# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Winery I**

## The Druids

### The Word "Druid"

* + This is probably a totally personal preference, but I've never liked it when official game terminology shows itself in a narrative story. Saying, "The druids are attacking!" seems the same as saying, "Hey, guys, these baddies with familiar stat blocks and abilities are attacking!" I feel like players almost can't help but be a bit meta when they hear the name of a bad guy they know. And sure, druids are actually a real-life thing. But in dnd, they're an *official* thing. You know what I mean?
  + Under normal circumstances, you could just omit the name/title in conversation/role-play. But, in this particular chapter, how in the world would the Martikovs talk about the druids without actually saying the word, "druid?" It just doesn't work. Here's my solution.

### Forest Folk

* + I mentioned in my previous [post on the Fanes](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9l5zfh/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_the_fanes_and_the/) that the ancient residents of the Barovian valley were rather uncultured, but settled nonetheless. They lived in sharp contrast to the far more nature-based Forest Folk, who lived amongst the animals and were wild in their behaviors.
  + The druids and barbarians mentioned throughout the campaign book are instead Forest Folk. Yes, they still have the stat blocks of druids and barbarians, but narratively, they're known to Barovians as Forest Folk, or Wood Dwellers. Of course, there are likely a menagerie of horrible slurs you could incorporate into role-play. ;)
  + **Culture and Fluff**
    - * The Forest Folk are entirely unsettled, living within the western woods of Barovia.
      * The Forest Folk have almost entirely lost their language capabilities and speak to each other in rough Druidic. One in five might know a handful of words in Common.
      * The Forest Folk remember the Fanes and believe that Strahd has somehow become connected to their Ladies. Because the Ladies no longer speak to them, they've turned to Strahd as a way of messenger. They believe that communing with Strahd will somehow pass their worship onto the lost Ladies. If the Folk ever truly understand that Strahd is actually the *cause* of their Ladies' disappearance, the Folk will be angry beyond words and attack Strahd relentlessly in retaliation. (To little effect of course, as they are much weaker than Strahd.)

## The Martikov Family

Alrighty. Here's an outline of the (rather extensive) Martikov family. Hopefully, this should help you organize their relations and their personalities.

* **Davian**
  + Family patriarch
    - Davian's an older, quirky grouch who takes just about everything very seriously. You can actually stretch this crotchety old man's personality to the point that it can be quite comedic during role play. I personally used Mr. Filch from the Harry Potter series as a baseline for Davian's role-play.
    - Davian is the former leader of the Keepers of the Feather. Though it's not quite official yet, he's been training his son, Adrian, to take over the role.
    - Davian's first priorities are to the Winery, sometimes to the point that his children feel a bit neglected. Think of Davian like an overworked father who chooses business meetings over his family. Yes, he loves them, but his work defines him quite a bit more than his kin.
  + **Adrian** - Eldest Son
    - Adrian is the de facto leader of the Keepers of the Feather. His father, while still holding the formal position, has passed on most of his work to Adrian.
    - As such, Adrian is hooked into just about everything. He's got a collection of knowledge that would blow your party away if he tried to dump it all at once. Instead, provided the party proves friendly and helpful, Adrian will slowly filter information to them to help in the party's endeavors against Strahd. If there's something he doesn't know, Adrian will privately send some of his raven spies to try and glean some intel, which he'll then relay to the party via a letter.
    - Adrian is also the only family member in contact with Urwin because of their mutual duties in the Keepers.
  + **Stephania** - 2nd born and the only daughter.
    - I made Stephania 2nd born because of her teenaged son. The book never actually states she's the youngest sibling, so moving her towards the front of the birth order made sense.
    - Stephania is a very level headed woman with versatile talents and duties. She helps Adrian keep up with the Keepers of the Feather and she helps Elvir keep track of the winery's books. While not an expert in anything, Stephania instead is more of a jack-of-all-trades around the winery. Think of her as having a sort of "ambassador" role in the family.
    - Married to **Dag Tomescu** - Dag is extremely family oriented and absolutely loves the people of this household. Dag is definitely the homemaker here and is the main mediator of conflicts and primary shoulder to cry on. Dag has been trying (in vain) for years to get Davian to contact Urwin so the two may resolve their differences.
    - **Claudiu** - 1st born son (14 yrs old)
    - **Martin** - 2nd born son (8 yrs old)
    - **Viggo** - 3rd born son (5 yrs old)
    - **Yolanda** - 4th born and only daughter (11 months old)
    - Look at these four, wonderful, well-adjusted and overall normal children in Curse of Strahd. Just look it. Aren't they beautiful?
  + **Urwin** - 3rd born, son.
    - Married to **Danika**.
    - Currently estranged from the family and living in Vallaki where he owns the Blue Water Inn.
    - Sons: **Brom** (10 yrs old) and **Bray** (7 yrs old)
  + **Elvir** - 4rd born, son.
    - Elvir is the one most interested in running the vineyard. He's got a real understanding of nature and producing the best wine. While Stephania runs the books, Elvir runs the production side of things in the winery.

## A Note on Wereraven Lycanthropy

Between myself, [u/DragnaCarta](https://www.reddit.com/u/DragnaCarta/), and [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/), we've said several times that the Martikovs will *not* share their true nature lightly. Even if the party seems incredibly trustworthy and helpful, the Keepers of Feather have survived by keeping their cards close to the chest. Remember, they've seen adventurers come through the valley before. And they've seen those same adventurers fail. The Keepers of the Feather won't throw their weight behind the PCs without cause and won't reveal their lycanthropy unless under dire circumstances.

The chance that they'll ever spread their lycanthropy, good or bad, to another is even more slim. As I stated in my [Lycanthropy Post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/97xjai/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_running_werewolves/), spreading inherited (good) lycanthropy is an arduous, dangerous process, so the Martikovs aren't about to try it on the PCs. However, the Martikovs can spread infected (bad) lycanthropy, if they should desire, to PCs who have done them a horrific, grievous wrong. Though, let's hope it doesn't come to that narratively in any campaign.

## The Timeline

You should get this info down. Because your party *will* ask.

* 10 Years Ago
  + The first gem was stolen and never seen again.
* A Month or so Ago
  + The forest folk started acting strangely in the woods. The Martikovs started hearing strange stories that they were gathering at Yesterhill for some unknown cause.
  + While the Martikovs of course used their ravens to collect this information, they won't openly tell the players their information gathering methods. Instead, they'll either be vague or lie, saying they heard the news from hunters from Kresk.
* Three Weeks Ago
  + The second gem was stolen in the night. There was no great fight or witnesses. However, the Martikovs were able to trace tracks to Berez but haven't dared actually venture into the bogs. They all know it's quite dangerous there.
* One Week Ago
  + The Forest Folk and their blights attacked the winery. The Martikovs were able to defend their home for a time. Remember, they're wereravens and are actually pretty good in combat.
* Five Days Ago
  + Two days into the assault, the Forest Folk found and stole the third and final gem.
* Two Days Ago
  + The blights were finally too much for the family to fend off and they had to flee the winery. They've been living in the woods since, trying to figure out a way to win back their home.

## The Road to the Winery

* Meeting the Family
  + Before even arriving at the Winery, the party should get flagged down by the Martikovs, who signal them from the nearby woods by flashing a small shard of mirror their way. The signaler is most likely *not* Davian, since he's particularly untrusting, but one of his better natured sons.
    - The Martikovs have taken up camp in a grove just off the main road. From the campsite, it's a ten-minute walk uphill and then the party can see the winery and the vineyards through the trees. The grove itself is filled with ravens, though the PCs should only notice a handful on a cursory glance. The rest blend into the shadows and trees effortlessly.
  + The family's first intension in attracting the party's attention was merely to warn them about the nearby danger. However, finding that the PCs are battle worn adventurers, they relate their story and ask for help. Remember, the Martikovs *do not* mention the gems in this initial encounter. Further incentive for PCs to help can include any of the following:
    - Funds. The Martikovs aren't absurdly wealthy, but they're certainly well off. They run the only winery in Barovia, after all. They can offer the players a monetary reward for their help. (Refer to the treasure listed under area W17 if you'd like a baseline).
    - Yolanda the baby crying pathetically. Only an icy hearted heathen should turn away from this sad, homeless family. Play up the children, putting them front and center. Guilt can go a long way to motivate players.
    - Wine. If you have a PC or two that have a thing for alcohol, make it clear that the loss of the winery means *no more drinking ever* in Barovia. XD
    - Allies/Information. The Martikovs should know of the party and therefore know they work against Strahd. The Martikovs may passively suggest an alliance and the promise of help should the players retake the winery. The Keepers of the Feather are an information goldmine, after all.
    - Other Quests. Lastly, remember that there are other groups that may have already asked the party to retrieve some wine for them: The Blue Water Inn, the Vallaki Vistani Encampment, and Kresk. The party may already be on a mission from one of these sources and therefore already have incentive to help the Martikovs.
  + If the party seems interested in helping, the Martikovs can lay down some key information if asked:
    - The winery has five entrances. They can also outline a general floorplan for the building if asked. Don't show your players the map, but make them draw something out according to the Martikov's description to make things more fun. :D
    - The Martikovs note that the leader of the assault is an older Forest Folk wielding a horrible, black staff. They can tell the party that this man seemed to have a measure of control over the blights.
* **NO FIRE**
  + Honestly, why are so many parties obsessed with fire in dnd? For goodness sake, guys, just cause the vineyards are filled with blights doesn't mean you burn it all down!
  + To try to avoid this idea or some other destructive nonsense, I would recommend that the Martikovs really stress the importance of the winery to the party. It's the only winery in the land and Barovians in general depend on their product. The vineyards are still alive and well, but the pest problem needs to be taken care of. (And the gem problem of course, but that's revealed later.) If the players burn down the vineyard, it will *not* regrow. If the players even suggest this to the Martikovs, the family looks downright horrified.
  + That's not to say the players shouldn't use fire against the *blights* of course. Just watch them to make sure they control the burn. ;)

## Tackling the Threat

This location can very easily turn into a long, boring battle. Yes, players might get overwhelmed by the blights, but if they're cautious, the whole quest can get tedious. However, quite recently, [u/DragnaCarta](https://www.reddit.com/u/DragnaCarta/) wrote up an absolutely fantastic skill challenge to handle running the winery and holy goodness it's great. I'm not going to repeat all the details here, but instead write out a brief summary so you guys can get the gist. Find the complete challenge on pages 6-13 in Dragna's [Strahd Reloaded](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9kcfj4/curse_of_strahd_reloaded_wizard_of_wines/). <3

* **Stage 1: Investigation**
  + The players can stop and scope out the winery from afar. Successful checks might reveal the layout/locations of enemies and safe routes to the winery.
* **Stage 2: Evasion**
  + If the players try to cross straight through the vineyards - or the main paths near the vineyards - the hidden needle blights will try to stop them. The players may, of course, try to sneak their way through the fields to avoid notice. If they're using some of the safer routes learned in Stage 1, they might roll with advantage.
  + However, if the blights do notices them, the blights will attack and try to grapple and swallow the players into the vines. Instead of an overwhelming fight, this encounter is a series of skill checks to escape the blights' grasps.
* **Stage 3: Flight**
  + Regardless of how Stage 2 goes, once the players break through the vineyards the blights take notice and try to stop them from actually entering the winery.
  + The players will have to quickly choose which entrance they'd like to try as the horde pursues them. You should really try and put the pressure on them, forcing them to make their decisions quickly and impressing that fighting seems like a *really bad idea*. Remember not to accidentally give away which door leads where, but instead just describe the doors themselves, making the players choose somewhat blindly. They can, of course, use the intel they might have gathered from the Martikovs or from Stage 1.
  + Dragna's provided a series of unique scenarios for each entrance along with accompanying checks.
    - **Stables:** This is unfortunately a dead end, but players may still try and take refuge here and hide from the blights.
    - **Loading Dock:** This place is overtly open to attack and players will have to think quickly to avoid the needles coming their way.
    - **The Barrel Workshop:** This door is barred from the inside and players will have to break the door down to get in.
    - **Veranda:** The Veranda has a set of double doors that are chained shut and a smaller door that is locked.
    - **Side Door by Outhouse** and **Glass Workshop/Backdoor**: The side door is ajar and the glass workshop door is unlocked, but both take longer to reach. Players will have to outrun the horde to reach either door without taking damage.
    - **Second Floor Access:** Players can also try to scale the walls of the winery and enter the building through a window on the second floor. Acrobatics and other such checks are a given.
* **Stage 4: Barricade**
  + After successfully getting inside the winery, the players will have to barricade the door against the blight horde. If they've done well on the previous checks, the horde may not actually pursue them at all at this point, negating this step entirely.

## Resting in the Winery

Depending on how the players are after running from the blights, they may want to rest in within the winery. If they've entered the fermentation vat area, there may be little time for resting. But otherwise, allow them to do so.

If you really want to put the pressure on them, I would highly suggest taking a look at pages 13-14 in that same guide of Dragna's. In summary, if the players do nothing to guard their resting place or stay quiet, the blights and/or druids will try to lay siege in the middle of their rest. Players will have to hold their room/location against the assault.

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Once successfully inside the winery, the actual battles begin with the druids and blights inside the building. I'll cover some more specifics on that in the next post. Otherwise, that's that for now, guys, even though the last couple sections are just an homage to dear DragnaCarta. XD I should finish up the winery in one more post. As always, thank you so much for reading!

- Mandy

# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Winery II and the Third Gem**

Once players have successfully entered the winery, they'll face a series of battles with druids and blights. These battles are pretty straight forward, so I won't reiterate what the book already outlines well enough. Instead, I'll go ahead and cover the few things I majorly changed for the second half of this chapter.

## The Poisoned Wine

Now, as always, this next bit of advice will vary from campaign to campaign and it is up to your discretion as the DM to decide what's best for your players. You either take out the poisoned wine altogether or you hide it from your players intentionally.

### Terrible Consequences

* + Having poisoned wine is a great way to spread discord in Barovia and further corrupt your players. In other words, if your players unknowingly deliver poisoned wine to any location, it'd be really traumatic for them to eventually return to said location and find mass death due to their actions.
    - Even if the players aren't directly responsible for poisoning the wine, they'll end up feeling horribly guilty for bringing such death to any location. This is a great way to break the PCs' spirits narratively.
    - Additionally, if NPCs know for certain that the PCs delivered the poison, those NPCs might openly blame the party for murder. Entire towns and villages might turn against the party as a result of the poison.

### Negative Effects of the Poison Plot

* + These horrific consequences are the main reason poisoning the wine works narratively. The poison, in and of itself, is a device meant to corrupt players and make them question their morals and past actions. If you decide to keep the poison, you need to be prepared to see these consequences through.
  + However, you *need* to gauge the relative fun-levels of your party when they come to winery. How much heartbreak is too much?
    - My party, for instance, had just come from Vallaki where they had failed miserably. They witnessed a lot of horror and were feeling really bad about themselves. I decided to fully take out the poison subplot because I felt like they really needed to feel successful about something.
    - If you feel like your party is at a similar emotional low, it might be worth it to just give them the winery and forego the poison altogether.

### Setting Up the Mystery

* + Now that that's said and done, let's say your party is up to the task and you poison the wine. There are a couple minor notes I feel you should change.

### The Poisoner Druid

* + - Okay. If you're taking the time and effort to put in a neat poisoning subplot, for the love of the Morning Lord, *don't* have that druid pouring poison into the vat right in front of your players like a Disney villain. By doing so, you're completely eliminating any kind of mystery and sense of accomplishment the party might get in discovering and/or purifying the wine.
    - Instead, put a couple empty vials on the druid's person. Heck, maybe put a couple others on one or two other druids too. If players loot the bodies after the fight, they find the vials with a mysterious residue within. Let your players' paranoia take over and create some exciting subplot.

### Unknown to All

* + - If your players completely miss the poison, under no circumstances should any other NPC find it instead. Remember, from a narrative standpoint, your players are the main characters. They should feel responsible for solving problems (or creating them if we're being honest) in Barovia. If you just have a Martikov walk up and be like, "Oh this wine tastes funny," your players will end up feeling a little inadequate.
* Neutralizing the Poison
  + [u/DragnaCarta](https://www.reddit.com/u/DragnaCarta/) wonderfully suggests placing a spell scroll of Purify Food and Drink somewhere prior to the winery, since players are highly unlikely to actually take or prepare that spell themselves. Perhaps its hidden in Death House. Maybe they get it as a boon from Lady Watcher or buy it from Jeny Greenteeth's shop in Vallaki. No matter what, this is a great idea.
  + Antitoxin is a great way to purify the wine as well. The book tells us that it would spoil the taste of the wine, but that just sounds like such an anticlimactic letdown to me. If you have a party that actively carries around antitoxin, for goodness’ sake just let them win this one.
    - Here's another idea you might entertain: Maybe antitoxin *will* spoil the taste of the wine. However, the Martikovs know of a special herb that can significantly stop that side effect. However, the herb only grows on Yesterhill. ;)

## The Gulthias Staff

The Guthias Staff is a really interesting magical object. It also, by nature, should be incredibly evil. After all, it literally comes from an evil tree. The worry is, some PCs might want to keep the staff. And as written, there's no reason they can't. I ended up reworking the staff, giving it some extra attributes and a lot of extra creepy aesthetic.

After running my changes by [u/DragnaCarta](https://www.reddit.com/u/DragnaCarta/), he wonderfully rewrote those changes all pretty and included them in his own [Winery guide](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9kcfj4/curse_of_strahd_reloaded_wizard_of_wines/?ref=share&ref_source=link). Some of this is just copy and pasted from there. ^3^

### Aesthetic

* + Made from the branch of a Gulthias tree, the Gulthias staff is a spongy, black length of wood from which ashen smoke wisps at a constant rate. It has a strangely spongy texture, and leaves behind a bloody residue on one's hand when touched.
  + If the branch is cut or broken, it positively weeps blood, possibly leaving a rather grotesque spatter in the surrounding area.
  + Nightmares
    - Anyone attuned to the staff has vivid nightmares/visions of the Gulthias Tree each and every night. They will dream of nothing else.

### Technical Capabilities

* + If the staff is broken or burned to ashes, its wood releases a terrible, inhuman scream that can be heard out to a range of 300 feet. All blights that can hear the screams immediately wither and die.
  + Unattuned Users
    - Anyone simply holding the staff has technical control over blights. Someone holding the staff has the ability to command blights around them using simple, one-word commands, so long as the blights can see and hear the user. While holding the staff, blights and other evil plant creatures don’t regard the user as hostile unless they harm the blights.
  + Attuned Users
    - The Gulthias staff has 10 charges. As an action, an attuned wielder can expend charges to create any of the following creatures:
    - 1 charge: 1x Twig Blight
    - 2 charges: 1x Needle Blight
    - 4 charges: 1x Vine Blight
    - When all charges are expended, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff crumbles to dust without releasing its blight-killing shriek. Otherwise, it regains 1d8 charges each dusk.

### Attuning to a Host

* + The Gulthias Staff creates a symbiotic relationship with its host, feeding off its user's blood. It's actually pretty gross. When someone comes in possession of the staff, the staff slowly grows tiny black roots, which crawl beneath the user's skin and drinks their blood.
  + This doesn't happen right away, mind you. It takes a full long rest to attune to the staff and this can actually happen completely unintentionally. In other words, this is a magical item that can quietly force attunement on an unwilling host.
    - For example: Marcus decides he's going to keep the staff, but can't figure out how to use it. That night, when Marcus goes to sleep/to trance, he places the staff beside him. The next morning, he wakes to to find a series of tiny black veins growing from the staff and into his skin. Naturally, Marcus freaks out and brushes the roots away, easily breaking them. But now, he feels an attunement with the staff. Somehow, he knows what it's capable of.
  + Once the roots are in a host, they can live independently without a direct connection to the staff. Even if they're broken (like Marcus does in the example), the roots live on under the skin, growing unbeknownst to the host, eating them from the inside.
    - If you've ever seen/heard of the movie *The Ruins*, that's basically what I'm talking about. If you want to run to YouTube and watch a couple horrifying clips, feel free. But WARNING. It's a super gory movie.

### Multiple Hosts

* + The only way to unattune to the staff is to destroy/break the staff. Because of this, the staff can technically have multiple living hosts at the same time, provided it has living roots growing within each host.
  + If the staff is broken, the roots inside a host die and are safely dissolved and absorbed into the bloodstream.

### Consequences of Attunement

* + Besides the sheer creepy nastiness of having roots living and growing inside you, there are actual technical consequences of attuning to the staff.
  + Each day that someone is attuned to the staff, they must make a DC 14 Constitution Saving Throw or take 2d6 necrotic damage or half as much damage on a success. The user's hit point maximum is also reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. The reduction lasts until the Gulthias staff is destroyed and the former user finishes a long rest. The user dies if this effect reduces their hit point maximum to 0.

## The Winery Saved

### Mission Rewards

* + Once the winery is saved and the Martikovs restored to their home, the players should get some kind of reward for their efforts. If the players met the family beforehand by the side of the road, you may have already promised them some form of recompense.
  + Whatever the Martikovs offered, they pay in full, be it money or otherwise. The wereravens are people of their word and are incredibly honorable, especially in comparison to most Barovians. They don't hesitate or haggle, but instead make sure the party knows how grateful they are.
  + Lastly, the Martikovs also make it clear that the party is now forever welcome in their home. They have room and board available, no matter the hour.

### Likable NPCs

* + Now that the immediate threat is vanquished, the party will have a chance to really sit down and chat with the Martikovs. The winery and the Keepers of the Feather can (and likely will) serve as key NPCs and invaluable allies for the remainder of the campaign. It's important that you make the entire family as likable as possible.
  + You know your players. By now, you should have an idea of what kind of personalities they'll vibe with. Tailor the Martikovs to meet those personalities so that your party makes real friends with the family.
    - Does one of your PCs have a soft spot for children? Put the little ones front and center for a while.
    - Is one PC the classic, tavern-going rogue? Have Elvir invite them down to the cellar to get wine-drunk on their victory.
  + Information and mission giving can come intermittently, of course, but make that first evening at the winery about building relationships.

### Revealing the Keepers

* + Throughout conversations - or possibly the following day depending on the flow of the campaign - the Martikovs should eventually reveal that their family has been quietly working against Strahd for generations.
  + What the Martikovs DON'T Say
    - The Martikovs don't identify themselves as "The Keepers of the Feather." They simply say that they've been gathering information to use against Strahd over time. They don't reveal exactly how immense and organized they actually are.
    - They DON'T say that they use ravens to gather information. The Martikovs will willingly admit that ravens are the symbol of their family (also a nice time to point out that ravens are symbols of good luck in Barovia) and that they use the birds the send messages when they need to. But they don't reveal the depth of their connection to ravens.
    - And, for the hundredth time, the Martikovs do NOT admit to being wereravens.
  + Otherwise, the Martikovs are happy to have new allies in their fight against the Devil. They'll answer as many of the party's questions as they can and make themselves known as clever information brokers.

### Revealing the Gemstones

* + Narratively, I would recommend you reveal the theft of the third gem the day after the winery assault. Since it's a long battle, it's entirely likely that players will end up staying the night at the winery. The next day, at an appropriate time, one of the Martikov children rushes in and tells the gathered family (and players most likely) that the third gemstone is missing.
    - If you play out this scene, make it abundantly clear that this is practically the end of the world to the Martikovs. They seem heartbroken and distraught and desperate. Hopefully, this will come after your players have made an emotional connection to the family, so seeing their new friends so upset should upset them too.
  + At this point, the Martikovs will completely reveal the existence of the magic gemstones. They quite literally have nothing to lose by telling the party about the gems.
    - The Martikovs can tell the players that the gems were gifts from the Ladies Three to their ancestors. This family is one of the few that remembers a bit of lore about the Ladies and still respects their memory. For fun, you might have a couple family members dismiss the Ladies as old fairy tales, giving the PCs a bit of conflicting information.
  + Regardless of where the gems came from, the fact that they're gone now means the death of the winery. All the work that the players did in saving the place will be for naught. The Martikovs beg the players' assistance in retrieving the even a single gem before the vineyards die.
    - The Martikovs can readily tell the party that one gemstone was stolen much earlier and taken to Berez. One of the sons followed tracks to the swamp but dared not go farther. They suspect the swamp's local witch, a being of vile blood and blackened soul, now has it. When you bring up Berez, be *sure* to emphasize just how frightened the Martikovs are of this evil witch. They spare no words in emphasizing the danger of old Berez.
    - Though the last gem was only just recently stolen, the Martikovs still have an idea of where the Forest Folk might have taken it. The family will tell the players that they heard about the Forest Folk having strange gatherings at Yesterhill.

## The Third Missing Gem

The location of the third gem is one of the biggest mysteries in the campaign to me. Quite literally everything else in the book has some sort of explanation, even minimally. Yes, I take liberties and modify things in the story. The book leaves spaces specifically for that kind of modification. But the first time I saw the gaping hole involving the missing winery gem, it just about drove me nuts. So let's talk about where this silly little bauble might be hiding.

### What the Gems Do

* + Thankfully, we know from the other two instances of thievery that the gems are primarily used to give life. They are, in their essence, extreme life boosters. They can be used to grow plants in a land where there is no sunlight and bring giant, inanimate objects to life.
  + On a more intricate level, all the evidence of the gem's magic seems to be rooted in plant life. The vineyards are nature based. The druid statue is a treant. And Baba Lysaga's hut is an animated walking tree stump. So, while we can say that the gems are magical life givers, it wouldn't be farfetched to postulate that they only work on plant life. You certainly don't have to enforce this aspect of their power in your campaign, but it's there for your consideration.

### Why Steal a Gem?

* + Life Giving
    - Knowing what the gems do, we can safely assume that the thief of the first gem wanted to use its powers to give life to something magically. Possibly a plant based being, though not exclusively.
  + Messing with the Keepers of the Feather
    - This reason is already given to us freely in the text. Baba Lysaga's only reason for stealing a gem and then convincing the druids to steal another is because she wishes to hurt the Keepers of the Feather. It's possible that someone else stole the first gem for a similar reason.
* Possible Culprits
  + **Strahd**
    - We all know that Strahd is a very formal sort of fellow. For all his evilness, he's a man of propriety and manners. He's most commonly pictured drinking what we can assume is blood out of a wineglass. You know, super classy like the vampire he is.
    - However, that doesn't mean Strahd is a stranger to mortal guests. He knows how to court humans and appeal to them with his kingly tastes. Having the finest of wines to serve those guests is only logical. So why would he let Champaign du le Stomp, the finest wine in his realm, die out by stealing the third gem? Well, he wouldn't. Unless he had a particularly good reason.
  + **The Heart of Sorrow** - Strahd doesn't really have any plant-based things in his thematic repertoire he would want to bring to life. *But* he does have the Heart of Sorrow. In an effort to make himself that much stronger, it's possible he gave up the fine Champaign du le Stomp in order to create the Heart and the gem lies within its crystal form, turned red from corruption.
  + **The Abbot**
    - The Abbot's main goal in the campaign is to create a bride for Strahd. He wants to cure the vampire lord's wickedness with love and to this effect he's been building Strahd the perfect wife.
  + **Vasilka**
    - It's possible that the Abbot was having trouble giving life to flesh based constructs that don't have their own souls. The Mongrelfolk were normal people before he transformed them and the flesh golem is less than perfect. The Abbot has the ability to raise the dead, yes, but what about making a soul form scratch? If he's been having trouble with this, he could have taken the gemstone and put it inside Vasilka to give her life and, possibly, a personality.
  + **Urwin Martikov**
    - The only real clue we have to the gem's location is Urwin, the enstranged Martikov son and proprietor of the Blue Water Inn. He was on watch when the gem was stolen and supposedly has no idea what happened to it.
    - I propose that Urwin in fact knows *exactly* what happened to the third gem, but is somehow honor bound to keep it a secret. Maybe he stole it at the behest of one of the Ladies Three, who knew that its power could somehow purify one of their shrines. Maybe a character from one of the PCs' backstories is from Barovia and convinced him to hand over the gem to keep it safe.
    - Or maybe it's far simpler than that. Maybe Urwin's rivalry with his father convinced him to steal the gem for his own personal gain and now there’s a small, private vineyard growing in a cellar under the Blue Water Inn.

### What About You?

* + Lastly, I'd honestly like to ask what you think happened to the third gem? Did you come up with something entirely different? How did it work out? I'd love to hear your thoughts! :)

## Where to Next?

At this point, the players have a couple different options for their next destination. Though they can technically go anywhere they wish, three quest lines stand out most prominently.

### Wine Deliveries

* + **Vallaki**
    - * If the players have just come from Vallaki, they'll likely have requests from either the Vistani or from the Blue Water Inn to see wine delivered. Players may feel inclined to do just that.
      * If players end up returning to Vallaki, this is a perfect time to emphasize that actions have consequences. Whatever the outcomes of the Festival of the Blazing Sun and/or St. Andral's Feast, it'd be pretty neat to show some change in Vallaki, for better or for worse.
  + **Kresk**
    - * If players tried to go to Kresk before the winery, they'll have been turned away at the gate. Getting Kresk's shipment of wine arranged from the Martikovs will be an incredibly easy feat.
      * If players haven't been to Kresk, the Martikovs themselves might ask players to deliver the latest shipment of wine, since they're so behind at the moment.

### Yesterhill Gem Rescue

* + The most important thing to note about Yesterhill is the time limit. Players can't just put off the gem quests since the vineyards will quite literally wither and die before too long. I'd give them five days of in-game time before the vineyards are too withered to be revived. The Martikovs will most definitely tell the players about their timeframe. They *are* experts in grapevine growth after all.
  + Because of the time limit, players will feel the most pressure to complete this quest. So, one way or another, you should likely prep for Yesterhill next. XP

### The Coming of Wintersplinter

* + If your players do avoid Yesterhill, give them at least two or three days in-game before Wintersplinter attacks the winery. Who knows, maybe it takes the druids a bit longer to fully complete the ritual. It's simply not terribly fair to players if they just want to take a day to run some wine to the Vistani and then run back to find the winery destroyed.
  + However, if they reasonably *do* take too long to visit Yesterhill, the destruction of the winery is inevitable. Instead of writing even more here, I'm just going to refer you guys to the last 3 pages of [Dragna's winery guide](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9kcfj4/curse_of_strahd_reloaded_wizard_of_wines/?ref=share&ref_source=link) again. He's beautifully written up the winery attack and possible fallout for the Martikovs.

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And that's it for now guys! I hope your journey into the winery is a fun one! :D

- Mandy