



a dozen malevolent villains

BY PHILIP REED

Operating from the shadows and fog of the game world, manipulating underlings and the unknowing alike, recurring villains can add depth to any campaign. Hints and clues of the villain's existence builds to a climactic battle against an opponent that the PCs may have never met before the final scene of the campaign.

For those gamemasters who seek to stitch a common thread through multiple game sessions, the twelve villains that follow may provide inspiration that transforms what could have been a few weeks of lightly-connected adventures into a powerful narrative that the players are unlikely to forget.

I have presented each villain as a rumor that you, the gamemaster, may use to determine how you wish to include the villain in your campaign. As with all of the entries in the **A Dozen . . .** series of PDFs, **A Dozen Malevolent Villains** is not a collection of worked examples but, rather, twelve springboards to spark your own imagination. It is my opinion that every gaming group is different, making it important that the GM tailor the specifics to suit the needs of the group. Personally, I prefer concepts and ideas to fleshed out stories.

As always, the characters are without game statistics. You will need to provide the necessary stats.

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anatomy of a villain

1. A title, to help set the mood.
2. A little descriptive text to help set the scene and give the GM some understanding of the villain.
3. An overview of the situation, including what minions the villain may have and the villain's base of operations and usual actions. This is, of course, all suggestions that the gamemaster may use or disregard as the GM feels is appropriate to the campaign. As always, make the work fit your own needs.
4. An illustration of the villain.

1 HORROR THE UNDYING

Servant of the snake gods of old, Xorror is an undead snakefolk wizard who lives in the deep caverns beneath the city. Through necromancy, the snakeman has kept himself in an unliving, inactive state for decades, slowly building an army of snakefolk followers who creep to the surface late at night to search for supplies, gather information, and to please their master.

"We saw them two nights ago, at least a dozen of them, and managed to get a good look before they fled into the sewers. Each were a man or woman, yes, but they were warped and twisted with skin like that of a snake and eyes that glowed as red as any evil you can imagine."

Xorror rarely leaves the safety of the caverns, instead choosing to send his followers to search the city for supplies and information. If the PCs try, they should find one or two of the snakefolk in the city late at night and, if they're careful, follow the creature back to its lair.

The snakefolk followers and Xorror have made a town for themselves in the caverns. Homes, shops, services, and anything you would expect to find in a small human settlement exist in the snakefolk underground town.

The creatures will do all that they can to protect their home and leader from the surface world, even sacrificing their lives in battle.

If the snakefolk town is attacked, Xorror will flee and avoid battle. If pressed into combat, treat the creature as a powerful lich that is capable of protecting himself using magic spells. His people only try to escape if half their number are killed in a fight.

"A villain can be anything from a lowly pickpocket street urchin to a dragon criminal mastermind."

– Paul "Wiggy" Wade-Williams,

Savage Worlds

Fantasy Companion



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USING THE VILLAINS

Every villain that follows is presented as a bit of a rumor – that is true! – for the gamemaster to use to either add some background noise to the campaign or as bait for the player characters to latch onto and pursue. The villains shouldn't be confronted immediately, though, and will be more fun if the PCs hear about the exploits of a villain over the course of a few different game sessions.

Maybe they first hear the name of a villain when at a local tavern. Nothing with too much detail, just the name and a mentioned crime that has been associated with the villain. The PCs then set off on adventure and leave the situation behind them. After they complete the adventure, and return to the tavern – or to a different town altogether – they again hear the name of the villain and of a new crime.

By building up the villains in this way, the act of confrontation will have a lot more meaning to the PCs than if the situation were played out in its entirety in a single game session. Part of what makes a campaign memorable are those NPCs that return again and again, and no NPC is as exciting as a recurring villain.

Perhaps more than any other rumor or type of character that I have created for the **A Dozen . . .** series of PDFs, villains are those who demand the most attention by the gamemaster. A good villain is one that the PCs are aware of and, over time, choose to act against. That means the villains will need to continue taking villainous acts in the campaign's background over several sessions, and only the GM can identify exactly which crimes will spur the PCs to action against the villain.

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FUCHSIA, LADY OF WOODS

The sorceress Fuchsia was transformed by a magical disaster that both granted her greater arcane powers and forever changed her into a monster unlike any other creature in existence. Once an elf, Fuchsia is now shunned by her former friends and feared by all those who have heard of the monster's evil nature and vile acts.

"She is one not to be trifled with, so I've heard said, because her powers are greater than any such as you may dream of possessing. I hear that she were the one responsible for the murders in Torkertown two weeks ago and that she is also who has been ambushing the merchants on the road to Damazkus."

The adventurers hear of the once-elf Fuchsia who now lives in the dark wood outside of the city. The woman is described as an evil cultists and spellcaster, and the PCs are warned to stay away from her and her forest home.

Fuchsia spends her time attacking the smaller villages and towns that lie within a few miles of her forest, choosing to move in at night and kill random citizens of the city. The city and towns have banded together to offer a reward of 1,000 gold to anyone who delivers the head of the woman to the town dungeon.

"She uses magic as well as might in her attacks, with those who escape telling of how she is both a dangerous warrior and a wizard more powerful than any they have seen before. Do not misjudge her if you choose to try and confront her."

The woman sometimes hires thugs to aid her in her pursuits.

In battle, Fuchsia prefers to stand back at a distance and launch spell after spell at her opponents. If pressed into melee battle, though, she attacks with her magic staff and her deformed, clawed hand.

Fuchsia is more powerful than the party and capable of destroying them the first time they hear of her. Keep her in the background for a few sessions, teasing the PCs with her exploits, before they confront her.



BROGHI THE TRAPPED

Once a powerful wizard, Broghi Balfarch's life was forever changed the day that he betrayed a minor devil. He made a deal with the devil – a trade of a captured spellbook in exchange for an amulet that would give him unending life – but then Broghi tried to manipulate the devil and worm his way out of the deal. As punishment, the devil cursed the man and transformed him into a wood beast that was planted in the forest. Broghi is unable to move from his new place in the forest.

Trapped in the forest and forever secured to a single location, Broghi has been forced to use his magic to secure mindless agents who can be sent out into the world to act as his eyes, ears, and hands. The transformed wizard has managed to enlarge his area of control over time, with the creature's root system pliable enough that he can move anywhere within a 20' radius of where he was trapped by the devil.

"It was while collecting fallen branches to chop and sell to others that I saw the thing. It was a treeman of sorts, of that I have no doubt, but there was an evil about it that scared me so much that I dropped my findings and ran. I will not go back to that part of the forest again."

Broghi's agents are plant golems that he builds from the vegetation that grows nearby. He models them to look as much like men as possible, using leaves stitched together with magic as cloaks to conceal the wooden and unnatural look of the golems.

When possible, Broghi's agents only go near civilization in the dark of night, to better mask their true appearance from others. The creatures are incapable of speech and each is programmed by the wizard before setting off on its assignment. In battle, the golems are quick to flee, preferring escape over conflict of any sort.

Broghi's ultimate goal is to reverse the power that has trapped him in his current state. He has learned of a magical ring of undoing that may prove powerful enough to free him from his captive state. The ring is currently being held at one of the city's many magic shops and the wizard is now preparing to send his golems to steal the item. Will the PCs learn of the situation in time to act against the evil wizard?



PHANDAX DARKSOUL

In life, Phandax was a human knight who devoted his life to combating evil in all its forms. Unfortunately for the man, his encounter with a necromantic spellcaster ended in brutal failure that stripped his flesh and blood from this world, destroyed his heart and soul, and infused the skeletal bits of the man with the dark cosmic force of an ancient evil that now controls Phandax's remains.

"Live in the caverns beneath the ruins of Zhentall Keep, they say he does, though I'm not one foolish enough to go and check for myself. The thing is cursed and no longer the man that it once was. I fear that Phandax is forever gone and now the only way to give him peace is to murder this thing that he has become."

The transformation of Phandax from a knight to the beast that he is now happened recently enough that elders of the city remember the time when the man was a force for good. Every now and then, one of the elders will suggest that – just maybe – someone can find a way to undo the curse and release the knight to his proper place in the afterlife.

Phandax now exists only to cause chaos and destruction. Once every few months, the creature comes out of its home beneath the ruins of a once-great fortress. When on the surface world, Phandax searches for the innocent so that he may murder them and consume their life force. From time to time, the thing's attack changes the victim into a skeletal warrior that follows Phandax back to the caverns. It is unknown what happens to those skeletons.

The best course of action is to attack Phandax in the caverns beneath the keep. Of course, that's where the skeletons are waiting and will protect their master from assault.

"Unlike the friendly innkeepers and livery men who may people your campaign, villains motivate the player characters to action."

*– Kirk Botula,
**The Complete Book
of Villains***



DANYEL ETHERKAN

In his early years, Etherkan was a warrior, a mercenary in the employ of the Heart's Force. Under the command of the elven general Xerxes Heart, Etherkan became a skilled and powerful fighter and one of Heart's finest bodyguards. It was the discovery of the Axe of Blood that forever changed Etherkan into the villain that he is today.

Etherkan's axe is the true source of his power. An intelligent entity all its own, the Axe of Blood is an ancient artifact that injects its own desires and thoughts into the one who carries it. A powerful mind is required to resist the Axe of Blood's commands . . . and Etherkan failed in resisting the item's power.

Constructed centuries ago by orc mages, the Axe of Blood takes its name from the item's ability to drink the blood of victims. The object must kill daily or its powers begin to weaken; if the axe doesn't murder an intelligent being at least once every day, its hold over its carrier grows weaker. After a week, the one under the control of the axe may again resist its mind control power and try to escape.

Unfortunately for Etherkan, the murderous nature of the man plays right into the strengths of the intelligent axe. Danyel Etherkan wants to kill others, so the axe is stronger than ever before and now has an unwavering command of the man's mind and body.

These days, Etherkan travels from city to city and offers his services as a killer to any who will pay him. The axe has decided that it is time that it own a fortress home of its own, so it is sending Etherkan out again and again in an attempt to secure enough coin to buy a tower. If the opportunity ever comes up to take a tower by force, the axe will most certainly change its plan from purchase to conquest.

The PCs may find themselves up against Etherkan when they are hired to protect a merchant or noble from the killer. Gold often attracts the attention of adventurers, and what better source of gold than playing bodyguard for a rich merchant?

The Axe of Blood will only release its hold on a victim if it encounters one it considers to be a more powerful carrier. In a confrontation between Etherkan and the PCs, what happens if the axe decides that one of the PCs is a more suitable carrier?



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ELINORA ROSAMOND

Ever since the planar accident ripped the flesh of her face from her body, Elinora Rosamond has worn a metal mask to hide her faceless form from the world. Beneath the mask is nothing but scraps of flesh clinging to bone, everything held into place by the spell of a healer who tried to save her. The accident twisted Rosamond, changing her into an unfeeling monster that wishes only to make others suffer.

"What I heard is that her face is gone, completely wiped from her head when the planar gate collapsed as she was trying to escape. I'm not sure if that's true or not, but it is what everyone says. And regardless of what did happen, none will deny that the mask she wears is terrifying to look at and a magical item of power."

Rosamond has recently made her home in the city, her reputation as a brutal killer and assassin preceding her. She has enough wealth and power that she has already bribed many of the upper levels of the city watch, which is giving her the freedom to walk the streets even though many are aware of her background as a wanted criminal.

The woman's home is in a small block house that she has rented that sits on a dusty, stench-riddled alleyway in one of the worst parts of the city. It is only a matter of time before her home becomes a battlefield – too many other towns in the land have offered a reward for her scarred and grotesque head – and that has led many who lived near her to move (so long as they could afford to). Now, only the poorest of the poor and most hardened of the criminals of the city live within a few blocks of her home.

"She's paying gold to them that brings her gems and valuables. I heard she is using these to power some dark ritual or other, and while I've not sold to the woman, you can bet I will if I see the chance to snatch a diamond or other stone and make off with it."

Rosamond's acts of crime become more blatant with each passing week as she openly bribes city officials, pays off guardsmen, and hires criminals to do her bidding. If left unchecked, there's a danger that the woman will gain so much power that she runs for the town council and, very likely, buys so many votes that she wins and starts her climb to assuming control of the city.

Only those brave enough (or foolish enough, some would say) to face her can stop the fiend.



Chaz 2006

Murderer and fiend, those are the two words most often used to describe the elven warrior Jojeon. At a young age, Jojeon was a cruel and brutal individual who enjoyed making others uncomfortable. As he grew, he embraced his dark side and today causes pain to all he meets.



IOLAS JOJEON

"Killed several just last week he did. Two at the Baited Hook out by the docks, because they refused to quiet down when Jojeon were drinking and didn't want to hear their singing. Another two later that night in the alley who made the mistake o' asking for a few copper. One watchman because he demanded that Jojeon get inside since it were after curfew. Them's all I know of, but I'd be shocked not to hear there were more."

One thing about Iolas Jojeon that should not be forgotten is that the man lives to kill. Nothing brings him as much joy and satisfaction as taking a life, and he will use any perceived slight or threat as permission to slaughter the one who offended him.

Most inns and taverns in the nearby towns and cities know of the villain and pray that he not visit them. Having Jojeon as a patron is a sure way to lose business; once the others hear that the elf is in the establishment they start to trickle out, one by one, and they warn others outside to avoid the place.

There's a price on Jojeon's head of 200 gold, even if none have yet been willing to try and take in the elf. Professional bounty hunters feel the reward is too low for the risk involved, and those without the experience of a professional bounty hunter have – at least so far – had enough sense to not confront the killer.

"He insisted that we join him in a round of drinks, his treat, and though we were afraid to drink with one such as he, we were more afeared of turning down his offer and angering a man so quick with his sword."

Jojeon has been in the city for well over a week now, moving from tavern to tavern and drinking away what coin he has stolen over the last few months. He is even quicker to anger than ever before, and members of the town watch are trying to stay a step ahead of the man to warn citizens to leave the area before the elf gets there. Why Jojeon isn't confronted by the watch and arrested is a mystery that may never be solved. Are they afraid of him, or is someone in charge covering for the elf?

KRIZHAR CRYSTANN

An elemental creature from another world, Krizhar is trapped in this realm after being forever banished from his home plane. The evil, powerful beast is more than just a monster; Krizhar has established a network of thieves since reaching this world and is doing all he can to collect power and wealth.

"Thieves say they're working for someone new, not of this world, and that this new leader of theirs is a strange sort of fellow."

The city underground network of criminals is buzzing with news that someone has been knocking off competition and taking control of different thieves' operations and guilds that work in the city. Word is, this new criminal leader is from another world and consumes the gems and jewels that his new minions steal and deliver to him.

"You heard the news, yes? That the town watch has captured and broken a thief, forcing the scoundrel to tell of his new master. It's a rock beast of some kind, walking on two legs but made of stones. I'd hate to run into a monster such as that day or night."

If the PCs investigate the situation, they soon hear that the town watch has offered a reward of 200 gold for the capture of this new ringleader. As days pass, the story of the monster grows and spreads and it isn't long before everyone is speaking of the rock beast that is commanding the city's thieves and murderers.

Of course, the story is soon far from the truth.



As the crimes increase in frequency – every night, two or three people report being assaulted by thieves and the merchants are finding that their shops are being broken into – the town watch puts more and more men on the streets to watch for thieves.

In their hurry to capture the reported monster and put an end to the thefts, the town watch starts confronting everyone they see on the streets after dusk, making it difficult for honest citizens to go about their business. Soon, the bars and taverns lose their regulars as more and more people choose to stay home at night.

Before long, the reward for the monster reaches 500 gold coins. If someone does manage to capture this beast, they're going to be well rewarded.

ZHAZHUL CORPSEMAKER

Beneath the armor, Zhazhul is a human warrior who was left for dead by his companions several years ago. Wounded by a wizard's attack, Zhazhul was thought dead by the members of his adventuring party and it was only luck that kept him alive. Since escaping the dungeon, Zhazhul has sworn to take his revenge on all dungeoneers.

After being left by his friends in the dungeon, Zhazhul managed to crawl to the safety of a small, narrow hallway where he lived off of his remaining rations and the steady drips of water that he collected in his shield. After a few days, the man had healed enough to stand and slowly – cautiously – started searching the rooms nearest his location. It was the discovery of the armor that he wears today that allowed him to survive.

The armor is a suit of healing, magic armor that grants the wearer the power of near-instant healing and has the magical strength to even regrow lost limbs. Zhazhul felt better within hours of pulling on the armor and he soon was strong enough to escape the dungeon and return to the world above.

To this day, Zhazhul suffers from “spell shock” and must fight against his own fear whenever he confronts a mage. There’s a 25% chance that going up against any mage, regardless of the spellcaster’s true power, will cause the villain to flee the scene. If forced to fight more than one arcane spellcaster at once, the spell shock check must be made once for each wizard in the combat. Any one failure causes Zhazhul to run; a second failed check reduces the man to a catatonic state and leaves him unable to act.

The villain is aware of his fear of spellcasters and will do all that he can to avoid them. Before setting off to explore a dungeon or take on any assignment, Zhazhul seeks out information on the situation and chooses to skip the opportunity if his intel reports the presence of a wizard.

Whenever he meets adventurers, Zhazhul’s anger at those who abandoned him often drives him to attack the strangers. His blind desire for revenge will lead to his death.



ZHEKIS, KEEPER OF THE FROST

Through the magic of a Gem of Frost Control, the towering giant Zhekis Gosarn has connected a demiplane of ice to an abandoned tower on the outskirts of the city. Those who come close to the tower report that the area is unnaturally cold, but none have so far been brave enough to investigate what may be causing the odd shift in temperature.

Over time, the area surrounding the tower grows colder and colder, with every passing week pushing the affected space out a few more feet. After a year, the tower's frost effect is starting to make metal objects near the tower difficult to hold without gloves . . . and still the town watch takes no action and doesn't investigate.

"I've seen ice on the tower walls in the hottest days of summer, and there are times when you can feel a freezing wind blowing as if it originates within the tower itself. Something unnatural and evil is happening there, and it is a sin that the city does nothing to put an end to whatever evil lives inside the cursed tower."

Zhekis Gosarn keeps the tower closed tight during the day, with every window and door sealed and bolted shut to prevent anyone from entering the building. At night, a few times each week, the giant sends his minions – frost golems, creatures built from the remains of people and brought to life through the power of the Gem of Frost Control – out into the city. These minions have no will or mind of their own, with each instead controlled by Gosarn's thoughts. He sees what the minions see. Any words they speak are those of the giant. And each will die rather than betray the giant.



The minions are murderers and thieves, seeking out fresh bodies to feed Gosarn's need of new parts to continue crafting new minions. The creatures should be treated like zombies, (they're slow to move and react, because of the delay between the giant's commands and the minion's actions), and Gosarn usually sends out only two or three at a time.

If the PCs break into the tower, they find an ice-covered dungeon just waiting to be explored.

smagheD, ORC WARLORD

The villain Smaghed is a brutal dictator in command of a force of 30+ orc warriors who follow him out of fear. Smaghed, in addition to being a violent and powerful fighter, wears a Belt of Devastating Fear that has captured his soldiers and twisted their minds to the point that they will follow him blindly into any battle.

"They've no home, instead choosing to travel with all of their belongings on their backs and in carts that are pulled by the youngest and strongest of the group. Word is, the warlord is seeking to build an army of hundreds so that they can smash their way through the gates and take the city for themselves."

Smaghed was terrifying before he discovered the magic belt, and now that he has the item he is scarier than ever before. The belt casts a spell of control over those who fail to resist, driving them to follow the warlord's commands out of fear.

Few orcs who have met the warlord have managed to resist the powers of the belt, and its effect holds so long as the victim is within a few hundred feet of the magic item. It is that limitation that should prevent Smaghed from growing his number of followers much more.

"Smaghed and his soldiers were last spotted a week ago in the mountains to the south. They were turned back by the king's private guard and forced to seek shelter in the mountains, but who knows when they'll next attack."

The warlord may be encountered by the dungeoneers when they are on adventure and not expecting such a large band of orcs. The gamemaster may wish to use Smaghed and his orcs in a "random encounter" when the PCs are least expecting it, throwing the monsters at the party for a large battle.



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CRAGSON, FALLEN KNIGHT

Once an honorable and just knight, Cragson Hephmar spent his waking hours protecting those people of the lands who had no defense against evil. It was discovering and donning the magical armor that he wears today that was his undoing; the cursed armor sucked the good from his soul and filled the knight with pure evil.

"Fear his swords is my advice to you, dungeoneer. Those twin blades are as sharp and horrible as you may imagine and each is infused with the power of a thousand suns."

Cragson today lives in the ruins of Castle Omen, the former home of his king who the knight murdered shortly after he was consumed by the cursed armor. Calling an army of evil from the mountains and forests, Cragson led goblins, orcs, trolls, and other foul beasts on a rampage that terrified the king and his people.

It has now been centuries since the fall of Castle Omen, and only those scholars who look to the past are even aware of Cragson's place in the destruction of the small kingdom. The people were driven out of the land, forced on marches to distant towns and cities where they were taken in and eventually became citizens of their new homes.

To this day, some who are descended from the refugees speak of reclaiming Castle Omen and rebuilding their fallen land. It is all talk, though, because none have proven courageous enough to attempt an assault on the castle and its evil master.

Cragson devotes his time to patrolling his lands and castle, sometimes taking a band of evil nonhumans to raid a town or village to claim supplies and, at times, slaves. He keeps no permanent army, but he can summon a force 100 strong within a few days if he needs soldiers to deal with intruders.

