

LIST OF USEFUL OLD-SCHOOL/OSR INTRO MODULES v2.0

lol definition wars lol

These are adventures adhering to some sort of old-school mindset that were intended to be faced by 1st-level characters, included because I either think that they're good (in whole or in part) or because they're commonly recommended. Bear in mind that authors' ideas of what constitutes an appropriate low-level challenge varies. Also bear in mind that the assumed party size varies, so that some of these adventures were only intended to be tackled at 1st level if the party was quite large and/or supplemented with 2nd-level characters (e.g. B2 was intended for 6-9 players; B4 for 6-10 players).

Megadungeons and adventure path-type scenarios like *Night Below* have specifically been excluded, as even if they start with 1st-level areas their enormous scope tends to preclude the "intro" aspect.

THE CLASSICS

B1 In Search of the Unknown

Basic D&D. Introductory scenario with DM advice, intended to teach how to not just run but create dungeons. It does this by leaving lots of blank spaces for you to work your magic, but for that reason it's only as good as you are, and if you're just starting, that's probably not so good. Also hard to map if you're teaching that (though see [here](#) for an easier-to-use version of the upper level map, and [here](#) for an alternate full dungeon layout). For creatives only.

B2 The Keep on the Borderlands

Basic D&D. A small keep to explore, and a nearby cave system full of beasties, with short play and rules advice for those new to the game. Very straightforward. Easier to use out of the gate than B1, but pretty basic. It can be argued that if you're just starting D&D then you want basic, because you're trying to learn a lot at once. Still, some encountering this as their first D&D experience might be bored unless the DM is good at setting up faction play and creature interactions.

Pacesetter has put out two add-ons to this module that expand the original content: *B2 Beyond the Caves of Chaos* and *B2.5 Blizzard on the Borderland*. I can't speak to their quality.

B4 The Lost City

Basic D&D. Sort of a Conan-esque "Red Nails" B2 with a more interesting background and environment, including strong faction play. Though lacking advice for those new to D&D, IMO this is the superior of the first four intro Basic modules. See [here](#) for further material.

N1 Against the Cult of the Reptile God

AD&D 1st ed. Technically level 1, but tough at that level. Great mystery surrounding cultists, and a bit of a Body-Snatchers feel. Town, wilderness, and dungeon components give some good variety. Needing an NPC to save the day at the end lets it down somewhat, however.

Pacesetter released a N0.5 add-on (*Twisting Trail of the Reptile God*) that expands the wilderness portion.

Caverns of Thracia

AD&D 1st ed (Judges Guild). Technically level 1, but perhaps more than any other adventure here quite tough at that level (and low on treasure to boot). The Greek-themed module that made "[Jaquaving the dungeon](#)" a thing and helped make Judges Guild a beloved name. A faction-heavy, very open dungeon that's a good way to see non-linear mapping and exploration in action. Somewhat rough in terms of keying / room descriptions, though, so it requires more work than usual for a DM to prep.

The Illhiedrin Book

AD&D 1st ed (Judges Guild). The usual fetch quest on behalf of a powerful spellcaster with better things to do (the sexy sorceress on the cover), but with some complicating NPCs, the chance for some interesting magical gear right at the start, and a town and a couple of mini crawls. Too much time spent on the sorceress' tower (though this is stealable content). Nowhere near as interesting as *Caverns*, but much quicker, simpler, and less lethal.

MISC OSR STUFF

Blood Moon Rising

Labyrinth Lord. A small village in the middle of a festival. Colourful timed events, and during it all monsters attack. Avoids being a railroad, unlike many things with timed events, which is a helpful lesson. Good NPCs.

Blood of the Dragon (UK-S01)

Crypts & Things 1st edition. You've got a bandit village, and battle apes, and an area dripping with sword & sorcery vibes. Unfortunately removed from official circulation for some reason, but still floating around out there.

Curse of Cragbridge

Swords & Wizardry. A haunted tower, which does a nice job of breaking free from your typical generic D&D monster stuff you so often see at this level. Also gives a major threat that far outclasses a starter party, for the group to work towards / desperately avoid.

Gatehouse on Cormac's Crag

Seven levels and 134 keyed areas in 37 pages gets you a minimalist but eminently playable starter dungeon with plenty of legs. If I was going to do the classic "humanoids in caves" style of starter, this is what I'd pick.

The Hole in the Oak

Old-School Essentials (B/X). A solid, colourful dungeon beneath a tree, along with decent factions. At the same time, it can be rough at Level 1 despite being labelled as for such, as some of the encounters are pretty brutal (though there is resurrection magic within). Good for teaching caution.

The Incandescent Grottoes

Old-School Essentials (B/X). Ignore the overly cutesy cover art: you get a fun underground complex with some good faction work, designed to be directly added onto the also great *The Hole in the Oak* for a hefty-sized intro crawl. Good emphasis on usability/layout.

Prison of the Hated Pretender

Vaguely Basic / 1st ed. Short. A giant statue head with an undead dude inside that's been imprisoned for his crimes so long ago that no one remembers what they are. Great atmosphere. The original release is free, but it's been recently updated with a new layout and notes in a version that's PWYW on DriveThru.

Purple Worm Graveyard

Labyrinth Lord (with some custom bits that are kind of fluffy but oh well). Short. A small dungeon where purple worms go to die. Stay as long as you dare and harvest the plentiful worm ivory, but the longer you stick around, the more you risk getting to play with a 15HD monster. Really nails the risk vs. reward issue.

Redtooth Ridge

OSRIC (AD&D 1st ed). Advanced Adventures #28. A wilderness module, where the party examines some abandoned buildings atop a ridge. Solid meat-and-potatoes site exploration.

The Sanctuary Ruin

Labyrinth Lord. A basic goblin lair, but a very well-done basic goblin lair.

Tomb of the Dragon's Heart

Labyrinth Lord. Short (aims for 4 hours) single-level dungeon with some solid faction bits and a good mythic vibe.

Tomb of the Iron God

Swords & Wizardry. Designed specifically to be an intro module, with an appendix giving some helpful lessons. Interesting setting, sort of let down by the second level (too much undead and other non-negotiable stuff for me to like it, though the room of 50 skeletons teaches useful lessons); mentioned here more because it's commonly recommended. Still, it's workable, and the specific design element raises it up. Revised edition available that removes the advice, changes the layout to an extremely annoying comic book style, and tweaks the encounters (bye-bye 50 skeletons).

Tomb of the Serpent Kings

Largely systemless. Designed specifically to teach old-school dungeon crawls. Most rooms have a "lesson" call-out to let you know why it was added—what lesson it's conveying to the DM and the players. Divisive, in that some feel it's overly linear and basic while others think it's just right; lots of success and frustration both reported with this one. Latest is version 4.0. Free.

Tower of the Stargazer

Lamentations of the Flame Princess (LotFP). Storming a wizard's apparently abandoned tower. Another module with advice designed to introduce old-school play, this one is heralded in some quarters for properly informing players as to

the dangers of such play. While it definitely can be fun, in terms of being an introductory module IMO it teaches bad habits by not having time pressure (no wandering monsters) and being too aggressive in penalizing players for actually exploring. Quicker to just listen to Rainbow while considering the advice and making save or die checks.

The Withered Crag

AD&D 1st ed. A dungeon in an ancient, mist-shrouded crater, with differing day and night time play.

MAGAZINE MATERIAL

Barnacus: City in Peril

Dragon #80. A bandit hunt, complicated by the fact that the bandits have spies within the city that have to be ferreted out. The main feature here is the reasonably detailed settlement provided that the adventure is set against.

Borshak's Lair

Dungeoneer #3. Another Jaquays gem. Basically the gold standard of starter goblinoid dens in terms of layout and encounter design, though suffering from the usual Judges Guild layout issues and with way, way too much treasure. There is a reformat [floating around out there](#) that makes it more readable.

Citadel by the Sea

Dragon #78. Orcs and party square off in a search for a legendary orcish spear in a ruined citadel. A seemingly cursed village and a hidden opponent add some further depth to this one.

The Darkness Beneath, Level 1: The Upper Caves

Fight On! #2. Honestly never read/played it, but Bryce at tenfootpole voted it the best OSR adventure he's ever seen.

The Lichway

White Dwarf #9. Short crypt adventure with a great gimmick later seen in LotFP's *Death Frost Doom*.

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS STUFF

Requires more conversion work than other OSR stuff, as DCC is based on 3.5 and then adds its own mutations on top, though as these are all modules for 0-level and 1st-level characters they're (comparatively) simple. The main note is that DCC doesn't use gold for XP, and so treasure levels may not be appropriate. The ruleset also skimps on resource management and timekeeping. For these reasons I recommend these for more advanced DMs only (unless you're playing DCC itself, of course).

Doom of the Savage Kings

"The footprints of a gigantic hound...". Strong Beowulf vibes in a sandboxy setting. Decent mix of horror and NPC interaction, with a mini-crawl at the end to tie it all together.

In the Wake of the Zorkul

0-level funnel. Literally starts in a tavern, but gets much better from there as you're dropped without warning into underground nastiness. Good resource management, unlike your standard DCC module. Free.

The One Who Watches from Below

Impossible threats, impossible treasure, lots of eyeballs. Great module for emphasizing player skill over level-appropriate encounters, and a similar risk vs. reward bit to *Purple Worm Graveyard*. Get the 2nd printing if you can (8 extra pages).

People of the Pit

Cultists are a great enemy, and when backed by a Cthulhu-like patron (and I really mean this: not some stupid large but killable squid monster, but something unspeakably huge and powerful), they can be really scary. Nonstop unreasoning cultists makes it a bit of a combat grind, though. Another good one for teaching players that PC death isn't unusual.

Sailors on the Starless Seas

0-level funnel. Linear and quite small, but dramatic and evocative. Good for being at once basic and memorable.

Tower of the Black Pearl

Short. Linear and with basic opponents, but the setting (a sunken tower that rises from the ocean once a decade for only eight hours) is great: a good way to teach time management and actually considering environmental dangers (assuming you use a ruleset that actually supports timekeeping; I'd also chop the hours available in half).

Well of the Worm

Short. A mini-dungeon full of creepy human-faced giant maggots.

SPECIAL FEATURE: STARTING BASES

While overall this document is intended to highlight only 1st-level modules, people often request good starting material for campaigns. The typical good campaign starter has a home base and a series of outlying mini-dungeons or general areas of adventure to play around in. However, they're also often intended for at least 2nd-level characters, so I've added this little addendum. Between everything listed below you should have no problem cobbling together a memorable "point of light" style home base surrounded by danger.

As an aside, *B2 Keep on the Borderlands* would also fit in this section.

The Black Wurm of Brandonsford

B/X, levels 1-2. Similar to *The Ruined Hamlet*, below, you get a base town with some things to do and some fun bits to explore nearby. At the heart of things is a dragon, but it's all a sandbox and so players have plenty of freedom to do as they will. The Silver Axe you can get as treasure can be gamebreaking.

Blackapple Brugh

BFRPG, levels 1-3. In your small starter village an evil elf king is replacing children with wicked doppelgangers. Nearby there's a forest and an underground elf mound to explore. Good faerie feel. P.S. Hexmap is at scale of 1 mile per hex.

The Evils of Illmire

Old-School Essentials (B/X), levels 1-2. A great hexcrawl surrounding a town, with absolutely tons of stuff to do crammed into its 74 digest-sized content pages. Great stuff. Make sure you've downloaded the latest version, as v4 (the current) has significant improvements.

The Ruined Hamlet / Terror in the Gloaming

Basic, levels 1-2. A good introduction to sandbox play in that it offers a home base to start with points of interest there, and then several interesting areas to explore nearby. Lots of playtime in these 58 pages.

L1 The Secret of Bone Hill

AD&D 1st ed, levels 2-4. A genuine TSR sandbox module, this one gives you a town and nearby Bone Hill, an above-ground castle with underground works below it, alongside the usual wilderness encounters. Unwieldy in terms of organization, not a lot of wealth, but a decent haul in magic. Perhaps the beginning of the trend for towns in modules to be populated with NPCs strong enough to quite easily handle whatever they're sending you out to do. Useful, but not stellar. Its town of Restenford is sometimes suggested as a good candidate for the undescribed town base of U1 *The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*.

T1 The Village of Hommllet

AD&D 1st ed, level 1 (supposedly). A thoroughly detailed starting base (the village) and a nearby dungeon. Though a Gygax work, I find this one a lesser light. The village is overdetailed to the point of tedium (the polar opposite of most of the Keep in B2), while the challenges are incredibly lethal for the 1st-level PCs this module is allegedly intended for. As a whole I'd give this a pass at the stated level range (though this is by no means a universal opinion; if you favour heavy detail or prefer naturalism, this will likely climb in your estimation). Definitely contains plunderable bits.

White Dragon Run

OSRIC (AD&D 1st ed), levels 2-4. Advanced Adventures #13. A village at the heart of a wilderness sandbox. Lots of random wilderness encounter tables, but also two small dungeon complexes. Quite basic, but entirely usable.

White Dragon Run II

OSRIC (AD&D 1st ed), levels 2-5. Advanced Adventures #38. A repeat of the village and wilderness sandbox in the first volume (for some reason), followed by four new mini locations to add to the area.