

# FLESHING OUT CURSE OF STRAHD: PREPPING THE ADVENTURE

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CHAPTER 1

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 Irene 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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# INTRODUCTION

**I**elcome to *Curse of Strahd*, one of the most popular modules available for *Dungeons & Dragons* 5e! In this campaign, players are transported to the horrifying demiplane of Barovia, a dismal and sunless land ruled by the immortal vampire, Count Strahd von Zarovich. The campaign fully represents the gothic horror genre, from werewolves and vampires to insane asylums and haunted houses.

This chapter of *Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd* will cover everything a Dungeon Master would need to start prepping this campaign, including the background of the setting and an adventure overview. This chapter also establishes all the groundwork for the additional changes found in future chapters of the *Fleshing Out* series. Let's get started!

## THE COSMOLOGY OF CURSE OF STRAHD

While the campaign module gives us a fair amount of background information to work with regarding Strahd, it surprisingly never covers the planar nature of Barovia. After being trapped within this mist-bound demiplane session after session, players are bound to question the nature of their imprisonment. Where is Barovia, exactly? How do the mists work and why is Strahd so strong? Unfortunately, the module doesn't include answers to these questions, for players or for Dungeon Masters.

This section aims to fill in this missing information.

### THE DOMAINS OF DREAD

The cosmology of the Forgotten Realms contains a vast multiverse and within that multiverse lie the planes of existence. 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.

The Shadowfell is a reflection of the Material Plane and exists alongside it, like the opposite face of a coin. A forest that exists in the Material Plane also exists in the Shadowfell, 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.

Long ago, pieces of the Shadowfell bled into the Material Plane, causing a strange convergence. The effected dimensional space ended up adopting aspects of both the parent planes, appearing mostly material but with a generally grey or dark thematic overtone. This warped land broke away from both the Material Plane and the Shadowfell and became a series of closed demiplanes.

The newly created demiplanes eventually became known as the Domains of Dread.

### DARK POWERS VS. VESTIGES

In Forgotten Realms mythos, the Dark Powers that have cursed Strahd and the evil vestiges in the Amber Temple that have blessed him with vampirism are unrelated. However, to simplify this relationship, the *Fleshing Out* series has combined the two entities. Throughout this series, the vestiges are trapped Dark Powers and Vampyr is not only responsible for Strahd's undeath, but also for his curse.

### THE DARK POWERS

The Dark Powers are a collection of malevolent entities that control the Domains of Dread. In the Forgotten Realms mythos, these entities are kept deliberately vague to give them an unfathomable and unconquerable air, essential to the horror genre. Their numbers are unknown and their forms undefined, but they have powers and strength reflective of evil gods.

The Dark Powers tend to make connections with powerful and evil individuals within the Domains of Dread. Once such a connection is formed, the Dark Powers usually gift an individual with great abilities, making them a Darklord of a single Domain of Dread. However, this promotion and accompanying power are not without cost. The appointed Darklord of a realm is also cursed by the Dark Powers in some way, both trapping the Darklord in their own demiplane and also tormenting them throughout their rule. The Dark Powers delight in the torture of the Darklords.

In *Curse of Strahd*, Barovia is considered a single Domain of Dread and Strahd is its Darklord.

### THE CURSE OF STRAHD

When Strahd murdered his brother and drove Tatyana to her death, he also completed a deal with Vampyr, one of the Dark Powers. He turned into a high vampire, obtained immortality, and cemented his permanent rule over Barovia as Darklord of the domain.

However, Vampyr also cursed Strahd in the same day. Strahd, despite all his power, is cursed to never have Tatyana, the woman he covets most. Vampyr frequently reincarnates Tatyana's spirit to dangle in front of Strahd. When Strahd gets close to claiming her love or turning her into a vampire, some ill twist of fate murders her again. This makes Tatyana's soul just as cursed as Strahd himself, as she is continuously killed and reborn for Strahd's own torment.

Strahd lives in a perpetual limbo where the object of his desire is always just beyond his grasp. That limbo is quite literally the curse of Strahd.

# THE HISTORY OF BAROVIA

Centuries before Strahd's arrival and before the Shadowfell corrupted the land, the Barovian valley was an idyllic and undiscovered piece of the Material Plane.

## THE OLD TRIBES

Long before Strahd's reign and the founding of any official settlement, the Barovian valley was once home to a collection of nomadic, druidic tribes. The people of these tribes lived entirely off the land and were completely unsettled. They are also the ancient ancestors of the druids and berserkers outlined in the module.

These wild peoples have survived the test of time, enduring throughout planar shifts and Strahd's conquest. The modern people of Barovia refer to these tribes simply as the forest folk or the mountain folk.

## THE FANES OF BAROVIA

The forest folk of old used to worship a trio of archfey known as the Ladies Three, or otherwise referred to as the Fanes of Barovia. The Ladies were extremely powerful nature goddesses who watched over the valley.

They were:

- The Seeker of the Forest Fane
- The Weaver of the Swamp Fane
- The Huntress of the Mountain Fane

The Fanes are technically official Ravenloft lore found in previous editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* but not mentioned at all in the *Curse of Strahd* module. They are, however, now essential to the lore and flow of the *Fleshing Out* series. More information will be provided on the Fanes later in this chapter.

## SETTLING THE VALLEY

As time went by, various tribes of forest folk established small villages in the valley. These settlements were tiny, each home to no more than a handful of families living in makeshift huts.

In time, four major settlements arose. Though they were known by other names, now forgotten, these settlements were the precursors to the towns in the module. They are: The Village of Barovia, Vallaki, Kresk, and Berez.

Most of these people, settled or not, still actively worshiped the Ladies Three.

## THE MAGES' ARRIVAL

A little over a thousand years before the start of the campaign, a great circle of mages wondered into the valley. These mages had dedicated their lives to studying, understanding, and defeating great evils of a magical nature. In their studies, they learned of the Dark Powers and the distant Domains of Dread and hoped to somehow subdue the evil gods.

The mages were looking for a place to found a base for their research. Not only was the valley beautiful and rich in magic, but it was also remote, flanked by impassable mountains. These mages went on to build the Amber Temple on Mount Ghakis, and successfully managed to trap and contain over a dozen Dark Powers.





However, after living with such horrible evil in close proximity, many of the mages were corrupted and they all subsequently died at the hands of their own good intentions.

The coming of the mages also lead to a sort of industrial boom for the settlements of the valley. The villages grew in population and became much more civilized.

## STRAHD'S CONQUEST

Before arriving in the Barovian valley, Strahd was fighting wars in distant lands in honor of his father, King Barov. During these crusades, Strahd followed some of his enemies to the Barovian valley and fell in love with the beautiful land. He then decided to settle in the valley when the fighting was done and name the country after his father.

### A QUESTION OF TIME

The original module implies that Strahd arrived in the Barovian valley approximately 400 years before the start of the campaign. However, to further concrete his role as an immovable fixture in Barovia, you may safely push this time frame back several centuries. The *Fleshing Out* series assumes that Strahd's original conquest occurred about 700 years ago.

Strahd claimed the valley as his own, naming it Barovia. He brought another wave of civilization growth to the already established towns and build Castle Ravenloft in honor of his mother.

Though Strahd himself was never a terribly religious man, his people and soldiers also brought the religion of the Morninglord to the valley, which spread quickly through the local populace.

Strahd also discovered the remnants of the Amber Temple in these early days and began conversing with the Dark Power, Vampyr, who was still sealed within an amber sarcophagus as the time.

## THE MISTS COMETH

The rest of the fall of Strahd and Barovia occurs much as the original module states. Strahd fell in love with his younger brother's bride to be, Tatyana. But when Tatyana did not return Strahd's affections, he turned to the Dark Powers for help. He selfishly murdered his brother and drove Tatyana to suicide. This premeditated act of evil allowed Strahd to strike a deal with Vampyr, giving Strahd his immortality and vampiric powers and freeing Vampyr from his amber prison.

The Dark Powers descended on Barovia, fulling transforming the valley into a Domain of Dread and cutting it off from other planes. Strahd took his place as the cursed Darklord of the land.

### REPRESSING THE LADIES THREE

In the very early years of his vampiric reign, Strahd sought to make himself even more powerful, so that no one could challenge his post.

Strahd committed three terrible acts of desecration at the main shrines to the Ladies Three and stole their power over the valley. The Ladies, while still alive at the time of the campaign, are almost completely powerless now.

# ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

**T**he original *Curse of Strahd* module presents the campaign overview very much as a sandbox adventure. While this method of running the campaign can work, it is often not the most conductive way to promote the narrative of the module and can leave Dungeon Masters feeling lost. The book presents a great deal of information, including wonderful location descriptions and interesting non-player characters (NPCs), but doesn't provide a way to connect all that information.

As written, there's not much reason for the party to pursue many of the available side quests or to explore those wonderful locations outside of the experience they would gain to level up. With a few basic changes, the *Fleshing Out* series has hopefully fixed many of these issues.

## OVERALL CHANGES TO THE CAMPAIGN

This next section of the *Fleshing Out* guide aims to set the narrative groundwork of the campaign.

### STRAHD CANNOT DIE

This is the very first and most important change to the campaign. Strahd is quite literally immortal and does not perish if he's reduced to 0 hit points while in sunlight, while in running water, or because he cannot return to his coffin in time.

Strahd is not immortal because he is a vampire. He's immortal because of his connection to the Dark Power, Vampyr. Strahd's status as a Darklord makes his rule eternal.

Replace Strahd's *Misty Escape* feature with the following:

Strahd's connection with Vampyr makes him truly immortal. When Strahd drops to 0 hit points outside his coffin, he transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious or dying. While he has 0 hit points in mist form, he is immune to all effects and attacks and must immediately travel to his coffin, where he reverts to his vampire form, unconscious and paralyzed. Strahd wakes with full hit points the following dusk.

As the campaign progresses and the players become acclimated to Barovia, they'll begin to question why no one has tried to dethrone Strahd before. At that point, many NPCs can and will inform the party that others have not only tried, but have succeeded in killing Strahd in the past. However, Strahd always resurrects within a day and kills his quarry soon after. Strahd seems utterly unconquerable, making him, "The Ancient."

The new information of Strahd's immortality should push players towards investigating the source of that immortality. With this change, players are now required to explore Barovia in pursuit of a way to kill Strahd and discover the source of his power.

### STRAHD IS OBSCENELY POWERFUL

Strahd's as-written statblock, while a bit underwhelming to high level parties, is still respectable for a high vampire. Most Dungeon Masters alter Strahd's stats to strengthen him for the final confrontation.

However, for the sake of guiding the story, Strahd's final stateblock is unimportant. Strahd's stats for the majority of the campaign are instead simply obscenely powerful. Even a party of level 20 adventurers would have trouble combating him.

Why is Strahd so powerful for the majority of the game? Shortly after becoming a vampire and a Darklord, Strahd stole power from the Ladies Three, otherwise known as the Fanes of Barovia, by desecrating their shrines. This power gives Strahd a variety of enhanced abilities, invulnerabilities, a deeper well of hit points, and literal control over nature in the Barovian valley. With this stolen power, Strahd is literally "The Land."

Should players find a way to halt or negate Strahd's immortality from his connection to Vampyr, they still would not be able to defeat him mechanically in battle because of this power. However, players will learn that restoring the Ladies Three will also reclaim that power from Strahd. Restoring the Fanes of Barovia will therefore become a late-game quest required to confront and defeat Strahd. Find out more about the Fanes of Barovia on page 25 of this guide.

### BUFFING STRAHD

While a statblock is hardly required for Strahd when he possesses the power of the Fanes, since parties are unlikely to fight him before the final confrontation, some Dungeon Masters might find one useful for their own peace of mind.

Though this guide does not provide such a statblock, here are some changes you might consider when developing your own.

- Give Strahd at least 500 hit points in addition to those he has from the Heart of Sorrow. You might also enhance his regeneration ability to 50 hit points per turn.
- Give Strahd immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical weapons, as well as immunity to fire, cold, and lightning damage.
- Strahd should have some sort of trait that allows him to control nature in Barovia. At will, he can change the weather, stop rivers, wither forests, and perhaps even change the phases of the moon.
- Strahd should have at least 5 charges of his legendary resistance per day.

Remember that buffing Strahd's attack power shouldn't be relevant. The point of his connection to the Fanes is enhancing his survivability and not his ability to murder his enemies. Most of his existing attack power should be deadly enough, especially to mid-level parties.

# ADVENTURE FLOWCHART

## ARRIVING IN BAROIVA

*For 1st to 4th-level characters*

Parties are transported to the foreign land of Barovia. There, they investigate the Death House and the dour Village of Barovia. Later, they meet the mystical Vistani seer, Madam Eva and have an encounter with a coven of hags in a decrepit windmill.

## DEALINGS IN VALLAKI

*For 4th to 5th-level characters*

The players arrive in Vallaki, the largest town in the Barovia. There, they discover all is not well as the political powers within vie for control over the town. The players race to stop Vallaki from self-destructing.

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER

*For 5th to 6th-level characters*

After settling in to this sunless domain, the party rescues a beloved winery and stops an evil, druidic ritual. In doing so, they make valuable allies in the form of an organization of wereravens.

## CORRUPTION AND CURSES

*For 6th to 8th-level characters*

On the hunt for a way to defeat Strahd, the party travels to the western town of Krezk. There, they discover a corrupted abbey and must help the town deal with a threatening pack of werewolves in the nearby woods.

## REVELATIONS IN THE RUINS

*For 8th to 9th-level characters*

The party must find the location of the mythical Amber Temple. But that vital information is guarded in the fallen fortress of Argynvostholt and in the ruins of old Berez. Players must fight undead revenants and evil witches alike.

## INTO THE MOUNTAINS

*For 9th to 10th-level characters*

The players brave the bitter cold of the Baritok mountains and find the ancient Amber Temple. The temple is a den of evil and darkness, but it also holds the secret of Strahd's defeat.

## STORMING RAVENLOFT

*For 10th to 12th-level characters*

As the adventure races to a dramatic finish, players restore the Fanes of Barovia and confront Strahd in his dreaded castle. Defeating the ancient vampire frees Barovia from the mists and lets the sun shine on the land once again.

## EFFECTS OF STRAHD'S CHANGES

By making Strahd both immortal and insanely powerful, players are now required to explore Barovia and complete its many quests to defeat him. Players will have to make allies with powerful and/or intelligent NPCs to gain information and guidance. They'll also have to travel to the Amber Temple to learn a method for untethering Strahd as Darklord of Barovia. And finally, they must travel to and deal with the events at Yester Hill, Berez, and other locations in order to restore the Fanes.

With these simple changes, parties can no longer theoretically grind levels against wolves in the woods to defeat Strahd. Traversing Barovia is now a much needed narrative requirement to completing the campaign.

## CAMPAIGN ROADMAP

The following section not only summarizes the campaign, but also provides a roadmap and leveling guide for DMs. Note that the many changes and additions the *Fleshing Out* series provides to the game also increases the **level cap** of the campaign to about **Level 12**.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO BAROVIA

The party begins at **Level 1** in Faerûn, traveling on the Trade Way south of the Misty Forest. The Dungeon Master may choose to use a number of adventure hooks to unite the party, such as the hunt for a werewolf menace or simply traveling to the town of Daggerford. One way or another, a mist descends upon the travelers, transporting them to a foreign forest. After aimlessly wandering this fog ridden wood, the party stumbles upon a lone, vacant road.

With little else to do, the party follows the road and eventually finds a tiny cluster of old buildings, including the Death House from Appendix B. There, they engage the crying children and eventually become trapped in the Death House. They navigate the hauntings and eventually make their way into the basement, where they gain **Level 2**. They then deal with the monster in the basement, for better or worse. Completing the Death House earns them **Level 3**.

Players continue to follow the Svalich road into the Village of Barovia. There, they meet the distressed Ismark Kolyanovich and help him bury his father. The party meets a kind old woman who sells them dream pies as well as the mad Father Donovich. The party also learns they are in Barovia and trapped under Strahd's tyrannical rule.

Either through an escort mission involving Ismark's sister, Irene, or because the party needs to find safe haven themselves, they are told to seek sanctuary from Strahd in the town of Vallaki.

## PROPHESIES AND TRAVELS

After leaving the Village of Barovia, the party eventually comes across the Vistani encampment at Tser Pool. There, they have their fortunes told by the mystical seer, Madam Eva. These fortunes hint that destiny has brought the party to Barovia to defeat Strahd once and for all. After leaving the camp, the party reaches **Level 4**.

Continuing their trek towards Vallaki, the party comes across an old windmill on a hill. Should they investigate, the party finds out the windmill is inhabited by a coven of hags that cook children into their pies. The party can choose to fight or flee from this terrifying encounter.

## THE POWDER KEG OF VALLAKI

The party arrives in Vallaki, the largest town in Barovia. It doesn't take them long to discover that the Burgomaster of Vallaki is a fanatical dictator who "protects" the people with absurd, weekly festivals to upkeep morale. Despite the Burgomaster's greatest objections, all is *not* well in Vallaki and an underground cell of equally fanatical resistance members seeks to overthrow him.





Unfortunately, the resistance is far from the worst of the Burgomaster's troubles. Unknown to him, the local church was unconsecrated after the theft of a holy artifact. There's a terrible plot in place to release half a dozen starving vampire spawn upon the town at the upcoming Festival of the Blazing Sun to terrorize Vallaki's citizens and murder the local priest.

While in Vallaki, the players will likely gain over a dozen quest hooks as well as find a few of their own personal stakes in Barovia. They'll follow one lead after another as they watch Vallaki unravel and race to save as many innocent people as they can from the coming chaos.

Following the Festival of the Blazing Sun and the attack of the vampire spawn, the party receives **Level 5** and they have a direct influence over who rules Vallaki in the fallout. With the town in shambles, the party helps the people pick up the pieces and start anew.

Vallaki is one of the largest chapters in the *Curse of Strahd* module and it is expected that players spend a number of sessions in the town. Later, Vallaki can easily become a hub or basecamp for their travels and operations against Strahd.

## WINE AND DRUIDS

In the aftermath of Vallaki's disaster, one of the easiest ways the players can get the town back on its feet is by investigating the town's missing wine shipments. These shipments from the Wizards of Wine Winery stopped mysteriously a couple weeks prior.

Back on the road, the players make their way to the winery only to discover that it has been overrun by evil druids. After purging this threat, they learn that the vineyards will soon die unless a magical gemstone is recovered from Yester Hill, where other druids have converged. At the urgency of the Winery owners, the players go to retrieve the stolen gem.

Upon reaching Yester Hill, the players discover that tribes of evil forest folk are planning to bring a giant treant to life for some nefarious purpose. The players go through a tough fight to stop this ritual and recover the gemstone from the heart of the treant, more than earning them **Level 6**.

With the vineyard restored and the winery secure, the players are tasked with delivering several shipments of wine across Barovia. Shipments are due to the Vistani south of Vallaki, to Vallaki itself, and to the town of Krezk.

## MAKING ALLIES

At this point in the campaign, players should have a relatively good foundation for allies in Barovia. Most importantly, by rescuing the Winery, they've made friends of the Martikov family, who are not only well connected in Barovia, but are also the leaders of a secret cell of wereravens working against Strahd.

The Martikovs and the party's other allies should begin to drop hints to the party about the desecrated Fanes of Barovia and Strahd's mysterious immortality. These allies provide hooks to outlying locations where the players might find information and artifacts to defeat Strahd.

At this point, the campaign becomes far more open and the direction the party will go will vary from table to table.

## CORRUPTION IN KREZK

Despite the many plot hooks the party has at this point, their most likely next destination will be the town of Krezk, to deliver the missing wine. Not only is Krezk a new location and therefore a curiosity to players, it also is home to a couple possible informants to help in defeating Strahd: the Burgomaster and the Abbott. Because Krezk is also level appropriate for the party, it is recommended that Dungeon Masters use the Martikovs as mouth pieces to encourage that the Krezk shipment of wine be the delivered first.

Once in Krezk, the players will learn that missing wine is not the town's only problem. Krezk has been suffering a massive food shortage as of late and with the coming winter, the Burgomaster is very worried. The players will soon discover that Ilya, the Burgomaster's recently resurrected child, is responsible for the missing food. Ilya's resurrection was not wholly successful and the boy has been transformed into a ravenous monster that must be killed.

With Ilya dead and the people of Krezk devastated and facing a hungry winter, the players can pursue two different plot hooks: one to the Abbey of St. Markovia to discover the source of Ilya's corrupted resurrection and one to the Fidatov Manor, a wealthy estate outside Krezk that may have food stores to spare. After discovering and purging the evils from both locations, the players earn **Level 7**.

## FINDING ANSWERS

Through the party's many informants, they learn of the existence of the Amber Temple and of the desecrated Fanes of Barovia. However, these informants don't know the location of the temple or how exactly to help the Fanes. The party must look elsewhere for information on both.

The players learn that the feral werewolf packs in the forests north of Krezk may have had a connection to the Fanes long ago and may know a method of restoring them. If and when the party pursues this knowledge, they eventually find the Werewolf Den and must help the pack solve a local power struggle. By doing so, the players learn the locations of the Fanes' three shines across the valley, though all three are now inert. Completing the Werewolf Den and gaining this information earns the party **Level 8**.

The players may also head towards Argynvostholt, a ruined fortress southwest of Vallaki. The party's contacts inform them that the knightly order that once lived in the fortress may have known the location of the Amber Temple. Players arrive at Argynvolstholt to find that it is populated by undead revenants who have been corrupted by their own hatred of Strahd. The ghost of Argynvost, a good-aligned silver dragon, appears to the party and asks them to purify the knights of Argynvostholt. By helping the revenants and the dragon's ghost, the party earns **Level 9**.

## INTO THE MOUNTAINS

Players must now travel into the southern mountains in search of the long forgotten Amber Temple. Though they have vague knowledge of their destination, the path forward is wrought with danger as the players must confront mountain folk, local predators, and unforgiving cold. The journey is long and harsh, but eventually, the players reach their destination.

Once inside the Amber Temple, players find the remnants of the mage order that once tried to combat the Dark Powers. Unfortunately, all that remains are monsters, traps, and dark magic. Players will have push through this horrible dungeon to find the Temple's great library, which contains the answers they seek.

The players will gain quite a bit of lore from the Amber Temple. They'll gain access to a ritual that can summon the Dark Power, Vampyr, to Barovia and seal him away again. They'll also learn exactly how to reconsecrate the Fanes of Barovia, restoring their power and weakening Strahd.

With these significant strides forward in the adventure, the players descend from the mountains and head back towards the Barovian townships. They also earn **Level 10**.

## RESTORING THE FANES

Now, players begin the arduous task of restoring the Fanes of Barovia.

To restore the Mountain Fane, they must travel into the caverns beneath the Gulthias Tree at Yester Hill. They'll find that the caverns are a strange limbo realm that unite life and death. After confronting their personal demons and making it to the bottom of the dungeon, the Huntress of Mountain Fane will regain her power.

To restore the Swamp Fane, the party must travel to Berez, a ruined town half eaten by a cold swamp and ruled by evil witches. Players will have to fight and kill the leader of the witch coven, Baba Lysaga, and take her corrupted heart to restore the Weaver of the Swamp Fane.

Lastly, to restore the Forest Fane, the players will have to confront an ancient and corrupted wereraven at the shrine by Old Bonegrinder. After conquering this evil, they successfully reconsecrate the shrine of the Seeker, the Forest Fane.

After restoring the Fanes, the Ladies Three appear to the party in all their glory. They thank the players and gift each character with some item or boon, many of which will be exceptionally usefully in the final fight against Strahd. The players also earn **Level 11** for completing this daunting task.

## DEFATING STRAHD

With the Fanes restored, the party is finally ready to fight Strahd. Not only do that have a way to disconnect him from Vampyr and therefore thwart his immortality, but they have also weakened him considerably by restoring the Fanes.

At this point, Strahd is at full war with the players, angered beyond reason over his weakened power. He will begin taking out his wrath on the party in any way he can. While he may not confront them in open combat, he'll start to murder their allies and destroy their strongholds in retaliation. It's a race to the finish as the party rushes to Castle Ravenloft in an effort to stop Strahd before he can destroy everything they have come to hold dear.

Upon their arrival, Strahd resolves to murder the party once and for all. Out of propriety, he may allow them one last dinner in his home before their fight commences, but otherwise the party's stay at Castle Ravenloft is not pleasant.

The party fights Strahd and defeats him, earning **Level 12**. They then use the ritual they learned at the Amber Temple to summon Vampyr and fight him as well. After successfully sealing away the Dark Power, Strahd loses his immortality and dies. The campaign ends as the clouds above Baroiva part and sun shines on the valley for the first time in centuries.

## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS AND REMINDERS

There are several overall recommendations and mechanical notes you should consider when running *Curse of Strahd*.

### PARTY SIZE

It is recommended you run this particular campaign for a smaller party, ideally 3-5 players.

Human beings generally find safety in numbers and as a gothic horror themed campaign, safety isn't something that *Curse of Strahd* should promote. For example, you aren't going to feel as anxious marching into a haunted house in a party of 7 as you would with a single friend. Not only will a smaller party be easier to manage as the Dungeon Master, but it will also improve the overall tone of the game.

### THE HARDSHIPS OF BAROVIA

Remember that one of the main goals of *Curse of Strahd* is to corrupt the player characters. No matter how happy and pure they may be entering Barovia, the horrors that characters face and the double-edged choices they'll be forced to make are meant to change them for the worse.

Don't be afraid to hurt your player characters or present them with lose-lose situations. There are some NPCs that simply can't be saved and some encounters that can't be won. Such losses and hardships should slowly break the player characters. Some will come out stronger from these hardships. Others will become as monstrous as the creatures they fight.



### DON'T BE AFRAID TO LAUGH!

That being said, this is game. Yes, it's a horror game, but even if a situation is truly dreadful, you and your players are allowed to joke and laugh. Though the player characters are suffering, your *players* most certainly should not be.

### ILLUSTRATIONS AND PICTURES

Do *NOT* show your players the majority of the illustrations of various NPCs shown throughout the book!

If you ever want to inspire friendship or trust between your players and a NPC, showing them a terrifying character portrait is not going to help. While the art throughout *Curse of Strahd* is beautiful and thematic, it's not terribly functional for running the game. Instead, keep those NPC portraits to yourself, or at least keep them private until you're sure your players are never going to meet that NPC again.

The illustrations of Rose and Thorn, Morgontha, and Lady Wachter are examples of images you should *not* show your players.

Additionally, it also recommended that you not show your players the world map of Barovia. Barovia is a foreign land and the party should feel out of their element.

### THEATER OF THE MIND

The *Curse of Strahd* module contains a number of excellent maps for its many locations. However, much of the time using the maps can actually hinder a session or distract players instead of help them. For example, while the map for the Blue Water Inn is beautiful, it's not really required unless a fight breaks out at that location.

The majority of locations are better presented through theater of the mind, summarizing travel through or past unimportant rooms.

Of course, the maps for more dungeon-like locations, such as the maps for the Amber Temple, should be presented normally.

## THE STRENGTH OF CURSES

The spell *remove curse* is both too powerful and too prevalent in *Curse of Strahd*.

While curses can be interesting in any game, they're arguably much more important in this specific campaign. Curses are supposed to be major plot points of this module and have significant effects on character growth, should they come into play.

However, almost all the negative ailments we see in the campaign can be cured by *remove curse*, a relatively easy to learn spell for player characters and something known by NPCs all over Barovia. As written, curses are inconsequential as a result.

It is recommended that you either completely remove the spell *remove curse* from the available spell lists for this campaign or that you increase the severity of all curses in the game so that they can only be cured with the *greater restoration* spell or an equivalent.

## EVIL PLAYER CHARACTERS

Unless you have experience with evil player characters and are completely comfortable running them at your table, it is recommended that they be off-limits to players for this campaign. While you might expect that a horror themed game might better support evil alignments than other games, the exact opposite is actually the case. Evil player characters tend to be highly problematic in *Curse of Strahd* and newer Dungeon Masters can get blindsided by their ineffectiveness towards the plot of the game.

Evil player characters tend to work in direct opposition to the plot of *Curse of Strahd*. In this campaign, the majority of the hooks and transitions rely on the player characters' good nature to progress. Evil party members generally will not want to help those in need without reward and may ignore calls to adventure if it does not benefit them. In fact, they may be more inclined to cause turmoil to forward their own desires. This can make it exceptionally hard to move the story from one location to the next, let alone actually get through the full narrative.

While the natural progression of the campaign may corrupt player characters towards evil, at the very least they should start out resistant to that change, allowing the party to settle into Barovia before their alignments dissolve.



# WHAT TO PREPARE FIRST



Outside reading the setting background and understanding the flow of the adventure, where should you begin prepping this campaign?

## STRAHD

First, decide how you wish to portray Strahd. Should he be an enigmatic figure in a distant castle, or would you prefer a more involved villain?

Remember that Strahd is a tyrant and a conqueror who has confused love for ownership. He prioritizes wooing Tatyana's reincarnation in an attempt to finally turn her into a vampire spawn. However, he knows that his many previous attempts to do so have failed because of these reincarnations' untimely deaths and proceeds with extreme caution. Otherwise, he takes an interest in the party to alleviate his own boredom.

Push the idea that Strahd is an oppressive and abusive individual to all those he claims to love, including the land itself. Also remember that he is arrogant, but frightfully intelligent, meaning he won't fall for player characters' goading or paltry tricks.

Once you've decided how you wish to present Strahd in the campaign, you'll be one significant step closer to Session 1.



## TAROKKA

By far, the Tarokka reading at the Tser Pool Encampment is one of the most iconic and influential elements of *Curse of Strahd*. However, almost every guide or set of advice available for this module tells Dungeon Masters to rig the initial reading. The *Fleshing Out* series is no different.

Pre-select the locations of the prophesied items, the party's potential ally, and the location of the final encounter with Strahd. During the card reading, let your players draw randomly from the deck but then read the results you already have prepared. For more advice on this card reading and the best potential results, refer to the Vistani chapter of the *Fleshing Out* series.

By rigging the Tarokka reading, you can more adequately hook parties into various locations around Barovia and prevent all the vastly inferior results that may appear, such as the Sunsword's appearance in Madam Eva's tent and the card that denotes no ally at all.

## SESSION 0

Make sure to set up a Session 0 with your players to establish the expectations of the game. *Curse of Strahd*, as a horror-themed module, contains many uncomfortable topics that may be sources of anxiety to potential players. For example, *Curse of Strahd* contains instances of substance abuse, cannibalism, child abuse, and suggestions of non-consensual relationships, to name but a few of these traumatic subjects. Make sure you define your players' personal limits long before you start running this module.

## LOCATIONS

Though it is recommended that you read the entirety of the module before running the adventure, you only need to prepare your adventure hook, Death House (should you choose to run it), and the Village of Barovia for your opening sessions.

## PLAYER CHARACTER INCORPORATION

Lastly, as your players develop characters for the campaign, look for ways to incorporate their backstories into the module. The following section details options to go about this incorporation.

# CONNECTING PLAYER CHARACTERS TO THE CURSE OF STRAHD CAMPAIGN

**I**While *Curse of Strahd* is one of the most popular 5e modules to date, the isolated nature of Barovia often prevents player characters from having preexisting connections to the setting or story. While most players can and will establish new connections to the campaign and come to care for certain NPCs, the early development of player characters with thriving backstories will end up stunted by simple necessity.

This lack of backstory involvement may end up disappointing players. A criminal organization that wronged a player character in their backstory will likely never be confronted in this adventure. A player character with noble ties and an established family will never have the chance to use those connections or have those familial interactions. Such a disconnect may leave players feeling as though developing a backstory was a waste of time.

In an effort to further engage players in the *Curse of Strahd* campaign, the following section details ways to connect player character backstories to this particular module.

## THE PLAYER PRIMER

To hopefully guide players towards developing characters with connections to Barovia, *Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd* has an accompanying [Player Primer](#) available on the DM's Guild. In particular, the Primer includes a document entitled, "Mysterious Secrets" that can aid in connecting the players to this campaign.

## TATYANA'S REINCARNATION

If possible, replace Irenea's character with that of a player character. Instead of Irenea, a player character takes up the role of Tatyana's reincarnation. Irenea's character is either removed from the campaign or is given a more unimportant role in the story.

### THE REINCARNATION'S APPEARANCE

While this character is traditionally female, Strahd is canonically bisexual and a male version of Tatyana's reincarnation can work if appropriate at your table.

Otherwise, make sure to change Tatyana's appearance in the book to match the new description provided by the player. In other words, if the potential new Tatyana reincarnation described by the player has blonde hair instead of red, change all descriptions of Tatyana and her past lives to having blonde hair to match.

### FATED ADVENTURERS

By connecting many or all of your player characters' backstories to Barovia, the players may end up feeling like these connections are a bit contrived. After all, what's the likelihood that every character in the party has a surprising connection to this distant land?

However, the surmounting coincidences that brought the player characters together in Barovia can easily be attributed canonically to fate. Fate and foretelling are active motifs that appear repeatedly throughout the *Curse of Strahd* campaign. Starting with the card reading in Madam Eva's tent, have this seer imply that the party's arrival in Barovia was hardly chance. You can then reinforce this sense of fate through Arabelle and other Vistani south of Vallaki, the fanatical Lady Fiona Wachter, the wise mages at the Amber Temple, and countless other NPCs.

If you continuously reinforce the idea of fate to the party, they will slowly but surely stop seeing their connections to Barovia as a narrative tool but instead as a unifying destiny for their characters.



## RUNNING THE REINCARNATION'S STORY

If you have a player character that might fit the role of Tatyana's reincarnation, there are a few important details that character will learn over the course of the campaign.

This character is now an essential part of Strahd's curse. She is reborn over and over again just to die horribly before Strahd can claim her.

This player character should start the campaign without any idea of their past lives and learn about this curse slowly. For instance, dreams induced by dream pastries or drinking from the Pool of the White Sun in Krezk might bring back memories of her time as Tatyana and she might recall loving a man in golden armor (Sergei). The ruins of Berez might also feel exceptionally familiar to her and she might be able to navigate certain parts of Castle Ravenloft instinctually.

Look for ways to pepper in ideas of this player character's mysterious past lives and lead them to understand that they are cursed to die young so long as Strahd survives.

## THE REINCARNATION'S SAFETY

The original module makes note that Strahd goes to great lengths to ensure Ireneena's safety. As written, most of the monsters of Barovia avoid attacking her and she has advantages with certain NPCs due to her status. While this works for a NPC, it is highly problematic for a player character.

In order to give the new reincarnation player character the same sense of danger as the rest of the party, relax Strahd's control over the beasts of his realm. For instance, wolves and other monsters might only obey Strahd while he is in sight and attack the party normally if Strahd is elsewhere. Additionally, Strahd wants Tatyana's reincarnation to submit to him willingly and giving her leniency and favoritism with past reincarnations could have feasibly cost him ground with them. Strahd would avoid making such a mistake twice.

At the end of the campaign, in the final confrontation with Strahd, Strahd finally understands that this reincarnation will never submit and he regrettfully moves to kill her himself. Strahd understands that she will only be reincarnated and that he can try again with Tatyana's next iteration.

## THE OPENING QUEST IN THE VILLAGE OF BAROVIA

One of the first and most prominent quests in the *Curse of Strahd* campaign is the escort mission involving Ireneena, which requires players to accompany Ireneena to Vallaki and later to Krezk to find a safe haven from Strahd. By removing Ireneena from the campaign, this quest disappears.

Instead, players arrive in the Village of Barovia to learn that the stress of Strahd's harassing minions has driven the burgomaster, Ismark's father Kolyan, into an early grave. Ismark employs the party to help him carry the coffin to the graveyard and persuade Father Donovich to perform a proper burial.

Later that evening, Strahd and his minions reappear at the door of the burgomaster's mansion for a brief meeting. Strahd expresses his sympathies over the death of the burgomaster (but shows no signs of guilt or remorse for causing the death) and implies that his knowledge of Tatyana's impending arrival made him overzealous towards the late burgomaster.

Though he doesn't elaborate on this point, the Dark Powers sent him visions of Tatyana's arrival and stay at the burgomaster's mansion weeks before, inspiring his assault on the home to find her.

During this brief meeting, Strahd only addresses the player character as Tatyana, and not by her character name, and proclaims his love for her. He offers her his hand in marriage, but doesn't push for an immediate answer. However, there is a vaguely threatening undertone to the conversation that implies the player character will end up with little choice.

After Strahd's departure, Ismark informs the party of the horror that it is to be chosen as one of Strahd's future brides. He tells the party of the potential safety of Vallaki's walls and cathedral and tells them to seek sanctuary there.

## THE REINCARNATION'S ENDINGS

The unsatisfying endings for Ireneena which occur at the Pool of the White Sun in Krezk and in the Epilogue section of the module are no longer needed if a player character takes up the role of Tatyana's reincarnation. This character's story will instead end when they die in Barovia, in accordance to Strahd's curse, or when they defeat Strahd and free themselves forever.

Sergei's spirit might briefly reappear before moving on into the afterlife, but otherwise, defeating Strahd signifies the liberation of Tatyana from her abuser. This player character is now free to move on and live their life anew.

## IZEK'S SIBLING

Whether or not Ireneena's character is replaced with that of player character, it is recommended that you have a player character fill the role of Izek Strazni's missing sibling. If you've already replaced Ireneena with a player character, do not also make Izek their long lost brother. Instead, give this connection to another player character.

## ORPHANS AND MISSING FAMILY

In order to fill this role, look for player characters that have dubious family backgrounds. Perhaps a player character is an orphan, born - but not raised - in Barovia. Izek is what remains of their family. Or perhaps there is a player character who's family was murdered in their backstory. This murdered family now includes a brother, who's corpse was transported to and resurrected in Barovia, unknown to the player.

Racially, characters who are human, half human, or tiefling work best for the role of Izek's missing sibling, if only so you may use his art or token if required. A tiefling sibling would also explain Izek's demon arm to a minor extent. However, if no such race exists in your party, you can easily change Izek's race to match a player character instead. For instance, if your party contains an orphaned dwarf character, Izek is now a burly dwarf with a demon arm instead of a human.

## IZEK'S OBSESSION

While Izek is obsessed with his missing sibling, he is fully aware that they are related to him. While the book tells of his taboo love for his missing sister, such a connection could be uncomfortable to have with a player character. Instead, Izek is highly aware of his relation to his missing family member and while he is still overprotective of them, he harbors no romantic inclinations towards them.

Since their separation as children, Izek has had unexplainable, prophetic dreams about his missing sibling. Over the years, he has watched this sibling grow up in his dreams and would recognize them from across a crowded room. The hundreds of dolls in Izek's room are all of this sibling player character and heavily resemble the player character at different stages of their life thus far.

## TRACKING VAN RICHTEN

If your party contains a player character that is searching for someone, that someone might easily be Rudolph van Richten.

### ANOTHER PUPIL

While haunted by his losses and an overall grim man, Rudolph van Richten makes for an excellent past mentor for a player character. He is an accomplished monster hunter, doctor, and adventurer and has been known to traverse between planes in the past.

It is extraordinarily easy to give van Richten a second pupil that he may have trained before or after Ezmerelda. After receiving word of Strahd's oppressive rule over Barovia and securing a path into the demiplane, he left this player character without explanation or a way to follow. After arriving in Barovia, the player character learns that their mentor may be closer than they think.

### HUNTING A KILLER

While van Richten is generally a good man who cares for the lives and well-being of common folk, he is also a determined individual who is willing to sacrifice lives for the good of many. He does not hesitate in combat and takes no quarter against monsters. For instance, van Richten is not the sort of man to let a werewolf live based on good behavior or sympathy. He would sooner break a dam and flood a village to stop a vampire infestation, killing every innocent inhabitant, than let the vampires scourge grow.

It's entirely possible that van Richten murdered a friend or family member of a player character, either because that person was somehow dangerous or because they were a victim of collateral damage. That player character might be out for revenge and attempt to hunt down van Richten.

### INTERACTING WITH VAN RICHTEN

When a player character makes it to Barovia and is on the hunt for van Richten, van Richten will not reveal himself to them unless under dire circumstances. Even if he recognizes the player character as his former pupil, he values his hunt for Strahd more than relinquishing his disguise as Rictavio. However, while disguised, van Richten might attempt to help his former student with dubious advice on the horrors of Barovia.

Should a player character meet van Richten under less favorable circumstances, like on the hunt for revenge, van Richten will attempt to persuade the player character out of attacking by describing the necessity of preserving the greater good. However, if such persuasions seem ineffectual, van Richten will show this player character no mercy.



## FREEING A PATRON

While player characters with the Warlock class are the most obvious choice for this campaign hook, most any character can adopt this secret provided they have the right backstory elements. At one point in their backstory, a player character may have come in contact with some ancient and mysterious entity. Maybe they interrupted a ritual or inherited some strange artifact from a family member. Now, their connection with this enigmatic entity has drawn them to Barovia.

### A SEALED DARK POWER

The Dark Powers sealed away in the Amber Temple, while unable to truly influence the planes from within their prisons, can still communicate with individuals willing to listen. Vampyr, for instance, spoke to Strahd for some time before convincing Strahd to free him.

It's possible that a sealed Dark Power managed to reach through the planes and randomly find a player character that would listen. In return for power or perhaps some one-time assistance, the player character has been tasked with helping their mysterious patron. After the player character finds themselves in Barovia, their connection to the Dark Power grows and eventually ends with a demand that they are freed from the Amber Temple.

This personal quest may end with the player character succumbing to the request and potentially freeing the ancient evil for unknown and long-reaching effects. It may also end with them taming their patron or further sealing away the Dark Power that contacted them.

### RESTORING THE FANES

The *Fleshing Out* series heavily relies on the Fanes of Barovia to push the players forward in the adventure. The Fanes consist of a trio of ancient archfey called the Ladies Three. At the start of the campaign, the Ladies are all but powerless, reduced to the forms of undying, elderly women.

It's possible that one of these Ladies has secretly employed the help of a player character to restore the Ladies to their former glory. In particular, Jeny Greenteeth, the former Weaver of the Swamp Fane, is an avid trickster who is more than willing to interact with mortals and traverse the planes. Jeny may have befriended a player character in their backstory without revealing her true identity. As the campaign progresses, it's Jeny who reappears and quietly pushes the party forward in their quest.

## HONORING A HOLY CALLING

*Curse of Strahd* is a gothic horror campaign filled to the brim with desecrated land and undead creatures. It's likely that at least one player will be interested in playing a divine class, subclass, or race in order to combat the coming horrors.

### A DRACONIC BLOODLINE

It's possible that instead of some horrible dark secret, a player character's family might harbor some good familial trait. If one of your player characters develops a backstory that has some revealed, blood-related secret, consider giving that character a connection to Argynvost, the silver dragon.

A dragonborn, a sorcerer with unknown magical origin, or an godless but good aligned aasimar may get their abilities from their distant connection to the silver dragon.

Before the start of the campaign, this character may have started to receive visions of a fallen castle and a call for help.

### HUNTING THE FALLEN

Paladins and clerics of good domains and oaths may receive important callings from their patron god. If you have a player character with an inclination towards some holy quest, consider plugging the idea of a demon in need of purging. As the campaign progresses, these vision get more and more clear, revealing that the unholy creature is not only a man, but some kind of fallen angel.

Eventually, this player character discovers the Abbott and his terrible madhouse. Stopping the Abbott from continuing his depravity would satisfy this character's holy quest.

## A STRANGE ELF

Dusk elves are one of the few alternate races native to Barovia. Like drow, they have dark skin, but instead have black hair and dark eyes to match. The dusk elves, unfortunately, are far from a thriving race. During Strahd's first conquest, he and his father's armies decimated the dusk elves. Centuries later, Strahd ordered all their women executed and their race has been slowly dying out ever since.

### THE LAST DUSK ELF

It is possible that one dusk elf female survived the purge of their women and is a player character. Perhaps her parents managed to steal her away in a Vistani caravan as a baby, letting her grow and thrive in another plane. Or, perhaps, a player character is a male and after discovering their broken brethren, will take up the thematic role of Kasimir in pursuing a way to resurrect a dusk elf female. Lastly, if there is a player character that wishes to play a dusk elf male, you could instead gender swap the whole subplot, making all the remaining dusk elves in Barovia female.

No matter the role, a dusk elf player character has grown up outside Barovia. Make sure to tell this player that their character is assuredly an elf, but that their physical appearance is unlike any known subrace. If this character was raised by elves, they are most certainly adopted or at the very least were born under dubious circumstances.

Discovering the broken remnants of the dusk elves in Barovia should motivate this player character to seek revenge on Strahd and to lead their people back to their former glory.

## OTHER CONNECTIONS

There are no doubt other ways to connect player character backstories to the *Curse of Strahd* campaign or otherwise personalize the adventure for your party. If the above suggestions don't inspire you or otherwise seem appealing, look for alternate ways to incorporate your player characters' backstories into the module. Above all things, remember to have fun!

# THE SETTING OF BAROVIA

**T**he Barovian valley lays nestled within the Balinok Mountains and is rich in natural magic. The environment is loosely based off real-world Romania, with cool summers and frost ridden winters. Under Strahd's reign, the land has slowly taken a darker turn, with monsters gaining strength in the Svalich woods and the people relying on old customs to stay safe and sane.

This section of the *Fleshing Out* guide aims to redefine and expand upon the lore regarding the setting of *Curse of Strahd* and should provide everything Dungeon Masters need to run an adventure set in the Barovian valley.

## A CLOSED PLANE

As a quick reminder, any magic meant to facilitate planar travel or otherwise leave Barovia simply fails. Barovia is a closed demiplane entirely controlled by Strahd. While every so often, an outsider might wander into the realm through the mists - like the players might at the start of the campaign - leaving Barovia is impossible without Strahd's permission.

If players wonder why Barovians don't leave the realm with magic, it's recommended that you allow them to discover the ineffectiveness of such magic organically. For instance, if a Wizard player character takes the spell *banishment* when they gain access to 4th level spells, they might go to cast the spell and see it fail without explanation. While this might seem harsh, it also reflects the restricted and unforgiving nature of Barovia.

## TRAVELING THROUGH THE MISTS

There is a physical wall of mist that surrounds Barovia and isolates the land. The mist wall reaches into the sky and it is impossible to see within it more than a few feet at a time.

Strahd is the only creature that can open and close the mists at will, allowing interplanar travel. However, because he is a Darklord and bound to this demiplane, he ironically can't leave Barovia himself. Because of the debt he owes the Vistani, he opens and closes the mists for their travel without question, unless a Vistana has broken that trust in some way.

A creature who travels into the mists immediately loses their sense of time and direction. There is no day and night cycle within the mist and the environment is nothing but stone-like ground and a dense fog that limits vision to about 15 feet at a time.

If a tether or something similar is used to protect someone from the mist, such as tying a rope around a traveling creature, the rope goes slack shortly after the creature disappears from view. If the rope is pulled back, the end is cleanly severed, as if cut by an invisible wall. Additionally, if multiple creatures enter the mist at the same time, they immediately become separated from one another and each continue their travel alone.

If a creature attempts to leave Barovia by traveling into the mists without Strahd's permission, use the following rules to determine the outcome of the attempt.

- Time itself is warped within the mists. A day in the mist is equivalent to about an hour in Barovia.
- A creature will roll two checks for each day they spend in the mist: one to determine if they are noticed by the Dark Powers swimming within, and one to gain levels of exhaustion and mark the passage of days.
- The first check is a straight d20 roll, DC 10. On a failure, a Dark Power notices the creature and tries to pursue them through the mist. Describe this event as a giant, shadow like horror descending on them. By running or cowering, the creature manages to evade the Dark Power, but takes a -1 penalty to their all their core stats. All the penalties accumulated by failing this daily check last  $1d4 + 1$  days after the creature has escaped the mists. Additionally, you might give this creature a temporary or permanent madness from the DMG for failing this check.
- The second check is in a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. A failure will give the creature 1 level of exhaustion. Making this check also marks a day gone by in the mist.
- After a creature accumulates a total of 3 successful checks from either or both categories, they find their way out of the mists and stumble back into Barovia at the location from which they left, hungry, tired, and confused.

## SUNLIGHT

As a reminder, there is no natural sunlight Barovia for the purposes of overcoming resistances. Shortly before sunrise, a thick layer of cloud cover stretches over the sky, muting the light of the day. Most evenings, these clouds dissipate to reveal the starry sky and the moon above.

The overcast skies are a passive outcome of Strahd's power over Barovia. Indirectly, Vampyr moves the weather in such a way to protect his Darklord. However, Strahd's control over the Fanes of Barovia means that he has control over the weather and can get rid of the cloud cover if he chose, though he most certainly has no reason to do so.



# THE WORLD MAP

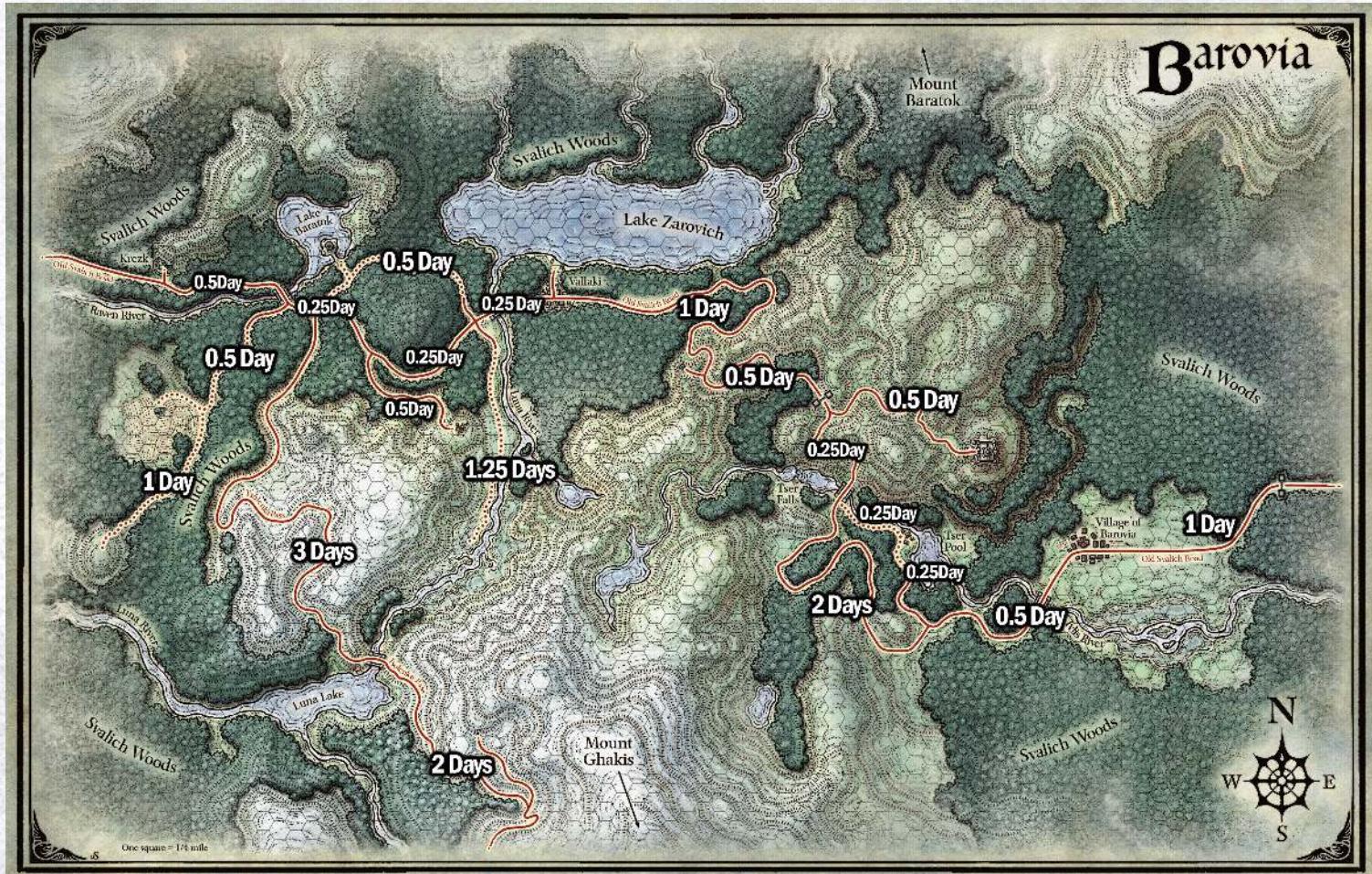
Most Dungeon Masters agree that the general scale of Barovia is abysmally small. According to the *Player's Handbook*, parties can travel for 8 hours in a day and can cover 24 miles in that day at a normal marching pace. As written, the map of Barovia is only about 20 miles wide (80 hexes x .24 miles per hex), meaning that player characters can realistically travel the entire width of Barovia in under a day.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAVEL TIME

Travel time is an extraordinarily important aspect of *Dungeons & Dragons* world building. Not only does it give players the illusion of time to settle into the world, making settings feel more visceral, but it also forces a campaign to slow down, giving players a chance to role-play between one another and build their in-character relationships without the many distractions within townships. Travel time also allows players to read books and investigate magic items found in game.

Additionally, camp time is prime for random encounters. Wolf attacks and similar dangers will help the players feel like they're developing their abilities, making them feel like they've earned their skills through time and practice. However, with the as written distances, players can feasibly go from levels 1-10 in about two in-game weeks. That kind of power spike is quite unbelievable.

**THIS MAP ASSUMES 1 HEX = 1 MILE:**



Additionally, travel time in Barovia is essential for pushing the dangers of the land. As written, there's no reason citizens can't quickly travel between towns, thus limiting the danger of such travel. However, if travelers are forced to spend nights on the road, that travel no longer seems viable to common folk. Putting additional travel time between locations also enhances Barovia's sense of isolation, a key thematic ingredient to any horror setting.

## SCALE

For the many reasons above, it is recommended that you increase the scale of Barovia to allow for longer travel times between locations.

The *Fleshing Out* guides recommends that you change the world map to 1 hex = 1 mile. However, you might also extend the distances to 1 hex = 2 miles and double the results on the following map and table.

No matter how you adjust the scale of Barovia, you want your players to spend at least one night in camp between each major location, if not two. Give your party the opportunity to have night-time random encounters, role-play amongst themselves, or otherwise use the time to process things that have happened in the campaign thus far. If they don't seem to need that time, you can simply montage the travel with a short description. Even a short narration can give the campaign a little breathing room to make the setting feel more believable.

Travel Path	Hexes	Miles (1 hex = 1/4)	Time (1 hex = 1/4)	Miles (1 hex = 1)	Time (1 hex = 1)	Difficult Terrain	Final Days Travel
Outer Gate to Village of Barovia	13	3.25 miles	1 hr 5 min	13 miles	4 hrs 20 min	Yes	1 Day
Village of Barovia to Tser Pool Camp	18	4.5 miles	1 hr 30 min	18 miles	6 hrs	No	3/4 Day
Tser Pool Camp to Inner Gate	12	3 miles	1 hr	12 miles	4 hrs	No	1/2 Day
Inner Gate to Castle Ravenloft	15	3.75 miles	1 hr 15 min	15 miles	5 hrs	No	1/2 Day
Inner Gate to Old Bonegrinder	11	2.75 miles	55 min	11 miles	3 hrs 40 min	No	1/2 Day
Old Bonegrinder to Vallaki	25	6.25 miles	2 hr 5 min	25 miles	8 hrs 20 min	No	1 Day
Vallaki to the Luna River Crossroads	4	1 mile	20 min	4 miles	1 hr 20 min	No	1/4 Day
Luna River Crossroads to Richten's Tower	12	3 miles	1 hr	12 miles	4 hrs	No	1/2 Day
Luna River Crossroads to Berez	14	3.5 miles	1 hr 10 min	14 miles	4 hrs 40 min	Yes	1 1/4 Days
Luna River Crossroads to Argynvostholt	16	4 miles	1 hr 20 min	16 miles	5 hrs 20 min	No	3/4 Day
Luna River Crossroads to Raven River Crossroads	12	3 miles	1 hr	12 miles	4 hrs	No	1/2 Day
Raven River Crossroads to Argynvostholt	16	4 miles	1 hr 20 min	16 miles	5 hrs 20 min	No	3/4 Day
Raven River Crossroads to Richten's Tower	6	1.5 miles	30 min	6 miles	2 hrs	No	1/4 Day
Raven River Crossroads to Krezk	11	2.75 miles	55 min	11 miles	3 hrs 40 min	No	1/2 Day
Raven River Crossroads to Winery	13	3.25 miles	1 hr 5 min	13 miles	4 hrs 20 min	No	1/2 Day
Raven River Crossroads to Tsolenka Pass	36	9 miles	3 hrs	36 miles	12 hrs	Yes	3 Days
Winery to Yester Hill	10	2.5 miles	50 min	10 miles	3 hrs 20 min	Yes	1 Day
Tsolenka Pass to Amber Temple	20	5 miles	1 hr 40 min	20 miles	6 hrs 40 min	Yes	2 Days



## A REMINDER OF RULES

The following is a simple list of travel rules from pages 181-182 of the *Player's Handbook*.

- A party can travel 8 hours in a day, covering 24 miles in those 8 hours. This travel assumes the party is taking small breaks and pacing themselves along the way.
- Parties can choose to travel at a Fast Pace to cover more ground. They travel 30 miles in 8 hours at a Fast Pace, but their passive Perception is reduced by 5, making the player characters more vulnerable to attack.
- Parties can also choose to travel at a Slow Pace and only cover 18 miles in a day. However, traveling slowly means they are able to travel stealthily.
- Difficult terrain applies to long distance travel as well. Traveling through the wilds or using more dangerous roads may slow the party, forcing them to move at half speed and effectively doubling the amount of time it takes the party to travel that distance.

Traveling with mounts or vehicles can expedite travel speed.

- Traveling with a mount effectively adds 4 miles of distance to a day's travel.
- Traveling with a wagon, carriage, or other land vehicle provides no bonus to travel. As written, land vehicles only provide bonuses towards carrying capacity and little else.
- However, at the Dungeon Master's discretion, party members may be able to take short rests or perform light activities while riding in a vehicle, provided a single character takes responsibility of driving the vehicle.  
Additionally, you may provide the same mount bonus to a day's travel distance for vehicles.

Traveling longer than 8 hours in a day poses certain risks to the party, detailed below.

- Trying to travel longer than 8 hours at a time requires a Constitution saving throw from each player character. Failure means gaining a point of exhaustion. The rules suggest the DC for this check equal  $10 + \text{the number of extra hours traveled}$ . However, for simplicity's sake, you might leave this check a straight DC 10.
- Additionally, if parties do not stop to take a long rest in a 24 hour period, most Dungeon Masters employ the Going Without a Long Rest rules on page 78 in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*. These rules state that parties who choose not to long rest must make a Constitution saving throw or risk taking a point of exhaustion. However, many Dungeon Masters do not require a roll and instead make this point of exhaustion mandatory.

## PLAYER FACING MAPS

It is highly recommended that you do *NOT* show players the world map of Barovia!

Players should be new to Barovia and unaware of the general layout of the land, much like their characters. Not providing them a map is good for making them feel alienated and out of their depth in this foreign setting.

If and when there comes a time when player characters can obtain a map within the game, such as from the Burgomaster of Vallaki, from van Richten, or perhaps even from a shop for a significant price, provide them with a more ambiguous, hand-drawn map. There are several alternative maps available across the Internet. Here are a couple recommended examples:

- [Barovia Hand Drawn Maps](#) available on the DM's Guild.
- [Map to the Barony of Barovia](#) by [u/theBlackBlue](#) on Reddit

## BAROVIAN POPULACE

Barovia is a dour and hopeless land and, for the most part, that attitude is reflected in its inhabitants.

### NATIVE RACES

Barovia is not the most diverse realm in the universe. While the book says that Barovians are used to seeing fantastical races from a constant influx of adventurers, it is recommended that you instead limit the number of travelers that come to Barovia by a large margin.

One of the most important marks of horror is isolation. If players are under the impression that Barovia receives countless visitors, they will most likely feel more comfortable in the setting, which is exactly the opposite of the tone you'd like to accomplish in this campaign. Instead, a handful of foreigners might slip through the mists every decade or two, giving Barovia just enough diversity that the locals won't be floored to see a dwarf, but will also find the appearance most unusual.

Otherwise, Barovians are almost exclusively human by race. Every so often, a tiefling is born into their society, just like in any other setting. Additionally, Barovia is home to the last remaining dusk elves, a rare subrace of elves. Otherwise, any dwarves, halflings, normal elves, or other races are either former adventurers or descendants of those who became trapped in Barovia decades prior. Non-humans remain exceptionally rare in Barovia, though not unheard of.

### POPULATION NUMBERS

Frankly, there aren't enough people in Barovia to appropriately support an economy as written and increasing the populace is another recommended change to the setting, if only so that the endurance of the townships is believable.



Outside of pure logistics, "tiny, scared village stuck in the dark ages" can get old to players as months of sessions roll by. Part of the success of horror comes in seeing the good. For moments of terror and isolation, there should also be times of joy and comfort. For the miles and miles of horrible woods and dark dungeons, there should also be places of civilization and normalcy.

For those reasons, the *Fleshing Out* series has rewritten the population numbers of Barovia. For a more in-depth analysis on the changed populations, see each location's appropriate chapter in the *Fleshing Out* guides.

Town/Group	Population
Village of Barovia	500 - 600
Vallaki	1500 - 2000
Krezk	75 - 100
Forest Folk	150 - 200
Vistani	150 - 250
Dusk Elves	50 - 75

## NAMING CONVENTIONS

Barovian names follow the conventions of old Slavic and Romanian culture, which can be rather confusing to some Dungeon Masters and players.

More often than not, an NPC's surname is taken from the name of their father. For instance, the name Ismark Kolyanovich quite literally means, 'Ismark, son of Kolyan.' Similarly, Ismark's father's name is Kolyan Indirovich, which means 'Koylan, son of Indir.' This convention changes slightly for woman, where the '-ovich' is changed to '-ana' or '-ova.' We see this change in characters like Ireena Kolyana, who's name means 'Ireena, daughter of Kolyan.' Most characters do not lose their surname when they marry. For instance, Urwin Martikov's wife still possesses her family name and is called Danika Dorakova.

However, this naming convention isn't absolute across *Curse of Strahd*. For example, all the blood related members of the Martikov family possess the Martikov surname, regardless of their father's name.

Because of the confusion these naming conventions can cause for both Dungeon Masters and players, you may choose to negate them entirely for something more modern or more western. You might instead present Kolyan, Ismark, and Ireena all as Indirovich's and Danika as a Martikov, for instance. Much of the *Fleshing Out* series employs this general change and you will see it noted throughout chapters of this guide whenever such a change occurs.

## BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS

The people of Barovia share common knowledge and superstitions amongst them. The following are lists of information that the odd NPC might know, outside of the more informed and named individuals in the book. The following lists also either repeat or alter the information found in the book.

### OF MONSTERS

- Near every Barovian knows that Strahd is not only King of Barovia, but also a dreaded high vampire. While he rarely takes a role in local politics outside collecting taxes, he tends to take consorts from the populace every decade or so. Those who voluntarily become one of Strahd's consorts are usually considered evil, crazy, or extraordinarily misguided individuals. Otherwise, being chosen by Strahd to become his potential bride or groom is one of the most dreaded fates to anyone in the valley.
- Vampires are one of the greatest threats in the valley. All vampires in Barovia were either created by Strahd or by one of his spawn and are therefore under Strahd's complete control. Most Barovians know that vampires can't enter a home without permission and are harmed by sunlight, but are unaware of other methods of combating them. Additionally, most Barovians believe that garlic wards away vampires, though this is untrue.
- Barovians also know that werewolves are cursed and diseased individuals that run in packs in the woods. Most know that werewolves can be harmed by silver and that being bitten by one means becoming one of them.
- While the woods are filled with a great many other threats, the most common are packs of wolves. Barovians generally don't dare to travel outside their townships in fear of these threats.

### FAITHS

- The only known god and organized religion in Barovia is the following of the Morninglord, a good aligned sun god. From their centuries of isolation, Barovians haven't picked up any other alternate pantheons or gods. However, since Strahd's rise to power, the Morninglord has failed to answer a single prayer. Paladins are non-existent and clerics are in extremely short supply in Barovia.
- Nearly half of the forest folk worship Strahd as a god of Barovia. Settled Barovians from the townships tend to believe *all* forest folk are evil and worship Strahd.
- The Ladies Three were a trio of nature goddess that lived in the valley before Strahd's arrival. About half of the forest and mountain folk still worship the Ladies. Though it is rare, the odd settled Barovian might have heard of the Ladies as well, and leave offerings to them to promote good harvest. In the *Fleshing Out* series, the Ladies Three completely replace Mother Night.

## SUPERSTITIONS

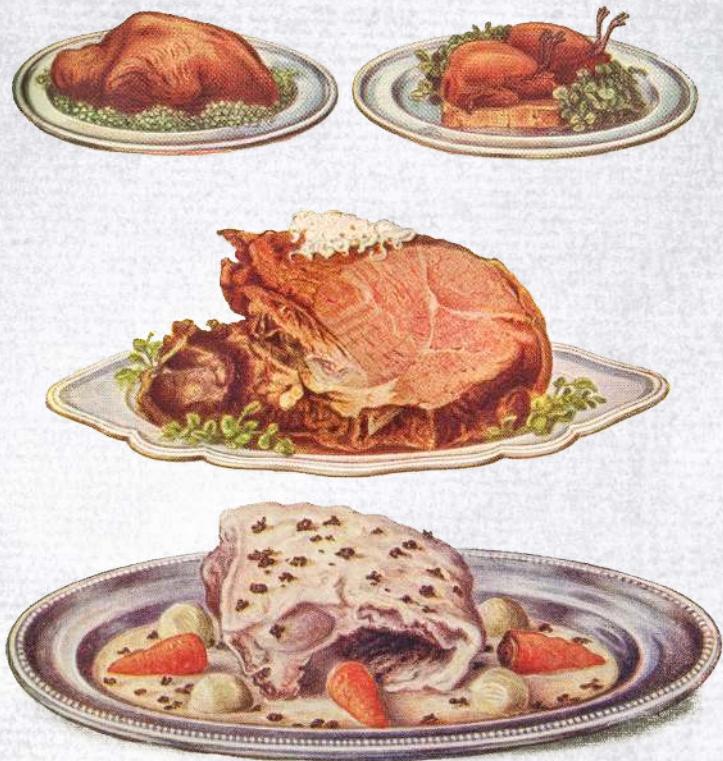
- It has quite literally been centuries since the sun has shone on Barovia. Though the people worship the Morninglord out of tradition, there's a rare superstition that the sun simply doesn't exist at all.
- Ravens are symbols of good luck. Conversely, it's bad luck to harm or kill a raven and the majority of Barovians will treat anyone that does so as a doomed pariah.
- Redheads are often considered bad luck. Tatyana and all her reincarnations, Irene included, have red hair. Though Barovians are completely unaware of Tatyana, the generations have slowly noticed that red-haired people tend to meet poor ends with early graves. As a result, most Barovians consider red haired individuals as bad luck. If you end up replacing Irene with a player character, as detailed in the *Connecting Player Characters to the Curse of Strahd Campaign* section, you may change this superstition as you see fit.

## BIASES

- Most Barovians do not care for the Vistani, believing them all agents of Strahd because they alone can leave Barovia.
- Most Barovians also think quite poorly of the forest and mountain folk, seeing them as primitive peoples who'd sooner murder their children in service of Strahd.
- While the Vistani are generally an open and welcoming people, they have a cultural superiority complex against Barovians, believing them too serious and far too boring.
- The forest and mountain folk have come to resent the civilized people of Barovia. The half that actually worship Strahd see them as cattle for the vampire lord. And the half that still worship the Ladies tend to hate Barovians for having forgotten the nature goddesses.
- Ironically, all Barovians lack any bias against foreign races. Besides finding dwarves, goliaths, and the like unusual oddities, they harbor no outright ill-will towards foreign beings.
- Similarly, no major groups harbor ill-will towards dusk elves. Instead, most Barovians regard them with a general overwhelming pity, as they are victim's of Strahd's anger.

## COMMON KNOWLEDGE

- All Barovians know the general locations of the major settlements - the Village of Barovia, Vallaki, and Krezk - and of Castle Ravenloft. The settled peoples also generally know the name of the Burgomaster of each town.
- Wine is one of the most important drinks of the valley and the lone Winery that supplies it is held in high esteem.
- The ruins of Berez lie in the bogs by the Luna River. Strahd destroyed Berez when their people openly defied him in some way. Now, the ruins are home to a coven of crazed, witch women. If a woman goes missing from one of the townships, many Barovians will believe she joined their evil sisterhood.
- The two holiest locations in Barovia are the Church of St. Andral in Vallaki and the Abbey of St. Markovia in Krezk.
- There are other scattered ruins around Barovia, namely the strange monoliths at Yester Hill, the old mage tower on Baritok Lake, and the old fortress southwest of Vallaki (Argynvostholt). However, no one knows the purpose or history of any of these ruins. Additionally, no one has heard of or is aware of the location of the Amber Temple.



## FOOD AND WILDLIFE

There are three distinct biomes in the Barovian valley: forests, mountains, and swamp. There are also very brief expanses of plains and grassland that usually develop between breaks in the Svalich woods, but such grassland is hardly relevant to the overall terrain of Barovia. These biomes combined with Barovia's sunless sky limit the variety of flora and fauna that thrive in the valley.

### CROPS

The lack of sunlight in Barovia hinders large scale farming in the valley. The people of Barovia can't live off the skills of hunters and fishermen alone, though.

The following list of crops are those that can grow with almost no direct sunlight. Note that most of these crops usually have more desaturated leaves and vines than their healthy counterparts, often making the plants appear either darker or lighter from the sunlight deficiency. Also remember that most of the products of these crops will be small and under-grown, meaning that farmers have to work twice as hard and plant more crops to grow enough produce.

Spices and crops that require warmer environments, like sugarcane and rice, are completely unavailable in Barovia except by extraordinarily rare Vistani imports. Even though the Vistani are more than capable of importing food stocks and foreign alcohol, their poor relationship with the rest of Barovia means they generally keep their trade goods to themselves.

### BAROVIAN CROPS INCLUDE:

Beet, cabbage, carrots, celery, collards, coriander, dill, garlic, kale, mustard greens, parsley, potatoes, radishes, tarragon, and turnips.

## NATIVE ANIMALS

Outside of monsters, wolves, and ravens, we rarely see mention of other wildlife in the printed module. Even the Adventure's League chapters surrounding Barovia mention that wolves are almost the exclusive inhabitants of the wilds. However, that's simply not plausible, or the valley would be all but purged of life after a few decades.

The compiled tables below include animals that would be native to Barovia. These tables certainly do *not* include every animal found in such an environment, but they're comprehensive enough to satisfy a session in a pinch, especially if you have a Druid in your party.

## BAROVIAN COOKING

Barovia's limited number of crops and livestock usually makes for more uninspired meals. However, the hardy people of the valley have learned to make due.

Potatoes are by far the largest staple of Barovian diets. Most tables have potatoes in near every meal, with potato pottages and porridges commonplace to feed large families. Without wheat available, Barovians even make their bread out of potatoes.

Otherwise, Barovians use their spice crops to liven up their meals. They produce basic celery salt to mix into most dishes and favor garlic to ward off vampires. Barovians also tend to favor root based salad dishes and vegetable soups, since they're easy to make and feed many at a time.

Barovian diets tend to favor protein more than other cultures, since animals are more easily cared for than crops in this setting. Chickens, sheep, and goats are generally kept alive as long as possible for their eggs, wool, and goat milk, but are regular staples of Barovian meals.

The people also raise pens of pigs, which they readily slaughter for food. Lastly, though the meat of predators is generally tough and unfavorable to most cultures, Barovians consider wolf meat a delicacy, as consuming it represents a minor victory over the horrors of Barovia.

## ALCOHOL

The only mass produced alcoholic beverage available in Barovia is wine. No beer. No mead, whiskey, or ale. *Wine*. Quite frankly, Barovia doesn't have the environment to support the crops needed to make other alcohol.

Though it's possible to produce forms of spirits from potatoes, Barovians lack the sophistication, man power, and land to mass produce it. What crops they have are already undergrown, so dedicating whole fields towards producing spirits when they already have wine available is generally ill-advised.

All wine in Barovia comes from the Wizards of Wine Winery, south of Krezk. The winery is known for three vintages of wine: the most common and standard Purple Grapemash No. 3, the slightly more tantalizing Red Dragon Crush, and the finely made Champagne du le Stomp, which they stopped producing about ten years ago after the theft of a magic gemstone. The winery also very rarely produces a grape-based brandy, similar to real-world Pálinka. However, because this takes so much time to produce, only the very wealthy citizens of Barovia own bottles for special occasions.

The Vistani are the only group that have access to other alcohol from their travels beyond the mist, though they themselves culturally prefer wine and don't tend to carry other varieties of drink. Additionally, their poor relationship with local Barovians prevents most trade between Vistani and those trapped in Barovia.

## WILD ANIMALS

Environment	Predators	Game	Birds	Other
Woods	Wolves, Boar, Bears, Lynx, Foxes	Deer, Rabbits, Squirrels, Mice	Ravens, Owls, Falcons, Larks, Jackdaws, Pheasant, Doves, Thrush	Rats, Bats
Swamps	Wolves, Boar, Snakes	Muskrats	Ravens, Owls, Larks, Jackdaws, Thrush	Rats, Bats, Frogs/Toads
Mountains	Wolves, Bears, Lynx, Foxes	Rabbits, Mountain Goats, Squirrels	Ravens, Owls, Falcons	Rats, Bats

## DOMESTIC/PRODUCTION ANIMALS

Food Production	Pets/Labor	Fish
Sheep	Dogs	Carp
Goats	Cats	Perch
Chickens	Horses	Pike
Domesetic Boar (hairy pigs)	Donkeys	Trout

# THE FANES OF BAROVIA



ong before Strahd's conquest, the Barovian valley was once an untamed land watched over by a trio of ancient archfey. The forest folk of old called these archfey, The Ladies Three, and built great, monolithic shrines in their honor. The Ladies Three were chaotic beings of nature, as wild as the land itself. Though they possessed physical forms, they rarely showed themselves to mortals.

Instead, they would appear in auguries, dreams, and omens, speaking through the mouths of animals and in the wind that mused the trees.

Shortly after Strahd became a Darklord, he cemented his rule over the land by stealing power from the Ladies Three, reducing these once great archfey to little more than immortal, but powerless, hags.

The Ladies Three are more often referred to as the Fanes of Barovia. These Fanes are canonical Ravenloft lore that appeared in previous editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* but not at all in the *Curse of Strahd* module. However, they are now an essential feature of the *Fleshing Out* revisions and restoring their power is an overarching quest of the campaign that motivates players to explore and engage with the various locations in Barovia. The Fanes also completely replace Mother Night in the module, overwriting the devilish moon goddess.

This section of the guide will cover all the information you need to incorporate the Fanes into your adventure.

## WORSHIPING OF THE FANES

As a direct definition, 'Fane' refers to a temple or shrine. However, for the sake of this module, it's far more constructive to define Fanes as magical environments. There are three core environments in Barovia, each with an associated shrine and Lady.

They are:

- The Seeker of the Forest Fane
- The Weaver of the Swamp Fane
- The Huntress of the Mountain Fane

## BEFORE STRAHD

The people of the valley used to worship the Ladies through shrines scattered across their respective environments, some small and some large. The three most prominent shrines were large circles of stone monoliths that all still stand during the time of the campaign. The shrine of the Forest Fane is the collection of monoliths behind Old Bonegrinder. The shrine of the Swamp Fane is the circle of stones in Berez. Lastly, the shrine of the Mountain Fane is the great circle of stones atop Yester Hill.

The worship of the Ladies usually came in the form of minor religious practices and offerings. The offerings were usually nature based tithes, such as the best sack of grain from a first harvest or the antlers of a buck killed on a hunt. Alternately, worshipers of the Ladies also left small, carved statues or other bits of artistic labor as offerings.

The religious practices involving the Ladies were usually communes with nature. A worshiper might live alone in the woods for a year in respect for the Ladies and then return home spiritually awakened. Other rituals included great seasonal feasts and village-wide pilgrimages to the major shrines.

## DURING THE CAMPAIGN

After Strahd's arrival and the introduction of the religion of the Morninglord, worship of the Ladies rapidly declined in the valley. Unfortunately, few Barovians remember the Ladies Three and their shrines are no more than relics of a bygone era to the current populace. However, the odd nursery rhyme or folk tale perseveres.

Outside of the settled Barovian townships, about half of the forest folk still worship the Ladies. The other half has forsaken them in favor of worshiping Strahd, who they believe a literal god of the valley.

## INFLUENCING BAROVIA

Though the Ladies Three were wild goddesses of nature who rarely interacted with people, signs of their influence remain across Barovia.

## THE ORIGINS OF BAROVIAN LYCANTHROPY

The Ladies Three are the origin of lycanthropy in Barovia.

The Ladies originally used lycanthropy to gift their faithful followers and to curse their blasphemers. The Huntress is responsible for wolf lycanthropes in Barovia while the Seeker is responsible for raven lycanthropes in Barovia. However, in their current, weakened states, they are incapable of granting or curing lycanthropy.

## THE BIRTH OF THE WINERY GEMS

The printed module provides very little information as to the origin of the mystical gems that give life to the vineyards of the Wizards of Wine Winery. The text only mentions a mysterious mage who crafted the gems for their fields.

Alternatively, the three gems were gifts from the Ladies Three. The mage formed a bond with the local, settled Barovians as well as the forest folk and managed to broker a temporary peace between the two factions. The resulting era of understanding impressed the Ladies Three significantly. To help the mage settle the land and start a bountiful vineyard, they each gifted the mage a gemstone to plant in their fields.

## THE FALL OF THE FANES

Unfortunately, the Ladies Three are no longer the reigning powers of the Barovian valley. As stated previously in this chapter, Strahd desecrated their shrines and stole their immense power, giving himself control over nature and weather. With this stolen power, Strahd is literally, "The Land." Players will have to restore the Fanes to weaken Strahd, enabling his defeat.

## THE LADIES

Though the Ladies Three have fallen, they are not gone. These archfey are still alive during the time of the campaign, living on in Barovia as elderly, eccentric women. In their weakened states, they maintain only their immortality and access to very basic magics. Players will encounter these women throughout the game, though they won't understand their true significance until the Fanes are restored.

The following section of this guide will cover each Lady individually, describing their domains, their appearances, and their sightings during the campaign.

### THE SEEKER OF THE FOREST FANE

The Seeker represents the coming of the future. Of the Ladies, she is the representative of foresight and soothsaying, peering into the future with timeless eyes. The Seeker is most often represented with ravens, highly intelligent birds that watch the valley from on high as the Seeker herself watches over the future.

Before her fall, the Seeker appeared as a tall, beautiful woman with angular features and ebony skin that absorbed light, making her look like a moving shadow. Her eyes were a pure, sightless white, without irises or pupils, and she had a mane of raven feathers instead of hair.

After the desecration of the Fanes, the Seeker was reduced to the form of an simple, old woman. She now appears in the campaign as Madam Eva, and lives amongst the Vistani as an honored seer. Though she has lived with the Vistani for generations, the Vistani recognize her longevity as a side effect of her immense gift for soothsaying and not as a sign of her former power.

Madam Eva - or more affectionately known as Eva Treenail to her sisters - instantly sees the player character's potential towards her restoration and uses her fateful Tarroka reading to guide them on that path.

### THE WEAVER OF THE SWAMP FANE

In contrast of the Seeker, the Weaver of the Swamp Fane represents the remembrance of the past. She acts as a nature based historian that remembers all that the land remembers. The Weaver is, in her essence, the keeper of time itself in the valley of Barovia.

At full power, she once appeared as a petite, sprite-like woman with a playful air about her. Her skin was a bright, yellow-green, similar in color to frog skin, and her mouth sported a row of pointed, razor sharp teeth. Her hair was white like spider's silk and it floated about her head as if perpetually underwater.

During the campaign, the Weaver appears as a stout old woman by the name of Jeny Greenteeth. Jeny is an quirky, old herbologist with an eye for mischief that owns a shop just outside the walls of Vallaki. She owns a cluttered rickshaw cart pulled by a giant boar named Toady, which she uses to make trips to Berez in vain attempts to rescue her sister, the Huntress, from the dreaded witch of the swamp.

### THE HUNTRESS OF THE MOUNTAIN FANE

Unlike her sisters, the Huntress has no representation in the passage of time. The forest folk of old didn't believe in the concept of the present, and instead focused solely on the past and the future. The Huntress is reflective of these old beliefs and instead represents the dark, underside of the weave of time.

The Huntress is a nature-based death goddess. However, death is not synonymous with evil. In the case of the Huntress, death is a natural occurrence meant to be accepted and not feared. Strahd and other undead are therefore her natural enemies, as their very existences are perversions of death. Lastly, the Gulthias Tree, a tree of death and one of the eldest living things in the valley, is a direct representation of her power.



# LADY OF THE WOOD (WEAKENED)

Medium fey, true neutral

**Armor Class** 10 (16 with barkskin)

**Hit Points** 33 (6d8 + 6)

**Speed** 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Animal Handling +10, Deception +10, Medicine +5, Nature +10, Survival +5

**Condition Immunities** Charmed, Exhaustion, Sleep

**Senses** Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Celestial, Common, Druidic, Primordial, Sylvan

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Archfey.** The Lady is a weakened archfey and nature goddess and cannot be killed by normal methods. When the Lady drops to 0 hit points, she falls unconscious and wakes with 1 hit point after 1d4 hours instead of dying.

The Huntress is the eldest sister of the Ladies Three, as old as the mountains themselves. Before the desecration of her shrine, the Huntress appeared as a tall, chiseled woman with grey skin. Her physique was toned, like that of an Amazonian woman, and her long, white hair sat upon her shoulders like snow on the cold stone of a mountain top. She had a pair of enormous, stag antlers growing from her temples, adding significantly to her height.

As an old hag, the Huntress goes by the name Lara Stoneheart and at the start of the campaign, she is a captive of the evil witch, Baba Lysaga in Berez. Instead of using goat blood for her rituals of immortality, Baba has Lara bound to the ceiling of her hut above her bathtub. Every week or so, Baba slits Lara's throat and bathes in her blood. This horrible and painful ritual has kept Baba Lysaga alive and powerful for centuries. And because Lara is still immortal, she has no choice but to continuously endure the ritual.

## INTERACTIONS WITH PLAYER CHARACTERS

The Ladies Three have no intention of revealing their backgrounds to the player characters. When they each first meet the party, they have no reason to believe that this group of adventurers will fair better than previous groups and would rather not waste their trust on individuals who may not deserve it. Additionally, these women once possessed all the power of nature and their own, innate pride sours them from admitting to how far they've fallen. Their claim to be woodland goddesses would sound insane to the average person, and they have no desire to be ridiculed by mortals.

**Magic Resistance.** The Lady has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

**Proof Against Detection and Location.** The Lady is hidden from Divination magic. She can't be targeted by such magic or perceived through magical Scrying sensors.

**Spellcasting.** The Lady is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The Lady has the following druid spells prepared:

- Cantrip (at will): druidcraft, gust, mold earth, shape water
- 1st level (4 slots): charm person, cure wounds, faerie fire, purify food and drink
- 2nd level (2 slots): barkskin, healing spirit

**Innate Spellcasting.** The Lady's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

- At will: animal friendship, beast bond, speak with animals
- 2/day: locate animals or plants

## ACTIONS

**Bone Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, Reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage

Most importantly, with the notable exception of Lara's capture in Berez, the Ladies have mostly managed to avoid the notice of the powerful beings that would exploit their weakness. Strahd, for instance, would likely wish to contain Jeny Greenteeth and Madam Eva if he knew their true identities. These two Ladies seek to avoid fates similar to their sister.

While the Ladies gladly assist the party in their endeavors to defeat Strahd, they will not reveal themselves until they have been restored.

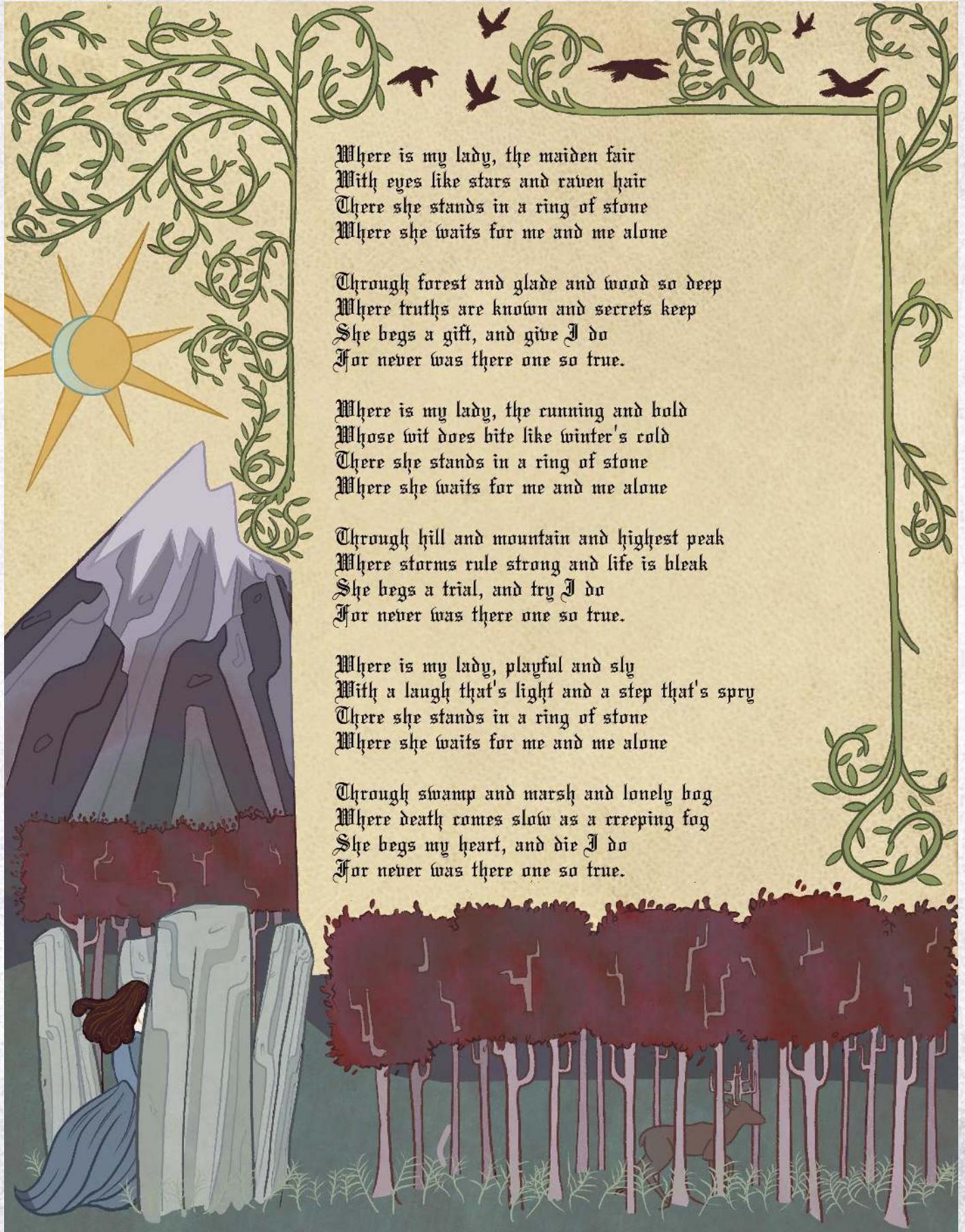
## DISCOVERING THE FANES

As previously stated, the Fanes are little more than ancient legend to the people of Barovia. The Ladies themselves have little power now and barely a whispered rumor remains of their godhood. So how might the players learn of these enigmatic archfey?

## SHRINES AND LORE

The players' first encounters with the Fanes should be quite small and seemingly insignificant.

Besides the great shrines at Old Bondgrinder, Berez, and Yester Hill, smaller shrines and relics still exist in Barovia pertaining to the Ladies Three. Should you require a benign random encounter during travel, consider having the party discover an old shrine to the Ladies. This shrine might be a lone boulder with simplistic drawings of the Ladies carved into its face. Or, perhaps the party finds an old, carved figurine of a lady with stag antlers in the dirt.



Where is my lady, the maiden fair  
With eyes like stars and raven hair  
There she stands in a ring of stone  
Where she waits for me and me alone

Through forest and glade and wood so deep  
Where truths are known and secrets keep  
She begs a gift, and give I do  
For never was there one so true.

Where is my lady, the running and bold  
Whose wit does bite like winter's cold  
There she stands in a ring of stone  
Where she waits for me and me alone

Through hill and mountain and highest peak  
Where storms rule strong and life is bleak  
She begs a trial, and try I do  
For never was there one so true.

Where is my lady, playful and sly  
With a laugh that's light and a step that's spry  
There she stands in a ring of stone  
Where she waits for me and me alone

Through swamp and marsh and lonely bog  
Where death comes slow as a creeping fog  
She begs my heart, and die I do  
For never was there one so true.

Additionally, nursery rhymes or old rumors might still pop up among the Barovian populace, though most civilians won't know their meaning or history. You might provide your players with a handout of one of these rhymes to foreshadow later reveals. The song provided on the previous page, entitled Ring of Stone, is an example of one of these rhymes.

## STRAHD'S POWER

Players should also learn of Strahd's immense power sometime in the early campaign. In particular, they should learn about his control over nature in Barovia. For example, a NPC might tell the players the story of Berez's fall, proclaiming that Strahd flooded the Luna River to wipe out the village. Witnessing or hearing about Strad's displays of power should signify to the players that Strahd's abilities far exceed a standard statblock.

While Strahd's power and relics of the Fanes will seem unconnected to the players at first, appropriately seeding this information will ease the reveal later in the adventure.

## INFORMED NPCs

Once the Fanes have been foreshadowed naturally through the Barovian populace and through random encounters, there are more informed NPCs that can tell the players about the fallen Ladies Three and provide clues to their restoration. Ideally, these NPCs should eventually lead the players to the Amber Temple, where the party can learn the mechanical method of reconsecrating the Fanes.

The following NPCs have information on the Fanes.

### Vargas Vallakovich, Fiona Wachter and other Nobility.

Vargas, Fiona and a variety of other nobility have access to better education and resources than Barovian civilians. They would know that prior to the Morninglord, the native peoples of the Barovian valley once worshiped nature goddesses. They would know nothing of these goddess' connection to Strahd, their greater shrines, or their symbolism.

**The Martikovs/Keepers of the Feather.** This spy network of wereravens are far more informed than the average Barovian. They know of the Ladies' symbolism and that Strahd drained them of their power to gain his own control over nature. However, the Keepers do not know that the Ladies can be reinstated and instead believe that the Fanes are completely dead.

**The Vistani.** Most Vistani know the same information as the Keepers of the Feather. They know a great deal about the symbolism behind the Seeker of the Forest Fane in particular, from their similar appreciation of the gift of foresight, but know far less of the other two Ladies.

The Vistani also believe the Ladies to be dead gods of a Barovia past.

**Rudolph van Richten and Ezmerelda.** Both these characters are excellent monster hunters and have built intelligence towards defeating Strahd specifically. As such, they are well aware of Strahd's connection to the Fanes and that these fallen nature goddesses are the source of a great deal of his power. Though they don't know how to go about it, they both correctly suspect that the power of the Fanes can be taken from Strahd. However, both van Richten and Ezmerelda are less informed about the general symbolism of the Ladies Three and know little of their shrines.

**The Werewolves and the Forest Folk.** These two groups live much more in line with nature than the rest of the Barovian populace and are very well informed about the Ladies Three. They know of the Ladies' symbolism, the desecration of their shrines, and that they can be restored, though they are unaware of a method to do so.

**The Abbott.** As a celestial angel, the Abbott knows of the Fanes, though he wasn't around for their desecration. He is unaware of their symbolism and the locations of their main shrines. However, he's one of the few that knows that it is almost impossible to truly kill a god, and that the Fanes can be restored somehow. He also knows of the Amber Temple, though not its exact location.

**The Revenants of Argynvostholt.** These undead knights remember a Barovia before Strahd became a vampire. They remember the Fanes, their shrines, and their desecration. The revenants are also some of the very few that know the location of the Amber Temple in the southern mountains, which possesses a method towards reconsecrating the Fanes. However, because they are so intent that Strahd remain in his own purgatory, they'll be far less inclined to help the players restore the Fanes.

**Baba Lysaga.** This evil witch not only knows most everything about the Ladies Three, but she is also the captor of the Huntress herself. While she doesn't know for certain a method of reconsecrating the Fanes, Lysaga is informed enough to make a few educated guesses. She also knows the location of the Amber Temple, which can prove her guesses right or wrong. However, Lysaga will under no circumstances part with this information willingly.

**Strahd von Zarovich.** Lastly and most obviously, Strahd knows most everything there is to know about the Fanes. He not only is responsible for their fall, but also has complete access to the Amber Temple. Like Baba Lysaga, he will not part with any of this information willingly.

	Nobility	Vistani	Keepers of the Feather	Richten & Ezmerelda	Werewolves & Forest Folk	Abbott	Revenants	Baba Lysaga	Strahd
<b>Symbolism</b>	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Shrines' Locations</b>	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Strahd's Connection</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Methods of Reconsecration</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Amber Temple Location</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

## THE ORDER OF INFORMATION

In order to gain information on the Fanes, the players should interact with the various NPCs listed on the previous page. Their first rumors of the Fanes might come from Lady Wachter or Vargas Vallakovich in Vallaki. They then might make friends of the Keepers of the Feather or of the pair of vampire hunters and come to learn that the Fanes are directly connected to Strahd.

In the search for more information, the players might then seek out the werewolves, who can tell them of the great Amber Temple, though not its location. The players might then confront the revenants at Argynvostholt or Baba Lysaga herself to learn the location of this temple. After traveling into the mountains and exploring the Amber Temple, the players will finally learn a direct method of reconsecrating the Fanes and restoring the Ladies Three.

Ideally, one informant should lead to the next, forcing the party to explore the various locations in Barovia. For example, while van Richten may not know if the Fanes can be restored, he'll know that the werewolf packs in the northwest woods would likely possess that information. Players would then follow van Richten's hook to the Werewolf Den.

## RESTORING THE FANES

Restoring the Ladies Three is an arduous task that should take place in the last third of the campaign and after the players have visited the Amber Temple to acquire this information. During this restoration, the players will have to travel to or revisit three locations in the game to right Strahd's past wrongs.

Initially desecrating the shrines of the Fanes was no easy task. Doing so required a great deal of time and effort on Strahd's part. As such, once the Fanes are restored, Strahd could not simply rush off to reclaim the power of the land before the final confrontation.

Additionally, the power of the Fanes is not incremental. All three shrines must be restored before Strahd loses access to that power and the Ladies rise again. Even as the Fanes are in the process of restoration, Strahd would not sense his access to that power waning until it is all suddenly gone. If, however, Strahd finds out the players actually have a method of restoring the Fanes, he will use all the power at his disposal to stop them. Discretion in the last stretch of the adventure is therefore paramount.

The following section of this guide provides information on reconsecrating the Fanes of Barovia.

## RECONSECRATING THE FOREST FANE

In accordance to the module, Lugdana was a holy paladin of light that spent much of her life battling the undead. In honor of her service, a giant, angelic raven presented her the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind. In this guide, the angelic raven was the Seeker herself.

In contrast to the module, Lugdana did not grow old and die in this profession. Instead, she was an elder, but still capable, warrior when Strahd came to power. Strahd captured Lugdana and forcefully turned her into one of his spawn, later entombing her in the catacombs beneath Ravenloft. During Lugdana's struggles against this fate, the Holy Symbol was lost to the wilds of Barovia.

## THE RITUAL

In order to restore the Forest Fane, players must retrieve the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind and return it to the henge of stones behind Old Bonegrinder.

Once the symbol is presented at the shrine in honor of the Seeker, the players are beset upon by a monstrous and **corrupted wereraven precursor**. Once this creature is defeated, the shrine becomes consecrated and a single raven swoops in and takes the Holy Symbol.



## FIGHTING THE WERERAVEN PRECURSOR

After the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind is presented to the mehirs behind Old Bonegrinder, the largest monolith shudders and the front of it turns into a smooth, black obsidian that is vaguely reflective. Within the obscured reflection, a humanoid figure appears, shrouded in black feathers, with a beaked face. Its feathers appear matted and bent, the space between them clotted with a diseased-looking, black ichor.

It mutters to itself in a low, rough voice and any player character that can understand druidic, primordial, or sylvan, can recognize that it continuously repeats the phrases, "My Ladies are gone. My Ladies are dead." and "Please, my Lady. I hurt. Help me."

The first player character to approach the menhir draws the wereraven precursor out of the reflection. It rears back its head and lets out a horrific scream, which is cut short as it begins to choke. As it retches forward, a cloudy, black fog spills from its beak and initiative begins.

The wereraven precursor will spend its first action or its first legendary action vomiting darkness onto the battlefield. Instead of attacking during the first one or two rounds, it will prioritize spreading its darkness to protect itself and disable the party. It will then focus down one enemy at a time, starting with the player character who first approached the black mirror.

When the wereraven precursor is defeated, it falls to its knees and bursts into a swarm of ravens, the last of which picks up the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind and flies into the woods.

## CORRUPTED WERERAVEN PRECURSOR

*Medium monstrosity, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16

**Hit Points** 139 (26d8 + 22)

**Speed** 40 ft. Fly 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	22 (+6)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Dex +10, Int +8

**Skills** Acrobatics +10, Perception +8, Stealth +10

**Damage Immunities** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

**Condition Immunities** Blinded, Charmed, Frightened

**Senses** Truesight 300 ft., passive Perception

**Languages** Druidic, Primordial, Sylvan

**Challenge** 11 (7200 XP)

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** If the wereraven precursor fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

**Beget Darkness.** The wereraven precursor knows the *Darkness* spell and can cast it at will and without material components. This spell is not a concentration spell for it.

**Light Sensitivity.** The wereraven precursor has disadvantage on any attack roll or saving throw while in bright light or sunlight.

**Dissonant Mimicry.** The wereraven precursor constantly mutters to itself, mimicking the cries of wounded villagers, screaming children, and dying animals. Any creature within magical darkness that can hear the wereraven precursor, but not see it must make a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw at the start of their turn or take 2d6 psychic damage or no damage on a successful save.

**The Weight of Corruption.** The wereraven precursor's wings and feathers are rotted and unkempt, making it appear undead or diseased. The weight of this corruption hinders its ability to fly reliably and it cannot maintain flight for more than 3 turns at a time.

### Actions

**Multiaction** The wereraven precursor makes two claws attacks.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, Reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit Damage* (1d8 + 4) slashing damage

**Piercing Flyby.** The wereraven precursor lunges forward, turning itself into a living torpedo with a single flap of its decrepit wings. The wereraven precursor moves in a straight line up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks. This movement does not count towards its movement on that turn. Any creature within 5 feet of the wereraven precursor at any point during this movement takes 1d6 + 4 piercing damage and must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

**Feathered Kindred (1/Day).** The wereraven precursor calls 2d4 swarms of ravens to aid it in battle.

### Legendary Actions

The wereraven precursor 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. Vampire regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

**Move.** The wereraven precursor moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

**Claws.** The wereraven precursor makes one claw attack.

**Darkness (Costs 2 Actions).** The wereraven precursor casts the *Darkness* spell.

## RECONSECRATING THE SWAMP FANE

Strahd only managed to desecrate the Swamp Fane with the help of his former nursemaid, Baba Lysaga. Under the witch's guidance, he hunted down and captured a half dozen high priestesses of the forest folk and lashed them to the stone monoliths at the Berez henge.

There, Strahd tortured the priestesses, bidding them forsake the Ladies and proclaim him the rightful ruler of Barovia. It took time, but eventually all succumbed. Once each priestess surrendered their faith, Baba cut out their hearts and presented them to Strahd. With the foul gift, Strahd took the power of the Swamp Fane.

### THE RITUAL

To reconsecrate the Swamp Fane, players must right the tragedy that befell the priestesses of the forest folk. To do so, the party must slay Baba Lysaga and present her corrupted heart at the henge of stones in Berez.

#### BABA LYSAGA'S HEART

- Baba Lysaga's heart is sickly grey in color. Swamp reeds and vines weave in and out of the muscle, flowing through ventricles and sinew in unnatural tangles. When the main arteries are cut, brown swamp water spills forth where blood should be.
- Though it stinks of bog and decay, the heart has no magical properties.

If the players have already killed Baba Lysaga when they learn of this ritual, they can return to the site of Baba's death, find her corpse, and successfully harvest her heart. If the players burned or otherwise destroyed her body, her heart remains mostly intact amongst the remains and can still be retrieved. If, by some chance, your players somehow erased Baba from existence, her heart is instead kept in a jar within her hut, removed by Baba herself years ago, and can now be retrieved by the players.

Once Baba Lysaga's heart is presented at the shrine, players standing within the stone circle will experience a series of visions. Remember that the Weaver is the keeper of the past, and now the players will bear witness. You can read the set of scenes on the following page to your players or interpret them in your own words.

## RECONSECRATING THE MOUNTAIN FANE

The Gulthias Tree remains sacred to the Huntress and is representative of her domain. Even in the current time of the campaign, the forest folk that still worship the Ladies Three present their honored dead to the Gulthias Tree. Any corpse or flesh in long term contact with the tree is eventually totally consumed by it in a process that only takes a few weeks. While this method of burial would seem gruesome to the average Barovian, the forest folk only present their tribe leaders, priestesses, powerful warriors, and other honored individuals to the tree.

To desecrate the Mountain Fane, Strahd fed the Gulthias Tree a series of his undead minions, mainly vampire spawn. As stated previously, the undead are perversions of death and therefore direct enemies of the Huntress herself. As the Gulthias Tree consumed these undead beings for months at a time, the Mountain Fane lost its power.

### THE RITUAL

To reconsecrate the Mountain Fane, the players must go through the Trial of the Huntress in the caverns beneath the Gulthias Tree. This Trial only presents itself to those who look for it, meaning that uninformed parties that investigate the tree will not find the entrance to the Trial. However, once the players are ready to brave this immense test, they'll discover a crawlspace in the roots of the tree leading downward.

The Trial of the Huntress is essentially a path through the land of the dead, where players can reconcile with lost loved ones, deal with the angry dead, and atone for their wrong doings. At the bottom of the caverns, the players come to the altar of the Huntress and receive her visions. Emerging from the Trial signifies the proper reconsecration of the Mountain Fane.

This Trial and its associated dungeon are not detailed in this chapter. Instead, refer to the Gulthias Dungeon Chapter later in this series or the original, [informal posts](#) on the [r/CurseofStrahd](#) subreddit.

## SCENES FOR RESTORING THE WEAVER

### TURNING BACK TIME

You stand in the center of the stone circle, Baba Lysaga's heart in your outstretched hand. For a moment, you feel like a fool. But just as you're about to lower your hand, you notice a change in the light.

You all look up to the sky and see the distant light of the sun - obscured by layers of cloud cover - as it moves much more quickly than usual. More than that, it seems to be moving West to East. Backwards. Wrong. Suddenly it's dawn. And then it is the darkness of midnight. And then it is dusk and then it is yesterday.

You all gather together in the center of the circle as the obscured sun seems to soar through the sky, days passing in the blink of an eye. It is day and then night, day, night, day, night, over and over until you can no longer distinguish the difference. The world is flying in perpetual twilight, seasons changing too fast for you to feel the frosts of winter for more than a second at a time.

### THE FLOOD

Suddenly, time stops. It is midday and Strahd stands before you in the circle.

But he isn't looking at you. He's holding up one hand as if in a mock wave, facing the river and the ruins below. Except, you each do a double take and see that they aren't ruins. In the once boggy marshes now stands a village. And the river... it's gone. The muddy bed lays ripped into the earth but there is no water. None at all.

Strahd lets out a low breath and closes his open hand into a fist.

And then you hear it. At first, it sounds like a storm, or perhaps the thundering of a distant army. You all look south and there, up the riverbed and roaring down the mountainside, is an unholy torrent of water. One of you screams and turns to run, always a little faster than the others. Another rushes to hide behind a menhir. But neither of you are fast enough! The water slams into Berez, drowning out the screams of the villagers! The water hits you! Soaks you to the bone and knocks the air out of you! But just before it washes you out of the Weaver's shrine, time stops and again begins to move backwards.

### MARINA

Time moves backwards only two days, stopping in the dead of night. Strahd walks into the circle and his face falls in horror. You follow his gaze down into Berez and you see the bonfire; hear the final few screams of a woman dead. You can only vaguely see her, lashed to a pole in the middle of the blazing pyre.

And time moves backwards again. Just one day this time. It's dusk and Strahd stands with a woman. Ireena. You recognize her immediately.

"Come, my love," says Strahd. "Let us go and I shall give you all you have dreamed of."

Ireena smiles widely, her eyes shining with unfamiliar joy. And then her smile falters, but only a little. "My family... I know they'll never understand us. But... I must say goodbye at least. I'll meet you here tonight?"

Strahd frowns, but bows low and kisses Ireena's hand. "What are a few more hours after centuries of waiting? Of course, my love. Tonight."

### THE LOSS OF THE SWAMP FANE

Again, time moves backwards. The clouds overhead move so quickly it hurts your eyes to look at them. How many years are passing? Hundreds at least. Finally it slows to a stop again. Berez is nothing more than a collection of huts on the riverbank.

Six young women are lashed to the surrounding menhirs, each wearing hides and foliage. Five are dead, their chests carved out. Strahd stands in the center of it all, Baba Lysaga at his side. His face bears no emotion, no sympathy.

The last girl, no more than fifteen, breathes ragged, wet breaths. Her shoulders are bent at odd angles from being lifted for so long and tears stain her cheeks. As she cries, she whispers something. Though the language is unfamiliar to you (unless a player speaks Druidic), the meaning flows into you like grief incarnate. "They are gone. Left us. My Ladies are dead."

Baba Lysaga walks forward and plunges a dagger into the girl's chest. The process is long and bloody, but eventually the old witch turns with a freshly cut heart in hand. She gives it Strahd with a manic grin.

### ACCEPTING THE GIFT

Time moves backwards, undoing the horrible scene. This time, the cycle is somehow faster than before. You're surprised when the clouds break and beam sunlight upon you for the first time in months. Berez deconstructs on the river and for a flash you see an army on a distant hill and a dragon, its silver scales catching the sunlight, dash across the open sky.

When time finally stops again, you're surprised to see Baba Lysaga standing before you. She seems out of place in this bright, serene world of ages passed. But... she's different. She's not a memory! She sees you! Baba stalks towards you, but just as she's about to reach you, an arm bursts through Baba's chest! It's clutching the old witch's rotten heart. You blink and find that your own hand is still outstretched, meeting the new appendage in the middle.

Baba Lysaga's form melts away. Behind where she stood, holding her heart, is a young woman with yellow tinged skin, her hair drifting about her brow as if floating underwater. Her lips stretch up to reveal a cheshire grin made up of rows of sharpened teeth. The woman brings the heart to her grinning lips... and takes a bite.

## REWARDS FROM THE LADIES

Outside weakening Strahd, restoring the Ladies Three more than warrants a more mechanical reward.

Once the final shrine is reconsecrated, the Ladies Three appear to the players as the elderly Jeny Greenteeth, Lara Stoneheart, and Madam Eva. As they approach, their elder forms melt away to reveal their more youthful and fey-like appearances. They thank the players and give them their rewards, but say little else.



### OVERCAST SKIES

Restoring the Fanes of Barovia weakens Strahd by removing his control over the land. This means that Strahd can no longer control the beasts of the Svalich Woods or the weather itself.

However, Barovia remains sunless even after the Ladies Three are restored. The Dark Power, Vampyr, makes Barovia permanently overcast to protect his Darklord from the sun.

In particular the Ladies might gift the players with the Sunsword. If the Dungeon Master rigs the Tarroka reading at the Tser Pool encampment, they might have the sword appear at Yester Hill, indicating the party's later descent into the Gulthias Dungeon. They might also provide a more vague prophesy without any particular location, and instead indicate a great magical event that moves the will of nature.

In addition to the Sunsword, the Ladies might also gift the players with additional magical items or abilities, which would feel especially warranted after they give up the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind.

This guide recommends that you reward the following items and abilities to parties that have restored the Fanes:

- The Sunsword
- The Orb of Rest (Magic Item found on page 37)
- This ability to each player character: "**Proof against Enchantment**. When you fail a saving throw to resist being charmed, you may choose to succeed instead. Once you use this ability, you may not use it again until you have completed a long rest."

Each of these gifts is representative of the Ladies. The Sunsword represents the Huntress, as it is a weapon meant to destroy her foes. The orb of day is a manipulation of time, which represents the Weaver's keeping of history. Lastly, protection from enchantment represents the Seeker, who's foresight can offer clarity.

All three of these gifts may prove crucial to Strahd's defeat. The sunsword is a mighty weapon to use against Strahd. The orb of day allows the party to quickly rest before summoning Vampyr or otherwise survive the final fight. Lastly, protection from enchantment allows the party to resist Strahd's powerful charm ability, which can last for 24 hours.

Once their gifts have been given, the Seeker turns into a swarm of ravens that scatter, the Weaver turns into a puddle of swamp water that falls to the dirt, and the Huntress turns into a stone statue, which promptly crumbles to dust.

# LYCANTHROPY IN BAROVIA



Another overarching change made to the campaign in the *Fleshing Out* series involves lycanthropy in the Barovian valley. Additionally, this section of the guide offers some alternative rules towards running a player character infected by lycanthropy.

## TYPES OF LYCANTHROPY

These guides recognize two forms of lycanthropy in Barovia: infected and inherited.

### INFECTED

Infected lycanthropes are affected by a magical disease or curse, and are examples of the most classic version of lycanthropy. This curse is spread through bite and enables its victims to succumb to their most beastly urges in exchange for monstrous power. The curse also makes its victims more violent in nature, giving them a soul-deep bloodlust that they cannot control.

Infected lycanthropes have little control over their transformations and usually shapechange into their were-forms when under duress or when angered. Once transformed, they lose almost all control of their actions, attacking the source of their duress indiscriminately.

Infected lycanthropes are dangerous monsters of Barovia. Though humanoids and therefore intelligent and sentient, it's generally only a matter of time before the bestial nature of their curse takes their senses and they become more violent and primitive versions of their former selves.

In Barovia, the vast majority of werewolf lycanthropes are infected in nature and highly dangerous. Additionally, infected lycanthropy is a curse of the Ladies Three.



### INHERITED

Inherited lycanthropy is more akin to a species than a disease. This more benign form of lycanthropy is passed on from parent to child and inherited lycanthropes lack the ability to pass on their lycanthropy through their bites. While slightly weaker than their infected counterparts, this form of lycanthropy is also controllable.

Inherited lycanthropes can change forms at will and retain their full personality and mind when in their altered states. Inherited lycanthropes undergo their first change in early adolescence. With enough practice and focus, they can gain full control of their change in a few short years. Because of its controllable nature, inherited lycanthropes often view their condition as a blessing rather than a curse.

However, on nights of the full moon, inherited lycanthropes are still forced into their were-forms and become primitive and animalistic in nature, though they are generally still not as violent as their infected counterparts. Most inherited lycanthropes arrange locations to lock themselves away during the full moon as a result.

In Barovia, nearly all wereraven lycanthropes are inherited in nature and live safely among the native populace, though all mysteriously disappear on nights of the full moon. Lastly, inherited lycanthropy in Barovia was once a gift bestowed on their ancestors by the Ladies Three.

## RUNNING A PLAYER CHARACTER INFECTED BY LYCANTHROPY

In the rules as written (page 207 of the *Monster Manual*), a player character that becomes an infected lycanthrope gains immediate bonuses to their character sheet. They gain a bonus to one of their core stats, extra AC, and the ability to shapechange at will. Additionally, they gain the monster statblock's damage immunities, traits, and actions. The only downside to becoming a lycanthrope involves a possible change towards an evil alignment, meaning the Dungeon Master has the right to take control of their character sheet for the foreseeable future, potentially forcing the player to roll a new character.

If a Dungeon Master allows their player to keep their lycanthrope character, these many bonuses hardly seem like a curse at all. And in *Curse of Strahd*, you certainly don't want your players to think being turned into a werewolf is a good thing. All power should come at a price, especially in this module.

This section of the guide details an alternate way to run lycanthrope player characters.

## ALIGNMENT

Firstly, do not change an infected player character's alignment. Suddenly gaining an evil alignment can be a faster way to lose a player character than death. Most infected player characters are not actively choosing to be bitten and suddenly losing their character in such a way can seem drastically unfair to players.

## MECHANICS

A player character infected with lycanthropy obtains the following traits and stat changes:

- Immunity to nonmagical and non-silvered damage.
- Advantage on all skill checks relying on smell and hearing (if a werewolf) or sight and hearing (if a wereraven).
- A Strength score of 18 (if a werewolf) or a Dexterity score of 18 (if a wereraven). If the player character's Strength/Dexterity is already an 18 or higher, it doesn't change.
- Beasts of the same classification of the player character's lycanthropy regard them with cautious friendship and don't outright attack.
- An infected player character involuntarily transforms into their were-form every night and therefore cannot benefit from a short or long rest at night. For each 24-hour period an infected player character goes without a long rest, they gain one level of exhaustion.

## CHANGING INTO WERE-FORM

Infected lycanthrope player characters cannot control their curse or their changes. They will transform into their were-form every sunset and revert to their humanoid selves every sunrise, without any memory of their time transformed. They also have no access to their beast form (wolf if a werewolf and raven if a wereraven).

While in were-form, the infected player character succumbs to bloodlust and attacks the nearest living creature they can perceive, friend or foe. They must prioritize attacking weak or already injured creatures. If they cannot perceive any creatures nearby, they spend their turn and movement trying to seek one out.

If you must run combat with a lycanthrope player character in were-form, use the following mechanical changes:

- Whenever a player character transforms into their were-form, they regain half their total hit points, but no spell slots, no class traits, and no racial traits.
- When in were-form, the player character has proficiency with unarmed strikes and may add either their Strength or Dexterity modifiers to those attack and damage rolls. Their unarmed strikes include a Claw attack that deals 2d6 slashing damage and a Bite attack that deals 1d10 piercing damage. Additionally, they can only use the attack action as their action, and that attack must use an unarmed strike. They may only use their strikes multiple times on a turn if their class already includes an Extra Attack feature.
- An infected player character has the ability to spread their curse only in were-form. If they bite another humanoid creature while in were-form, that creature must make a Constitution saving throw, DC (10 + proficiency bonus), or contract the player character's lycanthropy.

## SURPRISE, SURPRISE!

Do not tell your players whether or not their characters have contracted lycanthropy after being bitten!

Instead, have your players roll Constitution saving throws whenever they are bitten, regardless of whether or not they've already contracted lycanthropy, but then withhold the results of the saving throw and knowledge of the accompanying mechanical changes.

If possible, prepare copies of your player characters' sheets and make the necessary changes to them privately. Then, for example, when a player goes to make a perception check based on hearing, have them roll with advantage but do not tell them why they have that advantage.

Making their curse a discovery will be all the more interesting for them.

## DROPPING OBJECTS

This is just a friendly reminder that objects worn or carried by lycanthropes are not altered when they shapechange. Weapons will be dropped, clothing will rip, and backpacks will be abandoned, unless these objects are sized to appropriately accommodate a shapechange.

## BLACKOUTS

If there are no party members present to witness the infected character's change into were-form, describe a blackout event to cover the infected character's time out of control.

For example, the party goes to take a long rest, which passes without incident. The following morning, they wake, but the infected player character is missing. This character wakes in an alternate location of the Dungeon Master's choosing, naked and/or in tattered clothing, and covered in blood. This blood may belong to passing civilians, to animals, or something else entirely. Give the infected player character their point of exhaustion and let them figure it out.

## STRESS CHANGE

If an infected player character drops to 10 hit points or fewer, have them roll a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a fail, they transform into their were-form, regaining half their total hit points and entering their uncontrollable bloodlust. They remain in their were-form until they fall unconscious or until the following sunrise.

## CURING LYCANTHROPY

As mentioned on page 10, the spell *remove curse* is an exceedingly easy way to cure lycanthropy and mitigates the severity of this curse. Instead, lycanthropy can only be cured by the *greater restoration* spell or something equivalent.

In the campaign, the Abbott is capable of curing lycanthropy with his *healing touch* ability. Additionally, you might give van Richten a spell scroll of *greater restoration*.

Lastly, you might suggest that killing the root lycanthrope will cure all those that they cursed. In the module, that werewolf might be Kiril at the Werewolf Den and killing him would cure the majority of the infected werewolves in his pack.

# AMENDED MAGIC ITEMS



astly, the *Fleshing Out* series employs modified magic items for the campaign.

## HOLY SYMBOL OF RAVENKIND

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)*

The holy symbol is a carved, bone amulet shaped like the sun, with a large crystal embedded in its center. Those that stare into the crystal can vaguely see an eye staring back at them.

The changes to this magic item are meant to protect the party from Strahd's spying in the last third of the campaign.

### ABILITIES:

The holy symbol has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6+1 charges daily at dawn.

**Mental Barrier.** Anyone who wears the holy symbol gains the benefits of a *nondetection* spell and is resistant to psychic damage. As an action, the wearer can expend 4 charges to project this effect in a 15 ft radius around themselves, protecting any other creature within range. This effect lasts one hour.

**Raven's Eye.** As an action, you can expend 3 charges to magically summon 1d4 **swarms of ravens** to aid you in combat. When combat ends, the summoned ravens burst into feathers and disappear.

**Sunlight.** As an action, you can expend 5 charges while presenting the Symbol to make it shed bright light in a 30 ft radius and dim light for an additional 30 ft. The light is sunlight and lasts for 1 min or until you end the effect (no action required).

## ORB OF REST

*Wondrous item, very rare*

The orb of rest is a small, crystal orb that fits comfortably into the palm of an average, humanoid hand. The orb seems to contain an ever-flowing nebula of stars.

### ABILITIES:

The orb has a single charge. Once used, the orb regains its charge after 4d4 + 3 days.

**A Moment's Rest.** As an action, a creature in physical contact with the orb of rest can use the item's charge to choose up to six willing creatures within 60 feet of it, including itself, to instantly gain the effects of a Long Rest.

## GULTHIAS STAFF

*Staff, very rare, cursed (requires attunement)*

The staff is a spongy, black length of wood with the same statistics as a quarterstaff.

If the staff is broken or burned to ashes, its wood releases a terrible, inhuman scream that can be heard out to a range of 300 feet. All blights that can hear the scream immediately wither and die.

### ATTUNEMENT:

The Gulthias Staff can be attuned to over the course of a long rest. Multiple creatures can be attuned to the staff at the same time, though only one creature may attune to it per long rest. Once attuned to the staff, the only way to end attunement is to destroy or break the staff.

The staff automatically attunes to a single humanoid creature within 5 feet of it over the course of that creature's long rest. During attunement, the staff grows several dozen, thread sized vines that reach out and pierce the skin of the creature it is attuning to. After completing their long rest, the creature can easily break the tiny vines, but pieces still live on in their flesh. Occasionally, they can see these vines moving beneath their skin.

### ABILITIES:

**Bright Bane.** Anyone who holds the staff, attuned or unattuned, exerts a certain level of control over blights. Blights and other evil plant creatures don't regard the holder as hostile unless they harm them.

**Bright Lord.** The staff has 10 charges and regains 1d6 + 1 of its expended charges daily at dusk.

As an action, an attuned wielder can expend charges to create any of the following creatures:

- 1 charge: 1x Twig Blight
- 2 charges: 1x Needle Blight
- 4 charges: 1x Vine Blight

The summoned creature appears in a location within sight of and within 30 feet of the attuned user and is under their control, sharing the summoner's initiative. After 1 minute, the summon disappears. The summoner may dismiss a summon early as an action.

When all charges are expended, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff crumbles to dust without releasing its blight-killing shriek.

### CURSE:

Keep the staff's cursed abilities secret from players.

**Symbiote.** The staff lives by drinking the life force of its attuned hosts. When a creature attuned to the staff completes a long rest, they must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 15 (3d6 + 5) necrotic damage and have their hit point maximum reduced by the same amount. They take half damage on a successful save and their hit point maximum is reduced by that amount instead. This hit point reduction lasts until they complete their next long rest, at which point they must make another save.



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