

LUNCH BREAK HEROES PRESENTS

RAISING THE STAKES

THE ESSENTIAL CURSE OF STRAHD COMPANION



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INTRODUCTION

Starting with *I6: Ravenloft*, Count Strahd von Zarovich and his mist-clad land of Barovia have provided countless hours of adventure and harrowing perils for *Dungeons & Dragons* players worldwide. The original module and its sequels, spin-offs, and additions have solidified the gothic horror setting of Ravenloft as one of the most beloved in tabletop gaming history.

In 2016, adventurers were invited back to Barovia with the publication of *Curse of Strahd*. Rather than being a brand new adventure, *Curse of Strahd* served as a revival and expansion of the original adventure module. Many of the same characters, places, and events are present and updated for fifth edition rules.

Since its publication, *Curse of Strahd* has gathered one of the largest online communities of any official module. Community members dedicate their time to creating additional content and guides for the adventure in order to flesh out its story, provide alternative events, and add depth to its world. This is one such guide. Its goal is to add meat to the narrative bones of the module, make sense of the nonsensical, and provide you with the tools and ideas you need to run a compelling adventure, all while staying fairly true to the gothic horror essence of the module.

The order of the chapters within this guide roughly follow those of the official module. Most chapters are also accompanied by a companion video, which can be watched online. These videos provide much the same information in this book, but can be useful when you aren't in a position to sit down and read.

The details laid out in this guide are merely suggestions. By no means is anything here meant to be taken as gospel, or the "one right way" to run the adventure. You are free to add as much or as little of this guide's contents to your game as you see fit, or you can add content of your own!

If you like what we've done here, and want to see more content for Ravenloft, please consider supporting [Lunch Break Heroes on Patreon](#).

A PERSONAL NOTE

I started my career in roleplaying games back in 1999, when a friend of mine showed me the magical world of AOL chat rooms. There, in cyberspace, were a bunch of nerds like me pretending to be not-so-nerdy people who had grand adventures in magical lands. Something about that spoke to my soul, and forever altered the course of my life.

For a number of years, hardly a day went by without the sound of the modem connecting to the internet and taking up our only phone line, whereupon I disappeared into worlds of fantasy and magic. I was a

young teen at that time, and not at all adept at storytelling or embodying a character; to say nothing of how annoying I must have been. But as time wore on, I honed my craft and eventually became what I hope was a passable roleplayer.

As life is wont to do, it eventually drew my attention away from roleplaying games. Every time it did this, however, I somehow found my way back months or years later, always in a different game. A chatroom here, a large-scale MMO there, a simple MUD on the side—whatever scratched the itch to tell a collaborative tale.

After another break from roleplaying games, it was in the Spring of 2018 that I felt the itch again. After starting a game of *Lost Mine of Phandelver* with my wife and a couple of friends, which only lasted three sessions, I eventually moved on to running the game for several coworkers at the office of my day job during our lunch break.

After finishing up *Lost Mine of Phandelver*, I asked my coworkers what type of game they wanted to play next. I gave them several options of genre, of which they chose "Gothic Horror." Later that month, I received my copy of *Curse of Strahd* for Christmas of 2018. Unbeknownst to me at that moment, the die was cast, and my fate was sealed.

Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined that my efforts to enhance my game of *Curse of Strahd* would result in the creation of a widely-lauded series of guides, a YouTube channel, a thriving online community, and a successful business. Lunch Break Heroes, after all, only started as a way for me to teach the basics of the game to myself and others.

As of the time of this writing in September of 2021, while putting the finishing touches on this book, I look back on the journey that has led here and I am both humbled and awed. While it was my own efforts that created the content (and drew in talented writers to help), it is YOU whom I have to thank for everything. You, dear reader, have supported the efforts of Lunch Break Heroes in no small way—you've watched the videos, downloaded the guides, talked about us on social media, and supported us financially. With all that said, I want to add just two more heartfelt words.

Thank you.

Steve Miller
Lunch Break Heroes
September 29th, 2021

THE LAND OF BAROVIA

Situated in a small valley, the land of Barovia was once home to verdant, fertile fields and a peaceful and happy populace. Rivers flowed clear, crops grew under bright sunlight, and nefarious monsters were things of legend.

These days, life in the land of Barovia is harsh, and all-too-often short. The days are dark, travel is dangerous, and food is scarce. Fields that once grew wheat and corn now only grow kale and other low-light and cold weather plants. Groves that yielded bountiful fruit now serve only to fill the slop buckets of pigs.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

A CLOSED ECOSYSTEM

No one enters or leaves Barovia without Strahd's permission (or the whims of a Dark Power). This has caused Barovia to become a closed ecosystem, reliant entirely on what can be grown and produced within its misty borders.

Over the centuries, the population has entered an equilibrium with its surroundings. Families have become smaller in order to have fewer mouths to feed, and people have grown used to eating food made from hardier—if less flavorful—crops. Meat, both from livestock and wild game, has become a staple of the Barovian diet.

Most of the valley's population live their lives in one of the three main settlements: the Village of Barovia, the Town of Vallaki, or the Village of Krezk. With the exception of Krezk, which is self-sufficient, the people in these settlements must get their food from somewhere.

Surrounding the Village of Barovia and the Town of Vallaki are farms of various sizes. The lands between the River Ivlis (Area D) and the Village of Barovia (Area E) are particularly fertile, and serve a great deal of the land's agricultural needs. In addition to those farms, wild game roams most of the forested areas of Barovia. Deer, rabbits, fish, and other woodland creatures round out the diet of most villagers.

GIVE AN INCH, TAKE A MILE

In the module, the map of Barovia measures roughly 19 miles east-to-west, and 12 miles north-to-south. Those measurements mean that Barovia covers 228 square miles. This is a fairly sizable area to travel on foot or horseback, given the fact that overland travel is hampered by unmaintained roads, savage wilderness, and evil creatures.

Despite issues with overland travel, most adventuring parties will find themselves trekking from one settlement to another within the span of an afternoon. Unless you, as the Dungeon Master, assault the party with a myriad of roadside encounters, the walk from Vallaki to Krezk amounts to little more than a day hike. These short travels can often hamper the horror aspect of the module's narrative.

The *Curse of Strahd* adventure module is not the first time Barovia has been given dimensions, however. Its size and scale are also defined in previously published works, such as the books *I, Strahd: The Memoirs of a Vampire*, and *The War Against Azalin*.

These previously published novels depict a Barovia that is roughly three times the size of the land shown in *Curse of Strahd*. For example, in *The War Against Azalin*, Krezk is explicitly stated to lie 40 miles west of Castle Ravenloft.

Using the map of Barovia that is included with the adventure module, you can update the scale of the map by changing each hex from 1/4 of a mile to 3/4 of a mile. This change to the scale of the map transforms Barovia into a much larger landmass, measuring 57 miles east-to-west and 36 miles north-to-south. This gives Barovia a total area of 2,052 square miles.

ADJUSTED TRAVEL TIMES

With the map of Barovia being three times its original size, travel times are increased dramatically. It's all but guaranteed that a party traveling from one settlement to another will need to make camp along the Svalich road at least once, or travel in the darkness of the dreaded Barovian night.

This time on the road and the isolation of wilderness camping provide ample opportunity for the party to encounter the things that go "bump" in the night without a set of four sturdy walls to protect them. It also provides Strahd or his spies with chances to get close to the party under the cover of darkness.

THE SOULLESS BAROVIANS

The module describes one in every ten Barovian as lacking a soul. Those that lack a soul exhibit certain behaviors, such as not crying as a child, being very dull as an adult, and providing no sustenance to a vampire.

Instead of being “empty shells created by [Strahd’s] consciousness,” this guide posits a different and far more sinister origin for the soulless Barovians: something in the darkness is preventing nature from taking its course.

A SICK CYCLE

When someone dies in Barovia, its soul remains trapped until it is reincarnated. It remains in limbo, cycling and tumbling in a tumultuous cloud of torment.

When a Barovian is born, one of those souls is plucked from the swirling mass. It gets wiped clean and sent on its way for another life under Strahd’s rule. At least, that’s the way it’s supposed to be. Over the last several centuries, something has been disrupting the cycle of death and rebirth.

THE RAVENOUS ONES

Deep within the Amber Temple lie the Vestiges—remnants of dark gods, trapped inside prisons of amber. Once held fast by the spells of the wizards of the Amber Temple, the Vestiges have begun to find flaws in their prison.

Since the fall of the wizarding order, the seals and wards that have kept the Vestiges locked away have begun to wear down. Although the flaws in their prisons aren’t bad enough for them to escape completely (yet), they are enough to let the Vestiges’ influence reach out across the land in search of potential victims.

As they no longer possess physical bodies, the Vestiges rely on their own innate magical abilities and their cunning. In the night, they reach out to the minds of sleepers and invade their dreams. Often in the guise of family members or lovers, the Vestiges trick the sleeper into surrendering their soul.

Upon death, instead of joining the tumbling mass of souls to await rebirth, the victim’s soul is snatched up and devoured by the Vestige who claimed it, never again to be reborn.

A DWINDLING SUPPLY

As the centuries have worn on, more and more souls have been taken out of the cycle of death and rebirth by the Vestiges. With very few new souls entering the land of Barovia, this has created a problem of supply and demand. There are no longer enough souls to go around for every new Barovian.

For Strahd, this creates a problem of sustenance. As stated, the blood of soulless Barovians does not nourish a vampire. As fewer and fewer souls are reincarnated, the food supply for Strahd and his minions diminishes. At this time in Barovia’s history, Strahd is only vaguely aware of the growing issue of soullessness. He knows that some Barovians lack souls, but has not yet noticed that the number is growing as time goes on.

At your discretion, Strahd may discover this information and possibly change his motivations during the game. It’s possible that, if he discovers his food supply is dwindling, Strahd will redouble his efforts in attempting to escape the demiplane, or shift his focus toward eliminating the threat of the Vestiges.

THE SUNSWORD

Once a crystalline sword belonging to Sergei von Zarovich, Strahd’s younger brother, the Sunsword now serves as a potent weapon against the undead.

Rather than allowing players to find the sword intact and ready for use, it’s recommended that they find only the hilt. The hilt carries the sentient properties described in the module, with the addition of the following trait: *The Sunsword’s hilt grants its bearer the urge to visit Krezk.*

Once the hilt is brought to Krezk, characters are further urged to visit the Shrine of the White Sun, where Sergei von Zarovich awaits their arrival inside the pool. At that point, you can run the *The Power of the Sun* special event.

In addition to adding incentive to visit Krezk, this change adds greater depths and interactivity to the character of Sergei. Instead of just being someone from history, and a magical NPC that whisks Ireena away, he is someone that directly contributes to the success of the party.

MURIEL VINSHAW

In the module, Muriel is a wereraven that characters may encounter in the bogs of Berez. She serves primarily as an information dump, providing the players with insight into the dangers of Berez and its resident witch, Baba Lysaga.

While there is no problem with Muriel’s portrayal in the module, this guide recommends turning her into a recurring character for your adventure. She can make her first appearance in disguise as the raven who tries to warn the party away from Old Bonegrinder, or perhaps during the burial of Kolyan Indrovich. From there, she can crop up again and again to guide and aid the players when necessary.

STRAHD AND IREENA

Strahd's relationship with Ireena is an abusive one. Under the guise of undying love, he seeks to end her life and force her to join him as an immortal vampire. The module states that he has already bitten Ireena twice prior to the arrival of the characters.

A question that often comes up very soon during play is: "Why doesn't Strahd simply come and take Ireena away?" This is a valid question, given the fact that Strahd certainly has the strength (and assistance) to remove her from the burgomaster's mansion, and from the hands of a low-level party of adventurers. Thus, some explanation must be proffered to explain his lack of direct action.

This guide suggests making a slight change to the dynamic between Strahd and Ireena to answer that question and inform future gameplay. The relationship and Strahd's goals are still abusive in nature, but his tactics are different than those written in the module.

Over the centuries, Strahd has tried many times to woo and transform Tatyana's reincarnation. Each time, he has failed for one reason or another, and the reincarnation's life was ended. Although his first attempts were fraught with passion, Strahd quickly became cold and calculating in his efforts. He began to employ the scientific method and treated each reincarnation as an experiment. Each time, he changed certain aspects of his approach and took note of how and why it failed. Tatyana's latest reincarnation as Ireena is no exception. Strahd is trying a new approach—one that may see his quarry *come to him*.

Strahd's current goal now is to make Barovia inhospitable to Ireena. He aims to remove all support structures in her life—friends, family, sanctuaries—and leave her with no option but to come to his castle for safety.

Instead of having bitten her twice when the characters arrive, the story has changed so that Strahd has not bitten her at all. His forces have been assailing her house, not in an attempt to steal her away, but to make it seem unsafe. His other efforts in the Village of Barovia are detailed in that chapter. These acts serve to make her home seem like a dangerous place to stay. The death of Ireena's father during the assault, while not intended, was a happy accident in Strahd's favor.

The change in Strahd's approach to Ireena necessitates another change to the module: that of the burgomaster's letter, which players can find on a corpse on the road. Instead of stating that Ireena has been "bitten by a vampyr," change the text to state that she has been "harried by a vampyr." Additionally, change the mention of Ireena languishing and dying from an "unholy wound" to a fear that the vampire will consume her blood and damn her soul.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

The module presents quite a few random encounters for use during your game. It splits the encounters into two groups by day and night, and instructs you to roll for an encounter after every 30 minutes of travel on the roads or in the wilderness.

Although the random encounters provided are interesting and can be used to great effect, it's the opinion of this guide's author that their usage should be anything but random. An encounter on the road in Barovia should be more than a simple reminder that the land is dangerous, and it should always be more than a time filler.

To that end, it is recommended that you preplan encounters that your party has a chance of running into. Hand pick and tailor the encounters so that they tie into your overall narrative, or foreshadow upcoming events. For instance, parties who are going to the werewolf den might find daytime encounter 15, a corpse. In that case, it would be evidently mauled by a large animal, indicative of a werewolf.

If you have made Barovia three times larger, in accordance with this chapter's suggestions, you may also want to extend the duration between random encounters by the same factor. Instead of rolling for every thirty minutes of travel time, roll for every ninety minutes of travel time.

NEW ENCOUNTERS

The section that follows details additional encounters that you can place along the Svalich Road.

THE BLOOD OF RAVENS

This is a new encounter that you can employ anywhere, but preferably after the party has visited Vallaki. It provides foreshadowing of the druids and blights at Yester Hill, and also introduces the antagonistic relationship between the druids and the wereravens.

While on the road near a forested area, characters with a passive Perception score of 13 or higher will hear the sound of an animalistic struggle within the underbrush. If they investigate, they will find one **vine blight** and 1d4 **twig blights** pinning down a **wereraven** in hybrid form. Closing in from the opposite direction is a single **druid** from Yester Hill.

If the druid does not spot the characters, he will attempt to kill the wereraven by casting *shillelagh* and bashing in the wereraven's skull with his staff.

Should the characters intervene or otherwise make their presence known, the druid will immediately retreat and leave the twig blights to handle the party.

If freed, the wereraven will shift into raven form and fly away at the first opportunity so as to maintain the secrecy of the Keepers of the Feather.

A “CHANCE” ENCOUNTER

This encounter provides you with the opportunity to introduce your party to Vasili von Holtz, Strahd’s alter ego. When Strahd desires to walk amongst his people unnoticed, he dons the disguise of the mild-mannered Vasili.

While your party is traveling on the Svalich Road between Old Bonegrinder and Vallaki, they see an overturned stagecoach in the distance. Upon closer inspection, they find that the coach’s horses are gone, their fastenings having been broken.

Lying in the brush some ten feet away is the finely attired figure of a man. He appears to be unconscious, having hit his head on a nearby rock. The man regains consciousness while the characters draw near. When he catches sight of the party, he scrambles away in fear and asks that they don’t hurt him.

Should the characters attempt to assuage his fears, he calms down and introduces himself as Vasili von Holtz. He then requests the party’s assistance in escorting him to Vallaki. If they agree, he takes a black case from the overturned stagecoach before setting off with the party.

The black case contains old ledgers and figures from property sales and taxes in Vallaki. These were prepared by Lief Lipsiege in Castle Ravenloft years ago. Strahd regularly uses them as part of his disguise.

In order to protect his true identity, Strahd has cast *Nystul’s Magic Aura* and *Nondetection* on himself. This combination of spells prevents anyone from using divination magic to determine that he is both undead and evil. To all observers, he will look, sound, and feel like a living man.

If Strahd manages to ingratiate himself with the party, he will use every opportunity to gain more information about each character regarding their background, personality, and motivations. He may even choose to sow discord amongst the party members if he thinks he can get away with it.



DREAMS AND DESTINY

There are several adventure hooks provided with *Curse of Strahd*, each serving to draw your players into the mists of Barovia through various means.

This guide adds the *Dreams and Destiny* adventure hook whereby Madam Eva will, by way of a dream, extend a mysterious and enticing invitation to each character. This invitation will lure the characters to an inn, where they will be transported to the land of Barovia.

To use this hook to its fullest potential, you will need to possess a Tarokka deck—a physical copy is preferable, but a printed copy of the cards will suffice.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

PREPARATION

While you can use the hooks included in the module with very little setup, the hook in this guide requires careful preparation and forethought. It is recommended that you get started preparing this hook as soon as each player is done creating their character and choosing their backstory.

For every player in your group, you will need to prepare four things. This guide will cover each of these in detail.

- 1. A personal quest inside of Barovia.
- 2. A Tarokka card that relates to the quest.
- 3. A dream sequence that entices their character to meet up with others in the party.
- 4. A personal reading from **Madam Eva**.

THE PERSONAL QUEST

Everyone has a past, and every character has a backstory. Whether they're a noble out seeking adventure, a naive young cleric looking for their lost tutor, or an ex-werewolf just trying to make their way in the world, every character comes with some way to draw them into the mists.

The goal of this step is to craft a personalized quest that the player character can only achieve inside of Barovia. They'll be given a glimpse of this quest and its potential through their dream sequence later on, which should give them plenty of motivation to follow Madam Eva's instructions.

The type of quest that you give is entirely at your discretion. As stated above, however, it should be a quest that is achievable only in Barovia. The following table provides example quests by character class that might serve as inspiration.

Class	Quest
Barbarian	Retrieve the Blood Spear and unite the barbarian clans under your leadership.
Bard	Retrieve the Doss Lute from Castle Ravenloft.
Cleric	Redeem The Abbot in the eyes of your shared god.
Druid/Monk	Quell the animosity that lies in the hearts of the druids at Yester Hill.
Fighter/Paladin	Restore the Knights of the Silver Order at Argynvostholt.
Ranger	Bring peace to the forest around Krezk by defeating Kiril and his pack.
Rogue	Discover the mythical treasure horde of the Amber Temple and claim it as your own.
Sorcerer	Perform a ritual at each of the standing stone sites, imbibing their latent power.
Warlock	Perform a ritual at each of the standing stone sites, paving the way for your patron's entry into the realm of Barovia.
Wizard	Uncover the history of the Amber Temple and acquire its wizards' power as your own.

DESTINY AWAITS

Once you have determined what everyone's personal quest in Barovia will be, you may select *Destiny Cards* for each player. Each Destiny Card is symbolic of their character's quest within Barovia. The card itself will be given to the player in due time.

Your choice here is largely subjective, and may not be perfect due to there being a finite number of cards within the Tarokka deck. Try to match the image on the card as closely as possible with the theme of the quest. The Beast card is ideal for anything dealing with werewolves, for example, and The Avenger may be ideal for the Paladin's quest.

Take the cards that you choose and set them aside. Note that they will not be available during Madam Eva's card reading during the game. As such, if there is a card that you are hoping to draw during the reading, you may want to reconsider its position among the Destiny Cards.

SWEET DREAMS

With a quest in mind and a card in hand, craft a dream sequence for your players. The dream should relate to their character's backstory, and perhaps foreshadow parts of the adventure to come. Each dream should be written down and given to the players before the first session of play, perhaps in a sealed envelope.

While you are free to make your players' dreams whatever you wish them to be, nightmares are recommended to properly set the tone of the gothic horror adventure that will soon follow. Themes and imagery of death and despair, as well as hopelessness and corruption tend to work well.

When each dream sequence reaches its climax, perhaps before the character is mauled to death by a werewolf, describe the scene as ending abruptly in darkness. Next, describe the player character waking up to find a Tarokka card in their hand—the Destiny Card that you selected earlier. On the back of the card is written the name of an inn: *The Nightmare's Stable* in Daggerford.

It's at this point that you should present the players with the physical copy of their Destiny Card. Bonus points if you can hide it among their possessions or on their person without them noticing.

A PERSONAL READING

Although she contacted them through their dreams and summoned them to Barovia, Madam Eva did not tell the characters what their quests would be. The final step in preparation is determining what Madam Eva will tell each of character when she meets them at the Tarokka reading inside Barovia.

Madam Eva has the ability to glimpse forward in time and tell the fortunes of others. Her vision is not crystal clear, however, due to the vagaries of the future. As such, she never tells a fortune in a straightforward manner. The reading that she gives for each character's personal quest should be cryptic in nature.

Let's use the Barbarian's example from the previous quest table. Madam Eva would never tell the barbarian "Go to Yester Hill and fetch the Blood Spear." Instead, she would say something along the lines of, "Seek out the mist-clad hill where the tombs of the ancients hold the blooded instrument of your glory."

This method of telling a fortune not only keeps with atmosphere of the module, but it sets the players about another fun task: figuring out what Madam Eva is talking about.

THE FIRST SESSION

With all of the preparation done, you're ready to run your first session of *Curse of Strahd* with this adventure hook.

Start the session by describing a dark and stormy night in the town of Daggerford. Rain pours down from the sky, turning the streets to mud. Give each player a chance to describe their entrance into the inn's common room. Once they're all inside, allow them to interact with one another and get comfortable.

After everyone has had their fill of introductory role-play, describe each character as being very tired and feeling ready to turn in for the night. This should be enough to convince your players to purchase lodging at the inn.

Give them all a chance to describe their character's night time rituals. Take note of what they take off and stow away, and what they wear to bed.

Once every character has fallen asleep, they are magically transported to Barovia. Describe the first character to awake as finding themselves in a strange forest, shrouded in a cold and wet mist. Other characters awaken in turn.

The party is now in the woods just north of the Svallich Road in area A. Their adventure begins.

WEAPONLESS AND PENNILESS

A part of the horror genre is the concept of resource scarcity. Monsters are a lot scarier when you don't have a sword to fight them with. As such, you may find it worthwhile to start your players off in Barovia both weaponless and penniless.

If you choose to do this, any item that was not worn by a character when they fell asleep was not transported with them to Barovia. This can include purses, weapons, and even armor. It's entirely possible that a character enters the land of Barovia entirely in the buff!

This lack of starting equipment drives home the inhospitable nature of Barovia and its denizens, and makes the players work for the equipment that they'll have later on. They'll need to scavenge and scrounge, and use whatever they can find to survive.

DURST MANOR

More commonly known as “Death House,” the Durst Manor adventure is an excellent primer for any group who is starting *Curse of Strahd*. It takes characters from level 1 to level 3, and introduces them to the horrors that pervade the rest of Barovia.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

NAMES HAVE POWER

As stated previously, this section of *Curse of Strahd* is called “Death House.” It is recommended that you and any NPC present in the adventure refer to this location as “Durst Manor.” At no point should players hear the name “Death House,” as that could dissuade them from entering the location entirely.

AN ALTERNATE HISTORY

As written, the Durst family are stock-and-standard cultists who worship Strahd and engage in ritualistic cannibalism. While this is a fine history for cultists who serve as nothing more than window dressing in a campaign, the Durst family is your party’s introduction to the module. As such, they should have a background suitably fleshed-out and fitting with the tone of the adventure.

In this guide, Gustav and Elisabeth Durst were once wealthy land owners and agricultural merchants. In addition to their own manor house, located on a fully staffed plantation to the east of the Village of Barovia, they also owned the local mill and several other businesses. All of this made them one of the wealthiest and most well-connected families in the entire valley.

The Durst family’s prosperity was not to last, however. Their good fortune, and their fate, changed on the night that Strahd became a vampire and the mysterious mists enshrouded the land.

A TASTY MORSEL

When the mists rose and full sunlight became a mere memory, famine swept the land as plant life began to wither and die. The Durst’s agricultural fortune all but disappeared. Their remaining gold and lines of credit became worthless. Most of the family’s staff left to attend to their own affairs, or to forage on their own. The Dursts were ruined, and on the verge of starving just like everyone else.

In order to sustain their family, Elisabeth and Gustav called a midnight meeting with their remaining friends. Long into the morning, the attending nobles and ex-merchants schemed and argued about how best to survive. None of their ideas were feasible. The prospect of starvation hung like a pall over them all. At last, Elisabeth gathered her courage and put forth a simple, yet unthinkable idea: cannibalism.

As soon as she suggested it, a mysterious zeal took hold in her heart. Her hesitant words turned to fervent proselytizing, and swayed even the most soft-hearted of those in the meeting. Soon, it was decided. The Dursts and their friends would sustain themselves on the flesh of the living.

Not being complete monsters, Gustav and Elisabeth decided to keep their two young children and their nursemaid, Anya, ignorant of their activities. Work began in earnest on an expansion to the mansion’s basement and family crypt, where they planned to commit their heinous acts of survival in secret.

The group’s first victims were members of the Durst’s remaining plantation staff. In the weeks afterward, they began to lure wayward travelers whom they believed would not be missed.

A CULT IS BORN

Weeks turned into months, and months turned into years. Hundreds of Barovians died in the famine, but eventually the land and its people became accustomed to the oppressive mists and lack of sunlight. Hardier crops dotted the land and filled the bellies of the people. The threat of famine became a memory.

Yet the Dursts and their ilk continued their vile deeds underneath the manor house. The dark and bitter crops that now sustained the rest of Barovia did not satiate their distorted palates. Their desire for human flesh had only grown.

In addition to their deviant dining habits, the Dursts and their inner circle developed another dark fixation, born from rumors about their lord Strahd: eternal life.

Using goods and funds stolen from their victims, the Dursts and their fellow fanatics acquired many unsavory tomes. Within their pages were details on rites and rituals that promised to drain the life and vitality from a victim and transfer it to the caster. A cult of ritual killers was born, and the cellar was expanded further to include a ceremonial chamber and prison.

While Elisabeth and the other cultists ramped up their grisly activities, Gustav’s disillusionment grew, and he began to search for a different kind of satisfaction. He eventually found it in the arms of the children’s nursemaid.

Their union, although brief, resulted in Anya's pregnancy. It also resulted in the unadulterated ire of Elisabeth Durst, which came to a head after the birth of Gustav and Anya's son, Walter.

A CURSED FAMILY

The night after Walter's birth, Elisabeth sent Gustav away on an errand in the village. After he was gone, she locked their children in their attic bedroom before stealing into Anya's room one floor below. There, she brutally murdered the nursemaid and snatched Walter from his crib.

With the baby in her blood-covered arms, Elisabeth descended into the earthen halls underneath the manor. Within the ritual chamber, she placed the wailing child upon the cold stone of the altar and took hold of a nearby sacrificial knife. Without hesitation, she plunged the knife into the infant boy's heart.

In that moment, the Dark Powers took notice of Elisabeth and her abhorrent cult. With a twisting pain, she and everyone inside the house who had tasted human flesh felt themselves changing from the inside out. The immortality that they had sought for so long would be granted to them in the form of undeath. They would hunger for flesh forevermore within a house that would never let them leave.

ROSE AND THORN

As the party makes their way from the gates of Barovia toward the village, they will come to a crossroad. An overgrown wagon trail leads northward toward a small mansion flanked by several outbuildings. Standing at the crossroad are the Durst's two children, Rosavalda ("Rose") and Thornboldt ("Thorn").

As written, the versions of Rose and Thorn encountered here are creations of the manor house. Run the encounter as written in the module. If you wish to add some visual foreshadowing, Rose can carry a lantern on the end of a curved rod—much like the lure of an angler fish.

THE MISTS

Unlike the module, the mists of Barovia are surrounding Durst Manor, and do not force the characters inside. The remoteness of the manor house, combined with the fact that it is the first sign of civilization that the party will see in Barovia, may be motivation enough to go inside. Barring that, darkness, inclement weather, and distant howling of wolves will likely serve to convince characters to go inside.

Should your party still skirt around the lure of Durst Manor and make their way onward, let them. Player agency is an important part of the game, and it should be honored. You may choose to let your party go through the module at a handicap of three levels, or you may add additional milestones for leveling up as you see fit.

DURST MANOR'S LIVING FACADE

Contrary to the module, Durst Manor looks well-kept and recently inhabited. From the outside, lighted oil lamps can be seen inside the windows. When characters first enter the house, fireplaces and lamps provide illumination and warmth on the first and second floor.

When any character arrives at the third floor, the manor drops any pretense of being inhabited. The oiled wood of the walls and floors ages and cracks before the character's eyes, and all lights are extinguished. A cold chill replaces the warmth of the fires, and the illusory feast in area 5 disappears.

At the same time, the manor alters its exterior to keep its new prey from escaping. Windows are suddenly bricked over, as are any doorways leading outside.

AREAS OF THE HOUSE

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of Durst Manor. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

2. MAIN HALL

When characters search the wall of the room for secret doors, they won't find carved images of serpents and skulls. Instead, they find carved images of famine and death—starving men, women, and children.

3. DEN OF WOLVES

Until characters reach the third floor of the manor, this room remains as-written. Afterward, however, one of the stuffed wolves becomes a real **wolf**. Driven by a hunger that mirrors the famine that started it all, the wolf will stalk characters through the manor house and attack the weakest looking character.

4. KITCHEN AND PANTRY

The kitchen is neat and tidy, as written. However, both the kitchen and pantry are completely bare of any food. The shelves of the pantry are lined, instead, by empty burlap sacks that used to contain flour and grain of various sorts.

Hanging on the walls of the kitchen and inside drawers are various cooking implements that could serve as improvised weapons. Meat cleavers, butcher knives, and iron pans are available in abundance here.

The emaciated body of a rat can be found behind a crate on a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check.

5. DINING ROOM

Within the dining room, characters find a resplendent feast of meats, fruits, and cheeses laid out upon the table. In front of each of the table's eight high-backed chairs is a place setting. Every plate holds morsels of food, and each shows signs of having recently been eaten. It looks as if the dinner party left mid meal.

The food is an illusion created by the house in order to lure in and weaken its prey. A *Detect Magic* spell reveals the food's illusory nature.

Characters who partake of the table's feast suffer no immediate ill effects. Instead, the food is delicious and they feel satiated.

It is only when the party ascends to the third floor and above—when the house reveals its true nature—that the food's effect is felt. Any character who ate food from the dining room must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, affected characters suddenly feel extreme hunger pangs and gain one level of exhaustion.

6. UPPER HALL

After a character reaches the third floor and the house reveals its true nature, the suits of armor here will begin to change poses and placements around the hall when no one is looking. They are otherwise harmless.

Upon close inspect, the carvings on the wall depict emaciated children begging for food.

8. LIBRARY

In addition to the other items on the desk is a small framed oil painting of a dog. Its pose is regal, and the painting goes to great lengths to detail the luster of the dog's dark fur. At the bottom of the painting is written the name "Sophaxis."

Sophaxis was the Durst family dog at the time of their curse, and can be found in area 34.

9. SECRET ROOM

The bookshelves of this room no longer contain books on fiend-summoning. Instead, the books deal mostly with the subject of eternal life and rituals to steal the life force of others through means such as bloodletting, magical spells, and cannibalism.

Just as in the module, characters can determine the false nature of the rituals after studying the books for one hour and making a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The letter, clutched in the hands of a dead adventurer, reads:

My most pathetic servants,

I allow you and your pathetic band of miscreants to exist in my land only for my own amusement. I am not your messiah, and have not come to lead you on a path to immortality.

Continue your farcical rituals and have your meals of flesh. Carve my visage into every stone you see. Sire as many bastards as you wish. I care not. You are all worms writhing in my earth, and I shall not save you from your wretchedness. I much prefer you as you are.

*Your dread lord and master,
Strahd von Zarovich*

11. BALCONY

Upon a character reaching the third floor balcony, the house will reveal its sinister nature. All lamps and fires within the house will extinguish. The highly polished wood paneling on the walls and floors will lose their luster, age, and crack. Cobwebs and dust will appear on surfaces and walls.

On the outside of the house, bricks will appear and cover up the windows and doors, so as to trap the party inside the manor house.

If the version of Rose and Thorn that lured the characters to the house have been coaxed inside, they will crumble to dust.

12. MASTER SUITE

In this room, the dessicated body of Gustav Durst can be found hanging from the canopy of the bed. A makeshift noose, made from a bed sheet, is fastened around his neck. Gustav committed suicide when he returned home to find the grisly remains of Anya, as well as the undead forms of his wife and fellow cultists. He never discovered the bodies of his children, having assumed the worst.

A hastily-written suicide note sits on the table in the parlor on the south end of the room.

My dearest children,

The darkness takes us, and I am sorry that your mother and I have brought it upon you. What began as survival turned into our obsession, and now to our downfall. In my final moments, I see clear. We are anathema, and are being punished. We deserve it, but I regret that your fates are tied to ours.

I love you both with all my heart. No amount of darkness and death will ever change that. May all of our souls find peace.

*Your loving father,
Gustav*

14. STORAGE ROOM

The broom located here is an ordinary one.

15A. NURSEMAID'S SUITE

Any character who looks at the mirror on the wall sees a skeletally thin reflection of themselves, as if they were near to starving.

17. SPARE BEDROOM

This dusty room looks exactly as it is written in the module. However, the doll in the northern window box will appear randomly around the attic space after the characters have left the room. The doll is harmless, and is used by the house to fray the characters' nerves.

23B. WALTER'S CRYPT

In addition to being a bastard, Walter was killed the day after he was born. As such, he would not have a crypt. Instead of bearing Walter's name, this crypt is empty and unmarked.

25. WELL AND CULTIST QUARTERS

Three skeletally thin **ghouls** are in this area. One is in area A, one is in area B, and the third is in the well. The ghoul in the well will grab the first character to venture within five feet of its hiding place, and attempt to drag them in.

26. HIDDEN SPIKED PIT

Given that only cult members were meant to access these earthen halls, it makes little sense for a spiked pit to be present. Remove this hazard from the dungeon.

28. LARDER

Instead of a grick, this area contains a stunted **carriion crawler**. It is smaller than its full-sized brethren due to a lack of prey, and is a medium-sized creature as a result. In addition, its tentacle attack only has a reach of 5 feet.

29. GHOULISH ENCOUNTER

Due to the presence of ghouls in area 25, reduce the number of ghouls in this encounter from 4 to 2.

33. CULT LEADERS' DEN

Remove the **mimic** encounter from this area, as it makes little sense for such a creature to be in this area.

34. CULT LEADERS' QUARTERS

No ghosts are hidden in this area. Instead, a **death dog** lies in wait behind the bed and will attack any character that draws near.

The death dog was once the Durst family pet, Sophaxis, whom Gustav fed human flesh. If addressed by name, Sophaxis will cease attacking the party and may be convinced to accompany them with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check.

If Sophaxis is taken outside of the manor house, it will die and crumble to dust.

35. RELIQUARY

As written, this area contains various relics that the Dursts' cult had collected. At your discretion, you may replace those useless relics with items that foreshadow the coming adventure. While this may sacrifice verisimilitude, it can add a wonderful twist in your players' hindsight.

If you choose to replace the items in the module with more meaningful ones, the following items are found in the niches along the wall:

- A vial of coagulated blood
- A lock of auburn hair, woven into a figure eight
- A hag's severed finger
- A sun symbol made from woven wicker
- A patch of dried human skin
- A vial of murky swamp water
- The severed claw of a raven
- A black twig with blood-red thorns
- A dragon's tooth wrapped in silver wire
- The tattered remains of a large bird feather
- A shard of amber
- A dried bouquet of wolf's bane
- The desiccated ear of an elf

38. RITUAL CHAMBER

The monster in this area is not a shambling mound, but is instead a **gibbering moulder**. The gibbering moulder is Elisabeth Durst's cursed form, intermixed with all of the victims that have wandered into the manor house over the centuries.

If the characters refuse to offer up a sacrifice on the altar, or if they try to escape the room, the ghostly cultists will chant, "The end is nigh! Flesh will be taken!" At the same time, the gibbering moulder will slither out of the southern alcove and swim under the water toward the altar, preparing to attack. Characters with a Passive Perception score of 15 or higher notice the moulder's disturbances on the surface of the filth-ridden water.

ENDINGS

A SACRIFICE IS MADE

If the party makes a sacrifice on the altar in area 38, then the house and the spirits of the cult are appeased. The portcullis raises up on its own, and the survivors are free to leave the ritual chamber. Characters who linger can hear (or see if they're close enough) the gibbering moulder emerge from the water and devour the corpse.

Although the party will have been allowed to leave the ritual chamber, Durst Manor will not allow them to leave so easily. The house has removed and sealed up the staircase in area 22. This forces the characters to find an alternate escape route (area 32) or face the prospect of starving to death.

THE HOUSE REMAINS HUNGRY

If the party does not make a sacrifice, and either destroy the gibbering moulder or escape from it, Durst Manor attacks them as they try to leave. You may run this escape sequence as written, or optionally as a skill challenge.

SKILL CHALLENGE ESCAPE

If you choose to run the escape sequence as a skill challenge, have your players roll for initiative. Their initiative order dictates which character is fastest and which is slowest.

Obstacles that the house throws in the party's path can be overcome through the use of a relevant skill check. Players must choose the skill, and narrate how their characters use it to overcome the obstacle. One check is sufficient for the entire party to advance beyond an obstacle, regardless if the check passes or fails. Failed skill checks result in a setback, typically in the form of lost time.

In order to escape the manor house, the party must accrue five successes before they accrue three failures. Usage of appropriate spells can count as an automatic success.

If the party accrues three failures before they escape the house, the last character in the initiative order does not escape—they are lost to the house's threats. Every failure beyond that is a character that does not make it out alive.

The following challenges are examples of obstacles that you can set in the path of the characters along with a skill that might be used to overcome it. Creativity is encouraged, however. If a player proposes a different skill and an appropriate use for it, consider allowing them to make the check with that skill.

Challenge 1: Rocks begin to fall from the ceiling of the ritual chamber. A DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check can be used to avoid the falling rocks.

Challenge 2: The manor is holding the portcullis closed. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check can be used to lift it.

Challenge 3: The cultist quarters (area 25) has flooded and the water is filled with body parts and garbage. A DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check can be used to swim through the room.

Challenge 4: The bones in the dining hall (area 27) are flying through the air in a whirlwind. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check can be used to spot a gap in the whirling bones to run through.

Challenge 5: The steps in spiral staircase (area 21) have angled to create a slide. A DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check can be used to climb the slide to the attic.

Challenge 6: Black smoke fills the attic. A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check can lead the party through the smoke to the lower floor.

Challenge 7: Whirling blades fill up the doorway leading from the nursemaid's suite (area 15a) to the balcony (area 11). A DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check can be used to dart through without being cut.

Challenge 8: The front door of the house is bricked over, but it looks weak. A DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check can be used to break through.

OUTSIDE THE MANOR

Characters who make it out of Durst Manor alive find a picnic basket at the crossroads where they met the house's version of Rose and Thorn. Inside the basket is a bottle of Red Dragon Crush, a mixture of bread and fruit. The food and drink is real and not poisoned. There is no indication as to who may have left the basket.

THE VILLAGE OF BAROVIA

Village life is rough in the land of Barovia. However, few (living) souls have it worse than those who call the valley's namesake village "home". Nowhere else are the residents more dour, downtrodden, and depressed than in the Village of Barovia.

In the published module, there isn't much to do inside of the Village of Barovia, as far as side quests and intrigue are concerned. This guide aims to expand the village's role in the adventure by adding more quests, and the possibility of tying the village into the latter portion of the module.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

THE MISSING VILLAGERS

Every week for the past year, a villager has gone missing without an explanation. While he was alive, the disappearances plagued the village's previous burgo-master, Kolyan Indrovich. Now that Kolyan is dead, the problem of the missing villagers falls squarely into the lap of his son and successor, **Ismark "The Lesser" Kolyanovich**.

When Ismark first meets the adventurers, he will ask them to look into the matter of the missing villagers. He tells them that the villagers believe the disappearances to be the work of The Devil Strahd, but he thinks that the cause may be closer to home.

Should the party succeed in finding the cause of the disappearances, Ismark will deem them worthy of escorting his sister to the safety of Saint Andral's church in the town of Vallaki.

A FATHER'S LOVE

Ismark is correct to think that the cause of the disappearances is within the village. Once a week, the priest **Donavich** lures a villager into the church on false pretenses, and feeds them to his son **Doru**.

Doru's arrival at the church a year ago broke something inside of Donavich. He locked his monstrous son away in the church's undercroft and set about praying for a miracle. After many fruitless prayer sessions, Donavich's mind finally cracked under the pressure. Instead of listening to his son scream, "Father I'm starving!" over and over, Donavich decided that he would do what all good parents do: make sure that their child has enough to eat.

That decision drove Donavich to lure the first villager into the church as a bloodmeal for his son. A week later, screams of "Father, I'm starving!" started up again, and another villager was lured back to the church's undercroft. Both bodies were buried by Donavich in the graveyard behind the church.

After a period of several weeks, the villagers became frightened by the disappearances, and refused to go out after dark. This forced Donavich to be clever and use the trust the villagers had in him against them. Quick words, quicker thinking, and the occasional blow to the head are what Donavich uses to keep his son fed these days.

The latest victim was Gregor Stanovich, a devout follower of the Morninglord. Donavich entered his house under the guise of a private prayer session. When Donavich tried to lure Gregor to the church, Gregor refused. Eventually, a struggle ensued and Gregor hit Donavich with a candlestick and ripped off the priest's holy symbol. Donavich managed to knock the older man unconscious and drag him to the church under the cover of darkness.

A MYSTERY TO SOLVE

In order to solve the village's mystery, the party must work to discover clues that point them in the direction of the church. While talking to Ismark, Ireena, or other villagers, the party may discover the following facts:

- No funerals have been held at the church for over a year.
- The latest disappearance happened five days prior to the party's arrival.
- The latest victim was Gregor Stanovich, an old man who lived alone. He was a devout follower of the Morninglord, and was reported missing by a friend who expected to see him the following morning.
- Mad Mary is up at all hours of the night, wailing.

If the party talks to Mad Mary, she will tell them of a dark robed figure that she witnessed dragging a body north along the street two nights ago.

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

Should the party investigate Gregor's house, they will find the scene of a struggle. Furniture is overturned and there is a broken candlestick on the floor with blood on it. There is also a silver necklace with a broken clasp; its pendant is the symbol of the Morninglord. If shown to Ismark, he will recognize it as belonging to Donavich.

TAKE ME TO CHURCH

If your party arrives at the church to bury Kolyan Indrovich, or otherwise explores the graveyard, describe the presence of fresh graves. This detail runs counter to the fact that there have been no funerals at the church for over a year, and will help vigilant players clue in to Donavich's deception.

When Donavich meets the party, he walks with a slight limp and still wears a bandage where Gregor hit him with the candlestick.

If questioned about the bandaged wound or the limp, Donavich will claim to have hurt himself while tending the church gardens (which are quite unkempt). If confronted with the holy symbol from Gregor's house, he will claim to have lent it to Gregor many months ago.

THE DARKNESS REVEALED

Doru has been silent since he last fed, but the week is nearly over. When your party suspects Donavich and begins to question him, have Doru begin yelling "Father, I'm starving!" from the undercroft.

If confronted, Donavich pleads with the party not to hurt his son. He agrees to confess to everything, if only they would show mercy toward Doru.

When pressed, Donavich will unlock the trapdoor that leads to the undercroft. Inside, Doru awaits his next meal. Run the encounter with Doru as you see fit.

Should Doru be killed by the party, Donavich will be inconsolable. Roll on the table below to determine how he reacts.

d20	Donavich's Reaction
1-4	In a fit of rage, Donavich attacks the party.
5-8	After the party leaves the church, Donavich commits suicide by hanging.
9-12	When informed of his son's death, Donavich enters a catatonic state and responds to nothing for 1d4 days.
13-16	At the first opportunity, Donavich runs away into the Svalich Woods.
17-20	Donavich has a moment of clarity and realizes that his son's soul is free of Strahd's influence. He thanks the party and vows to face whatever justice Ismark has in store for him.

If Donavich is relieved of his position as village priest, Ismark will offer the party 5 gold pieces to deliver a letter to Father Petrovich in Vallaki. In the letter, Ismark offers the position of village priest to Yeska, or any other disciple of the Morninglord who wishes to take the post.

A SPREADING INFECTION

According to the module, fifteen percent of houses in the Village of Barovia are filled with **Strahd Zombies**. This is quite a few zombies to have in a village with absolutely no explanation as to why they are there. This quest explains their presence, allows the party to deal with the problem, and provides a late-game consequence if the zombie problem is left unchecked.

THE UNQUIET DEAD

For the past several weeks, a sickness has been spreading throughout the village. No one in the village knows what causes the sickness, but only what the end result is. Anyone who begins to display symptoms eventually dies and rises up as an undead monster. The villagers have taken to boarding up the houses of those known to harbor infection.

In truth, the infection stems from the local water supply. Strahd has dumped several of his Strahd Zombies down the well, and their putrescence has seeped into the water.

Until recently, the residents of the village have subsisted on wine and other brewed drinks, leaving the water for washing and cattle. However, shipments of wine have recently stopped coming to the village, and the villagers have had to rely more and more on well water.

After the characters arrive in the village, they may encounter a group of villagers boarding up a house that contains zombies. Outside, surviving family members plea for mercy.

If the party questions the villagers, they may discover the following:

- Those who die of the sickness rise up as flesh-eating monsters within minutes.
- Those who are killed by the monsters become monsters themselves.
- It is rumored that severed parts of the monsters have a mind of their own.
- The latest person to fall ill is Dolan Neizekov (LG male human **commoner**).
- Wine shipments have recently stopped to the local tavern, much to the annoyance of everyone.

THE NEIZEKOV FAMILY

If the party decides to talk to Dolan Neizekov and his family, any villager can point them in the direction of the Neizekov family home on the southern side of the village. The Neizekovs live in a small one room house, which is already surrounded by boards that will be used to seal up the house once Dolan has died.

Inside the house are Dolan's wife and two children. They sit at Dolan's bedside around the clock, waiting for the time of his passing.

- Anya Stovina (LG female human **commoner**)
- Catarina Dolanya (LG female human **commoner**)
- Vardin Dolanovich (NG male human **commoner**)

All three are despondent, and require a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check in order to talk to the party. If convinced to talk, they volunteer information about Dolan's activities and whereabouts over the last several days. They reveal that Dolan was recently at the local well getting water for the family's mule.

While the party talks with the family, Dolan finally perishes. Within two rounds, Dolan's eyes open again and he rises up as a Strahd Zombie to attack anyone still inside the house.

THE LOCAL WATERING HOLE

If the party decides to investigate the local well, they find that the area surrounding the well smells of old and decaying flesh. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the smell is coming from the well itself.

The well descends 50 feet straight down. A character with darkvision will easily be able to see shapes moving down in the well's depths. Characters without darkvision can toss down a torch or make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the same thing.

Characters can descent into the well by climbing down its stone wall with climber's tools or a DC 15 Athletics (Strength) check. Alternatively, the well's rope and bucket may be used, but the rope and pulley system is only strong enough to hold 200 pounds, and takes four rounds to ascend and descend.

At the bottom of the well is small chamber, measuring roughly 20 feet on each side with a low 7 foot ceiling. The floor is slippery and covered in 3 feet of water, and counts as difficult terrain. Occupying the chamber are 5 Strahd Zombies.

Killing and removing the zombies from the well will return the water to potability in 1d4 days. Casting *Purify Food and Drink* will return it to potability immediately.

WATER WATER EVERYWHERE...

If the Strahd Zombies are not removed from the well and regular shipments of wine are not restored, then the Village of Barovia has a serious problem. In 1d4+2 weeks, the village's wine reserves run dry and panic sets in. A mass exodus ensues; the surviving villagers pack up and begin to make their way toward Vallaki.

In addition to the perils associated with traveling on the Svalich Road, the refugee villagers will find that their arrival at Vallaki is not a warm one, no matter who runs the town at the time. Residents and officials alike begrudgingly scramble to make accommodations for the refugees while tensions and tempers run high.



THE CAST OF RAVENLOFT



One of Castle Ravenloft's weakest assets are the characters that inhabit its walls. Taken nearly one-for-one from the original I6 adventure module, few characters within the castle—Strahd aside—have much in the way of background or motivation.

Much as in any good tale, the villains should be dynamic and well-written. Every character has their own motivations and personalities. In this chapter this guide will make suggestions how to best play each of them to their strengths and how to make them dynamic for your characters to interact with.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

THE CONSORTS

No longer simply mindless, ravenous monsters, the consorts of Ravenloft should each be their own characters. They are challenges for your players to overcome, strong allies of Strahd, and opportunities for moments of roleplaying, rather than basic combat.

LUDMILLA VILISEVIC

Ludmilla is the eldest of Strahd's current consorts. In life, she drew his attention and with her keen mind. Ludmilla reminded Strahd more than a bit of himself, which is what drew him to take her as a consort.

While dealing with others, Ludmilla is cool-headed to the point of being nearly devoid of emotion. When faced with problems, she approaches them methodically and logically.

Ludmilla is a wizard of significant talent, though not as powerful as Strahd. At present, she is delving into the sciences, including her experiments on lycanthropes at Tsolenka Pass, where she may be readily encountered (see the Tsolenka Pass chapter of this guide). In addition to her scientific studies, she has taken on the daily running of Castle Ravenloft. Ludmilla has a hand in everything from planning dinners to budgeting expenses with Lief.

The closest thing that Ludmilla has to a friend is Strahd's most loyal servant, Rahadin. That protection and Strahd's respect for her brilliant mind have kept her from being locked away in the crypts. If Rahadin is slain while she still lives, she will ruthlessly pursue and attack the party until she is slain.

ANASTRASYA KARELOVA

A former Vallakian noblewoman, Anastrasya is the most proud of Strahd's consorts. She is deeply jealous of the affection that Strahd holds for the memory of Tatyana, as well as the focus that he has on acquiring Ireena as a new bride.

In her dealings with others, she prefers brute force and violence, but tempers herself with the tact of her noble upbringing. Still, she was accustomed to being obeyed in life and expects the same of anyone that she considers her "lesser" in undeath. She also has a distinct dislike of Ludmilla whom she believes—quite correctly—Strahd holds in higher regard than herself.

Anastrasya orchestrated the Feast of St. Andral (where she is likely to be encountered) in order to kill Ireena; something that Strahd is unaware of. If Strahd gained knowledge of her open hostility and violent desires towards Ireena, her life would be forfeit. She is the second of Strahd's free consorts and is in grave peril of being sealed away in her crypt once Ireena is in Strahd's clutches. She may or may not be aware of this peril, at your discretion.

Despite her hatred of Ireena, Anastrasya fancies herself in love with Strahd still, and cannot be turned against him by the characters. She is clever enough, however, to pretend to ally herself with the party in order to later betray them to earn back some favor with Strahd.

VOLENTA POPOFSKY

Raised as an orphan, and having grown up on the streets of the Village of Barovia, Volenta is the second youngest of Strahd's consorts. She is skilled at hiding in the shadows and setting traps for others. This, combined with her ruthless nature makes her useful in dealing with intruders to the castle; traits that Strahd finds entertaining enough to keep her around for a few more centuries.

Volenta is a stealthy assassin, blending flawlessly into the shadows of Castle Ravenloft, where she is likely to be encountered. If the characters are within the castle at Strahd's invitation and are behaving themselves, she will not attack them. Instead, she will taunt them and goad them into attacking her, or will attempt to lure them into a trap.

This guide recommends placing her in the dungeon area or in the tower containing the Heart of Sorrow. However, Volenta may be encountered anywhere within the castle.

ESCHER VON PRESHLOW

In life Escher was a bard in a former adventuring party that was brought to Barovia to fight against Strahd von Zarovich. Before slaughtering the rest of the party, Strahd took a liking to the talented poet and musician's wit and chose to keep him as a consort.

Escher is clever and outwardly obedient to Strahd, even though he longs for his freedom from the Count. He wishes to escape Strahd's clutches, having seen his ruthlessness and cruelty firsthand, as well as what becomes of his cast off consorts once they bore him. He distances himself from the other consorts and, as written, remains in the tower rooms as much as possible.

Escher can provide valuable information to the character, and may render aid to them within limitations. He cannot actively cause harm to Strahd or provide the characters with a weapon to use against him. However, he can give clues as to the location of any Fortunes of Ravenloft items that are within the castle. Additionally, he cannot tell the players about the purpose of the Heart of Sorrow, though he can lead them to it.

So long as Escher believes that the characters can defeat Strahd, he will aid them in their quest. Drinking the blood of a vampire (not a spawn) will free him of Strahd's control, as will slaying him and bringing him back to life with a Resurrection, True Resurrection, or Wish Spell.

THE STAFF OF RAVENLOFT

RAHADIN VON ZAROVICH

Every villain needs a servant of unquestionable loyalty, and Strahd Von Zarovich is no exception. Before Strahd, Rahadin served the Zarovich patriarch, King Barov, with exceptional loyalty. In return, Barov rewarded the dark elf with the surname Von Zarovich, a tremendous honor for the servant. His flawless fealty passed from father to son and Rahadin serves his master well.

The count's chamberlain obeys his master's orders unquestioningly. In return, Rahadin von Zarovich is the only being in Barovia whose council is valued by Strahd.

The closest thing that Rahadin has to a friend is Strahd's eldest active consort, Ludmilla. The elf is fiercely protective of her. He will not betray either Ludmilla or Strahd under any circumstances, and will follow their commands to the letter. If those orders are ever contradictory, Rahadin will follow Strahd's orders, though he will avoid harming Ludmilla if at all possible.

HELGA RUVAK

Originally a cobbler's daughter from the Village of Barovia, Helga caught Strahd's gaze with her beauty and auburn hair. At first, he mistook her a reincarnation of his long-lost Tatyana, but after turning her, Strahd was disabused of his delusion.

Rather than destroy Helga, which was his first instinct, Strahd kept her around as a servant at Ludmilla's suggestion. These days, Helga cleans just enough of the castle to keep herself from being locked in the catacombs, and regularly endures verbal and emotional abuse from both Ludmilla and Anastrasya.

As written, Helga will attempt to trick characters by pretending to be a damsel in distress and then betraying them at an opportune moment. She will make every attempt to slay or subdue the characters in order to regain her status as a consort, rather than continue an afterlife of servitude.

CYRUS BELVIEW

Cyrus is the latest in a long line of Belviews gifted by the Abbot to Strahd as a servant. He suffers the madness of the others in his family, while still being useful for the most basic of tasks. The Abbot instructed him to keep his eyes open and report back to the on the moods of his new master, the goings-on within the castle, as well as the arrival of any new consorts.

In Cyrus' room (K66), hidden within a desk, is a journal with crude observations in scrawled, messy handwriting. Pages have been torn out, where Cyrus has used them to send the Abbot messages via a trained bat that Cyrus keeps as a pet and messenger.

LIEF LIPSIEGE

Leif is the long-suffering accountant of Strahd. Contrary to the module as written, Lief is no longer a living man, but rather a specter with a penchant for moving certain objects on the material plane—primarily his quill and ledgers.

Long ago, Lief woke and rose to attend his duties, not noticing that he had left his corpse behind in bed. He is not physically chained to the desk as in the rules as written, but rather is "chained" by the knowledge that Strahd will set Rahadin after him to bring him back if he ever leaves the castle. Leif has weekly budget meetings with Ludmilla about the finances of Ravenloft, a task that Strahd assigned to her as he cannot be bothered by handling the finances himself.

If he's not attacked by the characters, Leif mistakes them for employees of his lord. He then impatiently requests that they help him find the rest of the money that Strahd has kept hidden, as he "must account for it." If asked where the money might be, Lief admits that he does not know, but suspects a treasury of sorts may be on an upper floor somewhere.

If attacked, Leif no longer pulls the rope, as in the written module, as he has no corporeal form. Instead he flees through the wall and will return with Rahadin in 1d8 rounds.

ADDITIONAL RESIDENTS

GERTRUDA

Contrary to the module as written, Mad Mary did not get her nickname by crying over her lost daughter, Gertruda. Instead, Mad Mary got her nickname because the entire village knew that she kept her daughter locked up in a bedroom, and had for decades.

Also contrary to the module, Gertruda is not a 16 year-old girl. She is, instead, a woman somewhere around 26 to 28 years old. This aging-up of Gertruda does three things. Firstly, it eliminates any pedophile association with Strahd; he is already enough of a villain and this does not fit into the narrative of the existing module. Secondly, it makes Mad Mary's deeds much more heinous, adding an entire decade on to the imprisonment of her own daughter. Finally, it takes players by complete surprise when they expect to find a child, but instead find a fully grown woman.

At some point Gertruda escaped her captivity. Perhaps her mother left the door unlocked by mistake. Perhaps her mother indulged in a dream pastry and passed into a deep sleep, allowing her time to pick the lock and flee. She then quickly found out, likely after going to the local tavern, about her mother's nickname and its origin. This knowledge would have ignited a fiery hatred within her in regards to the villagers, thus speeding her flight to the castle.

The specifics of her escape are up to you; Gertruda will gladly share the story with the party if asked.

Gertruda now lives as a guest of Strahd. Naively, she dreams of one day becoming a bride of her "rescuer", not understanding that she has simply traded one prison for another. Strahd has no intention of turning Gertruda into a consort. Instead, he plans to use her as a willing blood meal until he can no longer stand her aging countenance. He then may turn her, in which case she will share Helga's fate as a second maid to serve to clean the castle for eternity.

MAD MARY

Shortly after the characters depart from the Village of Barovia, Rahadin and several vampire spawn arrive in the night to capture Mad Mary and spirit her away to Castle Ravenloft. Once there, she is locked in the dungeon with no explanation from her captors. She can be found in area K75a, in place of Emil Toranescu.

Mad Mary's imprisonment is the result of Gertruda's whims and hatred of her mother. After settling in at the castle, she requested that Strahd lock her mother in the dungeons as repayment for her own captivity. Strahd, always willing to encourage the darkest side of his subject's personalities, acquiesced.

Gertruda now makes daily trips down to the dungeons to visit her mother, and to bring her stale food and water. She then alternates between furiously hurling vitriolic insults at Mad Mary, and seeking maternal comfort.



“STRAHDTEGY” GUIDE

As a former general, Strahd boasts a level of combat and military aptitude that is present in few other *Dungeons & Dragons* villains. Despite any skills that Strahd may possess as a character, however, he can only fight as well as the Dungeon Master can run him.

The goal of this chapter is to provide you with insight and tips on how to get the most out of Strahd during the final battle, and provide your party with an appropriately difficult encounter.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

PREPARE FOR BATTLE

One of Strahd’s greatest assets is his level of preparedness prior to any battle. He does everything within his power to learn all that he can about his enemy and their tactics. He has enough spies throughout Barovia that very few things about the characters are a secret from him. Also, given the proper materials, Strahd himself can snoop on the party to view them firsthand.

Before they fight Strahd for the final time, gather the character sheets of your party together and study them. Memorize their abilities, and take into consideration the tactics the party has used in past encounters. How did they use their powers? How did they work together? How might they use these abilities within the labyrinthine halls of Castle Ravenloft?

In regards to Castle Ravenloft, also take some time to study the map of the castle. Its twisting halls, tall spires, and unconventional layout make it a worthy opponent in its own right. You would do well to memorize as much of it as possible. As practice, pick a random point in the castle and try to find your way out, or to some other point of interest (such as the Heart of Sorrow). Knowing your way around the castle will help you prepare Strahd’s battle plan, and run a smooth game session.

STRAHD’S CAPABILITIES

MOBILITY

Few creatures are as fast and agile as Strahd when he is encountered within his own lair. Using his legendary actions, Strahd can move an additional 90 feet per round without incurring opportunity attacks. Combined with his base movement speed, that means he can move up to 120 feet per round, and 150 feet per round if he uses the Dash action.

His mobility is increased dramatically when combined with his lair action of moving through the walls of Castle Ravenloft. Any wall, floor, or ceiling of the castle becomes permeable to Strahd, letting him move in nearly any direction without impediment. This ability allows Strahd to very quickly put great distances between himself and the characters, either to heal himself or to plan his next attack.

DEALING WITH THE HOLY SYMBOL

The Holy Symbol of Ravenkind has two abilities of particular concern to Strahd: *sunlight* and *hold vampires*. Both have a range of 30 feet. Combined with the movement speed of the character wielding it, the effective range of the symbol is usually between 60 and 90 feet.

Strahd’s high mobility is key to mitigating any damage that the symbol might do to him, or that it enables the characters to do to him. So long as a character has the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind, Strahd will do his best to be out of the symbol’s effective range at the start of its wielder’s turn. Using his lair action to phase through the castle’s solid surfaces or to lock particular doors, this should be a fairly easy task.

STEALTH

As written, Strahd has a +14 bonus to his Stealth skill. This means that even if he rolls a 1 on the Hide action, he still scores a 15. Compared to the hypothetical maximum passive Perception score of a 19 for a 10th level character, Strahd will succeed on any stealth action if he rolls a 5 or higher—that’s an 80% success rate! Strahd’s stealthiness, combined with his mobility, make him an ideal hit-and-run enemy.

Using his high intelligence, Strahd can anticipate where characters are likely to go within his castle, and then head them off. Once there, he can take the Hide action to blend into the shadows of a dark corner. When the characters arrive in the area, he can then unleash a devastating fireball (or some other spell) that the characters are unable to counterspell. After casting, he may then use his movement and his lair action to phase through a nearby surface, out of sight and range of the characters.

HEALING

Strahd’s healing capabilities are far beyond that of any other creature that the characters have encountered in Barovia. Every round that he is not in sunlight or running water, and has not taken radiant damage, Strahd regains 20 hit points. With a hit point maximum of 144, he can regenerate to full health within 8 rounds.

As a military genius, Strahd is no stranger to the concept of a tactical retreat. Whenever his hit points are reduced by half, or the characters begin to get the upper hand in battle, Strahd will do his best to leave the area and get to a safe spot where he can regenerate and regroup.

ALLIES

There are few things that Strahd has in abundance more than allies. Between his legendary actions, his *children of the night* ability, and the other denizens of Castle Ravenloft, Strahd has no shortage of help to call upon in battle.

Prior to engaging with the party, Strahd can use his *children of the night* ability to summon swarms of bats, rats, or a pack of wolves. While these creatures aren't a threat to characters in terms of the damage they can do, they can use the Help action to distract characters. This causes the distracted character to attack at disadvantage, and grants Strahd advantage on attacks against them. If Strahd is in a position where he has disadvantage, then these helpful allies can eliminate that disadvantage. Such allies aren't likely to last for long, however, due to their low hit points. Characters are likely to target these allies instead of Strahd in order to eliminate the advantage that they grant him.

When Strahd is a safe distance away from the party, and they are distracted by additional enemies, he may choose to use his *lair actions* to rip shadows away from one or more characters to spawn a **shadow**. Characters with low Charisma scores are the primary targets here. The newly-created shadow will use its *strength drain* ability on a character with a low Strength score, such as a spellcaster.

Aside from allies that Strahd must use his own actions to summon, allies such as Rahadin and the consorts can fight against the characters. Rahadin's *deathly choir* is particularly useful in disrupting spellcasters' concentration on their spells, and his melee combat abilities are formidable.

Bucephalus can also prove to be a useful ally to Strahd during the final battle. The **nightmare's** ability to travel in the ethereal plane means that he can be near the battle without being spotted by the characters. Bucephalus can follow Strahd around Castle Ravenloft, or wait for him at strategic points, and serve as a means of emergency escape. On one turn, Bucephalus can appear in the material plane, and on the next he can transport Strahd and two other allies back into the ethereal plane and away from the characters. He can also bring along up to three allies—such as **vampire spawn**—to keep characters busy during the escape.

SPELLS

Within Barovia, Strahd's spellcasting ability is surpassed only Baba Lysaga and Madam Eva. As written, his arsenal of prepared spells offers an array of offensive and utilitarian options, ranging from *comprehend languages* to the ever-powerful *fireball*.

While the uses of the offensive spells are quite obvious, it's not always clear what use Strahd might have for his other prepared spells during the final battle.

Comprehend languages, a 1st level spell, would be used in the event that characters attempt to talk amongst themselves in Strahd's presence using a language that he does not understand. In that event, Strahd would do his best to cast the spell without being noticed, so as to listen in to the conversation.

Detect thoughts, a 2nd level spell, would be used as a method of intimidation or demoralization. When he first meets the party, for example, Strahd may cast this spell on a character or an NPC companion. Should he glean their thoughts, he can make those thoughts known to everyone present—and inject falsehoods of his own devising to create a rift within the party.

Nondetection, a 3rd level spell, would be used to disguise one or more of Strahd's allies while they are in the presence of the characters. For example, he may cast it on a vampire spawn and then have them play the part of a captive servant in order to gain the party's pity and trust.

HELP, I'M WINNING!

If you run Strahd to his fullest and moths ruthless capabilities, it's extremely likely that your party will find themselves knocking on death's door. Their hit points will be low, their spell slots and potions expended, and their hopes dashed. At that point, you must make a decision: either continue on and kill them all to end the game, or give them an opening to gain the upper hand.

Either of those options are valid. Many wonderful *Curse of Strahd* campaigns end in the death of the characters at Strahd's hands.

If you wish to give your party a chance to regain the upper hand, however, all you need to do is let Strahd's ego make decisions for him. With the battle all but won, Strahd becomes cocky and sure of himself. He begins to gloat, and taunt the characters. Rather than attack from the shadows, he wades into battle and begins to trade blows with the strongest party member. Instead of casting *counterspell*, he lets characters' spells hit him in order to show that they cannot truly harm him.

All of that adds up to a lot of damage for Strahd, which may anger him and cause him to make further poor decisions that are not in his best interest. In the end, his hubris and ego will be his downfall.

OTHER OPTIONS

If you have a larger-than-average party, or the characters are above the assumed level cap of the module, then you may wish to enhance Strahd's combat capabilities. The following suggestions will make Strahd a much deadlier enemy than what is found in the module, and they should be used only after careful consideration.

UPDATED SPELL LIST

Strahd's prepared spells in the module are well rounded, and would serve him well during normal day-to-day scenarios. If he is expecting a final confrontation with the characters, however, spells such as *comprehend languages* would likely be among the last that he would have prepared.

Instead of such a well-rounded spell list, tailor Strahd's spells toward dealing with your specific party. Bear in mind that he has access to any wizard spell from 1st to 5th level.

The following spell list is one possibility of a "combat-ready" list that Strahd would prepare if he knew the characters were coming to Castle Ravenloft.

- Cantrips: infestation, mind sliver, ray of frost
- 1st (4 slots): charm person, chromatic orb, shield
- 2nd (3 slots): detect thoughts, gust of wind, mirror image
- 3rd (3 slots): counterspell, fear, fireball
- 4th (3 slots): confusion, storm sphere
- 5th (1 slot): telekinesis, wall of force

ANIMATED ARMOR

Rather than fight unarmored, Strahd can don a suit of his own **Strahd's Animated Armor** during the final battle. This not only increases his defenses, but also provides additional offensive capabilities.

After donning the animated armor, Strahd's AC increases to 19. This is a step down from the 21 AC of the armor, due to the fact that there is now a being of flesh and blood inside the armor. Additionally, Strahd is subject to weak points in the armor (his head may be exposed, for example).

At the start of combat, roll for the armor's initiative in addition to Strahd's. Besides increasing Strahd's defenses, the armor also acts on its own during combat, minus movement. On its turn, it uses its Shocking Bolt ability on the nearest character.

Damage dealt to Strahd is dealt simultaneously to the animated armor. Unlike Strahd, the armor does not regenerate hit points. If its hit points are reduced to zero, its magic fails and the armor becomes a normal suit of plate mail.

INCREASED STATS

If your party size is larger than average—perhaps six members or more—it may be prudent to increase Strahd's statistics. This may also be the case if your party has had additional adventures in Barovia, and exceed the expected level of 10 when they finally confront Strahd inside his lair.

The first consideration should be given to Strahd's hit points. At $17d8 + 68$, Strahd has a full hit point maximum of 204. Increasing his hit points to this maximum value would provide one or two extra rounds where Strahd can get to safety, if necessary.

Next, the hit point buffer granted to Strahd by the Heart of Sorrow can also be increased. Instead of 50 hit points, you may consider doubling it to 100 hit points. Granted, this does little for Strahd if the Heart of Sorrow has been destroyed.

If you feel like more hit points are required, you can increase his level. At level 20, for example, Strahd has an average hit point value of 170 and a maximum of 240. Additionally, if the levels added were in the Wizard class, Strahd would gain access to 6th level spells such as *chain lightning* and *disintegrate*.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Against a large party, the action economy is not in Strahd's favor. If you wish to run a compelling and challenging battle, balancing the economy is imperative.

One option is to increase the number of allies that Strahd brings into battle. However, this can become unwieldy and hard to track, and may slow down the battle to the point where it becomes boring for your players. Instead of more allies then, you may increase the number of actions that Strahd may take in battle.

With more characters in the party, consider increasing the number of legendary actions that Strahd can perform. This will allow him to move greater distances or to counterattack with his unarmed strike or bite attacks. These additional actions, combined with the other tactics detailed in this chapter will help ensure that your players' final battle against Strahd will be one to remember.

DINNER WITH THE DEVIL

At a certain point within the campaign, the character's actions within Barovia will prompt Strahd to take a greater interest in them. To this end, Strahd will invite the characters to dine with him at Castle Ravenloft under a promise of peace and safety.

This chapter will guide you through the dinner event itself, and provide insight into Strahd's thought process during the event.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

THE INVITATION

When characters first arrive in Barovia, they are unlikely to rouse very much of Strahd's interest. They are nothing but more in a long line of adventurers, doomed to join the march of the dead. Until, that is, they prove their mettle by performing some great deed or other noteworthy act.

Once his eye is upon the party, Strahd will want to learn more about them. Who are they and where are they from? What motivates them? What are their fears? How best can he manipulate them?

To answer those questions, he will extend a formal invitation to dine at Castle Ravenloft. The invitation may be found as a handout at the end of the *Curse of Strahd* module, but you are free to write your own.

As written, the module provides several suggestions as to when Strahd might extend his invitation: after the characters interact with the Spirit Mirror in Wachterhaus (area N3p), at the end of Saint Andral's Feast, after Ezmerelda's Retreat at Van Richten's Tower, and after the reunion of Ireena and Sergei in the Krezk pool.

The timing of the invitation is ultimately up to you, however, and should be tailored to your players and their characters. Other suitable events that might trigger an invitation include defeating a difficult foe, acquiring a Fortunes of Ravenloft item, or uncovering Strahd's secrets within the Amber Temple.

DELIVERY AND RESPONSE

In nearly all cases, save the Magic Mirror, the invitation is delivered to the characters by someone other than Strahd. In the case of Saint Andral's feast, it is delivered by Ernst Larnak. In all other cases, it is likely delivered by Strahd's steward, Rahadin.

Should Rahadin deliver the invitation, he arrives in Strahd's black carriage while the characters are traveling along the Svalich Road. At your discretion, the carriage either overtakes them as they travel, or is waiting ahead of them in the middle of the road.

When Rahadin makes his presence known, he also declares his peaceful intentions. He delivers his master's invitation, and instructs the characters to arrive at the castle in two days' time, dressed appropriately for the occasion. He does not wait for a response before getting back in the carriage to take his leave.

If the characters attack Rahadin, the horses, or the carriage, he makes every effort to escape the situation and return to Castle Ravenloft. Rahadin is not concerned about the carriage or its horses, and opts to disappear into the nearby forest using a combination of his misty step, dash, and Mask of the Wild abilities.

Should the characters refuse the dinner invitation, or otherwise fail to show for dinner, Strahd is disappointed but not surprised. His esteem for the party is lowered substantially, and he resorts to other methods of information gathering and manipulation.

STRAHD'S PURPOSE

Nothing that Strahd does is without purpose. In addition to learning more about the latest adventuring party to enter his domain, he has one or more of the following goals in mind for the dinner:

Identify a consort - Strahd is a collector of beautiful and interesting people, and he has grown bored with the latest addition to his collection: Escher. Should a member of the party stand out as a suitable replacement, Strahd will set his sights on turning them into a vampire and locking Escher away in his crypt.

Identify a successor - Strahd knows that he cannot leave Barovia, so long as he is the dark lord of his domain. In order to gain freedom, he will look for a suitable replacement in characters with the darkest of hearts. Should he find a potential candidate, he will make a point of testing them throughout the rest of the campaign, always finding them lacking in some way.

Negotiation - The party may be in possession of something that Strahd wants, such as Ezmerelda D'Avenir, a Fortunes of Ravenloft item, or Ireena Kolyana. In order to gain possession of any of these things, Strahd is willing to strike a deal. What he is willing to offer depends largely on what he wants, and may range from gold, to magic items, to passage out of Barovia. Be cautious when offering the latter, as char-

acters may take Strahd up on his offer and end your campaign! If he is attempting to gain possession of an item, such as the sunsword, he will attempt to sway and deal with the individual character who possesses the item.

Sow distrust - If Strahd feels like the party is a credible threat—perhaps they have one or more Fortunes of Ravenloft items—he may seek to undermine their unity and trust in one another. To this end, he may focus his attentions on a single character, or perhaps gives one character a unique gift. He may also take a more direct approach with lines such as, “One of you shall betray the others. It is already happening. I’ll leave it up to you to uncover whom.”

ARRIVAL AT THE CASTLE

On the day of the dinner, the characters are expected and welcomed guests in Strahd’s home. When they arrive in area I, Strahd’s carriage is waiting to escort them the rest of the way to the castle. Taking the carriage is optional, but it is faster and makes traversing the drawbridge much safer.

Once in the courtyard of the castle, characters are greeted by Cyrus Belview. His moth-eaten clothes appear to have been washed, and he has attempted to tame his hair with pungent grease. He bows low and bids the characters follow him in through the great double doors. Cyrus then leads the party into area K8 where he hands them off to Rahadin.

APPEARANCES MATTER

If any member of the party is not washed and dressed appropriately for dinner, they are chastised by the chamberlain. He then leads them up to the guest room (area K50) where they may wash and change. When they arrive in the room, Gertruda and Escher are already laying out suitable garments for them.

This encounter presents an opportunity for the party to interact with Gertruda, whom they likely heard about quite some time ago in the Village of Barovia. She is an easy character to forget about, and this lets you bring her back to the forefront of your players’ minds. Additionally, if you want Escher to be a sympathetic contact within Castle Ravenloft, this is also an opportunity for him to interact with the characters without Strahd seeing or hearing.

THE DINING HALL

As written, characters enter the dining hall to find an illusory Strahd playing the organ. Instead of that, consider placing the real Strahd in the dining hall—after all, he is likely not intimidated by the party. He may or may not be playing the organ, to your tastes. Consider having Strahd simply sitting at the head of the table, waiting in sinister silence.

OTHER GUESTS AND STAFF

Strahd is not the only NPC in attendance at the dinner. Several other members of Strahd’s household are present as well, either to dine or to act as waitstaff.

CYRUS BELVIEW

Despite his eccentric nature and disheveled appearance, Cyrus is an accomplished chef. With the help of several undead servants, he cooks each course of the meal himself down in the castle’s kitchen. Additionally, he serves as the headwaiter, ordering the delivery of each dinner course by his temporary assistant, Helga.

HELGA RUVAK

Stepping out of her role as the castle maid for at least one night, Helga serves as a member of the waitstaff during the dinner. When commanded by Cyrus, she delivers and clears plates of food from the table, and refills drinks as necessary.

At no point will Helga speak to the characters, or even make eye contact with them—save for the briefest of moments. Her avoidance of the characters is not due to any command by Cyrus or Strahd, but rather to her desire to play the part of an unwilling captive. Her behavior here sets up her act and future betrayal during later encounters.

THE CONSORTS

Strahd’s consorts (Ludmilla, Anastrasya, Volenta, and Escher) are present during the dinner. They are seated toward the head of the table, nearest to Strahd.

This is an ideal time to introduce the characters to the consorts, rather than late in the game when their ability to interact with the characters is minimized. Allow the personality of each consort to shine through during dinner conversation. Volenta is almost entirely silent, communicating instead through body language. Escher is reserved and polite, as he sees a repeat of his own past in the characters and their current predicament. Anastrasya and Ludmilla pepper their conversation with subtle jabs against the characters, and remarks about their impending fate.

A FINE AFFAIR

Despite his brutality and evil nature, Strahd is still a nobleman at heart. As such, a formal dinner at his residence is no small affair. In order to charm and entertain the characters, he will pull out all of the stops in regards to preparing an exquisite dining experience.

Although Strahd himself cannot leave Barovia, his reach knows no bounds thanks to the Vistani people. In order to prepare an elegant dinner worthy of the Von Zarovich name, he will import ingredients that have not been seen in Barovia for centuries from whatever realm that lays outside Barovia's border.

Like any fine dining experience, the dinner at Castle Ravenloft is split into multiple courses. Each course of the meal takes roughly thirty minutes to an hour to complete, giving plenty of time for conversation between Strahd, the characters, and other guests. At no point does Strahd or any of his consorts partake in the meal, choosing instead to sip on goblets of red liquid.

Depending on the dietary preferences of your players, you may want to adjust the food that is provided during the dinner. For example, if your players are vegetarian or vegan, the meat courses should be replaced by suitable vegetable-based alternatives.

STARTER

To begin the meal, a bowl of lobster bisque is set before each character.

During this course, Strahd will formally introduce himself, if he has not already done so. He will go on to detail the history of the land of Barovia, and his role in "liberating" it.

Once finished with his own story, Strahd will seek to know the stories of each of the characters. Through their own tales, he attempts to learn as much about them as possible. At various points, any consorts in attendance may pipe up to make comments or ask questions of their own.

This is an excellent opportunity for your players to build up the backstories of their own characters through improvisation.

ENTREE

The bisque is cleared away, replaced by a plate of sliced tender beef drizzled in a dark sauce and framed by vibrant greens. Placed between the characters are bowls of freshly baked bread, still warm from the oven, and pads of freshly churned butter.

By the time this course arrives at the table, Strahd should have a good idea of who the characters are and where they come from. It's at this time that he begins to work toward his goal for the dinner, whether that be negotiation, sowing distrust, or identifying a successor or consort.

DESSERT

The entree dishes are cleared away, to be replaced by saucers topped with an arrangement of fresh fruits. The bright reds and yellows of the berries, picked at the height of their seasons, stands in stark contrast to the darkness of the castle.

At this point, the dinner is winding down. Depending on how conversations have gone, tensions at this point may be at an all time high, however. If necessary, Strahd will attempt to lighten the mood with a joke.

"Castle Ravenloft has an extensive library. Just the other day, I was reading a book about an immortal dog. It was impossible to put down."

OPEN HOSTILITIES

There is no accounting for the actions of the characters. At any point, a character might launch an attack against Strahd, one of his consorts, or the waitstaff.

In order to prevent such an occurrence from disrupting the carefully-planned dinner, Strahd has prepared the *wall of force* spell. Should any character show signs of aggression, he will cast the spell to create a barrier separating the characters from himself and his consorts. At that point, he will attempt to defuse the situation and continue the dinner on as planned.

"I assure you, this barrier is for your protection, not mine. You are trying to skip to the end of our story, but we have so many more pages yet to go."

If peace cannot be achieved, Strahd and his consorts will exit the dining hall in mist form. At that point, all lights within the castle are extinguished and the safety of the characters is no longer guaranteed.

SPENDING THE NIGHT

Once the dinner is concluded, Strahd will offer to let the party stay in his castle until morning. He will also grant them leave to explore the castle at their leisure, save for the castle's lower levels.

Should the party accept Strahd's invitation, they are led by Cyrus Belview to the lounge and guest room (areas K49 and K50) where they may spend the night. After attending to their needs, Cyrus excuses himself and returns to his chambers (area K66).

In the morning, the characters are roused by Cyrus who leads them the courtyard. There, the black carriage waits to take them anywhere in Barovia.

Strahd's guarantee of safe passage lasts until the final member of the party exits the carriage. At that point, the door to the carriage slams shut of its own accord, and the horses immediately dart off toward the castle. An ambush soon follows, comprised of your choice of Strahd's minions.

MAIN FLOOR

The main floor of Castle Ravenloft is a dangerous area filled with intriguing elements. From the dining hall, to the chapel, to the Heart of Sorrow itself, there's no shortage of interesting rooms to explore. This chapter of the guide aims to add a bit more flavor to some of the less fleshed-out areas, as well as a dangerous fight against one of Strahd's brides.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AREAS OF THE MAIN FLOOR

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the Main Floor. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

K9. GUEST HALL

The suit of armor here gleams with shines with great beauty.

Veins of ruby red run along the legs and arms of this suit of armor, as if outlining blood vessels. Against the light, you could swear you see them pulsate slowly with an inner glow.

Close inspection reveals that it is clearly magical full plate armor, conferring a +1 to AC. Inside the armor are adjustable straps that allow it to fit nearly any medium humanoid.

The armor is not all it seems, however. At will, Strahd may cast *command* on any character wearing this armor, and the wearer automatically fails their saving throw against the spell. Strahd uses this ability sparingly, waiting for the moment of maximum effect. The curse cannot be revealed by any magic, including the identify spell.

K10. DINING HALL

After a significant event in your adventure, Strahd may invite the characters to dine with him in this area of Castle Ravenloft. The specifics of running the dinner event are beyond the scope of this chapter, and will be handled in a separate *Dinner with the Devil* chapter.

If characters arrive here without an invitation from Strahd, they find one of two things: either a dark and silent dining hall, or one filled with music played by Strahd himself. In the latter case, Strahd is immediately aware of the character's arrival. He either stops playing music, or plays quietly enough that he may converse with the characters.

Where this encounter with Strahd goes is up to you, and depends largely on his disposition toward the characters at the time of the meeting.

If the characters have arrived with their items of power with the goal of killing Strahd, then he commands the lights in the castle to go out and the doors to shut. He then phases through a wall and out of the reach of the characters until they encounter him again in the location determined by the Tarokka reading.

On the other hand, if the characters have arrived earlier in the game or are in Strahd's good graces (for now), then you may want to run an impromptu dinner session. See the "Dinner with the Devil" chapter.

K11. SOUTH ARCHERS' POST

When a character looks into a mirror, they see themselves—dead. Perhaps they are impaled on a spike, or burnt (but not beyond recognition), or drained of all blood with two puncture wounds on their neck. Possibly their reflection is carrying their own head under one arm. One vision is more horrifying than the next. After the blink of an eye, their reflection returns to normal, leaving them wondering if it was merely a figment of their imagination.

The reflections in the mirrors here are meant to scare and intimidate the characters, but are otherwise harmless.

K14. HALL OF FAITH

This hall bears its name because it has tested the faith and the force of conviction of many adventurers who came before. Those who enter this hall have the very essence of their soul weighed and measured against their actions inside of Barovia.

Because Barovia is a demiplane cut off from the realms of the gods, the source of this area's power is a mystery even to Strahd himself. Nevertheless, something great and mysterious is at work here. Any character who enters this area falls subject to the judgment of a mysterious force.

As the Dungeon Master, examine the ideals, bonds, and flaws of the characters in this area. If their time in Barovia has been spent in accordance with those character traits, award them a point of inspiration.

Alternatively, you might choose to award inspiration to a character who has changed or evolved significantly, for good or ill. The goal of the area is not to provide a trap or a setback, but to reward those who have done well from a narrative and character standpoint.

K15. CHAPEL

Gustav Herrengast's spirit has not accepted his fate. It yearns to return and take revenge, but his body was burned by the radiant energy of the icon of Ravenloft. When the characters enter the chapel, they become aware of the restless spirit.

A pile of ashes spills from the altar to the ground, and a black mace lies on the floor in the ashes. A strange chill runs down your spine as a voice like the rustling of robes and the screams of the pyre speaks to you. "It should not have been like this! I do not accept this! There should be nothing good, no light, here to burn like this! Now, YOU shall be my vessel!"

The spirit of Gustav attempts to possess one of the characters. They have to succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or Gustav takes over. If they succeed, they only feel a tremendous chill running from their scalp down their spine before Gustav tries the next character. A character who succeeds on their saving throw cannot be possessed by Gustav again.

Should Gustav succeed, the possessed character assumes the statistics of a **revenant** and turns hostile. In order to keep the player involved, consider allowing them to control their character in this battle.

Gustav leaves a character's body when it drops to 0 hit points or when a *protection from evil and good* or *remove curse* spell is cast on the possessed character. Gustav's spirit departs if he is expelled from a body or cannot possess anyone.

K20. HEART OF SORROW

Update the boxed text of this area to the following, adjusting as necessary depending on where the party enters into the tower.

As you enter into this area, you are bathed in the flickering glow of a thousand candles. Set into irregularly spaced alcoves along the spiral staircase that hugs the outer wall, each candle stands above a brass name plate—some faded with the centuries, others gleaming as if installed yesterday.

Each name plate bears the name of an adventurer who died attempting to best Strahd inside of Castle Ravenloft.

When the characters begin to climb the stairs, read the following:

As you set foot on the stairs, you are plunged into darkness as the candles in the wall each go out at once. Your eyes adjust moments later; the only light left in the tower is the dull red glow of the heart above, and faint flicker right next to you. As you turn to read the name plate, you realize that it carries your own. The candle burns, but its flame is feeble, and seems ready to flicker out at any moment—much like your own life.

Instead of the encounter with the animated halberds, **Volenta Popofsky** (see Appendix B) makes her stand here. One of Strahd's brides, she a master trapper and assassin tasked by her lord with the defense of the Heart of Sorrow.

When the encounter begins, Volenta has two traps of her choice active. She does not intend to kill the characters; that is up to her Lord Strahd—but she protects the Heart of Sorrows at all cost.

K23. SERVANT'S ENTRANCE

Instead of the inanimate skeletons assembled by Cyrus, the characters find two animated **skeletons** here. Much like the skeleton guards that this guide placed in area K26, these skeletons are going about a mockery of their former lives as servants.

You can hear strange noises coming from this room, a faint scratching, brushing, and clattering. As you open the door, you find three skeletons shuffling about, dressed in moth-eaten rags. One is sweeping the same spot over and over, while another attempts to scratch something into a dusty ledger, dunking its quill into a dry ink well between invisible words. Another stirs an empty pot, its wooden spoon thumping the sides of the empty pots.

As you enter, the skeletons stop, turn, and curtsy to you. They look at you expectantly for a few seconds before going back to their duties.

The skeletons are not hostile. If attacked, they cower and gesture as if begging for mercy.

K24. SERVANT'S QUARTERS

The stairs here lead to area K34, the room that this guide turned into Tatyana's quarters. A character with a passive Perception of 12 or more can read two words that have been scratched faintly into the stone wall at the foot of the stairs: "harlot's nest." This was done by a servant girl who was jealous of Tatyana's elevation as a commoner.

COURT OF THE COUNT

While this is a smaller area of Castle Ravenloft, the Court of the Count provides ample opportunities to give insight into Barovian history, and the history of Castle Ravenloft.

In this chapter, we aim to give players clues as to what happened on the night of Sergei and Tatyana's wedding, as well as clues to the personalities of the two young lovers.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AREAS OF THE COURT

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the Court of the Count. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

K25. AUDIENCE HALL

Strahd keeps two items of personal value at his throne: a letter from his brother Sergei is hidden in a secret compartment in the right armrest, and the Ba'al Verzi knife used in the assassination attempt on Strahd pierces the velvet of the armrest.

The Ba'al Verzi knife is a rare magical dagger with a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. It ignores any non-magical armor that isn't adamantine or natural armor, so attacks made with this dagger against any creature not equipped with such armor are against an AC of 10 + the creature's Dexterity modifier. The dagger magically slips through armor and clothes, leaving behind no trace of piercing. Players score a critical hit on a 19-20 when attacking with the Ba'al Verzi knife.

A character that pulls out the knife or investigates the throne more closely can spot the secret compartment with a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception). Upon opening the compartment, they find a letter that has been crumpled into a ball:

My dearest Brother!

We have had the terrible news about the attempt at your life—my shock and concern could not be greater! I cannot wait to finally visit you in Castle Ravenloft. Please let me know if there is anything we can do for you in the meantime. I will keep you in my prayers, Strahd, as always!

Your devoted brother,
Sergei

K26. GUARD POST

The four **skeletons** here have not been placed by Cyrus, but are the remains of those who checked the guest list on the night of Tatyana's and Sergei's fateful wedding, which ended in tragedy when Strahd became a vampire.

When characters enter this area, one of the skeleton guards produces a dusty ledger that carries the title "Wedding Guests—Sergei von Zarovich & Tatyana Federovna".

The guard runs its bony finger down a list of hundreds upon hundreds of names in fading ink. It looks up at you, cocking its skull questioningly. You gather that it is asking for your names.

The characters are not on the list, obviously. However, the list is in poor condition and the minds of the skeletal guards are just as decayed as their flesh. They are merely going through the motions of their duties in life and are easy to fool. If the characters succeed on a DC 9 group Charisma (Deception) check, the guards salute and wave them inside; otherwise, they attack.

K27. KING'S HALL

The vampire dummy here is actually a **mimic**—Cyrus has developed a fondness for these creatures and keeps this one here just as the **kettle mimic** (see Appendix B) in area K65. This puppet mimic is dependent on the pulleys and ropes for movement while in its vampire dummy form. The pulleys have an AC of 20 and 10 hit points; if they are destroyed, the mimic falls to the ground. If any character approaches within five feet of the mimic at that point, it attacks.

The puppet mimic here uses the statistics of a standard mimic but has the following additional features:

Scary Surprise. The mimic always gets a surprise round when initiative is rolled, unless a creature has a passive Perception of 20 or higher.

K30. KING'S ACCOUNTANT

Leif is the long-suffering accountant of Strahd. Contrary to the module as written, Lief is no longer a living man, but rather a **specter** with a penchant for moving certain objects on the material plane—primarily his quill and ledgers.

Long ago, Lief woke and rose to attend his duties, not noticing that he had left his corpse behind in bed. He is not physically chained to the desk as in the rules as written, but rather is "chained" by the knowl-

edge that Strahd will set Rahadin after him to bring him back if he ever leaves the castle. Leif has weekly budget meetings with Ludmilla about the finances of Ravenloft, a task that Strahd assigned to her as he cannot be bothered by handling the finances himself.

If he's not attacked by the characters, Leif mistakes them for employees of his lord. He then impatiently requests that they help him find the rest of the money that Strahd has kept hidden, as he "must account for it." If asked where the money might be, Lief admits that he does not know, but suspects a treasury of sorts may be on an upper floor somewhere.

If attacked, Leif no longer pulls the rope, as in the written module, as he has no corporeal form. Instead he flees through the wall and will return with Rahadin 1d8 rounds.

K31. TRAPWORKS

Since the elevator trap in area K61 does not exist, as per this guide, this area is a simple storage closet where Cyrus keeps replacement parts for the system of pulleys and ropes that holds the mimic in area K27.

K32. MAID IN HELL

Helga is missing her ruby necklace, a gift given to her by Strahd when he mistook her for a reincarnation of Tatyana. Once he found out that Helga was not, in fact, a reincarnation of his lost love, Strahd took the necklace and gave it to Anastrasya. Helga has been furious ever since, and wants the necklace returned to her.

When she first encounters the characters, Helga pleads with them to help her get the necklace back, claiming it to be a family heirloom. She knows where Anastrasya keeps it (in her crypt in area K84), and wants to see her dead. In all Helga does, she presents herself as an innocent human woman, wronged by Strahd and his minions.

Helga will still betray the characters if an opportunity to ingratiate herself with Strahd presents itself—she wants nothing more than to be in his good graces again. There is a chance the characters become wise to this with a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check from how Helga tries to imitate the way Tatyana dressed and carried herself. This check can be made with advantage if they have seen the painting of Tatyana in area K37.

K34. SERVANT'S UPPER FLOOR

This is where Tatyana lived for most of her stay at Castle Ravenloft. Being a peasant girl, it was not proper for her to stay in a nobler wing of the castle. However, Strahd wanted to keep her close and grant her a domain of her own, so this area was the perfect compromise to maintain the proper decorum.

Tatyana was playful and somewhat naive in life. She is responsible for the cavorting fey creatures painted on the doors of the wardrobe here. The dancing dress in this area was her favorite summer dress of hers and still remembers how she sashayed around in it. When the characters first encounter the dancing dress, they can hear a soft song being hummed by a beautiful clear voice:

Sergei, my handsome—
Thrill me, darling,
With the words I want to hear—
Call me darling,
Call me sweetheart—
Call me, call me dear!

The room is in chaos because Strahd smashed it in his fury when he realized that he had lost Tatyana forever. The only exception to the chaos is a single chair by a small nightstand with Tatyana's diary in it. The diary can be located easily by anyone who looks in the nightstand.

Strahd comes here regularly to read and re-read the innocent account of the girl he fell in love with, writing in wonder of the noble world she has entered, full of love for Sergei and thankfulness to Strahd, as if to a benevolent uncle. Several of the pages that mention Sergei bear scratches, as if someone had clawed them in fury.

In the diary, Tatyana also mentions strange dreams of Strahd watching her from the corner of her room—she dismisses these as mere nightmares, but the diary entry provides enough clues for character to discover the secret door behind the hanging mirror without a check.

SPECIAL EVENTS

A DANCE OF DEATH

The dancing dress in area K34 does not simply dance on forever, as written in the module. Rather, it continues its dance down the stairs and into area K24. The dress will then move into area K23 and outside to area K3 if the way is not blocked.

Once outside, the dress will cease its dance and begin to rush toward area K6, the overlook, as if it is being pursued by some unseen agitator. Once at the overlook, the dress floats up onto the railing and throw itself over the edge in an echo of Tatyana's demise hundreds of years prior.

ROOMS OF WEEPING

The Rooms of Weeping within Castle Ravenloft provide a glimpse into the life Strahd had when he was but a man. Plush cushions, varnished wood, and opulent decor are to be found here. The rich trappings of the area hide horrors lurking just below the surface, however. This chapter of the guide aims to increase the threat that this area of the castle has on both the minds and bodies of the characters.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AREAS OF WEEPING

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the Rooms of Weeping. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

K35. GUARDIAN VERMIN

The door to area K36, shining with a light of its own, is enchanted with a vision of days past when Castle Ravenloft still held the promise of peace and prosperity. A character walking through this door for the first time towards area K36 experiences a brief vision of Sergei's and Tatyana's wedding night.

As you step through the door, the dark and deserted dining hall in front of you suddenly lights up with the warm light of dozens of candelabras. The table is laden with delicious smelling hors d'oeuvres. Waiters with drinks on silver platters and guests dressed in their finest garments glide around the room, engaged in murmurous conversation. A woman in the corner strums away on a harp; a cheerful melody to go with a happy occasion.

The vision ends as soon as a character tries to interact with a guest, waiter, or food or drink.

K36. DINING HALL OF THE COUNT

The Doss Lute in this room has been moved to Escher's crypt in area K84 in this guide. Instead, the party encounters a **crypt chanter** (see Appendix B) who is playing the harp in the southwest corner.

The faint notes of a hauntingly beautiful music, sadly recalling happier times, hang in the cold air. You become aware of a ghostly woman dressed in the finery of a court musician, sitting at the harp in the southwest corner of the room. She softly strums her eerie melody, swaying gently to the tune, her eyes hooded by eternal grief.

The crypt chanter is mad with loneliness and grief. She yearns for the rapt and joyful audience she once had in life. Once the party enters the room, the crypt chanter tries to catch their attention with its song, and modulates the melody if it does not receive attention.

While the crypt chanter does not initiate combat upon seeing the party, she will immediately use her *song of sorrow* ability to charm any character within 60 feet of her. If the party seems to be moving on to another room, the crypt chanter grows hostile and makes clear attempts to engage with the party, playing different melodies that grow angrier and more discordant the further they move towards an exit.

The party can appease the crypt chanter by joining her song of sorrow with any sort of instrument or song available to them and succeeding on a DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check. On a failure, the crypt chanter becomes hostile and attacks until defeated.

K38. FALSE TREASURY

Since in our guide the witches in area K56 are not present, the characters are found by Gertruda instead, should they all be incapacitated by the trap. She drags them, one by one, to area K37 and fusses worriedly over them until they awaken.

"I don't know what you were doing behind the fireplace, but you looked awfully uncomfortable sleeping on that stone floor."

K39. HALL OF WEBS

The door to area K31b does not exist, as we removed area K31b in our guide. Aside from that removal, the entire area is populated with tiny, harmless baby spiders.

As you open the door, light falls onto a hallway filled with spiderwebs. For the briefest moment, the light reflects back at you in a dazzling glitter. Thousands of tiny spiders look your direction for one heartbeat before quickly taking shelter in their nests of webs.

As you proceed through the hallway, a constant ripple of webs and scurrying of thousands of tiny legs reminds you of the spiders, as they scuttle away from you in a wave and squeeze below the door at the end of the hallway.

K41. TREASURY

Rather than a Daerne's Instant Fortress, this area is a normal part of Castle Ravenloft. The entrance is thoroughly trapped, however. Rather than a normal door, the treasury is guarded by a *Door of Faces*, a complex trap crafted by Strahd himself. He created the door from several victims whom he had caught trying to steal from the castle.

When inactive, the door appears to be made of iron, but with an irregular surface texture. Close inspection reveals what appear to be faces with closed eyes and mouths embossed on the door. When the door's trap is triggered, however, the iron melts away and the faces underneath become animated. They begin to twist and contort, leering and shouting at nearby characters.

Attempting to open the door, whether by mundane or magical means, triggers the trap. Once a character starts to interfere with the lock, have everyone roll initiative. Run the trap like you would a legendary creature in combat, triggering its various elements as the party's efforts to bypass the trap unfold (see the Door of Faces sidebar).

Once the Door of Faces is overcome, possibly by disabling its two main ways of harassing characters, it functions just like a mundane door. The faces hang slack and revert back to their iron form. If a temporary effect that disabled the door is removed, the door becomes active once more.

K42. KING'S BEDCHAMBER

Gertruda is in this chamber, as per the original description—but it is not the teenage Gertruda of the original. Gertruda is 30 years old and has been kept prisoner by her mother all of her life. Though still naive, she is harsh and jaded toward those who she feels would take her freedom. She does not realize that she has traded one cage for another. You can find all necessary information on her in the Cast of Ravenloft chapter of this guide!

K43. BATH CHAMBER

The spirit of Varushka, the maid that took her own life here rather than become a vampire spawn of Strahd's, still haunts this area—but takes on a far more active and vengeful role. She has been mocking and tormenting poor Gertruda with surprise scares, and worse, ever since Gertruda arrived. Varushka does not want anyone to fall for Strahd and feels for his other victims, but has little patience for fools who would give themselves to him willingly. She also holds a dim view of anyone who thinks they can best Strahd—she has seen too many come and die at his hand over the centuries.

Door of Faces

Complex trap

Trigger. This trap activates as soon as someone attempts to open the door, whether by mundane or magical means, and acts on initiative counts 10 and 20. It reverts back to its inert form if there is no creature within 30 feet of it on one of its turns.

Actions

Domineering Look. The eyes of all faces all roll in unison to look one particular creature in the eye, piercing its very soul. The door casts dominate person on the target (spell save DC 16). The door can concentrate on only one dominate person spell at a time.

Mockery. The voices unify to mock one particular creature within 60 feet of it and casts vicious mockery on it (spell save DC 16).

Reactions

Taunt. As a reaction, the door shouts distracting abuse at the character and it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn. The door can take this reaction twice per round.

Constant Elements

Maddening Glares. Characters who starts its turn within 30 feet of the door or who enter the area for the first time on one of their turns must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effects of a confusion spell for that turn. Characters who succeed on this save are immune against this effect for 24 hours.

Countermeasures

If both its voice and its sight are disabled, the door can be passed safely like a normal door.

Muting the Voices. If the door is made mute in some way, it loses all effects that rely on its voice. The character with the highest passive Investigation score notices that one of the mouths is gagged with an old rag and is furiously working to spit it out, in vain. If all other mouths are gagged or a silence spell is cast on the door, it loses its voice. Gagging a mouth requires an action and being within 5 feet of the door. There are six mouths to gag.

Blinding the Eyes. If the door is made blind in some way, it loses all effects that rely on its voice. The eyes have darkvision out to a range of 30 feet, but cannot see through magical darkness, so a darkness spell would disrupt its sight. A blindness/deafness spell or a color spray spell could achieve the same, but the door can resist with a +8 bonus to its saving throw, as if it were a creature saving from it. Alternatively, the eyes can be poked out one by one, blinding the door. This requires a successful attack against AC 18. There are six pairs of eyes to blind and they can be blinded one pair at a time.

d6 Bloody Bath Haunt

1 **Bloody Footprints.** The characters come across bloody footprints, that lead away from them and towards the closest exit, appearing before their very eyes. They stop after a few paces and then vanish.

2 **Echoing Voices.** Varushka speaks to the characters as an echoing voice, but only in short phrases, such as “turn back, you fools—save yourselves” or “you were not the first—do you think you’ll be the last?” or “he is too powerful for you.”

3 **Cold Hands.** Varushka touches one of the characters, sending a cold shiver down their spine as if ice water was poured down their back. They must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or also be poisoned for 10 minutes.

4 **Possession.** Varushka possesses one of the characters, as a ghost would. She mocks the other party members and berates them for their futile foolishness. She explains her own history and explains that she thinks their quest is not only futile, but foolish. She can be reasoned with and invited to possess someone else to talk with her after this occurs for the first time. If nobody engages her, she departs the host after a few minutes.

5 **Poltergeist.** Varushka pushes or pulls a character unexpectedly, knocking them prone or smashing them into a wall or furniture. A character she attacks in this way must succeed in a DC 13 Strength saving throw (with disadvantage, due to the unexpected attack) or also take 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from this.

6 **Attack.** Varushka manifests as a ghost with the Telekinetic Thrust ability of a poltergeist and attacks the group. She does not fight to the death, and rather fades into a wall after she did some damage in a surprise round. Her objective is to turn these fools back, not kill them.

Varushka follows anyone around who falls in either of the two categories, as long as they are in the Rooms of Weeping, and periodically haunts them (see Bloody Bath Haunt table). She can only be appeased by showing her one of the Fortunes of Ravenloft items and succeeding in a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check while characters explain that they can, in fact, defeat Strahd (one attempt per item, only one success necessary).+

K44. CLOSET

The clothes here are intended by Strahd for Tatyana’s use—and her use only. The garments are enchanted to reveal anyone who removes them without Strahd’s authorization. The trespasser’s right hand grows black, starting from the fingertips, over a period of 24 hours after removing a garment from the closet. This recalls the traditional Barovian punishment for thieves—chopping off of the right hand. Once the entire hand has grown black, it falls off and becomes a crawling claw that is friendly towards its erstwhile owner. This effect can be reversed, over the course of another 24 hours, including reattaching the hand, by a remove curse or greater restoration spell.

Gertruda has been longing after these garments ever since she moved into Castle Ravenloft, but Strahd has forbidden her to touch any of them. In her childlike naivete, she could not contain herself, however. Her fingers are already black to her knuckles, which she tries to conceal, but characters with a passive Perception of 13 or higher can notice.

K45. HALL OF HEROES

The characters have another opportunity to have some of their questions divined by the ghosts of the fallen adventurers that came before them, in area K67. The statues in this area instead address the characters directly, turning their heads towards them as they pass. They mutter cryptic observations about the characters’ past and make vague prophecies about their future. Some of these are outrageous, some eerily plausible—but none of them are true, except by accident. Each statue makes no more than one single statement as the group passes them; they do not answer any questions.

SPIRES OF RAVENLOFT

Within the Spires of Castle Ravenloft, characters find themselves at the highest points of Strahd's lair. Rooftops slick with rain, perilous drops, and murderous denizens abound here. In this chapter of the guide, we have fleshed out the area and its inhabitants.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AREAS OF THE SPIRES

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the Spires of Ravenloft. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

K47. PORTRAIT OF STRAHD

The trapdoor to area K31a does not exist, as we removed the elevator trap in this guide.

The **rug of smothering** in this area does not immediately attack the first character to step on it. As a relatively weak combatant, its primary goal is smother its opponent and cause them to fall down the nearby staircase. To that end, it will wait patiently until there is a clear path to the staircase before attacking.

Any creature that the rug pushes down the stairs takes 1d4 bludgeoning damage per 10 feet of falling. Every 10 feet, the character may make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw check to stop the fall. On a failure, they fall another 10 feet.

At your discretion, the **guardian portrait** here may remain a non-combatant. Instead, Strahd may use it as a means of surveillance as he magically looks through the eyes of the painting. With a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, characters notice the eyes of the painting move as they look around the area.

K49. LOUNGE

Prior to becoming one of Strahd's consorts, Escher was an adventurer trapped in Barovia, just like the characters. If the characters have not met Escher before, he is unaware of their exploits as he has fallen from Strahd's grace and is not kept apprised of goings-on outside of the castle.

Escher is not immediately hostile when encountering the characters. Although he is reluctant to talk with them at first, he can be convinced to open up with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the characters convince Escher that they share with him the common goal of escaping Barovia, and that

they have a fighting chance to do so, he offers to aid them in whatever small ways that he can. Escher is incapable of physically acting against Strahd due to the nature of their ties, but he can provide characters with information about the castle and Strahd's tactics.

If there are any Fortunes of Ravenloft items inside the castle, Escher knows where they are and can tell the characters where they are.

Should any character look out the window in this area, they see that a number of grotesque statues of winged beasts are set along the rooftop edge at irregular intervals. Any character with a passive Perception of 16 or higher catches one of these gargoyles moving. See area K53 for more details.

K52. SMOKESTACK

Any characters that come close to this smokestack while moving on the rooftop, or who attempt to enter it, are attacked by 1d4 **smoke mephits**. The mephits fight until defeated. Noise from this encounter alerts the **gargoyles** in area K53, who come to join the fray after three rounds.

K53. ROOFTOP

If any characters move across the rooftop, they are attacked by 1d4 + 2 **gargoyles** set along the edges; the rest remain inert but can animate at any time. There seems to be an almost inexhaustible supply. Over time, new gargoyles eerily take the place of those vanquished while nobody is looking.

K55. ELEMENT ROOM

Instead of the vampire spawn, a curious gargoyle might come investigate if the characters open a window.

If the characters rummage through the alchemical supplies stored here, they can find a rare spell component with a successful DC 14 Investigation check (maximum of one per character). These are consumed when used, even if the spell they are used in does not state so. See the Rare Spell Component table later in this chapter for more details.

d6	Rare Spell Component	Spell	Effect
1	Extra-tart tiny tarts	Tasha's hideous laughter	The target has disadvantage on the save against this spell and the spell can also target creatures with an Intelligence score of less than 4.
2	Barovian shadow herbs	Find familiar	The spell can summon the giant version of any creature usually summoned, e.g. a giant crab instead of a crab.
3	Burnt branching twig	Witch bolt	The spell can be cast on two targets (requiring separate attack rolls), as if twinned by a sorcerer.
4	Dream sand	Sleep	When rolling for hit points, add +2 for every d8 rolled.
5	Boar hide leather	Mage armor	The target's AC becomes 15 + its Dexterity modifier.
6	Silver dragon holy water	Protection from evil and good	The protective effects on the target extend to any friendly creature within 10 feet of the target while the spell lasts.

K56. CAULDRON

The Barovian witches in this area do not automatically attack the characters. Instead, they try to gauge what their interests are and what brings them to Castle Ravenloft. They hope to relay this information to Strahd, to ingratiate themselves. They speak alternating between all witches present, finishing each other's sentences:

"Oh, my sweeties!"—"What might bring..."—"...you pretties here, hm?"—"Hm?"—"Hm?"

The seven witches of the coven introduce themselves by name, if given the chance: Circe, Corvus, Cindy, Cassandra, Clarabelle, Craven, and Crecia. Corvus is their leader, and is in possession of a flying broom.

The witches are the middle of preparing the cauldron to reproduce potions. All ingredients and rites are complete, and the contents of the cauldron can now take on the properties of any potion that is poured into it. This yields 1d4 + 1 potions identical to that which was poured into it. The characters can deduce this effect with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana) check by looking through the notes and spell components scattered around the cauldron.

If combat breaks out, Corvus will try to escape on her broom through one of the windows in area K55. The **gargoyles** on the rooftops are friendly towards her and she returns to the fight with 1d4 + 2 of them within 1d4 rounds.

K57. TOWER ROOF

One particularly stocky **gargoyle** perches here. It has 77 hit points and its attacks deal 1d8+2 damage.

K58. BRIDGE

If the characters try to traverse this bridge, 1d4 + 2 **gargoyles** attack when they are right in the middle of their crossing. The gargoyles attempt to push or drag the characters off the bridge.

K59. HIGH TOWER PEAK

As written, Pidlwick II was created by Fritz von Weerg. In the spirit of keeping things tied together, this guide will alter the origins of the clockwork man.

In the town of Vallaki, the Blinsky family has been making toys and contraptions for generations. Gadof Blinsky's great great grandfather was particularly skilled in clockwork, and specialized in mechanical marvels that had a startlingly lifelike quality. One such creation was Pidlwick II, whom he created on commission for Duchess Dorfniya Dilisnya.

If the characters befriend Pidlwick II, he points frantically at a torn and faded label sewn into his trousers. He repeats this periodically until the characters assure him that they will return him to his creator. The label reads:

Master Toy Maker Mikhail Blinsky
Is No Fun, Is No Blinsky!

If Pidlwick II is returned to Gadof Blinsky in Vallaki, the toymaker will do his best to reward the characters. He has very little money, but is willing to part with as much as 10 gold pieces and whatever toys he has in the shop.

Unfortunately for Gadof, Pidlwick II is not happy being returned to anyone but his creator, Gadof's great great grandfather. Within 2d4 days, Pidlwick II smotheres Gadof in his sleep and then continues to "entertain" random townspeople every night.

K60. NORTH TOWER PEAK

As written, this area contains little more than manacles, a bed, and a chest containing a crown. Because these items have little connection to anything else in the module or the castle, this guide recommends replacing the contents of this area entirely.

Instead, this area serves as a stable of sorts for Bucephalus. The perimeter of the area is lined with piles of straw that Cyrus brings up in order to feed the fiendish horse. Much of the straw has been burnt black by the flames that emit from Bucephalus' body.

In the southern wall, from floor to ceiling, are a large set of double doors, beyond which lies only open air. When characters arrive in the area, the doors are latched shut on the inside. Strahd opens the doors in order to fly Bucephalus in and out.

Hanging from the northern wall are three leather saddles, all of exquisite craftsmanship and worth 60 gold apiece.

When Bucephalus is not confined to its crypt, being ridden by Strahd or aiding him in battle, it can be found in this area. There is a 20 percent chance that Cyrus is present, tending to the nightmare. If encountered by the characters, Bucephalus is hostile toward them. If reduced to half health, Bucephalus will use its Ethereal Stride action to escape from battle, and will seek out Strahd at the earliest opportunity.



LARDERS OF ILL OMEN

While generally well crafted, players' experience of the larders is harmed by its staunch adherence to the 1st edition appearance of Castle Ravenloft. This chapter aims to adjust the larders to provide a more positive experience of the area, and to provide more ties to Barovian history and lore.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AREAS OF THE LARDER

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the Larders of Ill Omen. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

K61. ELEVATOR TRAP

The elevator trap is needlessly complex for to run and not fun to engage with for players. We suggest removing it entirely.

K62. SERVANT'S HALL

This is where characters are most likely to meet Cyrus Belview, Strahd's mongrelfolk servant. Cyrus will no longer try to guide the players to the removed elevator trap. Instead, he will try to lead characters directly to the lounge in area K49. After he departs from the character's company, providing he has not been harmed, Cyrus will return to his quarters in area K66 to take notes on the character's arrival and behavior in a journal that he keeps hidden inside his desk.

K63. WINE CELLAR

Characters with a passive Perception score of 17 or higher, or who succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, discover five bottles Champagne du le Stomp behind a loose brick. This finest of vintages from the Wizard of Wines was long thought entirely lost and is a literally priceless treasure in Barovia. Should characters be willing to do so, the Wachter brothers in Vallaki will pay a hefty sum for the bottles.

K65. KITCHEN

The kitchen must be functional to service Strahd's mortal servants and provide the dinner for the characters when they are invited to by Strahd.

Outside the door to this room, you catch a whiff of smoked meats, freshly baked bread, and some kind of delicious fresh stew—more tempting than any other food you have encountered in Barovia... save for some particular pastries, maybe. Strahd clearly has not allowed the kitchen in his castle to deteriorate, even if he himself no longer needs it.

The most notable feature in the kitchen besides the well-stocked larder is a huge kettle slowly bubbling away at the center. The scent is almost unbearably mouthwatering.

This is not to say that the kitchen is entirely safe for intruders, however. Cyrus keeps a pet **kettle mimic** here (see Appendix B) that likes to pretend it's a cooking pot. It is well-fed but never passes up an unwary victim. The kettle mimic attacks any creature that comes within 5 feet of it, except Cyrus.

K66. BUTLER'S QUARTERS

Cyrus is no longer just a simple mongrelfolk from the Abbey. Instead, he works as a spy for the Abbot, and his quarters have been updated to reflect his secret occupation.

Characters who are not careful about opening the door to this room will topple a pile of garbage inside the room, creating a loud noise. This will alert Cyrus to any intruders if he is within 100 feet.

Crammed into this 20-square-foot room are a long, sagging bed and an ancient writing desk. They are barely accessible between piles and piles of junk—all manner of adventuring gear, armor, and weapons lie about, all rendered unusable from years of neglect. The desk is the only area that seems semi-functional for work.

With a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the players can discover a bunch of scribbled notes hidden below a recipe book in the desk's drawer. These contain unnecessarily minute and mostly useless information about the goings-on at Castle Ravenloft. If the characters have been here for long enough, they may find their own names and exploits enumerated here from Cyrus' perspective.

If the check succeeds by 3 or more, the characters also discover a ring with 16 keys on it, hung from a hook inside the drawers of the desk, hidden behind a bunch of disused writing utensils. These keys can open the dungeon cells in areas K74 and K75.

Strahd is, of course, aware that Cyrus works for the Abbot. It amuses him to see Cyrus perform so miserably in his ill-fitting role. On occasion, Strahd also finds it useful to use Cyrus to feed the Abbot information that serves his purpose.

K67. HALL OF BONES

Cyrus has completed this disquieting monument to death, but he has worked standing on the shoulders of giants. Generations of adventurers, servants who disappointed Strahd and Barovians who opposed him have had their mortal remains deposited in this grotesque ossuary, added to by one of Strahd's deranged servants after another. Anyone who enters this hall can feel the restless spirits.

As you enter this disturbing shrine, the deathly silence is anything but quieting. It presses on your ears as if it is trying to get inside your head—until you begin to hear whispers, urgent but muffled. It seems to you that you can almost make out words, if you would just listen a little bit closer or concentrate a bit harder. The voices seem to want to tell you something.

The characters can attempt to interact with the tormented souls trapped here to learn from their mistakes and accumulated knowledge, but it is a risky undertaking. Any character who uses an action to focus on the whispers begins to perceive ghostly figures manifesting around them, still bleeding from the wounds that killed them.

The character must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the ghostly figures press in ever closer, clawing at the character. The character is frightened by the room itself for 1 minute and takes 4d10 psychic damage. On a successful save, the ghostly figures stand back and offer to answer one question pertaining to the history of Barovia or Strahd. Their answers may be brief, cryptic or repetitive, but are generally truthful.

A character can attempt to commune with the spirits here a number of times equal to their Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1) or until they fail at the attempt once. After that, they automatically fail the saving throw.

K70. KINGSMEN HALL

This hall was witness to one of the bloodiest chapters of Strahd's final fall to darkness. The spirits of Strahd's former guards, whom he slaughtered here in his fury on the night he was transformed into a vampire, still linger.

As you walk through this hall, you sense that you are not alone. A dark shade stalks alongside you, always just at the edge of your peripheral vision if you try to turn around to catch a direct look. Echoes of desperate screams and the clanging of weapons hang in the air—and you can smell fresh blood.

After a few more steps, you become aware of more faint shades pressed into corners, hands held up in pleading and obviously scared to death. These shades are unmoving, and you realize that each of them huddles over a particularly dark patch of blood on the floor.

The first dark shade is the **shadow demon** from area K72. It is an aspect of Strahd made manifest here from the sheer power of his rage when he killed the guards. The lesser shades are six shadows spawned from the murdered guards, now manifesting here exactly on the spots where they fell.

In a grotesque reenactment of the past, the shadow demon will attack the shadows if the characters linger here instead of moving straight through the room. The shadows do not defend themselves and the shadow demon does not attack the characters unless attacked first. If attacked, the shadow demon changes its focus from the shadows to the characters. If the shadow demon is defeated while the shadows are still alive, read or paraphrase the following:

A many-voiced moan of soul-deep relief rises from the corners of the hall: "free from the devil Strahd, free at last—our loyalty did not save us, but you did!". You see the shades shudder and fall back onto the ground in long-sought solace, before dissipating. They finally seem to have found rest. You can feel some of this relief washing over you yourself—you have pushed the darkness back a little bit today.

For every shade that is still alive when the shadow demon is defeated, one character in the party gains 5 temporary hit points, and also gains advantage on saving throws against being frightened until the end of their next long rest.

DUNGEON AND CATACOMBS

Sergei's tomb and the tombs of King Barov and Queen Ravenovia are extremely important to Strahd, yet there are no penalties to desecrating the former and the latter are not even accessible to Strahd himself. We have changed these areas so the players can understand their significance and made them more logical parts of Strahd's history.

Exploring some areas in the Dungeons and Catacombs does not further the story of *Curse of Strahd*, despite of how much Strahd identifies with Castle Ravenloft, which he made into an edifice of his own accomplishments and disappointments over the century. We have modified these areas to gain more significance and make the characters realize that they are not exploring the ruins of any random castle, but of Strahd's very soul itself.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AREAS OF THE DUNGEON

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the dungeons and catacombs of Castle Ravenloft. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or as modified to your liking.

K74. NORTH DUNGEON

The keys to be found in area K66 open the doors here and in area K75. If Cyrus is with the party, you can also decide to place the key ring on his person.

The steps leading from area K73 to the dungeon cells in area K74 and area K75 no longer lead down, but up. This leaves areas K73 and K76 flooded to a depth of 3 feet, but the cells themselves are dry.

Inside of area K74e is a fresh corpse, recently drained of blood. Five rounds after a character enters this cell, either via K81 or K73, the corpse rises as a hungry **vampire spawn** and attacks.

K75. SOUTH DUNGEON

Unlike the module as written, Emil is now located at Tsolenka Pass, rather than in these dungeons. In Emil's place, the characters will find Mad Mary from the village of Barovia. At the request of her daughter, Gertruda, Mary was captured and incarcerated here by Rahadin shortly after the characters' departure from the village.

When characters first arrive in this area, read:

A suppressed sobbing and crying echoes down the southern steps. It is so pure in its suffering that it immediately fills your heart with sadness. It sounds faintly familiar as well, and then you catch the meaning of one drawn-out moan—a name: “Gertruda...”

Gertruda, Mad Mary's adult daughter, is currently residing in Castle Ravenloft with aspirations of becoming a “bride”. After breaking out of her mother's house, Gertruda came to realize the full extent of the abuse that she'd undergone, and eventually made her way to Strahd's castle.

Driven by her fury over her mother's actions and her own fairytale world view, Gertruda wanted her mother to get a taste of her own medicine. Strahd obliged her, being all too willing to encourage the darker aspects of his subjects' personalities.

Gertruda is now torn between her anger toward her mother and her continued need for her mother's love. She makes regular visits to her Mary's cell in the dungeons to flaunt her new-found power and scream abuses at her mother—but also to seek comfort in that unique minute-by-minute turn of affection and hatred.

K76. TORTURE CHAMBER

Remove the Strahd zombies from this area; they are no longer a threat at this point in the campaign and just an annoyance to go through due to their mechanics.

The torture chamber has seen recent use, however.

A bloodied body still hangs from one of the torture racks, upright, limp arms outstretched and bound, face hidden behind blood-matted hair. As you look upon the horrific display, an involuntary shudder comes over you—and the feeling that you are being watched...

Strahd has only recently been here, for entertainment; see the description of area K77.

At your discretion, you may swap any well-known NPC in the game (who is not traveling with the party currently) for the anonymous dead body in this room. This is especially encouraged if there is an NPC that has been especially kind or helpful to the characters.

K77. OBSERVATORY BALCONY

When the group investigates this area, they discover that someone must have been here not too long ago.

Standing on a mahogany table between the thrones is a tall crystal glass with a few remaining sips of red liquid. The faint steam rising from it in the cold dungeon air indicates that it is still warm. Clearly, someone had recently been sitting here, amusing themselves with the spectacle in the torture chamber below.

K78. BRAZIER ROOM

Once a character has been teleported using the brazier, the portal that brought them to their new location stays open for five minutes and can be used as a two-way teleportation circle. The portal is visible as a circle of blood-red runes on the ground that slowly fade into black smoke over the duration, indicating that the portal will close soon. This change prevents characters from being scattered all over Barovia with no fast method of return, potentially during a crucial moment of the story.

K79. WESTERN STAIR

Strahd did not place a mere illusion of himself here, but a more elaborate spell trap to protect the teleportation mechanism in area K78. When the glyph of warding is triggered, it releases a *Mental Prison* spell (save DC 14) on the creature that triggered the trap. The illusion that appears to the target is Strahd, standing in front of them and staring menacingly, holding a glass of red liquid.

K81. TUNNEL

This guide does not recommend traps that can't be spotted passively. Instead, the trap door in this area can be noticed with a passive Perception score of 20 or higher.

K84. CATACOMBS

The catacombs of Castle Ravenloft here are a callback to the days of the first edition module. Each tomb is used as an opportunity for tongue-in-cheek humor, a trap, or to provide valuable treasure.

While this guide does not recommend eschewing the entirety of the catacomb or its themes, there are some changes that are believed necessary.

Foremost, we recommend removing the luck blade from crypt 29. Strahd is liable to know about every artifact within his castle, and it is unlikely such a weapon would escape his notice.

Next, the sleeping arrangements of each of Strahd's consorts should be addressed. Each consort, the brides Ludmilla, Anastrasya and Volenta as well as Escher, each have their own crypt here. These crypts stand out because they, in contrast to all the other

crypts in the area, stand open, their heavy stone doors laid to the side. An open stone sarcophagus is visible inside each, standing upright. You can replace any of the current crypts with these, but one of them must be crypt 18, the one originally intended for Ireena. Entering any of the consorts' crypts triggers an alarm spell that mentally alerts any of the consorts of the disturbance of their resting place if they are within one mile.

Ludmilla's crypt. A sparsely decorated crypt with bare stone walls. It is immaculately clean, as it is dusted by Helga on a daily basis. Hidden in a compartment of the sarcophagus is Ludmilla's spellbook, which has the following spells prepared: expeditious retreat, fog cloud, hideous laughter, magic missile, blindness/deafness, ray of enfeeblement, suggestion, fly, and lightning bolt.

Anastrasya's crypt. A richly decorated crypt with finely polished furniture placed here and there so as to make a sitting room. The walls are decorated with colorful tapestries. Laid out on a hook is a golden necklace with a red ruby pendant. Strahd originally gave the necklace to Helga, but took it away when he realized that she was not a reincarnation of Tatyana. Ever since, it has been in the possession of Anastrasya who likes to taunt Helga by wearing the necklace whenever she is around.

Volenta's crypt. The entrance to this crypt is protected by a poison dart trap, which can be noticed with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check and disarmed with a DC 12 Dexterity check. The floor of the crypt is covered with a woven straw mat, and the walls are lined with shelves containing mechanical components for traps. Tucked away in a box, characters can find a hand-drawn map of Castle Ravenloft's interior, which Volenta made shortly after becoming a vampire so that she would not get lost in the castle.

Escher's crypt. Escher spends as little time here as possible. As such, there is no furniture or adornment here aside from a single wooden chair, at the feet of which is a leather case. Within the case, characters can find the *Doss Lute*, which is normally located in area K36. This is the lute that Escher used during his travels as a bard before Strahd turned him into a vampire.

Additionally, the catacombs are filled with illusions much like the one found at the River Ivlis Crossroads (area F). Some of the closed crypts scattered throughout the catacombs carry the names of the characters. There is a crypt prepared for each of them, some carrying suitable epithets. Upon closer inspection, the writing fades and reveals the original inscriptions described in *Curse of Strahd*. You may place these illusions at any of the crypts which do not belong to a consort.

K85. SERGEI'S TOMB

Sergei von Zarovich was, in many ways, the antithesis to Strahd. Where Strahd was a ruthless conqueror and politician who grew up away from his family, hardened by the necessities of a life on the battlefield, Sergei was a pious man who was raised in the loving care of Queen Ravenovia, naïve of the harsher aspects of life. Strahd killed his brother Sergei in his rage over his love Tatyana favoring the younger Sergei, but he is haunted by this mistake and still loves and mourns his brother, in his own twisted way.

Desecrating Sergei's tomb, one of the few places left in Barovia to house a gentle and loving spirit, comes at a heavy cost to any character who is of good or neutral alignment. If such a character removes any item from the tomb, they are cursed with the Brightbane curse. The precise nature of the curse can only be ascertained by trial and error, by divine consultation such as a *Commune* spell, or with a successful DC 19 Intelligence (Religion) check.

Brightbane

You are unworthy to look on the world's beauty in the shining light of day. You are blind to daylight and light produced by the light and daylight spells. You can only see in darkness, if you had darkvision before, or by the dim light of an artificial light source such as a torch or an oil lamp.

This curse can only be removed by replacing all items removed from Sergei's tomb and atoning there in prayer for 10 minutes, or by a *Wish* spell.

K86. STRAHD'S TOMB

Strahd's brides have a much more active role in this version of *Curse of Strahd* and are thus not to be found in his tomb. Ludmilla is at Tsolenka Pass, Anas-trasya can be encountered during the Feast of Saint Andral, and Volenta has her own business elsewhere in Castle Ravenloft.

Instead, three **vampire spawn** are hanging upside down from the ceiling, apparently sleeping. When characters first enter this area, read the following:

As you enter the tomb, you almost run straight into something that looks like cobwebs at first glance—you realize just in time before brushing it away that it is hair! Three pale figures hang upside-down from the ceiling, their arms folded on their torsos.

Characters who move into the chamber must succeed on a DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check or wake the vampire spawn, who immediately attack in defense of their master's abode.

K87. GUARDIANS

The effect of the curtain protecting this area is reversed—it no longer allows the passage of any living being, but dead and undead can pass unhindered. This allows Strahd to visit his beloved parents but keeps out any of his living servants or current paramours not yet turned into vampire spawn.

An inscription in the wall above the curtain reads:

Here, beyond death's door, lie King Barov and Queen Ravenovia. Only those who have passed themselves may enter, so their rest shall never be disturbed.

Characters can deduce, with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Religion) check, that the curtain is likely a one-way ward and passage out of the tomb behind it is not an issue for living creatures. They further realize that the reference to passing death's door can be taken literally, and means that a creature that has previously died and been resurrected may also enter.

If a living being attempts to pass the curtain, it is teleported back to the top of the stairs behind it and Strahd's voice rings through its mind: "This place is not for you."

K88. TOMB OF KING BAROV AND QUEEN RAVENOVIA

This tomb is an eerie place that has both a hallowed and a desecrated quality to it. Strahd truly loved his mother, Queen Ravenovia, and respected and wanted to please his father, King Barov, greatly. However, Strahd's very nature and his and his father's shared lust for conquest and power mean that nothing created by them can ever truly be pure.

The entire area is desecrated ground (see p. 110 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) and a supernatural silence reigns here, as befits the dignity of those laid to rest here—no sound can emanate from within the area, and no sound can reach into it. In addition, no dead bodies interred in the area can be turned into undead.

If anything is removed from this place or someone attempts to remove the desecrated nature of the place, Strahd knows this immediately and come rushing to the area in fury, with the aim of expelling any intruder and then making sure the remains of his beloved parents are intact—he can run down the interlopers later.

THE TOWN OF VALLAKI

If Death House and the Village of Barovia are the tutorial and introductory levels of *Curse of Strahd*, then the Town of Vallaki is the start of the game proper.

The length of the Vallaki's chapter, combined with the high number of NPCs and events within the town, make it a daunting prospect for many Dungeon Masters. There's a lot going on, and the module as written throws a lot of it at you and the players within a short period of time.

This guide will walk you through the process of preparing you for Vallaki by getting you organized and helping you space out the pacing of the events within the town to provide a better experience.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

PREPARING VALLAKI

Vallaki is one of the largest chapters in the entire *Curse of Strahd* module. As such, running it can be a daunting task. The key to successfully running Vallaki is in preparation. Take the following steps to ensure that you are ready.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Vallaki is a hub, from whence the bulk of the module's story branches out. It is a location that your players are likely to return to time and time again for various reasons.

Because they'll be returning to Vallaki many times over the course of the game, you should take your time with the events in the town. There's no need to throw everything at your players within the first three days of their arrival. Some events may not occur for up to a week afterward, at your discretion.

By taking your time and spacing out the individual events of the town, each event gets its time in the spotlight. Additionally, unrelated events won't be conflated with one another due to their chronological proximity.

MAKE SOME LISTS

There is a lot of related information scattered throughout Vallaki's chapter in the module. To help yourself stay organized, you should make three lists.

1. Locations
2. Plot hooks & quests
3. NPCs

LOCATIONS

There are ten locations in Vallaki. For each of those locations, jot down a few quick notes about what players will find at there. Pay special attention to the **Burgomaster's Mansion**, **Wachterhaus**, the **Coffin Maker's Shop**, and anywhere that the Fortunes of Ravenloft point the characters.

#	Name
1	Town Gates
2	St. Andral's Church
3	Blue Water Inn
4	Burgomaster's Mansion
5	Wachterhaus
6	Arasek Stockyard
7	Coffin Maker's Shop
8	Blinsky Toys
9	Town Square
10	Vistani Camp

PLOT HOOKS & QUESTS

The next list contains all of the plot hooks and quests that start in or around Vallaki, their triggers, and some notes on their possible outcomes, good or bad. This allows you to quickly reference what your players came there to do, why, and what can happen one way or another.

Common hooks and quests include the Baron's missing staff members, killing Izek Strazni, and finding the missing bones of St. Andral. Your adventure may include any number of additional quests and hooks.

NPCs

The third list you should make contains the NPCs in the town, and where they might be found at a given time or under certain circumstances. This is where you should also keep notes on the personality and mannerisms of the NPCs.

Not every character is important, and your party probably won't interact with all of them on a meaningful level, if at all. As such, we've organized the NPCs by their level of importance in the tables on the following page.

Note that these lists can change depending on your circumstances, such as who Strahd's Enemy is in your game.

PRIMARY NPCs

These are your star characters in Vallaki, aside from the characters themselves. These are individuals whom you should know inside and out. They should have their own unique personality that is memorable to the players.

Primary NPC Name

Vargas Vallakovich

Victor Vallakovich

Fiona Wachter

Father Lucian Petrovich

Danika Dorakova

Urwin Martikov

Izek Strazni

Rictavio/Rudolph van Richten

Henrik van der Voort

Milivoj

SECONDARY NPCs

These NPCs should have developed motivations, but your players aren't likely to interact with them on a repeated basis. You may expend less effort in developing these characters.

Secondary NPC Name

Stella Wachter

Nikolai Wachter Jr.

Karl Wachter

Bluto Krogarov

Yeska

Gadof Blinsky

Lydia Petrovna

NEW LOCATIONS

The following locations can be added to Vallaki. They can be placed on the map wherever you wish, but it is likely that the shops are concentrated around the town square.

THE CRACKED ANVIL

The Cracked Anvil is run by Dmitri Valistov (NG male human **commoner**), a surly man of large stature. Dmitri is adept at shoeing horses and creating basic hunting traps, but he is not a weaponsmith or armorsmith. Despite that, he sells an assortment of low-grade weapons and armor that you can find in the starting equipment list of the Player's Handbook. Each item was taken from the body of a dead adventurer.

THE STRAIGHT ARROW

The Straight Arrow is run by Ana Krogarov (LG female human **commoner**), a distant cousin of Bluto. She crafts short and long bows of decent quality while her assistant and son, Duryan (LG male human non-combatant), crafts arrows and quills.

ENDLESS DELIGHT CLOTHIERS

The Endless Delight Clothier is run by twin brothers Harwin and Hewin Yustov (NG male human **commoners**). They sell various bolts of cloth, along with basic clothing that is worn by most residents of the town. In addition, they offer bespoke clothing to those who are willing to pay a higher price.

Player characters who are looking to venture into the mountains may also find warm weather clothing that will protect them from sub-zero temperatures.

STEFANOVICH & SONS APOTHECARY

Gregor Stefanovich (LE male human **commoner**) has no children, but decided that having the words "and sons" in his shop's name would garner more trust in his business. He is also not a true apothecary, and peddles fake "cure all" potions to anyone who ventures into his store.

Unbeknownst to Gregor, several items on his shelf are real and potent, such as the bottle of Alchemist's Fire and several Potions of Healing.

ST. ANDRAL'S ORPHANAGE

St. Andral's Orphanage is a popular addition to *Curse of Strahd*, written by Reddit user MandyMod. It provides additional quest hooks into the Werewolf's den later in the module, and it also increases the difficulty of finding and returning the bones of St. Andral to the church.

[You may find MandyMod's full writeup here.](#)

This guide makes modifications and extensions to the St. Andral's Orphanage quest, which are outlined below.

NEW & UPDATED QUESTS

MISSING BONES

Milivoj lives at the orphanage as a part time caretaker. After three orphan boys went missing, he contracted the wolf hunters at the Blue Water Inn to find them. In order to get the money to hire the hunters, he was manipulated by Anastrasya into stealing the bones of St. Andral and giving them to the coffin maker.

Now, Milivoj has fallen mysteriously ill, and lies catatonic in his bedroom. In order to discover the location of the bones, players will have to cure Milivoj or find them by some other means.

A SHADOW IN THE ORPHANAGE

Inside the orphanage, players will find the stern headmistress, Claudia Belasco. She's doing her best to juggle the problem of a sick and dying Milivoj with the pervasive nightmares and unexplained bruises on nearly all of the children in her care.

If the party investigates, they'll discover that a new addition to the orphanage, Felix, is being influenced by a **shadow demon** who inhabits a locket that Felix carries. The demon is working through Felix to deliver terrible nightmares to the children of the orphanage, while sucking away Milivoj's life essence in order to break free from the locket.

When players confront Felix, they'll likely fight the demon (a **shadow demon**). If it feels like the players are too big a threat, the demon will do its best to escape with Felix into the hustle and bustle of Vallaki.

If the players catch the demon and kill it, then Milivoj wakes up and tells the players all about the missing bones of St. Andral. However, if Felix and his demon aren't caught and dealt with, they'll hide in a crypt in the church graveyard. In 1d4 days, Milivoj will die and the demon will break free of its prison.

A DEMON ON THE LOOSE

If the demon is freed, it will take full possession of Felix and begin to hunt down orphans that were recently adopted. One family will die each night for 1d4+3 days. After the first three days, the townsfolk demand justice. In lieu of any known perpetrator, the Baron will arrest Claudia Belasco and attempt to burn her at the stake to appease the bloodthirsty masses.

The demon will go on killing after that until it runs out of families, or the players kill the demon. If the players do not kill the demon, it leaves Vallaki and takes up residence in the Amber Temple.

Players may find clues as to which family is next by examining a ledger of recent adoptions in Claudia's office. The ledger shows which orphans have been adopted out to families inside of Vallaki, which are the demon's next targets.

ANOTHER MISSING SERVANT

The Vallakoviches aren't the only family with servants who have gone missing. Lady Wachter's footman, Haliq, has also mysteriously disappeared. Just like the Vallakoviches suspect foul play on the part of the Wachters, the Wachters in turn suspect the Vallakoviches.

In truth, Haliq was abducted by the Night's Children wolf pack after they discovered one of their number had fallen in love with him. Now, Haliq and his love, Anica, are being held captive in area Z7 (see the Were-wolf Den chapter for more detail).

Lady Wachter is offering 50 gold for the discovery of any information regarding Haliq's whereabouts, and will pay double if it leads back to the Vallakovich family.

Clues to Haliq's disappearance can be found in the town square. With a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, several vendors can recall Haliq talking with a mysterious and beautiful woman on the day that he disappeared. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, they also recall a band of fur clad strangers that were hanging around on the same day.

VASILI VON HOLTZ

Vasili von Holtz is Strahd's alter ego. He uses the guise of Vasili to move among the people of Barovia and to act as his own representative in diplomatic matters.

During the game, Vasili is a great way to get Strahd to personally interact with your party, gather information, and subtly work against them. You may introduce him to the party at any point after the players pass Old Bonegrinder—either on the road as a traveler in need of help, or in Vallaki as a friendly face.

Vasili, on the surface, is friendly, helpful, and informative. He claims to come by his wealth of knowledge by way of his work around town as an accountant. When asked, however, no shop keeper remembers ever working with someone named Vasili.

Despite his friendly facade, Strahd (acting as Vasili) is always working against the party in some subtle fashion. He may attempt to sow mistrust among the party members, or he may gift the party cursed items that work against them at the worst moment.

For example, Vasili can send the party out to retrieve a wagon shipment that he was expecting, only for the players to find a suit of plate armor that is, in reality, **Strahd's Animated Armor**. If one of your players equips it, then all Strahd has to do at an opportune moment is speak a command word, and the armor turns against the player.

If your players don't know that Strahd can walk around in the Barovian daytime, then having Vasili walk around Vallaki during the day is a great way to throw even the most suspicious player off his scent. You can also have him meet with the characters within the Church of Saint Andral while the bones are gone and the characters are unaware of that fact.

Despite Strahd's skill in disguising himself, there are a couple of things that can give Vasili away. The first is the old letter in Wachterhaus from Vasili to

Lovina. This is an incredibly old letter, and the handwriting matches that in the Tome of Strahd. The second is Vasili's house—it's locked up tight like nothing else in Vallaki, but if the players do manage to break in, they'll find an empty house covered in dust that hasn't been used in decades. These two clues should be enough to let any party of players know that Vasili von Holtz is not what he claims to be.

SPECIAL EVENTS

This section details changes to the Feast of St. Andral special event in Vallaki.

THE FEAST OF ST. ANDRAL

The biggest problem with the Feast of St. Andral event is its timeline. According to the module, it takes place on the same night as the Festival of Blazing Sun, three days after the player's arrival. We recommend pushing it out so that the Feast event takes place ten days after the players arrive in Vallaki, as well as changing things so that Father Lucian only notices the missing bones seven days after the players arrive.

This change to the timeline sets the Feast event apart from other events in the town and gives your players the opportunity to get comfortable within Vallaki and get to know its residents.

In addition, this guide recommends changing the premise of this event in such a way that it is not part of Strahd's plan at all, but rather that of his consort, Anastrasya. The following event will take place if the characters do not replace the bones of Saint Andral by the time ten days have passed since their arrival in Vallaki.

ANASTRASYA'S PLAN

Anastrasya's motivation in this encounter is to kill Ireena, and do it in a way that impresses Strahd. She has noted Strahd's preoccupation with Ireena and wants to make a spectacle of her killing her in order to show Strahd how inferior Ireena is as a consort choice to herself. She intends to further impress him by killing her in St. Andral's Church, which is usually barred even to Strahd.

Anastrasya (see Appendix B) knows Vallaki well, having grown up as a noblewoman here. She is well aware of the protection conferred to the church by the bones of St. Andral. She has whispered this information to Milivoj and enticed him into stealing them for her. Anastrasya knows that Ismark and Ireena expect to find protection from Strahd and his minions in St. Andral's Church, which makes it the perfect venue to expect them—they must come here, sooner or later, and they will let their guard down.

When Ireena and the characters enter St. Andral's Church, read or paraphrase the following:

Half a dozen Vallakians are scattered among the pews, praying under their breath, an occasional half-choked sob breaking the contemplative silence. A veiled woman in a sober but finely made black dress kneels in the front pew, meticulously passing a necklace with black pearls between her fingers. The priest stands at the altar, chanting quietly but talking gently to anyone who approaches.

Anastrasya is the veiled figure kneeling in the front pew. Any character with a passive Perception score of 15 or higher can tell that the other church-goers instinctively avoid her and Father Lucian shoots her an occasional troubled glance. All he knows is that this strange woman appeared to pray here every day since the bones of St. Andral vanished.

The pearls Anastrasya is holding are a necklace of prayer beads, but they contain the following, unusual, spells: *bane*, *bestow curse*, *danse macabre*, and *fear*. When Anastrasya casts a spell from the necklace, the spell save DC is 15. This necklace of prayer beads can only be attuned by a warlock, paladin, or cleric who is not of a good alignment.

DEVELOPMENTS

Anastrasya planned to attack as soon as Ireena came into her reach, but her being accompanied by unknown adventurers gives her pause. She strikes once she thinks the characters are distracted, talking to Father Lucian. She starts the encounter with a *bane* or *fear* spell from her necklace of prayer beads, to maximize her advantage. A character who did not notice anything suspicious about Anastrasya is surprised. During the encounter, Anastrasya uses the Vallakians in the church as a source of blood to regain hit points, making use of her Bloody Talons legendary action. The corpses this produces serve a second purpose: material for the *danse macabre* spell she can cast from her necklace.

To kick off the encounter, read or paraphrase the following:

A snarl makes you spin around, just in time to see the woman with the praying necklace tear off her veil—revealing her monstrously distorted features, and the fangs in her mouth! A vampire spawn, here, in St. Andral's Church! The congregation erupts in confused screams, as the woman lunges towards Ireena, nails extending into claws and teeth glistening!

OLD BONEGRINDER



Old Bonegrinder is one of the darker chapters of *Curse of Strahd*, given what happens inside the mill. It's also a point in the game that is extremely dangerous to the low-level players who may stumble unwittingly into the clutches of the resident night hags, Morgantha and her daughters Bella and Ofallia.

This chapter will lay out some tips for you to provide a memorable experience for your players by lowering the chance of a total party kill (TPK), fleshing out the surrounding area, and the characters within the mill.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

A HAG'S BUSINESS

The primary goal of Morgantha and her daughters is to sell as many **Dream Pastries** (see Appendix A) as possible. Secondary to that is to sow as much corruption as they can throughout the land. To those ends, the hags hide their true nature as much as possible.

The hags will maintain their human disguises outside of combat when in the presence of anyone but each other and Strahd. Unlike in the module, they are not dressed in bloody aprons and clothing of stitched flesh. Instead, they resemble frumpy old Barovian women, clothing and all.

When they speak with the player characters, the hags are warm and inviting, perhaps even saccharine. Despite their outwardly welcoming exteriors, the hags will not tolerate the presence of anyone who is not going to purchase Dream Pastries, nor will not tolerate anyone setting out to explore the upper floors of their windmill.

NAMES HAVE POWER

Names are a powerful thing in games and literature. Players expect them to be meaningful, especially when those names sound ominous. Connotation is everything in this regard, and nearly all the names in this chapter as-written carry very negative connotations.

In order to avoid putting your players on guard before they even arrive at Old Bonegrinder, never refer to the location by its proper name. You and the NPCs in the module should call it "The Old Mill" or more simply "The Windmill". It's been there for years, and no one besides of the hags is sure of what goes on there.

Additionally, the daughters of Morgantha bear very ominous names. "Bella" is a suitable name for any woman, but the surname "Sunbane" points to her being a villain. Likewise, the name "Ofallia Wormwiggles" does not inspire much trust.

This guide recommends dropping surnames completely, and referring to Ofallia as "Ofelia", "Sister", or "Daughter" when either Bella or Morgantha are speaking.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

Regional effects are changes to a landscape that happen due to the presence of a legendary creature. These can range from mundane environmental effects to changes in the space-time continuum.

Night hags are not legendary creatures, but they've lived in Barovia long enough for their presence to have a tangible effect around their home. Within a two-mile radius of Old Bonegrinder all of the grass is dead or dying, and no wild animals can be found. Any animal companion of the players with an Intelligence score of 5 or lower must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened and turned. Additionally, players with a passive Perception score of 15 or higher will notice small stick effigies hung from the branches of low trees and shrubs.

THE RAVEN

The raven outside of Old Bonegrinder is still present, but it is no longer an anonymous raven attempting to ward off the player characters. Instead, this raven is Muriel, the same wereraven that players can encounter in the swamps of Berez.

Muriel is a good NPC to use as a recurring guide for the players throughout the module. She's a member of the Keepers of the Feather and has access to much knowledge that could be useful to players in times of need. You may find it thematically appropriate to change Muriel from being a middle-aged woman to being a hot-headed youth with delusions grandeur involving a revolution against Strahd.



THE MEGALITHS

The megaliths are the most enigmatic aspect of *Curse of Strahd*—this is intentional. Their purpose was left intentionally vague so as to inspire Dungeon Masters to adapt them for their own purposes. In the first published Ravenloft novel, *Vampire of the Mists*, Strahd and a vampire named Jander Sunstar were unable to attack two young boys who had set up camp inside a ring of standing stones. The megaliths resemble these standing stones, and as such, they can work as a safe-haven for player characters against the evils of Barovia.

Additionally, this guide uses the megaliths as a site for summoning the vampire god, Vampyr. See the "Binding of Vampyr" chapter for more information.

THE WINDMILL EXTERIOR

When player characters first approach the mill, don't describe it as being a leaning pile of decrepit stones that looks vaguely evil. Instead, describe it as being a sad dilapidated building with bare vanes and a water-logged fence out front. It's not leaning like a hunched over hag, but rather succumbing to the weight of time.

INSIDE THE WINDMILL

The first floor of the windmill is, in contrast to the official module, a neat-and-tidy place of business. No bones litter the floor, and the smelly barrel of demon ichor is covered and pushed to the side of the room.

Players who make a DC 15 Nature check on the bones can see that they are human, and players with a passive Perception score of 17 or higher can smell the ichor.

The upper floors of the windmill are as described in the module, and any attempt to go up there is met with resistance by the hags.

ARRIVAL AT THE MILL

When players arrive at the mill, only Bella and Ofelia are home. Morgantha is on the road, returning from the Village of Barovia, and isn't far behind the characters.

If the characters knock on the door of the mill, Bella will greet them from the peephole in the door and inquire if they are there to buy pastries. If no character wishes to purchase her pastries, she dismisses them.

The door is barred on the inside and requires a DC 20 Strength check to knock it down. Doing so will immediately initiate combat with the hags.

Once she has invited the characters inside, Bella immediately busies herself with playing the part of the welcoming hostess. She clears a small table and pulls over additional chairs or stools for the party to sit on.

After making the party comfortable, Bella attempts to sell the party as many dream pastries as possible. Should players inquire about shelter, Bella says that they cannot stay at the mill, and should instead camp in the nearby woods.

COMBAT WITH THE HAGS

Combat with night hags is a deadly prospect for a low-level party, especially if the hags form a coven. If combat does break out, only Bella and Ofelia are present at the start, and no coven can yet be formed.

Morgantha arrives home after 5 rounds of combat, and isn't immediately aware that her daughters are in danger. Inside her cart is a captive young boy named **Lucian**.

The wereraven Muriel may also offer some assistance if combat breaks out and the players are losing. She sends three **swarms of ravens** in through the windows of the windmill in order to cause a distraction and aid the characters in their escape.

Alternatively, you can change Morgantha and her daughters from night hags to **green hags**. This results in a much easier combat scenario.

DEALING WITH A TPK

A total party kill (TPK) is very likely during this chapter, especially at low levels. However, a TPK here is no reason to end your game. Instead, you may use it as an opportunity to "fail forward" and progress the narrative.

Should the characters fall in battle, then all of them are captured and stored in cages inside the windmill. Rather than kill them, the hags would instead use them to perform a dangerous task.

The hags cast the spell *Geas* and command the party to deliver a hag's eye pendant to **Cyrus Belview** inside Castle Ravenloft without Strahd noticing. In the module, Cyrus is already in possession of this item, but that's easy enough to eliminate.

This quest gets your party out of Old Bonegrinder, compels them to explore Castle Ravenloft before the end of the module, and gives them an excuse to come back to the windmill at a later date to exact revenge.

DELIVER THE ORPHANS

If the characters are fooled by their disguises, the hags will attempt to enlist their help in bringing more children to the windmill. They will spin a tall tale of how Bella and Ofelia were adopted from the orphanage in Vallaki, and how it was a horrid place. They will hint that the current headmistress there is a hag that devours the children and will then ask the players to free as many children as possible from the orphanage and bring them to the mill for their safety.

ARGYNVOSTHOLT

The Order of the Silver Dragon, lead by the silver dragon Argynvost, were responsible for holding back Strahd's forces during their initial invasion of the valley. Argynvost knew of the Amber Temple's existence and what it contained, and was resolved to keep invading forces away from it at all costs. Ultimately, however, their defenses were overwhelmed and Strahd's army slaughtered the knights and their leader.

Among all of the chapters in the module, Argynvostholt seems to have the weakest ties into the overall narrative. Without significant modification from the Dungeon Master, it serves as little more than a drop-off point for the skull of Argynvost—a mere button to push in order to receive a higher AC. Additionally, over 40 percent of the mansion's locations are entirely empty and devoid of interactivity.

The aim of this chapter is to provide players with more meaningful interactions within the mansion, as well as ties to the module's overall narrative.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

A CENTRAL THEME

As part of revising the chapter of Argynvostholt, this guide suggests an overarching theme for your party's adventure to the mansion: *Love versus Hate*.

Both Vladimir and Godfrey stand front and center among the few NPCs within the mansion; former lovers trapped together in Vladimir's vengeful mission. It's this dynamic that lies at the heart of the story of Argynvostholt.

HATE

After the destruction of the order, Vladimir's spirit was enraged. He came back as a **revenant** and swore vengeance on Strahd and his forces. As the module states, so great was his zeal that several other knights were brought back with him.

It was not a spell that Vladimir cast to bring the others back, however. Vladimir is not a wizard or a sorcerer. The well of hatred within his soul was so deep and dark that it was able to warp the Weave and create a magic of its own.

The magic created by Vladimir's hatred latched onto the souls of several knights of the order. Theirs were restless souls, who had died without a sense of fulfillment. They had left unfinished business in the living world, and it was that business that Vladimir's hatred grabbed a hold of to yank their souls from the afterlife.

LOVE

While the three revenants in Q13 are mindless and blinded by hatred, and attack the characters on sight, not all revenants in the mansion are immediately hostile. The five revenants in area Q37 retain a sense of self, and can converse with the characters. Among them is **Sir Godfrey Gwilym**, Vladimir's former lover.

This raises the question, what is the difference between the two groups of revenants?

The answer is: *love*.

When the knights were brought back by Vladimir's intense hatred, it was Godfrey's equally intense love that acted as a counterbalance and allowed the revenants to keep their minds.

The three revenants inside the chapel were once like Godfrey and his ilk. But the years in Barovia weigh heavily on even the most stout individuals, living or dead. Over time, those knights began to lose heart and gave in to despair. This allowed Vladimir's hatred to overcome them, taking full control of their minds.

A RACE AGAINST TIME

When the characters arrive at Argynvostholt, the rest of the revenants are in the process of succumbing to Vladimir's full control, just like those in the chapel. Even Godfrey can feel the weight of the years press upon him, and his grip on his humanity is slipping. He knows that, if much more time passes, even he will lose heart and become nothing more than Vladimir's puppet.

In order to prevent the revenants from falling to darkness, each knight must sort out their unfinished business. This will allow them to find peace and eliminate the hold that Vladimir's hatred has on their souls. Once outside of hatred's grasp, the soul of each knight can finally find peace and leave their undead body.

If the characters are not openly hostile, Godfrey is willing to share all of this information with them. As a spell caster, he has a working knowledge of what is happening with Vladimir, and how it is affecting himself and the other knights.



RETURNING THE SKULL

As in the module, one of the primary goals for characters at Argynvostholt is to return the skull of Argynvost to its rightful place in the mausoleum. Doing so will light the beacon in area Q53 and send the revenants and ghosts in the mansion to their rest.

Vladimir knows that if Argynvost's skull is returned, he will be forced to find peace and his vendetta against Strahd will come to an end. This, he cannot abide. As such, the magic of his hatred is using the revenants as amplifiers for its power, and has sealed the mausoleum against all forms of entry.

BREAKING THE SEAL

In order to return the skull of Argynvost, characters must help three of the five revenants find peace in order to weaken the seal around the mausoleum and gain entry.

Alternatively characters may cast *Antimagic Field* on themselves to nullify the seal's effect when they get within 10 feet of the mausoleum.

THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

When characters disrupt the seal around the mausoleum, Vladimir will directly attempt to prevent their entry. He will use any of the revenants still at his disposal, along with several **phantom warriors**.

If necessary, Sir Godfrey Gwilym can enter the fray as a temporary ally to the characters. Although he will not harm Vladimir, he has no such qualms about harming other knights to help his beloved find peace.

THE BEACON IS LIT

If the characters can return Argynvost's skull to its rightful place in the mausoleum, the beacon is lit. Run this event as written in the module.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Each of the knights that were brought back by Vladimir's hatred has some form of unfinished business within Barovia. Those that have not yet fallen to Vladimir's total control can still be helped by the characters.

Unlike in the module, the revenants are not all located in area Q37. Instead, they are scattered around the mansion. This gives players an incentive to explore the mansion's otherwise empty areas, as well as something to find within them.

This section will detail each of the revenants, along with their unfinished business, and how characters can help them achieve fulfillment.

SIR GODFREY GWILYM

In life, Godfrey was Vladimir's beloved. It was this love that, in death, allowed Godfrey and the other knights to retain their humanity. Now, he serves Vladimir in death and awaits with apprehension the loss of his mind and soul. He can be found in area Q37 or area Q39.

Unfinished Business: Godfrey's unfinished business is the redemption of Vladimir. As such, he is the only revenant that cannot be put to rest through the direct actions of the characters.

SIR ROBERN TERAY

Aside from serving in the order, what Robern wanted more than anything was to see the face of his newborn son. Born mere days before the fall of the order, baby Teray never got to meet his father.

Sir Robern can be found in area Q35, admiring the stained glass windows.

Unfinished Business: Although he knows that centuries have passed since his son died of old age, Robern still wishes to pass something along to his descendants. Robern's sole possession is the Teray family crest.

If the characters offer to help him, Robern will ask them to deliver his family crest to his most recent direct descendant. To help in this task, Robern tells players that his son was born in the year 347 in Vallaki, and that there may still be records in the town that they can use to trace his lineage.

Records of births and deaths in Vallaki are stored in an old administrative building near the baron's mansion, but they are incomplete due to a fire that broke out two hundred years ago. Characters will need to interview townspeople to get the missing information.

The location of the most recent Teray descendant is at your discretion. They could still be living in Vallaki, or you could send players all over the valley.

Whatever you decide, Teray's descendant is overjoyed at receiving the family crest. They were raised on tales of "Brave Sir Robern," and are filled with pride upon hearing that the tales were true.

Once the crest is given to the descendant, Sir Robern's soul finds fulfillment and is released from his revenant body to find peace.

ARTHUND BOARWIN

When players encounter Arthund, they can tell that he is much younger than the other revenants. At the time of his death, he was fifteen years old. His soul, when it needs to find another body, tends to gravitate toward the corpses of younger Barovians. As a result, he is a revenant with only 40 hit points and 14 strength.

Arthund was not a knight, but rather a squire. He joined the order in the hope of training to become a member of its ranks under the guidance of its greatest warrior, Vladimir Horngaard.

Before his dream could be realized, Arthund was cut down in the halls of Argynvost. During the invasion, he valiantly defended his home with a sword that he had picked up from a fallen knight. These days, he can be found in area Q32, staring south off the edge of the mansion.

Unfinished Business: More than anything, Arthund wishes to be a hero. If the characters offer to help him, Arthund will ask that they bring him along, so that he can complete a knightly quest or perform a heroic deed.

Suitable deeds, in Arthund's mind, include rescuing damsels in distress and dispatching powerful foes. Arthund will accompany the characters as a temporary ally, but will not fight Strahd according to Vladimir's orders.

Once a deed of sufficient heroism has been completed, Arthund's soul finds fulfillment and is released from his revenant body to find peace.

Time is of the essence, however, as Arthund's resolve is weakening. In 2d4 days, he will succumb to Vladimir's hatred and become a mindless revenant, incapable of being helped by the characters.

SIR DAMIAN HARGROVE

Not all knights are of the sword-wielding variety. Damian, unlike his martial counterparts, wielded his knowledge of metallurgy in the service of the order. It was he who crafted most of the order's weaponry, including the ballistas on the top of the mansion.

Damian can be found in area Q46, staring blankly at the wreckage of one of his destroyed ballistas.

Unfinished Business: In addition to weapons, Damian was also a skilled jeweler. Prior to the attack on Argynvostholt, Damian was putting the finishing touches on a wedding ring. He intended to propose to Amalthea, another member of the order, as soon as she returned from her post at Mount Ghakis. Unfortunately, Amalthea perished atop the tower at Tsolenka Pass shortly after Argynvostholt was overrun by Strahd's forces.

More than anything, Damian wishes to show his love for Amalthea so that they can be joined in union in the afterlife. If the characters offer to help him, Damian will give them the wedding ring and ask that they deliver it to Amalthea's body in Tsolenka Pass. In order to help identify her body, he tells the characters that Amalthea liked to adorn her armor with red ribbons. If the characters ask him to accompany them to the pass, Damian will refuse due to him having little martial ability.

If the characters successfully deliver the ring to Amalthea's body atop the tower at Tsolenka Pass, the soul of Sir Damian Hargrove finds fulfillment and is released from his revenant body.

SIR ERICH NORINTHAAL

In life, Erich was regarded as the finest hunter in the order. It was said that, once he decided to hunt something, its life was forfeit.

Before Strahd's invasion of the Valley, Erich and his team of hunters had their sights set on the largest and grandest game in all of the valley: the **roc** of Mount Ghakis. His hunting trip was cut short, however, when Strahd's forces arrived. Erich and his team never got to make a return trip to the mountain.

These days, he can be found atop the tower of Argynvostholt, staring southeast toward Mount Ghakis.

Unfinished Business: Erich wishes to finish the hunting trip that he started so many years ago. If the characters agree to help him, he will accompany them on the road toward Tsolenka pass. Before reaching the pass, Erich will direct the characters to a hidden side trail, and then up into the craggy mountain region.

Erich will help the characters navigate their way toward the nest of the roc, which lies near the summit of Mount Ghakis. The frigid temperatures in the area should be treated as an environmental hazard for the characters. You are free to add any other environmental hazards that might make for an interesting journey, such as crevasses and avalanches.

Once the roc is within sight, Erich will urge the characters to help him engage it. Should the roc be slain in combat by Erich or the characters, Erich's soul finds fulfillment and is released from his revenant body.

KREZK & THE ABBEY OF SAINT MARKOVIA

Sitting at the foot of a mountain is the quiet farming village of Krezk. Looming over the village is the Abbey of Saint Markovia—once a bastion of hope and healing, and now a horrific prison for the insane and deformed mongrelfolk.

This chapter aims to expand the village of Krezk and also provides an alternate take on several aspects of the abbey.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

MAIN ENTRANCE

As written, the gates of Krezk are closed to visitors.

Dmitri Krezkov wants nothing to do Strahd's enemies, his allies, or strangers from another land. To that end, he will do his best to set the party to a suicidal or impossible task.

Instead of sending the party away to get a shipment of wine, he will ask that they bring him the head of **Kiril**, the leader of the local werewolf pack. Worst case, Dmitri figures, the party is killed and never comes back. Best case, they succeed and rid Krezk of a deadly nuisance.

This adds an additional quest hook into the Werewolf Den, which is an oft-overlooked location in the module.

FINE, GET IN HERE

After the party returns with the head of Kiril, they will be permitted to enter the village of Krezk. Dmitri has only a vague idea of what Kiril looks like, so the characters can trick him by bringing another werewolf head and succeeding on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

As written, Dmitri is obligated as a noble of the land to treat his guests with hospitality. As such, he invites the party to stay with him and his family at their cottage, so long as they earn their keep and stay no longer than five days.

BURGOMASTER'S COTTAGE

Upon reaching the burgomaster's cottage, the party will be led into the common room where they are told they can sleep. Dmitri's wife, Anna, gives the party a cautious and cool welcome.

As written, the Krezkovs had four children. In contrast to the module, however, **Ilya Krezkov** (LG male human commoner) is very much alive.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

A month ago, Ilya died from illness. Dmitri and Anna buried their last child behind the cottage, and resigned themselves to being the last of their bloodline.

As the days went by, the loss of Ilya wore heavily on Dmitri. Three weeks after Ilya's death, Dmitri cursed the gods and convinced his wife that matters had to be taken into their own hands. He exhumed Ilya's body, wrapped it in a shawl, and carried it up the hillside in the dead of night to the Abbey of Saint Markovia. Once there, he demanded an audience with the Abbot and pleaded for help in reviving his son.

At first, the Abbot refused to help the Dmitri, stating that the risk was too great. Resurrection, he said, was best done soon after death, and warned that such a delay could have unintended consequences.

Dmitri pleaded and begged the Abbot to do something, anything, to bring his boy back—no matter the risk.

Reluctantly, the Abbot acquiesced and resurrected the boy. Through various healing spells, Ilya's flesh was made whole again, and by morning he looked just as he had prior to his death.

Dmitri, overjoyed, took Ilya home.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

The resurrection of Ilya Krezkov so late after his demise has, indeed, had an unintended consequence. The boy's soul has been tainted and he has begun to exhibit strange mannerisms.

Rather than his previous joyful self, Ilya is almost always in a somber and dark mood. This change has gone unnoticed by both of his parents, who are simply happy to have their son back. Any other villager can attest to the change in Ilya's mood, however.

In addition, Ilya has developed a voracious appetite. He can almost always be seen eating something. Day by day, he grows hungrier and hungrier.

If left unchecked, Ilya will transform into a **mon-grelfolk** in 1d4 days. His madness is embodied in the following statement, "I am always hungry, and everyone is edible." He will begin to devour any creature in his path until killed or restrained.

Should Ilya be brought up to the abbey after his transformation, the Abbot will order the boy to be restrained and put in a cell in area S15.

AREAS OF THE ABBEY

The following sections describe updates to areas within the abbey. Any area not listed here should be run as written, or updated to your liking.

THE HOSPITAL

Area S21 once served as the hospital of the Abbey of Saint Markovia. In the module, there are six **shadows** waiting to ambush the party as they venture through. Given that the abbey is a lived-in building, and not an abandoned ruin, it makes little sense that these shadows would be lying in wait to attack. They serve only to slow down the pace of the game, and illustrate that people had died here.

Instead, remove the shadows from this room and replace the location's boxed text with the following:

This spacious chamber contains bed frames of wrought iron arranged in two neat rows. Cobwebs and bits of rotten mattress cling to each frame.

As you enter the room, you feel the temperature of the air around you grow colder. Your ears perk up to the sound of whispers coming from all around. Dark shapes begin to slide to-and-fro along the walls. You stand on guard, but quickly realize the dark shapes pay you no heed.

You watch and listen as the shadows of what appear to be priests and nuns tend to dying patients. Their echoes of pain and suffering reach out to you through time and space; echoes of a pain long turned to death. After several moments, the whispers fall silent and the shadows fade, leaving you in the quiet hospital room amidst a lingering sense of melancholy.



THE OPERATING ROOM

Area S22 is the operating room, depicted as a grisly site of dissections and death within the module. As written, characters hear the screams of long-dead victims upon entering the room.

The Abbey of Saint Markovia, however, was not a butcher shop. It was a reputable hospital and a place of healing. The written depiction of the operating room is not consistent with the history of the abbey, and should be modified.

Instead of screams, the characters will enter the room to see a vivisected body of one of the party members upon the table. This is an illusion, much the same as the one at the crossroads, or at Argynvostholt. Should a party member touch the illusion, it will crumble to dust.

So as to avoid redundancy, run the encounter with this illusion in place of the similar illusion in area S17, the belfry.

THE LIBRARY

Although long forgotten, the abbey was home to one of the largest collections of books in Barovia. Its contents were second only to those of the libraries in Castle Ravenloft and the Amber Temple.

After Saint Markovia's defeat at Castle Ravenloft, Strahd picked through the abbey's library and removed all volumes that dealt with magic. The books he left behind have been neglected and are in a poor state. Among the rotted and useless volumes, one may find the occasional book on medical theory, wine, or history.

The library is a new location for the Abbey of Saint Markovia, and isn't found on the published map. It is recommended that this area be placed in between the main hall (S13) and the belfry (S17).

The presence of the library is beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it provides **Ezmerelda d'Avenir** a reason to be at the abbey beyond having a conversation with the Abbot. Secondly, it provides characters the opportunity to learn more about the history of the land and discover useful information that you, as the Dungeon Master, think would aid them in their quest.

THE ABBEY'S RESIDENTS

EZMERELDA

Rather than the barracks (S19), Ezmerelda can be found within the library. When the characters arrive, she is bent over a large and dusty tome that details the family trees of Barovian nobility. The book is over two hundred years out of date.

Ezmerelda arrived at the abbey a week prior in search of information about Strahd and his past, as well as clues to the whereabouts of her mentor, **Rudolph van Richten**.

If she is the party's ally against Strahd, she will gladly leave the area and aid in their quest. Otherwise, she is content to stay within the walls of the abbey until it is no longer safe, or until she has found the information she needs.

Should Ezmerelda still reside at the abbey during Strahd's visit (see the *It's Bad Luck* special event), she attempts to trap him using a magic circle just outside the entrance of the main hall. If the characters are not present when this happens, there is a 50% chance that Ezmerelda is captured, killed, and turned into a vampire spawn who may be encountered at Castle Ravenloft.

THE MONGRELFOLK

When the Abbot first arrived in Barovia, he began to offer his healing services to the masses. The sick and afflicted came in droves, all in search of a miracle.

For a time, the Abbot and his remedies were, indeed, seen as miracles. But nothing in Barovia escapes the notice of the Dark Powers for very long. For reasons unknown, the Dark Powers corrupted and twisted the Abbot's healing magic. From then on, instead of simply curing a wound, the Abbot's spells also transformed the body of the afflicted in some bestial fashion.

As a cure for blindness, a person's eyes would be replaced by those of a lemur. A broken leg would be replaced by that of a horse or a lion. Arthritic hands would transform into those of a monkey.

This change in his healing capabilities dismayed the Abbot, at first. However, he soon came to accept the transformations as the will of his god. The patients were healed, after all. In many respects, they were better than before in terms of physical prowess. The fact that every one of them went insane and had to be locked up for their own good was regarded by the Abbot as a minor trifle.

Thus, the mongrelfolk were created.

It wasn't long before Barovians stopped coming to the Abbot for healing. Those who ventured up to the abbey never came back down again.

Despite the lack of new arrivals, there were plenty of mongrelfolk in the abbey to create a society within its darkened halls. They passed on their monstrous curses from one generation to the next, descending deeper and deeper into madness.

CLOVEN BELVIEW

Cloven Belview is trusted by the Abbot above all other mongrelfolk, and should have skills and abilities that set him apart. That way, he can be of greater service to the Abbot should they be engaged in combat.

Because Cloven plays music in his spare time, this guide presents an updated statblock for Cloven with bard-like skills and abilities. See Appendix B for more information.

THE ABBOT

The module does not specify which god the Abbot originates from. Should your party contain a cleric or paladin, it is recommended that the Abbot's god of origin match that of either of those party members. This creates a connection between the Abbot and those characters, and a strong starting point for any narrative ideas you may have.

The Abbot has been cut off from his god for hundreds of years, and has been under the corrupting influence of Strahd for a good portion of that time. Once a god of origin has been decided upon, think about how the purpose and essence of that god might be twisted over time if the god is no longer present to provide guidance.

As an example, a party may contain a cleric of Eldath, the goddess of peace. In this case, the Abbot is a Deva originating from Eldath, sent to bring peace to the land of Barovia. However, after being cut off from Eldath for so long, he's taken to bringing about peace through the death of others. "After all," he asks, "what is more peaceful than death?"



SPECIAL EVENTS

The following are new and updated special events that can occur while characters explore Krezk and the abbey.

THE POWER OF THE SUN

If Ireena is traveling with the party, run this event prior to the *Something Blue* event.

If your party brings the Sunsword's inactive hilt with them into Krezk, they find that it begins to vibrate slightly as they pass through the main gates. As they venture north toward the Shrine of the White Sun, the vibration becomes increasingly stronger. Once they reach the pool's edge, however, the vibration suddenly stops. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you reach the water's edge, the Sunsword's hilt ceases its vibration. Within the depths of the waters, the image of a handsome young man of noble visage appears.

"I see you bring the sun with you, stranger," he says, pointing to the hilt of the Sunsword. A warm smile spreads across his face, driving away any surprise or apprehension you may have had regarding a talking reflection.

"I sense a great purpose within you," he continues, "That hilt in your hand is but one half of a means toward that purpose. Dip it into the water, and I shall help you bring light to the darkness."

If a character submerses the hilt of the Sunsword into the pool, read or paraphrase the following:

The hilt of the Sunsword begins to vibrate in your hand once again. At the same time, shafts of light pierce the mists from above and converge just above the hilt, momentarily blinding you. After a moment the light fades away and the hilt becomes still. Emerging now from the once empty hilt is a blade of brilliant white light.

Your hold in your hand the Sunsword, restored and whole.

SOMETHING BLUE - REVISITED

In the "Something Blue" special event, there is a chance that Ireena can be drawn into the pool at the Shrine of the White Sun by Sergei von Zarovich. If that happens, she is removed from Barovia, and is no longer within Strahd's grasp.

This is one of the more divisive aspects of the module. There are some who consider it a reduction of Ireena's character to the way that Strahd views her—the woman-who-once-was—and diminishes her identity.

Including Ireena, there have been several reincarnations of Tatyana that are mentioned throughout the module and in the extended Ravenloft canon. It's possible that there have been even more throughout the centuries. This rich history of past lives presents an opportunity for character development that is entirely unique to Ireena.

Rather than having Ireena revert to the personality of Tatyana, proclaim her love for Sergei, and leave with him through the pool, use this event to return her past memories and expand her character's skill sets.

When Ireena interacts with the pool, read the following text. Adjust as necessary if you have already run the *Power of the Sun* event.

As Ireena reaches the pool's edge, an image appears in its sparkling blue waters: a handsome young man of kind and noble visage. The sadness in his eyes turns to sudden joy.

"Tatyana!" he says. "It has been so long! Come, my love. Let us be together at last."

Ireena gasps and nearly stumbles backwards in surprise. After the moment's shock wears off, she kneels down at the water's edge and looks at the man. Her eyes light up with a sudden recognition. "Sergei?" she asks.

"Yes, it is I, Tatyana!" the man replies. "Take my hand and let us be together!" A hand of water emerges from the pool, reaching out to her.

Ireena begins to reach forward, stopping just short of grasping the watery hand. You can see an expression of painful conflict wash over her face. Her eyes begin to well up, and her breath becomes ragged.

"I remember now," she says shakily, "I remember everything. About you, about us, and all that came after. I am Tatyana. And Marina. And Anne. And so very many others." Ireena's jaw tightens and she speaks through clenched teeth. "So many times he has tricked me and lured me. Not anymore!"

Ireena stands up and wipes the tears from her eyes. "Sergei, my love, I am Ireena Kolyana now, and I have a responsibility to the people of Barovia. I must help bring light to this land and end your brother's cycle of torment forever. But I swear that I shall return to you when my work is finished."

Sergei smiles sadly as Ireena blows him a gentle kiss and turns away. As his image fades away, you can hear his last words like an echo on the breeze. "Until then, Tatyana. Until then."

With the memories of her past life restored, Ireena's capabilities now extend beyond those of her noble upbringing. This provides the party with a tangible reward for protecting Ireena and bringing her all this way, rather than leaving her behind or giving her to Strahd.

Roll on the following table to determine which of her past lives she attunes with the most and replace her statblock with the one indicated, minus weapons and armor.

d10	Life	Statblock
1-2	Tatyana	Priest
3-4	Marina	Scout with 40 hit points
5-6	Anna	Berserker
7-8	Alina	Spy with 40 hit points
9-10	Kristiana	Knight

SOMETHING BORROWED - REDUX

In the module, the Abbot requests a wedding gown for Vasilka and pressures the burgomaster into getting one. This results in the party being sent on a fetch quest and backtracking to Vallaki—often just after they'd left it.

In place of that fetch quest, this guide recommends changing the Abbot's request to something more macabre: a face.

In this guide, the Abbot has already acquired a wedding gown, but has not been able to find a suitable face for his flesh golem. "Barovians," he says, "are such a plain sort."

When the party meets the Abbot and Vasilka, the flesh golem's face will be covered in a veil. The Abbot will apologize her incompleteness, and then reveal a fleshless face made of muscle and sinew. He will ask the characters to help him find a face of "suitable beauty" for his creation.

Should the party request services of the Abbot, such as resurrection, the request comes as a quid-pro-quo.

If Ireena is with the party while meeting the Abbot, he will indicate that he wants her face, specifically. His non-human logic and morality make this request seem innocuous to him. "You do not need a face to breath, eat, or speak. Also, you are not the intended bride of Lord Strahd. Thus, you do not require your face. Vasilka, however, does."

If the characters refuse to find a face for Vasilka, or refuse to hand over Ireena, the Abbot refuses to provide any services for them unless they can succeed on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or provide a passable replacement and succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

At your discretion, the Abbot may send his mongrel-folk out to kidnap Ireena and bring her back to the abbey at a later time.

IT'S BAD LUCK

Several weeks ago, the Abbot invited Strahd to come to the abbey and meet Vasilka. Strahd's visit is scheduled for two days after the characters' arrival.

If the party is present at the abbey during Strahd's arrival, and he is aware of their presence, he pays them little mind. The purpose of his visit is to torment the Abbot and encourage his descent into darkness.

Prior to Strahd's arrival, the Abbot spared no effort in getting Vasilka ready for her unveiling. Despite his effort, however, she still appears shabby and haphazard in her moth-eaten wedding gown.

Zygfrek or Otto Belview lead Strahd into the main hall, where the Abbot and Vasilka await their honored guest. If neither Zygfrek or Otto are alive, the Abbot greets and escorts Strahd personally.

Upon arriving in the hall, Strahd makes a show of inspecting Vasilka very carefully. He looks closely at her hands, hair, and pretends that the Abbot's stitching is impeccable. Lastly, he lifts up her veil to look at her face.

If the party did not complete the *Something Borrowed* quest, and Vasilka lacks a face, then Strahd lowers the veil back down with a "Tsk, tsk." The Abbot apologizes profusely, and promises to find a face in due time.

Regardless of whether or not Vasilka has no face or the face of a beautiful Barovian, Strahd rips Vasilka limb from limb with his bare hands and commands the Abbot, "Try again. This time with *fresher* parts."

A FAMILIAR FACE

If Vasilka is wearing Ireena's face, Strahd's reaction is much more severe. He angrily rips Vasilka limb-from-limb, and then attacks and does his best to kill any creature in sight for 10 rounds, after which he disengages and makes his way to the tallest tower of the abbey.

Once at the top of the tower, Strahd uses his command over the weather to call down a rainstorm before transforming into a bat and flying back to his castle. The storm is concentrated on the abbey and the hillside on which it sits, and continues until the soil is saturated. This triggers a landslide, whereby the abbey and half the hillside tumble down upon the northern portion of the village of Krezk.

Should this occur, 1d8 + 4 farms are buried under mud and debris. The other residents of the town scramble to dig for survivors and to recover what they can from the wreckage.

All mongrelfolk still held captive in the abbey perish in the landslide.

TSOLENKA PASS

High up on the slopes of Mount Ghakis, a narrow trail winds precariously toward the Amber Temple. The trail opens up as it nears a stone gatehouse. Tsolenka Pass stands before you, barring the way.

Not much is said within the module about the history of Tsolenka Pass. Its sparse descriptions and even sparser locations leave much to the imagination of the Dungeon Master. This chapter of the guide aims to flesh out the history of the pass, as well as add more interactivity to the area with the addition of the werewolf Emil Toranescu.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AN ALTERNATE HISTORY

Tsolenka Pass was in use long before Strahd's arrival in Barovia. It was originally constructed by the wizards of the Amber Temple and used to transport goods and materials. In addition to those goods and materials, it was also used to transport the large blocks of amber that served as the prisons for the vestiges located throughout the temple.

After the fall of the temple, the pass and its structures fell into disrepair. For several hundred years, ice and snow buried all signs of the temple wizard's activities in the area.

Eventually, the dragon Argynvost and his knights uncovered the area and rebuilt the structures. For decades, they used the area as an outpost, guarding passage to the temple and keeping watch for anyone foolish enough to seek the darkness in its depths—or for anything that might get out.

Strahd's conquest in Barovia forced most of the knights to withdraw from the area, however, leaving behind only a handful of knights as a garrison. Their bodies can be found at the top of the guard tower, riddled with the arrows of Strahd's forces.

These days, Tsolenka Pass serves as a location of scientific research for **Ludmilla** (see Appendix B), one of Strahd's brides. Her current line of inquiry revolves around exposure to extreme cold, and its effects on lycanthropes.

AREAS OF TSOLENKA PASS

The following sections describe updates to areas within the pass. Any area not listed here should be run as written, or updated to your liking.

T1. GATEHOUSE PORTCULLIS

When reading the boxed text for this area, replace the description of “statues of demonic vultures with horned heads” with a description of “crouching stone gargoyles with snarling mouths”.

T2. DEMON STATUES

Remove the **vrock** statues from this area. Vrocks are demons, and there is no precedence within the module for Strahd having any interest in demonology, or any sway with demons whatsoever.

In their place are two **gargoyle** statues. Just like the original vrock statues, these statues will come to life and attack anyone who attempts to bypass the gatehouse by climbing or flying over it. They will chase anyone who runs away, and will fight until slain.

To the side of the gatehouse, characters with a passive Perception score of 10 or higher will notice large chunks of amber buried in snow and ice. The chunks are remnants of a shipment that was rejected by the wizards of the Amber Temple due to imperfections in its craftsmanship.

T4. GUARD TOWER, GROUND FLOOR

Change the boxed text of this area to read:

A cold hearth stands in the wall across from the door, the wind blowing down its chimney. On either side of its mantle stand small silver dragon statues, and above the hearth is mounted a rime-encrusted shield, emblazoned with the image of a silver dragon. A stone staircase is on the south wall. Along the north wall is a line of six rotting crates.

TREASURE

The crates contain the time-worn and rotting remnants of the garrison's armaments, which fall apart if touched. One crate, however, contains new equipment including 20 silver-tipped arrows, a 50 foot length of silver-coated chain, and silver-coated manacles.

T5. GUARD HOUSE, UPPER FLOOR

Change the boxed text of this area to read:

Stone steps ascend to the second floor of the building before continuing their spiral upwards. In the middle of the room stands an iron cage, measuring five feet to a side. Curled up inside the cage is a man bound in silver chains, his face a mask of agony. He shivers violently against the cold.

In front of the cage stands a desk. Atop the desk is an unlit oil lantern and several stacks of parchment.

The captive man is Emil Toranescu. He was taken prisoner and locked away in this tower for causing conflict within the Night's Children pack (see the Werewolf Den chapter of this guide).

Emil is now being used by Ludmilla as the subject of an experiment. She is trying to see how much cold and pain a werewolf can withstand before dying. The parchments on the desk contain her notes and observations, as well as diagrams of werewolf anatomy.

The cage is locked and can be opened with a DC 22 Dexterity check, or with a key that is in Ludmilla's possession. The lock is also secured with a *Glyph of Warding*. If opened by anything other than the correct key, the glyph is activated and casts a stored *Alarm* spell to alert Ludmilla to the breakout. After the glyph is triggered, Ludmilla arrives in ten rounds via the teleportation circle on the first floor, accompanied by her pet, **Woolfie** (see Appendix B).

Unlike the module as written, Emil will not betray the characters if they free him from his prison. He holds no love for Strahd, and knows that his life is forfeit at the vampire's hands. He will accompany the party down the mountain in an attempt to return to his wife, Zuleika, but will refuse to travel eastward across the bridge.

If Zuleika is with the party when Emil is rescued, the two werewolves briefly rejoice in their reunion. They will then part from the characters and return to their den in the forests near Lake Baratok. Emil intends to challenge Kiril for leadership of the Night's Children pack.

T6. GUARD TOWER ROOFTOP

Characters who search the remains in this area find bits of armor emblazoned with a silver dragon. Arrows with black fletchings riddle the corpses' bodies. One corpse wears armor adorned with several tattered red ribbons. This is the body of Amalthea, who is of particular interest to Sir Damian Hargrove. See the Argynvostholt chapter of this guide for more details.

T9. EASTERN ARCH

Change the boxed text of this area to read:

A graceful dragon statue sits atop the southern side of the archway, facing across the bridge. The matching one to the northern side is broken; only the talons clutching the stone arch remain. The mountain pass continues beyond.

The dragon statue is dormant, looming over the entrance to the bridge. If any character who has accepted a dark gift (see the Amber Temple chapter of the module) attempts to cross the bridge from the eastern side, the statue will become animated and attack that character. Use the statistics of a **young white dragon**.

During its attack, the dragon focuses solely on those characters who have accepted dark gifts, and will ignore anyone and anything else. It will pursue its quarry to the west, but not to the east, and it will fight to the death.

SPECIAL EVENTS

This section details additional special events that can take place in this area.

SIR ERICH'S HUNT

If the characters arrive at Tsolenka Pass in the company of the **revenant** Sir Erich Nortinhaal, he will lead them up a hidden side trail before reaching the gatehouse in area T1. This side trail will lead further up to the summit of Mount Ghakis, where the **roc** makes its home.


As stated in the Argynvostholt chapter of this guide, the journey up the mountain should be fraught with dangers such as frigid temperatures, avalanches, and crevasses.

Once the roc is killed, Sir Erich's soul finds fulfillment, and is freed from his revenant body.

ROC OF MOUNT GHAKIS

If the roc has not been slain by Sir Erich and the characters, then it is recommended that you switch the timing of its attack to when the party is traveling across the bridge west-to-east on their way to the Amber Temple. This is to set it apart from the possible encounter with the dragon statue in area T9.

THE RUINS OF BEREZ

nce upon a time, Berez was a thriving village in the heart of the Barovian valley. It was here that Tatyana's first reincarnation appeared in the form of Marina.

After Marina's death at the hands of her adoptive father and the local priest, Strahd flooded the village and drove out its inhabitants. The land became a swamp and was quickly infested by all manner of slimy creatures, as well as the witch, Baba Lysaga.

As written, Berez is a very large and open area that players are free to explore. Unfortunately, save for a few key locations, Berez is largely devoid of anything of interest. This chapter aims to make exploration of Berez more interesting and engaging, and will also ramp up the horror of some of the encounters within the ruins.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

UPLIFTING MOTIVATION

Unless you have placed an item of power within the swamp, the Ruins of Berez are an entirely optional location. As written, the only other motivation for going to Berez is to retrieve the second winery gem.

In order to add further motivation for your party, this guide recommends replacing Baba Lysaga's flying giant's skull with the skull of Argynvost. The dragon's skull will still have the same enchanted flight capabilities as the giant's skull.

This change not only adds another quest hook to the ruins, but it also increases narrative consistency within the module. There are, after all, no other mentions of giants within the adventure or its lore.

Now, if your party wants to light the beacon at Argynvostholt, they're going to have to go through Baba Lysaga first.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

Baba Lysaga is, if nothing else, a maternal figure. Although she has become an evil and twisted being, she genuinely cares for Strahd and his wellbeing.

Because she is unable to be close to the man she considers her son, Baba has cultivated a fantasy to satisfy her maternal urges. This fantasy manifests throughout the landscape of Berez in the way of discarded children's toys and baby paraphernalia.

When your party arrives on the outskirts of Berez, they will find the occasional toy rattle or rocking horse sticking up out of the mud. Each item is wet and mouldering, and is adorned with skulls, ravens, and occult symbols. Additionally, the words "Is no fun, is no Blinsky" is inscribed on each of them.

As characters move further in toward the center of Berez, they will see more and more discarded toys. Baba's hut is at the epicenter of the toy junkyard. This gradual change in density can be a sign to perceptive players and characters that they are getting "warmer" or "colder" in their journey through the swamp.

EXPLORING BEREZ

Berez is a very wide open and empty location. It's very easy for parties to zip through the entire area and encounter little more than a few scarecrows and Baba herself.

In order to make Berez a mysterious place and encourage exploration, you can split the swamp into 200 foot hexagons instead of squares. Each hexagon is an explorable area, much like a room in a building. While moving through Berez, players may choose to move from their current hexagon to any adjoining hexagon.

Starting from the fork in the road and going westwards, every hex is obscured by fog or swamp gas. The river and the areas south of it are clear, as is the road leading into Berez. This means that characters can clearly see Muriel and the standing stones in area U6.

OBSCURED AREAS

When your players decide to venture into the obscuring fog that pervades Baba Lysaga's domain, follow these steps for navigating the area.

- Allow the players to choose which direction they want to go.
- Let the players choose a navigator. This can be a player character or an NPC.
- Move the party in the chosen direction. Describe the area as you see fit.
- Check for encounters (see "Random Encounters" below) and resolve them accordingly.
- Have the navigator make a Wisdom (Survival) check. If the party had to deal with a random encounter, make this check at disadvantage. On a result of 10 or lower, the party becomes disoriented and loses their sense of direction (see "Lost!" on the following page).

Once a hex has been explored by the party, it can be considered clear and exposed for the sake of gameplay.

LOST!

If the party becomes lost and disoriented in the fog, they will lose all sense of direction. If the players can see the map, hide it from them.

When the party decides to move again, instead of allowing them to choose a direction, roll a d6 to randomly determine the direction that they move in. Then, resolve movement through obscured areas as normal. If the navigator succeeds on their Wisdom (Survival) check, the party is no longer lost.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Every time the party moves into an obscured hex in Berez that does not coincide with a special encounter (see “Special Encounters” below), roll a d20. On a result of 16 or higher, a random encounter is triggered. To determine which random encounter, roll on the random encounter table below.

d12	Encounter
1	2d4 scarecrows .
2	A mimic disguised as a fallen log or a small boulder.
3	A broken scarecrow.
4	1d4 swarms of insects .
5	The severed wings of a raven nailed to a dead tree.
6	1d4 crocodiles .
7	A Blinsky music box that plays a creepy tune. The dancer inside is a skeleton.
8	1d4 giant frogs .
9	An illusory hand reaching out for help from beneath murky water.
10	A swarm of poisonous snakes .
11	A dying raven.
12	1d4 ghouls .

SPECIAL ENCOUNTERS

There are several locations on the hex map that coincide with special encounters. When the party enters these areas, do not roll for a random encounter, but instead run the encounter for that location.

BURGOMASTER’S MANSION

Lazlo Ulrich was not a kind man during his lifetime. Shortly after adopting Marina into his household, he set her to work as a servant. Later on, after seeing Marina blossom into a beautiful woman, Lazlo began to conspire with the local priest, Brother Grigor, to have Marina’s adoption papers replaced with a wedding certificate.

Shortly before Strahd could turn Marina into a vampire, both Lazlo and Grigor killed her in order to save her from damnation. This enraged Strahd, who promptly killed both Lazlo and Grigor and flooded the village.

However, that was not the end of the story for Lazlo. Strahd, wielding powerful necromantic magics, resurrected Lazlo as a **ghast**. Strahd then chained Lazlo to the walls and foundation of his mansion so that he could bear witness to the death and decay of the house and land around him.

When your party arrives at the ruins of the Burgomaster’s mansion, they will encounter Lazlo in what used to be the sitting room. If he sees or otherwise knows of the party’s presence, Lazlo will call out and attempt to lure characters closer to his position. He’s been chained up a long time, and he is very hungry. His chains, however, do not allow him to move more than five feet in any direction. If a character gets within five feet of Lazlo, he will attack and attempt to eat them.

Lazlo retains the memories of his past life and a perversion of his personality. If the party does not get within five feet of him, Lazlo will attempt to engage characters in conversation. He alternates between being crass and rude, and offering characters gold and riches (which he does not possess) if they would come closer or break his chains.

If Ireena is with the party, Lazlo immediately recognizes her and refers to her only as Marina. His words and actions toward her are lascivious, a vile exaggeration of his behaviors toward Marina whilst she was alive.

CRUMBLING CHURCH

The church of Berez, once dedicated to the Morninglord, is now a crumbling ruin. There are holes in the roof, and no glass remains in its windows. Mold covers the rotting pews, and nothing of value remains. The church is not uninhabited, however.

As stated, Lazlo Ulrich was not alone in the killing of Marina. Brother Grigor was also complicit, and was also subject to Strahd’s wrath. Like Lazlo, Grigor was violently killed and brought back as a **ghast**.

When your party enters the church, any character with a passive Perception score of 10 or higher can hear a voice coming from outside the door to the graveyard. The voice sounds as if it is chanting, but the words are unintelligible. Should the party investigate further, they will find the body of Brother Grigor nailed to the church wall, just above and outside the door that leads to the graveyard.

GRAVEYARD & MONUMENT

After the flood waters receded from the village of Berez, Strahd ordered the construction of a monument in Marina's honor. Instead of placing it in a remote location, as written in the module, Strahd placed it at the head of the graveyard atop a small rise. In this way, Marina's memory is elevated above all of the other dead in her village.

The graveyard is adjacent to the church, just to the north of the crumbling building. Watching over the graveyard is Brother Grigor, who is nailed to the wall just above the church door. By fastening the priest to the wall, Strahd ensured that Brother Grigor could see his folly for all eternity.

When Brother Grigor catches sight of any character, he will begin to preach to them. However, he doesn't preach of the Morninglord, as he would have in life. Instead, he preaches of darkness, hate, despair, and of evil beings that live within amber cages. In the years since his death, Brother Grigor has had plenty of time to dream, and the Vestiges of the Amber Temple have invaded his mind and turned him into their prophet.

If he is released from the wall, Brother Grigor will behave similarly to Lazlo in that he will attack the nearest character and attempt to eat them. Otherwise, he is content to preach incessantly.

Should any character disturb Marina's monument, Brother Grigor will cease his chanting and begin to scream. These screams serve to summon the distended human corpses mentioned in area U5 of the module.

GOAT PEN

In order to stave off the effects of extreme old age, Baba Lysaga bathes in the blood of goats during each full moon. She keeps a supply of goats on hand for this ritual, and perhaps as food.

This guide recommends that, instead of being goats of the natural variety, the goats in area U2 are polymorphed Barovians. These poor souls were captured by Baba's scarecrows whilst on the road and taken back to Berez to fuel Baba's eternal life.

Baba Lysaga isn't able to cast the 9th-level spell, *True Polymorph*, but perhaps she is powerful enough to cast a facsimile of it that has less-than-perfect results. When the party draws near to the goat pen, the goats within begin to bleat wildly. A character with a passive Perception score of 15 or higher will notice that the goats' bleating sounds like a repeated cry of "Help!"

The goats can be returned to their human forms by casting *Remove Curse* or *Greater Restoration*.

STANDING STONES

Amidst the standing stones is Muriel Vinshaw, as stated in the module. However, she isn't simply standing around with a lantern and waiting for the characters. Instead, Muriel is gravely injured and is waving down the party for assistance.

Muriel was leading a party of wereraven scouts around the perimeter of Berez when they were ambushed by blights and druids. While Muriel was able to escape with her injuries, the other scouts were killed. During her flight back to the Wizard of Wines, Muriel succumbed to her injuries and landed in the ring of standing stones outside of Berez.

If the characters heal Muriel's wounds, she will volunteer the information stated in the module. She may also warn them of Baba's capabilities of flight, and advise them against attacking the witch without ranged capabilities.

If the characters are unaware of Muriel's lycanthropic nature, she does not volunteer that information. Once she is healed and done speaking with the characters, she sneaks away before transforming into a raven and resuming her flight back to the winery.

Should Muriel make it back to the winery, she is available to return to Berez during the party's encounter with Baba Lysaga. At your discretion, allow 1d4 swarms of ravens descend into the fray to aid the party during combat.

BABA LYSAGA'S HUT

It's almost inevitable that your party will encounter Baba Lysaga. When they do—assuming they don't find her bathing in blood—they will find her to be a hunched old woman that walks with a cane. She is draped in a macabre garment of stitched-together raven body parts.

ROLEPLAYING BABA LYSAGA

Although she isn't what one would call a "gracious host", Baba is willing to have a conversation with those she sees as interlopers. You might consider roleplaying her as if she were a cat playing with the mouse it intends to eat. Baba has no intention of letting the party out of her swamp alive, so she figures that she may as well have fun with them in the meantime.

BABA'S BATTLE TACTICS

Baba Lysaga is not a melee fighter, and she knows it. When combat starts, the old witch will waste no time in getting into her flying skull. Once inside, she will take to the sky and get out of range of the party's melee combatants while keeping them in range of her own spells.

In order to push the odds in her favor, Baba will summon her fly swarm at the first opportunity and target it at the character with the least armor. In subsequent turns, she will focus on using her long-range spells.

If she sees that the party members are bunched together, she will cast *Evard's Black Tentacles* or *Fireball* and attempt to affect as many of them as possible.

Should the party include a member who is likely to have weak mental faculties (i.e., a low Wisdom score), she will cast *Geas* on them in an attempt to turn that party member against their allies.

Regarding the hut, Baba will only call upon its assistance once she is at around 60% health. Until then, it remains motionless. Once activated, the hut will mercilessly attack the nearest party member until they are completely dead.

BABY STRAHD

With all of the baby paraphernalia around the swamp, it stands to reason that the baby in the middle of Baba's hut is not an illusion, as written in the module.

Instead of an illusion, which is dispelled in the event of Baba's death, the baby in the hut is a small golem, the size of an infant. Whether this is a clay golem or a flesh golem is up to your discretion as the Dungeon Master. The golem has the statistics of a **commoner**.

In the event of Baba's death, the golem continues to act on its last order, "Act like a baby." It will continue to do so until destroyed.

FAILING FORWARD


In the event that Baba Lysaga is triumphant against the party, there is no need to scrap the adventure and start over. Instead, you may employ the "fail forward" strategy.

Impressed with the performance and prowess of the party, Baba Lysaga presses the surviving party members into her service. She has recently gained knowledge of the Hag's Eye pendant in the possession of Cyrus Belview, within Castle Ravenloft. Such an item undermines Strahd's ability to rule, and Baba cannot abide its presence in his castle.

Baba coerces the party into venturing into the castle to retrieve the Hag's Eye by either transforming them into mice, or by holding one of their number hostage. In either case, she promises to return them to their true form or release the prisoner upon the delivery of the Hag's Eye pendant. Whether she intends to fulfill that promise or not is up to you.



VAN RICHTEN'S TOWER

 On the shore of Lake Baratok stands a crumbling edifice that was once the property of the wizard, Khazan. The tower serves as a relative safe-haven for characters, in that it is the only area safe from Strahd's scrying spell. Aside from that, it is little more than a base of operations or a small stop on the way to other locations.

This chapter aims to add interest to the area by adding intriguing elements to the tower. It also aims to eliminate confusion around the tower's original owner.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

GOODBYE, KHAZAN

To streamline your game's lore and alleviate any confusion, this guide recommends that Khazan should be removed from your game's lore and his history merged with that of Exethanter.

This is done to alleviate player confusion. Firstly, Khazan's name sounds too similar to that of Kavan, the ancient barbarian at Yester Hill. Secondly, the presence of Khazan as a lich within Barovia's history means that there is a strong possibility that players may conflate Khazan and Exethanter.

Instead of Khazan, Exethanter served as Strahd's archwizard and constructed the tower on the shores of Lake Baratok. All references to Khazan within the tower should be replaced by a reference to Exethanter, such as the name above the tower door in area V2.

AREAS OF THE TOWER

The following sections describe updates to the areas of the tower. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or adjusted to your liking.

VI. EZMERELDA'S WAGON

Ezmerelda's wagon is a staple of many groups' stories of their arrival to the tower. Due to the difficult nature of discovering the booby trapped door, and the high damage of the resulting explosion, this is also the site of many character deaths.

If Ezmerelda is not with the party, this guide recommends—at your discretion—moving Ezmerelda's wagon to the outskirts of Krezk, where she may be found inside the Abbey of Saint Markovia. This provides a much less lethal introduction to the tower.

V2. TOWER DOOR

As noted previously, replace Khazan's name above the door with that of Exethanter. This area is otherwise unchanged.

V4. TOWER, FIRST FLOOR

Scattered around this room are four wooden crates. These were brought to the tower by Rudolph van Richten to store extra supplies.

Between three of the crates, characters can find 30 days of dried rations, 300 feet of hempen rope, 5 pints of oil, two healer's kits, and one hunting trap. The fourth crate contains Van Richten's monster hunting equipment. Inside, characters will find 7 vials of holy water, 10 wooden stakes, 10 bulbs of garlic, and a heavy crossbow with 20 bolts.

V5. TOWER, SECOND FLOOR

The floor here is sturdy, and does not collapse when characters step on it. The floor is littered with moldering books of various subjects, many of which lay open at random pages. Time and the elements have rendered most of the books unreadable. All of the books here are non-magical.

Within the western wall, four feet above the floor, is a small alcove, inside of which sits the bust of a middle aged man. The bust is of exquisite craftsmanship, and has been affixed within the alcove with Sovereign Glue.

As characters ride the elevator, any character with a passive Perception score of 10 or higher gets the impression that the eyes of the bust are following them. If any character approaches within five feet of the bust, it will speak and exuberantly introduce itself as "Buster."

BUSTER THE BUST

Shortly after the creation of the tower, Exethanter used his magic to give sentience to a marble bust, fashioned after his own likeness.

Although Exethanter granted the bust intelligence and personality, he did not bother to give it a name. Buster gained his name only recently after a lengthy conversation with Ezmerelda D'Avenir on the subjects of literature and history. She decided that no creature of such intelligence should go unnamed, and thus dubbed the sentient bust "Buster."

Although Buster is quite fond of Ezmerelda ("She's turned *several* pages for me!"), he has a very low opinion of the tower's previous occupant, Rudolph van Richten. Upon first arriving to the tower, Van Richten ruthlessly interrogated Buster for information, at one point threatening to burn all of the books in the tower.

WHAT IS LOVE?

Through his centuries of isolation, Buster has spent his time thinking, yelling at looters that climb in from the scaffolding, and reading the books that lay open on the ground near him. One particular book of poetry is his favorite.

Centuries of reading the same poems over and over again have given Buster romantic notions of one day finding a love of his own. He has recently become smitten with Ezmerelda, who has been kind to him during her visits to the tower.

In an attempt to woo her, Buster asks the character to find him three items: a new book of poetry, a bouquet of flowers, and a bottle of wine. Where the items can be found in Barovia is at your discretion.

Upon receiving the items, Buster will happily tell the characters the command word to activate the animated the suit of armor on the fourth floor so that they may reveal the hidden compartment behind it, and will freely share any information he has about the tower and its previous owner.

WHAT BUSTER KNOWS

Buster is willing to share the following pieces of information with the characters, if they help him or otherwise convince him to do so:

- The tower was built by Exethanter, Strahd's archwizard.
- Exethanter left the tower to seek immortality and power through lichdom, but never returned.
- Before leaving, Exethanter mentioned a "temple of amber" in the southern mountains.
- The hole in the wall on the third floor was created by a lightning strike.
- The scaffolding was built by looters who stole nearly everything from the tower.
- The command word for the suit of armor on the fourth floor is "Ravenovia."

V6. TOWER, THIRD FLOOR

Before the mists sealed Barovia away from the material plane, Exethanter was fond of stargazing. He spent many nights charting the movement of the stars and planets, and wrote several treatises on astronomical phenomena. After the mists arrived to obscure the sky, however, his stargazing hobby came to an end.

As a consolation, Exethanter enchanted the ceiling of this floor of the tower to resemble the night sky. The stars and planets were meticulously recreated according to his notes and calculations. However, the magic of the room has faded over the centuries, leaving only a few patches of the night sky available for viewing amidst the wooden ceiling.

At your discretion, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check can reveal constellations that are native to your characters' home land, wherever that may be.

V7. TOWER, FOURTH FLOOR

When Ezmerelda moved into the tower, she found Rudolph van Richten's notes burnt to a crisp, minus a lone journal entry. With that lone entry, she traced Rudolph's steps and reproduced much of his research in Barovia.

To that end, the walls of this room are covered in Ezmerelda's hastily scrawled notes and charcoal drawings of various people and places. Dominating the eastern wall are two portraits. The first portrait is of Strahd von Zarovich, and the other is of a severe-looking old man with glasses and thinning hair, labeled "Rudolph." A crisscrossing web of dark thread connects all of the other notes and portraits to the two larger portraits.

A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the interconnected papers on the wall represent Strahd's and Van Richten's connections to other people and places within the land of Barovia. This includes Strahd's consorts, the Wachters, and the Vistani camps throughout the land. There is also a sketch of the severed head that can be found inside the trunk in this area.

There are also several drawings of Castle Ravenloft, done from a distance. A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check grants information about the layout of the grounds and exterior of the castle.

Laying flat on the desk is a hand drawn map of the immediate area around Lake Baratok. A circle has been drawn around an area of forest to the northwest of the tower's location, with the word "den" written next to it.

EXETHANTER'S TREASURE

In the hidden compartment behind the suit of armor, characters will find a bronze telescope and sextant. The two items have tarnished with age, and are well worn with signs of previous use. Despite the tarnish and wear, the name "Exethanter" is clearly engraved in the metal on both pieces.

If presented to Exethanter in the Amber Temple, one or both of these items can help to return his lost memories. This is useful for parties that are unable to cast *Greater Restoration* or *Wish*.



THE WIZARD OF WINES

Wine is the lifeblood of the Barovian people. It is one of the few sources of joy and levity in their otherwise bleak, and often short lives. The only source of wine in the valley is the Wizard of Wines winery, run by the Martikov family, who distribute the wine to the few taverns in the land. Lately, the winery has been under attack by dark forces, which has disrupted the supply of wine. Left unchecked, these forces will destroy much more than Barovians' favorite drink.

This guide will shed light on some of the chapter's mysteries within the module, and will also expand on the motivations of key characters. Additionally, more quests have been created to provide characters a pathway toward gaining the trust of the Keepers of the Feather.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

A SPECIES IN DANGER

Everything happening at the winery—the stolen gems, the druids attacking—is happening at the behest of Baba Lysaga. As stated in the module, she has convinced the druids of Yester Hill that she is the natural mother of their god, Strahd von Zarovich, and has ignited something of a holy war against the wereravens.

While it is also stated that she's doing this to get rid of the Keepers of the Feather at the winery, who are undermining Strahd, the module does not state that this is where her goal ends.

Baba Lysaga is ancient, and is smart enough to know that destroying the Martikovs and their winery is not enough to free her precious Strahd of the feathered nuisances. Because wereravens are identical to normal ravens while in animal form, the only way that she can be sure there are no more wereravens in the land is to destroy every single raven.

Her ultimate goal is the extinction of Barovian ravens, lycanthropes included. The druids and their blights are perfectly suited to this goal, given that they inhabit the same environments as ravens. Blights, in particular, are effective weapons due to the fact that they can easily hide in foliage and ambush roosting ravens. Although they cannot damage the wereravens, the blights are able to hold them down and wait for the arrival of a druid who can finish the job with magic or a silver weapon.

ENVY OF THE DRUIDS

Some of the biggest unanswered questions of the winery's chapter in *Curse of Strahd* deal with the druids' motivations for coming back to the winery after stealing the final gem. If they planned on destroying the winery with Wintersplinter, why come back at all? Why not let the tree blight handle it? Additionally, what are they looking for while ransacking the house? They are clearly looking for something, but there's no mention as to what that might be.

A LIGHT FOR THE DARKNESS

When Baba Lysaga set the druids to the task of destroying every raven in the land, along with the winery, it was made clear that the druids were dealing with lycanthropes.

This new knowledge of the Martikov family, paired with the painful memory of the loss of their *wild shape* abilities (see the Yester Hill chapter of this guide for details), meant that the druids had a mission of their own: capture the wereravens and take their power.

This motivation explains why the druids came back to the winery after stealing the final magic gem. They returned to capture as many of the Martikovs as they could, interrogate them, and take the wereravens' powers as their own.

Unbeknownst to the druids, theirs is an impossible task, as lycanthropy cannot be taken by force. However, they will blindly persist in their efforts to search the winery and interrogate captured Martikovs for any clues toward regaining their lost power.

A BITTER DRAUGHT

Another of the druid's goals that is left open to interpretation is that of why they poison the vats of wine in the fermentation room. If their immediate plan is to destroy the winery, without any further ado, then poisoning the wine seems superfluous.

DEATH TO NON BELIEVERS

As stated in the module, the druids of Yester Hill worship Strahd as their god. They revere the land and the darkness that covers it. By extension, the forlorn nature of Barovia is considered a sacred state of mind by the tribe. Anything that works against Strahd, the land, or a feeling of forlornness is anathema.

The wine that the Martikovs create and distribute, according to the druids, is sacrilege. Drinking it is blasphemy.

Rather than destroy the vats of wine and let it spill out onto the ground to infect the land that they worship, the druids plan to poison the wine and distribute it. Unless stopped, they will fill barrels with the poisoned wine and take to the taverns in the hope of killing as many blasphemers as possible.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

When the characters first arrive in the fermentation room, the module describes a druid in the act of pouring poison into one of the vats. It is recommended that you revise this encounter so that the wine is already poisoned by the time the characters arrive.

Instead of catching a druid in the act, allow the characters to find empty vials that let off a putrid smell. Characters with a passive Perception score of 17 or higher also find that the vats themselves smell putrid.

Rather than providing the players with an obvious problem with an obvious solution, the empty vials give them a satisfying mystery to solve.

It's also recommended that you allow characters to find a scroll of *Purify Food and Drink* prior to the encounter at the winery. Few characters have this spell prepare ahead of time, and finding the scroll can provide a bit of foreshadowing of the events to come.

WINTERSPLINTER'S DAY OUT

Quite a lot of work has gone into creating the tree blight, Wintersplinter. All of the effort and time it has taken bespeaks of a goal that extends beyond simply destroying one vineyard. However, the module makes no mention of the druids' or Baba Lysaga's plan for the tree blight.

In addition to knowing that wereravens live at the winery, Baba Lysaga has gleaned information that points to the Blue Water Inn, as another favored haunt of the lycanthropes.

If allowed to go on its rampage, Wintersplinter does not stop once it has destroyed the Wizard of Wines. It will trundle eastward and arrive at the gates of Val-laki, which it will break through in three rounds. Once inside the town walls, the tree blight will walk in a straight line toward the Blue Water Inn, destroying it and any structure in its path.

GAIN THE KEEPERS' TRUST

The Keepers of the Feather have been around for generations, working in secret against Strahd. They've seen countless bands of adventurers arrive in Barovia only to lose heart or lose their lives in one way or another. It will take quite a bit more than a plucky attitude and a good sword hand for the characters to gain the trust of the Keepers and learn of their secret.

The following quests expand on content already in the module, and can provide characters with a path toward gaining the trust of the Keepers.

RESCUE DAVIAN

The druids' return to the winery was swift and silent, but it did not take the Martikov family entirely by surprise. With a network of scouts and alarms in place, the family was given at least a small amount of time to escape before they were overrun.

Being the patriarch of the family, and its most stubborn member, Davian Martikov instructed the rest of his household to flee while he did what he could to hold off the attack.

Although Davian was not able to do much against the tide of blights and their masters, he managed to give his family enough time to gather up their children and flee into the forest. Shortly afterward, the winery became overrun, and Davian was taken hostage.

When the characters encounter the Martikov family in the woods next to the Svalich road, they are greeted by Adrian who has reluctantly taken up his father's position as leader of the clan. Adrian does not know whether his father is alive or dead, but he implores the characters to find out and rescue him if they can.

Should the characters agree to help, they will find Davian alive, but badly injured, in area W19. The druids have tied him up and beaten him within an inch of his life in search of his family's lycanthropic secret.

DISCOVER THE DARK PLOT

Although the Martikov family is well aware of who has stolen their gems, they are completely unaware of the motivation behind the thefts.

After the first gem went missing, they dispatched ravens as scouts to discover information about Baba Lysaga's plans for the gem. None of their scouts returned. The theft of the second gem was met with another dispatch of scouts, this time to the druid's home at Yester Hill. Again, none returned.

Despite their desire for answers, the Martikovs are hesitant to send any more of their number out on scouting missions to Berez or Yester Hill. Instead, in addition to returning the gems, they ask the characters to report back with as much information as they can find.

RESCUE THE SCOUTS

As stated previously, no scout recently sent to Berez or Yester Hill has returned. In addition to ravens, several wereravens—extended members of the Martikov family—were among the ranks.

Every scout that was sent to Yester Hill was killed by the blights that lie hidden in the trees surrounding the hill. Perceptive characters will notice the bodies of ravens scattered about on the forest floor during their approach to the area.

The scouts that went to Berez, however, have mostly survived. They were captured by Baba Lysaga, and are being held in the magically-locked cages outside of her hut, along with normal ravens. The one exception is Muriel Vinshaw, who managed to escape the witch's trap. See the "Berez" chapter of this guide for more details.



THE AMBER TEMPLE

The Amber Temple is an odd location that doesn't seem to fit very well into the overall module. Due to the lack of quest hooks leading players there, it feels tacked on.

This chapter aims to help you make the Amber Temple a pivotal location within your campaign, and the key to defeating Strahd von Zarovich once and for all. Along the way, this guide will also help you enhance the story of the Amber Temple by making various changes to its physical location, its rooms, and its inhabitants.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

GETTING TO THE TEMPLE

Unless your Tarokka reading has placed an item of power within the Amber Temple, or your players are traveling with Kasimir Velekov, the module provides no incentive to venture up the slopes of Mount Ghakis to the Amber Temple.

There are three key NPCs within *Curse of Strahd* that would have access to information about the temple. Any one of these could point your players in the temple's direction, and tell them at least a little about Strahd's link to it.

The Abbot - He's been in Barovia long enough, and has learned enough about Strahd, that he's bound to know at least something about the Amber Temple and its relation to the lord of the land.

Ezmerelda d'Avenir & Rudolph van Richten - The two monster hunters always come to a fight well-prepared. As such, they're bound to have done as much research on Strahd and his history as possible. During their respective researches, one or the other may have turned up information on Strahd's link to a temple somewhere in the southern mountains.

Madam Eva - In addition to using the Tarokka reading to tell your players where to go during their adventure, Madam Eva can give them cryptic hints about the temple. "The final nail in the Dark Lord's coffin lies beyond gates of Amber."

RESTING IN THE TEMPLE

Sleeping inside of the Amber Temple is possible, but it's rarely restful. While inside of the temple, the minds of your party members are under near-constant assault by the evil forces that reside there.

At each long rest, have every player roll a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. The character of any player who fails the save only regains 3/4 of their hit points and gains a malady from the Temple Madness table below.

These maladies confer no mechanical drawbacks, although you are free to add some as you see fit. They can be removed by casting *Greater Restoration*, or by leaving the temple and allowing 24 hours to pass.

d6 Malady

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Your head hurts and your hands tremble |
| 2 | You are constantly nauseous and irritable. |
| 3 | You see dark shapes on the periphery of your vision wherever you go. |
| 4 | You constantly feel as if you are being watched. |
| 5 | You forget your party members' names easily and frequently. |
| 6 | You forget your own name and where you are at least once per day. |

AREAS OF THE TEMPLE

The following sections describe updates to the areas of the Amber Temple. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or adjusted to your liking.

XI. TEMPLE FACADE

In the module, when players crest the icy landscape leading up to the temple, they are greeted by the faceless statues and giant amber doors that make up the temple's facade. The temple itself is built into the side of the mountain.

Instead of this, let's move the temple underground. It was built as a prison for dark gods, and it seems appropriate that it is hidden deep underground.

Instead of finding the entrance to the temple itself in area X1, your players find a more unassuming building. This building is located between area X1 and X2.

As your steps lead you up the icy path of the mountain, you see before you a sheer wall of granite, fifty feet wide and surrounded on either side by treacherous slopes.

At the base of the wall you can see a door, its normal size made tiny in comparison to the stone in which it stands. Thick ice covers the door, indicating its age and disuse. Despite that, the snow at the foot of the door has been swept away, indicating that someone has been here recently.

This monastery served as the general quarters for the wizards who originally built the Amber Temple. It's where they ate, slept, and it also served as their base of operations during the excavation of the temple further underground.

When the players enter into the monastery, they find it to be empty. Several rooms split off from the main hallway, each containing the ruins of what used to be simple wooden furniture.

In the corner of one room sits a corpse.

Sitting up against the corner of the room is a dead body, covered in tattered robes. You can tell from its mummified features that it has been here for a great number of years, preserved by the cold climate of the mountain.

A close inspection reveals that the corpse was likely a young man when he was alive. In one hand, he clutches an iron hammer. In the other, a dulled iron chisel.

A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the robes were likely those of an apprentice wizard. Beyond the hammer and chisel, no other items are found on the body.

If the party explores the back reaches of the monastery, they will find a large wooden door with iron banding. Carved into the wood, over and over again in various languages, is a message. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the message was likely carved by the apprentice wizard with his chisel.

When your players examine the message, read the following aloud:

"If you seek honor or power, turn back
for these walls hold naught but doom.
In many vessels below, the darkness
shelters a timeless evil.
The danger is an infection of malevolent divinity.
Our arrogance and folly forged
this place into our prison.
Leave now, before our damnation becomes yours."

If your players attempt to open the door, they find that it swings open easily despite its size and age—almost as if something were helping them open it.

THE DARKEST DESCENT

Beyond the door is an unlit stone staircase that descends 200 feet into Mount Ghakis. The stairs terminate in a hallway that is 10 feet wide and tall, and 50 feet long.

On either side of the hallway players can see elaborate carvings that depict the monastery above, as well as a group of twenty humanoid figures. The figures are shown excavating a portion of the mountainside through magical means.

Further down the hallway, the carvings show the construction of a massive underground structure—the Amber Temple itself.

Beyond that, the carvings show the humanoid figures trapping evil-looking entities into large blocks of stone. Players can't tell from the carvings, but those blocks of stone are the Amber Sarcophagi.

As the hallway progresses, the detail and care of the carvings begins to degrade. The humanoid figures begin to look like the evil entities they captured, and they begin to attack and kill one another.

At the end of the hallway is one final carving, hastily scrawled. In it is one living humanoid figure, surrounded by evil faces all bearing down upon it. In one hand, the figure holds a hammer; in the other, a chisel.

Beyond the hallway is a large natural cavern. At the far end of the cavern is the facade of the Amber Temple as described in the module. The large amber doors are slightly ajar.

X1A. NARROW FISSURE

Instead of leading from area X15 to X1, this fissure leads from area X15 to a remote outcropping of rock on the western side of Mount Ghakis overlooking Tsolenka Pass. It is through here that the Kavani tribe (see the sidebar later in this chapter) access the Amber Temple. Characters may leave the temple via this route, but they are unlikely to find it without being led here by a member of the tribe.

X3. EMPTY BARRACKS

The barracks here are not so empty. Read or paraphrase the following text for one of these areas.

On the opposite wall, three frozen corpses lay slumped over one another. Though time has worn away most of their armor, it is clear that these were once guards. One holds an empty bottle, while another holds the tattered remains of a quill.

During the fall of the temple, these three guards drank poison to avoid the fate of their brethren. Any character with a passive Perception score of 17 or higher notices words scrawled on the floor in front of the guard with the quill, written in ancient blood. The scrawl simply reads, "We are damned."

X5D. AMBER REFLECTIONS

In the module, areas X5d contain reflections of the characters that gesture wildly back at them in silent warning. Seemingly helpful encounters like this don't align with the evil nature of the temple, and should be changed.

Instead of warning the party, the reflections will shift and transform in front their eyes. Characters can watch as their reflections age rapidly, becoming withered and gaunt.

Characters watching their reflection must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, they disbelieve the reflection. On a failure, they feel old and have disadvantage on any attack rolls for the next ten minutes.

X9. LECTURE HALL

In the module, **Vilnius** is an apprentice of the wizard **Jakarion**. Jakarion has been killed by the **flameskulls** in area X17 and Vilnius is in hiding.

In this guide, Vilnius is no longer a wizard's apprentice with a familiar. He is, instead, a commoner from the outskirts of Vallaki. He finds himself within the Amber Temple at the behest of one of the vestiges, Fekre, Queen of Poxes.

Several days ago, while foraging for food, Vilnius found an ornate necklace. Thinking he could sell it back in town, he picked it up and slipped it around his neck. Unfortunately for Vilnius, the necklace was actually a cursed item, the *Pendant of Poxes* (see Appendix A). Upon donning it, Vilnius was telepathically connected to Fekre's dark mind. She infected his body with a myriad of diseases and then compelled him to bring the necklace to her in the Amber Temple in exchange for removing the diseases that now plagued his body.

Vilnius' appearance remains much the same as in the module, except that his burn marks are now weeping pustules and his skin has taken on a gray pallor. He coughs violently on a regular basis, and emits a foul odor.

When he arrived at the temple, Vilnius was forced to hide and take shelter from the golems and other monsters that guard the temple. At the time your players find him, Vilnius has been hiding for the last several days, surviving on the remains of his foraged rations and what vermin he can find in the temple.

If asked about his purpose in the temple, Vilnius will only reveal that he is there to cure his disease—Fekre has compelled him to remain silent about the necklace and his ties to her.

X15. SOUTHWEST ANNEX

In the module, area X15 is home to several **berserkers**, a **gladiator**, and a **dire wolf**. The purpose of these hostile NPCs is not made clear, other than to oppose the presence of the players. Due to their lack of purpose, we will remove the hostile NPCs.

In their place will be four NPCs of the Kavani tribe (male and female human **commoners**). Each one is sixteen years old. They are each in the temple on their coming-of-age quest (see the Kavani Tribe sidebar).

When characters attempt to enter area X15, they find the doors to be barred from the inside. To gain entry, they will either have to break the doors open with a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, or convince the Kavani NPCs inside the room to let them in.

Convincing the Kavani NPCs is not easy, however, as they do not believe your party to be real. Rather, they believe that your party is a conjuration of the evil within the temple, sent to trick them into opening the doors.

If your party enters the room by force, the Kavani NPCs take up arms with their hand axes and swords, and fight to the death.

If your party is able to enter the room peacefully, the Kavani NPCs offer them a place to rest and sleep.

Astrid - The granddaughter of the Kavani chieftess. When dealing with the players, Astrid naturally takes on a leadership role among the Kavani NPCs.

Frida - A quiet and timid girl, Frida keeps her distance from everyone else. The mental assault of the temple's evil appears to be wearing on her more than the others.

Harald - A strong and stocky boy, Harald has taken it upon himself to act as a protector of sorts for Astrid and Frida. He is outspoken, and will not hesitate to confront the party if he thinks they mean harm to the either of the girls.

Bjorn - Due to his overly headstrong nature, Bjorn ventured through the north door of area X15, only to be killed by a fireball. His body remains in the hallway.

THE KAVANI TRIBE

The Kavani are a mountain people, named for their original chief: Kavan.

For generations, the Kavani tribe have sent youth on the cusp of adulthood into the Amber Temple on a coming-of-age quest. Those that survive seven days and nights within the temple are considered strong of both body and mind, and worthy of joining the tribe as adults. Those that do not return are considered unworthy, and forgotten after a short period of mourning.

Having migrated from the Balinok Mountains some time ago, the Kavani now make their home in a small village south of Mount Ghakis, nestled deep within a wooded valley. They live off the land, and make their homes and clothing out of the hides of the animals they hunt.

Strahd is aware of the Kavani people, but pays them little notice due to their reclusive and innocuous nature.

THE BLOOD SPEAR

If any of your players possess the **Blood Spear**, the NPCs bow to them in respect. Whoever carries the spear, they say, is the spiritual reincarnation of Kavan. They are urged to visit the current Kavani chieftess in their home village for more information about integrating with the tribe, or returning the relic to its home.

X17. UPPER WEST HALL

The charred body in this area is no longer Jakarion. Instead, it is the body of Bjorn, one of the Kavani tribe members from area X15. Jakarion's staff has likewise been removed.

X20. ARCHITECT'S ROOM

It makes little sense that the architect of Castle Ravenloft stayed within the Amber Temple. As such, the replica of the castle is no longer present in this room. Replace this area's boxed text with the following:

Dominating this room is a massive washbasin, carved from black stone. In a hollow at its base is a pile of ash, where once burned a fire to heat the water. The basin itself is now cold and empty, but is covered with a brown sludge.

This is where the temple wizards would wash up before eating in area X22. In the final days of the temple, the basin held the blood of wizards and guards who were killed, but it has since dried up, leaving behind a noxious sludge on the basin's interior.

X30. PRESERVED LIBRARY

This library can provide your players with a wealth of information and spells. Unlike in the module, Exethanter does not need to have his memory restored in order to remember the command word for each of the books—they are one of the few things that he can remember. Because of this, Exethanter can find the answer to nearly any question that the characters ask, including how to bind the dark god, Vampyr, back into its amber prison. See area X33d for more details.

X31. CENTRAL CATACOMBS

Typically, locked doors guard something of value. This is especially true when said doors are locked by means of magic.

Area X31 is such an area with a magically-sealed door. Unfortunately for players, however, there is absolutely nothing of value inside the catacombs. We've added rewards for exploration here in the eastern and western catacombs.

STUCK PLAYERS?

If your players are stuck or are having trouble finding the hidden doors within the temple, use the candlesticks in this room as levers. Whenever one is pulled, the player characters hear something in the temple opening up. What opens is up to you and where you want your players to go.

X31B. EASTERN CATACOMBS

In the eastern catacombs, players will encounter an illusion similar to those found at the gallows, in Argynvostholt, and the Abbey of St. Markovia.

For each player character, there will be an illusory amber husk that depicts them in grievous pain. When a husk is touched, it will crumble to dust.

Inside one of the husks is 10 gold pieces. While this is not a significant monetary reward, it puts players in the mindset that other husks might contain interesting items.

X31A. WESTERN CATACOMBS

This is where all of the real amber husks are that belonged to wizards of ages past. If your players break any of them open, roll on the following table to determine what they find.

d20	Result
1-10	Nothing
11-15	Spawn a hostile specter
16-18	Spawn a hostile wraith
19-20	Roll on Magic Item Table A in the <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i>

X32. LOWER EAST HALL

There are no Barovian witches in this area. Instead, if the characters have killed at least one member of the coven at Old Bonegrinder, they may find the remainder of the coven here, attempting to gain additional power.

X33A. VAULT OF SHALX

This area contains Fekre's sarcophagus. Should Vilnius reach this area, he will press the necklace to the surface of her sarcophagus. The necklace will sink through the solid amber and into the swirling dark

vortex inside. Moments later, the floor will shake and the sarcophagus will explode, showering the surrounding area in amber shrapnel. Any creature in a 10 foot radius must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 piercing damage.

Hovering in place of the sarcophagus is Fekre herself, whole and restored.

If he survives the shrapnel from the explosion, Vilnius will drop to his knees in front of the dark goddess and ask her to free him from his diseases. She will agree to honor their bargain, and with a wave of her hand Fekre will drain the life from Vilnius' body and claim his soul. She will then disappear in a cloud of flies, back to the void from whence she came.

X33D. BREACHED VAULT

This area contains a broken sarcophagus. The original occupant of the sarcophagus is never specified in the module. In order to make the Amber Temple central to Strahd's defeat, we will use the broken sarcophagus as the original prison of the vestige of Vampyr (see Appendix C). The original sarcophagus of Vampyr, in area X42, will now stand empty and ready to be used later on.

STRAHD'S BARGAIN

In addition to killing Sergei and drinking his blood, part of Strahd's deal with Vampyr was to release the vestige from its prison. Having done that and sealed the pact of blood, Strahd now stands as Vampyr's champion.

Despite the fact that the Dark Powers have locked Strahd away in his own demiplane, Vampyr still grows fat upon the souls of those whom Strahd has killed over the centuries. In the event that Strahd is killed by a group of adventurers, Vampyr is ready to resurrect him after a short period of time.

To truly defeat Strahd once and for all, his tie to Vampyr must be severed. Either a suitable replacement champion must be found for the dark god, or Vampyr must be put back in his prison. Regarding the latter, the *Ritual of Binding* (see Appendix C) may be learned from a book in the Amber Temple library. Exethanter knows where the book may be found. If his memory is restored, he also knows the information provided above. He is happy to provide both to the characters if he is not hostile toward them.

X35. SLEEPING GUARDIAN

The shield guardian has been removed from this area, as has its control amulet in area X9. Instead, this is just another empty bed chamber.

X42. AMBER VAULT

In the module, the western sarcophagus here contained the vestige of Vampyr. In this module, however, Vampyr was located in area X33d. The western sarcophagus here now stands empty; it was awaiting the arrival of another dark god when the wizards of the temple began to turn on one another.

SPECIAL EVENTS

You can use the following special event if the characters have spent at least four days at the temple, or have come back after four days have passed since their initial visit.

THE MONSTER WITHIN

Upon returning to area X15, characters will find the room to be dark and cold. The floor and walls of the room are covered in blood, and the remains of Astrid and Harald are on the floor.

Any player character with a passive Perception score of 17 or higher will notice a monstrous figure crawling along the ceiling. The figure is humanoid, but its limbs jut out at odd angles, and it is covered in blood.

The monstrous figure is, in fact, Frida. Her mind has broken during her stay within the Amber Temple, and she has come under the thrall of *Drizlash, the Nine-Eyed Spider*. She killed her companions, and when your players find her, she is amidst her gruesome transformation into the spider-like **Thrall of Drizlash** (see Appendix B).

While your players watch, Frida's human form will be torn apart as a large and monstrous arachnid body emerges from within. There is no curing Frida or returning her to human form, and she will immediately attack the party once her transformation is complete.



YESTER HILL

The druids of Yester Hill are an enigmatic group within *Curse of Strahd*. Their involvement in the narrative is spread across multiple chapters, but little information is given regarding their motivations and history. That they worship Strahd as a god, and are being manipulated by Baba Lysaga to her own ends, is mostly what is known of them.

This chapter aims to tie up the loose narrative threads within the chapter, and will refocus the druid's summoning ritual around the Gulthias tree. Kavan and his blood spear will also take on a much more important role.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

AN ALTERNATE HISTORY

Hundreds of years ago, the forests and mountains of Barovia were home to a tribe of wild nomadic peoples. The "Forest Folk," as they were called by those who lived in villages, had chosen to eschew all trappings of civilized life, and instead sought solace and worship in the natural order of the land.

Lead by a powerful barbarian, Kavan, the tribe took to calling itself "The Kavani." See the Amber Temple chapter of this guide for more information on the Kavani tribe.

When the mists enshrouded Barovia, Kavan and several of his warriors left their village in order to drive back the darkness and restore light to the land. None of them returned, and none of their bodies were ever recovered. Kavan's name and memory became legend, as did stories of his infamous weapon, a spear made of black iron.

Within a few generations, the Kavani tribe began to suffer from internal strife. Two sects had sprung up: one that adhered to the old ways of natural harmony, and one that saw a Strahd as the avatar of the land, and deserving of their worship. Through a violent schism, the Kavani tribe was decimated. Those that worshiped Strahd were driven out, and came to call the forest near the Luna River their home.

Eventually, this offshoot of the Kavani tribe grew to become the druids and berserkers of Yester Hill.

A LOST GIFT

After their departure from the Kavani tribe, the druids of Yester Hill continued in their descent into darkness. Their connection with nature—while strained—remained with them, and they often took on the shapes

of forest animals for ritual purposes. This changed when the druids began to cultivate a Gulthias tree that they discovered in the forest. At that point, darkness truly took hold within them. Their ties to the natural world were severed, and their ability to change their shape was lost.

AREAS OF YESTER HILL

This section will cover revisions to the areas of Yester Hill. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or modified to your liking.

Y2. BERSERKER CAIRNS

The Blood Spear of Kavan is no longer located in this area, but can instead be found in area Y3.

Y3. THE DRUID'S CIRCLE

In the circle of stones stands a twisted effigy of wood and vines, resembling Strahd von Zarovich. Embedded where its heart would be is a spear of black iron, continuously dripping with blood, grasped by foul roots twisting up the statue. The echo of a furious battle cry seems to linger in the air—raging to break free.

On the ground in front of the effigy you glimpse a woman kneeling on the ground, her chin grasped by a figure clad in bloody hides behind her. The bloody figure wears a headdress of twisted antlers and holds a fist-sized gem in front of the woman's face, whispering in her ear. You can see tears streaking down her face.

The druids of Yester Hill have stolen one of the gems used by the Martikov family to give life to the grapevines cultivated at the Wizard of Wines. They know that this gem is precious to the Martikovs, and thus want to use it—and their lives—as bargaining chips.

The captive woman is Stefania Martikov, who was taken hostage along with her son, Claudiu, in the latest attack on the winery. Keshgar, a **blood druid** (see Appendix B), is forcing Stefania to watch her son's blood flow through the tree's roots and into the effigy in order to force her into giving up her family's secret. He is taunting her and holding the gem out in front of her, telling her that all of this can be reversed if she simply gives him what he wants.

If the ritual in area Y4 is interrupted, the gem becomes Keshgar's only remaining leverage against the Martikovs.

If the characters interrupt this scene, Keshgar immediately attacks, and Stefania cowers in fear until the fight is over. If the party did not free Claudiu before coming to area Y3, the ritual immediately commences and completes after six turns, animating Wintersplinter.

Y4. GULTHIAS TREE

Half a dozen humans, smeared with blue-gray mud, shout chants at a monstrous black tree while locking arms in a ring around it. Half a dozen more dance around them, swinging their axes in ecstasy. Dripping with sap—or worse—a maw-like hole gapes at the base of the trunk. Inside of it, being pierced by dozens of barbs slick with blood, is a teenage boy.

The six **berserkers** attack intruders immediately. The six **druids** only interrupt their chant if someone tries to breach their ring around the tree. Breaking through their chain requires a contested Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check; the druids have advantage as long as their chain holds.

The boy inside the tree's maw is Claudiu Martikov. He and his mother were taken captive during the latest attack on the Wizard of Wines. The druids plan to use his blood to fuel their ritual to summon the tree blight, Wintersplinter. See the *Druid's Ritual* special even for more information.

SPECIAL EVENTS

DRUID'S RITUAL

The ritual to animate Strahd's effigy in area Y3 now takes place at the Gulthias tree in area Y4. This vampiric abomination requires a sacrifice of blood to grant false life to Wintersplinter, funneling it through its roots.

In order to power the ritual, the druids have placed Claudiu Martikov inside a large opening in the side of the tree—its sacrificial maw. Once the ritual begins, Claudiu is pierced by spikes that grow from the tree's bark, which begin to drain him of blood. Throughout the ritual, his blood is funneled into bulbous black fruit that hangs from the tree's branches, and through its roots into Wintersplinter. The ritual concludes after six rounds of combat, when Claudiu is drained of his last drop of blood and dies.

While it has a victim, on initiative count 10 (losing all ties) the Gulthias tree sprouts 1d4 - 2 vine blights, 1d6 - 2 needle blights, and 1d8 - 2 twig blights within 60 feet of it (acting on initiative count 20). From the

fifth round of combat, any creature starting its turn within 30 feet of the tree must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute by the mist of black blood bursting from the fruit.

At any time during combat, a character can determine how much time is left in the ritual by succeeding on a DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) or a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Freeing the Claudiu requires a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check as an action or dealing 50 damage to the tree in one round.

A creature pushed into the empty maw must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or become restrained. Each round spent in the maw causes one level of exhaustion. The ritual must begin anew if the tree has no victim for 1 full round. The druids sacrifice themselves to continue the ritual, if necessary.

If the druids successfully complete their ritual, Kavan's soul is absorbed from his spear (see *The Blood Spear of Kavan* special event) and Wintersplinter erupts from the wooden effigy in area Y3. It then stalks off to destroy the winery, as written in the module. If it succeeds at that, it will continue on to Vallaki where it will attempt to break through the town's walls and destroy the Blue Water Inn.

STOPPING THE RITUAL

The druid's ritual can be stopped in one of three ways. At your discretion, you may add additional methods or let your players be creative and find a different way.

- All six druids around the Gulthias tree are killed.
- The effigy is destroyed.
- The Gulthias tree is destroyed.

If any of the above events take place, the ritual cannot be completed and the Gulthias tree's roots detach themselves from the effigy. The druids cannot hold another ritual of this type for approximately one month.

THE BLOOD SPEAR OF KAVAN

The druids have discovered the legendary blood spear of Kavan in the tombs in area Y2. Despite their separation from their original tribe, Kavan's name still rings with power to the people of Yester Hill. The restless spirit of Kavan lingers in his spear, enraged with Strahd's rule over the land he and his people once roamed freely.

The druids of Yester Hill plan to harness this fury, intending to fuel Wintersplinter with Kavan's soul as a spirit of destruction. They feel Kavan's fury at their intentions, but believe it will only make Wintersplinter stronger. The *Blood Spear* (see Appendix A) is currently embedded in the heart of the effigy in area Y3, in place of the winery gem.

The prospect of being used in the druids' vile ritual, effectively being made into an instrument of Strahd worship, chokes Kavan like bile, and he knows it will destroy what is left of his soul. When the characters approach within 60 feet of the statue, Kavan senses their presence and telepathically contacts them. Read the following boxed text aloud

As you take a step forward, a savage voice fills your head and rings in your ears.

"YOU! You are not of my domain, but I can smell your fury against the devil of this land! Tear me from this monster's heart and wield me against these misbegotten offspring of mine—I want to taste blood again!"

The blood spear rests in the statue 15 feet above ground. Climbing the statue requires a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check, as the roots of the Gulthias tree seem to actively shift out of the grasp of anyone scrambling towards the spear. Tearing the blood spear from the statue requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

If the party plucks the blood spear of Kavan from the effigy before stopping the druid's ritual, the ritual can still be completed as long as the effigy is not destroyed. However, the resulting tree blight will have only half its hit points.

ONLY THE WORTHY

The spear can only be attuned with Kavan's blessing, and he only judges the following characters worthy:

- Whoever pulls the blood spear from the effigy during combat.
- Whoever deals the most damage against the blood druid in area Y3.
- Whoever slays at least 3 creatures in a pitched battle within 24 hours while wielding the spear.

If the ritual to animate Wintersplinter is successfully concluded before the *Blood Spear* is retrieved, Kavan's soul is absorbed by the tree blight and the spear loses all of its magical and sentient properties.



WEREWOLF DEN

The werewolf den in *Curse of Strahd* is a small, combat-focused set piece that ties into several quest hooks throughout the module. The pack within the den is portrayed as entirely evil; they worship Mother Night, and both the current and possibly future leader advocate for infecting kidnapped children with lycanthropy to increase their numbers.

The broad brush with which the modules paints members of the pack makes them a collection of shallow characters, and presents a lack of meaningful choices for players. Either the players kill nearly all of the werewolves, or they side with one evil leader or another. This guide will aim to add depth to key characters in the den, and give players meaningful choices in their interactions with the pack.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

THE NIGHT'S CHILDREN

The werewolf pack west of Lake Baratok traces its lineage in Barovia to before the time of Strahd's arrival to the land. At one time, their numbers were great, and they flourished on the flesh of beast and man alike. Locals called them "The Night's Children."

After Barovia was locked away from the material plane, the pack's numbers began to dwindle through famine and lack of new members. Eventually, their bloodline became stagnant through generations of interbreeding. Only rarely was a Barovian human granted the curse of lycanthropy and brought into the pack.

Through the centuries, The Night's Children kept to themselves and stayed largely hidden from view. They had only the occasional dealing with Strahd, who was content to leave them in peace, so long as the pack left his food stock alone. Like others in Barovia, they learned to adapt to their surroundings, and fed primarily on forest game.

For several decades, the previous pack leader, Skennis, was content to let the pack live as it had been. When Skennis grew old and tired, however, his rule was challenged by Kiril Stoyanovich. Rather than fight to the death to defend his position as pack leader, Skennis stepped down and allowed Kiril to take his place.

Immediately, Kiril made sweeping changes to the pack's philosophies. He swore an oath of fealty to Strahd, who in turn granted the pack passage through

the mists to perform errands in the outside world. Under Kiril's orders, the pack began to kidnap children and forced them to fight each other to the death. The survivors were infected with lycanthropy and added to the pack's membership, as written in the module.

Many of the pack's members found Kiril's new recruitment practice to be abhorrent. They kept silent, however, out of respect for Kiril's rank as alpha, and out of fear of his newfound alliance with Strahd.

Emil Toranescu was the exception. He spoke out against Kiril's practice of kidnapping children, and criticized his alliance with Strahd. As written, Emil's opposition to Kiril caused a schism within the pack and resulted in his imprisonment by Strahd.

Unlike the module, however, Emil is not being held in Castle Ravenloft. Instead, he has been bound in silver chains within the guard tower at Tsolenka Pass, area T5.

AREAS OF THE DEN

This section will cover revisions to the various areas of the den. Any area not listed here should be run as it is written in the module, or modified to your liking.

Z2. GUARD POST

As written, Aziana and Davanka stand guard here in their human form. Aziana is a young woman in her late teens—one of the pack's first kidnapped victims. She was taken from her home in Gillian's Hill, just outside of Daggerford. Her years with the pack have hardened her and made her distrustful of strangers.

Davanka, on the other hand, is a natural born werewolf of middle age. She has raised and watched over Aziana since her arrival, but holds no love for the younger werewolf.

If the two guards spot the party, and don't feel that they are in immediate danger, Aziana will ring a nearby hand bell twice. The two rings will summon Skennis from area Z3. He and the two guards will question the characters about their purpose in the area, and will try to convince them to leave. At no point will any of the three admit to being werewolves, pretending instead to be outcasts from Barovian society.

Should either Aziana or Davanka feel threatened, one of them will ring the nearby hand bell three times, signaling every werewolf within hearing distance to come to their aid.

Only characters who are accompanied by another pack member, or are infected by lycanthropy, are permitted entry to the den.

Z3. WOLF DEN

If he has not been summoned to area Z2, Skennis is here playing his flute amidst nine **wolves**. Now that he is no longer the pack's alpha, he spends his days playing music and offering wisdom to any who will listen.

Skennis longs for the "old days" and quietly wishes that he had never stepped aside as pack leader. Although fiercely loyal to his pack members, Skennis could be convinced to rally against Kiril if provided with the proper motivation.

Z4. UNDERGROUND SPRING

The fissure in the ceiling of this cave can provide an alternate means of entry for characters who do not wish to alert the guards in area Z2. While exploring the area surrounding the den, characters can find the fissure with a successful DC 17 Perception (Wisdom) check, or a Passive Perception score of 13 or higher.

Z5. DEEP CAVES

Contrary to the module, bones do not litter the floor in this area. The pack members keep their living space clean and tidy, and dispose of their waste by burying it in the forest, well away from the cave.

Z5A. SOUTH CAVE

Bianca resides here, waiting for Kiril to return from his hunting trip. As written, she will attack any intruder that she sees. However, if the characters are accompanied by another member of the pack, such as Skennis or Zuleika, she will stay her hand.

If the characters interact with Bianca, they find her to be standoffish and haughty in her behavior. Kiril's position as pack leader has given her a sense of power, and she enjoys lording her position over those she sees as being of a lesser station.

Z5B. NORTH CAVE

Wensencia—known as "Wenny" to other pack members—spends much of her time here caring for the pack's newest member, Kellen. She's come to care for him greatly, and will protect him at all costs.

After killing the other children during his initiation into the pack, Kellen has become non-verbal. Kiril has demanded that Wensencia make him "snap out of it" on the threat of further violence against the boy.

Wensencia's soft spot for Kellen is due largely to the death of her own child, Berel, at the hands of the wolf hunter Szoldar Szoldarovich (see area N2c). If the characters seem friendly toward her, Wensencia will petition them to bring the wolf hunter to justice. She doesn't know his name, but can describe him by looks and smell, and knows that he lives in Vallaki.

Z6. KIRIL'S CAVE

On the western wall of Kiril's cave is an iron banded chest. It is locked, and Bianca carries the key when Kiril is not inside the den. The chest can be opened with thieves' tools and a DC 15 Dexterity check. Inside is a *Potion of Hill Giant Strength* and 50 gold pieces—both gifts from Strahd as rewards for Kiril's loyalty. Kiril plans to drink the potion in the event that his leadership of the pack is ever threatened. Also inside the chest is a wolf's tooth, a shrunken head, and a toy werewolf with "Is No Fun, Is No Blinsky" written on its tag.

Z7. SHRINE OF MOTHER NIGHT

This guide recommends the removal of the shrine, treasure, and the maggot-ridden corpses. Doing so allows you to add more depth to the werewolves than just "worshippers of evil." Because of the lack of a treasure pile, if your *Fortunes of Ravenloft* reading places an item here, you can move it to the locked chest in Kiril's cave, under a false bottom.

Change the boxed text of this area to read:

Rough-hewn stairs lead down to a torchlit cave. The cave holds eight cages—six small wooden ones, a large wooden one, and a large iron one. Two of the small wooden cages are empty, while four of the others each holds a pair of frightened children.

Curled up inside the large wooden cage is a man in tattered servant's attire, and in the iron cage is a female werewolf in hybrid form, bound in chains. The werewolf appears to be on the brink of starvation. It struggles weakly against its bonds, frothing at the mouth.

A woman in shredded clothes crouches with her back to you in front of the large iron cage.

The children are the same ones that appear in the module. The captive man is Haliq (N human **commoner**), the valet from Wachterhaus in Vallaki. The captive werewolf is Anica, a pack member who fell in love with Haliq.

When Kiril found out about Anica and Haliq's coupling, and Anica's plan to start a life away from the pack, he had both lovers captured. Kiril plans to starve Anica to the point of insanity and force her to eat Haliq.

The crouching woman is Zuleika, who is sneaking scraps of food to Anica. If she notices the characters, she jumps up and turns to face them.

SPECIAL EVENTS

You can use these special events while the characters are exploring the den or the surrounding area.

EZMERELDA'S HUNT

Ezmerelda has heard rumors that the werewolves of Barovia are in league with Strahd von Zarovich. As a result, she's been stalking the forests around Lake Baratok in an attempt to track the werewolves back to their den. Once she finds the den, she aims to destroy the pack in order to deprive Strahd of an ally.

Killing werewolves also serves as a bit of sport to the monster hunter, ever since she lost her leg to one in years past.

If the characters encounter Ezmerelda, or if she is already traveling with them, she tries to convince them to help her destroy the pack. If the characters refuse to help, Ezmerelda becomes angry. Her anger can be assuaged, however, if the characters propose a way to turn the werewolves against Strahd.

ONLY FOOLS RUSH IN

Livestock and crops have been going missing in Krezk. Many farmers there have witnessed dark shapes skulking about at night around their land, which run off on all fours when confronted. One local farmer, Stefan Moscovici (CG human **commoner**) blames werewolves for the raids.

In reality, the livestock and crops are being carried off by **mongrelfolk** who bring them back to the Abbey. They use the stolen food to supplement the meager harvests from the Abbey's gardens.

Stefan Moscovici (CG human **commoner**) is leading a band of eight farmers (N human **commoners**) armed with torches and pitchforks. The group is searching through the forests around Lake Baratok for the werewolf den. They've been at it for three days now, and are coming dangerously close to their goal. If they find the den, or run into a pack of werewolves, the farmers are sure to be torn apart.

At your discretion, the characters can run into the farmers on their way to or from the den. If convinced to return to Krezk, the farmers face the ire of the burgomaster, but suffer no additional harm.

Should the farmers die before their return to Krezk, the town suffers a significant blow to its food stores for the coming winter.

ZULEIKA'S PLOT

Zuleika has not been idle in her time guarding the pack's prisoners. While not under the watchful eye of Kiril or his loyal followers, she hatches plots to rescue her mate, Emil, from whatever fate has befallen him at Strahd's hands—or die trying.

Although she isn't aware that Emil is being held prisoner in Tsolenka Pass, something inside of Zuleika tells her that her mate is still alive somewhere in Barovia.

When the characters encounter Zuleika inside the den, she may choose to request their help in freeing Emil from Strahd's clutches, if the characters are not overtly hostile to her or other pack members.

Alternatively, if the characters have gained a powerful reputation throughout Barovia, Zuleika leaves the den against Kiril's orders to seek their aid. Using her keen senses, she can track them anywhere in the valley, and find them at a place of your choosing.

If Zuleika encounters the party outside of the den, she approaches them cautiously. If she isn't attacked outright, Zuleika will ask them to help her find signs of her mate, Emil. Finding Emil, she says, would help end Kiril's reign of terror.

Because she doesn't know Emil's location, Zuleika suggests visiting the Vistani for a Tarokka reading to discover clues to his whereabouts.

Zuleika's absence from the den has been noticed, and Kiril is eager to bring her back for punishment. While the characters are traveling with Zuleika, there is a 10% chance of encountering 1d4 hostile **werewolves** every morning and evening, and a 20% chance at night time, so long as Kiril is alive.

ZULEIKA'S READING

Should the characters agree to help Zuleika, she will suggest that they immediately seek out a Vistani seer for a Tarokka reading. This can either be Madam Eva or Ezmerelda. If Ezmerelda is chosen to perform the reading, she is not happy about being asked to help a werewolf, but will ultimately acquiesce.

When the reading is performed, Zuleika will ask about the location of her mate. Three cards are drawn:

Beast

The seer tells Zuleika that this card binds her and her Emil.

9 of Swords - The Torturer

The seer says that this card tells of Emil's current fate. He is bound and in great pain.

3 of Swords - Soldier

The seer says that this card tells of Emil's location. He is somewhere high, cold, and remote. He is under the watch of an unmoving guard.

THE BINDING OF VAMPYR

Strahd von Zarovich is a powerful immortal being, but he would be no more than a mortal man without the help of the dark god Vampyr, Lord of Blood. It was his bargain with Vampyr, deep within the Amber Temple, that granted Strahd the eternal youth—and blood lust—of the undying vampire.

In exchange for Vampyr's blessing, Strahd released the dark god from its prison. Now, as Vampyr's champion, the soul of every person Strahd kills is condemned to the vampire god.

Vampyr will not willingly let go of such a bountiful source of souls. Should Strahd be felled in combat, Vampyr will resurrect the vampire lord in a matter of days or weeks. Barovia will only be truly free of darkness when the dark god has been bound inside of an amber sarcophagus once again.

Note that this is an optional encounter. Should you wish to offer them the opportunity, characters may freely leave Barovia after they defeat Strahd.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

THE BINDING RITUAL

After defeating Strahd, the party learns that it is only a temporary victory. They can learn this from their own investigations of the Amber Temple, or be informed of this by someone like Rudolph van Richten, Exethanter, or the Abbot.

To prevent Strahd's resurrection, they must defeat his patron, Vampyr. Killing the dark god is a feat beyond the capabilities of the characters—putting Vampyr back into its amber prison is the best they can do. To accomplish this, they need to summon and bind the dark god, much as the Amber Enclave did two thousand years ago.

The ritual to imprison Vampyr can be found in the Amber Temple, and can be performed at any one of the megalith sites throughout Barovia. The full details of the ritual may be found in Appendix C.

The characters have time to make any preparations they wish to make, and you should encourage them to do so. Do not give them any information on the abilities of Vampyr beyond what is contained in the ritual text. They should expect to be confronted with terror, darkness and blood, but they should go in without any knowledge of the minutia. This ritual has not been attempted for generations, so there is no one yet living with any knowledge of the ritual's details.

BEGINNING THE RITUAL

After Strahd has been defeated, allow the party time to gather all of the components necessary for the binding ritual. These may be found all throughout Barovia, either through the characters' own ingenuity, or by drawing on the good will of the people. Acquiring certain components may even require their own quests.

At the ritual site, characters may prepare the site as outlined in the ritual text. Once those preparations are complete, and the players are ready to begin, have them choose one character to begin reading the Psalms of Terror aloud.

RUNNING THE RITUAL

In order to imprison Vampyr, the characters must read through all stanzas of the Psalms of Terror, and defeat the **Aspect of Vampyr** (see Appendix C) that is summoned at the end.

Give a copy of the Psalms of Terror to each one of your players. For the purpose of the ritual, assume that all characters have either memorized or copied down the text of the ritual. Reading a stanza from the ritual takes a bonus action, and may be done by any character. Only one stanza may be read per round.

To begin the ritual, have one character read the "Character Read Aloud" entry of the Psalm of Bone. Then you, the Dungeon Master, read aloud your text for that psalm and resolve the mechanical effects associated with it. When finished, move on to the next psalm and repeat this process.

At the end of the Psalm of Darkness, roll initiative and implement **Vampyr's Essence** (see Appendix C), a complex trap. The active elements of this trap will trigger on the defined initiative counts, and the dynamic elements of the trap will trigger in response to character actions. The goal of Vampyr's Essence is to stop the ritual, either by snuffing out the ritual lanterns, or by preventing the characters from reciting the ritual's text. Barring that, its summoned minions will attempt to kill the characters by any means possible.

If a full round passes without the proper psalm or stanza being recited, the ritual fails.

After the final stanza of the Psalm of Amber is read, Vampyr engages in one last-ditch effort to remain free. It summons the Aspect of Vampyr in an attempt to kill the characters. Should the characters defeat the aspect, the ritual is complete and Vampyr is locked away once more!

RITUAL LANTERNS

Light is the bane of a dark god such as Vampyr. As part of the ritual, blessed lanterns are placed around the summoning circle. During the ritual, Vampyr's Essence will attempt to snuff out the light of these lanterns. If all of them go out, the ritual fails!

Relighting one of the ritual lanterns requires a bonus action and a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival), Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Intelligence (Religion) check, as the mists will attempt to smother any flame about to be lit and dampen the spirits or drag at the fingers of those who are attempting the task.

VICTORY AND FAILURE CONDITIONS

Successfully completing the ritual will bind Vampyr into a block of amber. At that point, Barovia is freed of the dark god's influence and Strahd will never trouble the land again.

The ritual to bind Vampyr is successful if all of the following conditions are met:

- All stanzas of the Psalms of Terror have been read.
- At least one ritual lantern remains lit at all times.
- The Aspect of Vampyr is defeated.

In the event that Vampyr is successfully bound in amber, read the following boxed text:

As the Aspect of Vampyr is slain, reality itself seems to tremble for an infinite moment. Vampyr emits a shriek of rage and despair that goes through your bones. The mists around you seem to be drawn together, coalescing on the block of amber at the center of the ritual until the shriek suddenly cuts off. The chaotic scene of the ritual lies before you, the block of amber turned pitch black. Despite the scene about you, a new light seems to shine over Barovia as if a veil has been finally lifted.

If any of the following events occur during the ritual, the ritual fails and Vampyr is let loose.

- A full round passes without any character reciting the appropriate psalm of the ritual.
- All ritual lanterns have been extinguished.
- All party members have been reduced to zero hit points.

Should the ritual fail, read the following boxed text:

As the last of you succumbs to the darkness, a shadow is drawn across your bodies and souls. The last thing you see before the mists claim you is a face, laughing in the darkness, its snicker mounting to a bellow that rings in your ears like a bell of doom—and the darkness that claims you is no relief at all.

RELICS OF BAROVIA

Two magical relics that have already aided the characters in defeating Strahd might save their lives once more.

HOLY SYMBOL OF RAVENKIND

The Sunlight property of this relic can be used to break through Vampyr's mist in the ritual site, though it sheds only dim light in a 30 foot radius. Everyone within the light shed by the holy symbol has advantage on saving throws against Vampyr's abilities.

SUNSWORD

Within Vampyr's mist, the Sunsword's light spreads to a 15 foot radius. Everyone within the light shed by the sunsword has advantage on saving throws against Vampyr's abilities.

EPILOGUE

All good things must come to an end, and so too must your *Curse of Strahd* campaign. Although your journey started out like thousands of others throughout the world, it will end in a way that is quite unique to your own group. The specifics of the ending and epilogue of your adventures in Barovia will depend entirely on the actions of your players during the entire course of the game, which NPCs survived, and the state of the game world as a whole.

This chapter aims to provide some guidance on how to prepare and run an epilogue to wrap up this most memorable of campaigns.

VIDEO COMPANION

Watch the [companion video for this chapter](#) on YouTube.

WHY RUN AN EPILOGUE?

In books, an epilogue steps back from the main plot and focuses on small details in the wake of what happened during the story. This often involves looking at the lives of individual characters, and how they've been affected. Likewise, in your *Curse of Strahd* game, an epilogue lets you and your players examine how their adventure and actions within Barovia have affected not only the land and its inhabitants, but their own characters as well.

An epilogue provides a unique low-stakes opportunity to explore into the near future. Generally, no dice are thrown, no hit points are required, and the rules are set aside for the sake of narrative freedom. You and your players both get a chance to tie up loose ends and engage in freeform narrative and world building.

WHEN TO RUN AN EPILOGUE

You may run an epilogue whenever your campaign has come to an end, regardless of how it came to an end. Perhaps Strahd has triumphed against your party, or perhaps he is naught but dust within his coffin. Either way, the journey that you have undergone deserves a fitting end.

The epilogue itself is usually conducted in one of two ways. Either during the final session of the game as an improvisation, or during its own individual session. In the latter case, your players are to write their epilogues individually, and send them to you. At that point, you may read them over and work them in to

the epilogue for the overall world and its NPCs. Feel free to pass ideas back and forth at this stage to make everything fit together and feel right, just like you may have done with character backstories at the start of your campaign.

ENDING TYPE

As the Dungeon Master, it's your job to figure out what has happened to the land of Barovia in the wake of the party's actions. The specifics of what happens depends largely on the actions of the party over the course of the campaign. In order to simplify things, try to figure out what kind of ending the party has earned: good, bad, or neutral.

GOOD ENDING

Here are some general ideas of what might constitute a "good ending" in *Curse of Strahd*.

- Strahd has been defeated.
- Barovia has returned to the material plane, or its inhabitants are allowed to escape through the mists.
- Ireena/Tatyana has been reunited with Sergei.
- The beacon has been lit at Argynvostholt.
- The werewolves are no longer stealing children.
- The winery has returned to full operation.
- Old Bonegrinder will never be used to grind the bones of children again.
- Vallaki's political situation has been stabilized.

BAD ENDING

On the other hand, the following situations may signify a bad ending:

- Strahd has defeated the characters.
- Barovia remains locked away in the mists.
- A new dark lord has rising to power—especially if it is one of the player characters.
- The characters have succumbed to the dark gifts of the Amber Temple.
- One or more towns/villages lie in ruin.
- The werewolves are still kidnapping children.
- The hags of Old Bonegrinder have expanded their operations.

NEUTRAL ENDING

A neutral ending combines a mixture of good outcomes and bad outcomes. Perhaps the characters are able to escape Barovia and return home, but the land they leave behind is overall worse for them having been there. Or maybe Barovia has been freed, but at the expense of the souls or freedom of the characters themselves.

TIE THE WORLD TOGETHER

Once you have an idea of the type of ending the players have earned, begin putting it all together and see what happens to Barovia and its inhabitants. Look at each of the places they've visited, and the (surviving) NPCs that they've interacted with on a meaningful level. If a bad ending has been achieved, the outcomes for those places and people may be bleak. If a good ending has been achieved, then the outcomes will be much more positive.

For example, if the party has encountered Ezmerelda D'avenir and Rudolph van Richten, the two might reconcile in the case of a "good ending." Otherwise, they may never meet or decide to go their separate ways again. In extreme cases of a "bad ending," perhaps Ezmerelda decides not to forgive Rudolph for the murder of her family, and seeks revenge on her old mentor.

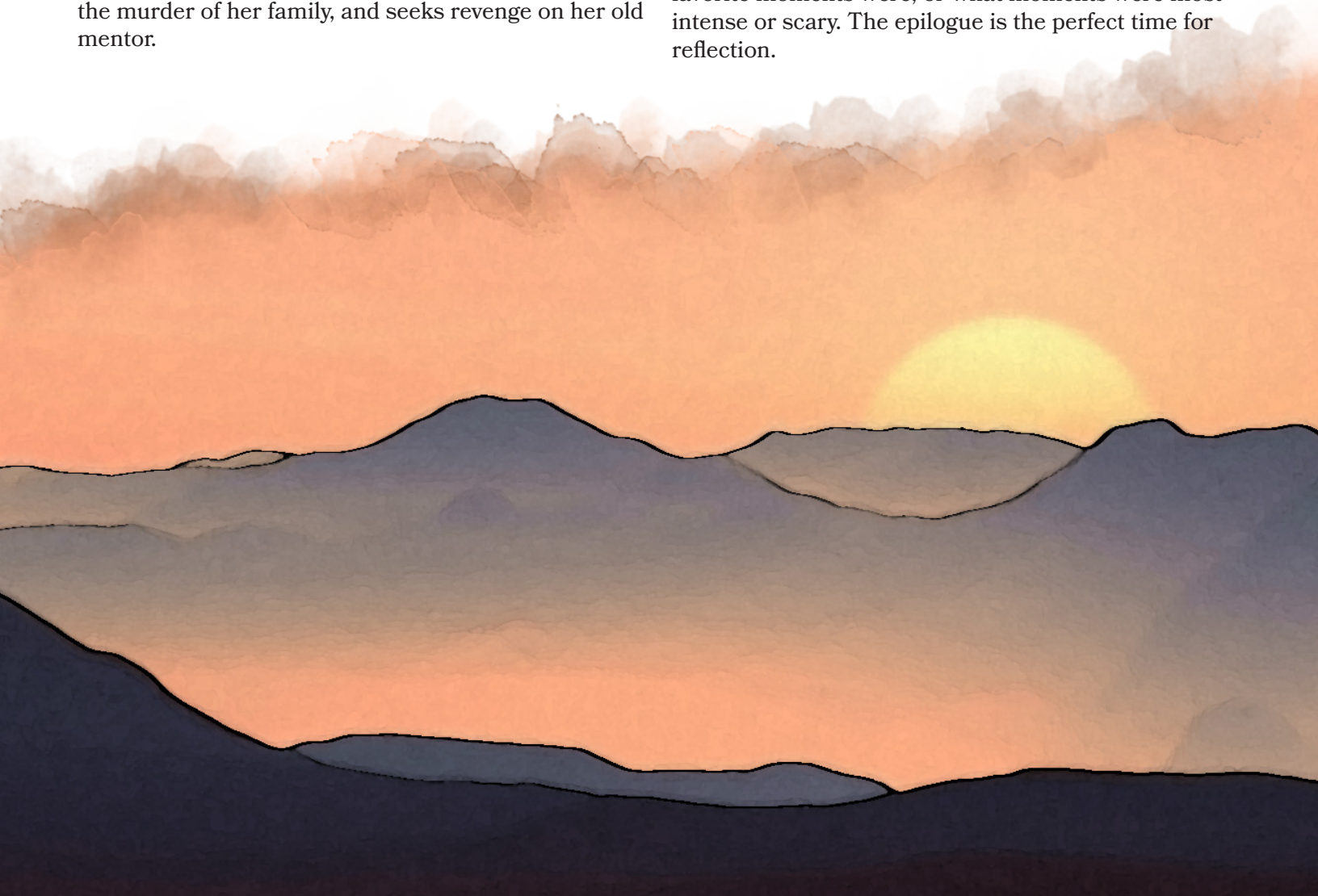
For another example, let's look at Argynvostholt. If the beacon has been lit, perhaps a character or an NPC takes up the mantle of the knights and reforms the order. On the other hand, if the beacon remains dark, perhaps the mansion finally crumbles to dust. In a particularly "bad ending," a new dark lord might seek to use the remaining knights to their own ends.

WORK IN THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

With an idea firmly in mind of what type of ending has been earned, and what has happened to key locations and NPCs, it's time to work in the player characters themselves.

If the epilogue is being held during the final session, work with each player to improvise the resolution of their character's arc within Barovia. If Strahd defeated them, maybe they now stalk the halls of Ravenloft as mindless vampire spawn, or perhaps as a privileged consort.

On the other hand, if everyone has written out their epilogue for a separate session, take turns going around the table and reading aloud. This process likely won't take long, so plan to fill the time in some other fashion. Converse, perhaps, about the highlights of the campaign. Allow everyone to discuss what their favorite moments were, or what moments were most intense or scary. The epilogue is the perfect time for reflection.



APPENDIX A: ITEMS

DREAM PASTRIES

A vile creation from the mind and kitchen of Morgantha. Peddled to the vulnerable denizens of the village of Barovia, these pastries grant their eater dreams of the most marvelous variety—and a much needed escape from the darkness of Barovian life. But like all things in the Demiplane of Dread, there is another side to these curious confections.

Every dream pastry comes with four servings, and is good for ten days after purchase. Eating a serving of dream pastry after ten days results in the character being poisoned for 1d4 hours.

EFFECTS

Characters that eat a serving of Dream Pastry gain 1d8 temporary HP and become immune to magical sleep during the day time. At their next long rest, they fall into a magical slumber for eight hours and cannot be woken by any means. Those immune to magical sleep are immune to the Dream Pastry's sleep effects.

After 24 hours, temporary hit points conferred by the pastry are removed, and the character must make a Constitution saving throw if they have not already eaten more pastry. On a failed save, they compulsively consume another serving and gain its benefits. For each serving eaten, the following day's saving throw DC increases by 2 to a maximum of 26, starting with a DC of 10 after the first serving.

If the character fails their Constitution saving throw, and no pastry is available to eat, they enter into withdrawal.

WITHDRAWAL

For each failed saving throw against Dream Pastry addiction that does not result in compulsively eating another serving, the affected character gains one level of withdrawal and its effects. If a character has withdrawal levels and succeeds on a saving throw, they retain their current levels of withdrawal and do not gain additional levels or effects. Regardless of pass or fail, the next day's target DC is lowered by 2. When the target DC drops below 10, the character breaks their addiction and all withdrawal symptoms are removed.

If a character eats another serving while in withdrawal, all withdrawal effects are removed, the character gains the pastry's effects, and the following day's Constitution save DC increases by 2.

Both addiction and any withdrawal symptoms can be removed with *Greater Restoration*.

Level	Withdrawal Effect & Symptom
	Non-magical food requires a CON save.
1	Normal food tastes like ash. After eating food of a non-magical origin, characters must roll a DC 15 CON save. On a failure, that food provides no nourishment.
	Convert highest hit die during short rest.
2	Short rests are less restorative. When players roll their hit die, take the highest number and convert it to a zero. This means that players need to spend at least two hit die during a short rest to receive any healing whatsoever.
	Subtract 1d4 from maximum HP.
3	Characters wake up tired and groggy with a major headache. They just can't take as much punishment as they're used to.
	Disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws.
4	The character's hands and knees begin to shake. These tremors make it hard to do nearly anything with finesse.
	Regain only 3/4 HP during long rests.
5	The nightmares are getting worse and the characters are sleeping fitfully. Instead of regaining all of their lost hit points, they only regain 3/4.
	Subtract 1d4 from maximum HP per level.
6	Characters wake up feeling like death warmed over. Their vitality has been severely drained, and they find it hard to go about their day.
	Reduce proficiency bonus by 1.
7	Hallucinations are starting to set in. Shapes, colors, and noises assault the character from their periphery. As a result, characters have a hard time focusing on any given task.
	Hit point maximum cut in half.
8	Withdrawal symptoms are at their peak. Characters fight against nausea and vomiting throughout the day, as they enter the final stretch of their ordeal.

BLOOD SPEAR

Weapon (spear), very rare (requires attunement by a champion chosen by Kavan's spirit)

This spear is filled with the fury of its original wielder: Kavan, first chief of the proud Kavani. He roamed the land of Barovia with his people long before Strahd ever laid claim to it. The sheer volume of blood drained by this spear in combat, combined with the unbreakable fury of Kavan's spirit, imbue this weapon with both magical abilities and sentience. The druids of Yester Hill find that the fury of this weapon's spirit are exactly what they need to lay waste to the Wizard of Wines.

When you hit with a melee attack using this magic spear and reduce the target to 0 hit points, you gain 2d6 temporary hit points.

The character chosen by Kavan gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Sentience. The blood spear of Kavan is a sentient chaotic neutral weapon with an Intelligence of 8, a Wisdom of 14, and a Charisma of 17. It has hearing and vision out to a range of 60 feet.

Personality. Kavan is furious that his descendants would bow to the devil Strahd and wants him gone with a fiery vengeance. He cares not for the people of Barovia, except for his own Kavani. He particularly despises all the settled people of the land and wants Barovia to go back to a primal state of living.

POX PENDANT

Cursed item, unique

This decorative pendant harbors a piece of a dark god's essence. Eons ago, Fekre, Queen of Poxes, placed part of her being within it as a safeguard. Whoever dons the pendant gains an instant telepathic connection with Fekre's vestige inside of the Amber Temple.

Once the telepathic connection has been made, Fekre will infect the wearer's body with terrible diseases. Additionally, she will compel the pendant's wearer, with an effect similar to *Geas*, to bring it to her sarcophagus inside of the Amber Temple, where she can use it to break free of her prison.

The effects of the necklace can be removed by casting *Remove Curse* or *Greater Restoration*.



SUNSWORD

Weapon (longsword), legendary (requires attunement)

After the wizard Khazan failed to completely destroy the Sunsword, the hilt of the weapon disappeared without a trace.

Whoever finds it will discover that the hilt has gained sentience, but lacks a blade of any sort. The hilt urges its wielder to take it to the pool at the Shrine of the White Sun in Krezk, where it can gain the properties of a *sun blade*.



APPENDIX B: MONSTERS

ANASTRASYA KARELOVA

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 20 (+5) **DEX** 16 (+3) **CON** 16 (+3)

INT 11 (+0) **WIS** 10 (+0) **CHA** 16 (+3)

Saving Throws DEX +7, WIS +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Brutalize. If Anastasya hits the same target with all three attacks granted by her Multiattack in a single turn, the target is stunned until the end of its next turn. If the creature is reduced to 0 hit points by the attacks, it gains one level of exhaustion.

Regeneration. Anastasya regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If Anastasya takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of her next turn.

Spider Climb. Anastasya can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. Anastasya has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. She can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. She takes 20 acid damage when she ends her turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. Anastasya is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into her heart while she is incapacitated in her resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Anastasya takes 20 radiant damage when she starts her turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, she has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack. Anastasya makes three attacks, either three Claw attacks or two Claw attacks and one Bite attack.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 5) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, Anastasya can grapple the target (escape DC 17).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Anastasya, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Anastasya regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Bonus Actions

Shove. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, one target, reach 5 ft. *Hit:* The target is shoved prone or 5 feet away from Anastasya (her choice).

Legendary Actions

Anastasya can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Anastasya regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Commanding Voice (1 Action). Anastasya attempts to influence another humanoid with the sheer power of her commanding voice. She casts *command*; by spending 2 of her legendary actions, she can cast the spell at 2nd level. Her spellcasting ability for this ability is Charisma, her spell save DC is 15. One of her favorite commands is "grovel".

Hurl (1 Action). Anastasya throws one creature she has grappled. The target is hurled up to 20 feet. It must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or land prone and take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage, or half as much on a successful save. If it lands in the space of another creature, that creature also must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone and take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage, or half as much on a successful save.

Bloody Talons (2 Actions). If Anastasya has dealt damage to any target on her last turn, she can lick the blood dripping off her claws, relishing every drop. This instills her with a sudden blood rush and she can immediately move up to 45 feet and make one Bite attack, even if the target is not willing, restrained, incapacitated, or grappled by her. While moving in this way, Anastasya does not provoke opportunity attacks.

BLOOD DRUID

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)

Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 50)

Speed 30 ft

STR 14 (+2)	DEX 14 (+2)	CON 12 (+1)
INT 10 (+0)	WIS 13 (+1)	CHA 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +6, Wis +9

Skills Nature +4, Perception +9, Survival +9

Damage Resistance Necrotic; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing From Nonmagical Attacks

Senses Passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Druidic

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Blood Rage (1/Day). As a bonus action, the blood druid can enter a blood rage. This lasts for 1 minute, until the blood druid falls unconscious, or until the blood druid ends it as a bonus action. When entering this blood rage and at the start of each of its turn while in blood rage, the blood druid loses 5 (2d4) hit points. While in blood rage, the druid can add the number of hit points it lost from the blood rage during its current turn to one damage roll it makes during the same turn.

Spellcasting. The blood druid is a 15th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following druid spells prepared:

- **Cantrips:** *frostbite, infestation, mold earth, poison spray*
- **1st level (4 slots):** *absorb elements, cure wounds, fog cloud, thunderwave*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *flame blade, hold person, pass without trace, spike growth*
- **3rd level (3 slots):** *call lightning, erupting earth, speak with plants*
- **4th level (3 slots):** *blight, confusion, grasping vine, wall of fire*
- **5th level (2 slots):** *awaken, contagion*
- **6th level (1 slot):** *wall of thorns*
- **7th level (1 slot):** *regenerate*
- **8th level (1 slot):** *control weather*

Actions

Blood Funnel. Ranged Spell Attack: +9 to hit, range 15 ft., one target, *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 5) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The blood druid regains hit points equal to the reduction in maximum hit points the target suffers as its blood shoots out of a wound or its eyes and into the druid's mouth. The druid regains hit points equal to half of the damage dealt, rounded down.

BLOOD DRUID

Once an integral part of the Kavani tribe, the druids of Yester Hill are mere shadows of what they were in generations past. No more are they attuned to the natural world around them, and no more does that natural world call out to them. Instead, they have fallen to darkness at the expense of their ability to shape shift into other animals. But that does not mean that the druids are powerless—quite the opposite, in fact.

In the absence of their ability to change shape, some druids have taken inspiration from the lord of the land and have unlocked the power of blood. By sacrificing their own blood, these druids can enhance their physical abilities. Additionally, they can drain the blood of others—from a distance—to replenish their own life force!



CLOVEN BELVIEW

Medium humanoid (mongrelfolk), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft

STR 14 (+2)	DEX 14 (+2)	CON 12 (+1)
INT 10 (+0)	WIS 13 (+1)	CHA 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dexterity +4, Wisdom +3

Skills Acrobatics +4, Perception +3, Performance +4

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. Cloven is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). Cloven has the following spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *blade ward, vicious mockery, mage hand*
- **1st level (4 slots):** *bane, healing word, dissonant whispers, faerie fire, thunderwave*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *invisibility, crown of madness*

Two-Headed. Cloven has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

Actions

Multiattack. Cloven makes two attacks. One with his bite and one with his claw.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/120, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Reactions

Cutting Words. When a creature that Cloven can see within 60 feet makes an attack roll, ability check, or damage roll, Cloven can subtract 4 (1d6) from the result. This has no effect if the creature can't hear Cloven or is immune to being charmed.

CLOVEN BELVIEW

Being a mongrelfolk, Cloven has spent his entire life within the walls of the Abbey of Saint Markovia. Initially, he was raised by some of the more sane and nurturing members of his extended family, but his demeanor and musical aptitude quickly caught the attention of the abbey's divine caretaker, the Abbot. The Abbot took Cloven into his care and raised him into adulthood.

Unlike most other members of his family, Cloven is devoutly loyal to the Abbot and his cause. He assists the Abbot in nearly all daily operations of the abbey, and plays music for the fallen angel at night. Any threat to the Abbot is a threat to Cloven.



CRYPT CHANTER

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 72 (16d8)

Speed 0 ft, fly 40 ft (hover)

STR 7 (-2)	DEX 14 (+2)	CON 10 (+0)
INT 10 (+0)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 19 (+4)

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but cannot speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The chanter can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the chanter has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Song of Sorrow. The crypt chanter is ceaselessly playing an eerily beautiful but deeply sorrowful music. Any creature that starts its turn within 60 feet of the crypt chanter or enters this area for the first time on its turn and can hear the crypt

chanter must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the crypt chanter. While charmed in this way, the affected creature cannot help but start weeping, as it falls into a deep sorrow. The creature is incapacitated until the end of its turn while affected in this way and it cannot take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Spellcasting. The crypt chanter is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The chanter has the following bard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *message, thaumaturgy, vicious mockery*
- **1st level (4 slots):** *bane, dissonant whispers, sleep, thunderwave*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *detect thoughts, phantasmal force, shatter*
- **3rd level (3 slots):** *bestow curse, fear, hypnotic pattern*
- **4th level (3 slots):** *compulsion, confusion*
- **5th level (1 slot):** *synaptic static*

Actions

Draining Melody. The crypt chanter targets one particular creature, attempting to weave a song that drains its very soul. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 22 (4d10) psychic damage and the target's Wisdom score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Wisdom to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. The chanter regains half as many hit points as the target lost from this ability.

CRYPT CHANTER

The spirit of music is woven deep within the fabric of our very beings. It stirs our souls, inspiring lovers and armies alike. Folk tales say that those who die are ushered into the ethereal plane to the sound of a music so beautiful that no mortal mind could comprehend it. For some, however, music becomes an anchor to this realm rather than a bridge to the next. For those who stay behind, the very music that shaped and enriched their lives becomes a poison.

In life, crypt chanters were often the most skilled of bards. In death, their talent with song is transformed into a sorrowful misery that the crypt chanter visits upon any who wander within earshot. These undead are usually found haunting the sites of their deaths. Typically adventurers in their past lives, these locations tend to be ancient ruins and gothic castles. Their melancholy melodies echo mournfully against stone walls, enrapturing and ensnaring the unwary who are inevitably drawn to the source of the music. Where one might have expected to see a beautiful woman singing an aria, or a proud bard plucking a lute, one only finds a hunched figure covered in decaying skin and putrid filth.

Remember, if you ever find yourself wandering through the darkness and you hear a mysterious tune, resist the urge to investigate.

DREAD SHADOW

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 30 (4d8+12)

Speed 0 ft, fly 30 ft (hover)

STR 5 (-2)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 15 (+2)
INT 4 (-3)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 9 (+0)

Saving Throws Wisdom +2, Charisma +1

Damage Resistances acid, cold, lightning, necrotic, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Shadow Senses. The shadow can see through any kind of darkness, natural or magical, completely unhindered. Likewise, its gaze penetrates mists, dust, and similar phenomena that would normally reduce vision, natural or magical, completely uninhibited. While in dim light or darkness, the shadow has advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Shadow Nature. The shadow can occupy another creature's space and vice versa. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the aspect can pass through it without squeezing.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. The shadow takes 10 radiant damage whenever it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, the shadow has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Choking Shadow. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or become grappled by the shadow. While grappled in this way, the target immediately begins to suffocate as the shadow chokes it. The shadow cannot attack while it is grappling another creature.

Mounting Despair. The shadow targets one creature that it shares a space with. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or the shadow mounts it and perches on its shoulders. While the target is mounted by the shadow, it is paralyzed. It can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns.

DREAD SHADOW

Vampyr, Lord of Blood, lurks within the shadow realms that separate our material plane from the ethereal. When he has need to extend his influence into the mortal realm, he will most often do so in the form of a dread shadow. The darkness that envelopes the vampire god is made manifest and sent into our world in order to sow discord, wreak havoc, and cause misery. On rare occasions, the dread shadow may be sent to tempt a mortal with dark gifts beyond their understanding in exchange for a soul or some other favor.

While they are not stout combatants, dread shadows nevertheless serve as effective footsoldiers when the need arises. These creatures of darkness tend to hide in dark corners and spring up behind their targets without a sound. Once enveloped by the dread shadow, the target is sapped of their breath and suffocates shortly afterwards. It is said that creatures who die in this manner have their souls condemned to the vampire god.

Darkness is illimitable and, by extension, so are Vampyr's forces. There is absolutely not shortage of shadows to do Vampyr's bidding. Woe betide any who draw the ire of the Lord of Blood, for they are sure to be enveloped in shadow and blood.

ESCHER VON PRESHLOW

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 11 (+0)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 17 (+3)

Saving Throws DEX +6, WIS +3

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Regeneration. Escher regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn if he has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If Escher takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

Spider Climb. Escher can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Spellcasting. Escher is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following bard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *friends, minor illusion, vicious mockery*
- **1st level (4 slots):** *bane, dissonant whispers, Tasha's hideous laughter*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *enthral, hold person, suggestion*
- **3rd level (2 slots):** *bestow curse, hypnotic pattern*

Vampire Weaknesses. Escher has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. He can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. He takes 20 acid damage when he ends his turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. Escher is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into his heart while he is incapacitated in his resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Escher takes 20 radiant damage when he starts his turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, he has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

All Eyes On Me (1/Day). Escher attempts to bind the attention of all around him. Any creature with an Intelligence of 3 or higher that can see or hear Escher within 60 feet of him must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or become charmed by Escher for up to 10 minutes. While charmed in this way, a creature is completely enraptured by Escher and suffers disadvantage on all Wisdom (Perception) and Wisdom (Insight) checks and is automatically surprised by any attacker, unless it is already in combat.

Multiattack. Escher makes two attacks, only one of which can be a Bite attack.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, the vampire can grapple the target (escape DC 13).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the vampire regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Reactions

Stunning Insult (3/Day). When a target takes damage from Escher's vicious mockery cantrip, Escher can add a few particularly choice insults to stun the target until the end of its next turn.

KETTLE MIMIC

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 15 ft

STR 17 (+3)	DEX 12 (+1)	CON 15 (+2)
INT 5 (-3)	WIS 13 (+1)	CHA 8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +5

Damage Immunities Acid

Condition Immunities Prone

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Shapechanger. The mimic can use its action to polymorph into an object or back into its true, amorphous form. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

False Appearance (Object Form Only). While the kettle mimic remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary object.

Grappler. The mimic has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

Special Features

Luring Smell. While it is in its object form, any creature with 30 feet of the Kettle Mimic must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by its delightful smell. Creatures with no sense of smell are immune against this effect. While a creature is charmed in this way, it must use its full movement on each of its turns to approach the mimic. The charmed creature can repeat this save when it takes damage and at the end of its turn. Any creature that succeeds on the saving throw is immune against this effect for 24 hours.

Engulf. Any creature hit by the kettle mimic's pseudopod attack must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or it is engulfed in the kettle mimic's boiling "soup". At the start of each of its turns, a creature engulfed by the mimic takes 2d8 fire damage and 2d8 acid damage. The engulfed creature is also suffocating. The mimic can only have one creature engulfed at a time.

Actions

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the mimic is in object form, the target is subjected to its Adhesive trait

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus (1d8)acid damage.

KETTLE MIMIC

Mimics are a staple of the dungeoneering lifestyle. They find their ways into all sorts of subterranean lairs, wilderness caves, back alleys, castles and any other environment where unsuspecting prey might make itself abundant.

Although all mimics are adept at changing their shape, those shapes are typically relegated to simple inanimate objects such as doors and treasure chests. Some rare examples of the species, however, have developed the ability to mimic somewhat more complex objects.

One such example is the kettle mimic, which imitates a cauldron of soup. Its soup—which is actually an acidic excretion—gives off a pleasant aroma that the mimic uses to lure in prey from a distance. The kettle mimic's targets find themselves charmed by the smell of the soup, and are invariably drawn to the mimic in order to gain a taste

Unfortunately for those in such a situation, the soup is very often their final meal.

As you enter the dimly lit room and slam the wooden door shut behind you, a delicious aroma snakes its way up through your nostrils. Despite the danger of your present situation, the smell of roasting meat and savory spices takes your mind back to summer afternoons spent in your grandmother's kitchen. You turn and see a cauldron of bubbling soup standing in the middle of the otherwise empty room. Before your mind has a chance to offer objections, such as the fact that you've never met your grandmother, you find yourself moving toward the cauldron. *Just one taste*, you tell yourself.

Reaching the cauldron, you place your hands on its edges and lean forward over the soup to breathe in a lungful of its scent. As something in the back of your mind screams, you finally realize that the aroma of the soup is more of a pungent odor, and that the viscous contents of the cauldron are teeming with all manner of body parts and humanoid bones. You try to pull your hands away, but find that they are stuck to the cauldron's edge. An edge that is rising up and changing shape as teeth sprout out at irregular intervals.

In your final moments, you can't help but think that this is the worst pot of soup you've ever had.

LUDMILLA VILISEVIC

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 20 (+5)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 12 (+1)

Saving Throws DEX +7, WIS +4

Skills Arcana +9, History +9, Nature +9, Perception +4, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Elvish, Infernal

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Impassionate. Ludmilla is immune to the charmed and frightened conditions and has advantage on Charisma saving throws.

Focused Mind. Ludmilla can concentrate on up to two spells at the same time. While concentrating on two spells, she makes separate concentration saving throws for each of them.

Regeneration. Ludmilla regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If Ludmilla takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of her next turn.

Spellcasting. Ludmilla is a 7th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *firebolt, minor illusion, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*
- **1st level (4 slots):** *expeditious retreat, magic missile, shield, thunderwave*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *hold person, mind spike, misty step*
- **3rd level (3 slots):** *counterspell, lightning bolt, sending, slow*
- **4th level (1 slot):** *greater invisibility, wall of fire*

Spider Climb. Ludmilla can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. Ludmilla has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. She can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. She takes 20 acid damage when she ends her turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. Ludmilla is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into her heart while she is incapacitated in her resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Ludmilla takes 20 radiant damage when she starts her turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, she has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack. Ludmilla makes three attacks, only one of which can be a Bite attack.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, Ludmilla can grapple the target (escape DC 13).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Ludmilla, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Ludmilla regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Parse (Recharge 6). Ludmilla attempts to analyze up to five creatures she can see within 30 feet of her. The targets must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or lose all damage immunities and resistances they currently have or can give themselves, and all condition immunities they currently have or can give themselves, against any attacks or effects originating from Ludmilla or Woolfie. This effect lasts for 10 minutes.

Legendary Actions

Ludmilla can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Ludmilla regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Cantrip (1 Action). Ludmilla casts a cantrip.

Command Woolfie (1 Action). Ludmilla can command Woolfie to make a single attack with a weapon of her choice or move up to its movement speed.

Snap Decision (2 Action). Ludmilla can take her turn immediately. Her position in the initiative order changes to this new position, permanently.

THRALL OF DRIZLASH

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 123 (13d10 + 52)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR 14 (+2)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 18 (+4)
INT 13 (+1)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 3 (-4)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +9

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages none

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spider Climb. The Thrall of Drizlash can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. The Thrall of Drizlash ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the Thrall of Drizlash knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Vile Incubator. When the Thrall of Drizlash is reduced to half its hit points, its abdomen bursts open and two giant spiders emerge to join the fight as its allies.

Actions

Multiattack. The Thrall of Drizlash makes three attacks, two with its claws and one with its bite.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

Web (Recharge 5-6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained by webbing. As an action, the restrained target can make a DC 14 Strength check, bursting the webbing on a success. The webbing can also be attacked and destroyed (AC 12; hp 10; vulnerability to fire damage; immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage).

THRALL OF DRIZLASH

The wizards of the Amber Temple experienced firsthand the transformative wrath of the dark gods that they held prisoner. Now, thousands of years later, those same dark gods work upon the minds of unsuspecting innocents throughout the land of Barovia. Those unlucky or foolish enough to find themselves within close proximity of the Amber Temple may experience the same fate as the wizards.

One dark god that is particularly keen to transform unwitting followers is Drizlash, the Nine-Eyed Spider. Those who succumb to its whispers and promises of delights find themselves torn apart from within as the seeds of Drizlash's promises sprout forth into a monstrous arachnid form.



VOLENTA POPOFSKY

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 18 (+4)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 12 (+1)	WIS 12 (+1)	CHA 12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +4

Skills Stealth +10, Perception +7

Damage Resistance Necrotic; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing From Nonmagical Attacks

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Regeneration. Volenta regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn if she at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If she takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of her next turn.

Spider Climb. Volenta can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. Volenta has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. Volenta can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. Volenta takes 20 acid damage when she ends her turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. Volenta is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into its heart while she is incapacitated in her resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Volenta takes 20 radiant damage when she starts her turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, she has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Meld into Shadows. Volenta is invisible while in dim light or darkness, even to creatures with darkvision.

Elusive. Opportunity attacks against Volenta have disadvantage.

Trapper. As a bonus action, Volenta can drop a trap at her current location, which can be spotted with a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. The trap is triggered when any creature enters the space. Volenta can have up to 3 traps active at any time. If she places a trap while she already has 3 traps active, the oldest trap breaks. A trap is active until it is destroyed, disarmed, or triggered. Volenta can place the following traps:

Caltrops. Any creature that triggers this trap must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 1 point of piercing damage and stop moving for their turn.

Toxic Cloud. Any creature that triggers this trap is engulfed in a cloud of toxic fumes and must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned and take 14 (4d6) poison damage, or half as much damage on a success.

Sleeping Dust. Any creature that triggers this trap is engulfed in a cloud of dust and subjected to a sleep spell at 3rd level.

Actions

Multiattack. Volenta makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Volenta, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Volenta regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, Volenta can grapple the target (escape DC 13).

Legendary Actions

Volenta can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Volenta regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Shank (1 Action). Volenta makes one Claws attack at a target within 5 feet of her. If the target takes any damage from the attack, it's movement speed is halved until the end of its next turn as she hits a particularly vulnerable spot.

Hamstring (1 Action). Volenta attempts to impede a target within 5 feet of her by throwing dirt into its face, kicking at a vital area, or employing some other dirty fighting move. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target can only take an action or a bonus action on its next turn, not both.

Move (1 Action). Volenta moves up to her movement speed.

WOOLFIE

Large construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)

Speed 40 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR 18 (+4)	DEX 13 (+1)	CON 19 (+4)
INT 5 (-3)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 7 (-2)

Damage Immunities lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Common, but can't speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Back from the Abyss. When Woolfie is reduced to 0 hit points, roll a d20. On a roll of 10 or higher, it comes back to life with 1 hit point remaining at the start of its next turn. Woolfie can only be destroyed by burning the body.

Lightning Absorption. Whenever Woolfie is subjected to lightning damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Malleable Form. Woolfie retains a twisted resemblance of a lycanthrope's shapeshifting ability, which it can utilize to deal with Ludmilla's many modifications to its body as well as any other damage it receives. Whenever Woolfie is dealt 15 or more damage in a single instance, it grows a new modification from the wound. The modification can be any of its attack options from its Manifold Strike. This does not add another attack or change the probabilities for each attack when using Manifold Strike, but it can immediately use the new modification as a reaction. Determine the new modification by rolling one d6 on the Manifold Strike feature.

Mighty Leap. Woolfie's long jump is up to 40 feet and its high jump is up to 20 feet, with or without a running start. When jumping, Woolfie does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Actions

Manifold Strike. Woolfie makes three attacks, each with one of its many different body parts. To determine which body parts it uses, roll a d6 three times.

(1) Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

(2) Death Ray. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 120 ft. *Hit:* 22 (4d10) necrotic damage. The target cannot regain hit points until the end of its next turn.

(3) Howl. Woolfie targets one creature it can see within 10 feet of it with a piercing howl. If the creature can hear Woolfie, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) thunder damage and become deafened until the end of its next turn. The target takes half as much damage on a successful save.

(4) Piercing Eyes. Woolfie targets one creature it can see within 60 feet of it and turns rows upon rows of burning red eyes onto it. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage and become frightened of Woolfie until the end of its next turn. The target takes half as much damage on a successful save.

(5) Spiny Tongue. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage. As the saliva from the experimental glands implanted in Woolfie makes its way into the target's blood stream, it must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure the target is charmed by Woolfie until the end of its next turn.

(6) Scorpion Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

WOOLFIE

Woolfie is a hideous, but strangely affectionate, amalgamation of different animal parts sewn onto a grotesquely mutated lycanthrope form. The werewolf's personality has been completely eroded under Ludmilla's torturous experiments, and what is left has become strangely attached to Ludmilla. Woolfie is vaguely wolf-shaped, but made larger by swelled muscles and various outgrowths and attachments Ludmilla has grafted onto it. Its fur is mottled with stitch-wounds and open flesh. It hunches under a large hump and rows of eyes and mouths are arranged along its flanks—not to mention the experimental piece of arcana tech Ludmilla grafted onto its hump!

APPENDIX C: VAMPYR, LORD OF BLOOD

The dark god of vampires, and the "Lord of Blood" as we like to call him, made his debut in *Curse of Strahd* as one of the vestiges within the bowels of the Amber Temple. Never before in Dungeons & Dragons lore had this entity existed. In all previous lore, Strahd is said to have made his pact with death itself, which manifested as a disembodied voice in the warlord's study. This lack of existing canon provides dungeon masters with a tremendous amount of leeway in regards to Vampyr's role within the narrative of *Curse of Strahd*, as well as with his manifestation and powers.

As written, Vampyr is locked away within the Amber Temple, placed so as to tempt player characters with the gift of vampirism. While such a dark gift might be interesting for some gaming tables, it is this author's opinion that the fifth edition rules do not provide a sufficient framework for undead player characters. With that in mind, and while creating the Amber Temple chapter of this guide, we chose to modify Vampyr so that he had escaped the temple with Strahd's help.

With Vampyr loose, we now had to decide what he'd been doing for the past several hundred years.

After a short amount of deliberation, we decided that Vampyr had been growing fat on the souls of those killed by Strahd, and was resurrecting Strahd any time he was killed by a band of adventurers. While that was all well and good, and it fit into our side-narrative of soul-hungry dark gods, we were faced with another question: what can the characters could do about it?

The idea of facing a dark god in combat at level 11 was laughable, at best. Best case, it's a suicide mission ending in oblivion; worst case, the characters become mindless vampire spawn. It took some time, but we finally found the answer right back where we started at: the empty sarcophagus from which we originally took Vampyr. What is an empty amber sarcophagus but a vessel awaiting a dark god?

With the idea of imprisoning Vampyr firmly in our mind, the video for the Amber Temple left off with a tantalizing proposition: can you survive ten rounds against a god?

Having posed that question to the masses, we went on to ignore the finer details of an encounter with Vampyr for over a year.

It wasn't until nearly all other chapters of this guide had been completed that we finally revisited the issue of Vampyr. The dark god could be held at bay no longer, and we had to survive our own metaphorical

"ten rounds" against him for the sake of completeness. With the problem of creating an interesting challenge at our feet, we set forward with creating an encounter worthy of being the capstone to this most amazing of adventures.

So we finally put our noses to the grindstone, got together a bunch of play testers, and began to revise, rewrite, and revise some more. After probably a hundred or so combined hours, we finally came upon a final encounter that challenged and satisfied us. And we hope that you'll have fun with it too.

So gather up your party, stay in the light, and get ready to lock away the Lord of Blood.

VAMPYR'S BINDING RITUAL

Casting Time: 5 minutes

Range: 50 feet

Components:

V: The stanzas associated with the ritual

M: Enough salt to create the circle, six blessed lanterns, blood of an evil man who still lives, at least one cubic foot of amber.

Vampyr, Lord of Blood, may be drawn out of the void and imprisoned in a solid block of amber on the material plane. Doing so is no small feat, and is extremely dangerous to mind, body, and soul.

Using salt, mark out a 50 foot wide circle. Place the lanterns at equal distances around the circle, and place the block of amber its center. Pour the blood over the amber. When you are ready to summon the lord of blood, move outside of the circle and begin reading the Psalms of Terror. Progress all the way through and do not stop, lest you forfeit your soul.

If properly laid, the salt will confine Vampyr to the immediate area. You are not safe from harm, however. Vampyr will use every bit of his influence on the world to stop your actions and kill you. Be on your guard, and stay in the light.

At the end of the ritual, Vampyr's essence will be locked away in the amber block, which may be stored safely away.

PSALMS OF TERROR

Psalm : Stanza	Character Read Aloud	Dungeon Master Read Aloud	Mechanical Effect
Bone	The great evil, for its bread, mills our bones.	You feel a ponderous weight press upon you, as if the world itself were crushing you into dust.	You must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion and have your speed reduced by 5 feet until the end of the ritual.
Blood	Lo, the blood of the martyrs runs in hot rivers.	Against your will, tears pour from your eyes. Wiping them away, you find your hand covered in blood.	You must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or lose 1 hit point at the end of each of your turns until the ritual is complete.
Darkness	Shrouded, a sanguine evil lies in wait.	The mists of Barovia press upon you, filling the ritual site and obscuring your vision. They carry with them a malevolence that you have never felt before.	The mists become Vampyr's Essence and heavily obscure the entire ritual area. Light sources can provide dim light within the mists. Roll initiative.
Fear	Our endings are nigh, and fear covers all.	Misty shapes swirl within the summoning circle; echoes of horrors that existed before there was language to name them. Shadows of your nightmares manifest, and your soul is filled with an animal's terror.	You must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the mists until the ritual is completed. You must use your action and movement to get to the light of a ritual lantern. You can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of your turns.
Amber : 1	Hear our blooded words and heed our call.	The very air itself rumbles with the fury of a god, and the gray mists become crimson. The air thickens with the life blood of the damned.	Whenever a character reads a stanza or casts a spell with a vocal component, the bloody mist attempts to choke them. They must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or they fail to read the stanza or cast the spell, and are silenced until the start of their next turn.
Amber : 2	Let our fear be a guiding light to protect us from your darkness.	Like jagged fingers, the mists coalesce and creep around each ritual lantern, blocking their light from view and plunging the ritual site into darkness.	The ritual lights are encased in a 10 ft. radius orb of thick mist. Creatures may pass the orb freely, but light cannot. This prevents characters from seeing which lanterns are lit, and which are snuffed out.
Amber : 3	We shall follow our path, narrow and true, through the valley of your malevolence!	The mists swirl to and fro before your eyes in disorienting patterns. They seem to invade your mind, and attempt to pull you off course.	Whenever a character moves, they must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or move half their movement speed in a random direction as determined by a d8.
Amber : 4	Neither darkness, nor blood, nor blight of death shall hold us in our stead.	The mists thicken and swirl faster on the ground. Tendrils flare wildly as if grasping at your legs and feet.	The entire ritual area becomes difficult terrain.
Amber : 5	Lord of Blood, we bind thee. Thus may your name be forgotten forevermore!	The world shudders, and you feel a thousand needles pierce your skin. Rivulets of your blood float through the air from your wounds and through the air. They coalesce and begins to take shape. Vampyr engages in its final, last ditch effort to remain free, as its aspect takes shape. Two glowing red eyes flare in the darkness before you, and a set of razor claws unfurl. The Aspect of Vampyr is manifest!	Every living creature in the ritual area takes 7 (2d7) necrotic damage as their blood is forcibly drained through their skin. No saving throw is made. Their blood coalesces together with the mists, and the Aspect of Vampyr materializes.

VAMPYR'S ESSENCE

Complex trap (level 11-17, deadly threat)

Vampyr will do anything in its power to avoid being imprisoned once again. To that end, the very essence of Vampyr pervades the ritual area, turning the mists of Barovia into an extension of the dark god. Vampyr can sense any creature within the mists that has a physical form, regardless of whether they are invisible or not.

Trigger. This eldritch terror is summoned forth when the ritual reaches the end of the Psalm of Darkness.

Initiative. Vampyr's Essence acts on initiative counts 20 and 10 (winning all initiative ties).

Active Elements

Vampyr's essence can strike terror into the hearts of those who dared summon it or call forth abominations to hunt them down.

Dread Hand. The mists coalesce and grasp at a creature, attempting to pull it away from light or allies. The target must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or become stunned until the end of its next turn. It also takes 14 (4d6) necrotic damage, or half as much on a successful save. If it fails the saving throw, it is also knocked prone and dragged up to 30 feet in any direction across the ground.

Smothering Darkness. All sources of light, save for the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind and the Sunsword, are extinguished by in a 10-foot radius around a point of Vampyr's choosing within the mists. Any creature that was in light, but is no longer because of this ability, must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become mute and frightened until the end of its next turn. The creature must use its movement and action to approach a source of light.

Dread Lord. A dread shadow (see Appendix B) manifests anywhere within the mists and attacks the characters. It acts on the same initiative count it was created. It is immune to abilities that turn undead, save for those from the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind.

Dynamic Elements

With each stanza of the Amber Psalm that is read, Vampyr's fury grows. It retaliates with a fresh manifestation of its vile essence. The descriptions and mechanical effects are detailed in the Psalms of Terror table, found in Appendix C.

Constant Elements

The very presence of Vampyr is draining and corrupting to living flesh. Those who are exposed to its essence are subject to the following effects.

Bastion of Evil. Every round, on initiative count 20, Vampyr summons 1d4-1 vampire spawn to attack the characters. This effect lasts until the final Psalm of Amber. The vampire spawn act on their own initiative, losing all ties.

Vampyr Hungers. Any creature that enters the summoning circle suffers Vampyr's hunger. The creature must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or take 14 (4d6) necrotic damage when it first enters the summoning circle on its turn or starts its turn there. It takes half as much damage if it succeeds on the saving throw.

Countermeasures

Vampyr's essence cannot be directly attacked or stopped from acting, but its actions can be countered.

Relics of Barovia. The Holy Symbol of Ravenkind and The Sunsword can also aid them against Vampyr. See the box Relics of Barovia for more information.

Ritual Lights. Reigniting the light sources on the ritual's 50-foot perimeter that Vampyr puts out is the primary countermeasure to keep the ritual going.

Dispersing the Mists. The mists can be dispersed by strong winds as produced by magic, such as the gust of wind spell. This momentarily removes all effects associated with the mists from the area in which the mists have been removed, such as dimming lights, obscured sight, the darkness descending from stanza 5:3 onward, and the difficult terrain from stanza 5:5 onward. However, the mists reclaim any cleared area, a total of 12 5-foot squares at the end of each round.

ASPECT OF VAMPYR

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 230 (20d10 + 120)

Speed 30 ft

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 18 (+4)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 12 (+1)	WIS 12 (+1)	CHA 12 (+1)

Saving Throws Charisma +9

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 240 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages all

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Shadow Senses. The aspect can see through any kind of darkness, natural or magical, completely unhindered. Likewise, its gaze penetrates mists, dust, and similar phenomena that would normally reduce vision, natural or magical, completely uninhibited. While in dim light or darkness, the aspect has advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Shadow Nature. The aspect can occupy another creature's space and vice versa. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the aspect can pass through it without squeezing.

Drenched in Despair. Any creature that starts its turn in the same space as the aspect must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become stunned until the start of its next turn. If a creature stunned in this way starts its turn in the same space, it takes 14 (4d6) necrotic damage and the aspect regains the same amount of hit points.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the aspect fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The aspect attacks twice with its Shadow Hand. If Blood Vapor is available, it replaces one Shadow Hand attack.

Shadow Hand. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (5d8 + 6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or be pulled by the shadow hand by up to 10 feet towards the aspect.

Blood Vapor (Recharge 5-6). The aspect targets a creature it can see within 60 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or be drained of blood through its eyes and nostrils. On a failed save, the target takes 33 (6d10) necrotic damage and has its Constitution score reduced by 2 (1d4). On a successful save, the target takes only half as much damage and does not have its Constitution score reduced. The aspect heals for the amount of damage taken by the target. If a target's Constitution score falls to 0, it dies. A target regains 2 (1d4) of its lost Constitution at the end of a long rest until it reaches its original Constitution score.

Legendary Actions

The aspect can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The aspect regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The aspect can move up to its movement speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Deathly Stare. The aspect turns its burning gaze onto a target it can see. The target must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of its next turn.

Misty Movement (2 actions). The aspect can teleport anywhere in the mists that it can see.

VISTANI CHARACTERS

Vistani are unique among the people of Barovia in that they can leave that cursed land whenever they please. And yet, even more remarkably, they choose to live in Barovia, most of the time. Their reasons for this are manifold: some of them just never knew any other life, some serve Strahd, and some work against Strahd and don't want to abandon the people of Barovia. The Vistani are a unique culture with strong traditions, rooted in their unique position as travelers between Barovia and the other planes.

The information here will allow you to create a playable character with a Vistani background for use in your game. This can be in *Curse of Strahd* or any other adventure of your choosing.

"We had a hard long day on the road behind us, and were desperately looking for a place to camp among this inhospitable wilderness. The howling of the wolves had followed us the whole day, and we could not find any spot that seemed defensible. This is when we noticed the campfires through the trees—and very different sounds echoed through the woods: music, singing... and bright laughter! It's dangerous to approach any other travelers in these lands—you never know if you're about to wake up with a knife in your back if you share a camp with strangers—but we were desperate enough to chance it.

As we slunk from the trees and into the brightly lit clearing, the music stopped for a beat--but then the people in front of us were all smiles and open arms, waving us closer and pressing mugs of mulled wine into our freezing hands. Every inch of their wagons was carved with cheery patterns and painted in bright, colorful scenes. Their dashing clothes and cheerful manner seemed to push back all the darkness around us and warmed our hearts more than the brightest campfire.

We knew, of course, who they were in an instant, even though none of us had ever exchanged so much as a nod with their folk before--Vistani. I know not if the old tales to frighten children still have some truth to them; all I can say is that they took us in as if we were their own, that night. We shared food and stories, and I know not if all I saw that night was trickery or true magic--it did not seem to make much difference. When we awoke the next morning, however--they were gone. Wagon and horse; men, women and children--gone, as if the wind had scattered them like a handful of leaves. I cannot account for it to this day, and it does strike me as creepy, I cannot lie. But I know this--if you ever encounter a Vistana, you'll not likely forget them soon."

— Habalt Grent, Barovian fur trader

VISTANI TRAITS

VISTANI FREEDOMS

One of the most central motivations for any player character in *Curse of Strahd* is to escape Strahd's cursed land. Since nobody can pass the mists of Barovia without perishing, unless Strahd is defeated, they immediately gain a strong incentive to confront Strahd. For Vistani characters, this is not the case—they can leave Barovia whenever they please. Consequently, Vistani characters need a different motivation to participate in this adventure. This could be that they have seen the evil the devil Strahd has done first hand all their life, and they feel compelled to finally put an end to him.

The feeling of being trapped is a strong contributor to how well *Curse of Strahd* works, as an adventure setting. The feeling of having nowhere else to go supports the horror of the setting and drives the characters inexorably towards the final confrontation with Strahd. Additionally, having to rely solely on what resources they can scavenge from Barovia and the allies they make here, gives the adventure a very unique flavor. Playing a Vistana could potentially disrupt this, so it may be good to have a chat about this with any Vistana player beforehand. You might also want to impose a limitation for travel through the mists for your Vistana player. Maybe crossing the mists is possible only at certain pre-ordained times, such as the winter solstice, even for Vistani. Or maybe Strahd has taken note of the player character and taken away that Vistana's ability to leave Barovia.

FAMILIES AND CLANS

Vistani usually grow up in tight-knit families, which are embedded into wider—often sprawling—clan structures. Vistani have, throughout their varied history, often been ostracized by other cultures, always the foreigners, even in the lands they grew up in. This is the main reason they have learned to rely on each other to such a great extent. It is not that they are isolationist or aloof by nature; it is a lifestyle pressed on them by circumstance. Vistani typically thrive in their families, and stick together through good and bad. As in any family, there can be conflict, but the Vistani take care of their own and resolve any conflict as amicably as possible.

Each Vistani family is part of a larger clan structure called a "tasque". These tasques form a sort of extended family and culture that each Vistana is a part of. One who is familiar with Vistani culture can often discern which tasque a Vistana is from within a few minutes of meeting them.

GLAMOROUS WANDERERS

Many Vistani wander away from their families, be it alone or with groups of friends or found families, at least for some periods of their lives. Some Vistani stay away from their families forever, finding happiness among foreigners, while others return home eventually, happy to fall back into the loving arms of their blood relatives.

A proud Vistana is often instantly identified, standing out with their confident demeanor and bold appearance. However, some people and cultures still harbor prejudice against Vistani. As such, some Vistana will choose to blend in to the local culture rather than stand out while traveling.

Many people are enticed by the reputation of Vistani as entertainers and craftspeople, and by their knowledge of magic and lore, and treat them as honored guests. Anyone who spends time with a Vistana, and has an open mind, usually learns that the negative prejudices against Vistani are not true at all.

MAGIC AND MYSTERY

There is an air of mystery surrounding the Vistani. Some of it is carefully cultivated by the Vistani to keep themselves safe, and some of it is attributed by superstitious outsiders. It is true, however, that some Vistani have an uncanny knack for magic and even a gift for supernatural foresight.

Regardless of their actual abilities, Vistana often make a living as entertainers, amazing their audiences with their sheer skill, magic tricks, and true magic alike. It is thus difficult to tell when a Vistana is actually performing real magic and when they are using carefully crafted phantasmagoria.

THE VISTANI AND STRAHD

Strahd has made some Vistani his servants. Most of the deeply prejudiced and suspicious Barovians therefore assume that all Vistani do the devil's bidding. This is not so—a great many Vistani actively work against Strahd. They have long played a complicated double-game with the lord of Barovia, often making difficult decisions oscillating between the two conflicting poles of not tipping-off Strahd to their true intentions and not perpetuating his evil.

Strahd often does not know which Vistana he can trust, but he is bound by his own oath—made long ago—to protect them and offer them safe passage through the mists of Barovia.

VISTANI NAMES

Vistani are given a name at birth, or within their first few months of life if their parents are more traditional and first wish to see if the child will live before they form any lasting attachment by giving it a name. It is not unheard of that a Vistana later changes their given birth name or adopt an epithet. Each Vistana is born into a close-knit family and usually a wider, often sprawling, clan structure. Most Vistani are tightly integrated into this social network and wear their family name proudly.

Male Names: Advan, Alexi, Alin, Andari, Bartolome, Cyril, Giacomo, Inarin, Keldro, Mateusz, Mikhail, Nikolaus, Petja, Raul, Vinchenzo, Zsalev

Female Names: Aisha, Arabella, Daria, Ethel, Eva, Gitana, Ina, Ingrid, Isabella, Lara, Leyla, Lucia, Magdalena, Marcella, Marushka, Reluca, Tal

Family and Clan Names: See the different Vistani tasques below.

Vistani Epithets: Madam, Monsieur, Old, the Wanderer, the Seer, the Magnificent, the Gentleman

VISTANI TRAITS

Vistani derive certain traits from being rooted deeply in their shared traditions.

Ability Score Increase. Reflecting the versatility of the Vistani, you can increase one ability score of your choice by 1.

Age. Vistani generally live as long and age as quickly as other humans, although some seem to have unnaturally long life spans.

Alignment. As freedom-loving people, Vistani tend towards chaotic alignments, across the whole spectrum from good (if they oppose Strahd) to evil (if they serve Strahd). Neutral alignments are common as well, while lawful alignments are rare among them.

Size. Vistani have the same range of height as any other group of humans. Your size is Medium.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Mistwalker. You can pass through the mists of Barovia unhindered, but you cannot take anyone not of Vistani blood with you.

Vistani Curse. As an action, you can curse another humanoid. You can target another humanoid within 30 feet of you that you can see. You can't utter another such curse before finishing a long rest, and the previous one ends as soon as you utter a new curse.

The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw to avoid the curse. The saving throw DC is 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier. The curse lasts until you utter another curse, end it as a bonus action, or until it is removed with a remove curse spell, a greater restoration spell, or similar magic.

When the curse is uttered, you suffer a harmful psychic backlash, representing the toll upon your soul for interfering with another creature's mind or body in this way. You take this damage whether the curse takes effect on the target or not. For this reason, many Vistani use their ability to curse others sparingly and reserve this for people who dealt them a grave insult or injury. The amount of the psychic damage depends on the severity of the curse you invoked.

You can choose the curse's effect from the options below, which increase in severity as you gain levels:

- The target's appearance changes in a sinister yet purely cosmetic way. For example, the curse can place a scar on the target's face, turn the target's teeth into yellow fangs, or give the target bad breath. When you utter this curse, you take 1d6 psychic damage.
- Starting from 5th level, you can curse a target to gain disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws tied to one ability score of your choice. When you utter this curse, you take 3d6 psychic damage.
- Starting from 9th level, you can blind or deafen a target, or both. When you utter this curse, you take 5d6 psychic damage.

Evil Eye. As an action, you can target a creature within 10 feet of you that you can see. This magical ability, which the Vistani call the Evil Eye, duplicates the duration and effect of the animal friendship, charm person, or hold person spell (your choice), but requires neither somatic nor material components. The spell save DC is 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier. If the target succeeds on the save, you are blinded until the end of your next turn.

After you use Evil Eye, you can't use it again before finishing a long rest. Once a target succeeds on a saving throw against your Evil Eye, it is immune to the Evil Eye of all Vistani for 24 hours.

Languages. Vistani can speak, read, and write Common and one additional language of their choice, that they learned on their extensive travels. The speech of Vistani may be liberally peppered with colorful phrases and proverbs, and is sometimes colored with the particular accent of their clan.

VISTANI TASQUES

Each Vistana grows up with the traditions and customs of their tasque. A tasque is, loosely speaking, a kind of Vistani "nation", although it is more accurate to think of them as collections of clans with a shared history and similar culture. Vistani gain additional features based on their tasque ancestry.

BOEM TASQUE

The Boem tasque values artistry, storytelling, and companionship. They are renowned performers and generally outgoing, always glad to meet new people and show their skills. More than any other group of Vistani, members of the Boem tasque are driven by an insatiable wanderlust. Because they interact with foreign cultures and people of vastly different temperaments on a regular basis, Boem Vistani are easy-going and skilled in defusing potentially dangerous situations.

Boem Tasque Family and Clan Names: Bogarav, Corvara, Naiat, Radanavich, Simiuka, Skurra

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 2.

Persuasive. You have proficiency in the Persuasion skill.

Charming and Disarming. You know the friends cantrip. When you reach 3rd level, you can cast the charm person spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. When you reach 5th level, you can cast the calm emotions spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Charisma is your spell-casting ability for these spells.

KALDRESH TASQUE

Many of the Vistani's most lauded craftspeople and artists come from the Kaldresh tasque. The Kaldresh value hard work and dedication to their chosen craft. They often travel to trade their goods, but they usually travel less light than other Vistani—they prefer wagons to horses, and lavishly decorate and outfit their mobile homesteads. Among the Vistani, they come closest to sedentary homemakers.

Kaldresh Family and Clan Names: Equaar, Kamii, Kulchevich, Moslavaric, Vatraska

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2.

Crafting Expertise. You gain proficiency with one type of artisan's tools of your choice. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses your chosen tools.

Magic Touch. You are adept at improving manufactured items of all kinds on the fly but, while quickly applied, your magic touch sadly is not permanent.

During a long rest, you can spend 1 hour honing the properties of a mundane weapon, shield, or set of armor. The chosen item gains +1 to attack rolls and damage rolls if it is a weapon, or +1 to AC if it is a shield or a piece of armor. The improvement lasts for 24 hours or until you apply your magic touch to another item.

MANUSA TASQUE

The Manusa tasque is the most enigmatic among the Vistani. They are generally more introspective, and value history and arcane lore greatly. The Manusa tasque has produced many great magic practitioners, combining an innate talent with their tasque's accumulated knowledge. Tales of great seers and even a non-linear relationship with time among some of the Manusa clans have further added to their mystery.

Manusa Family and Clan Names: Canjar, Hyskosa, Tekash, Zarovan

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 2.

Traditional Knowledge. You have proficiency in one of the following skills of your choice: Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion.

Precognition. You sometimes receive flashes of sudden insight into the immediate future. These only ever pertain to others, for no Vistana can see their own future. When one of your allies you can see within 30 feet of you fails a saving throw, you can use your reaction to allow them to repeat the saving throw, as you shout out just in time to alert them of the coming danger. Your ally must use the new roll. After you used this trait, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

STEREOTYPES AND RACISM

The Vistani have, throughout the history of Dungeons & Dragons, been played for negative stereotypes and racist prejudices commonly encountered against real-world Roma and Sinti people. Curse of Strahd has recently undergone some revisions to remove some of the most blatant examples of this, such as the portrayal of Vistani as cheats, drunks, lazy layabouts, and crooks. This is a step in the right direction, but some stereotypes and prejudices remain, and are deeply rooted in past and current Vistani lore, such as untrustworthiness as outsiders and wanderers, them being servants of the devil (Strahd), and their ability to curse you with a simple look (the evil eye). Other stereotypes show that the Vistani are a direct caricature of real-world Roma and Sinti, such as their penchant for craftiness, their uprooted lifestyle, sprawling clan structures, isolationism, a knack for entertainment, and love of freedom. Some of these stereotypes can be turned towards the positive, especially when you view the Vistani as victims of the deeply prejudiced societies they have to live among—just as the Roma and Sinti of the real world, where our mainstream society is deeply discriminatory against them.

Does this mean you shouldn't play a Vistana, or that we should completely remove them from the game? In our opinion, this is just as bad as painting them in a stereotypical light. Representation is important—it is the basis for any fight against stereotypes, racism, and discrimination. One of the best weapons against "othering" someone is to feel the plight of their oppression. Roleplaying can be one avenue towards this. Even more importantly: removing a culture and pretending the issue of their discrimination doesn't exist is preventing progress. The important thing is to keep in mind what stereotypes are at play, and to remember these are issues that affect people in the real world. We would thus urge you to be aware of when you fall back on a stereotype and try to find ways to turn the negative towards the positive when playing a Vistana. We have tried to do some work towards this in how we present Vistani here, but we are aware that reframing the Vistani and their complex culture is a work in progress.