

FLESHING OUT CURSE OF STRAHD: OLD BONEGRINDER

CHAPTER 5

A Guide and Expansion by MandyMod



How to Use This Guide

Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd is a series of expansions and elaborations to the main *Curse of Strahd* campaign. The full series is a DM tool that attempts to add depth to various NPCs, streamline confusing plot lines, fill in plot holes, and alleviate some of the stress associated with TPK inducing encounters throughout the campaign.

As such, information presented and included throughout the series is designed to overwrite some of the information in the original text. For instance, if *Fleshing Out* refers to Ireena Kolyana as the natural born daughter of the Village of Barovia's burgomaster, this is taken as fact, even if the printed text states otherwise.

However, *Fleshing Out* is in no way meant to completely replace the original *Curse of Strahd* campaign. It instead is a companion guide, used properly by reading and referencing the original text to incorporate the overwrites detailed in this series.

For a more in-depth and casual look at the thinking behind the changes in *Fleshing Out*, please refer to the original posting of the series on Reddit. Find the series under username [u/MandyMod](#) on the [r/CurseofStrahd](#) subreddit.

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OLD BONEGRINDER

The hag encounter at Old Bonegrinder is perhaps the most famous encounter in *Curse of Strahd*. Even players completely unfamiliar with the module will likely have heard of some elusive and horrifying windmill fight. Old Bonegrinder has more than earned this fearful reputation.

As written, the encounter at Old Bonegrinder is meant to warn players of the overwhelming danger in the campaign. As a sandbox adventure, it is very possible the players will eventually wander into areas that are far overpowered for them, such as Berez and Argynvostholt. The encounter with the hags in this windmill is meant to teach parties caution.

While Old Bonegrinder is intended to frighten players, perhaps providing a combat that only lasts a single round before the players flee, more often than not this encounter leads to a party wipe. Not only are the hags capable of killing an entire party in a single round, but most players possess a slight hero complex and insist on fighting until the bitter end, especially if they learn the lives of children are at stake.

THE OVERALL TONE

Even with the changes found in this guide, Old Bonegrinder is excessively dangerous. Before running the location, try to come up with an overall tone that you'd like to achieve for the session. Are your players overconfident? Then perhaps the a tough and relentless fight will provide them emotional gravity. Or is the party weary and downtrodden, with more than a few players already on their second or third character? In that case, a crushing combat encounter may be too much and a bit of leniency is needed.

Taking the time to read your party during session prep is an excellent habit for any campaign, but is especially important for severe encounters like Old Bonegrinder.

YOU CAN'T IMAGINE THE RAPTURE IN STORE

Just inside of this door!

There you'll sample Mrs. Lovett's meat pies! Savoury and sweet pies! As you'll see, you who eat pies, Mrs. Lovett's meat pies conjure up the treat pies used to be!

- Toby, Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

TRAVELING TO THE WINDMILL

If you are using the travel times found in Chapter 1 of the *Fleshing Out* series, the party should approach Old Bonegrinder at the end of a day's travel from Tser Pool.

Ireena - and Ismark prior to leaving the Village of Barovia - should have warned the player characters about the immense dangers of traveling Barovia at night. The players will see the decrepit old windmill on the hill as shelter and a potential threshold to hold Strahd at bay.

ENCOUNTERS ON THE ROAD

Overall, it is recommended that you avoid combat encounters for this second day's travel to Vallaki. Should the players decide to fight the hag coven in Old Bonegrinder at the end of the day, they'll need every resource they can get to survive.

TSER FALLS

Tser Falls is incredibly picturesque. While not necessarily an encounter, describing the party's journey by the beautiful waterfall provides a decent spacer for travel.

GATES OF BAROVIA

Like Tser Falls, the matching outer gates of Barovia are a good spacer for travel.

MEETING ARRIGAL

If the players didn't meet Arrigal, the Vistani man from the camp south of Vallaki, during an adventure hook, this is a good place to introduce him. An hour or two after the party crosses through the Gates of Barovia, Arrigal comes riding up behind them on a roan stallion.

Unlike the majority of the Vistani, Arrigal is, in fact, a Strahd spy. Many years ago, Arrigal made a deal with Strahd, asking the vampire lord to defend the Vistani south of Vallaki in the event the Vallakians ever attacked their camp. Arrigal makes frequent solo trips to and from Castle Ravenloft, as well as trips beyond the mists, at Strahd's bidding.

In this encounter, Arrigal is on his way home from Castle Ravenloft to visit his beloved niece, Arabelle, for her birthday. Outside his service to Strahd, Arrigal is just as friendly and jovial as any other Vistani, if just a tad quieter. He greets the party and asks them about their travels, fishing for information to provide Strahd. If asked where he is coming from, Arrigal is evasive, admitting only to traveling often. If possible, Arrigal may take the opportunity to slip a missive from Strahd into Ireena's bag during this encounter.

After their fairly positive experience with the Vistani the previous night, the party should be delighted to see Arrigal and be completely unsuspecting of him. Arrigal passively admits he wishes he could have acquired a toy from the legendary Blinsky for his niece and offers to repay the players if they bring such a toy to their Vistani encampment in the coming days.

After a pleasant conversation, Arrigal bids the party goodbye. On horseback, he naturally outpaces the player characters and they watch him ride into the distance.

ADVENTURE FLOW

After departing from the Tser Pool Encampment, the party has another long day's travel across Barovia. They pass through the Gates of Barovia and perhaps have a benign encounter with Arrigal, a Strahd spy.

As the day comes to a close, the party spots a windmill on a hill. Seeing the windmill as a source of shelter, the party approaches in hopes of gaining a long rest under its roof.

The party finds that the windmill is occupied by a pair of ugly, rude sisters who are busy baking familiar dream pastries. After bargaining for a place to stay, the party observes many suspicious elements inside the windmill, including the small, humanoid bones littered about and the muted cries of captives coming from the floors above.

One way or another, the party confronts the sisters about the bones or the cries and they initiate combat with the revealed hags. After a few rounds fighting the sisters, their mother, Morgantha, returns home and joins the fray. The hag coven moves to incapacitate the party and dump them out by the menhirs behind the windmill. Win or lose the, party manages to rescue at least one child before fleeing.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Never refer to Old Bonegrinder by name to your players. It is a rather sinister title and you certainly don't want to give away the encounter.

THE GOAL OF OLD BONEGRINDER

The tonal goal of Old Bonegrinder will vary from party to party, as mentioned on the previous page. For example, one campaign may use Old Bonegrinder to frighten players while another game might use it to give players a hard-won victory. Or, a game might use Old Bonegrinder to reinforce the idea of moral grey areas and that Barovia is a land of half-victories.

Narratively, the goal of Old Bonegrinder is to get the party to save at least one child from the hags' clutches. That child will help guide the party to St. Andral's Orphanage in Vallaki and overall aid the flow of the campaign.

NOTABLE NPCs

Name	Description
Morgantha "Granny"	Old woman who peddles dream pastries in the Village of Barovia. Coven mother. Night Hag statblock.
Offalia Wormwiggles	Coven sister. Night Hag statblock.
Bella Sunbane	Coven sister. Night Hag statblock.
Falkon Tomascu	Keeper of the Feather spy tasked with watching the party. Wereraven statblock.
Myrtle	Captured child. Commoner statblock.
Freek	Captured child. Commoner statblock.
Ludo	Captured child in Morgantha's cart. Commoner statblock.

TREASURE & ODDITIES

Loot	Location	Other Information
Demon Ichor	1st Floor, in a barrel	The Hags can use an action to knock on the barrel 3 times to summon a <i>dretch</i> . They can do this up to 9 times and the summons last 1 hour.
Frogs & Chickens	1st Floor, chest and coop	There is a closed chest containing hundreds of harmless frogs. The coop contains three chickens, a rooster, and a few laid eggs.
"Youth" Elixir	1st Floor, cabinet	A golden syrup in a glass, florence flask. Magically makes the imbiber appear younger and more attractive for 24 hours. Radiates transmutation magic and is worth 500 gp.
"Laughter" Elixir	1st Floor, cabinet	A red-brown, watery tea mixture in a large, stoppered beaker. Non-magical. Infects the imbiber with Cackle Fever (DMG pg 257).
"Mother's Milk" Elixir	1st Floor, cabinet	A milky-green cream in a glass, florence flask. A dose of Pale Tincture poison. Non-magical. (DMG pg 258).
Jewelry	3rd Floor, in the old mattress	Six pieces of cheap jewelry (worth 25 gp each).

THE MEGALITHS

The collection of menhirs behind Old Bonegrinder include five main stones positioned into a large half-circle. Each bears the simplistic carving of a stick-figure woman with wings and a third eye. Each carving varies slightly, some bearing extra depictions of trees, ravens, and feathers.

The megaliths actually make up the shrine of the Seeker of the Forest Fane. Players will have to return to this shrine at the ending of the campaign to reconsecrate the Seeker and restore the Fanes of Barovia. For more information on the Fanes, refer to Chapter 1 of this series.

Nonetheless, make note of the menhirs as the party arrives and as they leave Old Bonegrinder. If they choose to investigate the ruins, they find nothing of interest at the moment. However, even describing the henge should provide your campaign adequate foreshadowing for the restoration of the Fanes.

INTERACTING WITH THE HAGS

While the coven of night hags are deadly adversaries, it's important to note that the hags will never initiate combat unless outright forced. The players can safely hold full conversations with the coven without ever entering turn order. When it comes time for your party to approach Old Bonegrinder, approach the encounter as a role-play opportunity first.

A RAVEN'S WARNING

When players approach the windmill, they first smell fresh baked bread and strong herbs. The pleasant aroma and the warm light coming from the door frame should put the players at ease.

However, before the players are allowed to approach the front door, a raven flies forward, perches on the upper beam, and begins to squawk frantically. This raven is Falkon Tomascu, a wereraven spy from the Keepers of the Feather detailed in Chapter 3 of this series. He has been following the party since the Village of Barovia and knows generally of the danger within the windmill. However, he does not prevent the following encounter or outright talk to the party. Instead, he tries to warn the party of this danger without revealing his identity.

THE HAGS

If the players take too long to knock, Offalia opens the door to either quiet or kill the loud raven outside. Otherwise she opens the door to greet the party.

OFFALIA AND BELLA

Offalia and Bella are not as well-mannered as their mother. They do not peddle their wares in town and have little need to pander to commoners. As a result, Offalia is quite rude to the party, asking them to either buy her pastries or to leave. She seems rather annoyed with the players' presence and insists that her mother - who should be home soon - usually deals with such drivel.

If not otherwise occupied by the players, Offalia spends her time baking pastries and Bella spends her time manually turning the windmill grinder on the second floor. The sisters enjoy occasionally knocking on the crate cages on the third floor to torment their child captives.

Offalia and Bella do not get along. Like all hags, both sisters long for power and seek to be the strongest witch in their coven. However, both also know that Morgantha is far more intelligent than they, and they don't dare to try to displace their mother.

Instead the sisters continuously vie for second place, squabbling amongst themselves at every turn. Offalia and Bella are also consumed by warped vanity, reveling in their own hideousness. They take well to pandering compliments and sneer at any particularly attractive members of the party.

MORGANTHA

When the players arrive at Old Bonegrinder, Morgantha is *not* present. Only Offalia and Bella are available to meet the party. However, Morgantha is on her way home and players that squint back at the path can see a distant figure with a rolling cart walking up the road with a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. If combat starts, Morgantha starts to sprint towards the sounds of fighting and arrives at the windmill in 3 rounds.

If Morgantha arrives home under benevolent circumstances, she makes light efforts to conceal her fiendish nature. Ludo, a little boy from the Village of Barovia, is tied up and gagged in a sack in the lower compartment of her pastry cart. Once Morgantha sees her daughters have visitors, decides to leave Ludo outside in the cart for the night. A player character that sees the cart, even from a distance, can see it shake slightly as Ludo occasionally struggles within.

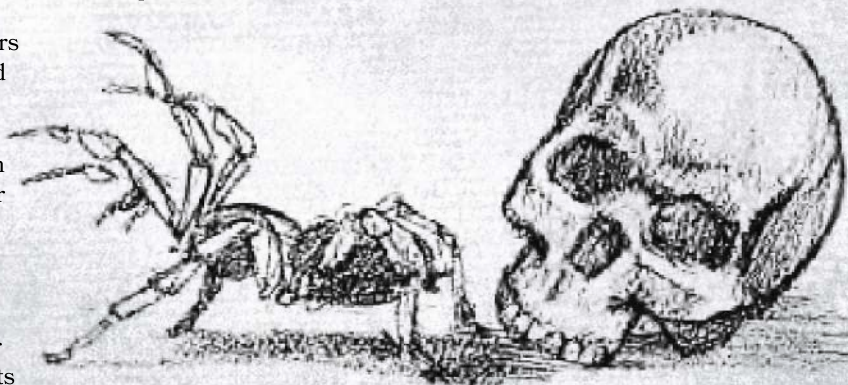
STAYING WITH THE HAGS

If the players show an interest in staying with the hags for the evening, Offalia and Bella offer to house and feed them for 5 gp. The hags do not offer the party sleeping arrangements, instead giving them an uncomfortable corner somewhere on the first floor for the night. They then give the party extra dream pastries for dinner, figuring the players will be still and quiet under the influence of their enchantment.

When Morgantha gets home, she maintains her grandmotherly disposition and apologizes for her daughters' rudeness. However, she is just as displeased about the party's presence as her daughters are and becomes more passive aggressive as the night continues.

The hags have little interest in killing the party or taking anything from them. They maintain their disguises and go about their business baking pies and tormenting their captured children long into the evening. As night hags, the coven does not require sleep and instead remain active the entire evening.

In the morning, the hags offer only the shortest and most impolite farewells.



FIGHTING THE HAGS

Let's be frank. Most likely, the party will end up fighting the hags at Old Bonegrinder.

Once the party has arrived at the windmill, the hag coven makes very little effort to conceal their atrocities. They blatantly lie about the contents of their pastries and about the muted cries from the captive children above. But they certainly do not lie well and it is easy to see through their deception.

Additionally, while night hags are known for making malicious bargains, they value their child captives above all else and will not part with them for any amount of gold. They're also exceptionally arrogant, confident they can subdue the party if confronted.

Brazen players will open combat immediately. Cautious players may suggest a more stealthy approach, perhaps attempting to rescue the children in the night. However, the hags, as former fey, do not sleep.

Combat, at least in some small form, is almost inevitable.

THE AS-WRITTEN FIGHT

Fighting optimally as the hag coven almost guarantees a total party kill.



When the party arrives at Old Bonegrinder, as written, all three hags are present and possess the additional Hag Coven traits on page 176 in the *Monster Manual*, giving them each a CR 7. In particular, their coven gives them access to following spellcasting:

SHARED SPELLCASTING

While all three members of a hag coven are within 30 ft. of one another, they can each cast the following spells from the wizard's spell list but must share the spell slots among themselves:

- 1st level (4 slots): identify, say of sickness
- 2nd level (3 slots): hold person, locate object
- 3rd level (3 slots): betow curse, counterspell, lightning bolt
- 4th level (3 slots): phantasmal killer, polymorph
- 5th level (2 slots): contact other plane, scrying
- 6th level (1 slots): eyebite

For casting these spells, each hag is a 12th-level spellcaster that uses Intelligence as her spellcasting ability. Her spell save DC is 15 and her spell attack bonus is +7.

According to the Areas by Level table on page 6 of the *Curse of Strahd* module, the party should be about level 4 when they have this encounter. On average, player characters should have around 28 hit points each at that point.

As the hags, the smartest thing to do in a combat encounter with such a party would be to ignore the vast majority of their spell list. Yes, *eyebite* and *polymorph* are incredibly fun spells that can help disable attackers, but the quickest way to end the encounter is not to disable the party, but to simply destroy them.

For the first round of combat, each hag on their turn casts *lightning bolt* at level 6 and 5 respectively. The average damage for a 6th level *lightning bolt* is 38 points, with a max 66 points of lightning damage. Additionally, the majority of windmill is stone, so the risk of setting the building on fire before such fire could be contained is minimal.

If the hags can get at least two or more party members in a line for each of these castings, they can down or kill the party in round 1. If, by chance, a party member survives this assault and still wants to fight, the hags spend the next round of combat using all three of their 4th-level slots to continue the lightning barrage.

If you *really* want to be brutal, the hags also use *counterspell* to thwart any healing magic meant to bring player characters up.

In approximately 12 in-game seconds, the hags can wipe the party. The hags, who have no use for adult corpses, dump the player characters' bodies by the menhirs behind Old Bonegrinder. Any player character that succeeds their death saving throws awakes within the pile of bodies with 1 hit point 1d4 hours later.

A FAIR FIGHT

To avoid the just-described slaughter and give your players a better chance at survival, approach the fight with the coven as follows.

MORGANTHA'S DELAY

As previously mentioned, Morgantha is not home when the players arrive at Old Bonegrinder, but she will be shortly. If combat starts, Morgantha abandons her pastry cart - including the little boy trapped within - and begins to sprint towards the battle, joining the initiative in 3 rounds.

Morgantha's momentary absence breaks the hag coven, drastically weakening Offalia and Bella. If players are efficient and clever, they can take down one sister before Morgantha arrives, potentially permanently breaking the coven for this fight.

Once combat starts with Offalia and Bella, the sisters spend their turns trying to delay combat for their mother's arrival. They use the first round of combat to transform, and subsequent turns attacking the party with their claws and with *magic missile*, trying to scare the players into fleeing. If they get particularly low in hit points, they slip into the ethereal plane to avoid death.

DISABLING SPELLS

At the top of the 4th round, Morgantha joins the fight and completes the hag coven.

Instead of focusing on damage, the hags immediately move to disable the party. Morgantha casts *eyebite*, choosing the sleep feature and will continue the casting on each turn until all the player characters have either saved or are unconscious. The remaining hags cast *polymorph*, attempting to turn player characters into a frogs. Once a polymorph is successful, the concentrating hag uses her next action to attempt to catch the frog (dexterity contest) and stuff them into her pocket. Morgantha then attempts to do the same on subsequent turns.

Once the entire party is either unconscious or turned into frogs, the hags gather them up and dump them out by the menhirs behind Old Bonegrinder.

Any party member that avoids the disabling effects of the hag's magics are instead brought down to 0 hit points and must make death saving throws. They either awake or die alongside their unconscious/frog companions by the menhirs.

KILLING HAGS

If the party manages to take down a single hag, the remaining hags ironically become more deadly in nature. Instead of using their advanced magics to disable the party, the hags must rely on their claws and magical attacks, which they most certainly use lethally.

The hags use their Etherealness to get close to party members with low AC, attacking them with their claws. They then use magic missile on more heavily armored player characters to take them down.

If a second hag falls, the last remaining coven member uses every ability she has to flee into the nearby woods.

WERERAVEN RESCUE

If things look exceptionally dire, Falcon will transform into his wereraven form and attempt to stabilize downed party members and pull their bodies out of combat. He does not fight the hags and does not attempt to rescue player characters who have been turned into frogs, looking only to help the immediately dying.

Once the party seems stable, Falcon turns back into a raven and retreats before the hags can hurt him.

OVERALL

With these changes, the fight with the hag coven should be difficult, but fair. There's still a good chance a party member could die during the encounter, but it is also possible for the players to win and rescue all three children from Old Bonegrinder.

Even if the fight goes poorly, the players have more than enough opportunity to rescue at least one child - Ludo, the child in Morgantha's cart - before fleeing themselves.





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