

Barovian Folk Tales

Madd Nichol

Ten dark folk tales set in the cursed and gloomy
lands of Barovia.



Barovian Folk Tales

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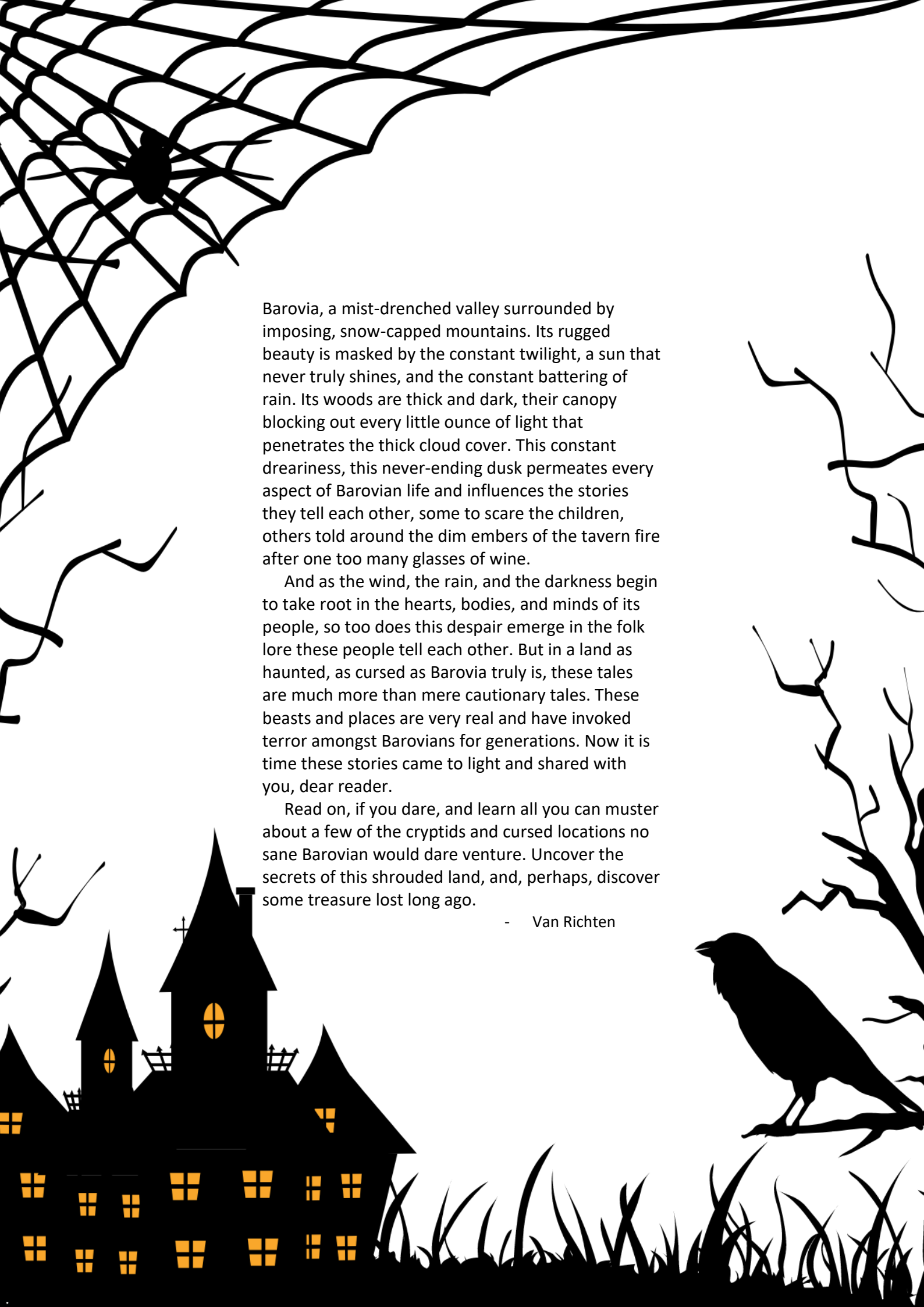
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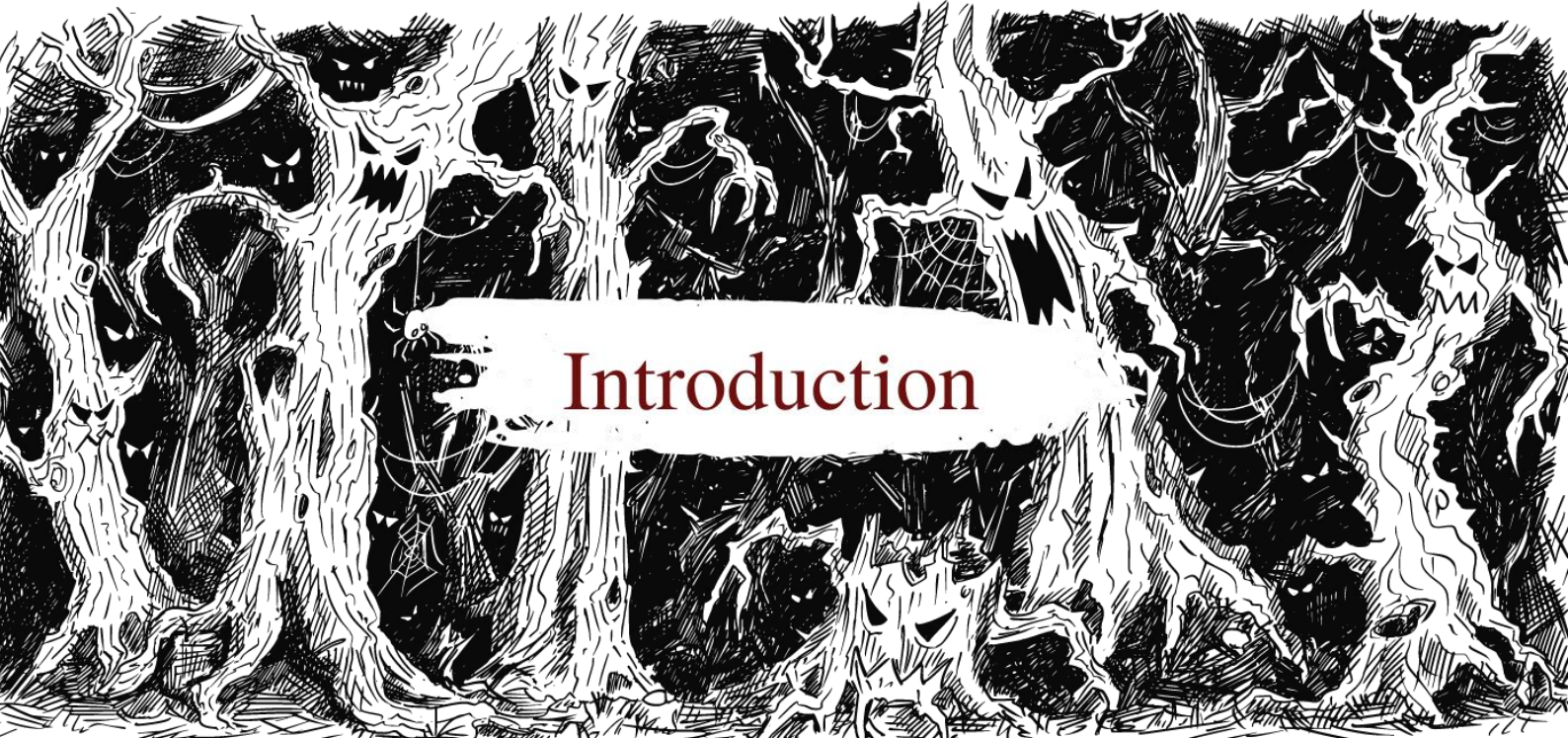
Barovia, a mist-drenched valley surrounded by imposing, snow-capped mountains. Its rugged beauty is masked by the constant twilight, a sun that never truly shines, and the constant battering of rain. Its woods are thick and dark, their canopy blocking out every little ounce of light that penetrates the thick cloud cover. This constant dreariness, this never-ending dusk permeates every aspect of Barovian life and influences the stories they tell each other, some to scare the children, others told around the dim embers of the tavern fire after one too many glasses of wine.

And as the wind, the rain, and the darkness begin to take root in the hearts, bodies, and minds of its people, so too does this despair emerge in the folk lore these people tell each other. But in a land as haunted, as cursed as Barovia truly is, these tales are much more than mere cautionary tales. These beasts and places are very real and have invoked terror amongst Barovians for generations. Now it is time these stories came to light and shared with you, dear reader.

Read on, if you dare, and learn all you can muster about a few of the cryptids and cursed locations no sane Barovian would dare venture. Uncover the secrets of this shrouded land, and, perhaps, discover some treasure lost long ago.

- Van Richten





Introduction

Barovian Folk Tales contains five optional cryptids and five new encounters for your adventurers to hear about, locate, and discover as they journey through Barovia. The book is separated into two sections, Cryptids and Haunts, and are explained in further detail below. While these creatures and events were designed with Barovia in mind, they can easily be made setting neutral with a few minor changes.

Cryptids

Cryptids are mysterious and powerful creatures. Only one such creature exists in the world and each one will prove a challenge to track and kill, unless it finds the players first. Each cryptid has a detailed stat block, accompanying lore, as well as a lair. In addition, each cryptid will also have a story to accompany them for the more lore-minded players at your table. How these cryptids interact with your characters is entirely up to you.

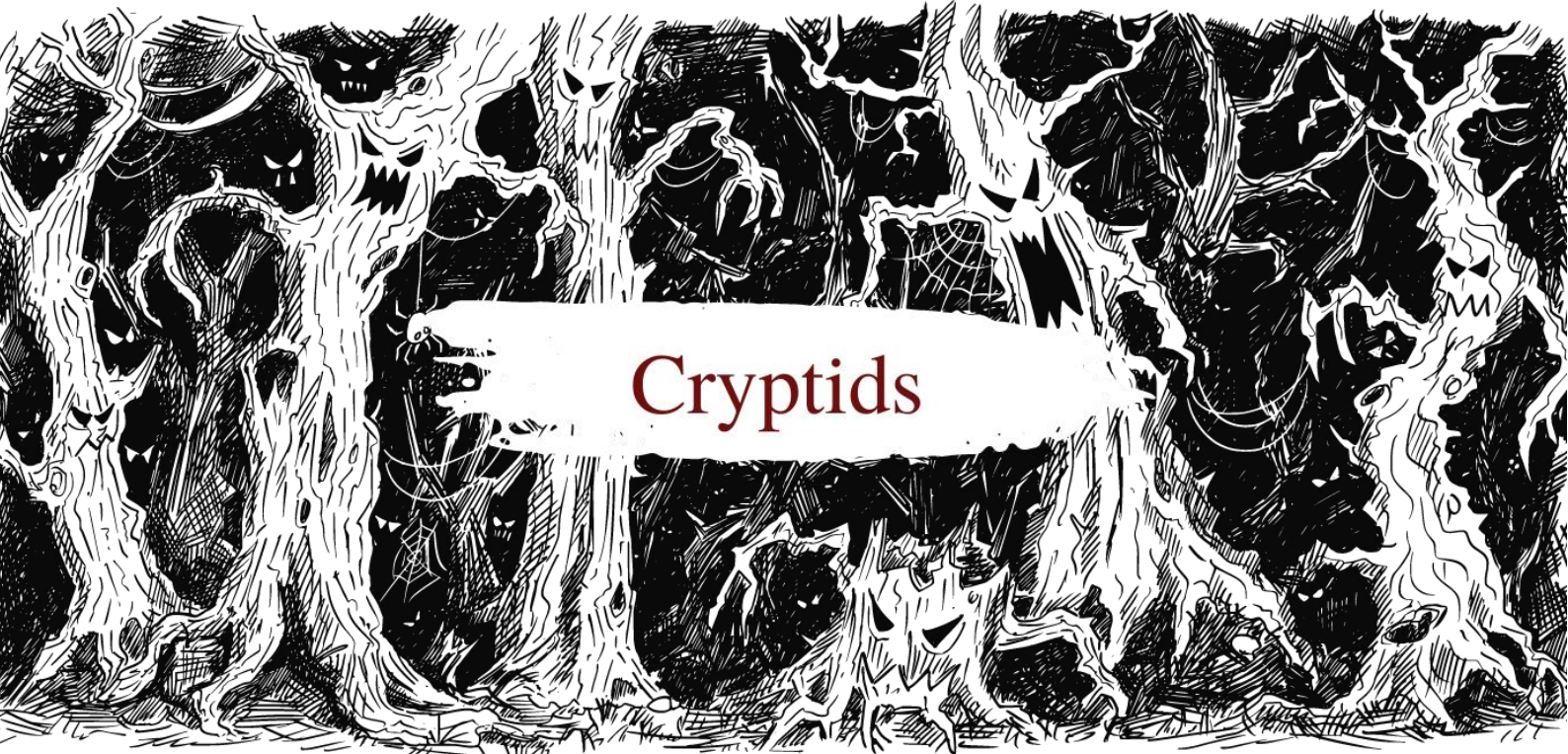
Haunts

Haunts are areas that have an associated folkloric tale about them. These range from a cabin hidden deep in the woods to a battlefield where an endless battle has been waged for centuries. Each haunt will

have an associated legend attached to it, as well as details and the events that occur once the players uncover it.

Running Folk Tales

Folk tales play out like a miniature self-contained adventure within the *Curse of Strahd* campaign. Learning about the folklore of a cryptid or a haunt is part of the fun and sometimes may just lend itself to the general creepiness of Barovia. However, since haunts and cryptids (save for one) have a set location, they can occur anywhere you desire in Barovia. Should the party run into a random encounter, consider have one of the cryptids stalk them for a while before attacking, or they see the unblinking eyes of Lady Svalich staring from the woods. Every encounter with a cryptid will stoke curiosity and fear in the characters and create a new layer of mystery to Barovia. Haunts create new tensions, new mysteries, and hidden rewards to tantalize players into seeking them out.



Cryptids

This chapter goes over the five Barovian cryptids the adventurers may learn about and uncover during their time in Barovia. Each cryptid is a formidable opponent, even more so in its lair, and should be approached with caution.

Bloody Elk

Saw it with my own eyes, I did. A beast, biggest thing I ever saw... but it didn't look right. Its legs were... backwards, bending the wrong way as it walked on all fours. And that face... I close my eyes and I still see it watching. Two blood red eyes in a skinless skull. Teeth the size of my arm. And the antlers were so large you could hang a man from them.

Every now and then I wake up with cold sweats in the night and hear that low bray in the darkness. It calls for me, beckons in a voice I don't understand. The worst part, the noises I hear are starting to change. It... calls my name. It knows me. Only a matter of time before it gets me. Once you see it it's only a matter of time. Beware the Bloody Elk, strangers, lest it find you first.

-Kaylin Drendar, Barovian Tracker

Tales of Bloody Elk go back centuries, originating around the time of Strahd's death. To many Barovians, Bloody Elk is a story to tell children not to wander out at night. To those who have spent a night deep in the heart of the Svalich Woods, or travelled along the roads without a lamp, Bloody Elk is very real.

Few survive an encounter with Bloody Elk, and those unlucky enough to escape alive wish they hadn't. None escape the ever-watching eyes of Bloody Elk, and, over time, it will always learn to say their name. In a braying voice not meant for words, the beast calls their name from the darkness of the woods, waiting until the survivor gives in to their fear and run screaming through the trees, never to be seen again.

Over the years, the tale of Bloody Elk has changed. Some describe it as a huge wolf with impossibly large antlers. Others as a beast with twisted, unnatural legs. But all accounts of Bloody Elk share a few commonalities. Its head is a skinless skull full of fangs with large black antlers rising from its head, and it always finds you in the end, learning to say your name until the thought of it drives you mad.

Territorial. Bloody Elk has been known to be incredibly territorial, keeping wolves and other dangerous creatures out of its

hunting grounds. A stretch of road that is unnaturally quiet, or a silent glade in the Svalich Woods is likely all part of Bloody Elk's territory. Nothing dares venture there.

Impossible Form. The limbs of Bloody Elk bend in unnatural ways. It walks on gaunt legs with backwards bending knees while its fleshless skull scans the mist for prey. Gazing upon Bloody Elk is enough to drive anyone to near madness.

Voracious Hunger. Bloody Elk is always hungry and never full. It always appears emaciated and starving, its fur mottled and mangy with patches of flesh missing to reveal sinew and rotting bones. No amount of food can sate the beast's impossible hunger, but despite this it has never attacked a settlement. This is because Bloody Elk doesn't require food or drink to sustain it and eats only out of habit.

Bloody Elk's Lair

Bloody Elk lives in a crudely dug burrow in a hillside. Its home consists of a few smaller chambers near the entrance where it keeps the devoured remains of its victims. Deep in the back of the lair is a large, circular chamber where the beast sleeps. Scattered around the room are objects Bloody Elk finds interesting and can sometimes be seen picking up an item with long, stick-like fingers and staring into it while humming a tuneless song to itself.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside its lair, Bloody Elk can evoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), Bloody Elk can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- A 30-foot square area of ground within 50 feet of Bloody Elk fills with skeletal remains; that area is

difficult terrain until initiative count 20 of the next round.

- A blood red mist floods the lair, obscuring everything until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- The lair trembles like an earthquake. Each creature in the lair, except for Blood Elk, must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be knocked prone.

Bloody Elk can't repeat an effect until they have all been used, and it can't repeat the same effect in two consecutive rounds.

Regional Effects

The region containing Bloody Elk's lair is corrupted by the beast's foul presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- The area within three miles of Bloody Elk's lair is dead silent. Birds don't chirp and the woods are absent of wolves.
- Light casts strange shadows in the area within three miles of Bloody Elk's lair. They move independently and never seem to make the correct shape. Every shadow of a creature or person has elk horns sprouting from their heads and burning red eyes.

Once Bloody Elk dies, the effects of its lair fade after 1d10 days. Wildlife returns to the woods until its territory is once again inhabited by the numerous other dangers that dwell under those mist shrouded leaves.

Bloody Elk

Large beast

Armor Class 16 (natural armour)

Hit Points 121 (16d10+33)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20	15	20	11	12	14
(+5)	(+2)	(+5)	(+0)	(+1)	(+2)

Saving Throws Con +3

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive perception 15

Languages Common (garbled)

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If Bloody Elk fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. Bloody Elk regains 10 hit points at the start of each of its turns if it has at least 1 hit point. If Bloody Elk takes fire damage, this trait doesn't function until the start of its next turn.

Unusual Nature. Bloody Elk doesn't require food, drink, or sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. Bloody Elk makes two Claw attacks followed by one Bite attack. If both Claw attacks hit the same creature, the Bite attack is made with advantage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) slashing damage. The target must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being dragged five feet towards Bloody Elk.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Legendary Actions

Bloody Elk can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Bloody Elk regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

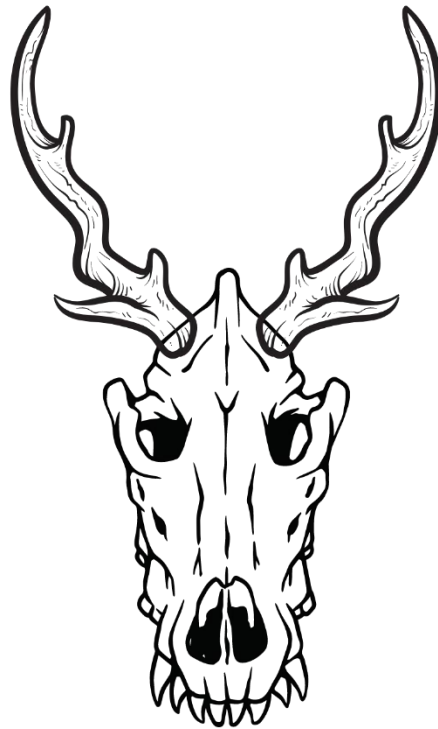
Gore (Costs 2 Actions). Bloody Elk moves up to its speed in a straight line, ignoring other creatures and terrain. Any creature and object in the path takes 27 (5d10) piercing damage.

Claw. Bloody Elk makes two Claw attacks.

Tactics

Bloody Elk may look bestial in nature, but the beast was once a person turned into something foul. It retains some of this intelligence and tactics and is capable of thinking about how best to take down a group of hunters. It makes frequent use of its Gore legendary action to deal huge damage to as many heroes as possible and get close to the squishy back lines. It knows that magic wielders and healers are a big threat to its corrupted life and will focus its attention on taking them down as quickly as possible. Forcing the up-close and personal warriors to chase the beast down keeps it healthier and alive for longer as it dashes across the battlefield.

When reduced to half of its hit points, Bloody Elk enters a fit of rage. Instead of charging across the map it will stand its ground and let out a barrage of claws and bites, focusing whoever wields fire magic or weapons. With fire damage out of the question, the beast will then resume trying to outpace its opponents and eliminate the weaker adventures first.



Brambleskin

I thought it was a tree, some great oak or pine, long dead. Fine piece of timber, I remember thinking. So, I went up to it, axe in hand, and set about ready to chop. That's when the others started screaming, being lifted into the sky by roots and branches. Worst of all, I watched as thorny brambles began wrapping around my friends' necks like a noose before they were left to hang, the life being drained from their faces as them thorns dug deeper into their necks. Dropped my axe and ran, I did. Didn't look back.

But those screams... I'll never forget them. Nor the three blinking eyes bleeding some kinda sap that opened in the bark as that unholy thing groaned like a tree being felled.

-Kastov Vortin, Barovian Logger

While the story of Brambleskin is a more recent creation, the fear this stalking tree instills in the people is no less great than a tale as old as Strahd. Loggers speak of a foul tree that moves, its bark thorned, and its roots covered in brambles and bracken. Strange flowers accompany it, growing like a weed in the glades it calls home. But the worst tales of all recounts the bodies, some still unnaturally fresh and barely alive, hanging from thorned nooses.

Brambleskin is no static tree reduced to tricking loggers into its glade. Capable of moving around the Svalich Woods with ease as if it were a simple beat of flesh and bone, Brambleskin finds new places to nest and wait. Preferring places near roads, ruins, or logging camps, it is not uncommon to find the remains of a crew of lumberjacks' camp amongst a glade of strangely beautiful flowers in an otherwise dreary landscape.

No one truly knows how Brambleskin came to be, or if this is simply another far

fetched tale told by frightened loggers in the woods. Those who have seen the tree moving or have experienced an attack firsthand know different. Its eyes bleed a thick red sap, and each pupil appears as a glittering gemstone. There is talk amongst the Keepers of the Feather that Brambleskin might be the foul perversion of one of the missing magic gemstones from the Wizard of the Wines, but only those brave enough to find, and slay the creature will ever know.

Nature's Perversion. Before Barovia was corrupted and whisked away into the mists of Ravenloft, Brambleskin was destined to become a treant. But once Barovia began to darken and foul magics began to take hold of the land, Brambleskin's meditations became tainted. Thoughts of vengeance flooded through its head and slowly, over the centuries since Strahd took control, Brambleskin became convinced that it had to commit evil acts to protect its forest.

Legendary Malice. The hatred that infests every root and branch of Brambleskin runs deep and spreads like a plague to the nearby plants. Furthered by the treant's possession of the third gemstone from the Wizard of the Wines, its power is only growing until, perhaps one day, the entire Svalich woods will be under its sway.

Corruptor of the Woods. Like all treants, Brambleskin is capable of animating plants around it. It enjoys creating sickly sweet-smelling flowers that can turn into thorned vines it then uses to strangle and hang trespassers in the forest.

Brambleskin's Lair

Brambleskin is always found in its lair, waiting for unsuspecting intruders to approach or attempt to chop it. It always sits in a glade surrounded by lovely smelling flowers that shine brightly in the dim of Barovia.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside its lair, Brambleskin can evoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), Brambleskin can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- The flowers release a sweet aroma that, when inhaled, causes paralysis. Each non-plant creature in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save they are paralyzed. Paralyzed creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of their turns, ending the paralysis on a success.
- The brambles and roots within 50 feet of Brambleskin wrap around those unfortunate enough to be caught in the lair. Each creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being grappled until initiative count 20 of the next rounds.
- The ground within 50 feet of Brambleskin shift and become difficult terrain until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Brambleskin can't repeat an effect until they have all been used, and it can't repeat the same effect in two consecutive rounds.

Regional Effects

The region containing Brambleskin's lair is corrupted by the tree's foul presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Ghostly voices cry out for help on the wind, their voices faint and garbled as if full of blood.
- The trees seem to quake and shiver on their own. Branches move to create labyrinths in the woods.
- An ever-present aroma of honey and sugar drifts on the winds, beckoning people closer to Brambleskin's lair.

Once Brambleskin dies, the effects of tis lair fade after 1d10 days.



Brambleskin

Huge plant

Armor Class 16 (natural armour)

Hit Points 138 (12d12+60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23	11	21	12	18	14
(+6)	(+0)	(+5)	(+1)	(+4)	(+2)

Saving Throws Con +3, Dex +4

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

False Appearance. While Brambleskin remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal tree.

Siege Monster. Brambleskin deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. Brambleskin makes two Slam attacks and one Vine attack.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d6+6) bludgeoning damage.

Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8+6) bludgeoning damage. The target must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled by Brambleskin.

Hang (Recharge 5-6). Brambleskin attempts to hang one of the creatures it is currently grappling. That creature must make a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature drops to one hit point and begins to suffocate.

Legendary Actions

Brambleskin can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. It regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. Brambleskin makes either a Slam or a Vine attack.

Grasping Dread. Brambleskin animates the dead bodies hanging from its branches to plead for help or mutter maddening words. Each creature must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened.

Tactics

Brambleskin has a lot of crowd control abilities which it uses with deadly effect. Its only purpose is to destroy those who attack it, venture into its woods, or come seeking out the gem it uses as its heart, the fabled missing gem from the Wizard of the Wines.

When it has a creature grappled with its vines it will always attempt to hang them if possible. If not, it will continue to squeeze the life from them and Slam them into the ground.

Due to Brambleskin's aversion to fire, it will always try to incapacitate or hang someone wielding a torch, fire weapons, or flame spells. This weakness, when used well by the adventurers, can make short work of Brambleskin. If it feels it cannot win, it may flee into the woods, crashing through trees and leaving an obvious path of destruction in its wake. Hiding amongst the other trees is its only goal for survival, but the still hanging corpses do little to help mask its true nature. If Brambleskin can hide for eight hours, it regains all its hit points and sets out trying to seek vengeance on those that harmed it.

Lady Svalich

We heard a sobbing sound in the woods just off the road, so Vlad thought he'd investigate. The sobbing stopped when the screaming began. We saw Vlad running back towards us, dodging low hanging branches, and leaping over roots. That's when we saw Her, Lady Svalich Herself, the weeping widow of the woods. Vlad never did manage to escape. He stopped dead in his tracks, his eyes went white as snow, and then he turned around and walked away from us.

Was us who started screaming then. We high tailed it out of there as fast as we could. Just... don't go after the sound of sobbing should you find yourself on the roads. You might not make it out the same.

-Boren Dvorchik, Trader

The story of Lady Svalich stretches back to the dark, twisted roots of Barovia's past. Before Strahd, before the mists engulfed the land, there was a woman widowed on her wedding day. Time has forgotten her name but not her story.

On the day of her wedding, Lady Svalich watched in horror as her betrothed collapsed under the effects of a curse. His skin withered away into dust, his hair, once thick and black, became wispy and grey in a moment. She rushed to embrace the man she loved and held him tightly, taking the curse within her. Her pristine white dress turned black as night, her once elegant fingers became emaciated and devoid of flesh.

The people screamed and tried to escape, but somehow Lady Svalich survived. The curse, not meant for her, slowly became her only friend and most trusted ally. She learned to harness it, channel it, and over time became the

fearsome being known only as Lady Svalich.

Corruption Incarnate. Lady Svalich is corruption incarnate; a feature that only strengthens with every passing year trapped within Ravenloft. The curse that destroyed her husband and transformed her is a power she can now channel against others. Some say those touched by Lady Svalich's curse wither away and perish. Others say those poor unfortunate people become something else, something inhuman.

Inhuman Likeness. While Lady Svalich does appear, for all intents and purposes, as a human woman deep in mourning, her piercing white eyes and fondness for bats and crows betrays her form. Bats have been known to fly from beneath her veil in the hundreds as if they were leaving a cave, and crows frequently perch on her shoulders awaiting an easy meal.

Veiled Gateway. Lady Svalich is an undead unlike many others. Halfway between the Material and Ethereal planes, she acts as a form of gateway between the two. When Lady Svalich is close by, the border between these realms is fragile and supernatural events are common.

Lady Svalich's Lair

Lady Svalich is always found in her lair because, unlike other lairs and creatures, the Lady's lair follows her wherever she goes. It is less a physical place than it is a presence darkening the world.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside its lair, Lady Svalich can evoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), Lady Svalich can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Lady Svalich casts *darkness* (no components required).
- Visions of death and decay flash before your eyes as the trees appear to be melting away. Each creature in Lady Svalich's lair must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature becomes frightened until the end of their next turn.
- Lady Svalich calls on a swarm of bats to harass any creature within her lair. One targeted creature makes their abilities or attacks at disadvantage until the start of the next round.

Lady Svalich can't repeat an effect until they have all been used, and it can't repeat the same effect in two consecutive rounds.

Regional Effects

The region around Lady Svalich is tainted by her presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Bats hang in droves from the branches near Lady Svalich. They watch in morbid fascination.
- The air within one mile of Lady Svalich smells of rot and decay. Creatures that spend more than an hour near Lady Svalich have difficulty breathing. After four hours they begin to suffocate.
- Creatures within one mile of Lady Svalich hear wedding bells ringing in the distance.
- Ghosts and other spectral undead flit between the trees and pathways sobbing uncontrollably. These are the souls of those slain by Lady Svalich.

If Lady Svalich dies, these effects fade over the course of 3d10 days.



Lady Svalich

Medium undead

Armor Class 17 (natural armour)

Hit Points 136 (16d8+64)

Speed hover 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	17	19	14	14	22
(+0)	(+3)	(+4)	(+2)	(+2)	(+6)

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Ethereal Sight. Lady Svalich can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when she is on the Material Plane, and vice versa.

Incorporeal Movement. Lady Svalich can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Actions

Withering Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 29 (6d6+8) necrotic damage. The target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, reducing their hit point maximum by the amount of damage dealt on a failed save. A creature whose hit point maximum is reduced to zero dies.

Cursing Gaze. Lady Svalich magically forces one creature it can see within 60 feet of it to make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw. The creature's eyes go white, and they attack the closest creature that isn't Lady Svalich. A creature affected by this can repeat the saving throw at the end of their turns.

Legendary Actions

Lady Svalich can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. It regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. Lady Svalich uses her Withering Touch.

Summon Spirits (2 Actions). Lady Svalich summons 1d4 **specters** from the Ethereal Plane to aid her. These specters are banished to the Ethereal Plane if Lady Svalich dies.

Etherealness. Lady Svalich enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material, or vice versa. It is visible on the Material Plane while in the Ethereal, but it cannot be targeted or harmed.

Tactics

Lady Svalich is a challenging fight, one where the characters will have to work together if they ever hope to slay her or make it out alive. She uses her Summon Spirits ability as often as possible, flooding the battlefield with allies to distract and deal with the characters. She moves around constantly, attempting to stay out of the reach of melee and ranged characters and harass them with her Withering Touch when possible. She would rather let her minions deal with the characters than do it herself.

Over the course of a prolonged fight, the withering effects of Lady Svalich's attacks and the necrotic miasma in the air will begin to take hold. Be warned, fighting lady Svalich is not meant to be an easy task and may prove incredibly difficult. Using her ability to shift into and out of the Ethereal Plane, Lady Svalich avoids heavy attacks and patiently waits to strike while the characters spend their resources defeating nearly endless waves of spirits.

Marek, The Great Wolf

The house was a wreck, you see. Everything was torn and shredded. The floorboards were warped under some immense weight and gouges raked the surface. The way the floor bowed and buckled formed a pathway of destruction to a macabre finale.

I don't think I'd ever seen so much blood. The walls were painted red, and entrails hung like curtains before shattered windows. But it wasn't until I stared out the window that I saw it, looming in the mist just behind the tree line.

A wolf with blood-soaked fur and glowing red eyes stared at me through the shards of broken glass. Its paws were bigger than shields, its claws longer than swords. Worst of all was the menacing intelligence lurking behind those accursed eyes. It knew what it had done, and it liked it.

-Dvensky Luric, Vallaki Guard

Marek has haunted the woods of Barovia ever since the land was drawn into the mists. Some whisper that it is the bestial nature of Strahd given flesh, others that it is Strahd's chosen champion. The truth, however, is that Marek is a foul, mutated direwolf that has gorged on monstrous flesh.

With a hide as thick as plate mail and teeth sharper than freshly made spears, Marek is a danger to all. Worst of all is his intelligence and his ability to speak. Marek loves nothing more than to wait and torment his next meal for weeks on end, savouring the fear that spices the meat until he breaks down the door and devours his prey.

People chosen by Marek slowly lose their minds over the course of a week, hearing his deep and bestial voice in the darkness, watching him stalk through the

trees and gazing through windows. And when the time has come to enjoy his next meal, Marek slaughters entire families in their beds, creeping into homes in the dead of night and leaving a grizzly scene in his wake.

Nowhere is truly safe, for even homes in walled cities have fallen victim to Marek's prey. Many have whispered that Marek is a werewolf and lives amongst them, others that the guards are corrupt and work for Strahd. None know for certain what Marek truly is, but those who know the story quake in fear, wondering if they will ever be chosen by the Great Wolf.

Sinister Intelligence. Marek is an intelligent, evil beast that has learned how to slip past walls and into buildings with ease. Capable of speech and reasoning beyond that of a normal wolf, Marek knows exactly what it's doing and relishes in it.

Immortality. Marek cannot truly be slain. When Marek is killed, his spirit inhabits a new wolf within seven years, causing Marek to be reborn.



Marek's Lair

Marek's lair is a ruined house deep in the woods, the remains of a hunting lodge long forgotten.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside its lair, Marek can evoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), Marek can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Blood unnaturally drips from the walls and ceiling in a 20-foot radius on a point Marek chooses. Creatures within that radius must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, becoming frightened of Marek on a failed save.
- Marek stomps his feet and the house reacts to its master, quaking unnaturally and throwing the characters off balance. Each creature in Marek's lair must succeed a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.
- The house warps and reacts to Marek's whims. Marek is transported to any unoccupied space within 50 feet of him inside the lair.

Marek can't repeat an effect until they have all been used, and it can't repeat the same effect in two consecutive rounds.

Regional Effects

The region around Marek's lair is tainted by his presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Wolves prowl in alarming numbers within 1 mile of Marek's lair. They alert Marek of any intruders.
- The woods are completely silent save for the occasional wolf howl.
- Water in the region is always thick and the colour of blood.

If Marek dies, these effects end in 1d10 days until Marek is reborn in seven years.



Marek, The Great Wolf

Large monstrosity

Armor Class 16 (natural armour)

Hit Points 127 (15d10+45)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20	14	16	10	14	10
(+5)	(+2)	(+3)	(+0)	(+2)	(+0)

Skills. Perception +9, Stealth +6

Damage immunities necrotic

Senses passive Perception 19

Languages Common

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. Marek has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Actions

Multiattack. Marek makes two Bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6+5) piercing damage. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Decaying Breath (Recharge 5-6). Marek exhales a noxious cloud of decaying gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) necrotic damage on a failed save and half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

Marek can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. It regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6+5) piercing damage. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Devour Corpse. Marek can devour an incapacitated body or a corpse, restoring 25 hit points. An incapacitated character who is targeted with this ability fails all their death saving throws and dies

Tactics

Marek is aggressive and relentless. With no fear of death, the Great Wolf rushes down prey and attempts to lure them deep inside its lair if possible. If Marek is caught outside its lair, he will attempt to hide and pick off the characters one by one or frighten them by speaking from the shadows. Marek does his best to terrify the characters, preferring the flavour of meat saturated with fear.

When stalking the characters or some other prey, Marek always remains out of range from spells and attacks. He watches from the trees, his eyes visible in the dark, he scratches at doors, windows, and walls while people sleep, and he ensures that his prey sees him and knows he is there. When it is time to attack, Marek breaks down the door to a home and creates a scene of bloodlust and destruction to terrify the guards and local townsfolk, or even adventurers hot on his trail.

The Pumpkin King

You ever seen the eyes of the Pumpkin King? It's not something I'd ever wish upon someone, let me tell you. I was walking from Barovia to Vallaki one day when I saw something tall poking from the mist. It looked like a huge plant, it's stalk tall and slender with limbs protruding from it. And that was when it moved, its body turning to face me with a smile etched across its face.

It was a pumpkin, the largest pumpkin I'd ever seen, but it was carved to resemble a smiling, joyous face. A sickly green light filled the inside of its head, casting reflections of my thoughts into the real world like dancing shadows. But worse of all was when its head spun around to reveal the frown, its smile now twisted into a leering, toothy grin. Jagged bones should not grow from a gourd and yet they did, all bloody and serrated.

I screamed and fled into the woods, chased by the crashing, woody footsteps of this horror until I found a place to hide. It searched for me, making a snuffling groaning noise as it stooped low to lift boulders and logs. Shadows danced around it, shadows of people from my own thoughts. It knew it was close but couldn't find me. At last it left, its limbs creaking with each massive step until that gaunt monstrosity was absorbed by the mist.

I don't leave town anymore. It's not safe out there, and the Pumpkin King knows my thoughts.

-Halin Farlakov, Urban Recluse

The Pumpkin King is perhaps the most feared cryptid in Barovia. Impossibly tall and gaunt, its sticklike silhouette is enough to terrify anyone with just a simple sighting. It stalks the roads and forests of Barovia, wandering from place to place without a home until it finds

someone. Its face a joyous smile, the Pumpkin King listens to the memories of a person until it senses fear. Its face changes into a toothy frown as it detects nightmare after nightmare and projects them into the world around it. It only wishes to silence the fear that forces its change but driven by maddened rage it always attempts to slaughter those who have upset it.

Powerful Mind Reader. The Pumpkin King can read the thoughts and memories of those around it, projecting them from its hollow face into the real world. Entire scenes can play out around the Pumpkin King, distracting those around it. When it detects a nightmare or a trace of fear, its demeanor changes into one of murderous rage.

Split Personality. The Pumpkin King acts on a duality between a curious observer and a murderous fiend. How it behaves depends on the memories and thoughts it detects.

One With the Mists. The Pumpkin King can bend the very Mists to its will, using it to hide itself or ambush prey. The Mist is always unnaturally thick around the Pumpkin King.

The Pumpkin King's Lair

The Pumpkin King's lair is an abandoned and overgrown farm in the woods. Carved pumpkins sit on crooked fence posts, their insides rotting and oozing through their faces. In the field are rows of pumpkins, each growing a different face on itself.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside its lair, the Pumpkin King can evoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Pumpkin King can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

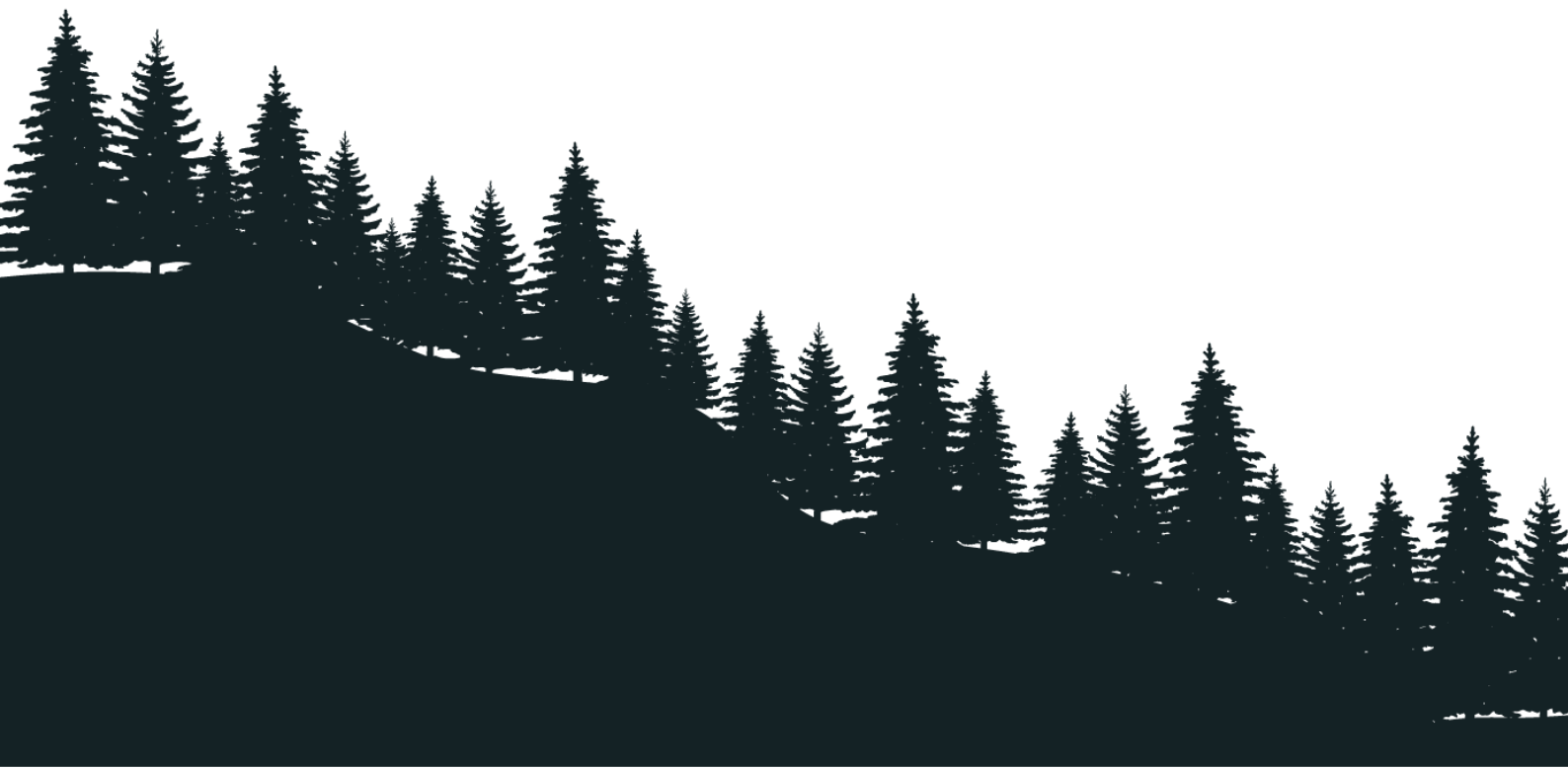
- 1d4 pumpkins sprout legs and attack. Their stats are those of a **scarecrow**.
- Entangling vines sprout from the ground in a 30-foot radius, creating difficult terrain for any creature moving across it.
- One pumpkin explodes, sending necrotic, rotting pumpkin chunks flying in a ten-foot radius. Any character in that radius must make a DC 4 Dexterity saving throw, taking 3d6 necrotic damage on a failed save and half as much on a successful one.

Regional Effects

The region around the Pumpkin King's lair is tainted by his presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Crows and ravens dare not fly within ten miles of the farm.
- The roots of any vegetation in the region occasionally squirms underfoot like snakes. They sometimes attack any non-plant creature within 10 miles of the lair.
- Faces seem to grow on trees in the area and they glow with a sickly green light.
- Eerie laughter travels on the wind, echoing through the mists from all directions.

If the Pumpkin King dies, these effects end in 1d10 days later.



The Pumpkin King

Huge plant monstrosity

Armor Class 17 (natural armour)

Hit Points 145 (15d12+48)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20	14	16	10	14	10
(+5)	(+2)	(+3)	(+0)	(+2)	(+0)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities psychic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Languages Common, but speaks through projected memories

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Memory Projection. Memories from one of the characters around the Pumpkin King spill out of his face. Any non-undead, non-plant creature within fifty feet of the Pumpkin King must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, they are charmed. A character can reroll the saving throw at the end of its turns. A character who succeeds on this saving throw is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

Mist Cloak. While in thick mist, the Pumpkin King can hide as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. Marek makes two Claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., on target. *Hit:* 28 (6d6+7) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Drown in Mist (Recharge 5-6). The Pumpkin King chooses up to three hostile creature it can see within 200 feet. A thick mist swirls around them, diving into the creature's mouth and pulling them into the air. The target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) necrotic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

The Pumpkin King can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. It regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., on target. *Hit:* 28 (6d6+7) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Thicken Mist. The mist within fifty feet of the Pumpkin King thickens creating an area with low visibility. Ranged attacks made inside or into this area are made at disadvantage. This area lasts until the start of the Pumpkin King's next turn.

Tactics

Defeating the Pumpkin King is no simple challenge. Using his Mist Cloak as often as possible, the creature is capable of masking its immensity in the thickest of mist. And by projecting memories out of its face, characters are at risk of being charmed as the Pumpkin King slaughters their companions.

When in combat, the Pumpkin King focuses whoever it sees as a threat. Characters who deal high damage to it in a round are likely its first targets, particularly those who wield magic or carry magic weapons. He will mercilessly attack them, using his Drown in Mist ability to hurt several hostiles before cloaking itself and attacking from the mist.

If fought in his lair, the Pumpkin King uses the scarecrows to harass enemies at range or keep melee combatants engaged while he takes out the mages and rangers.





This chapter goes over the five Haunts present in Barovia. Haunts play out like mini adventures or encounters that add depth and folk horror to the mysterious lands of Barovia.

Bloodshed Fields

Somewhere in Barovia is a battle that never ended. The crashing of blades on shields rings out nightly, mingling with the endless death cries of horses and men. It is a cursed place where few living people have dared venture, and it is a place none have known to return from. For once you step inside those bloody fields, the rage consumes you and you join the endless ranks of soldiers dying and rising again each night to fight forevermore.

The battle was once fought between Strahd's mortal soldiers and the defenders of Barovia in the days before the mist. Once a golden field of wheat, the site is now a charnel scene of mangled corpses, rusted armour and weapons, and a single tattered flag in the center of it all.

Each night, the bodies of fallen soldiers rise as **zombies** and attack with rusted weapon and glove, biting and scratching and slashing at anything and everything around them. There is no longer a sense of sides, there is only bloodshed.

Bloodshed Fields Rumours

While exploring the lands of Barovia, or while chatting with some of the locals, the characters may hear stories of an ancient battlefield where the fighting never stopped. Over time, the people of Barovia invented new and fantastical reasons for the ceaseless violence. Some say the spirit of a powerful necromancer lives in the field and does it for fun. Others that a curse was laid upon the land, the result of a deadly battle. Some say that beneath the field is great treasure vault filled to the brim with gold and treasure.

If the characters don't seem very interested in going to the field, that's perfectly fine. They can stumble upon it while travelling Barovia, or a local can approach them and ask them to investigate the rumors of hidden treasure. The choice is yours.

The Encounter

As the characters approach Bloodshed Fields, read or paraphrase the following:

The clang of steel scraping against steel rings out into the night, followed by the shrieks of horses and bloodcurdling yells of men.

If the characters investigate, read or paraphrase the following when they see the fields:

Hundreds of soldiers clad in rusted armour are fighting to the death around a tattered flag bearing the symbol of Strahd. Horses with pikes jutting from their throats gallop while riders wielding shattered lances slaughter indiscriminately. Many of the soldiers have swords run through their bellies or arrows peppering their armour. None of them seem quite alive.

The field is full of **zombies**, each attacking whichever zombie is closest to them with swords, spears, or fists. They surge towards the tattered flag in the center of the field.

As the players move through the field, they will have to clear a path through dozens of undead. The zombies will fight each other as well as them, but very quickly the characters themselves may turn on each other.

The Blood Rage

As soon as a player defeats their first zombie, they must succeed a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the character is driven mad with rage, attacking whoever, or whatever, is closest to them. The DC goes up by 1 for each zombie slain, capping at a DC of 18. A character affected by the blood rage can make a Wisdom saving throw equal to

their current DC, ending the effects of a success at the cost of 1d6 psychic damage.

The Tattered Standard

In the center of the field is a tattered and broken flag bearing the symbol of Strahd. It is tipped with a rusted spear head that hums with energy.

If a character grabs hold of the tattered standard, they can attempt to wrest it from the ground and claim it for themselves. The flag can be pulled from the ground with a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check.

Once a character pulls the flag from the ground, the carnage around them stops. The soldiers fall to the ground and any character affected with the blood rage is cured.

However, the person who has pulled the flag from the ground is inflicted with a terrible curse.

Curse of the Standard Bearer

The character who holds the standard takes on the curse of the standard bearer. Whenever they defeat an enemy in combat, they must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or succumb to the effects of blood rage until the end of their next turn. This effect can only be removed by a *remove curse* spell.

Strahd's Standard

Longspear, Rare (Requires Attunement)
Strahd's Standard has +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. In addition, once per long rest, the wielder can use an action to force five creatures to make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the targets suffer the effects of blood rage until the end of their next turn.

If the curse is lifted from the item, the standard bearer can instead choose five friendly targets and give them advantage on their next attack rolls.



Lost Toy Workshop

Lost and abandoned in the Svalich Woods is a glade of toys. Some were dropped, others brought here on purpose, but all lost toys in Barovia invariably find their way here. Like moths to a flame, these toys are dragged or carried by beasts and people into the woods and abandoned.

Some say that abused toys wander here on their own, desperately trying to escape from their torment. Others than the glade houses the abandoned workshop of Fritz von Weerg and that the toys are the remnants of the great inventor.

The truth is more sinister.

When von Weerg left Barovia, his workshop was taken over by a Barovian witch. Fascinated by the toys, she worked her magic to animate them and create living friends. When he toys gained sentience, they killed the witch and turned her into one of their kind. Stuffed with cotton and stitched together again, the witch now presides over the workshop with her toys enjoying endless “Tea Parties” with chipped, empty cups and moldy cakes.

Lost Toy Workshop Rumours

While exploring Barovia, or if they ever speak with Blinsky, they might hear about this lost toy workshop in the Svalich Woods. Locals will warn them of a secluded forest glade off the road with toys strung up from the withered, gaunt branches.

Blinsky tells another story. In addition to what he mentions about von Weerg in *Curse of Strahd*, he will also ask the characters to investigate the workshop and see if there is anything left that might help Blinsky create better toys and make people ‘hyappy’.

If the characters ask about von Weerg and his workshop, they may find out some

eerie details about cackles ripping through the silence, blank button eyes staring from lifeless sack faces, and a wand that the witch used to give the abandoned toys life.

The Encounter

As the characters approach the glade, read or paraphrase the following:

Toys stare down from the withered branches with lifeless buttons eyes. Permanent smiles have been stitched onto their weathered and split faces. A narrow muddy track runs through the mist deeper into the woods where the faint sound of laughter echoes around you.

As the characters move towards the workshop, read or paraphrase the following:

The dense trees abate, opening into a secluded forest glade. Mist blows across the long, brown grass cloaking a ruined wooden building choked in brambles. Toys lay scattered across the area, hanging from tiny nooses or nailed to the trees with rusted nails. From inside the small house comes the sound of clinking glasses and a high-pitched shrieking laugh.

The workshop is home to a stuffed and animated body of a Barovian witch. Her flesh is decayed and blackened with grave mold, and crude stitching covers her body. Stuffing pokes out of her flesh where the seams are beginning to fray. She has the statistics of a **carrionette** (see *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft*). Seated around a wooden table are several other motionless carrionettes, a total of 2 per player character.

The Tea Party

As the characters enter the house they are invited to sit around the table for tea. The witch offers them empty cups and moldy cakes and asks them why they've come to visit her.

The witch is not hostile at first and enthusiastically 'drinks' her tea while listening to the characters. When they tell a joke or attempt to lighten the mood, she laughs in a high-pitched shriek.

Throughout this event, the carrionettes are readying themselves to attempt and murder the characters and transform them into toys like them. They don't attack until the party angers the witch, attempts to take anything, or mentions that there isn't any tea.

Should the characters get through the tea party without angering the witch, she thanks them for coming and says that it is rare she gets any visitors these days. She asks them to stay and, if they refuse, becomes more persistent until the carrionettes jump up to attack the players. When combat begins, she expresses how happy she is to add to her friends, because good friends never leave.

Animating Wand

Wand, Rare (Requires Attunement)

This wand has 3 charges. While holding it, you can use an action and expend one of its actions to animate any non-animate object for 1 minute. The stat block of the object is usually an **animated armor** unless a weapon or rug has been animated. The wand regains one spent charge at dawn. If you expend all the wand's charges, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand crumbles to dust and is destroyed.



Spring of Memories

A glowing green-blue spring lies somewhere deep in the woods, its waters aglow with a strange and unnatural light. Faces drift underneath the surface, hollow and desiccated, whispering dark and depraved stories for any willing to listen.

In a whispering voice, the memories of long-ago people echo forth into the present. They tell tales of bloodshed, or betrayal, of lost love, and of secrets no one could ever know. All came here to rid themselves of an unwanted memory.

But the spring drinks as deeply as those who drink from it. Sometimes memories are sapped away, stolen until nothing is left but the hollow shell of a person bereft of joy, knowledge, or name.

These are the forgotten, and they are doomed to wander until the end of their days without so much as a single memory of their life before they drank. Few forgotten are still alive, and those that have been reduced to feral beasts that wander near the spring.

But, for those willing to forget some terrible act, or allow a fear to disappear forever, the Spring of Memories is a holy grail.

But finding it won't be easy. Few recognize its existence, fewer still know where it is. But the story of a spring capable of letting people forget their troubles is a common story among Barovians.

Spring of Memories Rumours

The Spring of Memories is a common story told amongst the downtrodden and destitute of Barovia. They tell each other stories of how they knew someone who sought it out and was never seen again, or how they themselves desperately want to forget something they have done. Sprinkle in references to the spring whenever the party is in a tavern with soulless Barovians, or those who have committed a great wrong.

Eventually, a player may become curious or even have something they want to forget themselves. They can seek it out, asking around town for anyone who knows where it may be. Eventually they'll find someone who knows more than they let on, having traced where the spring is rumoured to be.



The Encounter

As the characters approach the trail leading to the spring, read or paraphrase the following:

A crow calls out from somewhere in the darkened branches, the branches intertwining to create formless shapes above you. A narrow game trail leads deep into the woods, its end nowhere in sight.

The journey to the spring can be as long or as short as you'd like. For longer journeys, consider using an encounter.

As the characters approach the spring, read or paraphrase the following:

In the center of an overgrown forest glade is a spring of glowing water. Silhouetted against the gentle light is a hunched over figure drinking greedily from the water, laughing and mumbling to themselves with each fervent sip. The smell of decay lingers on the air like smoke as the gaunt figure turns his neck towards you, eyes sunken and rotten teeth showing in a deranged smile.

The Forgotten

Twelve forgotten are laying in wait around the spring, ambling through the trees without a thought in their mind.

Characters with a passive Perception of 13 or higher notice a few of these figures dressed in decaying fabrics and leather.

None of the forgotten can speak a coherent sentence, forming a string of nonsensical words and phrases that don't make any sense. They aren't immediately hostile towards the characters unless attacked. Should a character drink from the spring and offer up a memory, the forgotten will surround the glade and watch eerily from the forest's eaves.

A Memory Offered

As one or more characters offer up a memory to the spring, they feel a burning, stinging sensation in their mind. Describe how the characters can feel the memory being violently pulled from their head as if someone were tugging on a stuck rope. Then ask them to make a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, the spring draws more memories into it, sapping the character's treasured moments alongside it. The character must repeat this saving throw if they fail up to three times, losing more and more memories until they become a Forgotten. On a successful save, the character loses only one memory of their choice.

Attack of the Forgotten

The Forgotten aren't normally aggressive, having lost their memories about people outside their small, shriveled circle. They are distrustful of other people but do not attack unless provoked. If one of the characters becomes a Forgotten and the party tries to take them from the Spring, the Forgotten attack from all sides. There are three Forgotten per party member and they each have the statistics of a **ghoul**.

Becoming Forgotten

A character who becomes Forgotten loses all their memories. Despite not having any memories, Forgotten characters are still proficient in things they used to know, retaining the muscle memory or some innate knowledge that lingers at the back of their mind. They can still speak any languages they know, but they struggle to form a full sentence. Their memories can never be returned to them without some powerful magic, such as a *wish* spell or a pact with the Dark Powers of Ravenloft.

The Keeper and the Cabin

They say a cabin lies in the woods, lonely save for its shadow creeping through the mist. With no road leading from it, and no one brave enough to live there, the place is said to be abandoned. And yet, lost woodsmen say that lights have guided them to its door where a young family lives a peaceful and quiet life.

They say the birds never chirp in that strange and tranquil place, and that the sun never shines through those thick and twisted boughs. But the cabin's shadow stretches still, watching, waiting in the darkness of the woods where the sun never shines.

This is the Cabin, and the Cabin always needs a Keeper. Living inside the cabin is the shadow of a man, withered and decrepit. But the Cabin never shows this, for the Keeper lives in an illusion created by the home. Sapping his life away bit by bit, the Cabin keeps its victim trapped inside until he is spent. Then it will pick another, for the Cabin always needs a Keeper.

The illusory world the Keeper lives in is projected to the outside world. But the veil is thin, and a keen observer can notice the sloppy details. Shadows are not consistent. Light bends in strange ways. The family never speaks.

But if the Cabin decides that someone new would do nicely as a Keeper, it will trap them there, tempt them by a sickly-sweet illusory world and keep them inside forever.

Rumours of the Cabin

The Cabin and the Keeper works better as a random encounter while the characters are exploring the woods rather than something they actively seek out. However, during an adventure, characters can hear stories of a mysterious cabin in the woods that guides lost people to its doors.

As the characters are exploring Svalich Woods, perhaps while seeking a cryptid, consider running the following encounter.

The Encounter

As the characters are wandering through the Svalich Woods, read or paraphrase the following when they see the Cabin:

Lights pierce the crushing darkness around you, glowing like yellow eyes through the trees. As you approach the sounds of the forest quiet until total silence envelopes the world. As you approach, the shape of a small overgrown cabin emerges from the brush, its leaded windows streaming a warm and welcoming light into the forest beyond.

The Illusion

The outside of the cabin is small and aged. But inside appears much larger. Rooms stretch down long well-lit hallways past the mounted heads of various animals. The Keeper appears as a young man, happy and full of life while his wife and daughter are shy and reserved. They never speak to the characters, but the Keeper will sometimes laugh as if he heard them say something. Creating an uncanny feeling inside the Cabin is key. Explain the varying lengths of the shadows, how the flames in the candles never move, and the family never speaking no matter how many times they're spoken to.

The Keeper

The Keeper is a young man with a wide smile and a helpful demeanor. He is eager to help guide the characters to where they are going and provide directions but says he shouldn't leave his family alone. The Keeper never offers his name but will ask for the characters' names. However, when asked about his name, he will frown and say he can't remember it.

To roleplay the Keeper, speak as if he was much older than he appears. He recalls things from decades ago, asks about the village of Berez where he is from, and even mentions that he hasn't seen the sunrise in years and how strange that is. Eventually, the characters may be able to piece together that this man is older than he appears.

The Fake Reality

Over the course of their stay, the Keeper will serve food and drinks, tell stories of the war against Strahd, and be as homely as possible. A storm begins to rage outside the windows and the Keeper urges the characters to stay the night. They can refuse with no consequence if they are unnerved. Leaving will reveal that the storm outside isn't real and that the world beyond the cabin is the same as when they entered.

Should they stay, the characters hear a storm rage. Thunder crashes outside and lightning streaks through the windows. The longer the characters stay, the more the illusion begins to crumble away around them. Decorative walls begin to age rapidly and then renew themselves just as quickly. Shadows act of their own accord and then return to normal. The lights disappear, plunging them all into darkness before coming back up.

At any point, a character can realise that the interior of the house is an elaborate illusion by succeeding a DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check. As the night

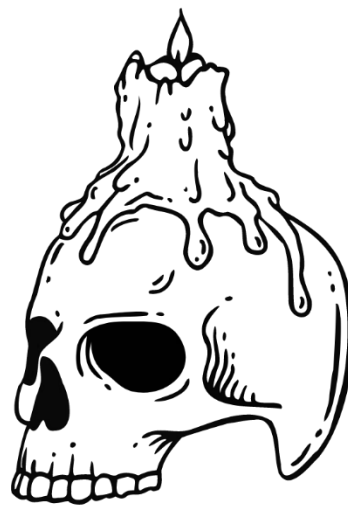
wares on and the effects begin to falter, this DC is lowered however you see fit.

The Real Cabin

Once the characters determine that the interior is an illusion, the Cabin drops all pretense of its fake reality. They see the keeper as an impossibly old, withered figure with tangled hair stretching across the house. He is melded to his rickety wooden chair, flesh mingling with wood while white cataracts stare blindly in the darkness. He wears nothing but a reeking cloth robe that doesn't hide his shrivelled, gaunt figure.

The Keeper acts as if he still sees the illusion, and a character who passes a DC 14 Perception check can see the illusion reflected in his white eyes. Should they kill the man, or steal him from the house, the Cabin will lure a new Keeper to the Cabin, potentially one of the characters.

Forcing the keeper to leave the Cabin immediately kills him. He screams as they move him towards the door, saying that he wants to stay with his family and how he doesn't want to go outside. The Cabin may appear for the characters again, but if there is no Keeper it will attempt to trap one of them inside forever.



The Wishing Well

Deep in the woods lies the village of Grensk secreted away from the prying eyes of Barovia. They say that it's a place of tranquillity, where the people don't live in fear of Strahd and his servants. And it's true, the people here have no fear of Strahd.

But we should be afraid of them.

For in this ruined town of people lies a deep well with no bottom in sight. But the well holds magic, powerful magic that the few remaining denizens of the village guard fiercely. The Well contains the dark portents of wishing magic, but the magic that pools in the bottom of the well has a mind of its own. It is not to be used. Ever.

What little people remain in Grensk are hellbent on keeping the dangerous magic in the well stuck there. And while the well can grant wishes, no one ever truly gets what they ask for.

Rumours of the Wishing Well

Whispers of the wishing well are abundant in Barovia. A wish is something that anyone could use, even if the cost is high. The people speak of a deserted village hidden in the woods where Strahd can't find it and in the center of town, amongst the rotting timber walls of the cottages, is a stone well.

Characters may be drawn to seek out the well if they're after a wish or be driven to it by rumours that Strahd is searching for it himself. With nearly every person in Barovia wishing they could find this place, eventually the characters will find someone who knows of the village.

They will offer to lead them there but urges them to reconsider. The person will tell them of their own wish, how they barely escaped with their lives, and how their joy turned to ash in their mouth when they returned to civilization.



The Encounter

As the characters approach the aged village of Grensk, read or paraphrase the following:

Seven shattered houses lean over a muddy central square. In the center of the village is a tumbling stone well. A crow caws loudly from a rotting rooftop, mingling with the banging of a shutter slamming into the bloated wall of one of the houses. All around you, the scent of decay lingers almost as thick as the mist curling around your feet.

As the characters approach the well, add:

Seven sets of bleeding eyes stare out from cracked and broken windows. Long, toothy smiles spread over their faces as they stare outwards.

The Townsfolk of Grensk

Wishing to be eternally happy, the townsfolk of Grensk made their bargain with the magic in the well. They now live forever with a permanent smile, unable to lower their lips to cover their rotting teeth.

While not immediately hostile, they will avoid contact with the characters until they get very close to the well. Should the characters move in to make a wish, the seven remaining townsfolk will rush in to attack, demanding the characters never make a wish. When they speak, they hiss through the gaps and holes in their teeth.

The townsfolk of Grensk have the statistics of a **tribal warrior**.

Making a Wish

Characters who wish to make a wish may do so, but the well only has enough magic left for one single wish. As they approach, the well whispers that it can grant one wish and one wish alone, but they must offer it something of equal worth in exchange.

The well accepts any currency, but blood, memories, flesh, and even spell slots are all viable. Let your players be creative and run with whatever they suggest offering the well. However, determine in secret how much their wish is worth.

Whatever your characters wish for, there are some stipulations. For starters, they cannot wish for Strahd to be defeated, removed from Barovia, or for them to leave. The well is empowered with magic from the Dark Powers of Ravenloft and they won't interfere with Strahd.

No wish made is truly perfect. For example, a character who makes a wish to have their memories restored will regain their memories, but they will be out of place and determining what happened when will be difficult. Or take the townsfolk of Grensk for example. Their wish to be eternally happy granted them immortality and permanent smiles. Consider your characters' wish and find a way to grant it and terrify them in some way. It's important to not let the wish's side effect overpower the wish itself or the players may feel cheated. It's sometimes better to grant them their wish and build up to the reality of what their wish has caused. This gives you time to develop a suitable curse and build tension at your table.