

Death House

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Zusammenfassung

Sources for this writeup include the official Curse of Strahd Gamemaster's Manual and Curse of Strahd: Reloaded.

Approaching Death House

As you continue up the road, dark storm clouds quickly begin to gather and before long a vicious thunderstorm has erupted; the wind is whipping violently, the rain is heavy like it's trying to pound you into the ground beneath you, and the flashes of lightning are often a bit too close for comfort.

In the distance farther down the road, you see a light in the darkness. As you approach it, you can begin making out more detail – the light is a lantern held by a girl, probably a bit younger than teenage, and a boy a few years younger still. They are both standing beneath the awning over the front door of an old house, where the girl appears to be sheltering the boy from the rain and waving to you as if trying to signal for help. The boy is holding a stuffed doll fearfully. The house is flanked by two sad-looking structures; one appears to be a servants' house and the other a stable.

▷ Inside Death House

Inside Death House

1 Entrance

A wrought-iron gate with hinges on one side and a lock on the other fills the archway of a stone portico. The gate is unlocked, and its rusty hinges shriek when the gate is opened. Oil lamps hang from the portico ceiling by chains, flanking a set of oaken doors that open into a foyer.

Hanging on the south wall of the foyer is a shield emblazoned with a coat-of-arms, flanked by framed portraits of stony-faced aristocrats. The coat-of-arms is a stylized golden windmill on a red field. Mahogany-framed double doors set with panes of stained glass lead further into the house.

The portraits are of the long-dead members of the Durst family.

▷ 2 / Main Hall

Skill Challenge Escape: Entrance Foyer

To your horror, you discover that the front doors are slowly becoming bricked up – and behind them, the doors to the Main Hall begin to swing shut.

Characters can make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to hurl themselves into the Main Hall before the doors swing shut. Otherwise, read the following:

The mahogany hall doors behind you slam shut with ominous thunder. You look about the room, desperate to escape – and when you look toward the exit, you see the bottom third of the front door has been replaced by brick. Defying all logic, the wood has melded into the rows of moldy brick. You blink – and to your mounting horror, in that span of a second, more of the door has been converted. You keep your eyes wide open so as to not cast away your chance at breaking down the door, but that's when a fetid cloud of filth rolls in, stinging your eyes and drawing tears. The walls are brittle now, rotten. The wallpaper hangs in slivers, and from behind the plaster a flood of rats bursts onto the floor, crawling across your feet and scratching at your flesh.

A PC that attempts a skill check in this room must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw, or the rats' stench causes them to falter giving them disadvantage on their check.

- **Athletics** or combat **spells** can be used to break through the rotten, brittle walls (Easy DC - 8); the bricked-up front door (Hard DC - 18); or the stuck hallway doors (Moderate DC - 13).

- **Nature, Intimidation, or Animal Handling** can be used to keep the rats away. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Perception or Investigation** can allow a PC to see a point in the bricks where they have become weak and crumbling. (Moderate DC - 13)

Skill Challenge Escape: Entrance Gate

This challenge takes place only if one or more of the PCs are still possessed by the spirits of Rose and Thorn. As the PCs approach the iron gate, the ghosts struggle with the PCs for control of their bodies, and beg and plead for the PCs to stay behind.

- **Athletics** can be used by an unpossessed character to force a possessed PC over the threshold. The possessed PC must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d4 psychic damage as the spirit is violently torn from their body. (Hard DC - 18)
- **Persuasion or Intimidation** can be used to coax the spirits from their unwilling hosts. (Easy DC - 8)
- **Arcana or Religion** may allow a character to draw on their reserves of magic or faith, respectively, forcefully dispelling the intrusive soul. (Moderate DC - 13)

▷ Aftermath of Escape

2 Main Hall

A wide hall {*Area 2A*} runs the width of the house, with a black marble fireplace at one end and a sweeping, red marble staircase at the other. Mounted on the wall above the fireplace is a longsword with a windmill cameo worked into the hilt. The wood-paneled walls are ornately sculpted with images of vines, flowers, nymphs, and satyrs. {*PCs with 12+ passive perception*: Upon closer inspection, you notice that there are serpents and skulls inconspicuously woven into the wall designs.} The decorative paneling follows the staircase as it circles upward to the second floor.

When the PCs open the door to Area 2B:

The door opens to reveal a cloakroom with several black cloaks hanging from hooks on the wall. A top hat sits on a high shelf.

When a PC listens at the dining room doors, the sound of clinking glass, laughter, and muffled conversation can be heard from beyond. When the door is opened, the PCs find the room to be empty.

- ▷ 3 / Den of Wolves
- ▷ 4 / Kitchen and Pantry
- ▷ 5 / Dining Room
- ▷ 6 / Upper Hall

3 Den of Wolves

This oak-paneled room looks like a hunter's den. Mounted above the fireplace is a stag's head, and positioned around the outskirts of the room are three stuffed wolves. Two padded chairs draped in animal furs face the hearth, with an oak table between them supporting a cask of wine, two carved wooden goblets, a pipe rack, and a candelabrum. A chandelier hangs above a cloth-covered table surrounded by four chairs. Two cabinets stand against the walls; the east cabinet sports a lock.

The stuffed wolves move/adjust their posture when not directly observed.

The east cabinet can be picked with thieves' tools and successful DC 15 Dexterity check. It holds a heavy crossbow, a light crossbow, a hand crossbow, and 20 bolts for each weapon (for a total of 60 bolts). The north cabinet is unlocked and holds a small box containing a deck of playing cards and an assortment of wine glasses.

Trapdoor

A trapdoor is hidden in the southwest corner of the floor. It can't be detected or opened until the PCs approach it from the underside (see Area 32). Until then, Death House supernaturally hides the trapdoor.

- ▷ 2 / Main Hall
- ▷ 32 / Hidden Trapdoor

Skill Challenge Escape: Den of Wolves

As you climb out of the trap door, you're greeted by thick clouds of blinding smoke making it impossible to see anything past a few feet. You can hear faint snuffing, panting, and growling that sounds like wolves pacing around the room, and can see a pair of glowing eyes near you that doesn't seem to have noticed the trapdoor being cracked open yet.

Death House has animated the stuffed wolves in the den and flooded the room with blinding smoke. The wolves have the statistics of a wolf but with vulnerability to slashing, piercing, and fire damage; their Bite attack deals 1 piercing damage; and they do not need to breathe.

- **Animal Handling** can be used to subdue the wolves; the long-lost spirits of the beasts still obey such primal laws of nature. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Stealth** can be used to slip past the wolves undetected. (Easy DC - 8)
- **Levelled Spells** (Automatic Success) or **cantrips** (Moderate DC - 13) such as *minor illusion* or *animal friendship* can be used to distract or subdue the wolves.

4 Kitchen and Pantry

The kitchen {Area 4A} is tidy, with dishware, cookware, and utensils neatly placed on shelves. A worktable has a cutting board and rolling pin atop it. A stone, dome-shaped oven stands near the east wall, its bent iron stovepipe connecting to a hole in the ceiling. Behind the stove and to the left is a thin door {Area 4B}. In the southwest corner there is a very small, 2-foot-wide door set in the wall at waist height.

When the PCs enter 4B:

The door opens to a well-stocked pantry. All the food appears fresh.

The food in the pantry tastes bland.

Dumbwaiter

The small door opens to a 2-foot-wide stone shaft containing a wooden elevator box attached to a simple rope-and-pulley mechanism that must be operated manually from the kitchen. Hanging on the wall next to the dumbwaiter is a tiny brass bell with two wires running from it into the ceiling.

The shaft connects to the servants' quarters (Area 7A) and the master bedroom (Area 12A). A small character can squeeze into the elevator box with a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The dumbwaiter's rope-and-pulley mechanism can support 200 pounds of weight before breaking.

- ▷ 2 / Main Hall
- ▷ 7 / Servants' Room
- ▷ 12 / Master Suite

Skill Challenge Escape: Kitchen and Pantry

As a character makes their way in or out of the dumbwaiter, the oven spits a column of fire. Any characters in the room must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw dodge the fire or to clamber into the dumbwaiter, working the rope and pulley before being scorched. On a failure, a creature takes 1d6 fire damage but continues upward. The explosion shakes the entirety of the manor.

5 Dining Room

The centerpiece of this wood-paneled dining room is a carved mahogany table surrounded by eight high-backed chairs with sculpted armrests and cushioned seats. A crystal chandelier hangs above the table, which is covered with resplendent silverware and crystalware polished to a dazzling shine, and laid with a magnificent feast. Mounted above the marble fireplace is a mahogany-framed painting of an alpine vale.

The wood paneling is carved with elegant images of deer among the trees. *{PCs with 12+ passive perception: Upon closer inspection, you see twisted faces carved into the tree trunks and wolves lurking amid the carved foliage.}* Red silk drapes cover the windows, and a tapestry depicting hunting dogs and horse-mounted aristocrats chasing after a wolf hangs from an iron rod bolted to the south wall.

A PC that eats any of the food on the table must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom save, or else be compelled to stuff themselves with food. After the PC has filled their gullet for a full minute, the glamor upon the banquet vanishes, revealing it to be rotted, foul meats infested with maggots and stale breads stuffed with weevils. At this point, the compulsion upon any affected PCs falls, leaving them poisoned for 1 hour.

The silverware tarnishes, the crystal cracks, the portrait fades, and the tapestry rots if removed from the house.

▷ 2 / Main Hall

6 Upper Hall

Unlit oil lamps are mounted on the walls of this elegant hall. Standing suits of armor flank wooden doors in the east and west walls. Each suit of armor clutches a spear and has a visored helm shaped like a wolf's head. The doors are carved with dancing youths. {*PCs with 12+ passive perception*: Closer inspection reveals that the youths aren't really dancing but fighting off swarms of bats.} The red marble staircase that started on the first floor continues its upward spiral. A cold draft can be felt coming down the steps.

Hanging above the mantelpiece is a wood-framed portrait of a family: a man and woman with two smiling children, and a swaddled baby in the father's arms that the mother regards with a hint of scorn. You recognize the mother and father from the portraits in the foyer downstairs; more unsettlingly, you also recognize the two children - they're the boy and girl that asked you for help at the entrance of the house!

A PC that listens at the door of the Servants' Room can smell blood, and hear the sobs and muffled gasps of a woman in pain.

- ▷ 2 / Main Hall
- ▷ 7 / Servants' Room
- ▷ 8 / Library
- ▷ 10 / Conservatory
- ▷ 11 / Balcony

Skill Challenge Escape: Upper Hall

As you come down the stairs, the suits of armor begin to shudder and then they each break out of the stands they were fastened to before turning towards the party.

The suits of armor have been animated by Death House but are not true suits of animated armor. For the purposes of potential combat, they have an AC of 12, 5 hit points each, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and -1 to Strength. Each suit can make a spear attack (+2 to hit, 1 piercing damage) against targets within 5 feet; these attacks might be made with advantage (and melee attacks made against with disadvantage) depending on if any attackers are below them on the staircase.

- **Athletics** can be used by a character wielding a shield or similar protection to charge the ranks, hoping to topple the statues. On a failure, they may be speared up to four times. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Acrobatics** can be used to leap to the other end of the spiraling staircase. (Moderate DC - 13)

- **Blacksmith's Tools** or **Investigation** can be used to ascertain the formation's weaknesses, for without men behind the armor they have significantly less strength. Characters with the Soldier background have advantage on such a check. (Moderate DC - 13)

7 Servants' Room

An undecorated bedroom contains a pair of beds with straw-stuffed mattresses. At the foot of each bed is an empty footlocker. In the southwest corner there is a very small, 2-foot-wide door set in the wall at waist height with a button next to it.

When PCs enter Area 7B:

It's a closet. Tidy servants' uniforms hang from hooks.

Dumbwaiter

The shaft connects to the servants' quarters (Area 7A) and the master bedroom (Area 12A). A small character can squeeze into the elevator box with a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The dumbwaiter's rope-and-pulley mechanism can support 200 pounds of weight before breaking. Pressing the button rings the tiny bell in the kitchen (Area 4A), which can be faintly heard from this room.

- ▷ 4 / Kitchen and Pantry
- ▷ 6 / Upper Hall
- ▷ 12 / Master Suite

8 Library

Red velvet drapes cover the windows of this room. An exquisite mahogany desk and a matching high-back chair face the entrance and the fireplace, above which hangs a framed picture of a windmill perched atop a rocky crag. Situated in corners of the room are two overstuffed chairs. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves line the south wall and contain hundreds of tomes covering a range of topics including history, warfare, and alchemy as well as several first-edition collected works of poetry and fiction. A rolling wooden ladder allows one to more easily reach the high shelves. *{PCs with 15+ passive perception: You can see flickering candlelight beneath the bookshelf in the southeast corner.}*

When a PC searches the desk:

The desk has several items resting atop it: an oil lamp, a jar of ink, a quill pen, a tinderbox, and a letter kit containing a red wax candle, four blank sheets of parchment, and a wooden seal bearing the same windmill insignia you've seen around the house. One desk drawer is empty except for an iron key. Another drawer has a tattered piece of sheet music in it, titled "Song for Elisabeth" as well as a handwritten, partially burnt note that reads "Bulwarton's words can open the way". Finally, a third drawer contains a number of receipts for candles, daggers, and incense.

The iron key unlocks the door to the children's room (Area 20).

A red-covered book with a black spine titled "An Architect's Art" by Archibald Bulwarton is fake and opens the secret door. All the books rot and fall apart if taken from the house.

Spooky Autobiography

Roll to select a random PC for this minor encounter.

One of the books on the shelves is titled "The History of [PC's Name]". *If the PC reads it:* It provides a narration of your entire life. The final page has a large bloodstain on it and reads: "[He/She/They] pulled the book down off the shelf and began to read, unaware of the creature that watched [him/her/them] from the shadows. Slowly, the beast began to creep forward."

A search of the room evidences no indication of any other creature (besides your party members, if present).

Secret Door

A secret door behind one bookshelf can be unlocked and swung open by pulling on a switch disguised to look like a red-covered book with a black spine. A character inspecting the bookshelf spots the fake book with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. Unless the secret door is propped open, springs in the hinges cause it to close on its own. Beyond the secret door lies the secret room (Area 9).

- ▷ 6 / Upper Hall
- ▷ 9 / Secret Room

9 Secret Room

This secret room contains bookshelves packed with tomes describing fiendsummoning incantations and the necromantic rituals of a cult called the Priests of Osybus. A heavy wooden chest with clawed iron feet stands against the south wall, its lid half-closed. Sticking out of the chest is a skeleton in leather armor. Close inspection reveals that the skeleton belongs to a human who triggered a poisoned dart trap. Three darts are stuck in the dead adventurer's armor and ribcage. There is a letter clutched in the skeleton's left hand.

The rituals described in the books are bogus, which any PC can ascertain after studying the books for 1 hour and succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The dart-firing mechanism inside the chest no longer functions. The letter in the skeleton's hand bears the seal of Strahd von Zarovich, which the adventurer tried to remove from the chest. Written in flowing script, the letter reads as follows:

My most pathetic servant,

I am not a messiah sent to you by the Dark Powers of this land. I have not come to lead you on a path of immortality. However many souls you have bled on your hidden altar, however many visitors you have tortured in your dungeon, know that you are not the ones who brought me to this beautiful land. You are but worms writhing in my earth.

You say that you are cursed, your fortunes spent. You abandoned love for madness, took solace in the bosom of another woman, and sired a bastard son. Cursed by darkness? Of that I have no doubt. Save you from your wretchedness? I think not. I much prefer you as you are.

Your dread lord and master,

Strahd von Zarovich.

Treasure

The chest contains three blank books with black leather covers (worth 25 gp each), three spell scrolls, the deed to the house you are in, the deed to a windmill, and a signed will. The windmill referred to in the second deed is situated in "the mountains east of Vallaki". The will is signed by Gustav and Elisabeth Durst, and bequeaths the house, the windmill, and all other family property to Rosavalda and Thornboldt Durst in the event of their parents' deaths. Tucked away in the alcove alongside the deed to the windmill is a letter addressed to one "Dimov".

The books, scrolls, deeds, and will age markedly if taken from the house but remain intact.

My dear Dimov,

I must confess, my nights as of late have been sleepless. The child's wails these past several evenings have kept me awake, haunting these halls like a ghost. Margaret does her best, but other clouds yet trouble my dreams.

My beloved Elisabeth, I am sure, feels it too, for she tosses and turns in our bed and awakes with her forehead slick with sweat. O'er the past several congregations, I have become suspicious of the ambitions of the others. Their dark murmurs worry me and, though I know that a shadow ought not fear a blacker night, I cannot but fear for the extent of their plotting.

If anything happens, you are to be steward of our parents' house, and caretaker of my children. Keep Rose and Thorn safe, and dear Walter close to your breast. Should the worst come to pass, you shall be all they have left.

Your loving brother,

Gustav

▷ 8 / Library

10 Conservatory

Gossamer drapes cover the windows of this elegantly appointed hall, which has a brass-plated chandelier hanging from the ceiling. Upholstered chairs line the walls, and stained-glass wall hangings depict beautiful men, women, and children singing and playing instruments.

A harpsichord with a bench rests in the northwest corner. Near the fireplace is a large standing harp. Alabaster figurines of well-dressed dancers adorn the mantelpiece. Close inspection of them reveals that several are carvings of well-dressed skeletons.

If a PC plays the “Song for Elisabeth” found in the library desk on the harpsichord:

The conservatory fills with ghosts that dance about the room to the tune of the melody. The ghosts take no notice of you all, save for two: a man and a woman that you recognize from the pictures around the house, {*If the PCs have found the secret room (Area 9)* presumably the Gustav and Elisabeth Durst mentioned in the documents you found earlier,} who stand beside the fireplace, staring at you. As soon as you notice them, the harpsichord’s strings are cut, the ghosts vanish, and a grinding sound like stone on stone can be heard from above.

If a PC searches the room or at another opportune moment before the PCs leave:

You find a small dog hiding under an armchair. He is rail-thin and clearly starving, and seems to be terrified of anyone that approaches him.

The dog has a tag on his leash that identifies him as Lancelot, owned by Gertruda; this can be seen once he is coaxed out. As Mad Mary lost herself to grief, Lancelot left his house in order to search for Gertruda. He wandered into Death House, and was trapped in the conservatory when the house shut the door behind him. He can be coaxed out from his hiding spot, however, with a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, with advantage if offered food.

The cult of Death House considers Lancelot an acceptable sacrifice if killed on the altar.

If the PCs exit the room without playing the harpsichord:

You hear the sound of a harpsichord playing faintly from the room you just left. {*If the PCs have the sheet music for “Song for Elisabeth”*: You recognize it as the “Song of Elisabeth” that you have sheet music for from the library.

The music continues to play until the room is re-entered.

▷ 6 / Upper Hall

11 Balcony

At the top of the stairs you arrive at a dusty balcony, and if you look over the railing of the spiraling staircase you're able to see all the way down to the first floor through the center.

There is a suit of black plate armor standing against one wall, draped in cobwebs. Oil lamps are mounted on the oak-paneled walls, which are carved with woodland scenes of trees, falling leaves, and tiny critters. *{PCs with 12+ passive perception: You notice tiny corpses hanging from the trees and worms bursting up from the ground.}*

If PCs had played the harpsichord in the conservatory (Area 10):

It looks like the entire stone wall swung open at the western end of the landing to reveal a secret doorway.

This suit of animated armor attacks as soon as it takes damage or a PC approaches within 5 feet of it. It fights until destroyed. If the animated armor is thrown down to the first floor and the PCs don't reveal their presence atop the balcony, it is unable to observe them with its sixty feet of blindsight and is too stupid to think to climb back up.

A creature that is pushed over the edge of the balcony falls two stories, or twenty feet, and takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage. That creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or land prone.

Know the Monsters: Animated Armor

The armor will attempt to push PCs over the railing itself using a shove attack, or attempt to grapple its nearest target before shoving them prone. Remember that, as the armor has two attacks per round, it is able to make two shove or grapple attempts each turn – or any mixture of the two.

Secret Door

A secret door in the west wall can be found with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. It pushes open easily to reveal a cobweb-filled wooden staircase leading up to the attic.

- ▷ 6 / Upper Hall
- ▷ 12 / Master Suite
- ▷ 13 / Bathroom
- ▷ 14 / Storage Room (Third Floor)
- ▷ 15 / Nursemaid's Suite
- ▷ 16 / Attic Hall

Skill Challenge Escape: Balcony

The door to the bathroom bulges outward, and then explodes into splinters! A flood of filthy water crashes out, threatening to sweep the party away.

- **Athletics** can be used to stand one's ground and resist the flood; other adventurers can brace themselves against the character or angle themselves so that he/she takes the brunt of the flood. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Nature** or **Survival** can be used to call on past experiences or knowledge of flash floods, allowing a character in that split second to take necessary precautions (hang on the other side of the balcony, leap for a nearby door, etc.). Characters with the Outlander background have advantage on such a check. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Sleight of Hand** can be used to snatch at the balcony or the oil lamps mounted on the wall before being swept away. (Easy DC - 8)

12 Master Suite

The double doors to this room have dusty panes of stained glass set into them; the designs in the glass resemble windmills. The dusty, cobweb-filled master bedroom has burgundy drapes covering the windows. Furnishings include a four-poster bed with embroidered curtains and tattered gossamer veils, a matching pair of empty wardrobes, a vanity with a wood-framed mirror and jewelry box, and a padded chair. A rotting tiger-skin rug lies on the floor in front of the fireplace, which has a dust-covered portrait hanging above it of *{If PCs have found the will: Gustav and Elisabeth Durst / Otherwise: the same dour man and woman you've seen pictured throughout the house}*. There is a male ghast dressed in fine clothes hanging from a noose tied beside the bed, and he has a small piece of parchment clutched in his right hand.

As PCs move into the room in general:

A web-filled parlor in the southwest corner contains a table and two chairs. Resting on the dusty tablecloth is an empty porcelain bowl and a matching rug. A door facing the foot of the bed has a full-length mirror mounted on it, and there is a door behind one of the chairs in the parlor. Additionally, in the back corner of the parlor you notice a small, 2-foot-wide door set into the wall with a button next to it.

The door facing the foot of the bed (behind the mirror) opens to reveal an empty, dust-choked closet (Area 12B). A door in the parlor leads to an outside balcony (Area 12C).

As PCs approach the ghast:

The hanging body doesn't move as you approach – it's clearly dead. *{PCs with proficiency in medicine / a DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check: The body has been dead for no more than a few hours.}* The note is held tight by rigor mortis, but you're able to wiggle it free.

The body is Mr. Durst. He is dead, and does not attack the PCs when disturbed. The appearance of only being dead a few hours is another manifestation of the house's curse, and not actually correct. The letter clutched in his hand reads:

My Beloved Children,

I wish I could be what all fathers do and tell you that monsters aren't real. But it wouldn't be true.

Life can create things of exquisite beauty. But it can also twist them into hideous beings. Selfish. Violent. Grotesque. Monstrous. It hurts me to say that your mother has turned into one such monster, inside and out. And I'm afraid the disease that afflicted her mind has taken hold of me as well.

It sickens me to think what we've put you through. There is no excuse. I only ask you, though I know I have not the right to do so, to try and forgive us. I despise what your mother has become, but I love and pity her all the same.

Rose, I wish I could see you blossom into a strong, beautiful woman. Thorn and Walter, I wish I could be there for you. But I can't. This is the only way.
Goodbye.

Dumbwaiter

A dumbwaiter in the corner of the west wall has a button on the wall next to it. Pressing the button rings a tiny bell in the kitchen (Area 4A).

Treasure

The jewelry box on the vanity is made of silver with gold filigree (worth 75 gp). It contains three gold rings (worth 25 gp each), a thin platinum necklace with a topaz pendant (worth 750 gp), and an unsent letter addressed to one Mrs. Petrovna.

The letter is from Mrs. Durst to a fellow cult member. It reads:

My Dear Mrs. Petrovna,

Your advice on dealing with the unwanted fiend in my home is quite good advice indeed. Tonight's ceremony will proceed as planned when the moon is at its highest peak – without, of course, the attendance of Mr. Durst. I must agree with you that, with the assistance of such a remarkably innocent subject, the results of our proceedings may be far improved. "Innocent", of course, is not quite the term I would use.

If nothing else, I am relieved that I shall soon no longer have to suffer the harlot's insufferable presence each time we must pass through her quarters to our meeting-space. We shall be well rid of her indeed.

My thanks,

Mrs. Elisabeth Durst

▷ 11 / Balcony

Skill Challenge Escape: Master Suite

The memories of the past have come alive; on the eve of Walter's birth, the Dursts are engaged in a cold war. The suite is as cold and unforgiving as their marriage; while Gustav paces the room, Elisabeth fumes in mute disdain at her vanity. Every so often the two burst into a new round of arguments – and the scythes spin ever faster.

Not quite ghosts, yet not quite illusions, the Dursts are representative of the emotional carnage of the manor. The scythes on the doorway are connected to the two's temperament and to escape, the party must make it through those scythes.

The master suite has grown deathly cold. A well-dressed man paces the room while a woman stares at herself in the vanity, her eyes scornful as if to wonder why she wasn't enough for her husband. You recognize the Dursts alive and in the flesh. The two alternate between bouts of silence and explosive rage, arguing over Gustav's infidelity.

You look to the corner of the room, to the balcony – a gate to getting out of this accursed manor – and in the doorway spin rusted scythe-blades. You look back: Elisabeth is glaring at you, and she snarls “Servant! Get out! Get out! Come back only when the bastard's been born!”

You notice with mounting frustration that while Elisabeth snarls at you, the scythe-blades pick up speed, spinning ever quicker.

If the party does not make an ability check for this obstacle, they accrue a failure, and each creature that passes through the doorway must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d10 slashing damage. Regardless, they pass through the doorway and onto the Master Balcony (Area 12C).

If the party attempts an ability check but fails, no Dexterity saving throws are necessary.

- **Acrobatics** or **Investigation** can be used to make it through the doorway unscathed; the adventurer making the check takes a leadership role in guiding his or her companions through the blades. This check is made only once for all characters present. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Insight** can be used to gauge Elisabeth or Gustav's emotions, finding the best possible moment to make the leap. (Easy DC - 8)
- **Persuasion** can be used to calm the Dursts, even if for a moment. (Moderate DC - 13)

Skill Challenge Escape: Master Balcony

The balcony seems to have grown into a cliff rising above a thousand-foot drop!

Death House has put all its remaining energy to afflict its prey with a powerful phantasmal force spell (no saving throws required). The balcony has grown into a cliff that drops to a thousand feet below – an eerily accurate representation of the Tser Falls of Barovia. Only with courage, skill, or acuity can the adventurers conquer the illusory cliff without destroying their minds in the process.

If no skills or spells are applied, the PCs accrue a failure and each creature that simply leaped must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 2d6 psychic damage and wakes to find itself groaning in pain at the foot of the Durst Manor an unknown amount of time later. On a success, a creature takes half damage. No matter the check made, scaling the cliff takes less than a minute but feels as if it took an hour.

- **Acrobatics, Athletics, or Survival** can be combined with tools such as rope or a climbing kit to scale the cliff, leading others down. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Arcana** can be used to understand the powerful phantasmal force spell at work, that their psyches stand to be torn apart if caution is thrown to the wind; that perhaps the best way to survive is to play along. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Investigation** can be used to shatter the illusion by harnessing the strength of the mind. (Hard DC - 18)
- **Spells** that slow or affect flying, such as feather fall, or that would imbue creatures with courage, such as heroism, can be used to conquer the illusion; both put the PCs' psyches at rest, tricking their subconsciousness to believe that all will be well. (Automatic Success)

▷ Aftermath of Escape

13 Bathroom

This dark room contains a wooden tub with clawed feet, a small iron stove with a kettle resting atop it, and a barrel under a spigot in the east wall. There is a pipe coming through the ceiling which feeds into the spigot.

A cistern on the roof used to collect rainwater, which was borne down a pipe to the spigot; however, the plumbing no longer works.

▷ 11 / Balcony

14 Storage Room (Third Floor)

Dusty shelves line the walls of this room. A few of the shelves have folded sheets, blankets, and old bars of soap on them, and leaning against the far wall is a cobweb-covered broom.

The broom leaning against the far wall is a broom of animated attack; it attacks any creature approaching within 5 feet of it.

▷ 11 / Balcony

15 Nursemaid's Suite

Dust and cobwebs shroud an elegantly appointed bedroom. There is a large bed, two end tables, and an empty wardrobe. Mounted on the wall next to the wardrobe is a full-length mirror with an ornate wooden frame carved to look like ivy and berries. {*PCs with 12+ passive perception:* You notice there are eyeballs among the berries.} There is a small table beside the bed, and atop it is a cobwebbed book which appears to have been clumsily hidden beneath a mildew-covered towel.

Double doors set with panes of stained glass pull open to reveal a balcony (Area 15C) overlooking the front house.

The bedroom once belonged to the family's nursemaid. The master of the house and the nursemaid had an affair, which led to the birth of a bastard baby named Walter. The cult slew the nursemaid shortly thereafter.

If a PC investigates the book:

The book appears to be a raunchy romance novel titled "Blue-Blooded Lips". It tells the story of a wealthy duke who enjoys an affair with his female cupbearer.

If a PC opens the door to the nursery (Area 15B):

There is a crib covered with a hanging black shroud. {*Ignore this if PCs have already defeated specter in 3rd-floor storage room (Area 18):*} Standing beside the crib is a specter in the form of a young woman; she is wearing a homely dress and bonnet, and is staring gently into a crib. She doesn't react to you opening the door.

When PCs part the shroud covering the crib, they see a tightly wrapped, baby-sized bundle lying in the crib. PCs who unwrap the blanket find nothing inside it.

Secret Door

When any character inspects the mirror, they find the secret door automatically without any checks required. It makes little sense for such a mundane door to be concealed so expertly, and a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) barrier can create undue frustration in your players, given that finding this door is necessary to continue forward. It pushes open easily to reveal a cobweb-filled wooden staircase leading up to the attic (Area 16).

Nursemaid Encounter

If the nursemaid's specter is disturbed (spoken to, touched, etc.):

The specter turns toward the PCs, holds a finger to her lips, and whispers "Hush, the baby is sleeping".

If a PC threatens or approaches the bundle containing the “baby”, the specter attacks, relenting only when all PCs have fled her chambers or when the character that disturbed her “baby” has been killed or knocked unconscious. If her HP gets very low she vanishes in order to reappear later in the 3rd-floor storage room (Area 18).

If the PCs approach with kindness or respect, the nursemaid’s specter introduces herself as Margaret. She is withdrawn and shy, and does not fully understand how or why she died. She is confused, and frequently jumps between awareness and ignorance of her own state of undeath, sometimes in the same sentence.

She speaks fondly of Mr. Durst, but avoids their affair out of a sense of propriety. If a PC asks her about her relationship with Mr. Durst or her parentage of Walter, she smiles sadly and informs the party that it is “not her place to speak of such things”. She adores Rose, Thorn, and Walter. While she does not speak ill of Mrs. Durst if asked, she is clearly uncomfortable and fearful of the lady of the house.

When the PCs finish their conversation:

The nursemaid scoops up the baby in her arms and turns to leave, saying: “I’m taking Walter upstairs to play with his older brother and sister. Take care!” She smiles warmly and walks into the main bedroom, before turning and passing through the mirror on the wall. A moment later, you hear a click and the mirror gently swings inward revealing a hidden passageway.

Margaret does not appear again.

- ▷ 11 / Balcony
- ▷ 16 / Attic Hall

Skill Challenge Escape: Nursemaid’s Suite

As you rush towards the door, you hear a woman shout out, “Tell me to push, one more time, Inala! One more time, I swear to the Morninglord!” but her curses are quickly consumed by cries of pain.

You peek into the room: women crowd around a young girl laying in the bed, her feet up. Her face twists with pain while a midwife says “The baby’s coming, but – Morninglord have mercy, it’s ankles first!”

The balcony lies nearby, and with frustrated horror, you see that the door has been replaced with bloodied scythe blades that seem to spin even quicker whenever the girl’s contractions rage.

The memories of the past have come alive: while Elisabeth fumes with mute disdain in the Master Suite, the nursemaid is giving birth to the bastard Walter. Several assistants crowd the room while the baby is crowning – but he’s coming out ankles-first. The scythe-blades spin so long as the nursemaid is in labor, spinning faster and faster during her contractions. To escape the manor, the adventurers must make it through that doorway.

If the party does not make an ability check for this obstacle, they accrue a failure and each creature that passes through the doorway must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity

saving throw or take 2d10 slashing damage. Regardless, they pass through the doorway and onto the Nursemaid's Balcony (Area 15C).

If the party attempts an ability check but fails, no Dexterity saving throws are necessary.

- **Acrobatics** or **Investigation** can be used to make it through the doorway unscathed; the adventurer making the check takes a leadership role in guiding his or her companions through the blades. This check is made only once for a characters present. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Insight** can be used to gauge when the nursemaid's contractions are about to begin or end. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Medicine** can be used to assist in the birth: Walter is coming out ankles-first, posing significant risk to him and the mother. The scythe-blades stop spinning altogether if this ability check succeeds. (Hard DC - 18)

Skill Challenge Escape: Nursemaids Balcony

The balcony seems to have grown into a cliff rising above a thousand-foot drop!

Death House has put all its remaining energy to afflict its prey with a powerful phantasmal force spell (no saving throws required). The balcony has grown into a cliff that drops to a thousand feet below – an eerily accurate representation of the Tser Falls of Barovia. Only with courage, skill, or acuity can the adventurers conquer the illusory cliff without destroying their minds in the process.

If no skills or spells are applied, the PCs accrue a failure and each creature that simply leaped must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 2d6 psychic damage and wakes to find itself groaning in pain at the foot of the Durst Manor an unknown amount of time later. On a success, a creature takes half damage. No matter the check made, scaling the cliff takes less than a minute but feels as if it took an hour.

- **Acrobatics, Athletics, or Survival** can be combined with tools such as rope or a climbing kit to scale the cliff, leading others down. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Arcana** can be used to understand the powerful phantasmal force spell at work, that their psyches stand to be torn apart if caution is thrown to the wind; that perhaps the best way to survive is to play along. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Investigation** can be used to shatter the illusion by harnessing the strength of the mind. (Hard DC - 18)
- **Spells** that slow or affect flying, such as feather fall, or that would imbue creatures with courage, such as heroism, can be used to conquer the illusion; both put the PCs' psyches at rest, tricking their subconsciousness to believe that all will be well. (Automatic Success)



▷ Aftermath of Escape

16 Attic Hall

This bare hall is choked with dust and cobwebs. The door to the northeast has a padlock on it.

Locked Door

The door to the children's room (Area 20) is held shut with a padlock. Its key is kept in the library (Area 8), but the lock can also be picked with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check or broken by smashing it with a bludgeoning or slashing weapon and succeeding on a DC 20 Strength check.

- ▷ 11 / Balcony
- ▷ 15 / Nursemaid's Suite
- ▷ 17 / Spare Bedroom (West)
- ▷ 18 / Storage Room (Fourth Floor)
- ▷ 19 / Spare Bedroom (East)
- ▷ 20 / Children's Room

17 Spare Bedroom (West)

This dust-choked room contains a slender bed, nightstand, a small iron stove, a writing desk with a stool, an empty wardrobe, and a rocking chair. A smiling doll in a lacy yellow dress sits in the northern window box, cobwebs draping it like a wedding veil.

▷ 16 / Attic Hall

18 Storage Room (Fourth Floor)

This dusty chamber is packed with old furniture – chairs, coat racks, standing mirrors, dress mannequins, and the like – all draped in dusty white sheets. Near an iron stove, underneath one of the sheets, is a wooden trunk. The far wall has a window set in an alcove, through which you can see occasional flashes of lightning.

If a PC opens the trunk:

The trunk is unlocked and contains skeletal remains of what appears to be a young woman. She is wrapped in a tattered bedsheet stained with dry blood.

PCs with proficiency in medicine / a DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check can verify that the woman was stabbed to death by multiple knife wounds. If the PCs disturb the remains in a disrespectful fashion, the nursemaid's specter appears and attacks unless it was previously defeated in the nursemaid's suite (Area 15).

Secret Door

A secret door in the east wall appears only when certain conditions are met; see the secret stairs (Area 21) for more information.

- ▷ 16 / Attic Hall
- ▷ 21 / Secret Stairs

19 Spare Bedroom (East)

This web-filled room contains a slender bed, a nightstand, a rocking chair, an empty wardrobe, and a small iron stove.

▷ 16 / Attic Hall

20 Children's Room

The door to this room is locked from the outside (see the attic hall (Area 16) for details).

This room contains a bricked-up window flanked by two dusty, wood-framed beds sized for children. Closer to the door is a toychest with windmills painted on its sides and a dollhouse that appears to be a perfect replica of the dreary edifice in which you stand. These furnishings are draped in cobwebs. Lying in the middle of the floor are two small skeletons wearing tattered but familiar clothing, and the smaller of the two is cradling an also-familiar stuffed doll.

The Durst children, Rose and Thorn, were neglected by their parents and locked in this room until they starved to death. Their small skeletons lie in the middle of the floor, plain as day, wearing tattered clothing that the PCs recognize as belonging to the children. Thorn's skeleton cradles the boy's stuffed doll.

The toychest contains an assortment of stuffed animals and toys. PCs who search the dollhouse (and succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check if pressed for time) find all of the house's secret doors, including one in the attic that leads to a spiral staircase (a miniature replica of Area 21).

Rose and Thorn

If either the dollhouse or the chest is disturbed, the ghosts of Rose and Thorn appear in the middle of the room. Use the ghost statistics in the Monster Manual, with the following modifications:

- The ghosts are small and lawful good.
- They have 35 (10d6) hit points each.
- They lack the Horrifying Visage action.
- They speak Common and have a challenge rating of 3 (700 XP).

The children don't like it when they PCs disturb their toys, but they fight only in self-defense. Unlike the illusions outside the house, these children know that they're dead.

If asked how they died, Rose and Thorn explain that their parents locked them in the attic to protect them from "the monster in the basement", and that they died from hunger.

If asked how one gets to the basement, Rose points to the dollhouse and says "There's a secret door in the attic". PCs who then search the dollhouse for secret doors automatically find them (or gain advantage on their Wisdom (Perception) checks to find them if pressed for time).

The children fear abandonment. If one or more PCs try to leave, the ghost-children attempt to possess them. If one of the ghosts possesses a PC, allow the player to retain control of the PC but assign one of the following flaws:

- Possessed by Rose: "I like being in charge and get angry when other people tell me what to do."

- Possessed by Thorn: “I’m scared of everything, including my own shadow, and weep with despair when things don’t go my way.”

The possession can be ended either by laying their bones to rest or through a successful DC 11 Charisma (Intimidation/Persuasion) check. A ghost reduced to 0 hit points can reform at dawn the next day.

Take care to play the encounter with Rose and Thorn’s ghosts as humanizing and sympathetic, rather than alien and frightening. Despite their nature as centuries-old spirits, Rose and Thorn are fundamentally children – lost, scared, yet innocent children. As such, when Rose or Thorn attempt to possess a PC, try to present it in such a manner that the PC willingly allows the spirit to enter their body. If you describe it as “a child’s tiny hand, desperately seeking the warm embrace of another soul”, your players may even decline to roll a saving throw against possession. A PC that is possessed by Rose or Thorn can continue to communicate with the child’s spirit as a voice in their head.

If you would like to deepen Rose’s characterization, you may make her a child prodigy who is quite aware of the dynamics in her house (though not the specific details). She is also a budding wizard who discovered a small spellbook in her father’s library, and took great care in copying the Mending, Light, and Shocking Grasp cantrips into her diary. To demonstrate this, you may choose to have the ghostly Thorn accidentally break one of his toys, which Rose swiftly Mends. Should she possess a PC, she is able to cast those cantrips through her host’s body.

Rose shyly shares her diary with the party if her use of magic is remarked upon.

Rose’s diary contains entries regarding her studies, her friends, her younger brother (who she is fiercely protective of), and elementary (yet insightful) observations on the nature of magic. The Mending, Light, and Shocking Grasp cantrips have, clearly with great care, been copied into the diary. Just below Rose’s notes on Shocking Grasp there is another scribbled comment that reads: “It worked! Uncle Dimov snuck into our room again, but this time I was ready. I hope he never comes back!”

If the PCs attempt to discuss this incident or Uncle Dimov with Rose, she instantly clams up. If Thorn is asked about his uncle he shrinks in on himself and falls silent, with Rose hugging him while glaring daggers at the PC responsible. If you would prefer to avoid the implication of child abuse, you may have Rose instead explain that Uncle Dimov would break Thorn’s toys and taunt him for his timid nature and weak constitution.

Once the PCs have made friends or allies of Rose and Thorn, if the PCs appear wounded or tired the ghostly children offer the use of their room as a sanctuary for a rest and promise to stand guard against the “monsters” that they’ve heard below.

While ignorant to the true nature of the cult, Rose remembers hearing her mother bringing Walter to the basement before she [Rose] died. She asks the PCs to save their baby brother and parents, and defeat the monster below once and for all.

Rose knows the way down to the basement, but “isn’t supposed to go down there” and “doesn’t want to get in trouble”. If the party convinces her to show them the way, she points them toward the dollhouse, revealing the secret entry. In exchange, she asks the PCs to deliver her and Thorn’s bones to their resting places in the crypts below.

The dollhouse contains small dolls that depict tiny, twisted molds of any characters and creatures currently visible in the house. The dolls are made of painted resin. Any PC

looking inside the dollhouse while in Rose and Thorn's room can see the appropriately-placed dolls of all living creatures within the manor.

Development

If the party lays the children's spirits to rest, each character gains inspiration (see "Inspiration" in chapter 4, "Personality and Background", of the Player's Handbook).

▷ 16 / Attic Hall

21 Secret Stairs

Make sure to remind your players to prepare to reach level two before the session that you expect them to find this area.

The door opens to a shaft of mortared stone containing a narrow spiral staircase made of creaky wood. Thick cobwebs fill the shaft, greatly reducing your visibility to about 5 feet as you descend.

The secret door and shaft don't exist until the house reveals them, which can happen in one of two ways:

- PCs find Strahd's letter in the secret room behind the library (Area 9).
- PCs find the replica secret door in the attic of the dollhouse (Area 20).

Once the house wills the secret door into existence, PCs find it automatically if they search the wall (no ability check required). PCs who descend the spiral staircase end up in the dungeon level access (Area 22).

- ▷ 18 / Storage Room (Fourth Floor)
- ▷ 22 / Dungeon Level Access

Skill Challenge Escape: Secret Stairs

The mortared walls of this staircase have been covered with swarms of infant spiders. As you flee up the steps, an enormous giant spider climbs up from the depths and attempts to start dragging [*the last PC in marching order*] back down the steps.

A PC that fails here loses time struggling against the spider.

- **Animal Handling** or **Intimidation** can be used to scare off the spider, especially if fire is used or an attack is made. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Athletics** or *Acrobatics* can be used to wrench the PC out of the web or to keep the spider from dragging the PC away. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Levelled Spells** (Automatic Success) or **cantrips** (Easy DC - 8) can be cast to subdue the spider or burn the web (e.g. *animal friendship*, *produce flame*, and *firebolt*)

22 Dungeon Level Access

The wooden spiral staircase from the attic ends in a narrow tunnel that stretches southward before branching east and west. The tunnel appears to be carved directly out of earth, clay, and rock. The tunnels are 4 feet wide by 7 feet high with timber braces at 5-foot intervals. The tunnel is absolutely dark, almost to the point where it feels like the shadows are pressing in towards you.

As you reached the bottom of the stairs and started moving into the tunnel, you began to hear an eerie, incessant chant echoing throughout.

It's impossible to gauge where the sound is coming until the PCs reach the Hidden Spike Pit (Area 26) or Ghoulish Encounter (Area 29). They can't discern its words until they reach the Reliquary (Area 35).

If PCs have light or darkvision as they begin to move into the tunnel:

As you begin to explore the dungeon, you see seemingly centuries-old human footprints in the earthen floor leading every which way.

- ▷ 21 / Secret Stairs
- ▷ 23 / Family Crypts
- ▷ 24 / Cult Initiates' Quarters
- ▷ 27 / Dining Hall

23 Family Crypts

Several crypts have been hewn from the earth. Each crypt is sealed with a stone slab unless noted otherwise. Removing a slab from its fitting requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check; using a crowbar or the like grants advantage on the check.

23A Empty Crypt

The blank stone slab meant to seal this crypt leans against a nearby wall. The crypt is empty.

23B Walter's Crypt

The stone slab meant to seal this crypt leans against a nearby wall. Etched into it is the name "Walter Durst". The crypt is empty.

23C Gustav's Crypt

The stone slab is etched with the name "Gustav Durst".

If PCs open the crypt: The chamber beyond contains a coffin atop a stone bier.

If PCs open/disturb the coffin: The coffin is empty.

23D Elisabeth's Crypt

The stone slab is etched with the name "Elisabeth Durst".

If PCs open the crypt: The crypt contains a stone bier with a coffin atop it.

If PCs open/disturb the coffin: A swarm of centipedes boils out of the back wall and attacks!

23E Rose's Crypt

The stone slab is etched with the name "Rosavalda Durst".

If PCs open the crypt: The chamber beyond contains a coffin on a stone bier.

If PCs open the coffin: The coffin is empty.

If PCs place Rose's skeletal remains in the coffin: You hear a light sigh on the air as well as a faint "Thank you!" in Rose's voice; she sounds relieved. *{If a PC is possessed by Rose:* You feel Rose's presence leave you; you are no longer possessed.*}*

23F Thorn's Crypt

The stone slab is etched with the name “Thornboldt Durst”.

If PCs open the crypt: The chamber beyond contains a coffin on a stone bier.

If PCs open the coffin: The coffin is empty.

If PCs place Thorn’s skeletal remains in the coffin: You hear a light woosh as well as a faint, almost upbeat or happy “Bye!” in Thorn’s voice. {*If a PC is possessed by Thorn:* You feel Thorn’s presence leave you; you are no longer possessed.}

- ▷ 22 / Dungeon Level Access
- ▷ 24 / Cult Initiates’ Quarters
- ▷ 27 / Dining Hall

24 Cult Initiates' Quarters

A wooden table and four chairs stand at the east end of this room. The room is 8 feet tall and supported by thick wooden posts with crossbeams. To the west are four alcoves containing moldy pallets.

- ▷ 22 / Dungeon Level Access
- ▷ 23 / Family Crypts
- ▷ 25 / Well and Cultist Quarters

25 Well and Cultist Quarters

A 4-foot-diameter well shaft with a 3-foot-high stone lip descends 30 feet to a water-filled cistern. A wooden bucket hangs from a rope-and-pulley mechanism bolted to the crossbeams above the well. There are five siderooms that each contain a wood-framed bed with a moldy straw mattress and a wooden chest, presumably for personal belongings. Each chest is secured with a rusty iron padlock.

There is a skeleton (unanimated) at the bottom of the well. The padlocks can all be picked with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check.

Treasure

In addition to some worthless personal effects, each chest contains one or more valuable items.

25A. This room's chest contains 11 gp and 60 sp in a pouch made of human skin.

25B. This room's chest contains three moss agates (worth 10 gp each) in a folded piece of black cloth.

25C. This room's chest contains a black leather eyepatch with a carnelian (worth 50 gp) sewn into it, along with a logbook bound in grimy black leather. This journal maintains a list of names, physical descriptions, and details of some sort of event. The details in this third column are rather gruesome, detailing what happened to each listed person in terms such as "struggled profusely" and "no sedative given"; from what you can glean, these appear to be describing how the persons listed were sacrificed for some unknown purpose.

{*GM Note:* The journal was kept by one of the head cultists as a record of the cult's victims.}

25D. This room's chest contains an ivory hairbrush with silver bristles (worth 25 gp).

25E. This room's chest contains a silvered shortsword (worth 110 gp).

▷ 24 / Cult Initiates' Quarters

▷ 26 / Hidden Spike Pit

▷ 27 / Dining Hall

Skill Challenge Escape: Well & Cultist Quarters

This room is heavily obscured by an unnatural black fog.

As the PCs cross the room to leave the chamber, if they haven't already succeeded on a check in this room, a skeleton reaches out of the well and grapples the last PC in the marching order. On a failure, the adventurer is nearly pulled into the well where they struggle against the skeleton that seeks to drown them; ultimately, the victim escapes, but not worse for wear.

- **Acrobatics** or **Athletics** can be used to break the grapple. (Easy DC - 8)
- **Insight** can be used to recall one's steps, if the PCs explored this room beforehand. (Easy DC - 8)
- **Perception** can be used to navigate the darkness, hear the skeleton before it strikes, or find its victims. (Moderate DC - 13)

26 Hidden Spike Pit

The ghostly chanting heard throughout the dungeon gets discernibly louder as you turn down this tunnel.

Pull the first player to enter this hallway into a breakout room, and continue with:

As you turn the corner, something strikes you as odd about this hallway but you can't quite put your finger on it.

{Have them roll against a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.}

Success: You notice that there is a distinct absence of footprints in this hallway. This is in stark contrast to all the other tunnels you've been in down here, which had plenty of very noticeable centuries-old footprints leading every which way.

Failure: You don't detect anything, and the feeling passes. It must have just been in your head, perhaps something about these tunnels making you a bit more paranoid than you normally would be.

If PCs search for traps:

You find a 5-foot-long, 10-foot-deep pit hidden under several rotted wooden planks, all hidden under a thin layer of dirt. The pit has sharpened wooden spikes at the bottom.

The first PC to step on the cover falls through, landing prone and taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall plus 2d10 piercing damage from the spikes.

- ▷ 25 / Well and Cultist Quarters
- ▷ 27 / Dining Hall
- ▷ 29 / Ghoulish Encounter
- ▷ 30 / Stairs Down

Skill Challenge Escape: Hidden Spike Pit

There is no mandatory obstacle here, but a trap that might not have been previously encountered by the adventurers; if so, run it as-is above. If nobody either notices the trap or if they don't alert the rest of the party, run it as an obstacle.

- **Sleight of Hand** can be used to snatch at another falling PC's belt, or snatch at the edge if preventing their own fall. (Easy DC - 8)
- **Acrobatics** may allow a PC to divert their momentum into a leap, landing safely on the opposite side. (Moderate DC - 13)

Once the hidden spike pit is known to the party, it's an automatic success to cross it.

27 Dining Hall

This room contains a plain wooden table flanked by long benches. Moldy humanoid bones lie strewn on the dirt floor. In the middle of the south wall is a darkened alcove.

The bones are the remains of the cult's vile banquets. PCs who approach within 5 feet of the alcove (Area 28) provoke the creature that lurks there.

- ▷ 22 / Dungeon Level Access
- ▷ 23 / Family Crypts
- ▷ 25 / Well and Cultist Quarters
- ▷ 26 / Hidden Spike Pit
- ▷ 28 / Larder
- ▷ 29 / Ghoulish Encounter

Skill Challenge Escape: Dining Hall

Screams rend the darkened depths. Screams for mercy, for help, for a quick end. You come across a man chained to the wooden table, thrashing, screaming. A gash runs the length of his belly, from which blood pulses out to the beat of his heart! How or where he came from doesn't matter, because in the distance you can hear them: the cultists, chanting, hungering! It sounds like they are quickly approaching and will be upon you soon.

A ghost of Death House's red past has been made flesh once again, and mad babbling threatens to draw the ghostly cultists upon the adventurers. He has the statistics of a restrained commoner with 1 hit point remaining and is bound by chains.

If the PCs linger here, five cultists (shadows) arrive in 2 rounds and descend upon the man if he yet remains. If slain, he does not die quietly.

- **Athletics** can be used with a weapon to break the man's chains (Hard DC - 18), while **thieves' tools** can unlock them. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Deception** or **Persuasion** can be used to deceive the man into calm. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Medicine** can be used to dress his wounds, if the PC has a healing kit with 1 action. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Spells** that restore hit points (healing word, cure wounds) can be used to heal the screaming man. (Automatic Success)

If the PCs succeed here, this lone spirit will tell them of the secret trapdoor to the first floor (Area 32) and lead them to it if he's been freed.

28 Larder

This alcove contains a grick that slithers out to attack the first character it sees within 5 feet of it. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score under 12 is surprised by it. The alcove is otherwise empty.

▷ 27 / Dining Hall

29 Ghoulish Encounter

The ghostly chanting heard throughout the dungeon is noticeably louder to the north. However, you're struck by an overpowering stench of death and decay coming from down the hallway.

When one or more PCs reach the midpoint of the four-way tunnel intersection:

As you walk into the center of this intersection, a decaying, clawed hand bursts out of the ground and grips your foot like a vice.

Have the affected PC roll a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check against a ghoul's Strength (Athletics) check. If they succeed, they're able to take a surprise round. Otherwise, combat begins normally.

Two ghouls (reduced from four to make this simply hard rather than deadly, per Kobold Fight Club) rise up out of the ground in the two closest spaces marked X on the map and attack. The ghouls fight until destroyed.

As the ghouls are the undead forms of the former cultists, they retain some vestige of their former selves. They mindlessly repeat any or all of the following phrases as they attack the PCs: "Beautiful. We're so beautiful"; "Nothing can hurt us"; "We are perfect. We are immortal"; and "Help us live forever".

- ▷ 26 / Hidden Spike Pit
- ▷ 27 / Dining Hall
- ▷ 30 / Stairs Down
- ▷ 31 / Darklord's Shrine
- ▷ 33 / Cult Leaders' Den

30 Stairs Down

You approach a 20-foot-long flight of stairs leading further down into the dungeon. It's obvious that the ghostly chants originate from somewhere below.

- ▷ 26 / Hidden Spike Pit
- ▷ 29 / Ghoulish Encounter
- ▷ 35 / Reliquary

31 Darklord's Shrine

This room is festooned with moldy skeletons that hang from rusty shackles against the walls. A wide alcove in the south wall contains a painted wooden statue carved in the likeness of a gaunt, pale-faced man wearing a voluminous black cloak, his pale left hand resting on the head of a wolf that stands next to him. In his right hand, he holds a smoky-gray crystal orb. There are five ashen shadows burned into the walls, with soot marks stretching across the floor toward the statue.

The room has exits in the west and north walls. Chanting can be heard coming from the west.

The statue depicts Strahd, to whom the cultists made sacrifices in the vain hope that he might reveal his darkest secrets to them. The skeletons on the wall are harmless decor.

If a PC approaches the statue:

As you approach the statue, you can hear many voices whispering: “His gaze burns upon us”; “The Darklord’s eyes are always watching”; and “He is the Ancient; He is the land”

If the characters disturb the crystal orb in Strahd’s hand:

The five shadows begin swooping across the walls menacingly. You hear murmured moans, including phrases such as “Begone from this place!” and “Look not upon us!”.

If the PCs leave without taking the orb or moving it from Strahd’s hand, the shadows don’t attack. Otherwise, two shadows attack after 1 round, two shadows the round after that, and the final shadow a round after the second pair of shadows. The shadows (the spirits of former cultists) pursue those who flee beyond the room’s confines.

Concealed Door

PCs searching the room for secret doors find a concealed door in the middle of the east wall with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check.

You discover an ordinary – albeit rotted – wooden door hidden under a layer of clay. The door pulls open to reveal a stone staircase that climbs 10 feet to a landing.

The staircase goes to the Hidden Trapdoor (Area 32).

Treasure

The crystal orb is worth 25 gp. It can be used as an arcane focus but is not magical.

▷ 29 / Ghoulish Encounter

- ▷ 32 / Hidden Trapdoor
- ▷ 33 / Cult Leaders' Den

32 Hidden Trapdoor

The staircase ends at a landing with a 6-foot-high ceiling of close-fitting planks with a wooden trapdoor set into it. The trapdoor is bolted shut from this side

If the trapdoor is pushed open, it reveals the den (Area 3) above.

Development

Once the trapdoor has been found and opened, it remains available to PCs as a way into and out of the dungeon level.

- ▷ 3 / Den of Wolves
- ▷ 31 / Darklord's Shrine

33 Cult Leaders' Den

A chandelier is suspended above a table in the middle of the room. Two high-backed chairs flank the table, which has an empty clay jug and two clay flagons atop it. Iron candlesticks stand in two corners, their candles long since melted away.

{I've removed the mimic since it doesn't fit the theme - mimics don't show up anywhere else in CoS. I'm leaving the text here just in case I do want to run it. The door in the southwest is a mimic in disguise. Any creature that touches the door becomes adhered to the creature, whereupon the mimic attacks. The mimic also attacks if it takes any damage; if it's attacked at range by a wary or alerted PC, however, it flees, vanishing around the corner and reappearing as a door, chest, or longsword elsewhere in the dungeon.}

- ▷ 29 / Ghoulish Encounter
- ▷ 31 / Darklord's Shrine
- ▷ 34 / Cult Leaders' Quarters

34 Cult Leaders' Quarters

This room contains a large wood-framed bed with a rotted feather mattress, a wardrobe containing several old robes, a pair of iron candlesticks, and an open crate containing thirty torches and a leather sack with fifteen candles inside it. At the foot of the bed is a wooden footlocker. The east wall, facing the footlocker, has crumbled revealing an empty human-sized alcove.

When a PCs have removed the items from the chest:

As you finish rifling through the footlocker, a ghast suddenly bursts out from the north wall! She is wearing a tattered, once-beautiful red dress, gold earrings, and a golden necklace around her neck. Her lips and gums have gone black with rot, and her smile shines with madness. The ghast bears a vague resemblance to the woman you've seen pictured throughout the house, but is terribly disfigured and twisted into a horrific, ghastly form. { *GM Note: Get it? "Ghast-ly!"* }

Unlike the ghouls, Mrs. Durst retains the ability of speech and her memory, but has completely succumbed to her own dark whims and is completely insane. She is arrogant to an extreme and shuns her dead husband, calling him a lecherous traitor who deserved his death. She speaks unkindly of Walter and the nursemaid, and even writes off Rose and Thorn as "bothersome nuisances". She is vulgar to a fault and speaks in a hissing, gurgling voice.

Should the players ask her what she did to Walter, she cackles, grins, and invites them to descend further into the basement to "see for themselves".

If reduced to half hitpoints, Mrs. Durst defensively backs herself into the corner and commands the PCs to leave.

Treasure

The footlocker is unlocked and contains the following gear and magic items:

- Folded cloak of protection
- Small unlocked wooden coffer containing four potions of healing
- Chain shirt
- Mess kit
- Flask of alchemist's fire
- Bullseye lantern
- Set of thieves' tools
- Spellbook with a yellow leather cover

The spellbook contains the following wizard spells:

- 1st Level:
 - Disguise Self
 - Identify
 - Mage Armor
 - Magic Missile
 - Protection from Evil and Good
- 2nd Level:
 - Darkvision
 - Hold Person
 - Invisibility
 - Magic Weapon

These items were taken from adventurers who were drawn into Barovia, captured, and killed by the cult.

▷ 33 / Cult Leaders' Den

35 Reliquary

The ghostly chant fills this room and seems to be emanating from the west. You can discern a dozen or so voices saying, over and over, “He is the Ancient. He is the land.”

Around the room are thirteen niches dug into the walls, with each containing an item of questionable value and provenance.

Items include:

- An angelic feather
- A knife carved from a human bone
- A dagger with a rat’s skull set into the pommel
- A pile of severed raven talons
- An aspergillum carved from bone
- A folded cloak made from stitched ghoul skin
- A desiccated frog lashed to a stick (could be mistaken for a wand of polymorph)
- A bag full of bat guano
- A hag’s severed finger
- A cracked egg containing the remains of a skeletal infant dragon
- An iron pendant adorned with a devil’s face on the front and the emblem of a rose on the back
- A small chunk of amber resin that exudes an evil aura
- A small wooden coffer containing a dire wolf’s withered tongue

The southernmost tunnel slopes down at a 20-degree angle into murky water and ends at a rusty portcullis (Area 37).

- ▷ 30 / Stairs Down
- ▷ 36 / Prison
- ▷ 37 / Portcullis

36 Prison

This appears to be a prison, given that there are rusty shackles against the back wall of each alcove you can see.

Secret Door

A secret door in the south wall can be found with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check that pulls open to reveal area 38 beyond.

Treasure

If the players approach the cell marked X on the map:

Hanging on the back wall of this cell is a human skeleton clad in a tattered black robe, and hanging around its neck is a wooden sign that reads “unbeliever” written in what appears to be dried blood.

The skeleton belongs to a cult member who questioned the cult’s blind devotion to Strahd. PCs who search the skeleton find a gold ring (worth 25 gp) on one of its bony fingers.

- ▷ 35 / Reliquary
- ▷ 38 / Ritual Chamber

37 Portcullis

This tunnel is blocked by a rusty iron portcullis submerged in 2 feet of murky water. There is a wooden wheel half-embedded in the wall by the gate that looks like it would open the way.

The wooden wheel raises and lowers the portcullis. The portcullis can be forcibly lifted with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check.

- ▷ 35 / Reliquary
- ▷ 38 / Ritual Chamber

38 Ritual Chamber

The cult used to perform rituals in this sunken room. The chanting heard throughout the dungeon originates here, yet when the PCs arrive the dungeon falls silent as the chanting mysteriously stops.

The chanting stops as you peer into this forty-foot-square room and it's suddenly eerily quiet. The smooth masonry walls provide excellent acoustics. Featureless stone pillars support a vaulting ceiling, and a breach in the west wall leads to a dark cave heaped with refuse. Murky water covers most of the floor. Stairs lead up to dry stone ledges that hug the walls. In the middle of the room, more stairs rise to form an octagonal dais that also rises above the water. Rusty chains with shackles dangle from the ceiling directly above a stone altar mounted on the dais. The altar is carved with hideous depictions of gasping ghouls and is stained with dry blood.

There is a small, white bundle visible atop the altar.

The water is 2 feet deep. The ledges and central dais are 5 feet high (3 feet higher than the water's surface), and the chamber's ceiling is 16 feet high (11 feet above the dais and ledges). The chains dangling from the ceiling are 8 feet long; the cultists would shackle prisoners to the chains, dangle them above the altar, cut them open with knives, and allow the altar to be bathed in blood.

“One Must Die!”

If any PC climbs to the top of the dais:

The chanting rises once more as thirteen dark apparitions appear on the ledges overlooking the room. Each one resembles a black-robed figure holding a torch, but the torch's fire is black and seems to draw light to it. Where you'd expect to see faces are voids.

“One must die!” they chant, over and over. “One must die! One must die!”

The apparitions are harmless figments that can't be damaged, turned, or dispelled.

PCs can ascertain what must be done with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Religion) or Wisdom (Insight) check. To count as a sacrifice, a creature must die on the altar. The apparitions don't care what kind of creature is sacrificed and they aren't fooled by illusions. Remember that, if the players befriended it, the dog Lancelot counts as a valid sacrifice.

If the PCs refuse to make the requested sacrifice, the cult is angered and summons Walter. If the PCs make the requested sacrifice, the cult chants victoriously and summons Walter anyway. Either way, your players should feel as though they have just made a grave error.

Suddenly, the portcullis slams back down behind you! The cultists' chant changes: “The end comes! Death, be praised!” The dirty water filling the chamber ripples as something moves beneath the surface. A host of bones, flesh, and disparate body

parts – some from the refuse pile in the alcove, some from under the water – come together and collect into a massive, shifting heap of gore.

When the Dark Power accepted Mrs. Durst's final sacrifice, Walter was transformed into a terrible monster: a vessel for the cult's hatred, arrogance, and depravity bound within an innocent babe.

Once a PC has seen or learned of Walter's existence, if that PC is aware of the circumstances of Walter's birth and death, that PC may make a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check to learn the source of the curse upon Death House. If they succeed they learn:

The spirit of a murdered infant, unwanted by a parent, can incite a powerful curse upon its household, tormenting its killers and chaining their souls to the place of its death. The only way to remove the curse upon the house is to bury Walter's corpse at sunrise beneath the threshold of the dwelling.

When the PCs defeat or flee from the Flesh Mound, the house responds in kind.

The floor begins to quake, and the ceiling shudders and cracks as debris and dust begin to sift into the air. The structure groaning above your heads makes one thing clear - the house is starting to come down around you! Fly, you fools!

- ▷ 36 / Prison
- ▷ 37 / Portcullis
- ▷ Flight from Death House: Skill Challenge

Skill Challenge Escape: Ritual Chamber

As the PCs move to flee and if it isn't already closed, the portcullis slams shut. On a failure, the PCs wallow in indecision or struggle to force it open, eventually escaping at the cost of 1 failed check.

- **Athletics** can be used to force open the portcullis. (Moderate DC - 13)
- **Insight** or **Investigation** can be used to recall or rationalize that the nearby corridor to the Prison (Area 36) might have a secret door. (Hard DC - 18)
- **Perception** can be used to spot the hidden door to the Prison (Area 36) providing another means of escape from the chamber. (Moderate DC - 13)

Flight from Death House: Skill Challenge

To successfully escape from Death House, the PCs must succeed on a skill challenge. A holdover from 4th edition, a skill challenge requires the PCs to face a number of obstacles that cannot be solved solely by combat.

Note: the following section is largely copied wholesale from Wyatt Trull's Curse of Strahd: Escaping Death House Skill Challenge.

Running the Skill Challenge

Explain to the players that this is a skill challenge, which boils down to the following tenets:

- PCs will encounter a series of obstacles that can be solved through their skills and abilities, rather than combat.
- Only one PC makes an ability check for each obstacle.
- The goal of the skill challenge is to reach a hidden number of successful checks.
- Skill challenges are about collaborative, creative storytelling. The GM presents the obstacle, and the players suggest solutions that utilize their skills. There are almost always multiple ways to overcome an obstacle, so don't be afraid to get creative!
- Failure on a skill check is not a wall; instead, the PCs progress but at the expense of a resource like time, energy, or power.

Explain to the players that the skill challenge follows the additional rules:

- A skill can be used only once per character (e.g. if Conan the barbarian uses Athletics to leap a chasm, he cannot use Athletics again to lift a boulder later. Other PCs, however, can still use Athletics for other obstacles.)
- Similarly, cantrips can be used once per PC in place of a skill check. The spellcaster must make an ability check with their spellcasting ability modifier, adding their proficiency bonus, and comparing it against the DC of the obstacle they are facing.
- Spells of 1st level or higher are automatic successes, so long as they can be logically used to surpass a given obstacle.
- Tool checks can be used in lieu of skills if a PC is proficient in them, and if they make sense in the context of the given obstacles. (This gives advantage on the skill check.)
- There is no set initiative order while running a skill challenge; any PC can seize the initiative when faced with a specific obstacle. However, no single PC can take initiative two consecutive obstacles in a row.

An *easy* skill check has a DC of 8. A *moderate* skill check has a DC of 13. A *hard* skill check has a DC of 18. These DCs increase by 2 when the PCs reach levels 5, 10, 15, or 20.

Once the challenge begins, swarms of maggots begin to bleed from the walls, floor, and ceiling of any room that the PCs take refuge in, filling the room completely within 3d4

rounds. Note that only the doorways to Areas 12 and 15 have the scythes mentioned in the module.

Roll initiative upon beginning the skill challenge; on 3 failures, the slowest adventurer is left behind. On 5 failures, the slowest two adventurers are trapped while their companions make it to safety. If the PCs achieve 4 successes before 3 failures, all make it out – worse for wear, and forced to carry in their hearts this hellish night forevermore.

▷ 38 / Skill Challenge Escape: Ritual Chamber

Aftermath of Escape

Once all PCs have either escaped from or been trapped by the house:

As you stumble out of the house and race to the edge of the road, you turn to look back at whence you came. The house is crumbling and sagging in on itself, groaning mournfully and almost angrily, yet definitely still standing; it reminds you of a fighter in a tough boxing match, bruised and bloodied yet defiant.

If you choose to use the **Walter, the Flesh Mound** encounter, Death House will reset (and, if destroyed, reform) soon after the PCs leave it, once more awaiting new travellers that it can ensnare. The only way to remove its curse permanently is to remove Walter's body from the remnants of the Mound below, and to bury it at the threshold of the House outside. If the PCs bury Walter:

As you bury Walter and step back to examine your work, the ground begins to shudder and the whole house almost seems to convulse. Slowly, as if some evil is trying to fight back, the house collapses in on itself and is swallowed up in the ground. Only the two outbuildings – the stable and the servants' house – remain as a sign of what was once in the grassy meadow before you.

Norganus, the Finger of Oblivion

If any PCs were trapped inside Death House, Norganus, the Finger of Oblivion appears to you as if in a dream.

The last thing you recall is being about to escape, yet suddenly you find yourself being dragged back in through the front doors of the house you've been exploring, your legs and ankles seized by shrieking spirits and hissing ghouls; inside, the house has become a craggy fissure in the ground – both fiery and pitch-black at the same time.

Just before you cross the threshold a tall, dark, human-shaped shadow with indistinguishable features appears before you and time seems to slow to a standstill. The shadow holds out its hand – an inky black void dripping a foul, ichorous ooze from its fingertips – and in a soft, hissing voice whispers, “Such wasted potential, it would be a grave disservice to the world and those that care for you to see it lost so soon. Take my hand, and I will free you from these ‘unquiet dead’”, and he gestures to the spirits and ghouls holding your legs and ankles.

If the PCs take his hand and accept Norganus' dark gift, they awaken in the tall grass in front of the house. PCs that have been resurrected this way gain the *Touched by the Mists* trait, which leaves them tainted by Norganus' evil touch. Cats hiss and milk sours at their approach, and they detect as evil-aligned undead to divination magic. These traits remain until the PC receives a *remove curse* spell. Moreover, any such PCs marked by Norganus specifically gain one of the following Dark Gifts:

- The characters's eyes melt away, leaving empty sockets. He/she has disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks, but gains blindsight out to a range of 60 feet. The character is blind beyond this distance.
- The character's skin is cold and clammy to the touch. The character gains resistance to cold damage and vulnerability to fire damage.
- At night, the character can spend 1 hit die to move through solid objects as though they were difficult terrain. A character who ends his or her turn inside an object takes 5 (1d10) force damage. The character counts as an undead creature for the purpose of spells and effects such as turn undead.

Welcome to Barovia

Regardless of the ultimate outcome of the ritual, Strahd is aware of the events beneath Death House and may taunt the PCs for their decisions in the dungeon below.

As you turn back to the road to continue heading west, you notice a sign pointing in the wrong direction that reads: "Death House – Don't talk to the Children!". Beside it is a small wooden box.

If the PCs open the box:

Inside the box are $\langle X \rangle$ health potions {*If PCs buried Walter:* and a bottle labeled "Purple Dragon Crush"}. It also contains a letter with a wax seal bearing a crest you've seen before.

X is the number of players that successfully escaped Death House. The crest is Strahd's. If the PCs didn't bury Walter – and thus actually destroy the house and cult for good, a "slow clap" sound effect plays when the letter is opened.

Thank you for cleaning this vermin off of my domain. Your efforts are appreciated, even if for just one night.

Please accept this small gift to help your recovery.

Welcome to Barovia. -S

Otherwise, the letter simply reads:

Thank you for cleaning this vermin off of my domain; your thorough efforts are much appreciated.

Please accept this small gift to help your recovery.

Welcome to Barovia. -S

Resting Inside Death House

If the PCs take a long rest in this or any other room of Death House, roll to randomly select a PC to have a nightmare while resting. This PC will receive a level of exhaustion upon waking. Use one or all of the following haunts while the PCs sleep:

- A PC hears rats scrabbling up and down the spaces between the walls.
- A PC hears footsteps descending from the attic and stopping outside of their door before moving away to the library. Soon after, a grinding noise can be heard coming from the library (the sound of a secret door).
- A PC hears maniacal laughter echoing from far below the House.
- A PC experiences a false awakening, wherein they wake to see that one of their friends has been replaced by a ghast, which is slowly creeping towards another PC. If the PC stays still, the ghast slices open its victim's throat and the PC watches their friend bleed out before waking up.
- A PC overhears a whispered argument about parentage. A pleading female voice in the PC's right ear swears that "it isn't his". A cold female voice in the PC's left ear scoffs, and says that it doesn't care.

If the PCs damage anything on the first or second floor in their search for traps or treasure and return to any such chambers after a long rest, let them know that the rooms have been restored to pristine condition.