

# CURSE OF STRAHD PLAYER GUIDE



*Under raging storm clouds, a lone figure stands silhouetted against the ancient walls of Castle Ravenloft. Count Strahd von Zarovich stares down a sheer cliff at the village below. A cold, bitter wind spins dead leaves about him, billowing his cape in the darkness. Lightning splits the clouds overhead, casting stark white light across him. Strahd turns to the sky, revealing the angular muscles of his face and hands. His once handsome face is contorted by a tragedy darker than the night itself. Rumbling thunder pounds the castle spires. The wind's howling increases as Strahd turns his gaze back to the village. Far below, yet not beyond his ken, guests have arrived in his domain. Strahd's face forms a twisted smile, for he knows why they have come. Another lightning flash rips through the darkness, its thunder echoing through the castle's towers, but Strahd is gone. Only the howling wind, or perhaps a lone wolf, fills the midnight air. The master of Ravenloft is having guests for dinner, and you are invited!*

## What is Curse of Strahd?

In short, classic gothic horror and dread in a medieval Romanian setting.

This is first and foremost a campaign of dread, a genre that requires players to willingly immerse into, at times, feelings of terror and hopelessness, without the use of dice or checks. Even the best lighting, music, and atmosphere cannot change the fact players are around a table with plenty of distractions. As such, the game begins in the style of play you bring to the table, and the more you bring, the more rewarding the campaign.



## What is Dread?

***It is the clock ticking down to the inevitable end. With each tock, you are dragged forward, no more able to avoid your fate than to stop the beating of your own heart. It is being trapped in the nightmare, knowing it doesn't matter where you run because it never stops, and trying to run even as your legs become heavy as concrete, knowing all you can do is wait to be destroyed. It is the mix of metallic copper fear on your tongue, an acute awareness of every beat of your heart, and the feeling your lungs cannot fill no matter how deep a breath you take.***

Use these feelings to envision how your characters feel at times. This Land you are about to enter will gladly let you drown in feelings of inevitability, of hopelessness. It will, if you let it, crush you with the knowledge that in *this* place, there are no happy endings, no heroes, no fires to banish the night. Yet, fear and dread can be countered with hope, and perhaps you will be the mortals that challenge, even if for a moment, this Evil.



# CHARACTER CREATION RULES

*Remember, you're making a living, breathing character, not a "build," so begin with concept first and let the rest fall into place! Players should come prepared with a base character, and we will flesh out details in a Session 0 as a group.*

**Starting Level:** 1<sup>st</sup>. No evil characters. *Alignment will be important where we're going.*

**Available Rules:** *Player's Handbook, Xanathar's Guide* (spells only if you own book or purchase spell cards), & *Curse of Strahd Haunted One* background ([free download](#)).

- *House Rule, hit points.* After 1<sup>st</sup> level, roll for HP at the table, can reroll once but must take the result even if lower. There are minimum guarantees based on the hit die. A d6 has no minimum value, a d8 will always get at least 2, a d10 at least 3, and a d12 at least 4.
- Feats allowed, multi-classing is not.
- By default, we use *Forgotten Realms*. However, for flavor, if the party as a whole wants to utilize another setting, this is fine (primarily for culture and deities).

**Characters:** Use the default rules in the PHB (standard array). While any races and classes are available, a gothic horror setting really, really fits human, elf, and maybe a dwarf best, instead of more exotic races such as dragonborn, gnomes, or tieflings. For immersion, highly recommend immersion races only.

**Backgrounds:** Vital in a role-play heavy campaign, and you should consider making a character that is linked to other players, including being related, married, of the same religion, in the same association, or with a common philosophy.

- Highly recommend character sheets with bonds/flaws on the front as a reminder of roleplay quirks. Putting them on the back minimizes their use and, I feel, encourages play off numbers rather than socialization.
- Highly recommend 1 person take the *Haunted One* background (free online).

## ***How much detail should I have for my character to start?***

Don't write a novel but work a simple concept with general appearance that gives your character some flavor. The rest can come out during role-play. Remember, your character is not "a dwarf warrior with a greataxe." That's not a character; that's a stereotype providing absolutely no reason why one should be interested, care, or otherwise invest in adventuring with this character.

*For example: I am/was a Templar of the Church of the Silver Flame, sworn to cleanse all from the curse of lycanthropy. After seeing my fellow Templars burn a cottage full of*

*“infected” children to the ground, I question(ed) the righteousness of my cause. I am unsure whether I can uphold my oath as others do, break it, or find another way. I am 22 now, a reedy warrior with cropped dark hair missing the lobe on my left ear, reminder from a training mishap never to disrespect a sharp blade.*

*On my sheet, I put that my character likes to smoke a pipe and his favorite curse is “Sod this,” borrowed from dwarf traders. I might add more later like being a cousin to another gamer, but this is good for now.*

As always, don't generate a character simply because you believe the campaign demands it or the party needs a particular class!

### ***First or Third Person?***

Decide whether you're going to roleplay your character in the first person (*I trace a rune in the air as I incantate the words of power*) or third person (*Andrezha traces a rune in the air as she...*) Remain consistent.

### ***Should I make a character with Romanian flair, for flavor?***

You can!

It works very well if a player's character hails from the original cultural area that we'll be entering. If the entire group wants to adopt a Romanian / Russian / Slavic flair, even better. If so, highly encourage looking up some superstitions, foreign language words (e.g. you call the undead “imortii”), and if you want, practice your accent. The more the better!

**Experience:** We will be using the milestone method, which awards advancement towards levels for acts other than random combats. It uses alternate math (easier for the DM to track) but otherwise functions as XP does (e.g. faster advancement at low levels).

Acts that grant milestone advancement in this campaign include:

- Acquiring artifacts of the land (major)
- Thwart major enemies (not necessarily by combat)
- Thwarting major bad guy's goals
- “Moving the Story Forward” (resolving quests generally)
- Acquiring certain magic items (minor)
- Exploring a new area (minor)

**Inspiration:** This has been an under-utilized part of our game but is core to D&D, intended to reward one for playing into their character's bonds or flaws, especially when



roleplay is not as optimal as a tabletop tactical decision (e.g. *your character has a strong hatred of orcs, so in combat you make a roleplay decision to attack the orc warrior instead of taking out the human wizard, which is a better metagame, tabletop decision.*) As an alternative, the DM may also ask players who accomplish a special challenge to describe something from their past for a point.

*For example, you convince a servant to not alert her master to you. For a point of inspiration, tell us of a time someone showed you a kindness, even though it was risky (make up a story that fits your character concept).*

Inspiration is used to gain/grant advantage on a d20 roll. You can't stockpile; either you have it or you don't.

**Death in Ravenloft:** While we hope no character will expire, there are special rules for death in this setting.

**Variant (injury):** Using the DMG injury rules. If a character at 0hp fails the Death Save to stabilize by 5 or more, they gain a random injury.

## OPENING STORY

You begin in the small town of Daggerford meeting the Lady Morwen. You have worked with her in the past, and she is having issues getting some gypsies camped outside the town gates to leave.

