# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Werewolf Den I - Background and NPCs

I could have either had one super-duper long post on the Werewolf Den or two normalish sized posts. In the end, I think splitting things up makes it more organized. So here we are with part one! In this post, I'll cover the Den's story and the major NPCs in the pack. Enjoy! :)

## The Mechanics of Lycanthropy

Ages ago, I did a big ol’ post on lycanthropy and all the mechanics and story history involved. However, just for the sake of clarity, I'll go ahead and summarize a few key points so we're all on the same page.

### The Origin of Lycanthropy

* + In Barovia, lycanthropes originate from the Fanes of Barovia. The Ladies Three, a trio of ancient archfey goddesses, used to rule over the valley before Strahd's arrival.
  + The Seeker of the Forest fane gifted some of her loyal believers with wereraven lycanthropy.
  + The Huntress of the Mountain fane gifted some of her loyal believers with werewolf lycanthropy.

### Inherited vs. Infected Lycanthropes

* + There are two types of lycanthropy. One is a blessing and the other is a curse.
  + ***Inherited***
    - Inherited lycanthropes are more like a race than a disease. Their abilities are passed on from parent to child.
    - Inherited lycanthropes' bites can create infected lycanthropes, but not more inherited.
    - Inherited lycanthropes have full control over their changes, both into were-form and animal form. While transformed, they maintain their memories, personalities, and capability for intelligent thought.
    - Inherited lycanthropes are considered superior to infected lycanthropes and are almost always the alphas in a pack. Infected lycanthropes instinctually submit before an inherited.
  + ***Infected***
    - Infected lycanthropy is a disease which is only passed on through bite. A parent with infected lycanthropy won't pass on the disease to a child unless they bite their child.
    - Infected lycanthropes do not have control over their shape-changing. They shift into were-form every single night except on the night of the new moon. (This provides better game play for lycanthropes since the pace of most dnd games is quite fast. Players may only see one or two full moons in the entirety of the campaign, so increasing the shifting parameters makes sense to get the most out of lycanthropy.) An infected lycanthrope may also shift into were-form if under great duress, such as if their life is in danger or they are quite angry.
    - When in were-form, an infected lycanthrope loses all sense of their humanity and fully become a beast. They have no access to their memories or higher intelligence and are instead driven by their most bestial instincts.
    - When in were-form, an infected lycanthrope is incredibly violent, even if their normal human nature is quite passive. They are driven by an insatiable bloodlust and will hunt without discrimination or prejudice. They are driven not by hunger, but by a simple need to kill.
    - Though an infected lycanthrope technically has access to an animal form, they will rarely use it. Through quite a bit of practice and training, an infected lycanthrope can gain control over their shift into animal form. However, once in animal form, they again lose all sense of their humanity and act like the animal they have transformed into.
    - While either in were or animal form, an infected lycanthrope will still bow before the will of an inherited lycanthrope. Though they can't understand intelligent orders, they still submit before their instincts to follow the alpha.

## The Story of the Den RAW

### As Written

* + ***Background***
    - Here's the gist of the Den as written. You've got two werewolf alphas competing for leadership. One believes in strength in numbers. The other in pure strength. They both advocate kidnapping children, though one makes the kids fight to the death.
    - When the feud went on too long, the current alpha, Kiril, went to Strahd to permanently get rid of his challenger, Emil. Now Emil is out of the picture and the pack isn't too happy with Kiril.
  + ***The Mission***
    - So, what is the party supposed to do about the Den? Like quite a few other areas in CoS, the Den seems to exist with little player agency. Or, at the least, some natural story progression.
    - By the book, players should go to the Den to save the captive children. Upon getting into the cages room (Area Z7), the players should meet Zuleika and hear her story. Then the players side with either her or Kiril.
    - But how do the players find out about the children, the cave, or any of it to begin with? And if they do side with one half of the werewolf schism, how does that solve anything in the long run? Besides rescuing some current hostages, how do the players' actions help anything, especially when the as written text states Emil will continue to kidnap children once the players leave?

### Issues With the RAW Story

* + Like many sections of CoS, I have a few issues with the as written stuff in this chapter. Now, these aren't major issues fortunately, but there's still enough that I'll go ahead and comment on it.
  + ***Kids in Trouble***
    - By this point in the campaign, the players will have seen children in distress before. Between Death House and Old Bonegrinder, CoS loves to use crying kids as a hook. While I understand conditioning youths into the werewolf cult thinking is easier than conditioning adults, I honestly don't think it matters if captives are grown or not. If anything, the captives being only children just seems like the book's cheaper way to add an extra level of grotesqueness to the chapter.
    - I fully admit that this one may just be my personal opinion. If you like the pack only abducting kiddos, that's totally fine. I personally just made anyone outside of city walls at night fair game to the pack, old or young.
  + ***A Little Too Evil***
    - I'm all about dark and horrific characters. I love evil NPCs and their wickedness. However, I'm not sure it really works in the Den chapter. As written, both Emil and Kiril and their respective ideologies are equally bad. Siding with either is a lose/lose situation for the players.
    - That would be fine if the players had no other choice. Forcing them to choose the lesser of two evils could be great fun. However, specifically with the Den, there is another choice: Get rid of all the werewolves.
    - If you walked into a room where two zombies were fighting over the best way to make new zombies, you wouldn't really care to hear them out. More than likely, you'd be like, "F this, you both get to die and then no more zombie problem. Period."
    - Most player parties will react similarly with the Werewolf Den. If, by chance, you have some super pacifist players, maybe they'll look into curing all the werewolves at once instead of killing them. But more than likely, you're looking at the death of most of the major players in the Den and the scattering of the remaining pack members. While that's a viable ending for the Den, it just doesn't really feel complete to me.

## The New Story

* I've embellished a few things to make the plot for this location more relatable. Mainly, I made the line between good and evil more clear, casting Emil has the rightful leader of the pack and Kiril as an evil for the players to defeat.

### A Matter of Succession

* + ***Old Skennis***
    - Until quite recently, Skennis was the pack leader. He was eldest and an inherited werewolf. However, he's now too old to protect and lead the pack properly. Normally, werewolf succession occurs when a pack leader dies. The werewolf life is hardly peaceful, after all. Skennis is one of the few who actually gets to pass on his leadership willingly. It's a rare honor and the entire pack holds Skennis in high regard.
    - Under Skennis' leadership, no new werewolves were added to the pack purposefully. In other words, he didn't go out and kidnap people or have the pack infect a stray humanoid or two for funsies. As a result, the pack has stayed quite safe over the last few decades. There haven't been nearly as many lynch mobs from townsfolk or as many hunters sent after them as there were in the past. However, that also means that the pack hasn't grown in quite a long time. In fact, their numbers have dwindled drastically over the last thirty years.
  + ***Tests of Strength***
    - On Skennis' retirement, both Kiril and Emil were the front runners for new pack alpha. Both potential leaders believe that new members must be added to the pack for it to survive. However, they have different ideas on how to go about it (detailed later in this post).
    - Werewolves have a particular culture in Barovia, one that values physical strength. (I don't know if the following is true in dnd lore or not, but it fits here and I like it.) The Barovian pack is not one who schemes. They don't have popularity contests and fists hold more sway than words. They consider things like poison and backstabs to be coward's weapons. And loyalty and honor are tenants that hold up the pack.
    - If there happens to be a big dispute between members of the pack, the arguers fight. Remember that werewolves are immune to physical damage (any wound heals instantly), even from other werewolves. So hardcore fights are almost never deadly. The winner of a duel is considered right in their argument. In the event that there's an argument that can't be solved with battle, the pack alpha settles the dispute.
    - When Kiril and Emil met for their duel for new alpha, the battle was harsh and long, lasting several hours. They were well matched. While Kiril was physically stronger, Emil was far more tactically strong. However, at the end of the fight, Emil was clearly winning.
    - Sensing her mate's loss, Bianca became enraged. As an infected lycanthrope, she had no control over her shift and raged out of control. The fight was interrupted in favor of quelling Bianca's fury.
  + ***Strahd's Intervention***
    - Kiril and Emil's fight would have had to have been restarted. However, at that point the pack were already accepting Emil as their new alpha. Kiril, angry and shamed, fled in the night rather than face him again. However, he wasn't gone long.
    - Kiril went to Strahd himself. Kiril offered Strahd the loyalty of the pack in return for Emil's removal. And Strahd agreed.

## Emil

As written, Emil believes that the strength of the pack comes in numbers. That's simple enough, but I've gone ahead and created a slightly expanded reasoning behind this belief.

### Emil's Beliefs

* + ***Freedom and Nature***
    - Emil truly believes that lycanthropy is a form of freedom. He believes that the gift of the Huntress is sacred and should be shared with others, even if by force. To Emil, turning another into a werewolf is to grant them an escape from the shackles of humanity.
    - As such, Emil revels in his own shift, preferring to run with his pack under the moonlight. He even relishes in the violence provided by his race. Ripping into the flesh of animals and feeling the crunch of bones between his jaws is a sort of simplistic joy that civilized humanoids cannot understand.
    - Emil isn't a huge fan of civilization. Modern comforts don't please him and new technologies hold no interest. Think of Emil like a brute hippie naturalist, who'd rather sleep in a tree and bathe in a river than go to the nearby camping park for a quick shower and a tent.
  + ***Strength and Honor***
    - Emil, like the rest of the pack, believes hardcore in honor and strength. He is brutally honest and up front with his ideas and opinions and he's terrible at keeping secrets. He's courageous to a fault and never backs down from a challenge.
    - Additionally, Emil is a masterful fighter. Yes, like most werewolves, he's brutal in battle. But he's also really good at reading his opponents and waiting for the opportune moments to strike. He would never do something so dishonorable as attacking an enemy who's back is turned. But if he observes that an enemy favors their right side in battle, Emil would wait to attack their left. This tactical use of his already brute strength is the reason why Emil would win against Kiril.

### Emil as Alpha

* + If Emil were to take over the pack, he would encourage the addition of new members. But not in the way the book suggests.
  + ***Bloodlust***
    - Like I just mentioned, Emil is one with his inner beast and sees absolutely nothing wrong with being a werewolf. He even considers infected lycanthropes as blessed individuals and treats them as such. When the infected werewolves are turned, he and the other inherited just make sure to guide their bloodlust appropriately.
    - In other words, Emil steers his kin away from major settlements. Though the pack is quite powerful, they all know that drawing too much unnecessary attention from humans is dangerous in the long run. That's how you end up with angry mobs burning down the Slavic Woods. Emil certainly doesn't want that.
    - Instead, when the pack hunts at night, Emil guides them through the wilderness in hunt of other animals. Deer, mainly. But sometimes the odd boar or bear could cross their path. These hunts would satiate the pack's need to hunt, kill, and find food all at once.
  + ***Humans in the Woods***
    - However, every so often there's a humanoid wondering the woods at night. Sometimes they're lost, other times they're travelers making camp. Under Skennis' rule, these people were either avoided entirely or outright killed.
    - To Emil, such individuals are in the wood at the providence of the Huntress, sent to them to be freed of their human chains. Emil would encourage the pack to attack these people, but not kill them. Those who changed would be welcomed into the pack as strong survivors. Those who did not would be left to go on their way.
    - Is this a good ideology? No. Emil's still forcing lycanthropy on unsuspecting victims. But at least he's not outright kidnapping people in this version. Additionally, you can reasonably argue this practice while role-playing Emil. It's easy to say that the pack is caught in bloodlust and changing a passerby is better than killing them. And remember that Emil doesn't consider lycanthropy a bad thing. He might even be insulted if the players call it a disease or something akin to, say, vampirism. ;)

Overall, Emil is the narratively preferred leader of the pack. If he ends up as alpha, the werewolves won't be actively hunting humans, invading villages, or kidnapping people. Instead, they'll keep to their hunting grounds (the upper left corner of Barovia) and only recruit the odd Barovian stupid enough to wonder the woods at night during a great hunt.

## Kiril

As written, Kiril believes that only the strongest should be werewolves; that lycanthropy is only earned by those who are worthy.

### Kiril's Beliefs

* If Emil loves a werewolf's connection with nature, Kiril loves a werewolf's natural strength. He's pretty much a brute who has taken the pack's trust of physical strength to an entirely new level. In physical prowess alone, Kiril is by far the strongest member of the pack.
* Kiril actively believes that werewolves are a superior race, better than other humanoids in every way. To Emil, humans are to werewolves what monkeys are to humans. He doesn't just look down on humanoids. He's actively disgusted by them. That a weakling can win an argument by talking is abhorrent. That they grow their food instead of hunt it is shameful.
* To Kiril, even infected lycanthropes were never human to begin with. They were truly werewolves who had not yet found their potential.

### Kiril as Alpha

* + Kiril has none of Emil or Skennis' hesitation in killing humans. Remember, humans are lesser beings to him. A mob of humans or a hunter are no match for the pack. The pack would always win. Or so Kiril believes.
  + Similarly, Kiril doesn't care about adding new members to the pack for the sake of safety. As far as he's concerned, a pack of four could still take on a thousand humans. However, he hates that potential werewolves are out there, trapped in their human skin and bound by human rules. If he were alpha, he would hunt down such people and weed out the strong so that they may know the freedom of lycanthropy.
  + And that's what he's been doing since he got rid of Emil. Kiril has been kidnapping humans (passerby, travelers, ect.) and forcing them to fight to the death. The last human standing is obviously a werewolf and is subsequently changed.
  + Though the rest of the pack follow Kiril as alpha now, they aren't happy with his leadership. Whether or not they agree with Kiril's ideology doesn't matter. What matters is that he didn't rightfully defeat Emil in combat. That doesn't sit well with the pack at all.

In the long run, Kiril as alpha is not a good thing. Though he's mostly stayed to the forests so far, it won't be long until he starts actively attacking towns. Kresk will be first to really meet the pack. And as the number of werewolves grows exponentially, finding food in the woods will get more difficult. It would only be a matter of time before someone like van Richten and/or Ezmerelda comes along and exterminates the whole pack, unjustly killing potentially peaceful werewolves who were just following their corrupt leader.

## Other Pack Members

Other than Emil and Kiril, there are only a few other inherited werewolves in the pack: Zuleika, Skennis, Wencencia, and Franz. This section will just be a quick rundown of these guys.

### Zuleika

* + Zuleika is Emil's mate. Though you might call them husband and wife, they aren't technically married. Marriage is a more civilized convention after all. They're just mates. However, if you're role-playing either Emil or Zuleika, they primary refer to each other as, "my beloved." Not using the term, "mate," is good especially for Emil, who the players will likely meet in Castle Ravenloft. A better term of endearment won't tip off players that he's a werewolf.
  + Zuleika is a lot like her mate and believes what he believes. However, if Emil is a mountain, Zuleika is a howling wind. She's fierce in battle and incredibly agile. She doesn't know how to back down from a good fight and is likely the fastest member of the pack in pure speed.
  + Zuleika doesn't know Emil is alive. No one in the pack does, actually. They all think he's dead. And that's why they all follow Kiril as well, because there's no one else fit to lead.
  + Zuleika hates Kiril. Though she can't say so openly, she doesn't consider him alpha. She's been carefully watching Kiril and training herself so that she may soon challenge him to her own duel. However, though she herself believes otherwise, she's unlikely to win.
  + Zuleika's hatred also makes her the only werewolf somewhat open to underhanded tactics. If the players sympathize with her, they might be able to convince her to fight dirty. Zuleika won't like it, but hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Once Kiril is dead, she'd willingly admit her shame, accept a fitting punishment, and step down as alpha, giving leadership to Franz instead.

### Bianca

* + Bianca is an infected lycanthrope and Kiril's mate. She's incredibly beautiful and the most physically appealing of the pack. However, she's crazy as hell and incredibly volatile, using violence as a first reaction in almost every situation. Long story short, I basically played her as Kiril's Bellatrix Lestrange.

### Skennis

* + Like I said, Skennis is the former pack alpha. Though he follows the way of the pack, he's not fond of either Emil or Kiril. He's pretty sure that both alphas will eventually get the pack killed. He's just happy he'll probably die of old age before he gets to see that happen.
  + Skennis is a bitter old dog who sides with no one but himself. He cares not for Zuleika's plight or the former feud between Emil and Kiril. In fact, if he got right down to it, he'd much prefer it if Franz became alpha.

### Franz

* + I would just nix the short line about Franz being vicious and merciless. That's Kiril now.
  + Instead, Franz is Skennis' biological nephew, son of Skennis' sister now long dead. Though a reasonably good fighter and an inherited lycanthrope, Franz is hardly leader material. He has no desire to be alpha and won't take the mantle unless there's no one else left to do so.

### Wencencia

* + Wencencia is an older woman and the resident den mother. Have you ever seen one of those middle-aged mothers who have already raised three kids and are absolutely beyond the point of taking bullshit of any sort from anyone? That's Wencencia. Though a great caregiver, she doesn't coddle. And all it would take her is a look to stop any shenanigans.

## Wrap Up

* With all that being said, I think the story behind the Werewolf Den is much more clear-cut now. Emil is good (mostly). Kiril is bad. The players need to do something about it.
* Werewolves are People Too
  + CoS loves to assume that if someone has a monster stat block, they're just a foe. For instance, a vampire spawn? No different than a giant spider or mindless ooze. But that's simply not true. Werewolves, like spawn, are technically NPCs. They have lives, personalities, and beliefs. Hopefully, the expansions I've made to Emil and Kiril have exemplified that ideology.
  + The way I see it, vilifying the entire werewolf pack of Barovia is pretty meh. To me, they're no different than, say, a leper colony in the middle ages. They're still people, but they've banded together to live their own lives away from others. Can they still be dangerous to normal humanoids? Absolutely. But do they still have the right to live? Yes. They shouldn't just be a nest of bloodthirsty baddies for your players to exterminate.
* Making Emil and Zuleika more likable, understandable NPCs gives the players someone to fight for. And changing the tactics and methodology behind creating new werewolves gives the players a reason to want the werewolf pack to survive.

# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Werewolf Den II - The Cave

In Part I, I covered my changes to the general background on the Werewolf Den. This post will be more logistical, including hooks and changes to the actual Den locale. Enjoy!

## Hooks to the Den

### Missing Persons

* + ***Barovians***
    - As I mentioned in Part I, it's perfectly okay to say that the werewolves aren't just abducting children. In fact, it makes more logistical sense to say they're abducting random travelers instead.
    - Towards the end of Vallaki, when your players are looking to travel elsewhere, you might have an ally warn them against the nightly roads towards Kresk, saying folk have been disappearing. These helpful informants might be the Vistani or the Martikovs or another NPC you've introduced to the party.
    - Once players are in Kresk, the local townsfolk might comment on the growing dangers of nightly travel, saying more than one person hasn't come home after leaving the walls. Maybe the burgomaster would even pay a reward for taking care of the issue. ;)
    - Should the players seem interested in looking into the disappearances, make sure to include that the missing persons were out at night and all went missing on the outskirts of Kresk.
  + ***Orphanage Children***
    - If you're familiar with my St. Andral's Orphanage addition to the campaign, you'll know I added a little hook into that chapter. After the events of the orphanage, 3 boys - Lazlo (age 7), Hans (age 10), and Franz (age 11) - ran away into the Slavic Woods where they were taken by the werewolf pack.
    - I moved the werewolf hunters, Szoldar and Yevgeni, out of Vallaki. Milivoj the gravedigger hired the hunters to find the boys and bring them home.
  + ***Hunters in the Wood***
    - It's also possible that either Ezmerelda, Van Richten, or both are already hunting the werewolf pack after the recent disappearances. Players might bump into either hunter long before finding the actual Den and gain a new ally.

### Seeking the Fanes

* + If players are seeking out information on the Fanes, they might learn that the werewolves of Barovia are a lot like the forest folk and remember the old ways. The most recent werewolf sighting was in the woods around Kresk.

### Emil's Revenge

* + Players might meet Emil before encountering the Den.
  + If dinner with Strahd doesn't go well, a player might find themselves in Ravenloft's dungeon where they can meet Emil.
    - Emil could tell the player(s) his story and get them to help him escape Ravenloft.
    - If escape seems unlikely, he could convince the players to go to his pack in his stead and kill the false leader, Kiril. Remember that Emil's first allegiance is to his pack, so leaving his kin in Kiril's hands is unacceptable, even if he must employ humans to help him.
  + You could also have Emil escape Ravenloft off-screen, meeting the players somewhere in the woods. After being imprisoned for so long, he's tired and weak. Maybe the players help him and Emil comes to appreciate their strength. After building some trust, Emil tells the party his story.

### Helping a Hunter

* + It's also possible that the party might meet either Van Richten or Ezmerelda long before pursuing the Werewolf Den. In this case, instead of the party and the NPCs simply crossing paths, the hunters actively get the players into the Den quest.
  + Maybe the hunters employ extra help, offering coin for the party's assistance in infiltrating a likely dangerous location. Or maybe the party is trying to earn Ez or Richten's trust and insist on following the hunters to the Den to prove their worth. The point is that the hunter NPCs actively trigger the party's hook to the Den in this case.

## Encounters in the Woods

Now your players are interested in venturing into the woods north of Kresk. Awesome. Depending on what hooks you might have used, you have a choice of different encounters for your party.

### Hidden and Mapless

* + Whatever you do, make sure to go mapless for travel to the Den. Even though we, the DMs, have a nice little marker on the Barovia map identifying the Werewolf Den, there absolutely shouldn't be a road, dirt path, or other identifying markers to lead your players to the Den.
  + Even the entrance to the Den - a nice gaping maw made of stone pillars - shouldn't stick out from the rest of the mountain to the naked eye. At night, the fire light from the mouth of the cave might help players find it, but during the day it's virtually invisible.
  + Finding the Den is a great opportunity to explore survival rules in your game. Did the party come equipped with rations and water to last them? If they fail enough survival checks in a row do they get lost a whole day or two? Do they gain a level of exhaustion if they're poorly equipped and out too long? What if your party decides to split up and send a scout and the scout gets lost, separated from the group? These are all potentially interesting things to consider, but are also up to your discretion to use in your game.

### Encounters

* + After a time in the woods, your party will likely have an initiating encounter to get them to the Den using the hooks I listed above. Here are some to consider.
  + ***Ezmerelda's Wagon***
    - The players come across Ezmerelda's wagon parked in a little clearing. Ezmerelda is off tracking werewolves. How do the players investigate? Do they blow up the wagon via booby trap? Does the explosion draw Ez or werewolves to their location? Which arrives first?
  + ***Van Richten's Battle***
    - The players hear the nearby howls and snarls of wolves. They come across two young werewolves in vicious battle with an elderly man. The players believe the old man to be in danger, but as they race forward, the man swings his sword and slays the beasts almost effortlessly. As he wipes the blood from his sword, he slow turns towards the party and says, "Go back to the safety of Kresk, travelers. There is only death here." Or maybe something else if he met them in Vallaki as Rictavio prior.
    - Alternatively, Richten has a werewolf caught in a Magic Circle. He's interrogating the werewolf for the location of the Den and details on the pack. Once the spell expires, Richten fully plans on executing the werewolf.
  + ***Wolf Hunters***
    - The party comes across Szoldar and Yevgeni, the wolf hunters from Vallaki. Though the hunters have experience with wolves, they've since learned that werewolves are another matter entirely. The pair are injured, but know that the Orphanage children will die unless they continue their hunt. And they're just noble enough not to give up on the kids.
  + ***Crime Scene***
    - You could also go Witcher style and start the adventure off with a crime scene. The players find a toppled merchant's wagon not far off the main road. Through an investigation check or two, players can find out that something spooked the horse and/or the driver and the wagon rode frantically into the woods. They didn't make it very far. All the merchant's goods are intact and only entrails remain of the wagon's horse. The merchant is missing.
    - The following additional information can be discovered with survival, perception, or investigation checks if you so please: The wagon bears deep claw marks in the wood and there are a series of large canine tracks in the mud around the wagon. The tracks indicate that there were multiple assailants, at least half a dozen. The horse's main carcass was dragged away from the site, leaving a trail through the brush leading northwest. At one point, the trail is lost to the natural chaos of the woods.
  + ***Werewolf Attack***
    - If players end up in the woods at night, you might just bring the werewolves to them. This would be the hunting party including Kiril, six werewolves, and nine wolves.
    - If I ran this encounter, I would personally do everything I could to make this encounter unbeatable, giving the enemies surprise attacks and the like. Remember that the pack's focus isn't killing the party, but instead capturing them. Kiril intends to force the adventurers to fight to the death to earn a place in their pack.
    - After falling unconscious, the party wakes in the cages in the Den, with Zuleika standing guard. Of course, she is highly susceptible to switching sides. ;)

## The Cave

So now your players have a proper hook to the Den and some facilitating encounters leading to the actual cave. What happens when they arrive?

### Time of Day

* + *Keep track of time of day*. This a werewolf adventure for goodness’ sake. Day and night cycles matter something fierce here.
  + ***Daytime***
    - If players arrive at the Den in the day, the whole pack is there, hunting party included. However, the majority of the pack will be asleep most of the day after their nighttime escapades. If you imagine they get in at dawn and get that 8ish hour rest afterward, they'll likely be waking up around 2pm in the afternoon.
    - The late afternoon is actually the most dangerous time for the party to arrive, as the entire pack is present and alert. Just a quick, by-the-book head count means there are over a dozen werewolves and almost twenty wolves present. Those are some scary odds. If the players have met Ez or Van Richten, you might have the NPC suggest they have a stake-out before going into the Den. You know, be a nice DM and try to save your party from foolishly charging to their deaths. XP
  + ***Nighttime***
    - At night, the hunting pack is out in the woods, leaving the Den pretty vacant. You might even send Bianca out with Kiril and the others since it makes sense for her to stick with her mate. Skennis, Wencencia, Zuleika, and a bunch of normal wolves are in the cave. The entrance is guarded by two transformed, infected lycanthropes who are kept in check by the resident inherited lycanthropes. In their were-forms, Aziana and Devanka have no control over their instincts and take guard on instinct alone.

### Meeting Zuleika

* + I would personally highly recommend orchestrating your party meeting Zuleika before any other encounters at the cave. Why? Most of the Den's backstory hinges on Zuleika's character and not speaking to her might lead to the murder-hobo ending I talked about in Part I.
    - If the party approaches the front entrance, Zuleika is on guard duty at night. The two transformed werewolves are wandering around the cave instead.
    - If the party find the alternative higher entrance to the cave, they find Zuleika training herself for a future fight with Kiril in the circle of stones. She is alone.
    - If the party watches the cave mouth for a while and someone fails a stealth check, she appears behind a party member with her claws to their throat. She asks why they've come and tells them to get out before her alpha returns.
  + No matter where they meet her, Zuleika should see the party's presence at the Den as an opportunity to get rid of Kiril. I personally played her as a slightly harsher version of Diana from Wonder Woman. She's absolutely no pushover and totally a warrior woman.
  + Zuleika ends up pleading her case and, hopefully, making a deal with the party. They help her get rid of Kiril and the hostages go free. And, in the spirit of her dead mate, Zuleika promises the pack will no longer kidnap travelers once the "false alpha" is dead.

## Better Stat Blocks

* I want to take a minute to warn you guys that if the werewolves don't have numbers on their side, they can be quite the pushovers. My own party was about level 8, I think, when they tackled this location and they obliterated Kiril. They already had magic and silvered weapons (found in other locales in CoS), so the werewolf immunity wasn't a big deal.
* In that light, I would definitely recommend running some test rolls/damage for the werewolves versus your party members. If things seem unbalanced with the as written werewolf stats, don't be afraid to adjust the enemies to meet your players. Give them more HP or an extra hit dice or a another multiattack. Whatever.
* Or, if you'd like something even cooler, u/DragnaCarta has included a Werewolf Alpha stat block for Kiril in his own Werewolf Den guide. ;)
* Basically, what I'm saying is that you should never underestimate your party at higher levels.

## Areas of Cave

Z7 is the only area I actually made physical changes to from the as written text. I felt like the rest of the Den was pretty straight forward and dependent on the NPCs present in each section.

### The Huntress

* + I'm pretty sure I've mentioned this in another post, but to reiterate I completely got rid of the concept of Mother Night in my own campaign. I definitely kept the religion of the Morning Lord, but never really needed a devil like figurehead.
  + In the case of the werewolves specifically, I felt it was a little cheap to write off the whole pack as devil worshipers with the statue of Mother Night in Z7. Instead, I made it a statue of the Huntress of the Ladies Three, the creator of werewolf lycanthropy in Barovia.
  + If players seek information on the Fanes, they can find it here. The base of the statue is engraved with a depiction of stone circles, a mountain trail, and a massive dead tree, clearing indicating Yester Hill and a hidden location in the mountains (the Amber Temple, though this path is more symbolic than an actual map to the Temple). Provided they are on good terms, any of the inherited lycanthropes of the pack can tell the party the same information.

### The Treasure

* + The curse on the pile of gold is pretty cool, but can also be really bad under the right circumstances. All it takes is one magic-deficient party to make your poor players nighttime renegades for many sessions to come.
  + As such, I would do your best to indicate that the treasure is dangerous, even to the naked eye. In addition to the statue and the gold, describe how the werewolves have created a makeshift, stone circle around the idol that seems like a kind of primitive barrier. Also describe how weeds, moss, and other signs of nature have grown over much of the treasure, indicating that it has been left untouched for a very long time. Just give your players enough to second guess their pilfering instincts a little until Zuleika can tell them the treasure is cursed. ;)
  + I would also personally add that reconsecrating the Mountain Fane lifts the curse off anyone who finishes the trial of the Huntress beneath the Gulthias tree.

### The Cages

* + If you used my Orphanage add-on, the three runaway children are here as well as at least one hostage merchant from Vallaki. If you happen to have used the orphanage kids, but wanted to introduce Ezmerelda to the party or use another hook instead of the wolf hunters, Szoldar and Yevgeni might also be captured.

------

Those are my basic notes on running the Werewolf Den. This one is a bit shorter than my usual posts, but like I said, this was originally all part of one, too long post. So, what can ya do? ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

Otherwise, just remember that fighting Kiril should feel like fighting a freight train. And if the players are simple humanoids going against him, he'll hardly make it a fair fight. Bianca and other werewolves will fight alongside their alpha and fur is bound to fly. But once Kiril dies, Zuleika jumps in and claims the pack, abruptly ending the battle.

The real fun comes afterwards as you deal with any of your players who might be infected with lycanthropy. ;)

- Mandy