# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Van Richten's Tower (and Ezmerelda)

Hey everyone and welcome to another chapter of Fleshing Out! This time, I'm going over the Tower and our resident hunter duo. Enjoy!

## Naming

Once again, the book throws us under the bus with location naming. Just like you wouldn't want to reference Old Bonegrinder by name to your players for the sake of spoilers, you also don't want to do so with Van Richten's Tower. Instead, if you must, refer to the location as the Baratok Tower, in reference to Lake Baratok.

## Quick History

### Fidatov Connection

* + In reference to my [Kresk expansions](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8wxhk1/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_kresk_part_ii/), I added another noble family to the valley who were quite wealthy. The Fidatovs had long been some of the best architects and bankers in Barovia before the curse came upon their house.
	+ As such, I completely got rid of the Khazan bit of plot, especially since he's just some dead guy in the as written campaign. In my own [Amber Temple expansion](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9vj5x5/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_the_amber_temple/), I even got rid of Vilnius' connection with him.
	+ Instead, I focused on the architect Artemis, who built Ravenloft. I renamed him Artemis Fidatov. He built the tower as a sort of prototype test for architecture meeting magic.
* However, it's unlikely players will ever learn the background behind the tower, so it probably doesn't matter much. But there ya go. ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

## Hooks to the Tower

### A Brief Curiosity

* + To be perfectly frank, there actually aren't any hooks that directly lead players to the tower. And I really don't think there needs to be. The tower is nicely settled between two major locations, right off the road. So, most parties will go to the tower as a passing curiosity.
	+ Or, if you took my advice way back and increased the travel time between locations, maybe the players will look for a place to camp for the night between Vallaki and Kresk.
	+ The point is, the tower is a viable pit stop for your players that's near the main road and usually marked on hand-drawn/player maps.

### Van Richten's Retreat

* + If/when Vallaki goes up in smoke during the Feast and/or Festival events, Van Richten is unlikely to stick around. If he's caught in the crossfires or otherwise loses a way to keep up is alter ego, he'll instead flee to this tower.
	+ If this should happen, replace Ezmerelda's wagon with Van Richten's sabretooth wagon.
	+ If you have a campaign where Rictavio actually gets rather friendly with the players, he himself might suggest they meet him at the tower should they find themselves in need.

### Ezmerelda's Hint

* + There's also a chance that players might meet Ezmerelda before they meet Van Richten. Or perhaps the players simply didn't hit it off with Rictavio and do with Ezmerelda later in the campaign.
	+ Either way, Ezmerelda might be the one to mention the tower as a safe haven to the players, suggesting they gather there should the party ever get separated.

## The Front Door

### The As Written Puzzle

* + If you play at an actual table in the real world with your players, please, for the love of all that is good, make those suckers actually stand up and *do the dance*. If possible, make more than one stands up and dance in sync. *You don't get opportunities like this very often.* MAKE THEM *DANCE*.
	+ Honestly, the mechanic and the simplicity of the puzzle is just too good to pass up, as it's bound to lead to peals of laughter.

### Alternative Entry

* + For the rest of us losers who don't play in person, including myself, the as written puzzle simply doesn't work. Especially if you only play with voice chat and no video.
	+ I'll be the first to admit that I'm no puzzle maker. Good riddles and puzzles are hard to come by and harder to come up with. So I started off by googling to find a good alternative. And after quite a bit of searching, I found lengthy riddles which I felt, frankly, were just too much. However, I've managed to come up with a few options for you guys to use if all else fails.
	+ **Colored Handles**
		- This is a quick puzzle that should be of a similar simplicity of the dance puzzle.
		- The door has six different handles, all made from a different shade of colored glass. The colors are red, yellow, green, blue, black, and clear. Touching the door or handles does nothing, but turning the wrong handle or trying to break down the door triggers the traps in the book.
		- Upon closer inspection, players can easily find an inscription carved into the door frame. It reads, "Follow the Violet Horizon." However, there is no purple handle. The solution is to turn both the red and blue handles at the same time.
	+ **Knocking**
		- This one is significantly simpler than anything else. It's not even a puzzle really.
		- The door to the tower is nicely crafted, if not terribly elegant, with an iron handle and knocker. There's a plaque on the door with the simple inscription, "Manners Maketh Man." Or something similar if that reference is too on the nose for some groups. ;) Other phrases could be, "Remember Your Manners" or "Good Etiquette for Entry."
		- Basically, so long as players knock first, they can open the door no problem. Any attempt to enter the tower without knocking will bring about the lightning strike and/or other traps.
	+ **Locksmith's Wonder**
		- This one is more of a thinking-outside-the-box thing.
		- The door is a large, iron monstrosity. The right side of the door sports three, large iron hinges. The left side of the door has the handle, and is literally top to bottom covered in different locking mechanisms. Some of the locks can be picked, others are specifically designed to break any key or lock pick that tries to open it. Others don't seem to be openable at all. The door is effectively impassible and trying to break it down results in the traps.
		- *However,* players can easily pull the bolts/pins from the hinges and open the door from that side instead, negating the locks entirely.
	+ None of these alternatives are ideal puzzles. But maybe they'll help you or inspire you for your own games.
	+ As a quick reminder, if the puzzle door fails altogether for you, the scaffolding offers an alternative entry into the tower.

## No Magic or Divination

### Antimagic Field

* + As a quick reminder, the tower is completely surrounded by an antimagic field. What does that mean exactly?
		- "This area is divorced from the magical energy that suffuses the multiverse. Within the field, spells can't be cast, summoned creatures disappear, and even magic items become mundane. Spells and other magical effects, except those created by an artifact or deity, are suppressed in the field and can't move into it."
	+ So, if you have a sorcerer with a magical familiar, it disappears. If the party gets into a fight within the tower, their +1 magic weapon or armor or whatever no longer gets that +1. If a fireball is cast at the tower from the outside, splash disappears if it hits the field.

### Out of Strahd's Eyes

* + The antimagic field should also extend to stopping divination effects.
		- "Targeted Effects: Spells and other magical effects, such as Magic Missile and Charm person, that target a creature or an object in the field have no effect on that target."
	+ So that *should* technically mean that spells like Scrying shouldn't get into the tower. Now, I'm sure there are some spells with wording that's a bit more interpretable. But for the sake of the plot, I think this is a nice addition. After all, Richten probably wouldn't set up shop in a place that both deactivates his disguise hat and opens him to the eyes of his target all at once.

## The Elevator

Honestly, the elevator is hilarious. You don't think it'll be, but it's inevitable. Why? Because it rises so *slowly*. It only goes up 5 ft. per round, so it's a pretty long ride to the top floor at 60ft. And the elevator is only a 5 ft. square, so players will have to literally hug in order to fit together as a compact unit. That's literally a minute and half long hug. If you don't have a track of elevator music prepared for this moment, you're missing out. XD

## Rudolph van Richten

Firstly and most importantly, *read* [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/)'s *guides on* [*Van Richten*](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8xcf57/my_notes_on_doctor_rudolph_van_richten_the/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x) *and* [*Ezmerelda*](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8wct9k/my_notes_on_ezmerelda_davenir_vistani_monster/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x). I fully and totally admit that I used most of their guidance on these 2 NPCs. I'll go ahead and paraphrase a few key points as well as make some of my own notes here, but otherwise, refer to those posts.

### Van Helsing

* + Most people have heard of Van Helsing. He's a mythical monster hunter that's been recreated in films, novels, and plenty of shows over time. Most famously, he's known for hunting Dracula.
	+ Van Richten is CoS's direct translation of the Van Helsing character. Though they don't share the same personalities, they share that core "legendary monster hunter" persona.
	+ Because of this, Richten is particularly popular in Barovia, though only as a legend, not as a real person. It wouldn't be out of place for a Barovian to compare the PCs' acts of heroism to the legendary stories of the monster hunter. And if you build that legend a bit, meeting Richten will be much more impactful on your players.

### Personality

* + Here's a list of the key information you should use to role-play Richten.
	+ **Elder Wisdom**
		- In this universe, Richten is *old*. He's no mid-thirties Hollywood slayer anymore. He's technically a senior citizen. However, he's still incredibly fit and healthy, despite his age.
		- Richten's age also comes with an absurd amount of experience. He knows everything about anything about monsters. Though his expertise is hunting gothic villains, like vampires, werewolves, and witches, he also knows *plenty* on other creatures.
	+ **Bitter Wisdom**
		- However, Richten is not incredibly personable. He's lived a long time and seen more tragedy than any man should. After all, hunting monsters usually begins with dead bodies and crying family members. As such, Richten is incredibly bitter and pessimistic about life in general.
		- I personally like to reference Mad Eye Moody from Harry Potter for Richten role-play. He won't be swayed by any of the players' sob stories or pleas, as he's heard it all before. And he has no time to walk amateurs through survival lessons. He's overly harsh and more than a little rude, but also brutally honest.
	+ **The Ends**
		- Richten is the kind of man where the ends *always* justify the means. He is always willing to do what is necessary to kill a monster, even if that means doing something horrible himself. If a town is infested with vampires, he'd blow up the nearby dam and douse the place in running water to kill them all, even if that meant drowning the living townsfolk as well.
		- Richten isn't concerned about his own morality or the purity of his soul. In fact, on some level, he feels he has no soul. In his own subconscious, Richten has vilified himself for not being able to protect his wife and son. He has since accepted that in order to kill monsters, one must to become a monster.
	+ **Racist**
		- If any of you are familiar with my work, you know I love the Vistani. Like a lot. And I've gone through great lengths to make sure they are portrayed in a much more positive light than the book suggests.
		- However, just like an entire race can't be evil, they can't be all good either. Ezmerelda's small family group were, unfortunately, some of those bad people. They did indeed kidnap Richten's son and sell the boy to a vampire.
		- That past has left its mark on Richten. Not only did it push him onto the path of a hunter, but it also left him more than a little racist. Richten detests Vistani now and thinks the worst of their culture. Basically, everything the book implies about the Vistani (that they're all drunks, gamblers, swindlers, cheats, Strahd supporters, and child stealers) is true to van Richten.
		- This is, in my opinion, Richten's most unfortunate personality trait. But like the old dog he is, he's much too far gone in his hatred to be persuaded to think otherwise.

## A Better Hunter Base

The top floor of the tower as written is nice enough, but doesn't really scream, "legendary monster hunter" to me. Though I know it's technically a temporary base, I still feel like Richten would be better prepared than just a cozy bed and a packaged, severed head. So I refitted a few things.

### Defense

* + **4th Floor**
		- Board up the windows. If I were an experienced monster hunter trying to set up a base in a damnable place like Barovia, the first thing I would do is cover the exits. Instead of "dirt caked windows with broken shutters," the windows have been recently and thoroughly boarded up. They'd require a DC 25 strength check to break down.
	+ **3rd Floor**
		- The hole on the third floor with the scaffolding is, unfortunately, much too big to properly board up. Instead, Richten has implemented a tripwire trap across the section which can be spotted with a DC 17 perception check.
		- If activated, a large piece of debris swings down from a rope and slams into the trespasser (sort of like a swinging battering ram), sending them hurling out of the tower. The target takes 3d8 bludgeoning damage from the hit plus the 4d6 (40 ft. tall at the 3rd floor) fall damage.
		- Richten has also doused the debris in holy water and spun simple tangles of silver thread across the impact point. If the target is a fiend or undead, they take an additional 2d6 radiant damage from the water. If the target is a werewolf, they aren't immune to the damage of the trap.

### More Loot

* + Honestly, if Ezmerelda has *that* much loot in her wagon, why doesn't Richten, the master hunter, have a better hoard? At the very least, I would recommend trading some of the items listed in the wagon section and straight up putting them in the tower.
		- For instance, you wouldn't want to overindulge your players in loot. So, if they get into the wagon without blowing themselves up, maybe hold off on a lot of the loot in the tower. Or, if they strip the tower, maybe nix a bunch of the items from the wagon.
	+ As such, take the following lists as suggestions. Don't be afraid to ignore some loot items if you feel your party is already carrying too much. And if Richten is already in the tower, players are far less likely to be able to steal the stuff anyway.
	+ Medical Supplies
		- Richten's spell list technically stems from a Cleric build, I think. But that still doesn't mean he shouldn't be prepared to the nines. He hasn't survived this long with just his spell casting ability, after all. Plus, before he was a hunter, Richten was an experienced physician.
		- There's a small crate near the head of the bed containing **2 Healers Kits** and 3 jars of preserved blood. It's Richten's blood, which he keeps for emergency transfusions. (Idk *how* he preserves it and it's probably actually not that safe but it looks cool in my head XD).
		- There's also a strange medical apparatus with long tubing and a hanging, glass jar (an old fashioned IV essentially) as well as several medical tools lying on an end table (scalpels, bandages, bone saw, etc.)
		- Anyone Richten fixes up using these advanced methods of medicine heal in half the normal time. Additionally, short rests that use this equipment earn back double HP from hit dice.
	+ **Weapons**
		- There's a **silvered dagger** hidden under the mattress of the bed.
		- 3 vials of **holy water** sit on a stand on the desk.
		- An extra **light crossbow** leans against the footlocker.
		- 7 **wooden stakes** sit in a pile in the corner.
	+ **Crafting Material**
		- The desk contains both a **poisoner's kit** and an **herbalism kit** as well as empty vials and enough material to craft 3 potions of healing and 2 doses of antitoxin.
		- By the fire is a leather wrap containing **15 silvered bolts** and another containing **18 regular bolts**. There's also a wooden coffer containing **8 thin sheets of pure silver** (worth 15 gp) used in crafting silvered bolts.
	+ **Other Supplies**
		- Laying around the room, in no particular place unless you wish it, should be 50 ft. of **hempen rope**, 12 packs of **rations**, clay jugs containing over a week's worth of clean, drinking water, parchment, ink, and at least one quill.

### Richten's Journal

* + It's more than likely that your players will fall for Ezmerelda's wagon trap when the time comes (see below), and I think it's such a shame to waste the journal handout that way. Instead, put the journal pages on the fourth floor with the rest of Richten's loot, in one of the drawers of the desk.

## Ezmerelda and Her Wicked Wagon

* FOR THE LOVE OF BLOG MOVE THE WAGON.
	+ No really. The wagon's booby trap is easier to miss than you'd think. The wagon itself doesn't have any open windows for players to peek through and the trapdoor is on the underbelly, carefully out of sight. And the "Keep Out" sign is just childish enough for more mischievous players to completely disregard.
	+ If your party only has about 50 HP a person, average, this booby trap will outright party wipe. It's deadly at lower levels.
	+ So instead of placing Ez's wagon in a permanent location, use it's mobility like a random encounter. Place it whenever and wherever it needs to be when the players are better leveled to survive it. For my own campaign, my players were level 7 or 8 when they were out in the woods looking for the Werewolf Den. So, I parked the wagon in the woods and Ez elsewhere also hunting werewolves. I recommend you do something similar when the time comes.

### Ezmerelda's Personality

* + Like Richten, I *heavily* referenced [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/)'s guide for running Ez. Honestly, that post is pure gold and I can't praise it enough. However, also like Richten, I'll go ahead and list out a few key points.
	+ **A Younger Helsing**
		- Like Richten, Ezmerelda is a viciously talented monster hunter. She should have pretty much all the same knowledge as her mentor. She knows the monsters of Barovia and how to hunt and kill them.
		- Her overwhelming amount of monster knowledge makes Ezmerelda quite confident. She shouldn't question her own knowledge and answer inquiries without hesitation or doubt. If new information surfaces to prove her wrong, she is unashamed to admit her error and will file away the new information so she won't make the same mistake twice. She sort of a quick witted prodigy when it comes to monster hunting.
		- Ezmerelda is *always* a bit overstocked with weapons and tools. She's the kind of person who would willingly carry the extra heavy backpack because she doesn't want to leave behind something she might need. When it became apparent that such weight would slow her down in combat, she got herself that wagon and never leaves it too far behind.
	+ **A Brash Loner**
		- Ezmerelda is exceedingly brash and reckless. She pretty much throws herself into danger, fulling ignoring personal risk in order to kill her prey.
		- She's also a very goal-oriented person. When she sets herself a task, Ezmerelda throws herself into it. She views the world not as a hiking trip, but as a series of races to various finish lines. That's not to say that Ez doesn't plan or lacks patience. She has both, but she tends to move at her own pace and gets frustrated by those who aren't as fast as she.
		- Ezmerelda is also really, really bad at working with other people. She's not a team player *at all*. That's mostly because she'd been trained by the already bitter van Richten. As such, if she ends up with your party, she'll forget to heal PCs or stabilize players who are down in favor of attacking the threat. She also won't generally explain herself or outline her plans unless outright asked to do so.
		- Now, Ez isn't *intentionally* rude. If a PC gets mad at her, yelling that "You should have *told* us!" or something similar, she's honestly upset that she did something wrong. Ezmerelda doesn't go rushing into a fight thinking, "lol I'm leaving the losers behind." She just acts on her instincts and goes forward, not realizing she's upsetting others. Ez is really just a bundle of poor people skills. ;p
	+ **Moral**
		- At this point in her life, Ezmerelda could very well be a better monster hunter than Richten, simply for her youth. She's physically able to do slightly more than the 80-year-old Richten in a fight.
		- However, she's not nearly as ruthless as Richten, though she likes to think that she is. In the dam example I used above, for instance, Ezmerelda is the kind of person who tells herself that she would blow the dam. She would even tell the players she would do so with absolute certainty and without hesitation. But, if the event ever came to pass, she wouldn't be able to pull the trigger knowing so many innocents would die.
		- Ezmerelda sees herself as Richten's creation. And, subconsciously, as the inheritor of his legend. Though she doesn't realize she's doing it, Ezmerelda often emulates Richten's quirks and mindsets in an effort to be more like the old man. However, her own rashness and more solid morality often puts her at odds with her master. Think of Ez as a rebellious youth who's trying to both become her own person while honoring her father-figure, and finding it difficult to consolidate both sides.

### Family History

* + Ezmerelda is a Vistani who has only spent about half her life with other Vistani. She knows all about curses and Tarokka and general Vistani custom and language, but is quite deficient in their culture-wide friendliness. Why? Because her family was not kind.
	+ **Crooks**
		- We've all seen *that* kind of family, whether in life or in film. They're the parents that would rather spend their last dollar at the liquor store than on food for their child. The kind of family where making quick money is better than making honest money. If any of you are familiar with the family from *Matilda* or the innkeepers from *Les Misérables,* that's the kind of family I'm talking about.
		- Unfortunately, Ezmerelda grew up in such a household. Now, they weren't the worst of people. They weren't outright abusive and they didn't hoard mutilated corpses in their wagons or anything. They were just wholly dishonest and selfish folk.
	+ **Leaving an Impact**
		- Though Ezmerelda didn't inherit her family's dishonesty, her upbringing shows itself in her mannerisms. Unlike most Vistani, she doesn't trust easily. And her prodigy level of uptake in monster hunting stems from a desperation for recognition from a parental figure (van Richten at the present).
		- Ezmerelda doesn't like talking about her parents and feels a great deal of shame if she must mention them at all. Though she and Richten don't get along well, the elder hunter is still the closest thing to father figure Ezmerelda has, and she strives for his approval. And that approval is quite hard to come by, since Richten struggles from differentiating his protege from the Vistani who stole his child. Talk about daddy issues. ;I

### Overall

* + All those points aside, just remember that Ezmerelda is a pretty cool NPC. She's intelligent, fiercely efficient, a little rude (but unintentionally so), and an overall badass. Though she has a pretty good moral compass, she views it as a weakness and tries to hide it, even from herself. And though she and van Richten argue 90% of the time they're together, she still holds her mentor in the highest regard and yearns for his recognition.
	+ Feel free to introduce Ezmerelda (and her wagon) at any location later in the game. Don't restrain her appearances to the sites listed in the book (the Tower, the Abbey, Argynvostholt, etc.). Instead, *you* decide when the time is right to introduce her to your players.

------

And that's a wrap! I'm sorry this one is so late, everyone. Tbh, the last couple months have been super hectic and I've had some hardcore burnout. But, no matter what, I'm determined to finish this guide and should be getting back on schedule soon!

<3 Mandy