

Ravenloft Reincarnated

The Black Vault

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Magic Items and Gothic Horror

The world of *Ravenloft* is often presented as one in which magic is dangerous, chaotic, and unpredictable. Sorcery is often a hidden or poorly understood force, one which average people might believe in with distant fear and loathing, but which is not part of their daily lives. The average person could go his whole life without encountering a true work of magic—or his life could end thanks to such an encounter.

In such a milieu, “magic items” in the traditional fantasy role-playing game might seem to have no place. While it is true that the Land of Mists isn’t the sort of place where adventurers do battle with dragons while wielding their trusty *+1 longsword*, the setting does have its roots in the world’s most popular dungeon-crawling game—you know the one.

Even beyond those roots, the faerie tales and scary legends that provide much of the setting’s source material are rife with enchanted objects, strange artifacts, and uncanny events. The more “grounded” horror of the Gothic era did away with much of the mysticism of previous literature, replacing it with a more low-key interpretation of the supernatural. Where magic exists at all in such literature, it is inevitably the province of evil.

With these core concepts in mind, this document will attempt to discuss the place of magic items in the *Ravenloft Reincarnated* version of the setting, as well as bringing back some of the classic objects of editions past.

The Place of Magic Items

In *Ravenloft Reincarnated*, player characters are assumed to be exceptional individuals—people who stand head and shoulders above the crowd. They are the major arcana in the tarot deck of fate, shaping the destiny of countless others through their actions for good or ill.

This principle of player character exceptionalism is at the heart of *Savage Worlds* as a whole, but it is being reiterated here for one simple reason: to remind players and GMs alike that player characters having access to magic spells, enchanted objects, and similar potent powers is not a statement about what the world is like for the average person. Powerful NPCs such as darklords have this same sort of exceptionalism in their favor, as they too are “major arcana.” In short, just because an Edge allows a player character to learn sorcery doesn’t mean that any given NPC can do the same.

That being said, this principle of exceptionalism can be taken as the basic reason why *Ravenloft* lacks things like “magic item shops” or “wizard’s guilds” that are a common staple of many fantasy worlds. Simply put, those things take away from how unique and important player characters are assumed to be. Narratively, magic is a force of chaos that only the most obsessive or dedicated or brilliant people can hope to master; just because player characters hardly ever have awful things happen to them from dabbling with sorcery is no reason it can’t happen to NPCs.

Extending this exceptionalism principle outward to equipment, it stands to reason that the focus of a campaign should be on the player characters and not on their gear. When a magic item shows up, it shouldn't be just a matter of swapping out one glowing sword for a different-colored one. The way in which a player character is engaged by the item is the point of the thing.

When a magic item shows up at all, there should always be questions attached to it. "What was it made for?" "Who created this, and why?" "Is this safe to use?" All of these and more should come along with the appearance of a magic item, and the best way to keep the heroes questioning is to make such items uncommon. If a magic item shows up in every adventure, then soon enough the players will start taking them for granted. Instead, take to heart the idea that the appearance of a magic item should be a matter central to the story—something that adds narratively.

Hand in hand with this concept of rarity is the idea of uniqueness. The Land of Mists isn't a place for *+1 longswords* and *rings of protection*. Every item should have a history (and probably a name), even if the GM is the only person who ever knows it. While the world might have many magical swords in it, no two of them are alike; each one has its own appearance, powers, and quirks.

Speaking of quirks, remember that magic in *Ravenloft* is a chaotic force. No one can predict everything that will result from the process of creating an item of power. A blade enchanted to freeze the blood of its victims might leave a sparkling trail of ice crystals wherever its owner walks, while a ring that shields a hero from sight might make him very visible indeed to ghosts.

With these principles in mind—rarity, uniqueness, and quirkiness—magic items do indeed have a place in the setting. Not every magic item need be the central focus of a plot, but they should never just be found lying around in a musty tomb... unless a story

can be had from how they got to that tomb or who will come looking for it later.

Magic Items and Monsters

Some creatures in the Land of Mists have resistance—or even outright immunity—to weapons that are not magical. This would seem to put the people of the world at a grave disadvantage when dealing with them. That perception is correct; to most people of *Ravenloft*, such a monster is an unstoppable killing machine, a terror to be escaped rather than a foe to be fought.

Player characters are people who seek to overcome seemingly impossible odds and fight back against the darkness. When dealing with a foe who can only be harmed by magical weapons, in a world where magical weapons are rare, then how does that opposition occur?

The first and most direct way to deal with this apparent deficiency is through the use of "battle magic." Most spellcasters know at least one way to directly harm opponents, often through the use of powers like *bolt* or *blast*. Such direct magical harm can do serious harm to "invulnerable" monsters, making such sorcerers preferred targets for clever adversaries.

Some casters eschew direct attack spells in favor of improving the capability of their allies. From these arcane folk, the solution is such powers as *smite*, which generally causes an affected weapon to count as "magical" for the duration of the power, in addition to any pure numerical bonuses.

At the GM's discretion, even the apparently technological devices of weird scientists can overcome creature immunities. This can represent either the basically magical nature of their inventions or it can highlight the ability of technology to overcome superstition, depending on the focus of the campaign and the group's preferences.

If the group has access to none of these resources, the GM should consider either not offering them opposition that is totally

impervious to their efforts or creating a specific mundane weakness that can overcome their apparent invulnerability. After all, vampires are seemingly impervious to mortal weapons but can be slain by a simple wooden stake to the heart or the cleansing power of fire. Werewolves laugh off steel weapons but shriek with pain at the touch of silver. Monsters in the gothic horror tradition almost always have such weaknesses.

A final idea is that if a monster appears that is truly impervious to all known harm, the focus of an adventure could be in finding a weapon or item that *can* harm it. Let legends speak of an enchanted dagger laid to rest with a king in ancient times, or a faerie-made blade that can be found in the depths of a nearby forest by those pure of heart. In short, remember the basic principle that “no” closes doors, while “yes” opens them. Saying “no, that won’t work” generally frustrates and annoys players, but saying “yes, if you can do this...” or “yes, but there’s a catch...” engages and excites them.

The Adventure Deck

The most common way that magic items will be found in a *Ravenloft Reincarnated* game outside of story placement is through the Relic card in the Adventure Deck. This card already offers guidelines for the way in which a discovered relic functions mechanically, but the GM still needs to provide flavor and rationale for this relic’s existence.

If the GM feels that the Relic card would be unbalancing for his game or create situations that were logically or narratively unwelcome, he can always discuss removing the card from the deck with his group. Some groups might prefer that the card be removed, feeling that an even lower level of magic items is good for their version of the setting.

Should the Relic card remain, be prepared for situations where a magic item can turn up

unexpectedly—and be ready to roll with it. What you *shouldn’t* do is include the card in the deck and then try to veto it when it shows up. This denies players the benefit of knowing that their actions are meaningful and ultimately undermines their confidence in the game as a whole. Besides which, some of the most fun in a game can come from running with unexpected or unplanned events!

Player Characters and Item Creation

While magically inclined player characters have the ability to make magical trinkets through the Mystic Craftsman and Gadgeteer Edges, the creation of permanent objects of power is generally limited to the pseudo-scientific sorcery of the Weird Science Arcane Background. Some player characters might be interested in becoming traditional fantasy style magic item crafters to supplement their spellcasting ability.

In general, things like “potions,” “scrolls,” and “wands”—the typical limited use items from traditional fantasy—are the part and parcel of the Mystic Craftsman Edge. A character with this Edge can easily make “healing potions,” “lightning wands,” or any other limited use sort of magic item, at the rate of one per game session. Notably, Mystic Craftsman allows a character to make one-shot items, while Gadgeteer allows a mad scientist to create objects with limited numbers of Power Points, but which theoretically could be used more than one.

Practically speaking, there’s no reason why a GM could allow either or both of those Edges to be re-flavored in such a way that any magic user could use them. In essence, the Edges as they exist are *examples* of how to build minor magic items rather than definitive paths on their creation. This also means that Trademark Weapon might easily be re-flavored to something like “Personal Relic” to create an item that is more effective in its owner’s hands, while the Legendary Edge Hand of Doom explicitly allows a

Trademark Weapon to become a magical relic.

For player characters unhappy with this limited selection, the GM has several options for adding in magic item crafting and creation. The *Shaintar* campaign setting has extensive rules for crafting magic items (page 44-47), such as the Enchant and Arcane Artificer Edges.

A simpler rule or one for those without access to that setting might be that a sufficiently skilled magic user can simply create one permanent magic item each time he advances a Rank. The player and the GM can discuss the specifics, but items possibly through the Relic card of the Adventure Deck should serve as a guidepost for what is possible when creating a magic item. Generally, these should remain in the +1 or +2 bonus to a single Trait range (or double that in a specific situation) or grant a power that is one Rank lower than its creator. Using this simple version does mean that a Legendary character can create a magic item every other advance.

Relics and Artifacts

Using the parlance of *Savage Worlds*, a “relic” is any permanent magical object that was created intentionally by a person with powers that are replicable by mortal means. Even a cursed sword is a relic in this sense, as its existence is due to the failure of its enchanter to account for some flaw in its making.

Beyond the power achievable by mere mortals, however, are *artifacts*. Only the most legendary of heroes could ever hope to craft such an object, and even then generally only with the aid of powers beyond mortal reckoning—and usually dark ones. An artifact might spontaneously come into being, untouched by any mortal hand, due to the emotional resonance of a great triumph, a terrible betrayal, or an act of unfathomable good or evil.

Artifacts are a manifestation of the chaotic power of magic. As purveyors of chaos—whether good or evil—an artifact’s creation is solely the purview of the GM. Artifacts should never appear randomly, and their appearance at all should be the central point of any adventure that includes them. A magic sword is a curiosity, and its existence brings gossip, offers of purchase, or attempts at theft. The revelation of the *Sword of Kas* or the *Hand of Vecna* brings terror, offers of fealty, or threats of murder.

An artifact isn’t as easily codified as a relic. Some of them don’t even seem magical to the most thorough examinations. Many appear to have a will of their own and goals or motivations that may not be in their possessor’s best interests. Not a small number are actively malevolent, working to the ruination or damnation of anyone unlucky enough to find them.

Not only should an artifact have a history—it should have a *legend*. Every artifact has a name, even if it is only one given to it by its owners or victims, as well as powers that are not replicable by mortal magic. Such powers need not be *greater* than those achievable by mortals—simply *different*. As well, every artifact should have a condition by which it can be destroyed, even if that condition seems difficult or impossible. A relic can generally just be smashed to bits or melted down; an artifact resists such destruction, even if just by vanishing and resurfacing at a future time.

In short, if relics should be uncommon, unique, and quirky, then artifacts should be rare, bizarre, and dangerous.

Further Reading

Players and GMs interested in adding more magic items to their game or getting further advice on how to deal with issues related to magic items in *Savage Worlds* are recommended to seek out the *Savage Worlds Fantasy Companion* (pages 48-99)

and the *Savage Worlds Horror Companion* (pages 42-51).

Additionally, several Savage Settings include rules, options, and ideas for magic items and magic item creation, including *Shaintar*, *Wonderland No More*, and *Suzerain*.

Sample Relics

Listed below are a selection of magic items that could be found (or perhaps even made) by player characters in a *Ravenloft Reincarnated* campaign. These items might be wielded by their enemies, discovered by their allies, or be found in the lair of a dread beast.

When a magic item holds a power, it will describe the conditions under which that power can be used. Such objects often have their own Power Points, which regenerate at the rate of 1 per hour unless otherwise noted. A relic's Power Points can only be used to fuel a power held in the relic unless the description says otherwise, and likewise the owner cannot use his own Power Points to fuel the power in a relic unless it says so.

A few items grant their owner the use of a specific Edge. An owner that already has that Edge gains no further benefit unless noted by the relic's description.

Cold Iron Bracer

This cold wrist guard was forged to protect its wielder from the powers of demons and the fey. The bracer acts as a small shield (+1 Parry) but grants a +2 bonus on rolls to resist the arcane powers of demons and faeries, as well as +2 Armor against any attack made by such creatures.

Devil's Fiddle

This fine musical instrument makes any music played on it seem sinister and eerie. The owner of the fiddle can call up demonic

servants by playing the right songs. This object has 10 Power Points with which the user can cast *summon ally*; any allies summoned have the *Demon* monstrous ability in addition to their usual statistics. The owner can use Socialize as his casting skill rather than Spellcasting when using this item.

Grimoire

A grimoire is a book of magic, penned by a skilled and experienced sorcerer to teach his secrets to a reader. Each such book is different, containing lore and madness in roughly equal proportion. A spellcaster who owns a grimoire can treat any power contained within it as a power that he knows, allowing him to cast that power normally. Most grimoires contain two to four powers, usually with their own trappings already applied. Using magic from a grimoire is riskier than using one's own powers, however; when making a Spellcasting roll for a spell from a grimoire, the caster suffers backlash if *either* of his dice show a result of 1.

These books have power even for the untrained user as well. Any power within a grimoire can be cast as a ritual by a non-arcane owner, using an appropriate Knowledge skill in place of Spellcasting.

Example Grimoire: The dread tome known as *Mysteries of the Worm* speaks of the power that lurks beneath the earth and the strength that comes from knowing the dark places. This grimoire contains the powers *burrow* and *darksight*. A ritual caster may use these powers with the Knowledge (Occult) skill.

Elemental Amulet

Inscribed with runes describing one of the four elements, this amulet grants minor control over a force of nature. While worn, the owner can use the *elemental manipulation* power at will, with no casting roll or Power Point cost. Each amulet is

attuned to a different element: air, earth, fire, or water.

Fiery Sword

Whether blazing with the holy flame of justice or searing with the black fires of hell, many sorcerers over the years have sought to create blades that burn with magic. When drawn forth, a fiery sword blazes with mystic fire—whether the owner wants it to or not. This flame sheds light like a lantern. The blade grants its wielder +2 on Fighting rolls and damage rolls, or +4 damage against creatures that are specifically vulnerable to fire. Any creature struck by a fiery sword has a chance of catching fire (*SWDE* 88).

Hand of Glory

A hand of glory is made from the left hand of a hanged man, dipped in wax to make a macabre candle. When lit, the fingertips burn with an eerie black flame that blinds the sight of onlookers.

The hand of glory hold the *invisibility* power and 20 Power Points with which to use it. The owner can use Knowledge (Occult) rather than Spellcasting to activate the hand.

Hunter's Bow

Made from the heartwood of a century-old tree felled by a thunderstorm, this “primitive” bow is more powerful than many firearms. In addition to the normal statistics for a hunting bow, this weapon gains Armor Piercing 2. Additionally, its fine craftsmanship grants a +2 bonus on Shooting rolls and damage rolls.

Jade Chime

Carved from green or red jade and inscribed with symbols of peace and healing, this chime’s pleasant tones are painful to the undead. As an action, the holder of the chime can ring it to make a Test of Wills against all undead within a range of 10”. An undead creature that fails this test reveals its true nature (by flinching, screaming, or

changing back into its true form) in addition to any other effects of failure. The wielder uses Spirit for this Test of Wills, opposed by Spirit. If the chime is struck more than once in an hour, it shatters.

Knife of Time

This dagger’s crystal blade seems to be filled with sand. When wielded in a life-threatening situation, it grants its owner superlative speed—almost as though time was standing still for him. The knife’s owner treats running as a free action and gains the Quick Edge, allowing him to discard and redraw initiative cards of five or lower.

Magic Bane Ring

When placed on a wearer’s finger, this iron ring pinches painfully into the skin and cannot be removed. While worn, the owner gains +4 Armor against damage-causing arcane powers and adds +4 to any roll to resist an opposed power. Allies attempting to cast beneficial spells on the wearer suffer a -4 penalty on their casting roll. If the wearer is a spellcaster, he suffers -4 on his casting roll for any power he attempts to cast.

The ring can only be removed by a successful casting of the *dispel* power (including the -4 penalty) or by cutting off the finger on which it rests.

Nightmare Box

Wrought of iron and black wood, this box can hold a single candle to cast strange shadows on the walls. When a candle is lit and placed in the box next to the owner’s bed, his dreams are filled with horror—but so are those of his foes. The owner must name his foe as he falls asleep, and it must be someone he knows and has met (though he need not know their real name). The box’s owner and the target make opposed Spirit rolls. If the owner succeeds, the target suffers a level of Fatigue that does not disappear until he has a night of peaceful sleep.

Regardless of success or failure, the owner also suffers a level of Fatigue that does not go away until he has a night of peaceful sleep.

Seer's Mirror

Made of black glass or obsidian, this mirror shows only cloudy reflections—until blood is spilled on its surface. Then it shows a seeker visions of the past, present, and future. These visions seem clear until the trance breaks, and then the see can only remember the most relevant pieces of information.

The owner of a seer's mirror can suffer a level of Fatigue and spend one minute gazing into the mirror's depths to use the *divination* power, with his Spirit as the casting ability. Consulting with the mirror also grants the owner a +2 bonus on Knowledge rolls, as long as he has the time to study the mirror and consider its answers (which generally takes ten minutes or so).

Summoner's Censer

This metal censer on a chain is covered in mystic runes. When held by a spellcaster, the coals within smolder and give off sweet-smelling smoke. This relic contains 20 Power Points that can only be used to cast *banish*, *summon ally*, or *teleport*, or to fuel a summoning ritual. The relic does not give a caster knowledge of these powers if he does not know them.

Artifacts of Dread

The following objects are magic items of great and terrible power and consequence. Some of them have appeared in the pages of *Ravenloft* before, while others are making their first appearance here—outside of your nightmares, that is. Use these dreadful items only with the greatest of caution.

Generally, an artifact bonds with its wielder in some way. Perhaps he cannot bear to part with it, stroking it and calling it “my

precious.” Maybe it literally can't be gotten rid of—any effort to simply throw it away winds up with the damned thing right back in the owner's possession. A few only stay with an owner long enough to get him in serious trouble.

If a person is convinced that an artifact is no good for him after it has bonded to him, a successful casting of *dispel* at -2 to -6 might let the artifact leave his possession long enough to go into a vault—or to pick a new master.

The Apparatus

This immense machine stands well over thirty feet tall, comprised of a series of crystal globes as big as a man, spinning disks and rings of metal, and a network of metal cables. Lightning energizes the Apparatus, giving it the power to work its dark magic.

This contraption can be used to perform a number of monstrous and misguided tasks by placing living people inside the globes of its body. It can exchange the minds of two subjects; all mental attributes go with the psyche, while physical ones remain with the body. A character keeps all of his trained skills, though skills in excess of his new body's physical Attributes are reduced accordingly. A character's Edges transfer with him as well, though any Edges whose prerequisites he no longer meets stop working. Mental Hindrances transfer, while physical ones stay with the original body.

The second function of the Apparatus allows a single person to be split into two separate beings, each with aspects of the original person's psyche. This can create “good” and “evil” twins, or two people who represent different paths the individual might have taken in life. The Apparatus can also recombine such split personalities into a single individual (though one or both of the “new” people might not wish to be rejoined).

Finally, the machine can physically combine two living beings into a single creature combining aspects of their bodies

and minds. For simple beasts, this can create strange chimerical monsters, while thinking creatures so joined become bizarre amalgams of the two people involved. Such fusions are rarely perfect and often possess horrific (even fatal) flaws in their nature or physique. Theoretically, the Apparatus could split apart beings that had been joined in this manner, but doing so requires a level of precision few users possess.

Using the Apparatus requires a Weird Science skill roll, with a penalty ranging from -2 to -6 depending on the precision of the act undertaken. A failure acts as a malfunction with a Weird Science device, while a roll of snake eyes causes a catastrophic explosion that generally levels whatever structure the Apparatus is housed in. The Apparatus itself might seem destroyed, but it always turns up again later.

Destruction: Destroying the Apparatus temporarily is easy enough—though enough damage to break it always makes it explode as well. No one has yet found a way to permanently destroy this infernal machine.

Blacker's Hook

Forged by a man who sought to learn everything and master every skill, the creator of Blacker's Hook eventually fell victim to his own vainglory and pride. This object appears to be a docker's hook forged from a single piece of fine steel, carved with images of oceanic life.

When used as a weapon, Blacker's Hook acts as a knife that grants +2 on Fighting and damage rolls, but which cannot be thrown. If the wielder uses this weapon in a grappling attempt, his Strength is increased by two steps for purposes of the opposed rolls.

Unfortunately, the wielder finds rage and fear strangely mingled together, leaving him angry and paranoid. When the wielder fails a Fear check, rather than the usual effects, he gains the Berserk Edge and immediately enters a rage. This rage only ends when all foes are dead or when the wielder does

nothing for one full round and succeeds on a Smarts roll at -2. The wielder loses the Berserk Edge when the rage ends.

The wielder feels the need to constantly remind others of his greatness and gains the Big Mouth Hindrance.

Destruction: Blacker's Hook can be melted down in a forge by a craftsman who feels no pride in his work. At the moment of its destruction, anyone close enough to inhale the vapors released must make a Fear check at -8.

The Fang of the Nosferatu

The blade of this dagger is made of hardened steel, with strange flowing symbols etched into the surface. The grooves of the lettering have been filled with ruby dust, giving it the appearance of having been written in blood.

Legend says this knife was once the possession of a skilled assassin who betrayed his master. The assassin's master imprisoned him and killed him so slowly it took him three years to die, tormenting him with his own favored blade the whole time. The knife went missing after the assassin died, only to resurface from time to time since then, always in the hands of a sadistic killer.

The knife grants a +4 bonus on Fighting and damage rolls, and any creature Shaken or wounded by the blade must attempt a Vigor roll at -4 or suffer a level of Fatigue as the Fang drains their blood away. The Fang of the Nosferatu also holds 30 Power Points, allowing its owner to use the *shape change* power, using Spirit as the casting trait, but only to become a wolf or bat.

The most potent power of the Fang is its ability to grant its owner a form of immortality. By committing six ritual murders on six consecutive nights, the knife's owner ceases to age for thirteen years, as well as gaining the Invulnerability monstrous ability. During this period, the Fang's owner can be Shaken by mundane weapons but cannot be wounded or killed save by magic.

A drawback of the knife is that it acts as a conduit for its victims' pain and fear. Each time it is used to kill an intelligent creature, the owner must make a Fear check at -4. Success on this roll, even once, permanently gives the owner the **Bloodthirsty Hindrance** but also immunizes him to future Fear checks from using the Fang to kill.

The Fang lusts for the blood of the innocent. Once per month, it must be used to kill an intelligent being; if not, the wielder suffers a level of Fatigue each week that cannot be removed until the knife has been sated. An owner who is Incapacitated in this way lingers near death for a few days before the Fang steals his life as well—then seeks a new wielder.

Destruction: Legend says that the Fang of the Nosferatu could be destroyed by a man who has never shed blood—neither his own nor another's—by plunging it into his own heart.

Hourglass of Klorr

The artificer known as Klorr made many wondrous objects in his years of crafting. This particular piece is made from lead crystal with a platinum stand, filled with shimmering quartz sand. The whole hourglass stands perhaps two feet tall, mounted on a central axle with words of power inscribed on either base.

Activating the Hourglass of Klorr is as simple as rotating the crystal vessel while speaking aloud the words inscribed on the base. Once turned, the sands take 24 hours to run out, and the Hourglass will not move itself for any mortal force.

From the user's perspective, time slows down to an impossible crawl, making the day last a whole year. With great concentration, he can slow himself down enough to interact with other creatures, but he still seems incredibly fast. He can run as a free action, as well as doubling his base Pace. The character draws two cards for initiative and acts on both of them; the higher card always acts first in the round, unless an opponent draws a Joker. Outside of combat, the character effectively has an entire year to do tasks he can perform alone, such as research, building and crafting projects, and so on.

The downside of the Hourglass of Klorr is primarily that its owner ages one year in one day each time it is used.

Additionally, tampering with time can cause a backlash that strips away a character's speed. After the Hourglass of Klorr's power is expended, the character must make a Spirit roll at -2. If he fails, then for the next week he discards and redraws initiative cards higher than 10 (except Jokers), as well as suffering a multi-action penalty if he wants to move and act in the same round. Using the Hourglass of Klorr again during this period ages the character a year and ends the slowness effect, but does not grant the usual benefits.

Destruction: Despite its fragile appearance, the Hourglass of Klorr is invulnerable to any known force. Legend says that it could be destroyed by a time traveler, or by taking it to a point in time before its own creation and shattering it.