

Two ghastly new Ranger kits

CRYPT RANGERS AND DEFENDERS

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The *Complete Ranger's Handbook (CRH)* introduced a number of character kits that a player may choose for his ranger character, as well as listing several others for the player or DM to develop. One of these, the Crypt Ranger, caught my attention, but the description of his traits and abilities struck me as wrong. Cemeteries are his terrain? Non-evil undead are his followers? How could this be? In many campaigns, the ranger is recognized as a naturalist second only to the druid, and a ranger's love of life in all of its forms is legendary. To suggest that a ranger roamed with a pack of undead seemed to be in complete opposition to the basic concept of the class.

The idea of a Crypt Ranger was still intriguing enough to deserve a full kit description, if not the one suggested by the *CRH*. Here then are the Crypt Ranger and the Crypt Defender.

This article refers to the abilities, skills, and restrictions of the ranger class as a whole. For more details, see both the *PHB* and the *CRH*. Other books that may prove helpful for further examination of the undead and their capabilities include *The Complete Book of Necromancers*, the various Van Richten guides, many of the *RAVENLOFT*® modules, and the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ *tome* and *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*® volumes.

Perrin paused for a moment, crouching on the soft undergrowth near the path. The quiet sounds of the moonlit night drifted in to him as he caught his breath. Tracking his quarry had taken its toll on the young ranger, but Perrin was determined to put an end to the creature's rampage. He looked up as his dog made a low growl. He moved forward to see what Bloodfang was staring at so fiercely. A small scrap of dirty white rag hung caught on the branch of a bush. He removed it and examined it carefully. The weave was similar. A quick sniff told him all he needed to know. Images of the desert and ancient burial tombs appeared in his head. Perrin smiled and patted his dog on the head.

"Let's go, Bloodfang. We're on the track of the mummy."

Description: In the darkest night, as the undead things creep forth to terrorize the unsuspecting populace, who rises to protect the commoner and noble alike from the vile monsters? Clerics and fighters are good enough when they have a present threat to fight, but when you need to hunt down and eradicate undead, there is only one person to consider: the Crypt Ranger.

Requirements: In addition to the normal requirements for a ranger, Crypt Rangers



must have an Intelligence score of at least 14.

Primary terrain: A Crypt Ranger can pick any land as a primary terrain. Certain terrain types, such as the arctic tundra, are less likely to harbor undead, but with enough imagination, even the arctic could be the basis for a Crypt Ranger campaign.

Role: The Crypt Ranger is the defender of all living things from the threat of the undead. He lives to hunt down and eradicate undead, as they are a perversion of the natural flow of life. He travels from place to place within (and, if need be, outside) his chosen territory, protecting his charges from attacks as well as investigating rumors of any mysterious events that may provide a clue as to the location of his next hunt. Crypt Rangers tend to be highly motivated, energetic warriors who rely on their wits as well as their brawn. The undead are in many cases intelligent and unforgiving, and one wrong slip could lead to death . . . or worse. The Crypt Ranger is usually driven and brave. He devotes his life to tracking and eliminating creatures that cause many to quake in fear. In this, he is matched only by the Deathslayer (see *The Complete Book of Necromancers*) and his paladin counterpart, the Ghosthunter (from *The Complete Paladin's Handbook*).

Secondary skills: Forester, scribe, trader/barterer, weaponsmith.

Weapon proficiency: Crypt Rangers may choose from any of the weapons that the ranger class can use. Crypt Rangers must take one weapon proficiency in a bludgeoning weapon, but there are no other restrictions. Because of their profession and quarry, magical versions of normal weapons are highly prized by Crypt Rangers.

Non-weapon proficiency: Bonus: Ancient history. Recommended: Alertness, blind-fighting, endurance, hunting, persuasion, reading/writing. Many of the proficiencies that a Crypt Ranger chooses seem unusual for a warrior, but much of his time is spent hunting down clues and stories, both from books and people. Other proficiencies should be chosen with this in mind.

Armor/equipment: Crypt Rangers must travel quickly. They prefer light armor, but they can use any armor or equipment if the situation requires.

Species enemy: Crypt Rangers choose any undead type for their species enemy. Normally, these would be undead such as ghouls, skeletons,

zombies, or the like, but in certain cases can include liches, vampires, or ghosts. Crypt Rangers may also choose as a species enemy a related opponent such as lycanthropes. Many reserve a special hatred toward necromancers as the guiding force behind much of the evil the undead perform.

Followers: As per normal rangers.

Special benefits: *Protection from evil.* This is a special form of the 1st-level wizard spell. It gives a Crypt Ranger's undead opponents with a -2 to any attack rolls, as well as providing a +1 to all of the ranger's saving throws. This represents the uncommon good luck that Crypt Rangers enjoy, as well as their training for combat with the undead.

Immunity to fear and scare effects. Many undead radiate auras that cause the normal adventurer or commoner to flee in horror or fright. The Crypt Ranger is immune to this effect generated by creatures of the same level/hit dice or lower.

Detect Undead. Crypt Rangers have the ability to *detect undead* as the 1st-level wizard spell with a base 50' radius. This increases at a rate of 5' per level. One round of concentration is required to activate this ability. The ranger can determine direction and distance to the undead, but not the exact type of undead. The effect lasts for one round, and three attempts per day can be made.

Special hindrances: While greatly appreciated by the populace they serve, Crypt Rangers are also regarded with extreme caution and fear. The mere sight of a known Crypt Ranger can cause a panic in people as they wonder what foul creature brings him to their community. For this reason, Crypt Rangers suffer a -3 to reaction roles from O-level NPCs who know of their profession.

The special attack forms of many undead are another concern for Crypt Rangers. Aging 10 years, losing levels of experience, and the chance to wind up as one of the undead are all occupational hazards for this kit. The penalty for failure or carelessness requires those choosing this kit to have a strong motivation.

Crypt Rangers are also subject to a great deal of harassment from the enemies they make. To have a necromancer, lich, or vampire lord as an enemy is to sleep very lightly. Crypt Rangers try to counter this problem by being very good at what they do and leaving none to become a future enemy. This doesn't mean they become twisted assassins, but it means Crypt Rangers must become very good at tying up loose ends.



Role in the campaign: Crypt Rangers tend to be highly motivated fighters who deal on a daily basis with things that causes others to flee into the night. They are highly prized members of the community when their services are needed, yet they engender a great deal of fear when their presence is known. A lonely figure, the Crypt Ranger

takes great satisfaction in eliminating a menace who refused to die.

Crypt Rangers enjoy life to the fullest, knowing there are those out there jealous of any semblance of the living's happiness. Crypt Rangers tend to be on good terms with paladins and clerics, who have similar interests. Their skills and experiences tend to make them a part of a small brotherhood of professional monster hunters, and they enjoy the thrill of the hunt as much as the destruction of the undead.

The idea of the professional undead hunter can be found everywhere. Just pick up a copy of Dracula or watch a good horror movie, and the ideas and potential for adventures should be evident.

Picture the isolated small village under siege at night from some ghouls that have taken up residence nearby. Imagine a Crypt Ranger finding out that a necromancer had taken up residence in his area. The scenarios are endless and a whole campaign can be built around professional undead hunters, especially if the other players are partial to paladins, clerics, or tomb-robbing thieves.

As an NPC, a Crypt Ranger could become an excellent foil to the PCs, stealing away contracts to kill undead or cleaning out a tomb before the PCs could reach it. The PCs may also want to hire a Crypt Ranger to accompany them on a particularly dangerous mission or just to consult with one and draw from his knowledge.

Crypt Defender

Paelor didn't need Crystalhawk's shrill cry in the cool night air as a warning. He heard the drunken group stumbling down the road toward Overbarrows ten minutes ago. He moved silently down the small gully toward the road and slipped into a narrow dry tunnel he had built himself. The tunnel carried him squarely under the middle of the road. Paelor reached his cramped cubbyhole and found his equipment. He smeared a sweet-smelling concoction from a jar onto his face and found a pile of ripped, light colored cloth and pulled it

over his head. Waiting until he could feel the vibrations of their movement, Paelor grasped the handles of the trapdoor above him. With a heave, Paelor sprung up from the roadbed, dirt and rocks exploding outward. As he howled at the top of his lungs and flailed his arms, the strips of cloth billowed, and his face glowed with an eerie luminescence in the moonlight. Screams ripped through the night as his acting had its desired effect. Paelor laughed grimly as the frightened teenagers fled back down the road as fast as they could. They were idiots out to prove their manhood by stealing rocks and souvenirs from the tombs of Overbarrow. He could imagine the stories that would circulate among the pubs tomorrow. The ghost of Overbarrows attacks local youths. He sighed as he started resetting his trap. If only it were this easy with adventurers!

Description: In an era when powerful necromancers raise the dead and a primary source of income for adventurers comes from looting tombs ancient as well as new, who protects burial sites from desecration? Who scares off the curious and fights the grave robbers and ghouls? As a kit of the ranger class, the Crypt Defender fills this role admirably.

Requirements: Crypt Defenders have the same basic requirements as the ranger class.

Special terrain: Crypt Defenders must choose a single local as their special terrain. The only exception is a defender in service to a ruler, who is assigned to different locals as needed. Defenders usually don't travel much, regarding their obligations to their site paramount above all else. Their special terrain is normally a large tomb complex (such as pyramids or a barrow), a large battlefield with mass grave sites, or a large cemetery or catacombs.

Role: One of the primary sources of income for many adventurers is the exploration and looting of dungeon complexes and burial areas. But what do you do if you don't want an area to be desecrated by a group of adventuring tomb robbers? Who does a king set to guard his final resting place? And who prevents looters from scavenging a battlefield or digging up mass graves? This is where the Crypt Defender steps in.

As a ranger, the Crypt Defender devotes himself to learning the area he guards. In the open glade of a battlefield, he knows every fold in the earth. In a dungeon tomb, he knows every pitfall and monster (and probably feeds a few as extra insurance, too!). The Crypt Defender is posted to a locale either out of a sense

of duty or because a high ranking individual requests it. Once he assumes the responsibility for an area, he defends it vigorously. For curiosity seekers or teens on a lark, the defender gives them a good scare or a friendly warning. For determined adventurers, a stern warning is in order. Looters and others who seek to disturb the defenders charge are in for a running battle of amazing proportions, as the ranger pulls out every trick he knows to eliminate the threat.

Secondary skill: Farmer, fisher, limner/painter, mason, trapper/furrier.

Weapon proficiency: Crypt Defenders can use any weapon, with two provisions. A defender can utilize only weapons of a size appropriate to their locale. For instance, a defender of a pyramid complex would be unable to use any weapon of large (L) size, such as a pole arm, in the narrow confines of his locale. Meanwhile, the defender of a battlefield would be able to use any weapon and would probably use several missile weapons to take advantage of the range capabilities.

A defender must also allocate one weapon proficiency slot to a weapon linked to a site. A pyramid defender would choose a kopesh, for example, while a defender of the catacombs of an abbey would be required to pick the cleric's favorite weapon, probably a quarterstaff or mace.

Non-weapon proficiency: Bonus: Local history. Recommended: Ancient history, blind-fighting endurance, etiquette, hunting, persuasion, reading/writing.

Armor/equipment: Crypt Defenders have no restrictions on the amount of equipment they can possess, although most adopt the spartan ways of their brethren and donate any gifts or excess equipment. For armor, a Crypt Defender adopts the ceremonial armor of the site he protects. Some defenders use this to their advantage, creating the impression that their locale is haunted by the ghosts of the deceased.

Species enemy: Crypt Defenders do not choose a species enemy as do other rangers, and they do not enjoy the same attack bonus or reaction penalty.

Followers: Crypt Defenders receive only one follower at the appropriate level. This follower becomes the next defender of the site whenever the Crypt Defender retires or moves on. If the site is not a permanent one, the follower leaves with the Crypt Ranger as an apprentice.

Special benefits: Reaction bonus. Crypt Defenders receive a great deal of respect from everyone, as they are

defenders of the dead. They are honored by periodic visits from priests and noblemen. Visitors to their sites often leave a gift ranging from money or artwork to a simple home cooked meal. If the defender makes a reasonable request, chances are it will be granted. Crypt Defenders gain +2 to reaction rolls with those who know their station.

Alertness and area knowledge. Crypt Defenders come to know their sites so well that anything out of the ordinary puts them on their guard. In the catacombs, for instance, a Crypt Defender uses air currents, smells, and sounds to determine what is normal and what is amiss. He shifts into a defensive mode immediately. This translates into a +2 on reaction rolls.

Speak with dead. Once per week, a Crypt Ranger can attempt to *speak with dead* at his locale in a manner similar to the 3rd-level priest spell of the same name. The ranger can ask one complex, two moderate, or three simple questions of the dead, but the answers, while truthful, may be very ambiguous. The length of time since the death of the petitioned soul is irrelevant, since this ability is tied directly to the site the Crypt Defender serves.

Special hindrances: Crypt Defenders lead an extremely solitary life. Even for the ranger, this life is lonely and has few physical rewards. Adventuring is a rare occurrence for the Crypt Defender, and few choose this kit. But for that rare individual, being a defender can be a fulfilling and even religious role in life.

Defending a huge or well-known site can be extremely tiring and dangerous, as wave after wave of adventurers, looters, or curiosity seekers swarm to the area. For this reason, most defenders employ numerous animal companions and traps to assist them in their task.

Training is also a solitary pursuit for a Crypt Defender. Except in the rarest of cases, defenders are required to train themselves as per the rules for self training in the *DMG*.

Role in the campaign: Crypt Defenders are a loosely organized branch of the ranger class. They have no recognized leaders, preferring to follow their own council. Some are retainers to kings and as such are sent to various locales to defend for differing lengths of time. Others are people with an obligation to a certain site or person and they choose to pay that obligation by becoming a defender. Many simply feel a calling to protect a certain site.

Defenders employ many of the ranger's special skills to their mission. Animal companions become trusted guards and friends. Hunting abilities translate into guerrilla tactics against much larger parties. Much like cornering an animal in its lair, it can be a dangerous thing to disturb a site protected by a Crypt Defender.

As a kit for a solo campaign, defenders make great PCs. Their independence and solitary nature make them ideal for campaigns where a DM could test the player's inventiveness with a storyline based around a series of threats to the rangers site. How do you scare off or kill the normal adventuring party that comes to loot your tomb? What happens when a vampire decides he wants your barrow as a base of operations?

If a player wants to run a Crypt Defender as a member of an adventuring party, there are a number of ways it can be worked into the story line. As a beginning character, the Crypt Defender's site is robbed. It is up to the defender to track down and recover all of the missing treasure (with some help or hindrance from the voices of the suitably annoyed dead). His superiors might become concerned that the defender is not as dedicated to protecting his site as he should be, sending him on a quest to prove his commitment. This quest would be something relevant to the character's duties such as discovering a piece of lost history or locating a lost relative.

As an NPC, the defender is invaluable. Perhaps the defender needs help to repel a drow invasion that has broken through into the bottom level of his mausoleum complex. Maybe the PCs need assistance finding their way through the haunted battlefield without disturbing one of the many ghosts in the area. An adventuring party could easily run afoul of a Crypt Defender in the course of their travels.



While his own modesty prevents him from saying so, since Ross Allen Clifton has lived in his town, the cemeteries have never been vandalized. Or haunted.