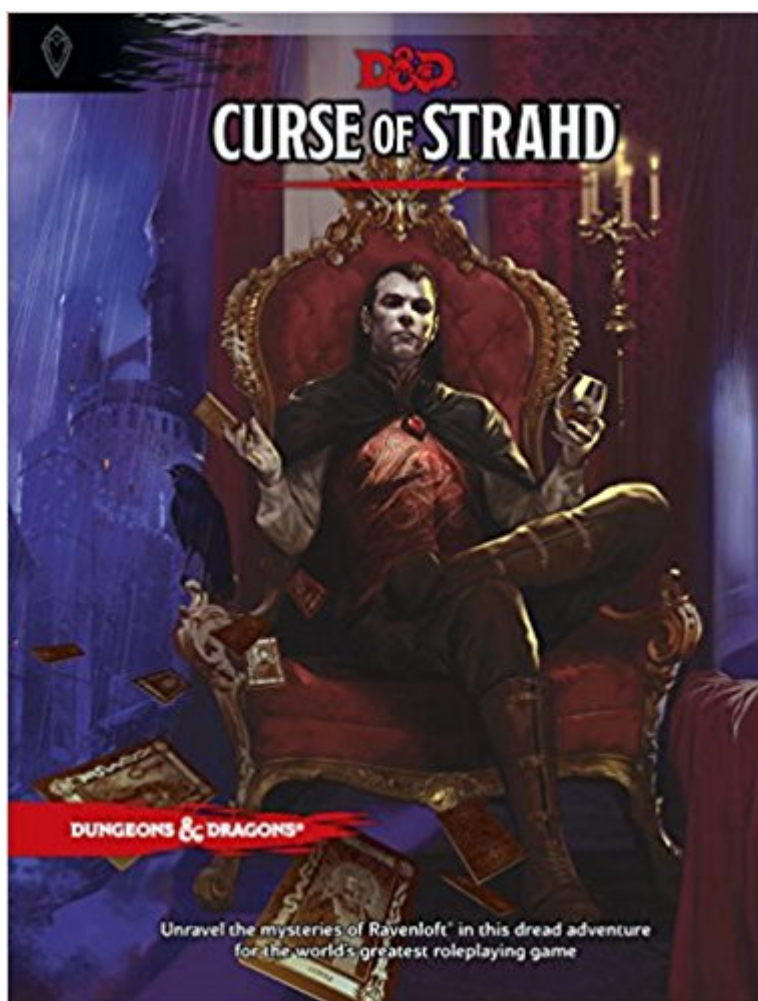




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Curse Of Strahd: A Dungeons & Dragons Sourcebook (D&D Supplement)



Synopsis

Unravel the mysteries of Ravenloft™ in this dread adventure for the world's greatest roleplaying game. Under raging storm clouds, the vampire Count Strahd von Zarovich stands silhouetted against the ancient walls of Castle Ravenloft. Rumbling thunder pounds the castle spires. The wind's howling increases as he turns his gaze down toward the village of Barovia. Far below, yet not beyond his keen eyesight, a party of adventurers has just entered his domain. Strahd's face forms the barest hint of a smile as his dark plan unfolds. He knew they were coming, and he knows why they came—all according to his plan. A lightning flash rips through the darkness, but Strahd is gone. Only the howling of the wind fills the midnight air. The master of Castle Ravenloft is having guests for dinner. And you are invited.

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Customer Reviews

Adventure design and development by Chris Perkins and Jeremy Crawford.

A neuronphaser.com review. CONTENT (4/5) Curse of Strahd is a re-tread of the original plot of I6 Ravenloft (later revised for AD&D 2nd edition as RM4 House of Strahd, and again, but more heavily so, for the revised 3.5 edition as Expedition to Castle Ravenloft), but with a metric boatload of added content. While the bulk is about the vampire Strahd von Zarovich and his oppressive rulership over the Village of Barovia, as well as his eternal sorrow and rage manifesting in physical form throughout his lair in Castle Ravenloft, of course

there's a ton of other plots directly and indirectly tied to Strahd. The players can try to rid Barovia of zombies and hags, take on werewolves, and break into Castle Ravenloft only to face their deaths or they can play it smart and travel the lands of Barovia, gathering magic items, allies, and lore that will help make the fight against Strahd that much more likely to be a success. Built for characters of levels 1 through 10, Curse of Strahd is easily enough adventuring material for characters to climb a fair bit higher than that, though the bulk of the challenges tend to hover around levels 4-9. Thankfully, Curse of Strahd kicks off with something missing in the adventure Out of the Abyss: an Introduction! Who'd have thunk it?! I couldn't for the life of me figure out why Abyss dropped us off in the middle of the adventure without any idea of what's happening, but Curse clearly corrected course. The Introduction, most of Ch. 1 Into the Mists, and all of Ch. 2 The Lands of Barovia act as a campaign setting supplement to Barovia (and indirectly the entire Ravenloft setting), so you're getting more than just preamble: you're getting unbelievably strong methods and mechanics to nail the tone, lore, and mechanics of The Domains of Dread. Tips range from concrete examples of ratcheting up the tension (characters with high Perception might catch things that others don't) to broad strokes "This is what horror gaming means in relation to Dungeons & Dragons" and there's not a piece of it that's not fantastic. Another feature missing from Out of the Abyss but extremely welcome here is a table calling out the expected PC levels when hitting various locations in the adventure. Since it's a non-linear adventure, this is absolutely critical information. Additionally, there's a system for using Tarokka cards • Tarot-like cards used by the Vistani fortune-tellers • to randomly place a few important features of the adventure, just like in the original I6 Ravenloft. Specifically, this reading will determine (1) Strahd's location in Castle Ravenloft, (2) the location of the Tome of Strahd, the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind, and the Sunsword, (3) and an NPC that will act as a powerful ally. Gone from earlier editions is Strahd's goals as they are now fixed: (1) turn Ireena Kolyana into a vampire spawn consort of his, (2) find and destroy Ruldolph Van Richten, and (3) search for a successor or consort among the PCs! The DM can perform a "reading" with the cards to determine these things ahead of time, but there are two NPCs (up from solely Madam Eva in the I6 Ravenloft version of this adventure) who can perform readings for the players, which might alter the results and give them additional clues. More on the Tarokka cards themselves below. Let's chat about the random

placement feature in a little more depth, because it's an absolutely killer idea that the original AD&D Ravenloft adventure featured, and which returns for a really good reason: because it is made of 100% pure, unfiltered awesome. By leaving these critical pieces of the adventure up to random card draws from a 54-card Tarokka deck, you've just ensured that Curse of Strahd can be replayed dozens of times without much chance of any repeats. The results aren't just a single line, either: "Draw The Soldier of Swords and place the Doohickey in the Abbey of Alliterative Grave Markers. Nope, each and every possibility gets a reference in the appropriate location of the adventure titled "Fortunes of Ravenloft" that gives you a succinct-yet-detailed blurb about what happens when the Thing of Great Import is placed there. Not only is this awesome because of the replayability • consider, too, that this is a non-linear adventure • but it provides the right level of guidance for newer Dungeon Masters. There's one flaw: the Tarokka cards for the magic items and the adventure locations they map to don't follow any internal logic, so if you are running a truncated version of Curse of Strahd, removing certain locations so you have a more streamlined/straightforward experience like in I6 Ravenloft, you're going to have to fudge the results. You can't just "remove all 3s" or "remove all aces" and expect to get results that work with exactly whatever it is you're removing from the adventure. As you'll see when we touch on certain sections, this is a bit problematic, but if you're planning to use the whole playing field, then it's nothing to worry about.

The Lands of Barovia. An overview of the wilderness areas on the main map of Barovia makes up most of this chapter, but it also provides the general lore of the region and its people (Barovians and Vistani), alterations to various magical spells and effects due to the mists and Strahd's control over the land, the random encounters that can be triggered both daytime and nighttime, and a few useful sidebars: Barovian Names (60+ male and female first names as well as surnames), and Barovian Calendar, which is a simple calendar that follows lunar cycles.

The Village of Barovia. This chapter covers the partially-abandoned village of Barovia. It was the site of constant wolf attacks and now has a lingering infestation of Strahd zombies and rats. There is little of interest to the overarching story outside of the fact that Irenea Kolyana resides here, who is almost certain to join the group or be the focus of their attentions in ensuring she isn't turned into one of Strahd's consorts. Notably, Curse of Strahd states that the burgomaster Irenea's adopted father died three days ago, a

number that varied in I6 Ravenloft and RM4 House of Strahd (the longer time-frame was 10 days, which makes for one stinky corpse!). Additionally, Ireena has been bitten twice by Strahd, only requiring one more encounter to be turned, and there's not a single stated reason for Strahd delaying, other than perhaps the fact that Ireena is a pretty mean swordswoman, so maybe he can't lift a finger to force her to submit to him? Considering his stats, that's about as lame-duck an excuse as you can get, so it's either something you're going to just roll with or you're going to want to consider changing. Giving her the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind is one possibility, or simply subjecting her to non-specific protective magics from allied wereravens (see the sections on Vallaki and Wizard of the Wines for more info) is your best bet.

Castle Ravenloft. Castle Ravenloft is where Strahd dwells, and is a haunted place suitable for 9th+ level characters, so it's going to be the climactic end-piece to the adventure, despite the fact that it is presented up-front in the book. The layout remains entirely unchanged from the original adventures (unless I missed something), but the presentation is vastly improved over the original adventures, avoiding the wall-of-text syndrome of AD&D modules, and adds close-up, top-down maps and diagrams that help explain traps or tight-spaces that in the original version(s) of the adventure were left strictly to text descriptions. There are several monster/NPC changes, but they are often as simple as a monster-swap (for example, there's an encounter where instead of a spectre in AD&D they use two gargoyles in 5th Edition), or an expansion of some minor character's role, such as incorporating a clockwork "clone" of the court jester into the adventure, or expanding the role of some of the connections such as Strahd's right-hand man Rahadin, or the role of the Barovian witches. As in the earlier-edition modules, many of the rooms are exploration-focused and few have set-piece monster encounters, but there is an ever-present threat of wandering monster rolls that are fun and evocative, and might even lead to a few run-ins with Strahd before the climactic battle at a location determined by the Fortunes of Ravenloft Tarokka draw.

The Town of Vallaki. This town is a bit better off than Barovia, and features all the fixings of a normal town in D&D but there are twists! The tavern is run by a group of secret wereravens who run a resistance against Strahd, and they are family members of the Wizard of Wines (see below). The burgomaster is a bizarre madman • more wacky than deadly • who forces the people to constantly engage in celebrations and parties to alleviate the gloom of Strahd's oppression, but instead becomes its own weight on their shoulders. The burgomaster has a crazed son trying to

become a mage, and a bodyguard with the right arm of a demon and an interesting connection to Ireena Kolyana, Strahd's love-interest. There's also a plot to overthrow the burgomaster. Oh, and Rudolph Van Richten hangs out in disguise here, looking to make a move on a nearby Vistani camp, his plan being to slaughter them with a trained saber-toothed tiger. Worth noting now: most (but not all) of the chapters • especially Vallaki and other settlement-style locations • have a Special Events section at the end of the chapter, providing either set-piece events that the players can witness or muck up, or additional plot threads and direction for the DM to tie various locations, NPCs, and so on together, creating a truly immersive environment and adding to the idea that Barovia is a living, breathing place.

Old Bonegrinder. A windmill overlooking the forested valley in which Vallaki sits has become the lair of three creepy old ladies selling pastries that act as a hallucinogenic drug to help the inhabitants of Barovia escape their grim-dark existence under Strahd's oppression. Turns out it's a coven of night hags, and their secret ingredient is the ground up bones of children, many of whom they get in exchange for the pastries once the Barovians are hooked on the pastries but can no longer afford them. There are a couple of kids in need of rescuing, but since they were sold off by their parents, they don't really want to go home; luckily, the adventure addresses this and gives some options on what to do with the little rascals. This chapter presents some pretty heavy material in the form of child torture and murder; I'm pretty sure there are no dead babies elsewhere in the adventure, but this comes real close to that sort of thing, so be careful with how you handle it.

Argynvostholt. This location features an awesome redemption quest, but it's going to be hard to fulfill as it requires understanding that a group of knights dedicated to a good order not only were destroyed by Strahd (that's the easy part to get), but also continue to haunt the location because they fell from grace, having gone wayward in the centuries since Strahd took power over Barovia (much harder for the players to pick up). On top of that, the party has to go to Castle Ravenloft, pick up a fairly random skull (I mean, it's unique, but there are a LOT of unique skulls in that damn castle!), and bring it back in order to put the revenants here to rest. Interestingly, there is one revenant who can accompany the party regardless of whether the redemption quest is completed, so that adds a unique sidekick to the party. This location • and several of the subsequent ones • feature a lot of really cool, evocative "fake-out" encounters, like weird strangers watching from windows, or bizarre reflections, none of which can be interacted with any useful manner, but heighten the feeling of dread, and reveal how far-reaching Strahd's evil can be. The

Village of Krezk. This village has an abbey-turned-insane-asylum at one end, and the whole thing is full of horror movie tropes. It's like a D&D-version of the American Horror Story TV show. The central conflict is represented by a fallen angel-turned asylum warden stitching together flesh golems to offer as a bride to Strahd in an attempt to backstab him later on. Important to the plot: the angel needs a bridal gown, and getting one is a pretty hefty quest with far-reaching consequences whether or not the party joins in and/or succeeds. Talk about "not your typical D&D fare!"

Tsolenka Pass. This chapter is the only part of the book that is chock-full of missed opportunities. It's an abandoned bridge-spanning fortress, and it certainly looks cool but there's nothing there. The only way this location becomes at all interesting is if the random Tarokka draw places one of the treasures here, which triggers an encounter with some pretty scary spirits. But if the treasure isn't there, literally nothing happens, and nothing is revealed by going here.

The Ruins of Berez. This town suffered the wrath of Strahd in the past, and now lies hunted and half-submerged in an bug-infested swamp. A very cool encounter with a witchy-hag monster awaits Baba Lysaga, who has a tree-stump hut that crawls around like a spider on its roots, as well as flying hill giant skull she uses as a hover-bike and her ties to Strahd ensure that not only does the party learn some interesting backstory-related stuff, but also that they witness some truly horrifying images in the process. In a location filled with great encounter ideas, one of the scariest bloated, drowned humans that barf up swarms of snakes when they get reduced to zero hit points is unfortunately only triggered if the Tarokka deck places a treasure here. Not as bad as Tsolenka Pass, which is utterly useless without the random card draw, but still a missed opportunity.

Van Richten's Tower. Once the lair of a looney fellow that helped Strahd out way back when, this ruined tower fell to the elements and remained abandoned until the famous vampire hunter Ruduloph Van Richten took it over as his headquarters after arriving from Darkon. After some time, he figured out what he needed about Strahd and the Vistani thanks in part to the mummified skull of a Vistani that the players can now extract info from and set out to Vallaki. Shortly after he left, his erstwhile compatriot Ezmerelda d'Avenir showed up, and has since made the tower her headquarters. The tower is simple, but has some neat little twists and a lot of potential answers for the characters to discover. There's even a chance Ezmerelda could show up, providing more info and a powerful ally, if the players don't mess around. If (or when) Ezmerelda returns to the tower, it's because she's just

gotten into a tussle with Strahd and lost. This has the side effect of giving Strahd a new goal in the adventure: to kill Ezmerelda. Not just an interesting twist, this also reinforces that whole replayability thing that *AfA* is always ever-present in Curse of Strahd, providing yet another angle that can greatly alter the flow of events and the relationships of characters in this campaign. It also shows why using the Tarokka deck to determine Strahd's goals *AfA* is a trope from the original I6 Ravenloft *AfA* can be unnecessarily limiting in the face of the relationships that the players will form with NPCs scattered throughout this version of the module.

The Wizard of Wines. The winery detailed in this section is *AfA*'s first and foremost *AfA* a really fun building encounter; you can easily strip this section for the maps and layout, reappropriating it for any haunted house, abandoned mansion, or even a fully-stocked noble's manor (you'll see this again in Appendix B: Death House). It's also a fun interlude from the rest of Barovia and Castle Ravenloft, as it basically frames a "woe is us!" quest as some mysterious vintners (actually members of the underground good-guy group of wereravens) have had their winery occupied by a band of evil druids and their blight servitors. There are even swarms of ravens lurking in the rafters that will help the party out! The weakness of it is that it's really just a handful of druids and like a billion blights that swarm the players en masse. At least this occurs among cool set-piece battles in wine-making vats, barrel-storage rooms, and things like that, so there's a lot of really interesting ways to use the environment; a few more tips for new DMs along those lines might have been useful. Story-wise, this area ties in with The Ruins of Berezhnaya and Yester Hill, continuing plot threads surrounding savage berserker/druid tribes that treat Strahd like some sort of patron deity, as well as some powerful gems that have bizarre effects (make sure to read those sections immediately!). The gems one of which animates Baba Lysaga's hut in Berezhnaya seem to make things come to life, and you'll see this again in Yester Hill, where the evil druids animate a tree that they'll incidentally point in the direction of this winery and say "Hulk Smash!"

There's a major problem though: the gems came in a group of three, and powered the ability of the winery to make good fruit on otherwise scary, dark land and all three are gone.

The Amber Temple. The Amber Temple is 5th Edition's attempt to peel back the layers of the Ravenloft onion and provide a reveal for how the Dark Powers came to forge a pact with Strahd that turned him into the ruler of this land. I really enjoy what they did here: there's a temple to a god of secrets that has fallen to profane powers, and in it

resides a buddy of Strahd's that has lost all memory and yep, he's a lich, because who wouldn't go that route? Buried amid the traps and undead are several tombs dedicated to the Dark Powers, which have been recast as Vestiges (something that appeared at least as early as the D&D 3.5 Tome of Magic and its Binder class), and each can still offer some great (temporary) magical power if someone is willing to take the (permanent) corruption that comes along with it. In a thoughtful twist, several NPCs are either in the Temple looking for these secrets or could stumble upon them, and there's a pair of NPCs (Kasimir and Patrina) that would seek these powers out, ultimately in order to take control of the domain from Strahd out of revenge for Patrina's death and imprisonment in Castle Ravenloft. But therein lies a problem for Ravenloft purists: if you want to keep the Dark Powers secret and mysterious • which in fairness, they will still kinda be • you'll have to remove the story ties to Strahd or remove the Amber Temple entirely.

Yester Hill. Throughout several random encounters, and later in the Wizard of Wines chapter, there is mention of the berserkers and evil druids that worship Strahd. Well, Yester Hill is their home, and it's a bit annoying you have to wait this long to figure that out, as this section describes their beliefs and activities in good detail. Yester Hill is a really interesting area largely divorced (physically) from other areas of the setting, but containing two great things: (1) the berserker/druid forces involved in taking out the Wizard of Wines winery and operating throughout Barovia, and (2) a terrifying mirage that both haunts Strahd and provides the players with a glimpse at how truly horrific Barovia is for Strahd (and by dint of proximity to Strahd, everyone else in Barovia). There's a part of me that wants to spoil it, but it's so small and yet so awesome • Let's just say, it has no mechanical implications, so it doesn't affect the PCs, but it'll certainly affect how the players view the plight of Barovia, and Strahd in particular.

Werewolf Den. Strahd has a band of werewolves that work for him, ravaging the countryside in his name. Turns out he's also got one of their members imprisoned in the bowels of Castle Ravenloft, because the guy was attempting to create a schism in the pack, and Strahd was like, "Um, no." • This area is a pretty basic cave setting for a dungeon crawl, but it quickly turns out to be a sort of red herring, as the players will only encounter the "ecology" of the werewolf den: old and young, members that have been reduced in station for helping create the schism in the pack, and some captive children who might get turned into werewolves later on (after beating on each other as a sort of initiation ritual). In other words, the typical family and non-combatants of a generic dungeon

crawl, except they are werewolves, so they aren't really non-combatants! But, the werewolf pack warriors are likely to return, and if the party was in "kill everything" mode, the werewolves quickly realize something is up and be able to flank the party in the caves, making the encounter much harder. And I can't forget one more cool twist: if the players allow (accidentally or not) any of the werewolves to live, there's a good chance that the pack will either become more numerous or become more closely allied with Strahd, so it's kind of a catch-22 for the players. If they just decide to kill everyone and let the gods sort out the dead, well, the fact is that the spirits of the dead remain in Barovia as long as Strahd is still active, so there's really no win condition here.

Epilogue. The Epilogue covers what happens if Strahd wins (I'm pretty sure he curb-stomps them, the whole time yelling, "T.P.K., bitches!" or if the players defeat Strahd. While there is some manner in which things are "wrapped up neatly," this is a horror adventure after all, so literally nothing goes perfectly right. Tying in with that beautiful glimpse of the nature of Barovia that I wouldn't spoil in the Yester Hill chapter, there's a very real chance that even the best possible ending simply sees Barovia falling under the darkness of Strahd's spell yet again, only he's even more angry since Ireena met up with the ghost of Sergei and no longer reincarnates among the people of Barovia. As Curse notes, souls can only leave if/when Strahd is defeated, and that's exactly what the best possible ending is for Ireena, which in a way, is the worst possible ending for everyone else when Strahd eventually reforms within his domain and doles out his anger on the populace. Luckily, there are other characters involved who may try to tip the balance, or who might try something else that makes big waves in Barovia, which radically changes the situation for Strahd. For example, Ezmerelda Avenir remains behind, expecting (rightfully so) that Strahd will rise again. Patrina Velikova, a dusk elf that was stoned to death for trying to marry Strahd and is currently chilling as a banshee in Castle Ravenloft's crypt, might be resurrected by her brother (Kasimir, a dusk elf in Vallaki), and her plotline involves some serious repercussions as she and Kasimir hit up the Amber Temple, and she tries to become the Dark Lord of Barovia in Strahd's absence. His inevitable return will create some serious conflict there.

Appendices* Appendix A: Character Options. A new Background appears here, good for any horror setting or just a really grim-dark character: Haunted One includes all the stuff found in every Background of the PHB, along with a Harrowing Event table that'd be fun to roll on for any random NPCs encountered throughout Curse of Strahd. This is followed by a pretty

extensive table of Gothic Trinkets, which can be used alongside or separate from the regular Trinkets table in the PHB.*Appendix B: Death House. Death House is a level 1 adventure that sees the party forcibly entering a haunted house in Barovia village to escape the Mists, and therein discovering the horrifying legacy of a cult dedicated to Strahd, but who failed to receive anything from the vampire lord other than his disdain. It's a great little standalone encounter area, featuring a house haunted by the spirits of children and angry cultists, and a basement filled with ghouls and ghouls. It should be noted that crunching the numbers for the encounter math in the basement area of Death House reveals no less than three that are considered Deadly for Level 2 characters. Considering that the party is trapped in the house (remember, they are there because the Mists have closed in around them), and there's not a single healing item among the few treasures littered throughout the manor, so kind DMs may want to sprinkle a few healing potions about the place, or pre-equip the characters with such things.*Appendix C: Treasures. The following magic items get descriptions and stats: Blood Spear, Gulthias Staff, Holy Symbol of Ravenkind, Icon of Ravenloft, Saint Markovia's Thighbone, and the Sunsword.*Appendix D: Monsters and NPCs. Over a dozen new creatures and NPCs get their own unique stat blocks here: The Abbot, 4 new Animated Objects, Baba Lysaga, Barovian witch, Tree blight, Ezmerelda, Izek, Kasimir, Madam Eva, Mongrelfolk, Phantom warriors, Pidwick II, Rahadin, Rictavio, Strahd von Zarovich, Strahd zombies, Vladimir Horngaard, and Wereravens.*Appendix E: The Tarokka Deck. Describes the Tarokka cards, and pictures all of them. See below for more chatter about these guys.*Appendix F: Handouts. There's a few letters, an invitation, some pages from journals, and some pages from the Tome of Strahd, all of which can be photocopied. Is this stuff available to download for printing anywhere? Because I can't find them, and that's a big miss if that's the case, because you'll be bending the crap outta this book's spine!Whether we're talking about the tropes and tricks of horror-fantasy in Dungeons & Dragons, or covering a non-linear adventure where artifacts and NPCs can be randomly placed at times, Curse of Strahd is a win on every front, and as I mentioned earlier it's a strong adventure for newer DMs to pick up. Now, I think a lot of other reviewers are going to say the opposite, reflecting on how difficult non-linear adventures can be to both read and run, but much like the less linear portions of Lost Mine of Phandelver from the D&D Starter Box, Curse provides such good, succinct advice on these topics that I think it's astronomically better at teaching how good D&D adventures can be, and how non-dungeon-crawly they can get and still be every bit as much "Dungeons & Dragons" as

in every way (well, except it maybe needs a few more dragons). By breaking things down into chunks

- even when those chunks are 50 pages of haunted castle ruled by evil vampire lord
- this adventure shows a DM how to handle all the pillars of play extremely well, and how to create a good variety of locations, encounters, and plot threads. And manage it all, too. Never an easy feat, but if you're going to do it, why shouldn't it be with one of the Most Popular Adventures of All Time according to popular vote? Kudos.

Curse of Strahd is an update, and not something new, so there's going to be issues for both the grognards and the new folks showing up at Strahd's door. Instead of a generation of gamers getting their own story to tell about Strahd the vampire and the foreboding mists of Ravenloft, we've got a generation of gamers who have to sit there and be lectured about how their thing is the same but not as good as the nostalgic thing. How their thing is more video gamey, or was made easier by the presence of healing surges, or was a pale shadow of the expansive world that Ravenloft became under the auspices of its own, full-on campaign setting. Or whatever the ramblings of some old fogeys suggest.

The other annoyance is the "General Features" sidebars that are common to most locations in pretty much all D&D adventures up to this point (not just 5th Edition, either!). In a case of some truly bad editing for consistency, these sidebars are a regular thing right up until Chapter 4: Castle Ravenloft. They entirely disappear for maybe 8 chapters! Not consecutively, but still. There are instances where it's okay, since the locations vary so much from room to room that they could be useless, but that's rarely the case (probably only Tsolenka Pass and The Ruins of Berez). Not having these guidelines throughout Castle Ravenloft creates a situation where you don't know how high the ceilings are in rooms like K7. Entry, where four red dragon wyrmlings lurk in the "vaulted foyer" overhead. They are flying creatures and I have no clue how high they can fly in this room that they won't leave. Annoying.

The only weakness in the core story itself that runs throughout this module is that Ireena's part feels a bit too much like a plot device, with Strahd simply forgetting to bite her for a third time until the players conveniently show up, or the players having to basically trip and drop her into the hands of Sergei, who's waiting ghostly embrace in order to free her from Strahd's endless hunting.

It's all a bit too convenient and ham-handed. A simple fix would be to have some of the apparition-related non-encounters just be Sergei trying to reach out for Ireena, literally or symbolically, and perhaps some journal or something of

Sergei is left behind to explain the fact that he is not one of the "bad guy ghosts." We're talking like 3-5 lines of text here, or maybe a single additional player handout, and this would be solved.

FORM (4/5) Wizards has done a great job with all of their releases, but there are flaws, to be sure. Some folks complain of smudging; yep, it's there (mine's on page 28). Also, "WHY ARE THEY USING OLD NEWSPAPER AS A DESIGN ENHANCEMENT?" Shouldn't there be mist or something? Maybe some bats and skulls? Luckily, Curse includes about 50 zillion maps, all of them of great quality, clean and easy on the eyes, and perhaps best of all • if nostalgia is your thing • there's both top-down maps of Castle Ravenloft's interior as well as the return of the isometric maps!

First, a confession: I never played the original Ravenloft. Other settings, certainly, but Ravenloft, beloved as it was, never made it into my collection. At the time, it just seemed a poor fit for me; why on earth would I want to use a fantasy game system to play a game about vampires? In my mind, the genre was inseparable from the game system, and it seemed too incongruous for me. Fast forward a few decades. 5E has revitalized my interest in tabletop role-playing after a long hibernation, and the older me now sees D&D as a mechanical system for collaborative storytelling, and a very versatile one at that. So, it is with impeccable timing for me that Wizards releases this book, the first official 5E book to leave the Forgotten Realms behind. EDIT: A closer reading reveals a brief mention that the default setting for Barovia is, in fact, the Sword Coast of the Forgotten Realms. There is, however, a qualifier immediately after that stating the story can transpire in any campaign setting one wishes. Mood-wise, I feel Curse of Strahd is sufficiently different from the 5E materials that have come before it that a change of setting is more than justified and will do literally nothing to impact the story negatively. I apologize for the initial error. Designed to move players through levels one through ten, Curse of Strahd looks to be an interesting campaign, with a mood that evokes dread rather than high adventure. I can very much see myself DMing this in such a way that my players would be more concerned with their survival than with glory and treasure. Even if I choose not to run the adventure itself, there are plenty of bits and pieces that could easily be borrowed for a homebrew campaign. Of particular note are the rules for the Tarokka deck, a separate add-on which can be used to randomize locations of key items and persons within the adventure. It's a neat idea, but I do wish the Tarokka deck wasn't a separate purchase. To be fair, however, the rules allow for the same effect to be achieved with

standard playing cards. All in all, another great addition to my 5E library, and further validation of Wizards' "quality over quantity" publishing strategy.

This is great. It outlines everything you need for an adventure level 1 or 3-10. It's a true sandbox so there are few breadcrumbs to force the party from place to place. While some areas will be way too overpowered for level 3 or 4 it should be pretty easy for your average DM to encourage the party to leave a couple areas alone for a while via NPC interaction while still giving them the freedom to explore 90% of the map. I'm starting this campaign in about a month after the current one finishes and already can't wait. I intended to start the party at level 3 but after reading the level 1-3 introduction area I quickly decided to start them at level 1. It sets the tone nicely especially for players who have no experience with a fantasy horror setting. It's a bit light on magic items as scripted rewards for completing areas so you may want to do as I will and add a few. I read through the entire book and did not see any discoloration on any pages as some have reported.

Superb product, WOTC brought in Tracy and Laura Hickman to help design it. Playing it in 2 games on Fantasy Grounds. Simple and elegant D&D module. Love the content. I had smeared print on the page with toy maker. So I had it replaced the next copy came same thing smeared ink on same page. I give up just going to settle for poor printing.

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