# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Amber Temple Part 1 – Battles for Days!**

## Divide the Temple

My first and most general recommendation regarding the Temple is this: split it into two narrative halves.

This harkens straight back to one of my first posts on Death House. Think about it. Death House is, essentially, split into the non-hostile house segment and the very hostile basement segment. While yes, some narrative spills into the basement and some fighting spills into the main house, the split is still pretty even.

The Amber Temple suffers the most because, in my opinion, it's written as long, murderous dungeon with very little story importance. So what we do instead is split it.

### The Battle Inward

* + Opposite to Death House, we should first move almost all the fighting to the beginning of the dungeon. At this point in the campaign, the players have come here for a reason. They don't need on-site narrative hooks to lure them in. Instead, they're fighting for answers. And what a fight it shall be.
	+ You'll want to make the beginning of this dungeon as openly hostile as possible without outright killing your party. You need to make it very obvious why no one braves the Temple. It is dangerous. Remember that your players shouldn't be fighting everything and that they totally can sneak past encounters. That's perfectly okay. Encouraged even. But as the DM, you need to be prepared for the various encounters depending on what path they'll take.
	+ If they keep to the upper floor, the hardcore battles/attacks could include:
		- The Flameskulls in areas X17 and X6 (Hallway and hole-in-the-floor room)
		- The Amber Golem in X8 (marching up the right hallway)
		- The deceitful Vilnius in the Lecture Hall
		- The Specters in X22 (the fake banquet)
	+ If they decide to go downward into the giant area of X5 and beyond, they'll encounter:
		- The Arcanaloth firing spells from the blackness
		- The Flameskulls firing down from X17 (That upper left hallway again)
		- The Nothics in X36 (the left downstairs hallway)
		- The Specters in X39 (The trashed room left of the treasure room)

### Exethanter and the Inner Sanctum

* + Once players get past all the fighting, they'll find themselves in the back Library area, including Exethanter's rooms. This area should be totally battle free (unless the players instigate something of course) and instead provide them with all the story and answers they've been seeking all campaign.
	+ Exethanter is a friendly NPC, which I've rewritten to an extent and the Library is everything the players could ever dream of. Within the Inner Santum, the PCs can and will learn about the Demiplanes of Dread, the Dark Powers, the Fanes of Barovia, and possibly any personal secret you've kept hidden from them to incorporate their backstories into the world. The Library is an almost mythical bastion of knowledge and Exethanter serves as their guide.

### Monsters/Battles I Totally Removed

* + Just like Death House, I felt like there were a few pointless battles put it just to make the area more dungeon-y. Bleh. So I took them out.
		- The Barovian Witches - Honestly, I don't see why halloween cliched witches have any business being here. The Temple is thematically undead and high wizardry, which leaves little room for these gals. And with all the cold, where are they gonna catch all their newts? ;P
		- The Death Slaad - Hell \*clap\* to \*clap\* the \*clap\* no \*clap\*. An Arcanaloth and a Slaad within 50 ft of one another? Let's not.
		- The Vampire Spawn - Alright, these guys totally actually do fit here RAW. But because I edited the narrative of Exethanter and the inner sanctum, that changed and they no longer belonged. Plus, the party has plenty of chances to fight vampires elsewhere in the campaign, so it's not like they're missing anything with me taking them out of the Temple.

## Hooks to the Temple

By the time the players reach the Amber Temple in your campaign, you should have already been peppering in hints and clues that the location can provide answers to huge questions. The amount of hinting you should do should be borderline absurd, actually.

### Killing Strahd

* + Through several conversations, your players should know that Strahd is immortal. Like, really immortal, not just undead. Other adventurers have battled him and won, but he always comes back. He cannot die.
	+ The Amber Temple may have answers as to why he is immortal and how that immortality can be broken.

### Escaping Barovia

* + From the very beginning, your players will know they're trapped in Barovia by the mists. But why do the mists exist at all? Why can they pull people from completely different worlds into Barovia? And why does Strahd have some sort of control over the mists?
	+ The truth behind the mists is likely kept in the Amber Temple. The Temple is said to hold a great, timeless library with all kinds of knowledge.

### The Fanes of Barovia

* + What exactly were the fanes and where did they go? Even if players can piece this together well, they still won't know how to restore the fanes. The Amber Temple's library is the most likely place to contain answers.

### The PCs' Dark Powers

* + Depending on how your campaign has progressed, it's entirely possible at least one of your players has developed an unhealthy reliance on a Dark Power. If they need to confront that power and break that connection, they can most likely do so in the Amber Temple.
* Here are some NPCs that can hint towards the Temple, and some example dialogue.
	+ ***Fiona Watcher***
		- "This particular volume predates all the work in my collection. It is one of the few that made it out of the long-lost Amber Temple. Though most of it is nonsense, it proposes that immortality must come with a price. I've often wondered what price Lord Strahd must've paid."
	+ ***Van Richten:***
		- "Damn demon made a deal with the devil, they say. And I can't say that's untrue. Like all monsters, Strahd was born from darkness, most like. There was once a place with all kinds of gatherings on devils, but the bastards who lived there fell under their own arrogance. Thought they could tame devils, they did. The were wrong."
	+ ***The Keepers of the Feather:***
		- "Well, s'pose there's no harm in telling you now, since they're all gone anyway. The gems were gifts from the Ladies Three, nature goddesses that watched over the valley before Strahd took over. It's hard to say what's true and what isn't, but supposedly Strahd killed the Ladies Three and took their power. \*Leans in.\* But truth is, I don't believe that. It takes a whole lot to really kill a god. There was even an old temple built up in the mountains meant to trap gods cause they were just so hard to kill."
	+ ***The Abbott:***
		- "I am so sorry, my dear, but I'm afraid I haven't answers to your questions. The only place I can think of to hold such knowledge would be the mythical Amber Temple. It is said it was once a great library. But alas, it has been lost to the southern mountains somewhere beyond Tsolenka Pass."
	+ You get the idea by now, but just in case, here are some other characters who could know of/mention the Temple under the right role-play circumstances:
		- The Dusk Elves
		- Baba Lysaga
		- Strahd
		- Rahadin
		- The Reformers at the Reformation Center in Vallaki
		- Lady Fidatov in Kresk, after she's saved from the curse
		- Argynvost, if the players manage to summon his spirit
		- Vladimir Horngard and the other Revenants
		- Ezmerelda
		- The Forest Folk

# Barbarian Allies

Because the Amber Temple is already so deadly, I figured some fun, light-hearted NPCs would go a long way for any party. I changed the gaggle of barbarians in Area X15 into non-hostile allies.

### Mountain Folk

* + If you've been going through all my posts, you'll remember how I changed the druids and barbarians at the Winery and Yesterhill into "Forest Folk." I did so simply for the sake of world building and conversation with NPCs, so that the wild peoples of Barovia could have a little bit more background than "evil druids just cause."
	+ This barbarian tribe is actually an offshoot of the Forest Folk, eloquently referred to as the Mountain Folk. There are actually only a handful of tribes of Mountain Folk living in the snowy terrain, each no bigger than ten or so people. Helwa's group is one of those tribes.

### First Meeting

* + When the party first meets the Mountain Folk, either through the amber doors or through the crack, they'll be met with battle shouts of warning. However, the Mountain Folk will not attack first under any circumstances. There should be a Mexican standoff sort of situation, where the Folk stand on alert with weapons raised, but are also actively backing away from the party. The Mountain Folk are used to battling animals, not humanoids, and so don't attack outright. After all, it could just be another tribe of Mountain Folk. Best not to shed blood on possible friendlies.

### Role-playing

* + The Mountain Folk are almost comically caveman-like. They speak Druidic and Common, but horrifically broken, and prefer to communicate with small words and grunts.
	+ "Helwa strong warrior! Best warrior! Helwa never cold! Always win!" \*dramatically throws off her fur coat\*
	+ "No! No go! Fire spirits there. Fire spirits baaaaaad. Make you dead!"
	+ The Mountain Folk will automatically gravitate towards the biggest/strongest looking PCs, assuming they have leadership roles in the party. Helwa is a mountain of a woman to begin with. Think Brienne of Tarth from Game of Thrones, but more barbaric.
	+ The dire wolf is an adorable giant husky baby. The Mountain Folk have named him Snow-Snow and he's basically their family pet. Once the Folk accept the PCs as friendlies, Snow-Snow will turn into the most lovable giant doggo Barovia has to offer.

### Views on Magic

* + As cavemen-like people, the Mountain Folk are extraordinarily superstitious. They don't like magic and any PC that uses magic in front of them will frighten them. To the Mountain Folk, such a person must be possessed in some way.
	+ If the party manages to pacify the Folk after using magic, the Folk will assume the big, strong PC is somehow controlling the magic user, like a very impressive pet. The Folk will then consider that strong PC as a mighty chieftain.

### Helping the Party

* + Because of their natural fear of the Temple and the evil spirits within, the Mountain Folk will not accompany the party beyond their den. However, so long as the PCs remain friendly, the Mountain Folk are happy to share their fire, meals, and bed matts with the players. This is effectively a totally safe place for the party to take a long rest within the Temple without threat of assault or extreme cold.
	+ The party can, however, convince the Mountain Folk to accompany them elsewhere on the mountain. For instance, if they want guides back down the mountain through Tsolenka Pass, the barbarians will happily oblige.

### One Last Change

* + Remember the dead wizard in the flameskull hallway nearby? I took him out completely. Like the vestiges and their implemented flaws, I felt like the wizard and his evil staff were a bit of a cop out, forcing character change on players instead of letting it occur naturally. If you really want to keep the staff of frost in game, I'd recommend moving it to the treasure room.
	+ Instead, the charred dead man in the hallway is one of the Mountain Folk. When Helwa's gang first discovered the hideout, one of their own tried to open the amber doors and scout further into the temple, only to die from the flameskulls.

## Vilnius: The Plague-Ridden Liar

I changed Vilnius' backstory and also trimmed his personality to make him more fun and story relevant

### Backstory

* + I've already stated that I changed the dead wizard in the Flameskull hall into a dead barbarian, which means that Vilnius is no longer a random wizard's apprentice. Instead, I changed his story so that he could serve as an example of the Dark Powers at work.
	+ **Fekre's Pawn**
		- Vilnius was once a resident of another world (could be Faerun, but it honestly doesn't matter) and lived in a rather large city. He was a small-minded gutter rat who survived by swindling others, selling fake miracles and pretending to be a disciple of the city's various temples.
		- However, his dirty living caused him to contract an illness, one that would kill him. He was weak, desperate, and, ironically, looking for a real miracle within one of those temples. He found an amulet locked away in the forbidden catacombs (the one mentioned in the book) and when he touched it, he accidentally established a direct link between himself and Fekre, Queen of Poxes.
		- The Dark Power promised Vilnius a cure a for his illness if he agreed to two terms. 1: That he traverses the planes and return Fekre's amulet to her. And 2: That he spread Fekre's own disease so that she my feed on the souls her sickness devours. Vilnius agreed.
		- Vilnius was cured of his initial illness, but his body became a putrid host for Fekre's disease, which he voluntarily spread into the water system of his home city. The disease spread like wildfire, consuming just about every living person within a few short years.
		- Vilnius' travels have brought him through a handful of different dimensions (leaving plague behind in his wake) before finally finding his way into Barovia. Luckily, he came in through the southern border in the mountains and didn't encounter any towns before coming across the Amber Temple.

### Personality

* + To quote the book's excellence, "Vilnius is a greedy, treacherous coward." Though he's technically backed by a Dark Power, he's actually incredibly weak. He's survived by lying and preying on the good nature of others, and he will most certainly continue to do so with the PCs.
	+ Upon meeting the PCs, he'll flinch away from them in abject terror, begging for his life. Once calmed, he'll tell them a tragic story to try and get them on his side:
		- That his family has been unfortunate enough to be afflicted by a terrible disease. He lies and says that it's not contagious, and stays within his family (basically saying it's genetic).
		- Vilnius will tell the PCs that he has a daughter who's shown signs of the disease. While it's too late for him, he desperately wants to find a cure for her. He's heard that such a cure lies somewhere in the Temple, but the various monsters and creatures have kept him from moving on any further.
		- Vilnius then begs the party to escort him deeper into the temple where a miracle cure-all is said to be hidden.
	+ If the PCs question Vilnius on any subject, make him lie. Think of the saddest, sappiest, most cliched stories and anecdotes you can imagine and those are the kinds of lies Vilnius will spill. Parents on their deathbeds, the day his mom brought home Fluffy, the dog, his grandmother's cookies, ect. Sappy, overused, emotion pullers. Those are the stories Vilnius will tell.
	+ Vilnius' believability should always be borderline. The sheer cliched nature of his stories as well as some accidental slips and inconsistencies should make players doubt him. But, at the same time, charisma is his best stat. He can lie to cover up his lies that should make players doubt their doubts. It's a terrible self-feeding circle.

### Vilnius' Actions

* + With the PCs
		- If Vilnius ends up traveling with the PCs, he won't try to kill them or get them sick. Remember, Vilnius is actually a really weak guy and he's no match for the creatures in the Temple, especially the ones he can't talk to. He needs the PCs to protect him.
	+ His Disease
		- The fire burns on his picture in the book are now not from fire, but are actually boils filled with highly contagious black puss. After a time, the boils grow, crack and leak puss, which is how the disease spreads. Touching the puss spreads the contagion (which also includes eating or drinking it accidentally). However, it is not an airborne disease.
	+ Reaching Fekre
		- Vilnius instinctively knows the way to Fekre's Amber prison. She's his patron, after all, and she's been subtly pulling him towards her.
		- Upon reaching the vestige in X33a, Vilnius will pull out his amulet, which reeks of fiendish, abyssal energy, and push it into the amber. The dark shadow with the vestige will move and wrap itself around the amulet, materializing into Fekre. The amber shatters, Fekre is released, and Vilnius shouts, "There, you putrid bitch! I've done it! Now cure me and let me go!" Fekre leans in and simply says, "No."
		- The pox then consumes Vilnius' entire body, painfully and violently killing him and Fekre disappears, leaving Barovia. Such a weakling could never be her true champion, after all.
		- This, of course, occurs only if the PCs don't kill Vilnius first. Or if they refuse to help him at all. It's just that it's always good to have an end plan in place in PCs decide to see a NPC through to the end of their quest line.
		- Lastly, here's [a cool pic of Fekre](https://www.artstation.com/artwork/lN0wa) you might use if you have to. Thanks to [u/fedex777](https://www.reddit.com/u/fedex777/) for finding this one!

### Fekre's Amulet

* + The amulet that Vilnius carries around is a cursed object that allows a holder to speak directly to Fekre, Queen of Poxes. Anyone who carries the amulet for more than 3 days (without making some kind of agreement with Fekre) will begin to contract random sicknesses. There's a nice wiki page of 5e illnesses out there, if you'd like to roll for it. Or, you know, make something up. ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯
	+ The amulet is still really pretty and worth 1000 gp though.

### New Stat Block

* + Since Vilnius is no longer a wizard's apprentice and all that, I went ahead and made him a whole new stat block, complete with Fekre's Pox traits. Remember, he's supposed to be pretty weak, actually, and his stat block reflects that.
	+ Oh! Also, I forgot to change the Challenge Rating on the stat block. It should probably be CR 3 I think.



## The Shield Guardian

Because of the changes I've made to Vilnius, I simply took out the shield guardian completely. The amulet is no longer connected to the thing, so why should it exist to confuse the players?

Also, as another completely different side note, I just got rid of Vilnius' quasit too. It just felt uneeded to me.

## Neferon the Arcanaloth

Of course, there's a furry in CoS. And of course, the furry has a god stat block. Why not?

### Backstory

* + As someone who's relatively new to d&d, I honestly had no idea what an Arcanaloth was before this guy. So the history of their race is a bit beyond me. However, in the most basic-y basic form, this is what I've gathered:
		- Yugoloths were/are a bunch of evil fiends that look like gross bug men and are all really powerful in their demon world. Arcanaloths were sort of like scribes and magic keepers for the bug men.

### With that being said, we've got to consider Neferon.

* + For simplicity's sake, I just devised that Neferon was once a dimension wanderer, traveling from one realm to the next in search of magical knowledge.
	+ At one point, he learned of the Dark Powers and they reminded him of the evil Yogoloths who once tried to enslave him. Neferon joined forces with a group of mages and helped build the Amber Temple in hopes of containing the Dark Powers.
	+ When the Temple was built, Neferon left to continue his journeys and learn more about the Dark Powers. He returned to the Temple centuries later, only to find the mages he'd left behind were all dead (except Exethanter). Overcome with guilt at not being there to protect his mage friends, Neferon vowed he would spend the rest of eternity guarding the Temple in their stead.

### Personality Notes

* + Okay. This one actually isn't too complicated. Firstly, get rid of Neferon's alter ego, the wizard man. If your players actually manage to get into the giant statue and meet Neferon, they've friggin earned seeing his true form.
	+ Neferon actually isn't a bad guy (I'd change his alignment to Neutral Good). He's just really, really, really dedicated to protecting the Temple from absolutely everyone. He distrusts literally everybody because, as far as he's concerned, they all could be agents of the Dark Powers.
	+ However, it isn't impossible to earn Neferon's favor... or at least his acceptance. Good aligned magic users and knowledge-y PCs who remind him of the dead mages can persuade him to allow them into the Temple. However, he'll warn the PCs that, should they have any interaction with the Dark Powers or attempt to stay for too long, he'll be forced to kill them. This conversation only takes place, however, if the players actually manage to meet Neferon face to face.
	+ Neferon absolutely hates Strahd, but not nearly as much as he hates Vampyr, the Dark Power that managed to get away. (I'll detail this more in Amber Temple pt. 2)
	+ When role-playing Neferon, remember to pull out your biggest, baddest vocab words. Neferon is a magical scribe that is thousands of years old. He speaks literally every single language. So he should definitely have impeccable grammar and avoid slang. Of course, we're only DMs and we're certainly not that good, but do your best to fake it XD

## Other Notes and Reminders on Battles in the Amber Temple

### Cold

* + Don't forget the Extreme Cold conditions, cause it can make gameplay really interesting. Fire and cold weather gear are super crucial here and you should enforce the rules around Extreme Cold.
	+ As a reminder, here's the rules as found in the DM's guide:
	+ "Whenever the temperature is at or below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, a creature exposed to the cold must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or gain one level of exhaustion. Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed on the saving throw, as do creatures wearing cold weather gear (thick coats, gloves, and the like) and creatures naturally adapted to cold climates."
	+ However, if your party is really suffering, you might want to reduce the number of con saves, to be just a little forgiving. I can imagine that every hour can be a bit much under the right circumstances.
	+ Also, I would recommend adding cold weather to rests within the Temple, whether they have cold gear, a fire or otherwise. It just makes things interesting and makes the players remember the cold. If the players take a long rest within the Temple, have them roll a DC 10 con save. On a fail, they can only benefit from a short rest, since the cold really got to them. The Barbarian's den, Exethanter's room, and the Library are all immune to this effect, either from the surplus of magic or from the numerous fire sources.

### Darkvision Reduction

* + Just for the sake of spookiness, I would reduce the range for PC darkvision in the Temple. You could just say that the overwhelming magic in the Temple quite literally strengthens the darkness.
	+ Idk, this one's probably just personal preference. Because, with standard Darkvision, a PC can see the entire main hall of X5 without any problem, and that sort of kills it in my opinion. Reducing Darkvision to about 20 ft of dim light will do wonders to hype up exploring the Temple.

### Arcanaloth's Attack

* + Speaking of the awesomeness of area X5, for the sake of DMing simplicity, make the stairs the line for attacking. Just assume that upon entering the Temple, Neferon knows the PCs are there. However, he'll only attack if someone tries to go deeper than the main entrance; in other words, if they try to go down the stairs.
	+ The second a PC steps onto the stairs, the Arcanaloth fires off a ranged spell at them as a surprise attack. The following turn, so do all the Flameskulls in the upper hallway. If PCs back off the stairs and remain on the upper balcony, the attacks stop. This'll make things just a little fairer to your players, lol.

# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Amber Temple Part 2 - Exethanter and the Library**

## Overview

* After battling flameskulls and golems and whatever else, you're party will inevitably find themselves in the back area of the Amber Temple, which I've dubbed, "The Inner Sanctum." The Inner Sanctum includes the following rooms:
	+ X40 - the Treasure Room
	+ X42 - The Amber Vault
	+ X30 - the Library
	+ X27, X28, X29 - Exethanter's Rooms
* *Fewer Secret Doors*
	+ After taking a second and third look over the Amber Temple, it occurred to me that the only visible way into the Inner Sanctum is through the crack in the Treasure Room. And even the doors to the Treasure Room are locked to begin with. Given the size of the Temple, I'm not sure that's entirely fair.
	+ Now, I don't know about the rest of you, but my players are absolutely shit at finding traps and even worse about finding hidden doors. In order for the Temple to go well, I knew for a fact that I'd have to replace some of the secret doors with normal doors, just so they can even find the Inner Sanctum without dying.
	+ Here are the few doors I would change:
		- The doors flanking the long staircase between the giant god statue and the library, between X5 and X30. If this Temple was once a home to a whole brotherhood of mages, it makes sense they'd want direct access to their library anyway. If you want, go ahead and lock the doors similarly to the amber doors on the Treasure Room (Arcane Lock with a password. DC 25 Strength to break open).
		- The doors flanking X26, going from the main Temple into Exethanter's room. This is the room with the chest glued to the ceiling. As far as I'm concerned, Exethanter's room is technically the living quarters of the high mage in the old circle of mages who built the temple. You should be able to access your own bedroom without all the fanfare of pulling hidden levers or searching for the switch brick, I'd say.

## Other Room Notes

### Speaking of X26 (The Trapped Chest Room)

### No Skulls

* + - While I love the idea of forcing my players to dig through a mountain of skulls, it honestly just doesn't fit. This is the entrance to the high mage's chambers. There's no reason for the skulls.

### The Chest Trap

* + - On the other hand, the chest trap is exactly the kind of thing I'd expect to see at the entrance to such a bedroom. Only the "unworthy" would fall for it, after all.
		- As an added clue that the chest is indeed a trap, go ahead and engrave the following inscription into the lid in Celestial: "Greed has no place in the heart of the scholar, for the truest treasure is knowledge."
		- I was a bit cautious about this inscription at first, as it most definitely screams, "trap!" But let me tell you, my sad pathetic players still couldn't help themselves and opened the darn thing. The temptation was just too strong. XD

### The Disappearing Floor

* + - Once the trap triggers, the floor caves in. Go ahead and give this a timer of 6 seconds (one turn) before the trap resets. After all, no mage wants a gaping hole right in the entrance to their bedroom.
		- After a turn, the disintegrated floor reforms and the chest closes and locks itself. Players will have to think fast, especially if the party is large. Some PCs might fall through and get separated from the others who hadn't been standing on the trapped ground. This might lead to some neat anxiety ridden dungeon delving. ;)

### X22 - the Ghost Banquet

* + Now, I don't know if I'm just some sad, uncultured swine, but I had no idea what an ewer was, lol. I just dumbed it down for my own sake and said the thing was a pitcher.
	+ Otherwise, be careful with this encounter. It can be rather bad. Luckily, my party had the forethought to use Mage Hand to touch the pitcher, which brought forth the specters, but didn't make them attack, as they were confused by the skeletal hand and didn't know how to attack such a thing.
	+ If your party does have it out with the ghosts, remember that the enemies should all clearly focus on the pitcher, attacking whomever is holding it. If the party lets it go or puts it back, the attack stops.

### X24 - the Enchanting Statue Room

* + This was actually pretty cool to run with my party and an incredibly fun little trap. The only glaring problem is, what if the entire party gets enchanted? Is that how the epic campaign ends, with everybody starving to death in front of the statue? XP
	+ If you have even a single NPC traveling with the party, make sure they enter this room after everyone else. If the rest of the party gets enchanted, just fudge it and make the NPC succeed so that they may save everyone.
	+ Or, if you're really not cool with that, after 24 hours, the PCs will start to black out from exhaustion, forcing them to close their eyes. When they wake, they'll see the statue again and be allowed to repeat the saving throw. Hopefully somebody will succeed after a time.

### The Giant Statue / Neferon's House

* + I totes changed the inside of the statue into Neferon's very own hobbit hole and it went over sooooo well with my players. After the cold, horrible rest of the Temple (they hadn't gotten to the inner sanctum yet), finding a cozy little living area and chatting with Neferon was a godsend.
	+ Two Floors
		- I gave this makeshift house two floors/rooms. At the top of the spiral stairs I put a ladder leading to a trap door which opens to the first floor. The first floor is in the statue's chest cavity and contains a tiny table and chair, a kitchenette run entirely by magic, and a cozy cot pushed against the wall. In every other available nook and cranny are books, parchment, and crockery.
		- The third floor, accessible by a second ladder and trap door, contained a little sitting area and stacks of books. This room is smaller and inside the statue's head. One half of the room is shrouded in magical darkness which contains the statue's eyes/outlook.
	+ Everything about Neferon's quarters are cramped, but also cozy. Once my own players earned his trust, Neferon served them tea in mismatched cups and they all had a good ole time.

## The Great Library

### Visuals

* + To be perfectly frank, the library as written is no where near big enough. I personally wanted something of epic, fantastic proportions, straight out of a high fantasy novel. Not a measly six bookcases.
	+ I've changed it so that the library is so big that it has no ceiling. The walls stretch up so high into the heart of the mountain that the ceiling is literally too far to discern with the naked eye. And the bookcases stretch upward the same amount, into infinity.
	+ Here's some new flavor text for the library. Some of this is taken and adapted from the text in the book.
		- "While this library seems small at first glance, you quickly find that the ceiling is so high, you cannot spot its end. Six immense, black marble bookcases line the walls and stretch up into unending heights. Each shelf on each bookcase is filled with well preserved tomes and carefully stacked scrolls. The amount of knowledge stored within this single room seems unfathomable.
		- "Dozens of floating, copper lanterns light the room, hovering at various heights throughout the library. To the north, a black marble railing encloses an amber staircase that spirals gently down to a lower level. Embroidered rugs, chairs, and lit candelabras fill the center of the room."

### The Lanterns

* + The lanterns are similar to the ones found in the lecture hall. They've each had continual light cast on them, and have also been enchanted to float perpetually around the library. They stay in one general spot in the air, but can be pushed, at which point they'll float away and gently come to a stop.
	+ The light within the lanterns is magical and not actually fire. So they don't produce heat and can't set anything on fire.

### Ladders

* + Each bookshelf has a magical ladder mounted to it. These ladders are stagnant and don't roll from one end of the bookcase to another. The sheer height of the bookcases and the ladders would make that horrifically unstable. Instead, any mage who had to reach a book on a far shelf would usually use mage hand and/or floating disk to collect whatever tomes they needed.
	+ The ladders are all enchanted to act as sort of funny, fantasy elevators. If you stand on one of the rungs and say, "Up," all the rungs start going up the ladder, taking you with them. "Stop" and "Down" are the other two command words. So, essentially, you can ride any ladder as high as you need to on any bookshelf. The command words only work if the speaker is standing on the ladder's rungs.

### Contents of the Library

### Command Words

* + - I got rid of the command words for each book. Because I've increased the number of books insurmountably, it seems impossible for anyone to keep that many command words with them. While the blank pages are a neat trick for a few tomes, it's just unreasonable for thousands.

### Preserved Magically

* + - However, I did keep the fragility of all the books in tact. If any of them are taken from the library, they crumble into dust.

### Dimensions, Religion, History, and Everything Else

* + - Pretty much if it's rare or interesting knowledge, the library is bound to have it. Don't stop at the "vile, forbidden lore" the book suggests. Make this place the wikipedia of Ravenloft.
		- However, if a PC really wants to know something, they'll have to actually find the proper book or scroll first. Which, as you can imagine, could be quite difficult. Exethanter is the only one who has read literally every tome in the library and can navigate the place quickly and effectively.

### The Demiplanes of Dread

* + - I wrote a summary about the Demiplanes in my very first post in this series, regarding the Core and the misty borders. The library actually has maps of the Core, including the location of Barovia in the grander scale of things.
		- Each Demiplane's map is on a rather large scroll with irregular edges. The scrolls, if unfurled, can essentially be laid out like puzzle pieces, each demiplane fitting next to its neighbors.

## Exethanter's Background

Like Vilnius, I actually ended up reworking Exethanter almost completely. He has the potential to be such an interesting character, but the book simply gives us the bones of a NPC and little else. So, here's what I've come up with.

### One of the Old Mages

* + Instead of arriving at the Temple much later, Exethanter used to be one of the mages that helped construct the Amber Temple. He was a good and powerful wizard who dedicated his life to studying and sealing away various Dark Powers.
	+ After the Temple's construction and the gathering of the Dark Powers began, the mages slowly began to submit to the darkness they sought to imprison. Just like the book says, the mages turned on one another and all ended up dying. All, save Exethanter.
	+ Exethanter was actually one of the last of the mages to submit to the darkness. He tried desperately to save the other mages, but watched them all fall and die. And, as their numbers dwindled, Exethanter looked around him and feared that all the mages had accomplished would be lost. All their gathered knowledge would be wiped away and the strides they'd made against darkness forgotten. The thought terrified him. And that's how the Dark Powers ended up finding him.

### The Dark Power, Tenebrous

* + The one thing the book absolutely does give us is this: Exethanter made a deal with Tenebrous, a Dark Power, in order to become a lich. But how does that connection work? This is my take on it.

### Tenebrous' Lure

* + - In order to gain pawns and a possible champion, Tenebrous seeks out a very specific individual: Those obsessed with knowledge and terrified of death. Exethanter fit this bill perfectly. Latching onto the poor mage's desperation, Tenebrous promised Exethanter a way to preserve the library and the Temple as a whole.
		- Exethanter succumbed and became a lich.

### Tenebrous' Wants

* + - Like most Dark Powers, Tenebrous feeds off the souls of mortals, drinking life energy to increase his power. However, since he can't actually exist on the mortal plane for an extended period of time, he uses pawns and champions to collect those souls for him.
		- Ideally, he wants to find a strong, worthy champion so that he may claim a demiplane for his own, ripe with souls. Exethanter was incredibly worthy.

### Tenebrous and the Power of Names

* + - Each Dark Power has their own way of collecting power/souls. Vampyr feeds on the blood of the damned. Fekre, the souls of those who die from plague. Tenebrous takes souls by collecting mortals' true names. In a way, Tenebrous knowing someone's true, full name means that he owns you. And your soul.
		- This goes beyond knowing your name is Fiona Wachter, though. Most people have a collection of minor titles or nicknames that they don't even know about. Learning these extended nicknames is part of knowing someone's true name. So, in this example, the name would be something along the lines of, "Lady Fiona Wachter of Vallaki, beloved wife and mother, devout follower of daylight, and harbinger of prophesy."

### Tenebrous in other DnD

* + - I did a tiny bit of light research and saw somewhere that Tenebrous is somehow linked to Orcus? I'll admit right now that I totally derailed from that, as you just read. If this change to Tenebrous bothers you, remember that you certainly don't have to use what I've written here. If you do want to use it but still hate that it's not very Orcus, just change Tenebrous' name. Call him Thinathmel, Name Eater or something. ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

### How Exethanter Outsmarted Tenebrous

### As Champion

* + - As the chosen champion of Tenebrous, Exethanter carries around a thin, black ledger within which he is meant to collect names for Tenebrous to feed upon. With his magic, endless lifespan, and incredible knowledge, Exethanter should be able to meet people, get to know them and devise their true names and titles, which he then records in the journal for his Power. However, he no longer remembers the purpose of the journal, so it sits unused in his room.
		- Under normal circumstances, Exethanter would have been pretty much forced to write names. Tenebrous has Exethanter's name, after all, and can therefore control him.

### Memory Loss

* + - Exethanter figured out a loophole in his servitude to Tenebrous. If Exethanter didn't recognize his name as his own, then technically Tenebrous couldn't force him to do anything.
		- So Exethanter cast some magic on himself, effectively breaking his own mind. He shattered his own memory so that he quite literally can't recall his name.

### No Trace

* + - As an added safety measure, Exethanter took the time to get rid of any written trace of his name within the Amber Temple prior to zapping himself.
		- In other words, he no longer has a spell book and the password into his phylactery isn't his own name. In fact, the only one left who likely knows his name is Neferon. And Neferon is much too smart to share such a thing. Oh, and Tenebrous knows of course. But he's still locked inside his amber prison, unable to talk to any mortals and silently fuming about Exethanter.

## Role-Playing Exethanter

### First Meeting

* + If the PCs enter the Inner Sanctum through Exethanter's room or through the Library (upper or lower level), Exethanter is already in that room and greets them appropriately. Just place him wherever he's needed.
	+ If the PCs come across the vestiges before meeting Exethanter and they interact with the amber sarcophagi in any extreme way (connecting with a Dark Power, destroying a sarcophagus and freeing a Dark Power, ect.) Exethanter feels the disturbance and rushes to the appropriate location. When he rounds the corner, he shouts, "No! What have you done?!"
		- If your campaign turns this direction, it's possible that Exethanter might be openly hostile, especially if the PCs knew what they were doing and/or show signs of connection with a Dark Power. He might try to attack them to stop that darkness from escaping.
		- If the PCs show that they are contrite and simply didn't know any better, Exethanter can certainly be reasoned with and forgives their ignorance. He invites them to library to discuss their deeds so that they understand the dangers of the Dark Powers.
		- Lastly, because I've overall reworked Exethanter into being a friendly guy, I let him keep his entire spell list. If PCs get into a a fight with him, they're in for one hell of a battle.

### Mr. Forgetful

* + Unlike the Mad Mage, Exethanter is actually wholly sane. He's reasonable and can have a solid conversation without having extreme mood swings or delusions or anything like that. The only real problem he has is his memory.
	+ Exethanter does not remember his name. He has several other lapses in memory and information, but those can all come and go. For a moment, he'll remember all his friends among the old mages and then the next assume he never had mage friends. It comes and goes. His name is the only thing that stays actively gone.
		- Frequently during conversations with the PCs, he'll ask them if they know what his name is. Exethanter honestly has no idea why he can't remember his own name and why it isn't recorded anywhere. It's a puzzle he can't figure out. And each time he decides he's going to dedicate himself to its discovery, he forgets that dedication moments later.
		- Exethanter knows that he is a lich, but only because he's quite educated and can compare his symptoms to various notes. Technically, he's not 100% sure he's a lich, he doesn't know about his own phylactery, and he has no idea how he came to be in his present state. He doesn't remember Tenebrous at all, either.
	+ Exethanter effectively has some short term memory loss. He can remember just about every long term bit of information relatively well. However, new information is much harder for him to process. When dealing with the PCs, he'll forget their names every few minutes and need gentle reminders on why they're there in the first place.

### Exethanter Knows Everything Else Though

* + This is the party's opportunity to have just about any question answered. Exethanter has quite literally read every book in the library and has just about all the knowledge that we, the DMs, have. Anything short of present day politics (Vallaki stuff, for example) Exethanter knows. Sometimes, he'll need to ride the elevator ladders to get the right book and check himself. But yeah, you can basically just throw down the lore through this NPC, so long as your PCs ask the right questions.
	+ He's also pretty kind and personable, when you get right down to it. Exethanter should be super excited (in his own old man way) that he has visitors and dives headfirst in his efforts to answer the party's questions.
		- He'll even repeatedly remark that his friend, Neferon, doesn't visit nearly as much as he should. (This is false. Neferon visits often enough, but Exethanter simply can't remember).
		- Exethanter will also remark that he had another good friend for a time, but said friend fell into darkness. He was a man called, Strahd...

## Exethanter and Strahd

Exethanter is probably the only "good" NPC who knows exactly what happened to Strahd and has a history with vampire lord.

### Friends

* + When Strahd first came to Barovia, he inadvertently discovered the Amber Temple and its great library. He also met the curious undead and forgetful Exethanter. Neferon had not returned to Barovia at this point and so never met Strahd.
	+ Exethanter, lonely and eager for kind company, happily spoke to Strahd about anything he could. He answered questions, helped Strahd learn new magics, and became quick friends with the man.
		- Because neither Strahd nor Exethanter knew Exethanter's name, Strahd simply referred to him as, "my friend" or "old friend."
	+ Strahd, during this initial time, wasn't the evil dick he is in present day campaign. He was a conquering prince, traveling the land trying to keep his armies alive. Though he was brutal on the battlefield, he really was a decent person back then.
	+ Exethanter even hosted Strahd's plans for the building of Castle Ravenloft at the Temple.

### Strahd's Descent

* + Unfortunately, his friendship with Exethanter put Strahd in close proximity to the caged Dark Powers in the Temple. Vampyr reached out to him and offered him various powers; things that would help Strahd win on the battlefield and keep his men alive. Vampyr also continuously stroked Strahd's ego, further solidifying their connection.
	+ As time passed and Strahd conquered more and more, Strahd got pretty drunk on his power and started turning cruel. He grew distant from Exethanter and became rather sadistic, only visiting the Temple to speak to Vampyr instead of his undead friend.
	+ When the Tatyana and Sergei incident occurred, Strahd was already quite heavily addicted to his connection to Vampyr and long passed saving.
		- I like to imagine that Exethanter was actually at the wedding, under the guise of an Alter Self spell so as not to freak out the other attendees. He saw the horror wrought at the wedding and witnessed Vampyr's rise first hand.

### Exethanter's Guilt

* + Though Exethanter's memory comes and goes, his long-term friendship with Strahd makes those memories pretty solid.
	+ Exethanter blames himself for Strahd's fall, as Strahd would never have spent so much time in the Temple if it weren't for their friendship. And, through all the years of friendship, Exethanter was never aware enough to notice the Dark Power's hold over his friend. He feels incredibly guilty for not trying to save Strahd before it was too late.
		- It's important to note here that I'm not trying to pass off Strahd's villainy as Vampyr's doing. Vampyr simply propagated and nurtured Strahd's existing personality flaws. As Strahd grew older, his fear of aging and death would have grown without a Dark Power's influence. He would likely have become a bitter, horrible old man who hurt others in order to still feel powerful. Vampyr just gave him a lot more power to work with and the eternal life with which to use it.
	+ Exethanter is now overly cautious about the Dark Powers, preaching of their evilness to any who might listen to him. He willingly and openly tells the party about the Dark Powers and their trickery; how they steal souls and spread darkness. Exethanter does not want another to fall victim to a Dark Power's influence without every possible warning.
	+ Exethanter is also extremely resistant to ever leaving the Temple again. Though he's not technically bound to the location (except perhaps by the existence of his phylactery, but he doesn't know that), he considers himself the last remaining guardian of the Amber Temple and keeper of the library. He has absolutely no desire to leave his post to adventure with the PCs.
		- Though he would never admit to it, Exethanter also considers his stay in the Temple a self-made purgatory. Not only does he blame himself for Strahd's downfall, but he also has loads of survivor's guilt for being the only mage left alive here. His exile and loneliness are partially self-imposed and, in his mind, deserved.

# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Amber Temple Part 3 – The Amber Vestiges**

**Tiny Disclaimer**

I recently did a little research and discovered that the vestiges and the Dark Powers are technically not the same thing RAW. I fully and willingly admit that I had no idea. lolololol oopsie.

So, in an effort to be super clear, throughout my Fleshing Out guides, they are indeed one and the same for me. The vestiges are just trapped Dark Powers. Heck, it makes things a little bit simpler anyway, so it all works out I'd say. ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

## The Problem with the Vestiges

Let's face it, nobody really likes the way the amber vestiges are done as written. For a quick, simple mechanic, they work just fine. However, for a more in-depth, plot heavy campaign, they seem just a pinch contrived.

### Alignment Change

* + The alignment system in dnd has received quite a bit of different criticism over the years, both good and bad. I personally don't mind it, as it provides a nice, simplistic baseline from which you can quickly form a character's personality. This is especially helpful for DMs if we have to quickly deal with NPCs we weren't ready for.
	+ However, I absolutely hate the sudden and unprovoked changes in alignment we see so often in the CoS book, particularly with the vestiges. The fact that all you have to do is say yes to a gift and then suddenly lose control of your character as they turn evil is just wrong.
		- One, I don't know a single player who wouldn't be outright devastated to suddenly lose control of their character. In a way, it's almost worse than character death.
		- Two, if you do let them keep their character but tell them to act evil, not every player is going to be able to role-play that jump well. Most likely, they'll keep acting and playing the character the way they have been up until that point, perhaps with a few bouts of evil laughter. Suddenly shifting alignment can be hard for many players, meaning that it probably won't happen and it won't feel natural or fun.
	+ As a little extra note, I'd like to differentiate alignment change from personality change due to a spell. Yes, a character can act differently if they're under the influence of mind control or something. But when we see such spells, they never mention anything about alignment change and/or loosing control of a character. It's much easier to role-play mind control than sudden personality shifts, after all.
	+ As far as I'm concerned, alignment denotes personality. And there's almost no way that Cinderella can turn into the Evil Stepmother in a single instant. There should be time, plot, and character development that ignites an alignment change.
	+ To reiterate from my first Amber Temple post, this is also why I got rid of the evil ice staff by the barbarian's room.

### The Gifts

* + The gifts given by the vestiges aren't terribly consistent. Some of the given spells and abilities are outright devastating while others are meager at best, especially given the scope of the campaign. By the time players reach the Temple, they should be in the last legs of the plot. Some of the usefulness of the gifts end up null and void.
	+ Also, the time limits/limited number of uses on the gifts seem useless. It is really worth giving up your character to evil just for three uses of suggestion? No. No it's not.
	+ For powerful evil gods, many of these gifts end up feeling rather lackluster, tbh.

### The Dark Consequences

### Personality Flaws

* + - About half the dark gifts give out new personality flaws as consequences. Honestly, I don't see much difference between this and the alignment shift. If you're going to gain a new personality trait, it should be from natural gameplay and personality growth.
		- Don't get me wrong, most of these flaws are actually really interesting and could be really fun under different circumstances. But randomly forcing one on a player isn't something I'm comfortable with as a DM, pretty much for all the reasons I listed above.

### Cosmetic

* + - The other half of the dark gifts have purely cosmetic consequences. Now, some players might be absolutely horrified to suddenly find half their face sagging or their body breaking out into fur. But, most likely, some of the changes aren't going to bother most players. What's stopping them from charging around and accepting all the gifts? Sure, they'll be uglier, but what do they care?
		- Consequences should feel real, and to be blunt, many of these simply don't. It's not much different from getting a battle scar and moving on; more of an afterthought than an actual consequence.

## Updating the Dark Powers

I recently wrote up a full [post on the Dark Powers](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9zswmf/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_running_the_dark/) with a better way to run them in your game. For all the details and goodies, I suggest you go check that out.

In summary, I totally got rid of the gift/consequence system outlined in the book and replaced it with a long term corruption system, in which customized Dark Powers single out PCs and try to mold them into their champions. The Dark Powers act more like distant NPCs, offering their appropriate PC different themed boons for working together. Eventually, the PC might become addicted to their new powers and become unwilling to part with them, even when the Dark Power starts doing bad stuff through their connection.

After running this method in my game, I've found that this is a much better way to show a PC's moral decline over time. It's slow and ever building, allowing the players to change their PC's personalities naturally, instead of the sudden, "Here's your new flaw!" method.

## History with the Temple

### Planes

* + Firstly, the tendrils trapped within the amber sarcophagi aren't dead, as the book says. They are very alive, very real Dark Powers. They're just trapped is all.
	+ As I mention in my Dark Powers post, the Dark Powers quite literally can't live on the mortal plane. They can enter into our world for a short time (usually no more than an hour or two), but always must return to the space between dimensions. If they spend too long on the mortal plane, they are bungied back into the void automatically. They're immoral gods, so too much plane exposure will hardly kill them.
		- When they materialize in our world, they usually take on a distinct, material form. Some forms are monstrous, some humanoid. Some Dark Powers can even alter their mortal appearance to suit different situations.
		- When they exist in the space between dimensions, they are enormous, black shadows which float through the void.
	+ Conversely, no mortal can exist within the void for more than a couple hours either. However, because we're not god beings, staying too long will undoubtedly kill us instead of flinging us back to a mortal dimension.
	+ **The Mists**
		- Any time this void is mentioned in the campaign, whether in the Amber Temple's books or through Exethanter or otherwise, it's usually referred to as "The Mists between worlds." Because mortals can't comprehend or exist within this interdimentional void, we simply perceive it as mist.
		- The misty borders that surround Barovia are in fact a direct pathway into the void where the Dark Powers live, but because we can't live there, folk who wonder into the mist either die or, much less often, immediately pop up in another dimension. But yeah, usually they die. XD
		- That's why Strahd has control over the mists in the first place. He has a direct connection to Vampyr, a Dark Power that can exist in the mists.

### What the Mages Did

* + The great circle of mages who built the Amber Temple constructed the place with two goals in mind: collect knowledge and imprison the Dark Powers. And, to an extent, they largely succeeded. They spent a great many decades, if not longer, studying the mists and the gods that lived within.

### Fighting and Trapping

* + - It didn't take long for the mages to realize that killing the Dark Powers was nearly impossible, though they did manage to outright destroy a handful of them. However, the cost was immeasurable and often took the lives of many of the mages involved in the fight. Battling a god is no trite matter.
		- Instead, the mages devised a way to trap the gods on the mortal plane by freezing their essence in solid amber. They created two rituals: one that could forcefully summon a Dark Power to the mortal realm and one that would summon the amber to trap it there.
		- Once a Dark Power is encased in their amber prison, they revert from their material form into a lesser version of their shadow form, appearing as the pitch black smoke trapped within each sarcophagus.

### Constructing the Temple

* + - The Mages had already largely constructed the Temple before they figured out how to trap the Dark Powers. They built is as a remote base of operations, so that any of their evil based studies were far away from innocent civilians. In turn, they constructed the library to collect all the knowledge they could.
		- Once they figured out that trapping gods was much more effective than killing them, they started constructing and filling the various vaults throughout the Temple's lower level.

## The Amber Sarcophagi

So, with all those changes to the Dark Powers, where does that leave the vestiges? What do we do with them and how should we treat them?

### Trapped

* + When a Dark Power is trapped within an amber slab, they are rendered immobile. While they can reach out telepathically to sympathetic souls (potential pawns/champions), they can't actually mess with souls or the mortal realm.
		- This means that they can't fish for souls to eat. Literally all the Powers currently trapped within the Temple are outright *starving*. They haven't fed on a single soul in thousands of years.
	+ *The only way* for them to interact with the mortal realm beyond speech is through a mortal conduit; a champion. If a PC hosts and fosters a relationship with a trapped Dark Power, they become that conduit, enabling the Power to push their influence onto the world. Without a willing conduit, the Dark Power is powerless.
	+ So, I'm sure you can imagine how much the trapped Powers in the Temple want a champion.

### Chosen Sarcophagi

* + Through the whole Temple, the PCs should only ever need to interact with a few of the amber sarcophagi.
		- Vilnius' amber slab containing Fekre during his quest line, for instance.
		- If a PC has a connection to a Dark Power, they might need to confront that Power in their sarcophagus.

### Minor Interactions

* + The rest of the sarcophagi should all be decorative, there for the players to look at but not really do anything with.
	+ If players do come in contact with the various sarcophagi, you may have a mini interaction between them and that Dark Power. This only happens if they actually touch a sarcophagus though. Describe it as a cloying darkness which they can feel inching into their minds, clawing through their thoughts as if in search.
		- *Do not* go through the trouble of making a full conversation happen though. Developing so many evil NPCs will open more doors than your party will know what to do with. They have enough plot hooks at this point. Plus, they should be on their endgame route to killing Strahd. Giving them a plethora of different dark voices to talk to will only convolute the plot.
	+ If you'd like, interacting with a sarcophagus might have some sort of light dressing to make the encounter more spooky. If a player touches Delban's sarcophagus (Star of Ice and Hate), they pull their hand away and find themselves shivering with abrupt cold. If they come in contact with Norganas, Finger of Oblivion, they turn and for a brief few seconds view the rest of the party as rotting corpses before their vision returns to normal. These should all be extremely temporary but indicative effects of the dormant evil.

### Late Game Dark Power Connections

* + I know what you're thinking. If these Powers are starving for souls and suddenly come in close contact with the PCs, why wouldn't they reach out? They're desperate after all. Well...

### Making Friends

* + - Remember, a Dark Power can't actually connect with a mortal if they're not of the right mindset. A greed based Dark Power can't really do anything with a PC who isn't remotely greedy for instance. Just like making friends, the PC and the Dark Power must have some baseline with which to foster a relationship.
		- In my expansion on the Dark Powers, I recommend that you develop a Dark Power for each of your PCs. It's sort of like making an NPC that you know each PC will fall for. So you've likely already got the perfect connections set up. Whether or not your PCs have fostered those connections over the campaign is up to them, of course. But no matter what, none of these trapped Powers should have a chance at a great connection to the PCs at this point.
		- On that note, if a PC already has a connection with one Dark Power, they can't be claimed by a second one. So there's no reason a new Dark Power would try to chat with a soul that is already possessed.

### Chosen Dark Power

* + - But what if one of the sarcophagi does hold a PC's chosen Dark Power; the one you've set up from the beginning of the game? They've just somehow avoided making contact throughout the whole campaign thus far.
		- If this is the case, I honestly still wouldn't start a Dark Power relationship at this point in the campaign. As I keep saying, the Amber Temple is a late game dungeon on the way to the finale. There's frankly not enough time left in the game for a Dark Power connection to hold any significant umph.

### Bad Plot

* + - And lastly, it really is just too much plot. You don't want to open a whole bunch of new random NPCs to your players. What if your players latch onto one of the voices and try to go on a whole side quest involving that Dark Power? Where did the Power come from? What do they want? How can the PCs do something about it?
		- Are you, the DM, prepared for that side questing? If not, just have that little spooky encounter and then let the players continue on their path to the library. You know, the actual goal of the Temple. XD

### Bad Juju

* + Detect Magic, Divine Sense, and any similar magic is awesome when it comes to the vestiges. Most of those traits have enough range that they're able to sense stuff through the thick floors of the Temple, meaning that players standing above a vault can sense the evil beneath their feet.
	+ Should a player use one of these abilities while in the Temple, really layer on how much pure darkness and evil they can feel radiating from the amber slabs. It really freaked out the magic user in my party and gave the various sarcophagi an extra layer of spooky.

### Spread Them Out

* + Let's say you end up with three main amber slabs to deal with in your plot: Vilnius' and two PCs'. You know that your players are going to have interact with three sarcophagi and go to plan accordingly.
	+ I would *highly* recommend that you spread these out. It doesn't matter if the book says all three slabs are in the same corner of the Temple. Ignore that and put each one in a different vault room, so they each feel distinct and force the party to move around.

### Movement

* + The more connected a Dark Power is with the mortal realm (through a chosen pawn and/or champion) the more their form materializes within their amber sarcophagus. The dark wisp actually moves within the amber and starts to take a vague form.
		- For instance, should Vilnius manage to get close to Fekre's sarcophagus, the dark shadow within actually has the vague form of a woman with elongated, alien proportions. If the amulet is brought within range, the shadow quivers and twitches unnaturally.
		- The same occurs to various degrees if a PC with a connection to a trapped Dark Power approaches the prison. Depending on the level of the connection, the trapped vestige will have either a more or less concrete form.

## The Amber Vault Beneath the Library

Because it no longer matters which Dark Powers are where or how many there are, I changed this lower level of the library into a workshop of sorts, where the mages used to gather to further develop their entrapment spells. The three amber slabs in this room are actually empty prototypes.

Before all my changes to the Dark Powers, the book was written so that this room held the most powerful vestiges. But after my rewrites, no Dark Power is really scarier than another. They're all terrifying. So, it's fine to move them to whatever sarcophagus/vault you want.

If players are looking for a way to trap a dark power and somehow lose track of Exethanter, they can find all the information they need readily available here.

## Vampyr, the One that Got Away

When I first started writing this series, I wrote a few times that Vampyr was indeed trapped within the Amber Temple. Since further developing the story and various locations, I changed this so that Vampyr and Strahd are both in Castle Ravenloft for the end game encounter.

### The Broken Sarcophagus

* + Since no Dark Power is technically more or less powerful than another with these changes, moving Vampyr to a different vault really makes no difference. So, I moved him to the broken sarcophagus in X33d.
	+ After the failed wedding between Sergei and Tatyana, Strahd's actions fully cemented his bond with Vampyr. Vampyr, fully empowered from that bond, was able to break free from his confinement and return to the mists.
	+ Now, Vampyr swims through the mists/void that surrounds Barovia and watches his realm like the vast evil god he is, feasting on the souls his champion provides him. Vampyr has lived fat and happy for over seven centuries now.

### Vampyr in the Endgame

* + Yet again, I actually made Vampyr the *final* final boss. So long as Strahd has a connection to Vampyr, Strahd can't die. Players can somehow break that connection or supplant Strahd, but Vampyr would still be around. And so would the mists. Barovia would still be an isolated demiplane.

### The Good and the Bad

* + - The main reason I developed Vampyr so much is because, plot wise, Strahd himself didn't quite feel like enough to me. His name is on the cover of the book and therefore sets him up from session 0 as the biggest, baddest thing there is. And that's totally awesome at first glance. But, after the months roll by playing the campaign, hearing his name all the time can get just the tiniest bit redundant. I really wanted the very end of the campaign to have one final, surprising umph for my players. And Vampyr is my answer to that.
		- On the other hand, you might feel like this takes away too much of the spotlight from Strahd. Strahd is supposed to be this ever present and ever malevolent force throughout the campaign. He's also a uniquely humanoid enemy which we don't see in the endgame of very many campaigns. If you don't play things right, Curse of Strahd could lose its Strahdness. And nobody wants that.
		- Lastly, the success of either ending will depend on how well you run the rest of the campaign. Can you bring up Strahd just the right amount so that your players don't forget him but also don't tire of him? Can you nicely distribute information of Vampyr, so that his name doesn't even come up until the Amber Temple and therefore keep the element of surprise?
	+ In the end, I think it's a matter of personal preference; of creating a campaign that's perfect for both you and your players. Have you read all my stuff on the Dark Powers and Vampyr and really liked it? Then go for it. If you don't like it, then set it aside. So long as our players have fun and end the campaign feeling like heroes, we've done a damn good job. ;)

### In that spirit, I've created a lesser and greater Vampyr encounter to go with Strahd's final showdown. You can use either, depending on how much you want to insert Vampyr into your campaign.

### Vampyr as a Lesser Entity in the Finale

* + - In the lesser encounter, players fight Strahd throughout Ravenloft. They'll throw down and travel through the various areas of the castle until Strahd is finally defeated. Once Strahd is down, he turns into mist and will automatically return to his coffin where he'll remain unconscious and paralyzed until the following dusk.
		- While he's vulnerable in his coffin, the players have the opportunity to quickly perform a ritual over Strahd which forcefully summons a physical manifestation of the bond between Strahd and Vampyr. The bond appears as a solid, but misty looking tether. Players can then attack the tether and sever it.
		- The shock of the break will force Strahd into wakefulness and he'll scream and die (for real and permanently this time) in front of the players. The mist from the broken tether will momentarily take on the form of a demonic visage (Vampyr's face), growling in rage. The face then disappears and Barovia is free from the mists.

### Vampyr as a Greater Entity in the Finale

* + - If you want to really play up Vampyr as a secondary boss battle, the players still have a show down with Strahd in Ravenloft. Once Strahd is defeated and returns to his coffin, the players have the opportunity to cast that same ritual. Only in this version, it doesn't summon a tether. It summons Vampyr himself.
		- Players then have a boss battle with a Dark Power in which one of two things can happen: they either fight the whole fight and kill Vampyr OR they perform a secondary ritual which recaptures Vampyr in an amber block.
		- Either way, Strahd is shocked into a human form where he promptly withers and dies. And Barovia is freed from the mists!

### The Bad Ending

* + - As a reminder to my Dark Power write ups and to my very first post, if any PC has a high tiered connection to another Dark Power, Barovia won't be freed after either of these two endings. Instead, the PC will replace Strahd as champion of Barovia and their personal Dark Power will replace Vampyr as the reigning god.

### The Rituals

* + Both endings obviously involve a ritual. Two if the players want to recapture Vampyr in amber. These rituals can be found and learned in the lower vault beneath the library in the Amber Temple (the one I mentioned before).

### The Summoning Ritual

* + - The summoning ritual is the one that summons either the bond or Vampyr to the players for them to deal with. It requires a minimum of three casters (players or NPCs). For the sake of ease, the casters don't have to be magic users, especially if you've got a small party. If you happen to be running CoS with a party that does have 3 magic classes, then by all means, make those PCs perform the ritual.
		- As a ritual, the casters must proceed with the spell for 10 uninterrupted minutes. That's important. If you've got martial PCs, they may have to protect the casters from other hostiles in Ravenloft. The 10 minute rule may also encourage your players to prepare for the summoning, making traps and barricades and such. They have until Strahd wakes to perform the ritual after all.

### The Amber Ritual

* + - If you're going with the greater Vampyr ending, in which the boss fight is more extreme, a secondary ritual must be performed to capture the Dark Power in amber.
		- This ritual requires one caster that must be a magic user. The caster must succeed on 3 consecutive magic checks in their spell casting ability, DC 16. So, either intelligence, wisdom, or charisma checks for three turns in a row. And this will likely be happening while the in combat with Vampyr. it's not supposed to be easy, lol. If you feel like this is too much for your players or if you don't want to leave out a player from battle for 3 plus rounds, you can make the casting of this ritual take bonus actions instead of actions.
		- Secondly, the caster must be able to see Vampyr for each roll. They can't be in a different room or casting blindly in darkness. They've got to see the beast to imprison it.
		- And lastly, the ritual requires a chip of amber as a component.
	+ The players can learn and record all these details in the amber vault. Exethanter is more than happy to help them learn the information.

## Strahd and Rahadin

I changed things so that Strahd hasn't visited the Amber Temple at all since he released Vampyr over 700 years ago. Really, he's had no need to visit and somehow, I felt like his presence would mess with the Temple's overall theme of isolation. I really wanted the Temple to feel far away from the rest of Barovia; a location frozen in time and forgotten. This is also directly why I got rid of the vampire spawn beneath the library in order to preserve the area as a sanctuary of knowledge.

I also completely got rid of the Rahadin encounter at the end of this chapter. Especially as written, Rahadin's encounter is a weird non-starter. The book even says that Rahadin doesn't do anything with the players even if he sees them. So why have the encounter in the first place? Also, he too messes with the Temple's sense of isolation. Like Strahd, I pulled Rahadin away from the Amber Temple.

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With that note, I think I'm finally finished with the Amber Temple. Huzzah! Also, 'sarcophagus' is an exhausting word to write over and over again. XD

- Mandy