

LIST OF USEFUL OLD-SCHOOL/OSR INTRO MODULES v1.7

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 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).

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 rather bored unless the DM is good at setting up faction play.

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. 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.

U1 The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh

AD&D 1st ed. Scooby Doo: AD&D edition, dealing with an apparently haunted house. Progress is contingent on the party finding a secret door, however, so this could wind up being just a boring exploration of a relatively empty house. Intended to lead into two sequels, but they're not as good.

Caverns of Thracia

AD&D 1st ed (Judges Guild). Technically level 1, but tough at that level. 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.

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.

The Hole in the Oak

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

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). A short, 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.

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 at the back 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. 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 old-school play. While it definitely can be fun, 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.

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 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 borrowed by 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. 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. Good resource management. 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.

Well of the Worm

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