

DEATH HOUSE



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DEATH HOUSE

You can run *Curse of Strahd* for 1st-level characters with the help of this optional mini-adventure, which is designed to advance characters to 3rd level. Players creating 1st-level characters can use the haunted one character background in appendix A, or they can pick backgrounds from the *Player's Handbook* as normal.

Before the characters can explore the haunted townhouse known as Death House, you need to guide them to the village of Barovia. The “Creeping Fog” adventure hook in chapter 1 works best, as it introduces few distractions. Once the characters arrive in Strahd’s domain, steer them to the village. For the duration of this introductory adventure, any attempt by the characters to explore other locations in Strahd’s domain causes the mists of Ravenloft to block their path.

LEVEL ADVANCEMENT

In this mini-adventure, the characters gain levels by accomplishing specific goals, rather than by slaying monsters. These milestones are as follows:

- Characters who gain access to the secret stairs in the attic (area 21) advance to 2nd level. The stairs appear only under certain circumstances.
- Characters advance to 3rd level once they escape from the house (see the “Endings” section).

HISTORY

Death House is the name given to an old row house in the village of Barovia (area E7 on the village map). The house has been burned to the ground many times, only to rise from the ashes time and again—by its own will or that of Strahd. Locals give the building a wide berth for fear of antagonizing the evil spirits believed to haunt it.

The wealthy family that built the house practiced the dark arts. Through seduction and indoctrination, they expanded their cult to include a small yet nefarious circle of friends. When word got out, the rest of the village turned a blind eye to the house and the nightly debaucheries happening within it.

The cult tried to summon malevolent extraplanar entities with no success. The cultists also preyed on visitors, sacrificed them in bizarre rituals, and hosted morbid banquets to feast on their corpses. When nothing came of these ritualized murders, the cultists’ activities became thinly disguised excuses to indulge their lurid fantasies. The ranks of the cult thinned as members began to lose interest in the debacle.

Then Strahd von Zarovich arrived.

The cultists regarded Strahd as a messiah sent to them by the Dark Powers. Drawn to Strahd like moths to a flame, they pledged their devotion for a promise of immortality, but Strahd turned them away, deeming the cult and its leaders unworthy of his attention. The cultists withdrew to Death House in despair.

The cult’s habit of trapping and devouring wayward visitors proved to be its downfall. On one occasion, the cult snared a band of adventurers whom Strahd had lured to his domain to be his playthings. A black car-

riage arrived at Death House soon thereafter, and from out of its black heart stepped the vampire himself. The cultists tried to impress Strahd. In response, he slaughtered them for slaying his playthings. Centuries later, the cultists’ spirits haunt the dungeons under the house. The building itself, it seems, is unwilling to let the cult be forgotten.

ROSE AND THORN

The characters are pulled into Strahd’s domain by the mists of Ravenloft. Forced to follow a lonely road (area A), they eventually arrive at the village of Barovia (area E). Once they reach the village, read:

The gravel road leads to a village, its tall houses dark as tombstones. Nestled among these solemn dwellings are a handful of closed-up shops. Even the tavern is shut tight.

A soft whimpering draws your eye toward a pair of children standing in the middle of an otherwise lifeless street.

The children are ten-year-old Rosavalda (“Rose”) and her seven-year-old brother, Thornboldt (“Thorn”). Thorn is weeping and clutching a stuffed doll. Rose is trying to hush the boy.

If the characters approach the children or call out to them, add the following:

After shushing the boy, the girl turns to you and says, “There’s a monster in our house!” She then points to a tall brick row house that has seen better days. Its windows are dark. It has a gated portico on the ground floor, and the rusty gate is slightly ajar. The houses on either side are abandoned, their windows and doors boarded up.

Characters who question the children learn the following information:

- The children don’t know what the “monster” looks like, but they’ve heard its terrible howls.
- Their parents (Gustav and Elisabeth Durst) keep the monster trapped in the basement.
- There’s a baby (Walter) in the third-floor nursery. (Untrue, but the children believe it.)

Rose and Thorn say that they won’t go back in the house until they know the monster is gone. They can be convinced to wait in the portico (area 1A) while the characters search the house. Although they appear to be flesh-and-blood children, Rose and Thorn are actually illusions created by the house to lure the characters inside. The children don’t know that they’re illusions but vanish if attacked or forced into the house.