opponent to defeat .

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Dungeons & Dragons game in 1999 , two additional versions of the Ravenloft module were released . The first was a reprinting of the original adventure made available in the Dungeons & Dragons Silver Anniversary Collector 's Edition boxed set , with slight modifications to make it distinguishable from the original ( for collecting purposes ) . The second was the silver anniversary edition of Ravenloft that was adapted for use with the second edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons ( Wizards of the Coast periodically alters the rules of Dungeons & Dragons and releases a new version ) .

= = = Ravenloft II : The House on Gryphon Hill = = =

Ravenloft 's success led to a sequel in 1986 titled Ravenloft II : The House on Gryphon Hill . Although Tracy Hickman was credited in Ravenloft II , he had left TSR before the module was completed . The writing was done by David " Zeb " Cook , Jeff Grubb , Harold Johnson , and Douglas Niles , following the Hickmans ' outline . Each writer pursued a different section of the module in order to meet the deadline . Clyde Caldwell , who had done all of the art for the original Ravenloft module , provided the cover , but interior art was done by Jeff Easley . The adventure is designed for first edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons characters of levels 8 ? 10 . The adventure was 48 pages , and included a large color map and an outer folder . It shared structural

elements with the original , including variable NPC goals and variable locations for key objects , so that Gryphon Hill plays differently each time . The module 's plot features an artifact known as The Apparatus that switches a monster 's personality with that of an ordinary towns person ; player characters , therefore , are uncertain about the true identity of the people they meet . The module also introduces Azalin the lich , who later became a major character in the Ravenloft campaign setting . This module is playable alone , or as a sequel to the original Ravenloft . It includes descriptions of the town of Mordentshire , as well as some haunted moors , and a manor house , all mapped in perspective like the original module .

#### = = = Adaptations = = =

In 1986 , Ravenloft was adapted into the gamebook Master of Ravenloft , # 6 in the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Adventure Gamebooks series . In the book , the reader plays the role of Jeren Sureblade , a paladin , who must defeat Count Strahd von Zarovich to save a young girl from becoming one of the undead . The gamebook was written by Jean Blashfield , with cover art by Clyde Caldwell and interior art by Gary Williams .

Ravenloft inspired a campaign setting of the same name , published in 1990 . According to Andria Hayday , the boxed set 's developer , " TSR 's classic AD & D adventure , I6 Ravenloft , inspired this world 's creation . " The Ravenloft : Realm of Terror boxed set was published as part of the second edition of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons and , according to its back cover , it is " rooted in the Gothic tradition " and contains " tips for adding fear to your games " . The setting of the module was expanded ; Ravenloft is now a demiplane ( an alternate dimension ) . The boxed set 's version of Strahd is similar to character in the original adventure , but his abilities were increased and his background explained in more detail . The campaign setting has produced a number of spin @-@ offs , and this new version of Strahd was used as a major character in a number of novels .

The original Ravenloft module has been revised and expanded twice . In 1993 , TSR published House of Strahd ( module code RM4 ) . It was updated to include rules from the second edition of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons . The module credits the original work by the Hickmans , but was revised by Bruce Nesmith , who along with Andria Hayday created the Ravenloft campaign setting . Nesmith introduced some new creatures , developed Strahd 's tactics further , and added a Time @-@ Track Table so that the referee can anticipate the sunset . In October 2006 , Wizards of the Coast released an updated and expanded version of the original module for Dungeons & Dragons version 3 @.@ 5 as a 226 @-@ page hardcover book entitled Expedition to Castle Ravenloft . It was based on the original module , and not the Ravenloft material made in the intervening years . Expedition to Castle Ravenloft is designed to be played as a mini @-@ campaign lasting about 20 game sessions , much longer than the original module , although it contains options for running long 8 @-@ session or short 4 @-@ session adventures . The book also includes suggestions for incorporating the adventure into an existing generic setting , Forgotten Realms , Eberron or d20 Modern campaign . The original module was adapted to the HackMaster game system as Robinloft in 2002 , and its sequel as Robinloft 2 : Tahd 's Legacy in 2004 . Wizards of the Coast released the board game Castle Ravenloft in 2010 .

#### = = Reception = =

Ravenloft won one award , and was included on two " best of " lists . In 1984 , it won the Strategists ' Club Award for Outstanding Play Aid . The book Dungeon Master For Dummies chose the module as one of the ten best classic adventures , saying it is " perhaps our favorite D & D adventure of all time " , Ravenloft " takes the Dracula legend and gives it a D & D spin " , and praised the detailed yet concise plot and isometric maps . The book also claims that Ravenloft " inspired game designers and Dungeon Masters to take the art of adventure to the next level . "

In 2004 , on the 30th anniversary of the Dungeons & Dragons game , Dungeon magazine ranked the module as the second greatest Dungeons & Dragons adventure of all time ? behind Queen of the Spiders . The editor of Dungeon praised the placement of treasure , and Strahd 's motivation

was described as " a brilliant way to let fate drive the plot and evoke the mystery and mystique of Barovia " . Bill Slavicsek , director of Wizards of the Coast 's RPGs and Miniatures department , noted that it was the first adventure to " mix tone , story , and dungeon crawl " in a module , and game designer Andy Collins agreed . Clark Peterson , president of Necromancer Games , singled out the maps and Strahd for praise , saying the vampire is " perhaps one of the best villains of all time " . Author John Rateliff also applauded the maps and the randomization , as well as Strahd 's duality as a vampire / magic @-@ user . The catacombs , where player characters were teleported away and replaced with undead wights , was singled out as the adventure 's " defining moment " by the magazine 's editors .

Reviews for Ravenloft were generally positive . In the July 1984 issue of White Dwarf magazine , the module was given 8 out of 10 overall , with the reviewer mentioning its presentation as a positive , and its complexity as a negative . It was likened to a Hammer horror production and praised as enjoyable , although the reviewer said the game 's puns were tedious and detracted from the spooky atmosphere . Reviewer Dave Morris said it " should be a lot of fun ? ' light , relief ' of a nerve @-@ wracking and deadly sort . " Morris concluded that Ravenloft is " full of clever touches " , and " features some first @-@ class illustration and graphics " . In a review for the January 1984 issue of Dragon magazine ( published by a subsidiary of TSR ) , game designer Ken Rolston argued that , despite its design innovations , Ravenloft was still in essence a dungeon @-@ style adventure . Rolston praised the randomization , the maps , and the player text ( which is read aloud to the players by the DM ) . He said the player text " consistently develops an atmosphere of darkness and decay . " Despite this , Rolston felt that the adventure has trouble in developing a frightening tone . He singles out its use of common monsters in D & D , an abundance of traps , and frequent combat interludes as elements that detract from the adventure 's spookiness by interrupting the module 's flow . Ultimately , he felt that in " AD & D terms it is a masterpiece " , but not a work of " Gothic horror " . Tracy Hickman stated in 1998 , " I still believe the original Ravenloft modules were perhaps the best that ever had my name on them . "