

FLESHING OUT CURSE OF STRAHD: PLAYER PRIMER



A Campaign Companion by MandyMod



FORWARD

This character chronicle was designed to inspire the creation of player characters with depth and verisimilitude. Since the publication of *The Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* in March 2020, a couple different player primers have been published to help players integrate their characters into campaign settings. Most notably, we've seen the [Heroic Chronicle: Sword Coast and the North](#), which helps integrate characters generally into the Sword Coast, and the [Player Primer: Icewind Dale](#), which helps develop characters specifically for the *Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden* adventure module.

This primer was designed specifically for the *Curse of Strahd* campaign, to similarly assist in the character creation process. It reflects ideas and tables found in the previously mentioned work, but all rewritten to better suit the Ravenloft setting.

Dungeon Masters needn't fear, for this addition to the module contains no spoilers. However, this primer is best used during Session 0, and it is recommended that players refrain from reading every option on the following tables to maintain a sense of surprise and wonder.

CREDITS

Written by: [u/MandyMod](#)
Edited by: E.P.D. Lucas & [u/DragnaCarta](#)
GM Binder CoS Theme Creator: [u/AeronDrake](#)
Various Art: DM's Guild Creator Resources
Cover Art: Svalich Woods by [James' RPG art](#), purchased licensing agreement with artist
Cover Art Strahd Symbol: Free Supplement from [u/BaeCat](#)
Food Art: Mrs. Beeton's Household Management; Public Domain Art

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PRIMING PLAYERS

Congratulations! You are about to play in the renowned 5e campaign, *Curse of Strahd*. As a player, there's some basic information you might find handy before you begin developing a character.

Unless otherwise stated by your Dungeon Master, you will begin this campaign in the Forgotten Realms setting, on the Sword Coast, which is in the north-west of the continent of Faerûn, which in turn is on the planet Toril. You will be heading north on the Trade Way, past the Misty Forest and towards the town of Daggerford and the city of Waterdeep. If you're new to the Forgotten Realms, worry not. While the world lore of *Dungeons & Dragons* is vast and can be overwhelming to new players, you don't need much information to dive into this campaign.

If you are new to the Forgotten Realms, the following section is a quick guide to help you understand the cosmology of the setting, its different planes of existence, and how they interact. Should you desire a more in-depth explanation of the planes of existence, refer to Appendix C in the *Player's Handbook* or Chapter 2 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

A BRIEF UNDERSTANDING OF THE PLANES OF EXISTENCE

The cosmology of the Forgotten Realms contains a vast multiverse consisting of the planes of existence. The majority of player characters will have at least some basic understanding of these planes.

The Material Plane is the foundation and centerpiece of all planar knowledge. It contains multiple worlds, like Eberron, Greyhawk, and Toril, and is the starting plane for most any adventure. In general, the Material Plane makes up the mundane world around all characters, and the many different worlds within it act almost as alternate dimensions.

TRAVELING BETWEEN PLANES

Traveling between planes, whether between other worlds on the Material Plane or to more foreign corners of the multiverse, almost always requires magic.

When such travel occurs, most use either the Ethereal Plane or the Astral Plane to complete their journeys. These planes primarily serve as pathways between one plane to another. The Astral Plane is a realm of thought and dream while the Ethereal Plane is a realm of mist and distortion, often reflecting other planes nearby. Of the pair, the Ethereal Plane is more well known and more commonly used for planar travel.

THE SHADOWFELL AND FEYWILD

The Shadowfell and the Feywild are reflections of the Material Plane. A forest that exists in the Material Plane also exists in the Shadowfell and Feywild, similar to an alternate reality. However, the Shadowfell is marked by its lack of color, lethargy, and apathy. The reflected forest would be grim and rotted, haunted by foul creatures.

Alternatively, the Feywild is known for its overwhelming color. It is opulent and wild; rich with an overwhelming abundance of chaos and life. A forest reflected in the Feywild might have trees with crystal leaves.

THE INNER & OUTER PLANES

The Inner Planes are composed of the four Elemental Planes: Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. They are prone to great elemental chaos and most are unsafe for non-native creatures.

The Outer Planes consist of over a dozen planes, each considered either an Upper Plane or a Lower Plane with either positive or negative energy respectively. The Upper Planes are generally home to good aligned beings, like angels and devas. Elysium, for instance, is one of the most commonly known Upper Planes and is home of the good aligned gods. Conversely, the Lower Planes are home to more morally ambiguous or evil creatures. The Nine Hells is one of the most commonly recognized Lower Planes.

DEMIPLANES

Demiplanes are created under a variety of circumstances, but tend to reflect elements of other planes. They may be small as a room or large as a realm, but follow their own rules of reality.

THE DOMAINS OF DREAD AND BAROVIA

Long ago, a piece of the Shadowfell bled into the Material Plane, creating a number of dark demiplanes with some of the physical laws of both their parent planes. This collection of ill-disposed demiplanes are often called the Domains of Dread.

Centuries ago, there was a land called Barovia, conquered by a king long forgotten. Barovia was part of the Material Plane but was touched by the Shadowfell and promptly became one of the Domains of Dread. Of the collection of dreaded demiplanes, Barovia is the primary plane that the odd scholar remembers. Beyond its name, however, exceptionally little is known about Barovia and less still about the other Domains of Dread.



CHARACTER CREATION

This basic understanding of the planes of existence will help improve your player experience going forward. Unfortunately, the world of *Curse of Strahd* offers little background information and your player character will have exceptionally little knowledge about the setting of the campaign.

You will soon dive into the dark unknown. But first you must develop a character!

USING THIS PRIMER

Character creation is an important aspect of *Dungeons & Dragons*, but creating a compelling character and backstory can be difficult. The purpose of this primer is to inspire players' creativity and help develop unique characters that they may have not considered without rolling on the following tables.

This primer should also help target player character backstories towards the *Curse of Strahd* campaign setting, allowing the Dungeon Master to better integrate them into the narrative.

It's possible you already have a strong character concept in mind, in which case you may not need to use all the tables available in this primer. However, if you feel you need more detail, you can consult the tables, either picking the idea that fits best or rolling for a truly random addition to your character concept. Ultimately, you'll want to consult with your Dungeon Master to be sure your player character will work for the campaign.

Should you choose to create a character entirely by rolling, it may be more fun to avoid reading all the available options to maintain a sense of surprise. Additionally, to achieve the best results, it's recommended that this guide be used in a session zero with other players to help build bonds and foster connections between the members of the adventuring party.



BACKSTORY

The following tables will help you discover your character's origins. First, you'll start with your character's hometown and family composition. Afterward, you'll figure out a few of the more important relationships in their lives.

HOMETOWN

Discovering your character's hometown will help determine the foundation of their backstory. While the table below will provide a home or birthplace for your character, it is up to you to determine your character's relationship with that location. Was your character both born and raised in this location? Or were they born elsewhere, but have lived in this settlement the majority of their lives? Is your character well traveled or have they rarely left their hometown? The details are yours to develop.

For a reference map of Delimbiyr Vale, which includes all the following locations, [refer to this link](#).

Roll on the table below to discover your character's hometown.

CITY: WATERDEEP

Waterdeep is a booming city on the shores of the Sword Coast and is one of the largest and most well known settlements in Faerûn. The city is home to over two million people, including tens of thousands of merchants and over seventy-five noble households.

TOWN: DAGGERFORD

Daggerford is a large, walled town south of Waterdeep. Primarily a farming town and a rest stop for travelers, Daggerford is a Duchy, ruled by a group of merchant oligarchs under Duchess Morwen.

TOWN: SECOMBER

Located north of the High Moor, Secomber is a small town famed for its judicial system, which was used as a base for most law and order in the settlements of the Sword Coast. Now, the town is home to fishermen, farmers, and, to a lesser degree, stonemasons. Guides are often hired from Secomber to help navigate the moor.

TOWN: GOLDENFIELDS

Goldenfields is a small town surrounded by vast and beautiful farmland, orchards, and gardens. The town itself surrounds a grand temple and abbey to Chauntea, the goddess of harvest.

d100	Home Settlement	Size
1 - 15	Waterdeep	City
16 - 25	Daggerford	Town
26 - 35	Secomber	Town
36 - 45	Goldenfields	Town
46 - 55	Julkoun	Village
56 - 65	Bowshot	Village
66 - 75	Gillian's Hill	Village
76 - 85	Womford	Village
86 - 00	Unmarked Hamlet	Hamlet

VILLAGE: JULKOUN

Julkoun is a small farming settlement, led by a family of halflings. The villagers worship at a small church of Chauntea.

VILLAGE: BOWSHOT

Bowshot is a roadside village and is the closest geographical settlement to the Misty Forest.

VILLAGE: GILLIAN'S HILL

A small and unremarkable town, Gillian's Hill is about a day's travel south of Daggerford. It's said that a local tomb in Gillian's Hill has an entrance to the Underdark and occasionally has encounters with drow.

VILLAGE: WOMFORD

Womford is a tiny village built around the bridge crossing the Dessarin River. The village was once called Wyrmford, after a legend boasting of a dragon killed nearby. The locals make their living working mills and granaries.

UNMARKED HAMLET

There are a variety of other settlements along the Sword Coast, too small and unimportant to be included on most maps. These miniscule villages and hamlets are home to no more than a few dozen inhabitants each.

FAMILY

Your family is your first social network. In the most general sense, a character's family consists of two parents and their siblings, all of which are blood related. However, the composition of a family can vary greatly. It's possible that your parental figure was instead a mentor or an aunt. It's possible that you have over a dozen half-siblings from a particularly promiscuous parent and that the majority of those siblings are dead. However supportive or dysfunctional, loving or absent, your family has helped define you.

Using the size of your hometown as a base, roll on a pair of the following tables to determine the size of your family.

FAMILY SIZE (CITY/TOWN)

d100	Number of Parents	d100	Number of Siblings
1 - 10	1d4 + 2	1 - 12	2d4 + 2
11 - 45	2	13 - 38	2d4 - 2
46 - 80	1	39 - 88	1d4
81 - 00	0	89 - 00	0

FAMILY SIZE (VILLAGE/HAMLET)

d100	Number of Parents	d100	Number of Siblings
1 - 15	1d4 + 2	1 - 20	2d4 + 2
16 - 50	2	21 - 50	2d4 - 2
51 - 85	1	51 - 80	1d4
86 - 00	0	81 - 00	0

FATEFUL RELATIONS

Every character has or has had relationships that have helped shape their personalities. These important relations might be family, a friend, or a mentor. They might also be someone the character has wronged, creating an unfortunate rival or enemy. No matter the details, these relationships are crucial to that character.

If you encounter an inconsistency by rolling on the following chart, such as rolling an option that notes a parent but your character has no parents, you may change that option to denote a different relation, like to a sibling or friend.

Roll a d4 - 1 (minimum 1) to determine your number of fateful relations. And then roll that number of times on the following chart to determine the nature of those relations.

d100	Relationship
1 - 3	You once saved a small animal from dying and it has followed you ever since. Choose one beast of CR 1/8 or lower as a pet. This pet cannot help you in battle or in social encounters unless you have the magic or mechanical abilities to justify that help.
4 - 7	You once tried to steal from someone, but were caught in the act. Instead of turning you in for your attempted crime, this person employed you.
8 - 10	One of your parents left home. You were the only one to see them leave.
11 - 13	You once knew an adventurer of considerable talent and trained under them. But this adventurer revealed little about their own past and disappeared under mysterious circumstances.
14 - 16	Someone you love was murdered in cold blood. You got your revenge, but in doing so acted more monstrous than the murderer.
17 - 20	You know a soothsayer, but everything they predict is false.
21 - 23	While traveling, you encountered a well known band of brigands. However, you managed to impress or amuse one of their leaders and now they hold you in a friendly regard.
24 - 27	A priest once gave you safe haven in their church during your time of need.
28 - 30	You and a family member were once attacked by a werewolf. Though you both were bitten, only that family member obtained the affliction. A few months later, you found this family member dead with a silvered bolt in their chest.
31 - 33	You and a family member were once in a horrible accident. In an act of sheer cowardice, you left them to die to save your own skin.
34 - 37	One of your family members has always favored you over the others.
38 - 40	You know someone who survived over a year in the Shadowfell. They are now half-mad and tell you horrible stories of the experience.

d100	Relationship
41 - 43	A person knows one of your darkest secrets. You do what they say to <i>keep</i> it a secret.
44 - 46	A witch once healed you or one you care for of a dire ailment. You now have a healthy respect for blood magic.
47 - 50	You got into a friendly fist fight with a family member, but in a sudden turn of events you accidentally killed that family member.
51 - 53	You were once engaged to be married, but the engagement met an untimely end. You have not seen your ex-betrothed since.
54 - 56	One of your family members is obscenely wealthy. <i>You</i> are not.
57 - 60	You once got into terrible trouble and when caught, blamed a family member. This family member paid dearly for your crime.
61 - 63	You were once in an accident that cost you your life. Someone selflessly paid out of their own pockets for a cleric's quick <i>revivify</i> .
64 - 67	You married young. However, your marriage was short and ended from some unfortunate circumstance.
68 - 70	You and a family member once angered a powerful mage. The mage polymorphed that family member into an animal (a beast of CR 1/8 or lower). Despite all your attempts to tell others of the animal's true identity, everyone believes that they are simply your pet.
71 - 74	An injured stranger once fell on your doorstep. Though they revealed little about the cause of their injury, you nursed them back to health.
75 - 77	Someone you care for has a chronic illness for which there is no known cure.
78 - 81	You are not the trueborn child of one of your parents. Ironically, you know this fact and your parent does not.
82 - 84	A sick traveler once brought a terrible pox to your hometown, killing many. This traveler survived and you still blame them for the death of your loved ones.
85 - 87	You had a mentor, but you were not their only pupil. Of your mentor's pupils, you were either the least favored or the least successful.
88 - 90	You once hired an adventurer to help solve a monster problem in your hometown. They solved that problem so efficiently that you seek to emulate their skill.
91 - 93	You recently discovered that one of your family members is part of a demonic cult.
94 - 97	A family member has forsaken you and disowned you as family.
98 - 00	You recently discovered that one of your closest friends is in love with you, but you do not return the sentiment.

PERSONALITY

Now that you've laid the foundations of your character's past, you'll switch focus to their personality and tastes. What kind of employment is your character familiar with? Do they have any particular quirks or phobias? What event or events in their life gave your character these personality traits?

BACKGROUND

First you'll start with your character's background. Choosing a background is essential for character creation. Not only does a background give you some insight to your character's employment or life experience, but it also gives you proficiencies and starting gear that represent that experience.

Roll or choose a background from the following table.

d20	Background	Source
1	Acolyte	PHB
2	Charlatan	PHB
3	City Watch	SCAG
4	Cloistered Scholar	SCAG
5	Courtier	SCAG
6	Criminal	PHB
7	Entertainer	PHB
8	Fisher	GoS
9	Folk Hero	PHB
10	Guild Artisan	PHB
11	Haunted One	CoS
12	Hermit	PHB
13	Knight of the Order	SCAG
14	Noble	PHB
15	Outlander	PHB
16	Sage	PHB
17	Sailor	PHB
18	Sailor (Pirate)	PHB
19	Soldier	PHB
20	Urchin	PHB

PHOBIA

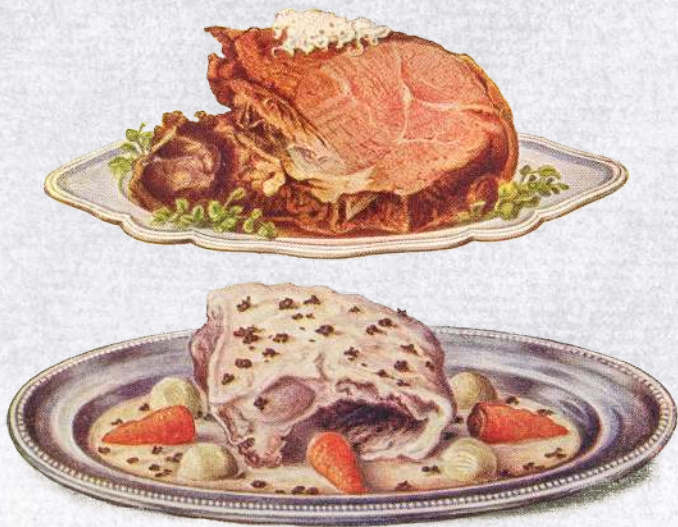
Curse of Strahd is a gothic horror campaign. And what would a horror themed game be without fear?

At one point in their lives, your character developed a phobia, an anxiety driven fear that borders on the irrational. How or why your character developed this fear is up to you. Your character has a very difficult time dealing with this particular source of anxiety and will avoid situations that might force them to face their fear.

If you think a certain phobia would be particularly difficult to portray or if you find the idea of having a phobia difficult or a source of personal anxiety, feel free to disregard this table. Otherwise, roll on or choose from the following to determine your character's phobia.

d20	Phobia	Fear of
1	Acrophobia	Heights
2	Agoraphobia	Open or Crowded Spaces
3	Aphenphosmophobia	Being Touched
4	Arachnophobia	Spiders
5	Astraphobia	Thunder Storms
6	Ataxophobia	Disorder or Untidiness
7	Autophobia	Being Alone
8	Catoptrophobia	Mirrors
9	Claustrophobia	Confined Spaces
10	Cynophobia	Dogs
11	Elurophobia	Cats
12	Hemophobia	Blood
13	Iatrophobia	Doctors or Healers
14	Insectophobia	Insects
15	Mysophobia	Dirt or Germs
16	Necrophobia	Death or Dead Things
17	Nyctophobia	Darkness
18	Pedophobia	Children
19	Pyrophobia	Fire
20	Zoophobia	Animals





FAVORITE FOOD & DRINK

The Sword Coast is home to all variety of beasts and to miles of farmland. Your character will have come into contact with all sorts of dishes and will likely have a favorite. While picking a favorite food or drink is a rather trivial detail in the long run, they're details that will help flesh out your character and bring them to life.

d12 Favorite Food

1	Meat Pie - Seasoned meat, usually beef, cut into small pieces and baked in a buttered pie crust.
2	Salomene - Pan fried fish fillets served with seasoned rice.
3	Chicken Pasty - Chicken wrapped in dough and baked, seasoned with sage and salt.
4	Vegetable Stew - Carrot, parsley root, pear, and cabbage heavily seasoned in a thin broth.
5	Cinnamon Brewet - Roasted beef, cooked with wine, cinnamon, and almonds.
6	Onion Tart - Onion, cheese, and beaten eggs, mixed together and cooked in an open pie crust.
7	Roe Deer - Roasted venison slices served with a garlic butter sauce.
8	Rique-Manger - Fried apple slices mixed with scrambled eggs, seasoned with fine spices and saffron.
9	Root Salad - Carrots, parsnips, and turnips topped with salt and wine vinegar.
10	Mawmeny - Chunks of meat served in a bowl of hearty, brown gravy.
11	Funges - A dish of leeks and mushrooms in a broth spiced with saffron and powder fort.
12	Hot Porridge - Thick wheat porridge made with milk and egg yolk.

d8 Favorite Dessert

1	Twisted Bread of Milk and Sugar - Sugared dough shaped into knots and baked.
2	Rice Tart - Egg, rice, and almond milk baked in a pie crust.
3	Sugared Almonds - Almonds slow cooked in sugared water.
4	Grape Pudding - Grapes mashed with cinnamon, sugar, and ginger.
5	Date Bars - Dates mashed and combined with bread crumbs, wine, and sweet spices, formed into bars.
6	Syryp Pears - Whole pears stewed in wine, sugar, and honey.
7	Gingerbread - Ground bread crumbs thoroughly mixed with honey, rebaked, and spiced with ginger and cinnamon.
8	Apple Muse - Apples mashed into a soft pudding, mixed with almond milk and honey.

d10 Favorite Drink

1	Water
2	Beer
3	Spirits
4	Mead
5	Tea
6	Ale
7	Cider
8	Milk
9	Sweet Fruit Wine
10	Aged Red Wine

TRINKETS

A trinket is an odd or peculiar object your character has collected. A trinket usually has no use or intrinsic value, but your character has kept it for one reason or another. Maybe the item reminds them of a dead parent or maybe it was the first thing they ever stole.

While the *Player Handbook* has a standard trinket list, *Curse of Strahd* has its very own trinket table of gothic themed items on pg. 210 in Appendix A. It's recommended that you roll on that table to obtain a trinket.

QUIRKS

For the last section of personality development, you'll roll for a quirk. Everyone possesses a little eccentricity, from a curious habit to a peculiar preference. A player character should be no different.

Roll a d20 on the table below to discover your character's quirk.

MYSTERIOUS SECRET

Your character has a secret, either terrible or seemingly benign. This Player Primer has a separate, accompanying document entitled, *Mysterious Secrets*, that contains a list of secrets that pertain to the *Curse of Strahd* campaign. These secrets can help your Dungeon Master integrate your character into the module.

If you are a player, do not open the *Mysterious Secrets* document unless you have permission from your Dungeon Master. If you are a Dungeon Master, use the *Mysterious Secrets* document privately and distribute the results individually to your players.



QUIRKS TABLE

d20	Quirk
1	Birds unnerve you. You feel as though any bird perched nearby is watching you.
2	You have trouble sleeping with lights, such as lamps or candles, still illuminated. Any source of light will keep you awake unless extinguished or unless they are very faint, such as moonlight.
3	Though you have no trouble sleeping on the ground or in uncomfortable situations, you take great joy in having a comfortable bed and a room to yourself.
4	You hate carrying change. Should the opportunity arise, you'll trade coppers and silver for a round number of gold coins.
5	You were a very small child, undergrown and short no matter how much you ate. Even after a proper growth spurt into adulthood, you have a soft spot for shorter individuals.
6	You have a favorite weapon which you have named.
7	You hate soup. No matter how well flavored or hearty, you think of soup as glorified water and avoid it if you can.
8	You are extremely confident in your own attractiveness. You have a habit of admiring your own reflection whenever you get the chance.
9	You claim to speak an exotic language. If asked to demonstrate this proficiency, you make up gibberish. No one has called you out on it so far.

d20	Quirk
10	You greet everyone you meet with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, no matter how unfriendly they appear. The only thing that stops this greeting is outright hostility.
11	Your resting face makes you appear angry. You try to smile often, less in happiness and more so people will stop asking you if you're okay.
12	You take heed of any and all superstitions. Even if you don't believe in them, you'd rather not risk ignoring a bad omen.
13	You are illiterate, and will stop at nothing to make sure no one knows this fact.
14	You believe that a mother's love for her children is the truest love in the world.
15	You like wearing rings on your fingers and fiddle with them often.
16	You're a morning person. You are the first to rise in camp and are always chipper about it.
17	You have a very specific request of what should happen to your body if you die. You inform anyone you travel with of this plan and carry a written will on you at all times.
18	You prefer to dress in your favorite color and will go to great lengths to acquire items, clothes, or trinkets in that color to add to your wardrobe.
19	You can easily roll a coin through the base of your fingers and do so habitually when your mind wanders.
20	Whether or not you need to, you prefer wearing a hood at all times. Maybe it makes you feel safe. Or maybe you're just trying to hide an early developing bald spot.

THE FINAL TOUCHES

You should now have all the information you need to start building a solid player character. You know where your character has lived the majority of their life, the composition of their family, and the important relationships that have helped define them. You also know some of their personality quirks, their fears, and their likes and dislikes. You also may have a character secret.

All that's left is to turn this information into a cohesive story. Take the information you've gathered and stitch it all together, interpreting what you need to along the way. Remember that if a result or two from your rolls doesn't quite work for your character concept, you can ask your Dungeon Master to reroll or disregard the result entirely. And, of course, don't forget to choose a race and class.

I hope you've enjoyed this in-depth look at character creation and found this process as entertaining to participate in as it was for me to write. If you're a Dungeon Master interested in running *Curse of Strahd*, I would encourage you to check out my other content in my [Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd](#) series on the [r/CurseofStrahd](#) subreddit.

Otherwise, I wish you a wonderful and horrifying adventure in your upcoming *Curse of Strahd* campaign!