# Vallaki NPCs I - Establishing Politics, The Baron and Lady Wachter

Vallaki is a political powder keg with multiple fuses all burning at the same time. And when your players get there, those fuses are almost spent. With all the different side plots going down in Vallaki, the likelihood of things going well while your party is there is quite slim. Most likely, they'll end up leaving Vallaki worse than they found it.

Now, this isn't a bad thing. You can pull some super fun story out of disaster and ruin, so don't be afraid to let Vallaki burn to the ground. This is the town that's going to screw with your players the most, as they'll find there's little, they can do during the turmoil but buckle their seatbelts and hope they don't die in the car crash.

Before actually giving you the sequence of events that can happen when your players get to Vallaki, I want to share my extended backgrounds on the town and the important NPCs so you have a better grasp on what you're dealing with.

## Author's Note! Please Read!

Before we get started, I want to put forth a general preemptive note on all the NPCs that I'm detailing from here on out, in Vallaki or otherwise. In general, I'm a pretty big fan of psychology. I love knowing what makes people tick and how the events of our lives define who we are as people.

I've gone through great efforts to figure out appropriate backgrounds for the vast majority of the NPCs in Curse of Strahd. A lot of these backgrounds may paint certain NPCs in a far more positive light than the campaign book. However, I want to make it very clear that even though I aim to explain the behavior of certain evil NPCs, their childhoods do not excuse their actions. Just because a rapist is also a victim of rape does not excuse the fact that they committed rape.

After reading many of my write ups, you may end up feeling sorry for people like Lady Wachter and Vargas Vallakovich. You might even relate to them on a certain level. Good. That means you'll be better equipped to role-play them in your game for your players. But always remember that these characters are in fact doing terrible things. They may try to justify their actions in character, but their actions should not be excused.

## Vallaki: A Police State

* Vallaki is a very oppressed place to live. The generalized fear of Strahd made people paranoid and long ago they elected the Vallakoviches to keep them safe. The Vallakovich family is an old one and in general, from Burgomaster to Burgomaster, they believe that strict laws are required to keep Vallaki safe from the vampire on high. The level of severity of these rules has varied from ruler to ruler, but there are always some hardcore guidelines the inhabitants of Vallaki have to follow.
  + With Vargas Vallakovich in charge, Vallaki has the following laws:
    - No one shall speak Strahd's name out loud or carry written documents with his name on them. Vargas heartily believes that to speak of the devil is to summon the devil. So, all of Vallaki has a sort of Voldemort thing going on, referring to Strahd as simply, "The Devil" or "You-Know-Who." (Original, I know, but it works too well during role-playing.)
    - Similarly, no one shall speak poorly of the Baron or the festivals nor hold any documents that present either in an ill light. Morale means everything here. Trying to break the spirits of your fellow Vallakians is criminal!
    - Everyone shall take part in preparing the festivals. The Vallakians treat this sort of like Jury Duty. Helping prepare for and clean up after a festival each week is a randomly chosen civic duty performed by the general public.
    - Everyone shall attend the festivals. Every festival, guards go door to door and patrol the streets to make sure no one is missing out. Of course, they can't actually check everywhere, so hiding isn't impossible. But getting caught avoiding a festival is grounds for a steep punishment.
    - Normal town laws still apply too. Stealing and assault and murder are punishable crimes. Doing any of these to a guard or the Baron's family automatically moves the punishment up a notch. For instance, murdering another civilian will likely get your lifetime incarceration. Murdering a guard, however, is grounds for execution (PCs be warned).
  + Anyone who breaks these laws are subject to any of the following, depending on the severity of their crime:
    - Time in the stocks ranging from anywhere between a day to a few weeks, depending on the severity of the crime.
    - Seizure of assets. If direct punishment seems insufficient, the Baron and his men have the right to collect a payment for their crimes. This can be something as small as a fine (which in and of itself is never small) to the complete seizure of the criminal's home, business, and other assets, thus leaving the offender completely destitute.
    - Imprisonment at Vallaki's Reformation House until the criminal is purged of their sin. This is basically a cross between a jail and a psych ward without any of the helpful parts. People are taken to this building and are low key tortured until they are pretty much brainwashed.
    - Personal Reformation conducted by the Baron himself. Every week or so, the Baron randomly chooses a dissenter and takes them to his mansion for some more severe and hands-on torture.
    - Public execution by hanging. This doesn't actually happen very often and is only reserved for the most severe dissenters who are both conspirators and repeat offenders. Someone being put to death in Vallaki is a bit of a novelty and only happens a few times a year.

### Vallaki's Last Burgomaster, Vargon Vallakovich

* + Believe it or not, the last Burgomaster of Vallaki was way worse that Vargas. Vargas' father was a dour, cruel man who ran Vallaki with an iron fist.
  + Vargon Vallakovich didn't have his son's absurd festivals, but he did have many extra laws to make up for them.
    - During his time, Vallaki was on a full town curfew from dusk till dawn. No one was allowed outside their homes when the sun was down.
    - Public torture was commonplace for any criminal activity, including beatings and whippings. And public execution happened more often than not.
    - Children who showed signs of ill temper were taken from their families and redesigned at Vargon's training camp, where they grew up to be members of the town guard and had no minds of their own.
  + And then Vargon Died
    - Vargon actually died quite young for a wealthy man in as civilized a town as Vallaki. He was only in his late forties when fever took him. He passed when Vargas was barely twenty.
    - Though Vargon's cause of death is officially illness, there were many suspicious circumstances surrounding his passing. However, with the sorry state of Vallaki, nobody really complained and those suspicions were swept under the rug in favor of paying attention to the new Burgomaster, the idealistic Vargas Vallakovich.

## Baron Vargas Vallakovich, Burgomaster of Vallaki

Vargas Vallakovich is a man completely and utterly motivated by fear. Fear drives him and is the source behind all of his delusions. He's not a great ruler and he is most certainly not a reasonable man.

### An Abusive Childhood

* + Unfortunately, Vargas is a victim of child abuse. Like, hard core, gloves off, call Special Victims Unit child abuse. His father was a harsh ruler who took pleasure in running Vallaki like a dictatorship. Vargon Vallakovich brought his harsh ways home with him every night and often took out his frustrations on his family.
  + Vargas' mother often took the brunt of her husband's anger, and Vargas grew up helplessly watching, wishing he could save his mother but knowing he was too weak to actually do anything. He watched his mother suffer a string of miscarriages due to the beatings, leaving Vargas an only child.
  + Because of the abuse, Vargas grew up in a constant state of fear. He was always extraordinarily careful about his actions and his words, lest he unintentionally anger his father.

### Strahd the Boogeyman

* + As he grew up, Vargas heard one name all too often. His father was trying to rid Vallaki of the Devil Strahd. That random villager deserved to die because they were in alliance with the Devil Strahd. Your father must be strict, Vargas, to protect us all from the Devil Strahd.
  + Unfortunately, this allowed Vargas' young mind to pass off his father's terrible actions and blame them on someone else. Vargas grew up under the impression that his father's cruelty was not his father's fault, but the fault of Strahd.
  + As he grew, this impression grew into a full-blown delusion. As an adult, Vargas actively believes that all evil in the world can be traced back to Strahd. All sadness, all anger, all terrible happenstances, they're all directly Strahd's fault in Vargas' mind.

### Murdering Vargon

* + As Vargas' delusions grew, he began to see the evil in his father. Vargas had always known his father was cruel and unreasonable, but over time he began to associate those personality traits with Strahd. And Strahd must be destroyed.
  + When Vargas was twenty, his father had another terrible night. Vargas decided enough was enough. He couldn't let the devil possess his father any longer. Vargas put a sleeping drought in his father's drink that night and then smothered the man in his sleep.
  + This murder had nothing to do with political gain or the seizing of power. It also had nothing to do with revenge or self-defense. Murdering his father was an entirely premeditated attempt to get rid of Strahd's possession in their household. That's all. To Vargas, this was no different than putting a villager to death in the town square for talking too openly about Strahd.

### Like Father, Like Son

* + Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that abuse breeds abuse. In real life, those who were victims in childhood often become abusers in adulthood if they don't get help. Vargas is one of those people.
  + While Vargas doesn't physically abuse his family, he does have anger and control issues. He wants Vallaki run in a very specific way, and when that doesn't happen, he tends to panic and lash out.
  + Vargas isn't as blatant in his violence as his father was, limiting his outbursts towards those who "deserve" it. Every week or so, he randomly selects a dissenter from the stocks and hold them in his house. For the next week or two, he takes out all his frustrations on this individual alone, letting his anger run wild.
  + This is far from a moral practice and is really really not okay. But in Vargas' mind, at least he's not draining these untoward feelings at the innocent.
  + According to Vargas' own delusions, feelings like panic and anger are signs of Strahd. Vargas does his very best to hide these feelings when they stir within him and walks around with a constant, almost comically strained smile.
  + This is where Vargas gets all his nervous ticks and catch phrases. People are dying? "Don't worry, all will be well!" You're feeling scared? "Smile! We must always smile to banish the darkness!"
  + This is also what inspired the festivals. The few happy memories that Vargas has from his childhood are of the festivals that were held in town, like Yuletide and Spring Coming. In an effort to replicate those good feelings year-round, there's now a festival every week.

### The Baron's Family

* + ***Lydia***
    - Vargas and his wife, Lydia came together under an arranged marriage. Lydia had a very complacent nature, which appealed to the late Burgomaster as a good match for his son. The two were married young, a little over a year before Vargon's murder.
    - Lydia is a god fearing (I mean Morning Lord fearing) woman. She's gentle and reserved for all accounts, but also actively stops herself from having "bad thoughts." If she sees something she knows is wrong, she actively suppresses that knowledge and goes into complete denial.
    - Lydia has only the most superficial likes and dislikes. She doesn't involve herself in more complicated matters because of the seriousness involved in them, which she wants nothing to do with.
    - Lydia is fully aware that her husband actively holds villager’s prisoner and beats them when he's feeling down. But she's also in complete denial about it. It's almost like her brain just short circuits whenever she sees or hears something distressing. Underneath all that denial, Lydia is actually afraid of her husband and is just glad he doesn't aim his anger as her.
  + ***Victor***
    - Victor Vallakovich, Vargas' fifteen-year-old son, is a pretentious little ass with a lot of angst and issues. For a positively superb way on running Victor, refer to [this post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8eex9m/alternate_very_negative_take_on_victor_vallakovich/).
    - Otherwise, know that Victor has grown up pretty much completely neglected by his parents. His mother refuses to talk about anything other than crafts and the weather, which frustrates him to no end. Victor considers his mother a horrible simpleton that he just wishes would wake up.
    - Vargas has also completely avoided his son over the years. Whenever Vargas looks at Victor, he sees a reflection of him and his father. Vargas is downright terrified that he might hurt his son the way his father hurt him, and so actively avoids any relationship at all with Victor.
    - As a little boy, Victor felt quite isolated in the world. His parents ignored him and Vallaki itself was very messed up and no one was ever going to do anything about it. As he reached adolescence, that loneliness turned into resentment and gave him a very angry, elitist attitude towards the world.

## Lady Fiona Wachter

Lady Wachter has a special place in my heart. When I first read her bit in the printed material, she was just another meh political cultist. But, as I adapted her for my campaign and role-played her with my players, she developed a much more extensive personality. She's a villain, yes, but one I actually like because she isn't outwardly evil. Here's how I've developed and changed Lady Wachter as a character.

### Childhood

* + Fiona grew up in the politically tumultuous Vallaki. The prior Burgomaster, Vargas' father, wasn't a great leader. He ruled Vallaki like a police state, with early curfews and strict rules on propaganda. Vallaki was the kind of town where people got black-bagged in the night for even talking about Strahd. Public hangings were quite regular during the time.
  + When the former Burgomaster died and left Vargas in charge, the town rejoiced. Vargas was known as a young idealistic man that always smiled when you spoke to him. However, after only a few years into his rule, Vallaki found out he was little better than his father. He just wore a happier face when he made people disappear. At the very least, the public hangings stopped, replaced with the stocks and plaster donkey heads.
  + Fiona hated the rulers of Vallaki and could never quite understand how such horror managed to take over the town. Compared to the violence and fear she saw every single day of her childhood, a distant vampire lord hardly seemed like a threat. And yet the general public's fear of that same vampire lord allowed people like Vargas and his father to abuse their people. Even her own parents had come to accept and even advocate this way of life.

### Meeting Strahd

* + When Fiona was fifteen, she convinced her parents to let her take a trip to the Village of Barovia to see if they could make some political connections. However, she took a little detour to Castle Ravenloft to meet the infamous devil that everyone was so afraid of.
  + Strahd didn't have a real interest in Fiona, but acted as a gentlemanly host during her visit. Fiona was never the most beautiful of girls, but she'd sharpened her mind and charismatic skills pretty well for her young age.
  + While Strahd never had a romantic interest in her, he saw her capability and potential and offered Fiona a place among his consorts as a vampire. Fiona politely declined and said that she could more adequately serve him as she was and perhaps provide him with information on Vallaki. Strahd happily agreed to the alliance. In return for her service, Strahd gifted Fiona with a few tomes on magic as well an Imp to act as her familiar so that she'd "never truly be alone in this world."
  + Thus, Fiona's servitude to Strahd began.

### The Prophesy

* + This is the event that really turned Fiona and molded who she is as a person.
  + On her way back to Vallaki, Fiona made yet another stop at the Tser Pool encampment to meet the famous Madam Eva. The Vistani welcomed Fiona, as they always do to travelers, and Madam Eva gladly read her fortune.
  + ***Madam Eva saw the following in Fiona's future:***
    - First, there would be the coming of an outsider to Vallaki, foreign to this land. The coming of this outsider would mark the beginning of a new age in Vallaki.
    - The coming of the outsider would also bring a great ruin. A purge on the town like none other.
    - But when the ruin was done, the blood of the outsider would shed sunlight on Vallaki yet again.
  + In general, prophesies can be interpreted in many different ways. There's no absolute way to fulfill one. And that's the general trouble with fortune telling. However, Fiona latched onto this fortune and it became her obsession.
  + I designed this prophesy to fit very well into the campaign with your PCs.
    - As I mentioned in the intro, when your players arrive at this town, it's already set to explode. Most likely, one of your PCs is "the outsider." And when shit hits the fan in Vallaki (which doesn't necessarily have to be your party's fault), it will be the "ruin".
    - The fulfillment of the 3rd part is completely up to you and actually might change depending on what your players do. You should adapt this prophesy to meet your PCs, not force them into meeting the prophesy. That way, it feels very natural and foretold. I'll do more of a write up about some possibilities in a later post.

## Fiona's Cult

The prophesy has defined Fiona and literally everything she does. It's what she teaches her followers and what she preaches to any that might listen. As sort of a real-world metaphor, she believes herself to be the prophet that tells of the coming of a biblical messiah.

### The Problem with Cults in Fiction

* + Fictional cults are overly simple. The book tells us that all Fiona has to do is use her imp to perform a cheap magic trick and her followers fall all over themselves in worship. No. That's not how cults work. What's more, she's preaching devil worship? Why? How does that inspire educated Vallakian nobles into following her?
  + Cults in the real-world gain ground because they are usually based in some kind of relatable belief. Everybody wants salvation. Everybody wants to be happy. Everybody wants to know that when they die, thing's will be okay. If a cult manages to explain any of these things or offers a way to guarantee happiness, people will listen.
  + If you go back far enough, most religions started off as primitive cults. Groups of people gathering in secret to talk about how a god will punish the wicked and rescue the good? That sins can be forgiven and that death isn't the end? Those are some really nice beliefs that a lot of people can get behind. And all those things can be yours so long as you study the scriptures and practice the ceremonies. Cults aren't so different.

### What Fiona Believes

* + Fiona knows in the depths of her soul that Vallaki will be rescued from the darkness and corruption that has overtaken it. She preaches that the coming of the outsider will purge the wicked from Vallaki and that afterwards sunlight will shine on them.
  + So not only is Fiona preaching that the corrupted Burgomaster is going to be overthrown, she's also telling these people, Barovians for goodness’ sake, that they're going to see sunlight! That's an amazing thing and something definitely worth following.
  + Because of the whole "purge" thing, Fiona actively condones putting "the wicked" to death. She believes that the death of unclean souls’ act as sacrifices for her prophecy's fulfillment. Every so often, a guard or avid Vargas supporter might go missing because Lady Wachter's cult abducted them to be sacrificed. It's bloody and awful and Fiona really hates having to kill anyone, but she and her cult do it for the sake of sunlight. To them, that's an entirely worthy reason to murder people.

### It's Not a Cult, We Swear!

* + As a side note, Lady Wachter and her followers do not consider themselves cultists or part of a cult. They don't use names or titles, simply saying that they follow Lady Wachter and believe as she does. And Lady Wachter refers to all her cultists simply as her "followers".
  + But yeah, jk, it's totally a cult.

## Fiona Wachter's Personality

### A Queen-Like Presence

* + In my game, I've played Fiona in a very specific way. She never raises her voice and always speaks in a calm, unhurried manner. Her voice is both comforting and commanding, like that of a stern mother figure. When someone is speaking to her, she actively and ardently listens, so that whomever has her attention usually ends up feeling very important. Fiona's strongest trait is her charisma, and she sure as hell knows how to use it.
  + However, Fiona is not afraid of doing bad things to get stuff done. According to her own beliefs, there must first be a purge before paradise. Sometimes, sacrifices must be made. And to Fiona, the ends always justify the means.
  + I sort of imagine her as a more religious-ish version of Cersei Lannister from Game of Thrones. You know, minus all the incest and child adoration. Fiona is calm and calculated and knows how to manipulate people. But her main goals are always clear and in the forefront of all her actions.

### Family

* + Fiona's late husband, Nikolai, was her world. He was one of the first people to hear her beliefs and then support them. They met when Fiona was sixteen and Nikolai nineteen. Nikolai was no more than a banker's apprentice, but his willingness to actually listen to Fiona, who felt so alone in Vallaki, won her heart.
  + The two fell madly in love, much to the chagrin of Fiona's parents. Fiona threatened to elope if they didn't let them marry, and rather than go through that scandal, her parents allowed it. The only condition was that Nikolai take the Wachter name, instead of Fiona joining his household. And so they were married.
  + Fiona's three children, Nikolai II, Karl, and Stella, are great loves to her. Fiona's actually been a pretty decent mother to them. There's been no abuse or neglect, as we see so often in CoS, and the three have grown into capable young people.
    - I treat Nikolai II and Karl kind of like college frat boys. They're heirs to an important line and are therefore doing everything in their power to avoid that important future. They drink. They party. They sleep around. And they pull pranks on the town when they can get away with it. But while they may be incredibly irresponsible, they also have pretty solid moral centers. They'll never pull any pranks that'll outright hurt anyone. And if they find out about their mother's sacrificial cult practices (which Fiona goes to great length to keep secret from them) or the fact that she's kept their father's dead body in the master bedroom, they'll be super upset. Overall, they're good kids who are enjoying the spoils of youth.
    - Stella, before [her mental shutdown at the hands of Victor Vallakovich](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8eex9m/alternate_very_negative_take_on_victor_vallakovich/), was sweet enough to give you a cavity. She was patient, mannered, and eager to please those around her, which is partly why she fell so easily to Victor's manipulations. Stella's brothers could sometimes convince her to join them in a night on the town, but Stella would always feel very out of place during such outings. Though the youngest of the three siblings, it was more often Stella chastising her brothers than the other way around.
  + Stella's fall is something that pains Fiona enormously. She actively hates herself for not seeing the true cause of Stella's condition before it was too late. It's also another reason Fiona holds a very personal grudge against the Burgomaster's house.
  + While Fiona does care for her family tremendously, her belief always come first. She is, at her core, a fanatic. Going back to another religious example, there's a story in the Bible about a man who has to murder his only son because God asked him too. He takes his boy up to the altar rock, weeping all the way, and just as he's about to kill his son, God stops him saying that it was a test of the man's faith. Fiona is this type of person exactly. She would sacrifice one of her own children if she had to, but it would hurt her very much to do so.

## The Resulting Political and Social Climate in Vallaki

I've now given you all the details on the two most prominent ruling parties in Vallaki. You know their backgrounds and their personalities and how they both have their own unique delusions that make them who they are. So how does all that information translate into the town that your PCs will soon come to see?

### Side Note on Strahd

* + I honestly couldn't figure out a good place to stick this information, so I'll put it here. Why not?
  + Strahd hasn't openly visited Vallaki in the last century. Yes, he's done a few undercover visits as Vasili where he wears a disguise. But the Lord of Barovia hasn't openly come to the town in literally 100 years.
    - Strahd has had no reason to visit. The book tells us that sometimes it takes time for Tatyana's spirit to reincarnate. When one incarnation of her dies, a replacement is not immediately born. Tatyana hasn't appeared in Vallaki in that time, so Strahd has had no real reason to make a scene there. What's more, there hasn't been anything super interesting in Vallaki to draw him there.
    - His boredom led Strahd to plan the Feast of St. Andral. He began planning this attack before he found out that Ireena was a thing, though. Since finding Ireena, Strahd's interest in the feast has dropped to zero and the vampire spawn he placed in the coffin shop have been on stand-by for months.
  + Because of his absence, the people of Vallaki have come to believe that their methods of keeping Strahd out are actually working. The guards, the curfews, the law against saying his name, and even the festivals, they've all proven effective methods to keep the vampire lord at bay. None of them know that Strahd has left them alone because he simply doesn't care enough to terrorize them.
  + Strahd's absence has also helped strengthen the support of the Vallakovich family as Burgomasters of the town.

### Three Sides

* + There are three sides in Vallaki right now.
  + ***The Innocent Bystanders:***
    - The civilians make up the majority of Vallaki. These are the people who are just trying to get by in this crazy world and not piss anybody off. They go along with the festivals because that's their way of life and they avoid talks about revolution. Strahd hasn't been in Vallaki in literally 100 years, but he's a scary enough concept that the Burgomaster might be right about him. At the same time, the Burgomaster is crazy and his policies absurd. No matter what, the average Vallakian is just trying to live their life without making waves.
  + ***The Loyalists:***
    - These are the people who actually believe in the Burgomaster and believe as he does. A great number of loyalists are of an older generation. These people remember how horrible Vargas' father was, so to them, Vargas is a wonderful leader. Also, the attempts that Vargas is making to keep Vallaki's people happy is admirable to them, instead of cumbersome. The most avid loyalists often elect members of their own families to work as city guards.
  + ***The Cultists:***
    - The cultists are Lady Wachter's followers. It started off as a secret gathering of members of wealthy Vallakian families. They heard Lady Wachter's preaching and were filled with hope at the possibility of sunlight in Vallaki. They spoke about their beliefs in their own homes and servants overheard them. Now, Lady Wachter has a pretty significant underground following in Vallaki, spreading from the rich to the poor. They want to see Lady Wachter's vision realized as well as see the Baron taken down and punished. To them, he's the real villain, not Strahd.
  + ***The Extra Group: The Oppositionists***
    - There are members of both the Loyalists and the Cultists who are not there for the right reasons. For instance, there are those in Vallaki that follow Lady Wachter not because they believe in her ideals, but because she's the anti-Burgomaster. They hate Vargas and his laws so much that any organized movement against him appeals to their interests. The biggest movement in town just happens to be Lady Wachter.
    - The opposite can be said as well, but to a lesser extreme. Those who don't agree with Lady Wachter's cult tend to not know much about it. It is an underground following after all. But those in town who fear change or her prophesied purge would favor Vargas.

## Biding Time

And that's what's going down in Vallaki during the campaign. Lady Wachter's support has been rising and social unrest has been rising with it. Nobody is particularly happy in this town and everybody is scheming against one another, waiting for the other shoe to drop. Vargas and his people know that Lady Wachter is up to something and they're waiting for just the right time to kick down her door and drag her to the noose. Likewise, all Lady Wachter needs is the appearance of her savior figure to start her uprising.

Next, I'll be doing a similar write-up on the Blue Water Inn, Izek, and the other extras in Vallaki. As always, I hope you found this post useful and are excited for the next installment.

- Mandy

# Vallaki NPCs II - The Blue Water Inn and Izek Strazni

On today's episode of "Oh my god I write too much," we continue our delve into the minds of the Vallakian NPCs. This time around, we'll be looking at the Martikovs and Izek. I promise, I'll definitely get to actually running this town in game soon! I just have so much in my brain and I gotta get it all out! XP

## The Martikovs at the Blue Water Inn

Welcome to the only real allies your party have in Vallaki. Everybody else in this town is either trying to use or destroy the party in their own agenda. Thank goodness someone decent exists in Vallaki.

I'll admit that I didn't really develop this family when my party first got to Vallaki. I knew what I was doing with most everyone else in town, but the wereravens sort of just got swept to the wayside unfortunately. They were helpers, not really characters, and I regret not putting more time into them prior to the play through. However, now that my party is returning to Vallaki, I've developed this family a bit more.

### The Spy Network

* + The Keepers of the Feather are the only legit organization actively working against Strahd in Barovia, and the book makes it pretty clear that the Martikov family is at the core of the whole thing. Not only are they a large family, but they also run the only winery in a land that practically needs wine to survive. As a result, the Martikovs are welcome pretty much everywhere they go.
  + For a more extensive run down on the Keepers of the Feather and what they know, I'd recommend taking a look at yet another [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/) post. This post gives us an excellent view of how the Keepers of the Feather operate in Barovia, including how they use normal ravens to communicate messages and how they act in a fight.
  + ***Don't Put all your Eggs in One Basket***
    - As a side note on the Keepers, you should know that this group isn't totally relying on the PCs to take down Strahd. They've seen challengers rise and fall against the vampire lord before, so they're not about to get their hopes up about your party. Yes, they're open to helping the party and will do what they can, but they're not about to sacrifice their order for the PCs.

### Urwin Martikov, the Kindhearted

* + Urwin is Davian Martikov's second born son, the current Spymaster of the Keepers of the Feather, and the owner of the Blue Water Inn. He regulates the hub of the town and is in charge of organizing information for the Keepers.
  + ***Spymaster***
    - The post that I mentioned before gives a pretty good explanation of Urwin's place in the Keepers as well as his general function in Vallaki. In summary, he's the town cook and likely one of the best cooks in Barovia. He tends to work wonders with what little the land has to give. Because of his skill and his place at the Inn, arguably the most popular place in town, Urwin has friends just about everywhere. He's able to gather and organize all sorts of gossip as a result.
  + ***Personality***
    - As far as Urwin's personality is concerned, I made him one of those completely and utterly genuinely nice people. The kind that's so nice you almost don't trust them at all. Urwin is the living embodiment of the term, "turn the other cheek." He's willing to forgive literally any sin and is the most nonviolent person in Barovia, seeing the best in even the worst people.
    - Urwin often stands up for those that no one else would. He's one of the only good NPCs that would actively stand up for Vargas, Lady Wachter, and even Strahd himself and expect nothing in return. He also is quick to give aid to those in need, freely giving away food and wine at the Inn, as well as rooms to those who have nowhere else to go. The whole Inn would be outright broke if Danika wasn't the one running the register.

### Danika Martikov

* + Actually, I think her name is Danika Dorakova because Romanian-esque surnames use different conventions. I just kept her as a Martikov in my notes to keep them organized. As a dm, it gets hard to keep track of everyone, ya know? ;p
  + ***Bartender Extraordinaire***
    - Danika is the bartender at the Inn and she also runs the tavern's books. Because of this, she's the biggest gossip monger in probably all of Barovia. She collects information like a hobby and is very, very good at it.
  + ***Personality***
    - Danika is much more of a realist than her kindhearted husband. She doesn't trust just about anyone, but she's always willing to give folks a chance before writing them off. Danika knows that this is a big bad world filled with even bigger, badder people and she wants desperately make things better for the sake of her children.
    - Whether Danika likes someone or not doesn't mean she isn't nice to them. She loves chatting with people, even if she doesn't agree with them. She's actually a very relatable person who is very easy to talk to. That's what makes her a great bartender. She's also an incredibly smart individual who's a master at reading people.
    - Danika's love for her family outweighs all else in her life. Yes, she a good bartender and a great information gatherer for the Keepers, but first and foremost, she's a mother and a wife. She loves Urwin with all her heart and his kindness has made her an overall more open and loving person. She often defers to his kindness because she admires it so.

### Brom and Bray

* + I'll say it once, I'll say it twice, I'll say it a thousand times: KIDS ARE NOT USELESS. You have no idea how sneaky and devilish an eleven-year-old boy can be. Children are often written off as innocents in need of saving in D&D and if you do that, you're missing some prime opportunities. Sure, maybe if the child is like, three, they're not all that useful. But by eight-years-old, kids can be da bomb.
  + ***Mini Spies***
    - Brom and Bray are eleven and seven years old respectively. They're known for hanging around the tavern, darting in between the legs of customers and generally being cute kids. But most of the time, they're helping their parents gather information for the order. Brom and Bray can easily sit under a table and listen in on conversations. Even if they're caught, most people won't think it anything more than kids being mischievous.
    - Brom and Bray have turned their spying into a brotherly game and competition. They make constant efforts to push the limits of their sneakiness, trying to one up each other on places they can sneak into. At the end of each week, their parents declare one of the boys the winner of being the most useful informant, which entertains the two to no end.
    - Sometimes the boys get into things they really shouldn't. Urwin and Danika have done their best to chide their children and train them appropriately. Information gathering can be great fun, but if there's ever sign of trouble they are to get out as quickly as possible or be grounded for a month. It may sound light, but Urwin and Danika know there's only so much they can do to keep their children pinned down. If they push too hard, it will likely cause the boys to get into even worse trouble as they test the limits of their parents' restrictions.
  + ***Resourceful Little Buggers***
    - Brom and Bray are two of the most resourceful kids in the game, with Arabelle being the other. These three kids are well aware of their abilities as well as their weaknesses and are able to act accordingly. They know how to use the fact that they're kids to manipulate adults as well. The "Mister, I've lost my mommy and daddy" trick works wonders in more situations than you can imagine.

### As a Family

* + Overall, the Martikovs are a well-balanced, well-adjusted family unit. Urwin and Danika are most obviously in love and often pick on each other to show their affection. Brom and Bray are bright and daring, but also respect their parents and the boundaries that have been set for them. Your players won't find this much cohesion anywhere else in the campaign and that's what makes the Martikovs truly special.

## Izek Strazni: Oh, Brother Mine!

As a warning, I'll tell you that I made Izek far less villainous in my game. It wasn't intentional, but somehow that's how it ended up. And now after playing Izek non-villainously for the last four months, I can't seem to think of him in any other way. This method of playing Izek certainly isn't for everyone and if you completely disagree with me, I totally understand. But, if you're open to changing his character from an enemy and into an ally, here's how I would recommend you do so:

### A Player Character's Brother

* + I talked about this briefly in my post on the Village of Barovia, but I'll go into more detail now. Whether you intend to make Izek an ally or an enemy, I would definitely recommend that you shift Izek's relation from Ireena to a PC. When things happen to NPCs, your players can't help but feel a little more detached. If possible, always try to make story elements circle around your players. It makes your players feel important and makes their situations more dire.
  + From the beginning of the campaign, try to use one of your PCs with a more ambiguous backstory. There's usually always one urchin rogue in the party, for instance. If you have a PC who doesn't know their parents or grew up alone, now they're actually from Barovia. They were carted out of this land as an infant and are now returning to it.
  + Izek Strazni is this PC's true born, blood brother. It doesn't really matter whether the PC is male or female, but they'll have to be either human or tiefling to make this work. If possible, go for the tiefling though.

### Izek's Background

* + I changed this a bit from the written campaign. Like I said, this won't be for everyone, but it's what I did. Mostly, I wasn't satisfied with the idea that Izek just grew a demon arm. So here's what I've come up with:
  + ***Bad Blood***
    - Izek Strazni is one of the only remaining descendants of the Durst family cult. You know, the warped family from Death House? While the Dursts may have all died in their home, they had a few very close followers among the wealthier families of Barovia.
    - The Durst Cult's primary goal was to find a way to evade death and hopefully achieve eternal youth. They turned to demon worship and blood magic in an effort to achieve those goals. While they were never successful, their practices left a stain on all the families in the cult.
    - While most of cultists' lines have died out over the centuries, one line survived. First, they were the Petrovna’s, and then their children married into another name, and so on and so forth until they landed on Strazni. They're not wealthy anymore or well known, but every so often the echo of their ancestors' actions shows itself in their line. This family line is one of the few in Barovia to have given birth to tieflings over the years, though only occasionally.
    - And that is why Izek has a demon arm. He's sort of a deformed, unfinished tiefling, where something went wrong in the genetics during conception. So now, Izek is neither tiefling nor human, but is instead a sad creature caught somewhere in between.
  + ***Izek's Early Childhood***
    - Izek's mother and father were middle class workers in Barovia who loved each very much. While his mother knew vaguely that her family had produced devil children in the past, she considered them only rumors. After all, who would want to believe that sort of thing, especially when there were no recent signs of devil children in current generations?
    - And then she gave birth to Izek. Unlike most parents who would be horrified by having a child with such a demonic deformity, Izek's parents weren't frightened at all. They only worried what others might think, especially in a place like Vallaki where the devil and other unnatural things were usually contributed to Strahd.
    - In an effort to protect their son, Izek's parents had him wrap his arm up to hide its demonic nature. Unfortunately, they couldn't quite conceal the sheer unnatural bulk of the appendage. Izek was often bullied by other children and spent his early years friendless.
  + ***The Birth of Izek's Sibling***
    - When Izek was a boy, his mother gave birth to another child. Hopefully, this is one of your PCs. And hopefully, that PC is a tiefling. It doesn't really matter whether Izek has a sister or a brother, though.
    - Unlike Izek, who's demonic arm could be more or less hidden from the paranoid eyes of Vallaki's people, Izek's sibling was a full blown tiefling, complete with horns and a tail. Yet again, their parents were very understanding and felt nothing but love for their children. But they knew that others would not be so merciful and felt they couldn't let the race of their new child be made public.
  + ***Fleeing Vallaki***
    - In an effort to save their new child from being murdered by Vallaki's laws, Izek's family fled town. They used what meager savings they had to pay off some guards in the night and sneak out of town.
    - Unfortunately, they met their end in the woods. The family was attacked by a large pack of wolves and Izek's parents were both killed before his eyes. But Izek also learned that his deformity was a bit more useful than he previously imagined. He managed to survive the attack with the fire from his arm and scare away the wolves in a long, horrible fight.
    - By the end of the fight, Izek was terribly lost in the woods and very injured. He saw that his parents were attacked and dead, but he wasn't sure what happened to his baby sibling. For the first time, Izek was truly alone.
  + ***The Burgomaster's Helpful Hand***
    - After days of wandering the woods alone, Izek finally found a road and made his way back to Vallaki. The guards brought the boy to the Burgomaster, the young and newly appointed Vargas Vallakovich.
    - Vargas was quite new to his post when he met Izek and when he heard Izek's terrible story, he felt bad for the boy. Vargas couldn't bring himself to give Izek up the orphanage or blame him for his demonic arm. In Vargas' eyes, Izek's arm was like a physical version of Vargas' anger: a sin of their parents that they had to bear. Vargas decided to take Izek into his household.
  + ***In the Event that you Don't have a Tiefling PC***
    - You don't need a Tiefling PC to make this version of Izek work if you want to. Instead of his mother giving birth to a devil child, Izek's sibling was born normal and human. However, after being bullied pretty badly one day, the coverings on Izek's arm were accidently removed and the demonic nature of his deformity was revealed. Izek's family tried to flee Vallaki to protect him and ended up in the wolf attack. It's a little less poetic, but this version still holds nicely if you want a human PC to be Izek's sibling.

### Izek's Personality

* + The book tells us that Izek is a pretty cruel individual and blatantly sociopathic. I made him a much more sympathetic.
  + ***Eager to Please***
    - In my version of this campaign, Izek is terrified of being alone. He wants to make the people around him happy so that they won't abandon him. He's kind of like a pathetic pit bull. He's a big, bulky guy with lots of muscle and looks scary as hell, but underneath his looks he just wants some loving in a safe, supporting home.
    - He holds Vargas in the highest regard, sort of like a mix between an adoptive father figure and an elder brother. Izek doesn't actually believe what Vargas believes (that all signs of anger and badness are manifestations of Strahd) but he wants to make the man happy. So Izek does Vargas' dirty work and patrols the streets in an effort to do his father-figure proud.
  + ***Non-Violent***
    - While Izek has a horrible reputation for violence and cruelty, most of that isn't actually true. He looks so scary that most Vallakians just think that Izek hurts people. His false reputation actually ends up keeping most people in line, so Izek doesn't actually have to do much. His appearance and the bad rumors about him do most of his work for him.
    - That being said, Izek will act when he has to. He's not afraid of putting his foot down, but he garners no enjoyment from hurting others. Often, if someone ends up needing corporal punishment, he does the deed as quickly as possible and then leaves the lesson learned. However, his first responses to an unruly citizen are usually grappling and restraining motions. It just happens to look like full blown assault when someone big and scary like Izek holds down a 120-pound woman who's going off in a bar. What's a guy to do?
  + Overall, I play Izek as a big, loud brute who's just doing his best not to wreak havoc. He's like a regretful bull in a China shop that just can't help but break things.

### Dreams of His Sister/Brother

* + Izek has been having vague dreams of his lost sibling ever since the wolf incident that killed their parents. These dreams are pretty nondescript:
    - A dark void with a blurry figure standing in the middle. When Izek approaches the figure, it becomes clearer, but when Izek gets close enough to touch them, the figure vanishes and Izek wakes up.
    - As the years roll by, the figure actually ages accordingly, so that Izek is literally watching his lost sibling grow up a little at a time.
  + While the baby was never found and everyone tells him otherwise, Izek adamantly believes that his dreams mean that his lost sibling is alive.
  + In this version of the campaign, Izek most certainly knows that the figure he's dreaming of is his sibling, so he's definitely not having any untoward thoughts about them. In fact, that was one of the first things I changed upon deciding that Izek's sister would be my Warlock PC. I did NOT want to have some big freaky guy making moves on her only for them both to find out that they're related. That would be pushing the PC boundaries a bit too much in my opinion.
  + Izek has been having the toymaker make dolls of his sibling over the years as well, to match the one he sees in his dreams. Believe me, it's SUPER fun to have a PC walk into a room filled with dolls of themselves. That was a memorable moment in my campaign if I do say so myself. :D

### Family Comes First, Sorry Vargas

* + Izek's fear of being alone stems from his separation from his family. If presented with the choice, Izek will choose his sibling over anything and everything else in the world. In my campaign, he's been following my warlock around like a faithful puppy.

## Conclusion

And that's it. That's how I see the Martikovs and how I turned Izek into a friendlier NPC. Even if you don't agree with my take on Izek's personality and want him to remain evil to the core, I would still recommend that he be a PC's brother. It adds a level of dynamism to Vallaki that your players are sure to remember.

"You open the door to a rather Spartan bedroom. There's the bed a chest of drawers and some shelves. Or rather, it would be sparse if it weren't filled with hundreds of handmade dolls. And they all... look... just like... *YOU*." \*Cue dramatic lightning strike\*

-Mandy

# The Church of St. Andral's NPCs and the Mechanics of Hallowed Ground

Hello again! I had all this information together with my write-ups of a few other NPCs, but for the first time hit Reddit's word limit and had to split up my posts. XD So you'll be getting my run down on the Blue Water Inn and Izek Strazni in a separate post. For now, enjoy these characters and background info!

## The Church of St. Andral

This location is actually a really big deal in the Vallaki chapter. As you run the module, you'll find that a lot actually happens at this location (sometimes arguably more than at either Wachterhaus or the Burgomaster's Mansion depending on how things go down). And yet, it doesn't even have its own map. But I'd like to go ahead and give you my thoughts on the few characters at this location as well as my general mechanics surrounding the church.

### Father Lucian

* + Father Lucian is a barmy old man who's hardcore faithful. I played this guy very stereotypically, I'll admit.
  + ***With the PCs***
    - Father Lucian has dedicated his entire life to the Morning Lord and is almost as fanatical as Lady Wachter in his beliefs. He'll actively lecture PCs about having faith and if the players do something good, he insists that it must have been the Morning Lord's divine presence working through them.
    - Father Lucian should carefully walk the line between annoying and pitiable. No one likes religion being shoved down their throats, PCs included. But at the same time, Father Lucian is so obviously old and broken that his faith is all he has left.
  + ***Keeper of Secrets***
    - Lucian's fanatical personality stems from the fact that he has heard and seen the worst sides of all people. He's the one that Vallakians come to for the "Forgive me Father for I have sinned" speech. And boy oh boy have Vallakians sinned.
    - Father Lucian has heard it all. He knows far more secrets than he should and he's been bound by his faith to never share those secrets. The knowledge has driven him borderline mad in his old age.
  + ***A couple things that Lucian knows about:***
    - Vargan Vallakovich (Vargas' father) used to abuse his family.
    - Vargas murdered his father. Vargas would have confessed this to the priest after doing the deed.
    - Fiona's cult kills people. One of Fiona's followers comes to confession after each sacrifice.
    - Fiona keeps her dead husband in her room. One of her servants feels horrible having to turn down the bed and move the body, so she confesses to the church.

### Yeska

* + Yeska, the altar boy at St. Andral's, is thankfully not part of the stereotype of little boys being sexually abused by old priests. However, he is the product of yet another Vallakian tragedy.
    - When Yeska was a toddler, about four years old or so, his mother brought him with her to confession one night. Yeska's mother was not very stable at the time and during the confession, she slit her own throat in front of Father Lucian.
    - Lucian took in Yeska under a sense of misplaced guilt. Lucian was not able to save Yeska's mother, but he wants to save the boy in her place.
  + ***Personality***
    - Yeska is a wide-eyed, fearful little thing. He darts around the church and is incredibly dutiful, but constantly thrums with nervous energy.
    - Yeska is very easy to intimidate and is quite the crier.

### Milivoj

* + Phew, smell that teenage angst. Milivoj is such a moody, jaded young man. I imagine him as being about nineteen years old; old enough that he's very much considered an adult by Vallakian standards, but also young enough to still be moody and get away with it. In other news, Milivoj has one of the most attractive illustrations in the campaign book. ;) Take that as you will.
  + ***Family***
    - The book tells us that Milivoj works to support his younger siblings and makes no mention of other family. I took this a little bit farther to tie it into another subplot I added to Vallaki.
    - If you read my post on Old Bonegrinder, you might want to push your players into a side quest involving Vallakian orphans. In my version of Vallaki, Milivoj is a former kid at the Orphanage of St. Andral. His younger siblings are in fact all orphans that adore him.
  + ***The Gravedigger***
    - As a former orphan with no family, no inheritance, and a pretty subpar education, Milivoj doesn't have much in the way of prospects. He's a gravedigger because it's a job that nobody else wants to do. He doesn't particularly like his job, but the Vallakian taxes pay him reasonably better than other menial labor would. Also, he's a particularly able-bodied young man, which makes him terribly efficient with a shovel.

## Hallowed Ground

Something that I haven't really found is a concrete definition of Hallowed Ground in 5e, which is annoying since it's such an intricate part of the Feast of St. Andral's event. Yes, there's the Hallow spell, but according to its description the effect can be dispelled pretty easily. So why doesn't Strahd or one of his non-undead minions just go and dispel the bones of St. Andral? Why must they be stolen? Did someone cast the Hallow spell on the bones after the saint was dead? Does that mean that someone *must* be magical to consecrate a location? There are really quite a few inconsistencies and unanswered questions.

From what I've found, what constitutes as holy ground can be up to the determination of the DM in any given campaign. For CoS, I've created my own set of house rules about Hallowed Ground that I want to present to you for your consideration. Please know that these mechanics are entirely made up because I love having a way to explain things to myself and to my players. I want to make it VERY CLEAR that this is not meant to reflect any real religion or religious practice, but is entirely made up for the sake of Curse of Strahd.

### The Saint

* + Firstly, consecration in my game can only come from a Saint. Not a priest or any other sort of holy figure. A Saint. And I've defined "Saint" to be a very specific kind of person.
  + ***Virtue***
    - Throughout most religions, we see the exemplification of many similar virtues. Honesty. Charity. Forgiveness. Mercy. These are all things that are innately and almost universally considered "good" to human beings. We love people who show these traits and tend to sympathize and honor such individuals.
    - My first qualification for a Saint in CoS is that they show an obscenely high level of virtue. A saintly person must be good to a fault and use these traits in their daily lives, almost unthinkingly.
  + ***Duty***
    - Most saintly figures are associated with some sort of deity or God. In CoS, that's most often the Morning Lord. However, why would we then have saints associated with different gods? What's the difference between one person who becomes a saint of the Morning Lord and another who becomes a saint of Tymora? We certainly don't want to say one God is better than another. And what if there's a saint that's part of a religion that has no gods, but instead studies an ideal (like karma maybe)? Are they any less of a saint?
    - I've gone ahead and taken the appointing of saints away from deities and instead associated that with a much more general notion: duty. No matter how you look at it, all saints show a profound sense of duty to their beliefs. They are devout followers of their tenants and actively change their lifestyles to follow what they believe. From someone taking a vow of nonviolence to another who devotes their lives to the church, they're following their beliefs to a level above the ordinarily virtuous.
    - This also allows completely non-religious people to potentially become saints. If someone is innately good and then goes on a hermit spirit quest to improve the purity of their soul, that technically counts as them following a duty to their beliefs. No gods required.
  + ***Action***
    - Having a virtuous personality means nothing if you don't show it. If a virtuous person just sits in their farmhouse alone their whole lives, they really can't be considered a Saint. Similarly, if they give up their lives for their sense of duty, but no one really benefits from it, that's not enough either.
  + As an example, think about a nun who dedicates herself to a convent for the rest of her life. Is the nun virtuous? Yes. Is she dutiful? Yes. But is she a saint? No.
    - A true Saint must act. They must be dutiful and innately good and actively use both to help others. Think about Saint Markovia in CoS. According to lore, she was not only completely incorruptible, but she dedicated her life to building the Abbey to help the downtrodden and the sick. When presented with the threat of Strahd, she actively worked against that evil and died trying to defeat him.
  + In my CoS lore, a person must have Virtue, Duty, and Action to constitute as a Saint. This also nicely takes away the requirement of magic in creating holy ground. Now, even a fighter can technically become a Saint.

### Location

* + So, we've got the Saint. How do we get them to make Hallowed Ground?
  + ***A Place of Great Action***
    - In many cases, consecration comes from a Saint performing some sort of great, memorable act at a specific location. Take the Shrine of the White Sun in Kresk, for instance. The book says that Markovia simply blessed the pool. But I like to think that she performed some sort of miracle here. I made up this event for my own game:
    - The villagers of Kresk sought to drown a young man they thought deserved to die horribly. He was some sort of career criminal. But Markovia saw the man drowning and jumped in to save him. She then gave a great speech to the people on the importance of mercy and forgiveness that not only moved the people, but moved the criminal to the point that he joined her abbey and became virtuous thereafter. This act of goodness from Markovia combined with the effect on the people of Kresk essentially consecrated the pool.
    - For your consideration, I imagine that Markovia's speech to the villagers sounded something like this: https://youtu.be/wmmBT\_4dmI0
  + ***A Place of Prolonged Action***
    - Holy ground doesn't have to come from a single act mind you, but perhaps an ongoing act that took a great deal of time and dedication.
    - In my mind, the abbey was consecrated ground for a time following the death of Markovia. She dedicated her life to building the place as a house of healing and medicine and did an amazing amount of good there over the years.
    - However, Strahd was pretty mad about Markovia's attack against him and tried to take out his rage on the abbey. However, he found that the place was now holy ground and couldn't enter. The remaining healers and clergy holed themselves up in the abbey to keep themselves safe from Strahd, only to find that they slowly ran out of food. As starvation set in, they turned on one another in murderous desperation. Their acts made the abbey normal ground again. Not desecrated, mind you, but normal.

### Object

* + It's also possible for an object to become holy thanks to a Saint's actions. This may be an object that a Saint carried around and became symbolic of their persona or an object used in one of their famous acts.
    - *The Holy Symbol of Ravenkind* was carried around by a Saint named Lugdana who used to root out and destroy vampire nests.
  + And lastly, bones. Sometimes a Saint becomes so holy that their very bones are infused with their virtue. This is the one sign of consecration we see in CoS most often, as with Markovia's thighbone.

## The Church's Consecration

* The Church of St. Andral is a curious thing that combines a rare mix in order to create consecrated ground. You see, the church in and of itself isn't holy. It's just a building in the end. And Andral's bones aren't holy like Markovia's thighbone. So why is it that when we put the two together, they suddenly activate and become holy?
  + I created another little saintly story to explain this:
    - St. Andral was no priest or holy figure, though he did devoutly believe in the Morning Lord. He lived during the time Strahd first became a vampire. At that time, the Church actually wasn't a church at all, but was Andral's house.
    - When Strahd became a vampire, a couple dozen of his own guards fired the arrows that killed him. While he managed to hunt down a couple of these guards, many of them fled to Vallaki where Andral took them in.
    - According the Vampire Allowance clause, Strahd couldn't actually enter Andral's home without permission. Normally, Strahd would just charm a resident into letting him in and he certainly tried to do so with Andral. However, Andral miraculously withstood each and every attempt Strahd made to charm him (most likely through a series of wondrously lucky wisdom saves ;p).
    - Andral declared that so long as he remained in his home, people would be safe from the evils of Strahd. Both Andral and the guards ended up living out the rest of their lives in Andral's house, never once leaving. They grew their own food using potted plants and lived entirely communally. Eventually, they all grew old and passed away, never leaving the house.
    - The land itself became Hallowed ground following the death of Andral. As the house aged, it was eventually torn down and the church built in its place. So long as St. Andral's bones remain on site, the church is consecrated.

## Desecrated Ground

Unfortunately, the opposite can be said of the above information. It is entirely possible for someone of absolutely horrible character to do something so terrible that it corrupts the location itself.

### The Offender

* + I must admit, I have no idea what I might call the formal opposite of a Saint. I feel like there should be some great title for such a person, but it eludes me at the moment. So, I'll just refer to them as an Offender.
  + ***Sin, Duty, and Action***
    - The creation of an Offender is no different from the creation of a Saint.
    - Firstly, an individual must possess a horrifically high amount of evil in their personality. This shows itself in vices and sins like wrath, greed, and pride.
    - Then, they must dedicate their actions to a higher ideal or duty. They're not being bad just because. They're following what they believe to be a higher purpose. An Offender might think that they are destined for greatness, for instance, or that a Dark Power compels them to act.
    - And lastly, an Offender must take action. They must actually perform the depraved acts they condone.

### Location

* + A place in which an Offender performed some sort of horrible act might become corrupted and turn into desecrated ground. These are places that radiate profound evil.

### Strahd

* + Strahd can NOT be an Offender because he is undead. Just like a fiend, his actions can't create hallowed or unhallowed space.

## Desecrated vs. Consecrated: What do they Actually do

### Side Note on Holy/Evil Objects

* + It's pretty easy to tell which objects and/or weapons might be considered holy or evil in the campaign. The Symbol of Ravenkind is holy, for instance, as is Markovia's thighbone. There might also be objects of intense evil. Go ahead and pick out these objects at your own discretion.
  + In general, mark these objects against users of a certain alignment. For instance, an Evil character or creature cannot use a holy object. And a good character or creature cannot use an evil object. In my game, I treat the intensity of this restriction on a case by case basis. Sometimes, an object might invoke constant disadvantage on a misaligned user. Other times, it might actually cause harm to the misaligned user, dealing them damage just to touch the thing.

### Who Can't be on Consecrated Ground

* + Mechanically speaking, I've made it so that any evil aligned character or creature on consecrated ground has disadvantage on all their rolls. The intensity of the good in such a place actually puts their very beings off.
  + Otherwise, Fiends, Undead, and Fey of an Unseelie nature physically cannot enter hallowed ground of their own free will. Like at all.
    - While the normal, published, *Hallow* spell lists off a few other types of creature, this is my home-brewed version of it.
    - Also note that these creatures can be forcibly moved onto consecrated ground against their will, to severe ill effect.
  + If any such creature is caught on the grounds when it becomes consecrated, or if they are forcibly moved onto such ground, they suffer intense holy damage. Each round they take damage equal to a third of their maximum HP until they leave the area of consecration or are destroyed.

### Who Can't be on Desecrated Ground

* + This is simply the opposite of Consecrated Ground.
  + Mechanically speaking, any good aligned character or creature on desecrated ground has disadvantage on all their rolls.
  + Celestials and Fey of a Seelie nature physically cannot enter desecrated ground of their own free will.
  + If any such creature is caught on the grounds when it becomes desecrated, or if they are forcibly moved onto such ground, they suffer intense profane damage. Each round they take damage equal to a third of their maximum HP until they leave the area of desecration or are destroyed.

### Examples in CoS

* + While there are a number of horrible places in CoS, there are actually not very many that constitute as consecrated or desecrated ground.
    - Old Bonegrinder, for instance, is the location where children are murdered and baked into pies. That's horrible! But these acts are not performed by normal people. They're performed by fiends and fiends are innately evil creatures and therefore cannot constitute as an Offender. So, no desecrated ground.
    - On the opposite end, innately good creatures like angels (not talking about the Abbot here) could perform all sorts of virtuous acts and still not create hallowed ground because they are not Saints.
    - At their core, both Saints and Offenders go against the status quo of their race and/or culture. While a normal person might fight for justice, a Saint fights for mercy, for instance. An angel's status quo is virtue, so they don't need to prove themselves as mere mortals must.
    - In the broadest terms, pretty much only humanoids can be a Saint or an Offender. Of course, I imagine that there are exceptions. A goblin could likely become a Saint and they're considered monsters I believe. But, if you want to think broadly, "humanoid" is a good starting point.
  + ***Places of Consecrated Ground***
    - In Barovia, there are literally only two places still considered holy:
    - The Pool of the White Sun in Kresk. Make note that the shrine/gazebo is not technically consecrated. Only the pool is holy.
    - The Church of St. Andral. And we all know that this might not last long depending on what happens in the campaign.
  + ***Places of Desecrated Ground***
    - The Altar Room in the Death House. In my version of Death House, Mrs. Durst most definitely constitutes as an Offender. Her great act of sacrificing Waltar not only called upon the Dark Powers, but also desecrated the room. If you're using my guide that ends with Waltar the Flesh Mound, having good aligned PCs at disadvantage down here shouldn't hurt the battle terribly. After all, someone is meant to be swallowed and then destroy Walter in this fight.
    - There's an area in the woods just off from the Vallakian Vistani camp that's considered desecrated. Though unmarked, this small patch of woods is where Rahadin gathered the female Dusk Elves and had them slaughtered. I consider Rahadin an Offender in my game (He's got the sin, the dedication/duty to Strahd, and the intensely evil acts to make this plausible. He's also technically a humanoid elf, so it still fits).
    - There are likely a couple other places of unhallowed ground in Barovia, but I can't quite think of them right now. If I do, I'll be sure to add them to this list.

## Conclusion

And that's it! That's my spiel on the Church as well as my much too detailed view of Hallowed vs Unhallowed Ground in CoS. If you've made it through all this, I'd love to hear what you think. As always, thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed my post!

-Mandy

# Vallaki I - Setting Up the Big Picture and Getting Through the Town Gates

Hello and welcome to another installment in my CoS series! If you've taken a look at my Vallaki NPC posts, you'll have a pretty good idea what's going down behind the scenes. Now, I'll give you my first piece of advice on actually running this crazy town. If you haven't taken a look at those NPC posts, I would recommend that you do so now. If you read something here that seems a little short or under elaborated, the expanded version is probably in one of those write-ups. Otherwise, enjoy!

## Setting Up a Game Plan

Before your players get to Vallaki, you need to plan for some if-then situations. I've set up a series of overviews that outline all the stuff that can go down in the three days your PCs have before the Festival of the Blazing Sun. All of the following situations are all inevitable fallout options depending on what actions your players take. The fallouts themselves can be changed depending on your PCs actions, but if left to their own devices, this is what would happen.

### Public Tension

* + ***Status***
    - At the moment, nobody's really happy living in Vallaki. Vargas Vallakovich rules quite sternly and the weekly festivals lost their charm decades ago. People live in fear of saying the wrong thing and accidentally getting themselves committed to the Reformation Center. What's more, the justice system in Vallaki isn't very kind. It operates under the assumption that everyone is guilty until proven innocent. All it takes is for your neighbor to falsely accuse you of Strahd worship and your life can get turned upside-down.
  + ***Fallout***
    - If your PCs openly break Vallaki's laws or antagonize the Baron's ideals, the guards will come down on them hard. There's more than one native Vallakian that'd be willing to snitch on the party for a boon from the Baron, whether that's money or perhaps the freedom of a friend/family member in the stocks. If you're players act rowdy and generally cause public unrest, don't let it go unnoticed. Your players should feel like they're walking on eggshells here.

### Izek Strazni

* + ***Status***
    - Izek is the Captain of the Guard and is quite dedicated to his job. He's quick to act against threats to the Baron as well as shut down anyone exhibiting public displays of malcontent. Just about everyone in town is afraid of him, even if they've no reason to be. Even the guards that patrol the streets with Izek eye him warily. His mere presence brims with authority, something directly in contrast to the Baron's general aura.
  + ***Fallout***
    - If and when Izek finds his long-lost sibling (hopefully one of your PCs), he will recognize them immediately and express so much elation that it will actually freak out the other guards and commoners alike. This should honestly be a pretty funny moment if played right. Most likely, your PCs will end up meeting Izek due to a scuffle. It's almost inevitable that the party breaks some kind of law that brings the guards down on them. When that happens, Izek will show up pretty quickly.
    - If it's a minor ordeal, Izek will use his authority to excuse the party and do his best to get them to the Burgomaster's mansion, where he promises they will be safe. Any friend of his sibling is a friend of his. This is a great way to get the PCs into the paranoid Burgomaster's mansion and give them free reign to explore as they wish (possibly discovering the mirror, the library, and Victor in the attic). If Izek says it's okay for them to be there, then it's all cool.
    - If the scuffle is not a minor ordeal, then Izek will do what he must to both follow the law as well as keep his sibling safe. In my game, one PC killed a guard in the fight (not Izek's sibling PC). Izek still invited the players to the mansion and happily did so. He then had the murderous PC secretly escorted to the prison/closet containing Udo the shoemaker where he was to await his execution. Izek was able to both satisfy his sibling and also deal with a murderer.
    - If, by chance, the worst criminal happens to be the sibling, Izek will actively betray Vallaki for their sake. He'll use all nonlethal attacks and try to avoid what he can, but if worse comes to worse, the sibling comes first.

### Lady Wachter

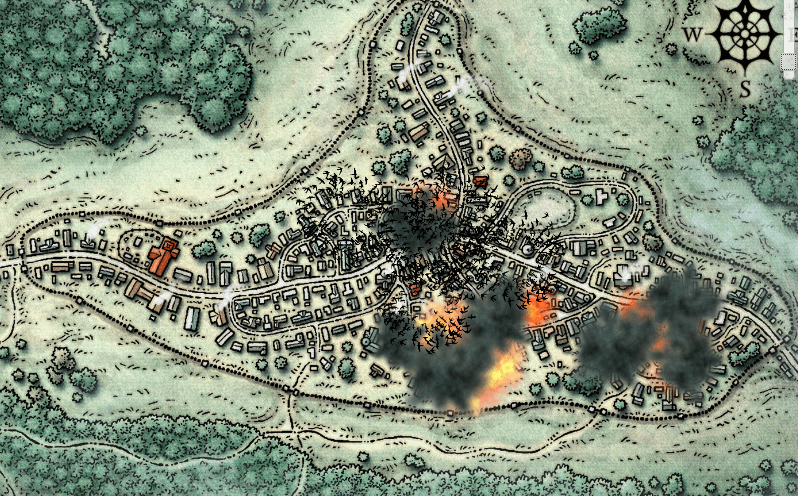
* + ***Status***
    - A collective of people none too happy with Vargas' leadership have come together under Lady Wachter. Many of them follow her fanatical belief that a savior will come to Vallaki and purge the wicked, the Baron included, and sunlight will again shine on the town.
  + ***Fallout***
    - Fiona has spies all over town. The coming of a group of outsiders won't go unnoticed. Fiona will do her best to send Ernst to them and invite them to her home. Upon meeting the party, have Fiona do a quick look over each of them and then decide which will be her chosen "savior." She'll favor tieflings for their demonic nature, which she sees as beautiful, as well as holy classes like Paladins and Cleric because they too believe in the power of light (usually). As the DM, go ahead and preplan which PC will be Fiona's messiah figure.
    - With the savior found, Fiona will go ahead and initiate her plan to overthrow the Burgomaster at the Festival of the Blazing Sun. She'll actively lament what a horrible leader Vargas is to the party and do everything she can to get them on her side. But no matter what, know that once Lady Wachter meets her savior, an uprising will happen at the festival.

### Picking Sides

* + ***Status***
    - Lady Wachter wants to take down Vargas at the Festival of the Blazing Sun. Once meeting the party, she will do this. Vargas, on the other hand, wants desperately for a reason to take down Lady Wachter, but lacks the evidence to do so.
  + ***Fallout***
    - If the PCs side with Lady Wachter and the revolution takes place, the Baron won't be killed, but instead taken prisoner and openly tortured and paraded around town. Go ahead and roll to see how many guards end up dying in the riots and make a show out of seeing them lynched by the mob. Lydia and Victor will be left alone, but also be marked as public outcasts for their association with Vargas. This will all happen even if the PCs sit back and do nothing but watch. If they intervene, situations might change of course.
    - If the PCs side with Vargas, perhaps after being introduced to him by Izek, Vargas will ask the party to find him evidence of Lady Wachter's foul plans. He knows she's up to something and he wants proof. If the PCs go to her house, find evidence of her cult or even have her tell them her plans, they have the option of bringing their findings to Vargas. The moment this happens, Vargas will send every guard not on gate duty to Wachterhaus and drag her to the noose in the center of town for a public execution. There will be a fight at Wachterhaus which Fiona will lose. The following night, the most loyal of Fiona's cultists will break into the Burgomaster's mansion and assassinate Vargas. Again, this all happens if your party does nothing to stop or change anything.

### The Feast of St. Andral

* + ***THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT IF-THEN SITUATION. PLEASE READ.***
  + ***Status***
    - Strahd hasn't openly been to Vallaki in literally 100 years. The Vallakians believe, on some level, that the protections of their town have successfully kept the great vampire away. This is untrue. Strahd hasn't come to Vallaki because he simply doesn't care about the town. However, right before discovering Ireena, Strahd arranged the Feast out of boredom. Because his beloved Tatyana had once again resurfaced, he then promptly forgot about the Feast and the bones. The vampire spawn he sent to Vallaki are on the second floor of the coffin shop and have been resting there for months, waiting their master's signal to begin the Feast.
    - The party's main story mission at this point in the campaign is to escort Ireena to the Church of St. Andral, where she'll be safe from Strahd. Amongst all the other political stuff, this is definitely going to come up sometime. Ireena herself will likely push the party towards the church from her fear of Strahd.
  + ***Fallout***
    - When the party discovers the plight of the missing bones, they'll set off to fix the church for Ireena's sake and inevitably end up at the coffin shop (where the bones are upstairs in my campaign, not at Lady Watcher's house). The moment the coffin maker sees the party, Strahd will know that the bones are in danger of being found. He knows that if the church is reconsecrated, Ireena might be beyond him for the rest of her life and he cannot let that happen. He immediately sets out oh Beaucephalus for Vallaki and will arrive in just a few hours.
    - Whether or not the party reconsecrates the church, Strahd will make an appearance in Vallaki due to the threat. If Ireena is safe, he'll be pissed. If she's not, he'll try to charm her into coming with him. Either way, he makes a show of riding his nightmare through the sky for all of Vallaki to see and sets his vampire spawn on the town.
    - At the Festival of the Blazing Sun, shit gets real. If there was public unrest about Vargas before, Strahd's visit has turned that into full blown panic. After 100 years, he finally made an appearance, killed a bunch of people with his spawn and otherwise proved that the town's walls are all but useless against him. People are beyond scared. When the festival happens, the public simply isn't having it. A total, town-wide mob erupts against the Baron and his men.
    - This mob goes far beyond the revolution that Fiona would have invoked. Her takeover would have looked civil in comparison. Both Vargas and Lydia are lynched in the town square and the mansion is burned down. Fires spread throughout Vallaki and there's city-wide looting. If you've ever seen a commercial for the Purge franchise, that's a good basis for what happens. Half the town burns down. Roll to see how far the fires spread and which important buildings are destroyed (toyshop, inn, etc.) and in turn, which NPCs die in the chaos.
    - When the dust settles, Fiona, if she's alive, takes over as Burgomistress. If not, then the town stays in a place of unrest for the foreseeable future. Many will end up camping out in or around the church because they feel safe there. Others will take advantage of the lack of law and take the street in gang like territories.
    - If the festival has already taken place by this point in the campaign, Vargas calls for a public meeting to calm the people and these events take place anyway. If Vargas is no longer in charge, Fiona gathers the public and tells them that Strahd's coming was all part of her prophesied purge and that sunlight would come soon. How well this speech goes is up to you.
    - Here's my Vallaki after this went down in my campaign:



## NPC Names Handy

As a side note, I would highly recommend that if you don't have some random NPC names to use in a pinch, get those together now. You'll want to have a good dozen names ready for guards, a couple random citizens, some servants, and probably a couple people in the stocks. Your PCs will talk to a lot of random people throughout Vallaki and stopping role play to search for a name that you don't have ready can break immersion. There's a helpful little list of Barovian names in the beginning of the campaign book, if you're interested.

## The Gates

Your party's problems at Vallaki will start right at the gates. While not as isolated as Kresk, Vallaki is a police state that heavily monitors the comings and goings in their town. This next section might seem overly excessive, but I feel like the whole experience really sets up Vallaki to your players. Having decent security also reinforces what Ismark told the party back in the Village of Barovia about the place being safe from Strahd. It wouldn't seem like a terribly viable option if players could just waltz in willy nilly.

### Who Goes There?

* + When your players approach, the guards will halt them from behind the closed wrought iron gates. They'll hold the following introductions from behind the gates so that outsiders won't be able to simply push their way past.
  + The guards will ask the PCs for their identities and their business in town. The guards are not looking for anything particular, but answers that sound suspicious will draw their attention. You should treat this introduction as a minor interrogation. If a PC role-plays their answers with doubt, the guards should latch onto that doubt and grill them on whatever subject in might have been. Right at the beginning, you want to make it very clear to your players that Vallaki takes itself very seriously.
  + The guards may also blatantly ask for the PCs' opinion of Strahd. They're doing their best to completely sift out Strahd supporters and won't allow such people into town. Even if your PCs lie and say they love Strahd, it's possible for them to backpedal and explain themselves to the guards with some good persuasion checks. Don't make it impossible for players to get into Vallaki, but make the general atmosphere very clear right at the start.

### Traveling with Ireena

* + Unless something horrific has happened between the Village of Barovia and Vallaki and your party has shifted dramatically off course plot-wise, they should be traveling with Ireena. Remember that Ireena is a burgomaster's daughter and therefore a member of one of the few noble lines in Barovia. Her family name is actually quite well known and very respected.
  + Ireena will happily and proudly present herself to the guards. She'll also use her status to steer around any unfortunate things your players may say during this introduction. Remember that Ireena is very much Barovian nobility and this is one of the few times she'll really play that card for all it's worth.

### The Laws of Vallaki

* + Passing the Introductions phase is only the first step to getting inside Vallaki. Once the guards are satisfied with the players' identities and intentions, they'll open the main gates for a preliminary rundown on Vallaki law. This is basically like customs check at an airport and that's how you should treat it. The guards will go over the following with the party:
    - "Once inside, the mention of the name "Strahd" is strictly illegal, even in written form. Know that even now as I say the name, it is the last time you will hear it within the gates. Instead, if you must refer to the aforementioned individual, you will refer to him simply as, "The Devil.""
    - "This noble town holds a festival each week in honor of the resident's general merriment and continued support of the Burgomaster, Baron Vargas Vallakovich. As guests of Vallaki, you will not be required to aid in the preparation for our festivals. However, your attendance and participation in each and every festival is absolutely mandatory for the length of your stay. Failure to attend will be in strict opposition to Vallakian law. The next great Vallakian festival, the Festival of the Blazing Sun, will be held in three days’ time in the town square."
    - "Failure to comply with any Vallakian law will mark you as criminals to our city and you will be punished as such in accordance to our justice system. If you have any questions, now is the time to ask them."
  + The guards will reinforce any and all of these laws with the party as many times as necessary. Should the players ask about the festivals, the guards will happily tell the players about them but only in the most positive light. And if the players ask about the punishment of criminals, the guards will only tell them the basics; that it may involve anywhere between a fine, imprisonment, or in severe cases, execution. The guards will not bring up the stocks or the Burgomaster's private torture.

### Weapons Registry

* + Vallaki supports its citizen's rights to bare arms... in sort of a medieval sense. A great number of weapons aren't really allowed, sure, but for the most part it is recognized that Vallakians should be allowed to defend themselves if Strahd ever came to town. Vallaki has a very rudimentary weapon's registry system in which anyone that wishes to own a proper weapon must register that ownership. That's how people like the wolf hunters get away with carrying their gear around. The weapons are technically part of their trade and are registered as such.
  + After your players are done going over Vallakian law, they'll reach the third and final step to get inside the town. The guards will ask that they present their weapons for registry.
    - Each player will essentially have a quick sheet written about them, detailing their name and appearance. On that same sheet, a scribe will list out that PC's gear as well as any significant descriptions of said gear. If a player is carrying around the longsword from Death House, for instance, the scribe will record the windmill motif on the handle.
    - Most likely, at least one player will do their best to hide a weapon and/or use a fake name. It's only dnd survival instinct after all. If a player uses a false name, have them roll deception DC 12. The guards don't have too much of a way to check fake names, so it isn't a huge problem to have a false one written down. If a PC tries to hide a weapon, have them roll sleight of hand against a guard's passive perception.
    - If a guard catches a player trying to lie or hide something, they won't get too overtly angry. Barovia is a harsh place and travelers have to be wary, after all. A guard might instead just get annoyed by the lie, and will simply and firmly ask for the truth instead.

## Murderers be Warned!

Vallaki is a strict place. Killing doesn't happen very often within its walls, but when it does it is taken very seriously. If your players cause some sort of unrest, it is entirely possible that guards will come to investigate or, in worse cases, come to arrest. Should such an encounter devolve into a fight, it is very possible that a PC will kill a guard.

Killing a guard is grounds for execution in Vallaki. Do not go to jail. Do not pass go. Do not collect 200. The token is *off* the board. With the strictness going down, you'd hope that players would get the message that laws mean something here. But sometimes it's hard for a player to not hit with the pointy end.

No matter what, being a wanted murderer can offer some really fun role play opportunities. So, if this happens, let it be so. At the very least, your players will learn that Barovia is a living breathing world where their actions have consequences.

## Battles in Vallaki

* In general, your PCs have a good chance at winning a fight against the guards. There aren't very many guards in Vallaki, anyway, so whittling down their numbers is easy enough. If such a fight breaks out, play the guards very intelligently. Don't make them dumb video game guards that can be cut through like warm butter.
  + To help reiterate that the guards are people and not expendable, go ahead and give them names. Make them sympathetic. This info probably won't come up, but if it does, it tells your players that Barovia is alive.
    - Example: In my campaign, my rogue killed a guard in a minor scuffle. He then quickly learned through a series of guard conversations that the murdered guard's name was Gordo. And Gordo was one week away from retirement and had three kids and eight grandkids. The guards were putting together a collection to pay for Gordo's funeral. I spread the guilt on thick with this one, almost to the point of comedy. But my players never attacked a guard again, so... ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

### Separate and Apprehend

* + The guards will do their best to separate fighting PCs and get them alone. If it's obvious that they're losing the fight, they'll retreat and come back when the party isn't expecting them. In the middle of the night, perhaps.
  + Depending on the severity of their crime, arrested PCs will either be put in the stocks for a time, taken to the Reformation Center (which I'll detail in a later post) or be lined up for execution by hanging in the public square.

### Wanted PCs

* + If PCs evade capture and/or escape Vallaki, they will become wanted in town. It may be fun to have bounty hunters come looking for the party on the road to Kresk, for instance. To reiterate, make sure that this feels like a real world where choices and morals matter.

## Stopping Point

And that's it for now. I could go on, but this is a pretty sizable post already, so I'll stop here. In my experience, Vallaki is one of those sandbox towns that's very hard to predict so I'd love to hear your thoughts on what I've come up with so far. If you have any requests on specific humps and hurdles in Vallaki that you'd like me cover in my later posts, feel free to ask. Otherwise, I'll catch you all later!

-Mandy

# Vallaki II - Town Square, The Inn, and St. Andrals

Or, the importance of the town square and other things.

Once inside Vallaki, everyone's campaign will start to branch out. It's almost impossible to really predict what will happen in this town or where your players will go first. So, get some initial stuff laid out and then roll with the party. Let your players take control here and then make Vallaki respond to them and not the other way around.

## The Atmosphere of Vallaki

Once getting inside the walls, the atmosphere of Vallaki should hit your players hard. But in a good way. The streets are teeming with people and there's the obvious sign of life everywhere. The volume of people in this area (while still light in comparison to most towns in other realms like Faerun) should shock them after what they've seen in the Village of Barovia. Even the Vistani camp at Tser Pool, while lively and friendly, was surrounded by the menacing woods. Vallaki should feel like a different, almost normal world to the PCs.

While the PCs' experience at the town gates should have given them a sign of Vallaki's oppression, the players' initial stroll through the streets shouldn't betray very much. The people here, though oppressed, are doing their best to live their lives as normally as possible. Remember, Vargas highly encourages smiles and happy moral, so passive jovial smiles aren't uncommon amongst Vallakians, however fake they may be.

## Of Stocks and Donkey Heads

Your players will likely enter the town from the eastern gates and start making their way westward through town. Upon this initial stroll, they'll have little reason to visit the stockyard and absolutely no reason to visit the coffin shop, so skip them unless a PC really fixates on a building on a map.

### The Town Square

* + Eventually, your PCs will get to the town square. Try to make the natural flow of the town lead them here. Maybe they're on their way to the church per Ireena's quest. Maybe a townie directed them towards the Inn. Maybe they're just looking for people and the party sees the most activity coming from the square.
  + No matter how they get there, know that the town square is a very important location in Vallaki. Though it doesn't have an official map, my players ended up in this location more than any other and yours likely will too. No matter what other location they visit, it will almost always push them back to the square (for a reason), so it's best to introduce this location early on.
  + ***Vallaki's True Nature on Display***
    - Your players' revelry about this nice, populated town won't last long once they get to the town square. Between the posters and stocks, they'll at the very least get an inkling of what it's really like to live in Vallaki.
    - If they try to approach townies, make the first couple NPCs pretty useless to the PCs so they feel alienated. One townie glares at them and tells them to get lost. The second wears a strained smile and tells the party only propaganda, advocating the stocks and the wondrous nature of the Baron who keeps them safe from the Devil.
    - Finally, a third townie may gesture them over as they put up posters for the upcoming festival. This Vallakian will tell the PCs about the Baron's strict rule in hushed, cautious tones. They also warn the party about breaking the law, for the punishments are far from just.
  + ***The Main Attraction***
    - The flavor text on page 119 of the campaign books tells us about the stocks being sort of off to the side of the square and a large fountain taking up the majority of the attention. No. Change this. You want to put those stocks on display, not some fountain with a statue that never comes up again.
    - Instead, set a large wooden platform up in the center of the square about four feet tall. This square stage features the stocks lined up around the edges and facing outward towards the rest of the town square. The donkey headed prisoners are on full display that way. In the center of this platform is empty gallows, a trio of nooses hanging ready and waiting.
    - You may, at your leisure, put a couple fountains off to the side that some townies are using. There may also be a couple secondary, smaller stages for use in the many festivals. But the centerpiece should definitely be the gallows and stocks.
  + ***No Izek Appearance***
    - Try to save the appearance of Izek as a surprise in an aggravated situation, so don't place him in the square absently tearing down posters. The threat that we can't see always seems more dangerous than the one we can. Only make Izek show up in any location if the party causes a ruckus of some sort. If they're good little angel PCs, then maybe you can have Izek make an appearance under different circumstance. But definitely save his appearances for the opportune moment.
    - Try to bring up Izek in passive conversation with townies. If the PCs ask about the stocks, for instance, or speak illy of the festivals, a random Vallakian might warn them about Izek and tell them to hold their tongues. Try to play up the threat of the Captain of the Guard. The townies probably also have one or two untrue (or true, it's up to you) stories that blow Izek's maliciousness far out of proportion, but are effectively scary nonetheless. Use these to make your players nervous as they should.
  + ***Probable Fight #1***
    - As I've said many times before, Vallaki is a powder keg. There are multiple instances where the PCs might break into a fight and/or get in trouble with the law. The town square is a prime location for this to happen.
    - It's very possible that your players will want to do something about the people in the stocks. If you'd like, have a townie try to quietly stop them, telling the PCs that they're acting like barbarians. Otherwise, the guards patrolling the square will come down hard if the players even step up onto the stage.
    - If a fight breaks out, Izek arrives pretty quickly with backup. You may use that opportunity to have Izek react to his sibling, if they are present, and potentially take the party to the Burgomaster's Mansion.
    - Depending on how bad the fight gets, Izek may either let the players off with a warning, take them to the Reformation Center (jail), kick them out of town, or, in the case of a murdered guard, sentence a PC to death.

## The Blue Water Inn

The Inn is one of those places that will sort of pop in and out of importance depending on when and why your PCs are visiting.

### Initial Visit

* + First impressions are everything and the Inn gives a pretty good one. This place is lively and homey, filled with the smells of homemade meals and cheery laughter. The Inn is the hub of the town, so make sure to give off that friendly ambiance.
  + ***Wereravens***
    - Try to save the secret of the wereravens for as long as possible in the campaign. The Keepers of the Feather are a very secretive group and they won't trust someone willy nilly. What's more, your players are not the first heroes they've seen who've come to take down Strahd. The Keepers won't present themselves without good reason.
    - There should really only be two reasons a wereraven reveals themselves to the party throughout the campaign. One: The wereraven is cornered in combat and has to use their abilities to survive, even if the PCs see them. Two: The party does something so profoundly helpful or otherwise ingratiate the Keepers to them that the wereravens reveal themselves out of honor.
  + ***Meeting Danika***
    - Danika should be the main NPC the party interacts and she makes an obvious show of her excitement over the arrival of new people. Getting your party to converse with her is a great way to get your players to role play and recount their deeds of heroism. She's also a hub of useful information and can answer any question the party has about Vallaki.
    - Danika is cautious about talking openly about the political tension in town, however. She'll phrase her words carefully so that she doesn't actually say anything incriminating. But the implications behind her phrasing should leave no room for dispute. After a chat with Danika, the PCs should have no doubt about the true oppression going on in town.
  + ***The Wolf Hunters***
    - These two are pretty fun characters to role play but are honestly pretty useless otherwise. As written, they can guide the players through the woods and help them in a fight, but honestly, you'll just be bogging down your players with more NPCs if they hire the hunters.
    - What's more, the pair of wolf hunters are easily confused with the Wachter brothers, whom also make a possible appearance at the Inn. Of the two pairs, the Wachter brothers are much more story relevant than the wolf hunters and should definitely take priority when introduced to your party.
    - Instead, I would recommend you remove the wolf hunters from Vallaki altogether and place them elsewhere in the campaign. I would highly recommend that you use them as a hook for the Werewolf Den. Your players could find the hunters while traveling around Kresk and find that they've stumbled upon something bigger than wolves. They would love to have PC backup when saving children from werewolves, which they feel morally obligated to do.
  + ***The Wachter Brothers***
    - Speaking of which, if your players meet the brothers at the Inn - and I would recommend that they do if at all plausible - play these two in the same open, jovial nature in which you played the Vistani. The brothers are Frat kids. They love to drink and party and otherwise cause mischief and your players shouldn't sense anything sinister going on about them.
    - The brothers don't know anything about their mother's cult or that she keeps their father's corpse in the master bedroom. They do however know about Stella's condition and have some strong opinions about the Burgomaster's family as a result. These two loved their baby sister and seeing her so broken is a source of great contention.
  + ***Staying the Night***
    - Should the players request a room at the Inn, Danika will have her boys, Brom and Bray, lead the way. This is a good chance to have a cute little role play between the boys, which in turn plays up the familial and comfortable nature of the Martikov family.
    - Danika will charge the players for their stay, but if Urwin gets to them first, he'll offer the room up free of charge. Urwin is honestly too kind for this world and Danika loves her husband for that reason exactly. This is yet another little scene you might play out to show off this wonderful, functional family.

### Make sure to put in these Rumors:

* + One of the Inn's best patrons and the town drunk, Bluto, hasn't been seen for a couple days. He's often found uselessly fishing on Lake Zarovich, north of town.
  + There's a shortage of wine. Danika and Urwin have family at the Winery, but due to a past falling out, they haven't spoken in years. Urwin is worried about the Winery but has yet to set aside his pride to send a word as of yet. The last shipment was due a week ago.

### Safe Haven

* + Your party might also end up at the Inn under less-than-ideal circumstances. If and when things go south between your players and Vallakian law, the Martikovs will do their best to provide the party with sanctuary. The wereraven family will put the party in the upper attic/hayloft to hide from the Baron's men.

### Rictavio

* + Rictavio, or Rudolph van Richten, is also staying at the Inn.
  + For an excellent way to run van Richten, take a peek at [this post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8xcf57/my_notes_on_doctor_rudolph_van_richten_the/) by the wonderful [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/).
  + ***Delaying the Reveal***
    - Hold off on Richten revealing his true identity to the players. This veteran hunter is very careful, after all. He shouldn't just reveal himself to the first adventuring group that wanders by. Even if he's your party's Ally, save the reveal of his true identity for Van Richten's Tower.
    - This is also a good opportunity to pepper in rumors about the famous monster hunter. Van Richten is a bit of a legend in Barovia, spoken of more like Batman than a real person. Go ahead and let NPCs name drop him a couple times to up his legend. That way, when the party meets the real Van Richten, it'll feel even more special.
  + ***Identities Behind Identities***
    - I actually gave Van Richten an extra layer to his secret identity so that he could help the party without revealing himself.
    - Rictavio is actually a spy in Vallaki, keeping an eye on the political climate as well as the general level of Strahd activity in town. He uses his carnival as a front for his spying. So, in simpler terms, van Richten is playing the part of a spy who's playing the part of a carnival ringmaster. Identities within identities. Identity-ception!
  + ***Meeting Rictavio***
    - If the players end up staying at the Inn, Rictavio will approach them in the late evening and warn the players about one thing or another. Go ahead and meta this just a little bit. Whatever your players are doing that might get them in trouble, Rictavio warns them about it. If they've been talking a lot about the stocks, Rictavio will calmly tell them about Vallakian law. If the players met Lady Wachter, Rictavio will tell them she's a dangerous woman.
    - No matter what Rictavio initially tells the players, they should be intrigued enough to follow him back to his room for a more private conversation. There, Rictavio reveals that his role as a carnival man is only a front for his spying ventures. Since the players are outsiders, Rictavio feels morally obligated to warn them that Vallaki is not a safe place. He tells them to leave town as quickly as they can and to keep their heads down in the meantime.
    - He'll also ask the players what they're doing in Vallaki in the first place. If the players mention Madam Eva, Rictavio is doubly interested and is willing to interpret her card reading for the party. If he's the prophesied Ally, he won't join the party just yet. He'll keep the information to himself and take some time to weigh his options before joining them later in the campaign.
    - Rictavio the Spy knows a little bit about everything in town. Basically, he knows the cliff notes version of Vallaki and is willing to share some intel with the party, provided they ask the right questions. Make it clear that Rictavio knows his stuff, but also keep him ignorant enough that the party will have to discover certain answers for themselves.

## The Church of St. Andral

The church is another location that your party will end up at sooner rather than later. Ireena's main story quest should push the party towards the church, especially if they seem at a loss. Overall, running the church is pretty simple. Use my NPC guide for Father Lucian and Yeska's personality.

One way or another, your players will find out about the missing bones and run off to track down Milivoj.

### The Problem with the Bone Quest

* + As written, tracking down the bones is actually a pretty quick quest. Going from Father Lucian to Yeska to Milivoj to the Coffin Shop sounds like a lot of steps, but will actually take no more than a half hour of gameplay, if that much.
  + The problem here harkens back to my previous post on cause-and-effect scenarios in Vallaki:
    - Strahd wants Ireena. Ireena will be safe from Strahd if the church is reconsecrated and Strahd *cannot* allow that.
    - Strahd has his mental claws in the coffin maker and likely scries through the man. If Strahd sees that the party has come to the Coffin Shop in search of the bones, he'll come to Vallaki pretty quickly to collect Ireena before she has a proper safe haven. He can't risk the consecration of the church hiding her from him.
  + By this logic, the party can potentially go from, "hey what a nice new town to explore" to "Strahd is coming right now all is lost" in less than an hour of gameplay. That's really fast. You want to give your players time to explore Vallaki and delve into that political intrigue. Hell, you spent a lot of time prepping this massive town! Don't let your players just throw it away by accidentally and completely logically summoning the big bad guy.

### What I've Added

* + Instead of fast-tracking ruin and riots through the bone quest, I've actually added a new mini adventure and location to help pace Vallaki a little better: St. Andral's Orphanage.
  + When your players are directed to Milivoj, they're told to find him at the orphanage instead of the graveyard. Running this mini adventure will give your party the chance to acclimate to Vallaki and put Milivoj's character portrait to better use. ;)
  + You can find the orphanage adventure here: Vallaki Extra Location: St. Andral's Orphanage

### After the Orphanage

* + After completing the orphanage side adventure, the PCs will know the bones are at the Coffin Shop. However, before they run off to that horrible fight with vampire spawn, go ahead and interweave a meeting with Ernst Larnak at this point. The players have been in Vallaki long enough that word of their arrival should have reached Lady Wachter by now.
  + Ernst has been sent to humbly invite the party to dinner at Wachterhaus. Lady Fiona Wachter wishes to employ their assistance...

## Conclusion

That's it for now! My next post on Vallaki will entail Wachterhaus, the Baron's Mansion and how to integrate both locations into a flowing plot while carefully putting off the coffin shop until later. I'll also be posting my full mini adventure on St. Andral's Orphanage soon, so get pumped! Thanks for reading!

- Mandy

# Vallaki III - Running the Mansion and Wachterhaus

In this section, I'm going to go over exploring the Burgomaster's Mansion and Wachterhaus in Vallaki. I already covered Vargas and Fiona in my NPCs post, so this'll be a more hands on approach to how PCs might explore the two locations in game and meet their residents. If there are discrepancies between some detail I write here and what you read in the campaign book, those changes are likely detailed in the NPC post or in my other Vallaki posts.

## Wachterhaus

### Hooks

* + Here are some ways to get your players to Wachterhaus:
    - After making note of the PCs arrival in Vallaki, Fiona sends Ernst Larnak to politely invite them to dinner. Ernst tells the players that his Lady wishes to ask their assistance in a matter of great importance. If pressed, Ernst only implies that the matter might have to do with the Burgomaster, but says little else while outside the safety of Wachterhaus.
    - If the players meet Vargas and earn his trust, he might ask them to investigate Wachterhaus for signs of the family's treachery. Vargas might give the players "diplomatic immunity" on a mission to sneak into the house, discover what they can, and report back to him.
    - If the players meet Vargas and leave feeling oppositional, they may privately complain about him. A random civilian (secretly a cultist) might overhear the complaint and quietly suggest they go to Wachterhaus to find friends of a similar mindset.

### Chatting with Fiona

* + ***NOTE***: This is yet another character illustration you should NOT show your players. Not only is it overtly creepy, as many of the NPC portraits are in the campaign, it also completely spoils Fiona's imp.
  + If the PCs meet Fiona on favorable terms, she takes her time feeling out the players and their personalities. However, she is quite open, if politely so, about her distaste for the Burgomaster.
  + Fiona might use the following stories/information to sway the party's opinions of Vargas:
    - Vargas isn't the first terrible Burgomaster of the Vallakovich family. Each Burgomaster has been just as terrible, if not worse, in their rules. Don't the PCs feel such leadership should end with Vargas?
    - Vargas and his captain, Izek Strazni, are brutes. Many believe only Izek is responsible for torturing prisoners, but Fiona knows that Vargas has his own mean streak. Perhaps that is why his wife, Lydia, is so delicate in nature...
    - Fiona tried to do the diplomatic thing and consolidate an understanding with the Burgomaster by arranging the marriage between their children. However, she was unaware that Victor Vallakovich could be as cruel as his father at so young an age. Though Fiona doesn't know what exactly Victor did to make her daughter lose her mind, she knows it must have been horrible. It obviously and truthfully pains Fiona to relate Stella's condition to the party, but she'll do so to impress the corruption of the Burgomaster's family line.
  + If Strahd comes up in conversation:
    - Fiona is the only person in Vallaki who will call Strahd by name, directly against Vallaki's laws. She does this because she has no fear of him.
    - Fiona sees no monster in the land but Vargas himself. Fiona believes that Vargas' fear of Strahd is only an excuse to get away with mistreating the people of Vallaki. She believes Vargas actively sows that fear to get the people to follow to him in a great conspiracy. This is false, however. Vargas actively believes the delusions he preaches and is in no way as manipulative as Fiona thinks.
    - As in the raw text, Fiona refers to Strahd as simply a "negligent landlord."
    - If the flow of conversation allows, Fiona will happily relate her meeting with Strahd when she was a teenager (detailed in the NPC post). She uses the story to prove how benign she believes Strahd to be.
  + Towards the end of role play, Fiona should be able to sense the party's general sympathy towards her and her cause. If the feeling is a bit more hostile, she'll thank the players for the chat and send them on their way. Ernst Larnak will tail the party and spy on them from that point on, reporting back to Fiona immediately if he witnesses the party conspiring against her.
    - If Fiona has generally earned the party's trust, she'll relate the following information:
    - Fiona once received a prophesy from a seer that told of their coming. Fiona believes that the PCs' arrival in Vallaki means the start of a new age and she desperately wants this to come to fruition. For the full background of this prophesy, please refer to my NPC post.
    - Fiona has plans in place to overthrow Vargas during the coming Festival. She would like the party's assistance during the revolution.
    - Fiona would like to have additional intel on Vargas and his foul practices. If there's time before the Festival, Fiona asks the players to go to the Mansion (and possibly the Reformation Center) to collect evidence for her to use during the revolt. She would also love to know how Victor may have tortured her daughter to cause Stella's condition so that Fiona might undo the damage.
    - If the party is in need of a place to stay, Fiona offers her home to them. She'll make her sons' rooms fit for guests, since they stay out most nights anyway. She tells the PCs that her daughter's room and the master bedroom are strictly off limits, however.

### Stella

* + For a better explanation for the cause of Stella's madness, refer to [this wonderful post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8eex9m/alternate_very_negative_take_on_victor_vallakovich/) by [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/).
  + ***PC Interaction***
    - If players walk the upper floor hall, Stella reaches her fingers under the door and tries to bat at their passing feet.
    - Stella was actually super fun to role play with my group. She always refers to herself in the third person as "Little Kitty" and has a skittish and fickle temperament. She's easily swayed by PCs who get down on her level and coo at her and hisses and swats at players who approach her too quickly.
  + ***Fiona's Love***
    - In my version of Wachterhaus, Fiona actually cares about her daughter. Like a true fanatic, she would still sacrifice Stella if it meant saving Vallaki from darkness, but it would definitely pain Fiona to do so. Fiona has done everything she can to keep Stella safe and has a personal vendetta against the Vallakovichs as a result of her daughter's condition. Fiona won't take kindly to any PC who tries to harm or frighten Stella.
  + ***Curing Stella***
    - Stella's madness isn't the result of a curse. It's all in her mind. So, curing her would require a greater restoration spell or better. Getting Stella's mind back is therefore far from easy and it's unlikely your players will be able to do so on their trip to Vallaki.
    - I'd like to make note that mental disease is pretty much the only thing the Abbott can't cure. If he could heal minds, the mongrelfolk would be a lot better off, after all. However, your players may still latch onto the hope that the Abbey can cure Stella and bring her there.

### Master Bedroom

* + ***Fiona's Dead Hubby***
    - The flavor text makes it pretty obvious Nikolai is dead. I'd change this. Instead, tell any player who peeks into the room that there's a man sleeping in the bed. Not, "apparently sleeping" or "lying still." He's just sleeping. Use the description to throw them off. Put him under the covers and get rid of the coins on his eyes for extra spook.
    - If the players spend a decent amount of time in the bedroom sneaking around the sleeping man, you may have them roll perception checks to notice that he's not breathing.
  + ***The Bones of Leo Dilisnya***
    - While this is an interesting find, the chances it becomes relevant in game are slim. What's more, St. Andral is already a much more important skeleton and it'd be better not to confuse your players.
    - I personally took out the bones from Wachterhaus. Though I certainly didn't need too because my players wouldn't have found them anyway. The likelihood of any party finding the hidden key and then the chest is quite small, so don't put much hope in the bones.
    - Instead, either get rid of the bones entirely or move them somewhere more relevant to the campaign.

### The Library Secret Room

* + If you're using my less Strahd-worshipy and less demon-worshipy version of Fiona, either take out or replace the two books.
  + I actually replaced the books with the following:
    - Fiona's journal, detailing the prophesy from the Vistani and her extensive notes and analysis on its possible meanings. Fiona concludes that an outsider will have to be sacrificed to bring sunlight to Vallaki. Though this is definitely up for debate based on the wording of the prophesy, this is what Fiona has personally settled on. It's become more of a sad truth to her than just a possible interpretation.
    - An incredibly old tome with thick leather pages telling stories about the Fanes of Barovia. Most of the stories are untrue and quite grotesque, but even the mention of the Fanes is rare in Barovia nowadays. For further information on the Fanes, refer to [this post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8ryr9b/revisions_for_running_curse_of_strahd_the_fanes/) by [u/DragnaCarta](https://www.reddit.com/u/DragnaCarta/) as well as my upcoming write up which I'll link once posted.

### Cellar

* + Firstly, if you take a look at that NPC post I keep mentioning, I go over the motives of cults and how the representation of Fiona's cult as written is quite poor.
  + Instead of Fiona's cheap parlor tricks, the underground headquarters is where Fiona and her followers occasionally sacrifice a kidnapped guard or avid Vargas supporter. Fiona's prophesy states that a purge is coming to Vallaki and that afterward, sunlight will shine on the town. She advocates the sacrifices as means to encourage the prophesy along. To Fiona, they are simply "purging the wicked."
    - Fiona and her followers still refer to these meetings as their "book club" so they may speak openly about their meetings without implicating themselves.
  + The bodies of the sacrificed are buried in the dirt of the cellar and are the skeletons charmed to attack intruders. If they awaken, three of the skeletons wear town guard armor, making it obvious who they were in life.

## The Burgomaster's Mansion

### Hooks

* + Here are some ways to get your players to the Mansion:
    - If a PC is Izek's sibling or if Ireena is with the party and Izek meets her, Izek will insist on bringing the party to the Mansion to meet the Burgomaster. Izek tells the party that they will be safe there and wants them to meet Vargas. Izek's blessing will also automatically tip Vargas towards accepting the PCs in their meeting.
    - If the players meet Fiona and earn her trust, she might ask them to investigate the Mansion for signs of the Burgomaster's corruption. Fiona also desperately wants to know what Victor did to her daughter to cause the girl's madness.
    - Ireena, as a member of one of the few noble families in Barovia, might request an audience with the Burgomaster. It would only be noble curtesy for Vargas to accept the meeting.

### Meeting the Vallakovichs

* + ***NOTE***: This is yet another NPC illustration you should NOT show your players. If you have any hope of making the players sympathetic to Vargas and his family, it will die the moment you show them this creepy picture.
  + ***Lydia***
    - To get a personalized showing of Vargas' brainwashing, I would suggest the players meet Lydia before anyone else. Once getting into the Mansion, the PCs are led to room b, the parlor, and are told to await Vargas there. Lydia quickly joins the PCs to entertain them in the meantime.
    - Lydia is so clearly lost to Vargas' beliefs that she's barely able to process any other information. If the players ask her anything unkosher, she blinks as if she doesn't hear the question and laughs nervously. Meeting Lydia should be an overall disturbing experience.
    - Once Vargas joins the party and Lydia, Lydia only speaks when spoken to and her responses become even more frighteningly scripted in nature. Vargas does all Lydia's talking for her and she becomes little more than a brainwashed set piece.
  + ***Vargas***
    - Once he joins the party in their meeting, Vargas is full of nervous ticks and wired speech patterns. He's not happy to meet the PCs, but endures the meeting out of necessity. If Izek is there to vouch for the PCs and his sibling, Vargas will be more receptive, but still obviously on edge. I used Cornelius Fudge from the Harry Potter books to inspire Vargas' role play.
    - For the sake of comparisons, Vargas is the obvious evil. He's the evil we can see easily and he doesn't even attempt to hide his views. Fiona, on the other hand, is the secret evil. She's well-spoken and hides her evils well.
  + ***Getting on Vargas' bad side might lead to the following:***
    - Should the PCs act in any way threatening or offensive to Vargas, he openly tells them to mind their tones lest they be thrown in the stocks for their malcontent. Vargas is nowhere near as subtle as other villains in CoS and has had very little need to veil his threats in his life. What's more, his threats are all accompanied by his near constant, creepy smile.
    - The book often suggests that, should the PCs fall from Vallakian grace, the guards and townspeople will all do their best to drive the party out of town. This seems rather unfortunate as it shuts down quite a few subplots and interesting story. Additionally, Vargas has never struck me as the sort of guy who could just let things go. He may not be subtle, but he is certainly vengeful.
    - Instead, if things go horrifically south in this interaction, Vargas will first sentence the dissenting PCs to a day in the stocks. Should they resist arrest and cause a scuffle (in Vargas' home no less), that sentence will go up. Izek, if present, will protect only his sibling adamantly. Vargas won't stop sending his men after the PCs at this point. In his mind, evil must not go unpunished. Even if the PCs do escape Vallaki of their own volition, Vargas will send bounty hunters after them so they can be captured and serve their sentences. This would be a great opportunity to use my Reformation Center supplement, the equivalent of Vallaki's prison.
  + ***Appealing to Vargas in conversation might lead to the following:***
    - Vargas is quite open in his beliefs that his efforts actively stop evil in Vallaki. Vargas actively believes that his measures work as protection from the Devil on high and elates in sharing them with like-minded folk.
    - Vargas doesn't need much prompting to gloat about the effectiveness of his festivals and the efforts he's made to punish citizens for being unhappy.
    - Vargas makes it quite clear he's trying to root out all evil in Vallaki, and he believes the abhorrent Lady Wachter is a source of great evil. The woman has brazenly stopped attending his festivals, claiming thin but acceptable excuses (that she must stay home to care for Stella). Vargas also suspects that she's not just a Devil worshiper (as in the devil Strahd) but also a practitioner of dark magic and is the cause behind the disappearance of his house staff (truly victims of Victor's teleportation circle). If Fiona were a middle-class peasant, Vargas would have had her home raided ages ago. However, Fiona's upper-class status and general acceptance by other prominent Vallakian families has made that impossible. Vargas is quite desperate for proof of Fiona's treachery and the players can earn his trust completely if they aid him in taking down Lady Wachter.

### Izek's Bedroom

* + Firstly, unlock this door. Izek's bedroom is such a beautiful bit of detail to add to campaigns, making it in any way off limits to the players is just sad. If PCs are allowed to wander the mansion, even supervised, they should be able to take a peek inside Izek's room while their guide's back is turned.
  + This is one of those things that gets extra impact if you made a PC Izek's long lost sibling as I suggested in this post. A PC walking into a room filled with dolls in their likeness is such a great moment. ;)

### The Torture Closet

* + Should PCs come across this room, make note that not only is the door locked, but it also has a deadbolt. On the outside. That should get the players curious.
  + I would handle this room in one of two ways, depending on how you want to run your campaign:
    - The whole town knows about Vargas' tendencies to beat townspeople, though no one ever talks about it. It's a generally accepted atrocity and discovering the room will further drive home the complete instability of Vallaki's rule.
    - Or, there are rumors about Vargas personally beating prisoners, but most people think they're untrue stories spread by evil dissenters. Getting proof of Vargas' torture room (and perhaps delivering it to Lady Wachter) would be quite the shock to the Vallakian townsfolk.
  + Udo, though horribly beaten and weak, is the most honest and forthcoming NPC in Vallaki. While everyone else talks in circles around their own agendas, trying not to raise suspicions, Udo is frank with any PC who will hear him. He's already been taken by the crazy Burgomaster. He figures he has nothing to lose.
  + Unfortunately, meeting Udo is something that likely won't happen in role play unless the players openly snoop. If there's only one PC that breaks a law while in the Mansion, you might have them taken to the closet and shackled alongside Udo for temporary holding. The conversation can actually happen in that case.

### The Assassin Mirror

* + ***This mirror is an uber cool concept, but unfortunately there's a lot wrong with it.***
    - Firstly, the likelihood that any party will actually figure out all the mirror has to offer is obscenely small. They'd have to get into the mansion, get to the private bathroom, figure out the mirror is magical, hopefully have the identify spell, and then give an order within 6 seconds without having any context for it to actually work. Without being a meta-DM, this frankly is never going to happen naturally in gameplay.
    - Narratively, the mirror raises more questions than it answers in game. If the PCs did somehow manage to understand the mirror, they'd want to know where it came from and why it's in the Burgomaster's house, possibly causing a lot of turmoil in an already unstable town.
    - What's more, if you make the assassin much more obvious, then it becomes more and more plausible that Vargas would know about it. If Vargas had his own shadow assassin, he would have killed Lady Wachter (and a lot of other people probably) already and half Vallaki's plot would disappear.
  + ***Get Rid of It***
    - I really hate to say it, but I'd just get rid of the mirror entirely. You could totally nix the magical nature of the object and honestly none would be the wiser. Additionally, most of the things you could do to make the mirror more narratively relevant can be more easily relayed to the players by other means. So, if you want to take out the magic mirror, feel free.

### Victor in the Attic

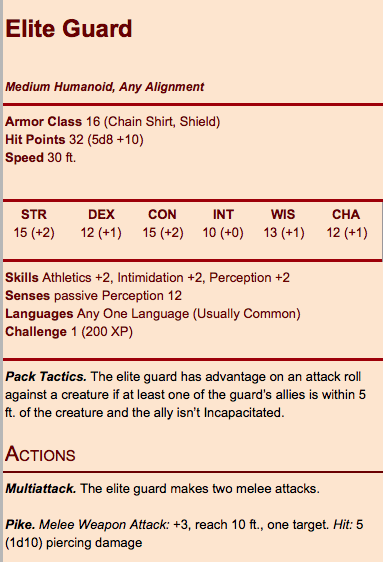
* + As I've stated many times before, I would definitely refer to [this wonderful post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8eex9m/alternate_very_negative_take_on_victor_vallakovich/) by [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/) to run Victor. Not only does it explain Stella's madness, but it also offers one hell of a supplement to give your players.
  + If you'd like to use a bit more of a lighthearted take on Victor, I might recommend playing him more like a moody teen than an evil mage, full of "dude"s and "duhhh"s. Give him some goth makeup and hair flips and you can easily turn Victor into a comedic relief in the middle of this hardcore town.

## More Guards and Better Trained

The written material tells us that Vallaki contains merely 24 guards, many of which are either guarding the gates or are on alternating active duty. Guards are actually pretty weak (with only 11 HP a pop and a 1/8 CR). If your players are levels 4-5, as they should be during their time in Vallaki, it might actually be pretty easy to kill every guard and Izek, thus negating the Police State effect that I've outlined so far in my guides.

I would suggest, in order to further impress the oppression of Vallaki on your players, to up the number of guards in town behind the scenes. Should your players get into an encounter, just throw as many guards at them as seems appropriate.

Additionally, I went ahead a put a few Elite Guards wandering around town. They're sort of like squad captains and can be used for more serious situations. Here's my stat block for the better guards:



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And that's how I'd run Wachterhaus and the Burgomaster's Mansion. This is mostly just tackling PC/NPC interaction and my modifications to the actual buildings, but hey, there you go. ;)

- Mandy

# Vallaki IV - The Feast of St. Andral and Tyger, Tyger

Now that I've gone over just about all of Vallaki, it's time to start covering the events that can take place within these walls. In this post, I'll be going over Tyger, Tyger and St. Andral's Feast.

As written, the events in Vallaki all occur on the same day at the same time. This is pure chaos. And I don't mean the fun, plot fueled kind of chaos. I mean the kind where both the DM and the players are all semi confused and uninvested. Instead, we have to prioritize and introduce our players to one plot point at a time if we have any hopes of having fun here.

## Tyger, Tyger

### Not in Vallaki

* + Alright. First thing's first: either eliminate this event completely or move it elsewhere in the campaign. The Feast is a far better way to spread turmoil in Vallaki, no matter how super cool a saber tooth tiger is. Additionally, the Feast has a much better lead up with the bone quest, the Ireena hook, and the coffin shop. Tyger, Tyger can feel so random in comparison that it's not worth running.

### Van Richten's Tower

* + If you feel so inclined, you can make the Tyger, Tyger event an act of racist terrorism against the Vistani later on. Here's an idea:
    - When the revolution goes down in Vallaki during the Festival of the Blazing Sun, Van Richten will flee to his Tower, tiger in tow. He wants no part in the mobs and political shifting and leaves the town.
    - No matter how cool Van Richten is as a character, or how interesting he is to role play, remember that he actually is pretty racist. He hates the Vistani and believes them no better than the monsters he's spent his life hunting. He's even trained his tiger into recognizing Vistani by their clothes. That's some dedicated racism.
    - Should the players meet the real Van Richten at his tower after Vallaki, they might discover his upcoming plan to take the tiger to Luvash's camp and set it loose. Richten doesn't invite the players to help him in this endeavor, but his journals detail the Vistani campsite's layout and other suggestive information. Snooping players can easily figure out his plans.
  + With this plan, we've both isolated the Tyger event to a smaller camp and moved it away from the Vallakian chaos.
  + I'll have a bigger write up on Van Richten and the tower in a later post, but this is an event that can definitely originate from there if you really want to use that tiger.

## The Feast of St. Andral

According to the RAW material, this event is pretty rushed and barren. I briefly went over some of the problems with the canon quest at the end of this Vallaki post, which I won't reiterate. Instead, I'll focus on reorganizing and running the quest, as well as the potential consequences in its aftermath.

Rather than a simple event or an exciting fight, the Feast of St. Andral has several different parts all connecting and interweaving. It's both a search quest, a who-dun-it quest, and a potential disaster event. Don't expect to handle it all in one session, but rather stretch it out and weave it into the main story.

### Overview

* + I'm just going to quickly recap some information from my previous posts so that you guys know what's going down.
    - *One*: Strahd hasn't openly visited Vallaki in over a century. The town has been delightfully vampire free for a long, long time.
    - *Two*: Strahd arranged the vampire attack months prior to the party's arrival in Barovia. He sent his spawn to plant them in Vallaki out of sheer boredom. However, once discovering Ireena, Strahd completely abandoned his plans for the attack on the town in favor of tracking Tatyana's newest incarnation.
    - *Three*: Strahd wants Ireena. Period. Letting her have a safe haven from him like the Church of St. Andral is absolutely unacceptable. If Strahd discovers that the church is in danger of reconsecration and Ireena is nearby, the gloves come off.
  + With that all in place, know that the Feast of St. Andral is actually a static event that could potentially never happen. The vampire spawn has been waiting in the coffin shop for months and will continue waiting unless the party gives Strahd a reason to let them loose.
  + This is therefore an event entirely reliant on your players' actions, which lets off some of the stress of running a bunch of chaos at the same time.

## Searching for the Bones

### Setting up the Quest

* + ***Pre-discovery***
    - The setup is frankly quite easy. Ireena needs a place of safety from Strahd and the church is an answer to that.
    - Once in Vallaki, go ahead and take the party through the town gates and the town square, as I detailed in my previous Vallaki installments.
    - At your discretion, you might want to have Ireena get that meeting with the Burgomaster out the way. She can claim it would only be in good manners for her (and the party by extension) as a noble to formally meet with Vargas before heading to the church.
  + ***Father Lucian***
    - Father Lucian is old and a little batty. While he's kept the secret of the missing bones to himself thus far, seeing a fellow holy figure, such as a light aligned Cleric or Paladin PC, will prompt him forward. He'll relate the church's plight to the players and begs their help.
    - If the party doesn't have a particularly holy character, he'll instead defer to Ireena. Once he learns that Ireena's safety from the Devil Strahd hangs on the church, Father Lucian will open up. Feel free to use Ireena as yet another quest prompt in this case.

### Following the Trail

* + ***The Church***
    - Lucian will happily show the players the location where the bones used to be in an effort to aid their search. He'll first make sure the church is otherwise empty and tell Yeska to watch the doors.
    - The altar at the head of the church is a large, stone dais carved with sun motifs. There's a small switch on the underside of the altar's lip that allows the altar to be slid out of the way, revealing a short staircase down into a tiny crypt. The crypt itself is no more than a 10x10 room with stone walls and a long stone table. St. Andral's bones used to lay atop the slab before they were stolen.
    - *THE BONES MUST BE PLACED ON THE SLAB TO RECONSECRATE THE CHURCH. SIMPLY HAVING THE BONES ON SITE AT THE CHURCH WON'T HELP.* That's all. Sorry for the scary caps, but ya know. Important details and all that.
    - If the players question Lucian and Yeska, refer to my NPC post for their personalities.
  + ***The Orphanage***
    - No matter how the questioning goes at the church, the PCs should next find themselves looking for Milivoj.
    - The players can find the teenager at St. Andral's Orphanage, where they'll follow a mini adventure. While technically, yes, the orphanage is an optional step in the search for the bones, I feel like it adds some much-needed pacing to the story. Otherwise, determined players could blast their way straight to the coffin shop and into disaster. This'll help stretch things out and give players time to acclimate to Vallaki.
    - Optionally, either before or after the Orphanage is a great time to have Ernst Larnak approach the party and invite them to Wachterhaus to meet Fiona.
  + ***End of the Day Break Point***
    - Depending on how much they've done thus far, this is also a good place to end the party's first day in Vallaki. Traveling from Tser Pool or Old Bonegrinder to Vallaki, entering the gates, seeing the town square, possibly meeting the Burgomaster, chatting at the church, and finally tackling the orphanage is a pretty long day.
    - As night sets in, the party may seek lodging at the Blue Water Inn. If they meet Fiona and get on favorable terms, she might let them stay at Wachterhaus for the night instead. Lastly, successfully completing the orphanage with get the headmistress there to offer the party safe lodging among the children.

### Day 2 in Vallaki

* + This is where things will start getting crazy. Depending on what your characters have done, they may start picking sides between Vargas and Fiona. They may want to report information to either side. If the players get into trouble, somebody might have an encounter with the Reformation Center, which is a whole other ordeal.
  + The players should have a myriad of hooks at this point, and the bone quest is one of them. They should know the bones were taken by the coffin maker and, if they're so inclined, they'll head for the coffin shop.

## The Coffin Shop

Gimme a T! Gimme a P! Gimme a K! What's that spell? TPK!!!!! All jokes aside, the coffin shop encounter is yet another notorious party killer. Six vampire spawns can easily wipe out unprepared PCs, so yet again, we have to do something about it.

### Henrik van der Voort

* + Henrik is a dead eyed loner and isn't much of a conversationalist. He's the kind of guy that only says one word when he can't get away with answering in grunts. He's an older man and has been completely worn down by the passive horror of Barovia. He finds no joy in life but also knows that death must be worse and so fears dying. Overall, Henrik is a super depressing individual. Play him like a more mature, dour version of Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh and you'll be on the right track.
  + ***Questioning Henrik***
    - Once again, Henrik is incredibly reticent. Your players should find him a bit frustrating to talk to. If players get into the shop, Henrik tells them to simply get out. He doesn't threaten to get guards as Henrik certainly doesn't want the authorities to find the vampires upstairs.
    - If asked about the bones, Henrik denies any knowledge of them. The phrase, "I don't know what you're talking about." should come up a lot. Rolling decent insight will easily tell players that Henrik is lying, but his answers remain steadfast.
    - If the players actively threaten Henrik, either with bodily harm or threatening to report the man to the authorities, Henrik will relinquish that the bones are upstairs, but he doesn't say exactly where. He doesn't mention the vampires at all.
    - If asked for his motives, Henrik stays silent. Remember that this is a man of few words. He's not about to embellish a whole sob story to the party. Plus, he finds the vampires a lot more threatening than the adventurers.
  + ***Avoiding the Second Floor***
    - Since the vampires' arrival in his shop, Henrik has been completely avoiding the second floor. He's got a bedroll against the wall in room B and has been sleeping there for the last few months.
    - If players seem keen on taking Henrik upstairs, he absolutely digs in his heels and refuses to ascent the stairs. There isn't a threat in the world that will get him up there and his obvious fear should set off some alarm bells with the players, hopefully making them more cautious.
    - If players ask Henrik why he's so afraid, he stays resolutely silent. But his lack of an answer should read as answer enough.

### STRAHD IS ON THE WAY

* + When Strahd was first arranging the vampire attack on Vallaki, he made sure certain safe guards were in place. He actually visited the town in the guise of his alter ego, Vasili van Holtz, and set up shop at the coffin shop, giving his spawn a place to sleep until the attack.
    - Oh, the door leading to the staircase (from area A to the stairs), Strahd placed a *glyph of warding* with a *clairvoyance* spell attached. Should anyone besides Henrik or Strahd himself open the door, the glyph activates and sends a clairvoyance message to Strahd, giving him eyes into the shop.
    - When Strahd sees the party heading upstairs, he'll either cast scrying or sending on Henrik to learn what's happening.
  + Once he knows the bones are in danger of being found - and by the adventurers who have had his beloved Tatyana in their care no less - Strahd grabs his nightmare, Beaucephalus, and begins flying towards Vallaki. Yes, Strahd is more than willing to let Ireena run free for a time while he woos her, but giving her the church is unacceptable.
  + Strahd intends to make an appearance, destroy the bones once and for all, and invite Ireena to join him at his castle.

### Finding and Fighting the Spawn

* + Once your players head upstairs looking for the bones (without Henrik), they'll most likely encounter the spawn. With Strahd on the way, the spawn will waken to the adventurers and begin the Feast event.
  + Change the Vampires' goals!!!
    - The vampires won't fight the party simply for a fight. Now that they're awake, their goal is to terrorize Vallaki, not kill the adventurers. Instead of attacking the party, they'll use their actions to disengage and head for the door, moving as quickly as they can.
    - Once out on the streets, they'll split up and start taking down townspeople.
    - This minor change will help your party survive this as written TPK. The vampire spawn will only fight the party if they are outright cornered and forced to do so.
    - Lastly, Strahd sends another sending spell to one of the spawns, telling them to fetch the bones and run with them. The party can witness this spawn grab a sack before fleeing. The party may also try to grab the bones for themselves. If they do so, the spawn try to run down the party and take the bones at their master's behest.

## A Feast Indeed

The direct text tells us that the Feast event is confined to the church. While the church is definitely a major location throughout this quest, I changed this, allowing the vampire spawn to run around Vallaki all they wanted, mowing down one person after another.

### The Vampire Spawn

* + Overall, the vampire spawns are starved for blood and therefore lack most of their social abilities. They're also under the explicit orders of Strahd to kill and drink from as many different native Vallakians as they can during the Feast until Strahd says stop. Even if they drink enough to regain some of their humanity, they'll continue to hunt down civilians throughout this event.
  + If, by chance, you're in need of some spawn role playing, here are some quick options you may use for the spawn present during this event.
    - **Eren** - was once a young farm girl. Once she recovers from her bloodlust and is freed from the event, she flees Vallaki into the woods.
    - **Vadu** - was once an uneducated peasant with abusive parents. He revels in his vampiric power and will do anything Strahd says.
    - **Tereska** - An honestly cruel individual who lives for the kill.
    - **Ulrich** - was a middle-class young man who happened to catch Strahd's eye several decades ago. Once he recovers from his bloodlust and is freed of the event, he recognizes the monster he's become and looks for a way to die.
    - **Nimira** - Desperately seeks Strahd's approval and follows his orders and wishes religiously.
    - **Rivia** - Insane. She has no mind of her own and follows her most beastial instincts.
    - **Liliana** - Delusional and vain. She tries to murder any girl she thinks is prettier than she seduce/bite any man she finds exceptionally handsome. Ugly people are below her regard.

### A Race of Priorities

* + As the vampire attack on Vallaki commences, things get crazy. This can be a really fun, chaotic chase sequence as well as a moral dilemma. Do the players prioritize the bones or focus on saving civilians? Do they waste precious time questioning Henrik?
  + ***Dem Bones***
    - If the single vampire spawn stole the bones, the players can have an exciting chase sequence through Vallaki as they try to run this vampire down. For the sake of plot, I'd have the spawn head for the church. While not entirely the best thing to do on the spawn's part, the church is a beautifully dramatic place for a Strahd encounter. Plus, the church is on the opposite side of town from the coffin shop, giving the chase ample room.
    - On the opposite end, if the players manage to grab the bones and run, screaming like banshees as they flee for the church, have a few of the spawn chase them. It'd be the same fun chase sequence, but they're the ones being pursued. ;)
  + ***Helping Civilians***
    - As the party runs through Vallaki, the screams of civilians will grow as town wide panic erupts.
    - Taking the time to corner a single vampire spawn and fight them will definitely give Strahd more time to get to Vallaki. If the party does this multiple times or otherwise takes the time to guide the masses through the disaster, Strahd gets ever closer. Leave it to your DM judgment on when Strahd gets to Vallaki.

### Strahd's Arrival

* + When Strahd does make it to Vallaki, give him an entrance. This dude is a complete badass and absolutely terrifying, so be sure to play him as such. Riding a flaming horse across a darkened sky is *really* impressive.
  + Make sure to have the people of Vallaki go absolutely nuts when they see Strahd in the sky. They may even notice the vampire lord before your players do. Yes, vampire spawn are terrifying, but they're nothing compared to legendary Devil himself. As far as Vallakians are concerned, this might as well be the apocalypse.

## Finale

### Location

* + The location of this Strahd encounter doesn't really matter. Most likely, it'll happen at the church as the characters try to get the bones in place. However, if it's more logical for your campaign, it can most certainly happen in the streets of Vallaki.

### Meeting Strahd

* + Depending on how you've run things up to this point, this might actually be the first time your party is officially meeting Strahd. During this encounter, he has one main goal: destroy the bones of St. Andral.
  + However, you deem appropriate, have Strahd descend on Beaucephalus and meet the party. Remember that once he's in town, Strahd can easily outpace the party on his nightmare. Flying through the sky, this guy is crazy fast.
    - If the party is chasing the spawn with the bones, the spawn flees into the church. When the party enters behind the spawn, they see Strahd standing before the altar and the spawn handing him the sack of bones.
    - If the party has the bones and they're running towards the church, they burst through the front doors and see Strahd waiting for them.
    - If the party has the bones and is fighting in the streets, Strahd descends and confronts them in the middle of everyone.
    - If the party doesn't have the bones and got preoccupied fighting, Strahd descends and meets them in the streets and the spawn runs out and gives him the bones.
  + ***Destroying the Bones***
    - This is a great role play opportunity to really amp up how utterly overpowered Strahd is to your party. Play this dude like a freaking god. If your players attack him, he bats them away like flies. Strahd has no intention of killing anyone, but instead wants to school them.
    - If Strahd has the bones, he makes a show of destroying them with magical fire. Maybe he'll even dramatically and derisively recount the story of St. Andral, which I detailed in this post, while he does so. Bad guy monologuing is so much fun, after all.
    - If Strahd doesn't have the bones, he uses the most quick and efficient methods to retrieve them from the party. Vampire Charm, suggestion and other such spells go a long way. And then he'll go off monologuing and burning anyway.
  + ***Propositioning Ireena***
    - If Ireena (or the Ireena equivalent PC) is still around, Strahd takes the time compliment and flirt with her a little. He'll politely ask her to join him in his castle and proclaim his love and devotion for her.
    - In this instance, Strahd won't use magic, charm, or force to persuade Ireena. Such methods are only alienating, after all, and he wants Ireena to fall in love with him for real. Even if she overtly refuses him, Strahd remains unfazed. It's only a matter of time in his eyes and this is all part of the courtship. He may even offer Ireena some kind of gift. That's up to you as the DM.

### If the Players Reconsecrate the Church before Strahd Arrives

* + After the bones are returned to the crypt, the players successfully reconsecrate the church. If this happens, Strahd awaits them outside the front door and has a super passive aggressive conversation with the party. All the while, the screams of civilians echo through Vallaki.
  + He hasn't given up on Ireena, and he'll probably work to find a way to get to her later on in the campaign, but for now she's safe. The same cannot be said for the party however, as they've now earned Strahd's full attention.

### Ending

* + With the bones either destroyed or returned to the church, Strahd has concluded his business. He mounts his nightmare and begins to head back to the castle.
  + At this point, he'll also call off his spawn. They exit the town on foot and head into the wilds. Most will likely head back to Castle Ravenloft. But you could have a couple hang around in the forest if you want, for future random encounters.

## Aftermath

Following Strahd's appearance and attack on the town, Vallaki goes into high alert. There are more guards on the streets from then on and the party should sense an overall state of unrest amongst the populace. They can still go about their business exploring the town and meeting NPCs, but the conversations will be a bit different, of course.

If the Feast happens and causes a lot of turmoil - or if the timing is just overall wrong - you can have the Burgomaster pass an edict postponing the Festival of the Blazing Sun for a day or two, giving the party more time to recover and explore. You don't want to run one disaster directly on the heels of another. You should try to give a session or two of down time and roleplaying before running the shitstorm that is the Festival. Otherwise, your players will likely feel rushed and disappointed.

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With these changes and expansions, the Feast of St. Andral turns into more of a Strahd encounter than anything else. Additionally, the party should never be fighting more than one vampire spawn at a time, drastically reducing the changes of that TPK. I hope these notes give you guys some flow to these events. Next, I'll be covering the Festival. Until then! <3

- Mandy

# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Vallaki V - The Festival of the Blazing Sun

Hello beautiful people! I'm back from vacation and locked and loaded with more extensions to CoS. This time, I'll be covering everyone's favorite festival. ;p

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The Festival of the Blazing Sun is a key event in CoS. If you're having trouble consolidating between the Feast of St. Andral's, Tyger Tyger, and the Festival, always choose the Festival. This event is essentially the climax of the Vallaki arc and brings together all the other elements of the town into one. It's an important, large-scale event that is entirely reliant on what your players have done prior to its execution. Don't skip it.

## PC Involvement Thus Far

* Before talking about the actual festival, you should make sure you know exactly where your players stand in Vallaki's politics. Do everything you can to give your players enough time to fully explore the town and meet whomever they can. I've written up quite a bit on making the town flow a little better, but each campaign is bound to run its own route in the end.
* Here are the things you should ask yourself before running the festival. Though not all are necessary, you should at least have some baseline answers for them all.
  + Have your players met with Fiona Wachter?
  + Have your players met Vargas Vallakovich?
  + Do your players understand the general political and police rule of Vallaki?
  + Are the players wanted at all by the guards?
  + What do the townspeople think of the players?
  + Where's Izek?
  + Has the Feast of St. Andral's or Tyger Tyger occurred?
  + And, most importantly, have your players picked a side?
* If you have a general answer for or an understanding of each of those questions, you might just be ready to run the Festival. Well, as ready as any of us can ever be.

## Disclaimer

Remember that all campaigns are different. Don't take these occurrences as absolute ways to tell the story of Vallaki, but rather as suggestions on what might occur at the Festival of the Blazing Sun. These are the basic cause and effect scenarios that I outlined for my campaign because they seemed both exciting and logical to me. Use them as you will. :)

## Attendance Mandatory

* On the day of the festival, no matter where the players are in Vallaki, they'll be pushed towards the town square and the Festival of the Blazing Sun. Whichever NPC they happen to be with will pressure them into attending.
  + ***The Martikovs***
    - If the players are staying at the Inn, the Martikovs will tell the players to go to the festival. If the guards find them skipping the festivities while hiding in the Inn, the guards will have grounds to seize the Inn from the family. The Martikovs just won't have that.
  + ***Fiona Wachter***
    - If the players are staying with Lady Wachter on the morning of the Festival, she'll gather them with excitement and tell them that the day of revolution has finally arrived. Fiona and her followers brim with excitement and usher the players to the town square.
  + ***Vargas Vallakovich***
    - If the players are at the Burgomaster's Mansion, they're just short of physically picked up and taken to the festival. The servants and guards don't seem particularly excited, but wear bright, fake smiles whenever in the presence of the Burgomaster. Everyone is whisked away to the town square.

### Skipping the Festival

* + Guards patrol the town during the time of the Festival. Doors are mandatorily unlocked for random searches. Depending on how well your players hide, they may be able to avoid the guards, but definitely make this a tense situation. If found hiding, the guards will march the players straight to the town square and into the stocks.

## Weather

As a minor note, don't forget the weather during this event. It should be raining the entire time after Vargas fails to light the sun. If there's battle, pepper in the bangs of thunder for flavor. It'll make the whole thing really epic.

For your consideration: Did Strahd bring the rain for his own amusement?

## The Proceedings of the Festival

**The following all assumes that Strahd and/or other vampires have NOT made an appearance prior to the Festival.**

Fiona technically doesn't need the players for her uprising to take place. So long as she's met the outsiders, she's going to call her followers to her at the Festival even if the players stand back and do nothing or have obviously joined Vargas' side. The only reason this may not take place is if Fiona has not met a single PC.

* If not a single PC has met Fiona by the time of the Festival, this is an alternate event I suggest:
  + Fiona doesn't attend the Festival. In fact, she openly doesn't attend them in her own little elitist rebellion.
  + The weather doesn't impede the lighting of the sun. It doesn't rain and Vargas gives a stuttering and somewhat crazed speech about how the sun represents the light that keeps away the devil. He then makes public note about the absence of Lady Wachter and declares that she's a consort of Strahd.
  + The guards, whom Vargas ordered to Wachterhaus just prior to the event, drag Lady Wachter and her children on stage and they are burned alive with smaller wicker suns piled at their feet.
  + As usual, this assumes that your players don't do anything to stop or interfere with events.

If players have met Lady Wachter, the Festival goes as follows.

### Part 1: The Laughing Guard

* + If the PCs side with Vargas, they join him on stage during the festival. Vargas prefers to keep the strangers close anyhow, to keep an eye on them. If the PCs side with Fiona, they stand with her in the crowd near the stage.
  + When Vargas orders the hit on poor Lars Kjurls, Fiona steps forward. She gives a grand and radical speed about the abomination of Vargas' rule, which Vargas stutteringly tries to counter. Fiona is a far more eloquent individual, however, and easily out does him with her charisma unless the PCs somehow interfere.
  + ***If the Players are on Fiona's Side:***
    - If the players have been facilitating Fiona, she might have the following information to use in her speech:
    - Vargas' son is an evil mage and a young murderer.
    - Long ago, she received a prophesy about outsiders who would bring sunlight to Vallaki. Those outsiders have come and are standing alongside her.
  + ***If the Players are on Vargas' Side:***
    - During Fiona's speech and debasing of Vargas, the PCs can directly stand with Vargas and speak with him to diffuse the coming revolt altogether. If successful, skip directly to Part 3.
  + Fiona has cultists planted in the crowd that will begin to agree with her speech, encouraging the normal townsfolk to join in.
  + Fiona has also ordered one of her followers to stand near a guard and kill a civilian standing next to them. The cultist will scream and blame the murder on the guard, further inciting the crowd. If a player has a passive perception of 14 or higher, they see the cultist hiding a bloodied knife in their cloak as they scream and point at the guard.

### Part 2: Vive la Revolution

* + When the crowd starts to revolt, fighting breaks out. Guards try to jump into the crowd and stop the people, but to no avail.
  + ***If the Players are on Fiona's Side:***
    - At this point, PCs will be expected to help fight off the guards. You may have a nice combat situation with the guards.
    - To determine a guard's personality during combat, roll a d4. On a 1, the guard will openly fight and kill civilians and will not surrender. On a 2, the guard will fight non lethally and attempted to apprehend and/or disable as many people as they can. They will also not surrender. On a 3, the guard will fight non lethally and surrender when they feel the tides are turning against them. On a 4, the guard joins the revolt and fights the other guards.
    - You may, for these fights, have Fiona's cultists and/or a mob help them in combat.
  + ***If the Players are on Vargas' Side:***
    - The PCs will be expected to assist the guards in battle against the cultists.
    - Depending on how well the PCs defended Vargas verbally, there may or may not be mobs of civilians to deal with as well. You may add 1-4 mobs to the fights as you see fit situationally.
  + **Suggestion**: To up the ante of the fight, you may choose to add more guards than the book states live in Vallaki. This is a police state after all. 24 guards may not seem an adequate amount. What's more, remember that Fiona's cult should be much larger than the few upper ranked book club members shown in the printed book. Both sides have pretty decent numbers.
  + **Optional**: If you have the Reformation Center in your game, the mobs break in and free the prisoners, similar to the storming of the Bastille.

### Part 3: Aftermath

* + If the guards are defeated, Fiona will further apprehend Vargas and his family. She orders a group to storm the Burgomaster's Mansion and bring Victor to the square.
    - Vargas and Lydia are hanged in the gallows.
    - Victor finally gets his teleportation circle to work (sort of) and escapes capture.
    - The Mansion is trashed, but still salvageable.
    - The remaining servants from the Mansion are put in the stocks.
    - Any remaining living guards are put in the stocks.
    - Fiona declares herself the new Burgomistress of Vallaki to the open cheers of the crowd.
    - If the PCs sided with Vargas and are caught by the cultists, the PCs are apprehended and placed in the stocks. Fiona intends to sacrifice them for her sunlight and will do so the following day.
    - If the PCs sided with Fiona, she declares the PCs savior’s indicative of Vallaki's new age. She still intends to sacrifice them, however. At dinner that evening, Fiona spikes the food and puts the PCs to sleep for sacrifice the following day.
  + If the cultists and mobs are defeated, Vargas harshly reinstates his rule.
    - Vargas hangs Fiona and as many cultists as are caught.
    - Watcherhaus is raided by guards and claimed by the Burgomaster.
    - Fiona's children are either sent to the Reformation Center or put in the stocks for being guilty by association.
    - If the PCs sided with Fiona and escape capture, they become wanted for treason. If they are apprehended, they are either taken to the Reformation Center, or hanged. The players will have to be crafty to escape their execution.
    - If the PCs sided with Vargas, The PCs receive formal awards and accommodations from Vargas and he declares the next festival will be held in their honor.

## If the Feast of St. Andral or Other Vampire Appearance has Occurred

If you refer to my first post on running Vallaki, Vallaki I, or my post covering the Feast, you'll know that I changed the conditions for the Feast of St. Andral. If Strahd made an appearance in Vallaki and in turn set his spawn upon the town, the Festival of the Blazing Sun will occur a little differently.

### Tensions High

* + Strahd's appearance has drastically increased the tensions in town. Whatever measures Vargas has proclaimed to keep the town safe have been proven, without a doubt, ineffective. The people no longer trust in the Burgomaster and have no reason to comply to his frivolous whims.

### Complete and Utter Chaos

* + When Lars the Guard laughs and Vargas orders the man apprehended, the gathered crowd erupts. Fiona doesn't even get the chance to step forward and her speeches are completely unneeded to incite an uprising.
  + While Fiona's revolt would be more organized, this is a full-on mob. The people are angry and as a whole, they're looking to take out their rage upon the world. The cultists and the guards are not the main combatants here, the mobs are.
  + ***Fires***
    - Despite the rain, the mob manages to get some torches going and indiscriminately light fire to the main stage. The wicker sun catches flame, falls and bursts, spreading the fire to a few of the surrounding houses.
    - The mobs also move to the Burgomaster's Mansion, where the house is looted and also set ablaze, possibly spreading to the surrounding buildings.
    - Roll a d100 percentile dice to see what percentage of Vallaki is consumed by the fires as it spreads. The PCs may make active efforts to stop the fires, which may affect the survival of the town.
    - Picture this as a full-on Great Fires of London like event, starting from the town square and moving outward.
  + ***Team Vallakovich***
    - Vargas and Lydia are consumed by the mob, tied up on stage and lynched. They scream in horror as they're burned alive.
    - Victor, as in the normal Festival event, gets his teleportation circle to work and blinks out of the Mansion as it's being looted. If a PC is outside the mansion at the time of the looting, they may see the flash of purple light come from the attic window.
    - For the guards, about 1/4 join the mobs and are swept up in the mania. The others are all taken down and killed. The mobs aren't of the mentality to take prisoners or to make examples of the guards. Instead, any guard felled by a mob is beaten to death and possibly dismembered in some way.
  + ***Team Fiona***
    - As the mobs frenzy, PCs can spot Fiona standing somewhere high, perhaps atop a cart or any other place in which she can find a vantage point. Fiona shouts about the failures of the Burgomaster as well as preaches that this is Vallaki's new age brought on by destiny itself. Her sermons encourage the mob's hysteria. As she watches the fires and carnage, Fiona's eyes brim with excitement and she wears an elated, crazed grin.
    - Most of the cultists are swept up and become part of the mobs.
  + ***The PCs***
    - Should the PCs try to calm the mobs, their attempts are almost entirely ineffective. The players will have to have some really good role play accompanied by some superb persuasion checks (likely at disadvantage) to make the people see reason.
    - If the PCs try and use any sort of intimidation or violence, the mob turns on them without question and are no longer reasonable.
    - The PCs can, however, try to redirect the mob. So long as their suggestions are not in open opposition for the mob's need for blood and destruction, the mob is actually quite suggestible.

### Aftermath

* + The fires of Vallaki burn for quite a while. Roll a d4 to determine how many days the fires rage.
  + I would also recommend rolling to see which major NPCs survive the fires and mobs. Van Richten escapes Vallaki no matter what and retreats to his tower.
  + Afterward, Fiona takes up rule and her cult is completely unearthed. They become the new "police" faction.
  + It's also likely that many more Vampire Spawn will be waking up around town in the coming days.

## What Happens to Victor

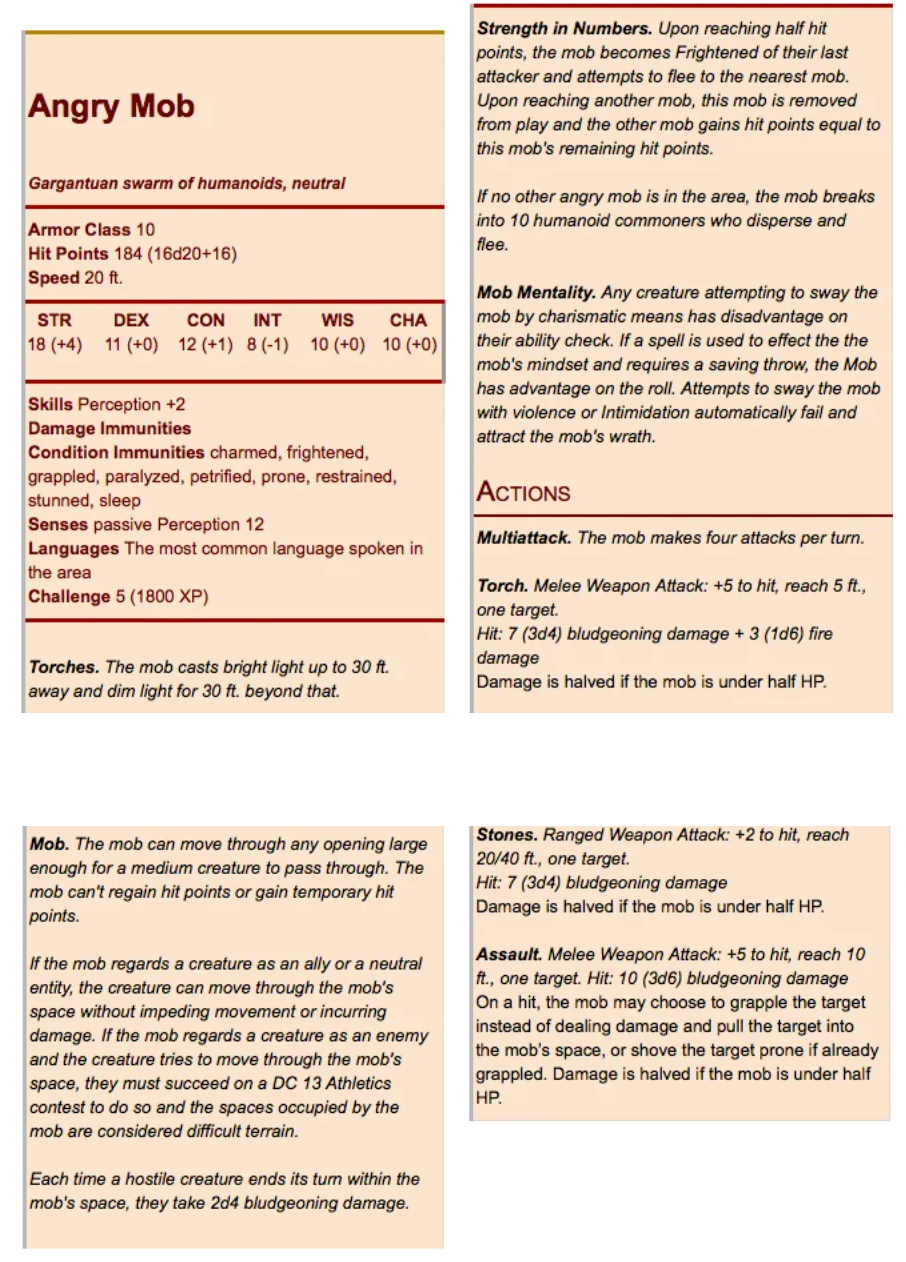
Victor gets his teleportation circle to work at the last possible minute. However, the circle still isn't 100% functional. Instead of just teleporting Victor to another location, it pulls him into a teleportation loop in which he blinks all over Barovia, changing locations every few minutes. Most of the time, he blinks into random wooded areas. Other times, inside homes.

As the campaign continues, Victor starts to live like a teleporting hermit boy. If he blinks into a house, he grabs whatever food is visible before blinking out again. If he blinks into the woods, he takes the fastest poop he can before he's whisked away. Victor has no control over his teleportation and no way to stop it, even while he sleeps.

This is something that I did to make Victor's exit a little more fun. Depending on how your campaign goes, your players may never find Victor again. But, this might be a fun mechanic to bring back in the future should you ever need it story wise.

## Stat Block

This might help you in running the event, should it come up. You can find this stat block in Reformation Center post.



## Conclusion

In essence, the Festival is a display of political change in Vallaki. Most likely, things will go Festival Proceedings --> Vargas vs. Fiona Debate --> Mobs and fighting --> Vallaki changed.

That's how I suggest running the Festival of the Blazing Sun. This event is Vallaki's major climax in my opinion, so I wanted it to be crazy and frightening. As I said in the disclaimer, you certainly don't have to use any of this in your own campaign. But I really liked the narrative implications. Happy playing!

- Mandy

# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Vallaki VI - Arabelle and the Vallakian Vistani

Alrighty, now that most of Vallaki is finished, it's time to move outside the walls and cover the Vistani camp nearby. I was planning on doing the Vistani and the Dusk Elves in one post, buuutttttt it's getting pretty long. Instead, this'll be about Bluto and Arabelle on Lake Zarovich, and the Vistani camp on the hill. Let's get started!

## Saving Arabelle

### Hooks

* + This little bit of story takes up an incredibly small space in the actual campaign book and many parties might have trouble even finding out about Arabelle, let alone saving her. Here are a couple hooks to help that happen:
  + ***Arrigal's Request***
    - I'll admit, this one I'm stealing straight from [u/DragnaCarta](https://www.reddit.com/u/DragnaCarta/). He's probably going to post this hook in his own posts, but I'd feel remiss if I didn't include it here.
    - On the road from Old Bonegrinder to Vallaki, the party comes across a Vistani man leading a draft horse along. This man is Arrigal, and he's on his way back to the Vallaki Vistani camp after a trip out of Barovia to get supplies for his people. The horse is laden with saddlebags containing mostly foreign food stocks including preserves and spices you would never find in Barovia.
    - Arrigal is friendly enough, if a bit reserved, but will happily walk alongside the party for the remainder of their journey to Vallaki. During the walk, he relates that Vallakians don't exactly like the Vistani (implied racism abounds), so they don't usually go within the walls.
    - However, Arrigal knows of Blinsky, a famous toy maker who lives in the town. Arrigal tells the party that his niece, Arabelle, has a birthday coming up rather soon and that he'd love to get the girl a present from Blinsky's. He'd be willing to pay the party for both the toy and a little extra if they deliver it to Arrigal at the Vistani camp later on.
    - This not only plants the Vistani camp later on, but also brings up Arabelle right out the gate and hooks Blinsky's.
  + ***Bluto the Drunk Criminal***
    - First, plant rumors at the Blue Water Inn that their best customer hasn't been seen for a while. Bluto the Drunk should come up in conversation and locals should relate his delusions that Lake Zarovich is just teeming with fish. He often spends his hours not at the Inn fishing.
    - Second, Bluto has recently become wanted by the Baron and his men. At the Wolf's Head Jamboree, Bluto got positively smashed on wine and mooned the Burgomaster in front of the crowd. The guards tried to chase him down, but sheer drunken luck managed to save Bluto's skin and he escaped.
    - If the players meet Vargas and want to earn his trust, Vargas tells them of the wayward criminal and asks the party to capture him. Of course, the party will be rewarded for their trouble. Alternatively, if Izek finds the party (and his sibling) he might relate the details of his job to them. Izek's most recent task has been to find Bluto and having his sibling help in this endeavor seems like a wonderful idea to him.

### Finding Bluto on the Lake

* + ***Scary Lake***
    - The next problem when dealing with this little quest comes in the form of the lake. Lake Zarovich is *huge*. The glassy black water will spook players to pieces. Mine were convinced a vampire Kraken was going to pull them under the moment they tried to go for a swim (which actually might be cool in other circumstances).
    - This is the one time where I would tone down the flavor text when introducing an area. Normally, I don't actually read the text straight up, but pick and choose words and phrasings to use in my descriptions. But even so, I would avoid it. Instead of the lake, focus on Bluto in his boat. Draw the players' attention towards him asap and away from the scary water.
  + ***Obvious Damsel in Distress***
    - When the players get to the lake, make the sack containing Arabelle super freaking obvious. You need to practically shout to your players that someone is in danger. Otherwise, players might think the sack contains objects or criminal evidence or something that can be retrieved later.
    - Instead of Bluto being all starry eyed and spaced out, when he sees the players on the shore, he gets obviously flustered. He's just been caught red handed, after all, and you should totally make him act like a guilty man in a rush. He stumbles around his boat and heaves up the sack.
    - As soon as the sack comes into view, describe it as wriggling. Something inside is obviously moving and fighting frantically. Bluto should actually have trouble picking up the wriggling sack, giving players more time to observe and react. If players ask the size of the sack, describe it as big enough for perhaps a halfling or a gnome.
    - As Bluto hauls the sack onto the edge of the boat, Arabelle finally gets rid of her gag from within and manages to scream for help. The voice is high pitched and terrified. A second scream gets cut off as the sack drops into the water.
    - *Hopefully* this should be enough to push your players into action and rescue Arabelle.
  + ***Saving Her***
    - Despite what the book says, give the players a several chances to reach Arabelle in time.
    - After it's thrown in, the air within the sack delays its descent for a few precious seconds. A character who hauls ass can reach it in time. The players must succeed on a DC 15 Athletics check to swim out to the boat before the sack sinks beneath the surface of the water. Any player wearing heavy armor has disadvantage on the roll.
    - If the players aren't fast enough and the sack sinks, PCs can still dive down and try to reach it before it hits the bottom. You should give diving PCs 3 chances to spot the sinking sack beneath the water, one roll for each breath and dive. The first time they go down, they must succeed on a DC 12 Perception check to spot the sack. If they fail, they come up for air and try again. The second Perception check is DC 15 and the third is DC 18. Then the sack hits bottom and Arabelle drowns.
    - If Arabelle drowns, PCs can still swim to the bottom and fetch the sack. If they do so right after the series of failed checks, they can bring Arabelle's body to shore. More intelligent PCs might try to perform a CPR on her. Have them roll a DC 14 Medicine check to resuscitate Arabelle.
  + After ALL THAT, if Arabelle still dies it's the PC's own darn fault. XP

### Results

* + ***Bluto***
    - Bluto is hopelessly intoxicated when the players deal with him, but he's certainly aware of his actions. He's more than a little bit racist towards the Vistani and refers to Arabelle as a "horse munching thief who'll spread her legs to earn her luck once she grows."
    - Players should feel pretty good about delivering him to the guards in Vallaki, if they're so inclined. Or, they could just kill him.
    - When Arrigal learns what almost happened to his niece, he holds a major grudge. If Bluto is still alive, even in Vallakian prison, he'll arrange the man's assassination later on.
  + ***Arabelle***
    - Once saved, Arabelle is very thankful. She tells the players that her father, Luvash, will surely reward them for saving her.
    - If Bluto is still alive, Arabelle lays a curse on him. "May all wine turn to water in your mouth, you drunken wretch of a man!" This should just sound like a normal outburst to the players, but little do they know, it's all real. ;)
    - If Arabelle learns the players are adventurers, she gets really excited and demands adventure stories as they travel together. For a kid who almost just died, she has little to cry about and bounces back really quickly.

### Optional Mad Mage Encounter

* + After your players save Arabelle, you might have the Mad Mage appear in elk form on the opposite bank. Even for an elk, he's huge and a notable presence across the lake.
  + Arabelle will gasp and spot the elk, claiming it to be the Mad Mage. She doesn't know it's him for sure, but she's heard the stories and will relate them to the players. After a few moments of watching, the elk turns and walks back into the tree line out of sight.

## Roleplaying Arabelle

Arabelle is my baby child and one of my favorite characters in the whole campaign. I've got this thing about the usefulness of children in dnd that I've mentioned in previous posts. I hate the pervading concept that all kids are useless little things in need of saving and Arabelle is my answer to that in CoS. This little girl is my heart song and I will fight all of you on how much I love her. O\_o

### Fortune Teller

* + Out of all the Vistani in Barovia, Arabelle is the 2nd most talented seer among them, Madam Eva coming in first of course. As such, she's plagued by vivid visions of the past, present and future. Because she lives in a grim place like Barovia, these visions are often incredibly bleak. Despite her youth, Arabelle has borne witness to brutality and gore from her second sight.
    - Because of her inexperience in dealing with her visions, Arabelle's sight shows up most prevalently in her dreams. Almost every night, she has dreams and nightmares that she can't quite interpret.
    - Arabelle also has powerful instinctual visions, usually triggered by the senses. When she touches another person, she may receive a vision of an incredibly emotional moment for them (a past trauma, or even their fast-coming death for instance). Smelling a distinct odor or perfume may also trigger a vision associated the scent. No matter what, Arabelle's visions are usually sudden and completely uncontrollable.
    - Her visions, though clear in appearance, lack context. Unless there are direct markers or dialogue in a vision, Arabelle can't tell whether a vision is past, present, or future.
  + ***Tarokka***
    - Because her visions are so difficult to understand, Arabelle religiously carries around a deck of Tarokka cards, which she uses to interpret them. Her readings are never as telling as Madam Eva's, but they can certainly help sort out what's what.
    - If you have Arabelle do a Tarokka reading for your party, her results are more like blurry photographs with no interpretation. For instance, if you have the players ask her where an artifact is and it's in the giant statue at the Amber Temple guarded by the Arcanaloth, Arabelle would say something like this: "There's a man. He's... wearing a cloak with a big hood. But... I can't see his face. It's like the darkness is alive and it's covering his face completely. That's it, that's all I see."

### Personality

* + ***Arabelle is extraordinarily mature for her age.***
    - Arabelle is, first and foremost, an incredibly gifted seer. As such, she's familiar with death, tragedy, and most emotional experiences in human life. This forced understanding made Arabelle grow up fast.
    - Arabelle understands most adult subjects and can crack a dirty joke as well as any vagabond. She's the kind of kid who knows what sex is scientifically (Arrigal gave her the birds and the bees talk at her own demanding when she was six), but can't quite comprehend why it's important just yet. She just knows that she's "not allowed to do it until I'm thirty and married, according to Uncle Arrigal."
  + ***Smart Cookie***
    - Arabelle is a very smart little thing. If she were in real life school, she'd likely have skipped a couple grades. Arabelle grasps concepts very quickly and positively hates it when people treat her like she's stupid.
    - Because of her quick uptake, she often gets frustrated with adults that talk down to her. Sometimes, when people are continuously condescending to Arabelle, she lashes out verbally. For a little kid that weighs about eighty pounds soaking wet, her words can cut deep when she wants them to.
  + ***Queen of Sass***
    - You heard me. Arabelle is a sassy little shit and she knows it. She loves picking on other people, but in ways that don't actually destroy their feelings. Here are some little quotes that Arabelle might use:
    - "Don't you worry. Strahd only goes after pretty people for his consorts."
    - A: "Wow! You're really brave!" Player: "Why... thank you. That means a lot." A: "Oh, no. That wasn't a compliment." Player: "What?" A: "Sorry. What I meant to say is that you're definitely gonna die soon."
    - Before a player takes a bite of their food. "Go ahead. Eat it. I dare you." (Nothing is wrong with the food; she just wants to mess with them.)
  + ***Friends***
    - When Arabelle makes a friend, she makes that friend for life. She sort of picks and chooses the people she likes the most and she'll stick up for those people fiercely. She won't tolerate anyone hurting her friends and is potentially a wicked ally to the party.
    - Like a good little Vistani, Arabelle knows just about everyone in their camp and she gets along with them all just fine. However, there's no one that she really, truly connects with. She's far too mature for children of her own age and most adults borderline worship her for her seer abilities. So, while Arabelle is technically surrounded by family, she's also always a little lonely.
    - The only exception to this is Arrigal. Arabelle thinks the world of her uncle and he is downright her best friend. Arrigal is the only person who actually treats her with respect and values her opinion. Luvash is Arabelle's father and yes, she loves him. But she's really Arrigal's little girl.

### In Combat

* + If your party decides to keep Arabelle around a while (or if you have her as the party's Ally), you're going to need to know what to do with her in combat. If all she does is get in the way and die a lot, your PCs will get annoyed pretty quickly.
  + [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/) has recently written a wonderful post on little Arabelle, which includes some detailed notes on using her in combat towards the end. If you want something a bit more concrete, I would definitely recommend you check out [this post](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9h7to2/my_notes_on_arabelle_the_heir_of_madame_eva/). Otherwise, I'll give some brief ideas and summary here.
  + ***The Little Helper***
    - Arabelle is like a living Help action. She actually does her best to stay out of open combat and darts in and out of melee range to help the party. She might suddenly run across the field and wind a rope around an enemy's legs to make them stumble. She might jump on an enemy's back and throw a bag over their head to temporarily blind them for a round. Maybe she'd go and collect that arrow that missed the enemy and return it to a PC.
    - Either way, Arabelle isn't someone that does damage in combat. She's a support character instead.
    - Also remember Arabelle's visions. If she suddenly sees something bad happen to a player, she might warn them and give the PC advantage on a saving throw. [u/guildsbounty](https://www.reddit.com/u/guildsbounty/) calls this "Danger Sense" and gives a positively superb description of it in that post. ;)
  + ***Childish Deceit***
    - Arabelle isn't afraid to use the fact that she's a child against enemies. If an enemy is intelligent, she may distract that enemy with stunts like, "I'm lost, mister, please help." People are far less likely to suspect a child of foul play.
  + ***Recommended: Bonus Action***
    - If you do end up playing Arabelle in a combat situation, I would recommend you give her a Rogue's bonus action so that each turn she can either dash, disengage, or hide without expending her action. Not only is this ability incredibly useful to her, but it also suits her personality very well.

### Story Significance

* + ***Related to Strahd***
    - Arabelle is a living descendent of Strahd's family line. For the sake of simplicity, Arabelle's mother carried the Zarovich blood, but died in childbirth. Luvash and Arrigal are therefore not of the same blood.
    - The only other person related to Strahd by blood RAW is Madam Eva. However, I changed this and made her a Fane (which I'll detail in another post). If you do the same, that means that Arabelle is literally the only other person alive with Zarovich blood.
    - From her relation, Arabelle technically has the ability to replace Strahd as Dark Lady of Barovia. She can supplant him in the eyes of the Dark Powers and take up leadership, which is a pretty extreme story element. Now, players won't know this right away of course. Even Arabelle is ignorant to her lineage. However, the Amber Temple holds more answers than the players could ever fathom. Establishing Arabelle as a memorable character will help this revelation later in the campaign.

## The Vistani Camp

### A Vistani Hub

* + This particular camp is one of two stagnant Vistani camps in Barovia. While most Vistani are nomadic, the Vallaki camp and the camp at Tser Pool serve as "Vistani hub towns" in a sense. Both campsites have continuously rotating families living there at any given time. So, which the people change and move, the actual location remains distinctly Vistani.
  + The only exception to this is Luvash, Arrigal, and Arabelle, who stay on site as the local leading family and govern the comings and goings of other Vistani.

### Friendly and Not Strahd Worshipers

* + First, remember that the Vistani are not all in league with Strahd, including these. In fact, the majority of them just stay out of his way out of principle. When your players get to the camp, they should be met in the same way they would have been met at Tser Pool, as detailed in my Tser Pool post. The Vistani are welcoming and they adore having guests. They rush the players into the main tent and thrust food towards them, if not wine due to the wine shortage.
  + Should the party have Arabelle in tow, they'll be doubly friendly. Random Vistani will come up each PC and embrace them, kissing them on both cheeks. The amount of love suddenly being thrust at the party should feel a bit overwhelming compared to everything else they've seen. The PC directly responsible for saving Arabelle, provided they are similarly open with the Vistani, will likely be privately considered a Giogoto, or honorary Vistani.

### Luvash

* + Luvash is not in league with Strahd and he's actually a decent leader to the Vistani here. Boisterous and loud, Luvash helps regulate the camp well enough and solve struggles. While he may look big and intimidating, Luvash is really a big teddy bear full of love for the most part. However, if you were to cross him, his fists could most certainly wreak havoc.

### Arrigal

* + Arrigal *is* in league with Strahd, but not for the reasons you might thing.
    - Unfortunately, due to this camp's proximity to Vallaki, this particular site has received a lot of hate over the years. They've suffered horrible bigotry and persecution at the hands of the local Barovians and their relationship with the people of Vallaki is quite sour. Vistani culture dictates that they must be friendly to visitors, but they are quite cautious about Vallakians.
    - While Luvash is hardcore Vistani and sticks to the welcoming tenants of their culture, Arrigal is much more of a realist. Arrigal can't stand seeing his people unjustly persecuted and knows that such bigotry can be very dangerous under the right circumstance. In an effort to protect his people, Arrigal secretly went to Strahd and struck a deal with him. In return for Arrigal's loyalty, information brokerage, and other support, Strahd would come to the aid of this particular Vistani camp if it ever came under attack from the people of Vallaki.
    - Arrigal, like most Vistani, doesn't think too poorly of Strahd. He's an old, powerful entity and therefore garners Arrigal's respect. Thus far, Strahd hasn't demanded that Arrigal do anything particularly heinous, but uses him as a talented informant.
    - Arrigal is quick to learn what he can about the party and cuts locks of hair from each PC as they sleep if he can. Whatever he gathers, he takes directly to Strahd in the following couple days.
  + ***A Loving Uncle***
    - While Arrigal is completely loyal to his people as a whole, he loves Arabelle more than anyone. She's the only one that Arrigal will open up to and he values her wit and insights.
    - In order, Arrigal's loyalties are first to Arabelle, then to this particular Vistani camp, then to all Vistani, then to Strahd, then to the players.

### Alexei

* + With all my rewrites of the Vistani people, don't make Luvash whipping this poor boy. Luvash is big and scary, sure, but he would never harm one of his own people without a good reason. Simply loosing track of an already adventurous child is not a good reason. Maybe Luvash yells at Alexei and curses him out for a while, but he wouldn't beat the guy.

### The Treasure Wagon

* + ***Reward***
    - For rescuing Arabelle, Luvash will offer the party one treasure from the treasure wagon of their choosing. However, they aren't allowed to touch any of the items before they choose. Therefore, they can't open the chests or unfurl the rug. In fact, the only thing the players can see totally will be the throne. This is actually a really fun bit to play with players.
    - If you have a particularly charismatic player or two who try to talk Luvash into giving them more treasure, go ahead and have them roll a DC 14 persuasion check. On a success, Luvash will allow the players to take two items from the wagon under the same rules.
  + ***Pidlewick II***
    - I took this idea directly from the show, "Dice, Camera, Action." And boy oh boy has it worked well.
    - Take Pidlewick out of Castle Ravenloft and put him inside the unicorn rug, rolled up inside the thing and leaving an ominous bulge in the center. Additionally, if players scan the wagon for magic, Pidlewick is the only thing that will go off. Detect Magic will reveal that the bulge in the rolled-up rug gives off conjuration magic (as Pidlewick is a construct after all).
    - If players end up choosing the rug and therefore Pidlewick, they will be surprised when they unroll the puppet and he suddenly springs to life. Luvash will think it's the funniest thing in the world and proclaim, "It's your problem now!"
    - Pidlewick is a prime source of morbid humor and can be absolutely hilarious if played the right way. Remember, he's only looking for someone to love him and think he's funny. He'll idolize any PC who gives him that attention. Alternatively, if there's a PC who hates him, Pidlewick will delight is slowly terrorizing them when no other PCs are looking.
    - Friendly reminder that Pidlewick can't speak and doesn't sleep. Also, he's the size of a gnome, at about two feet tall.

### Last Details on the Vistani Camp

* + Should Vallaki totally crumble under the political turmoil and revolutions, the Vistani Camp is an excellent place to which PCs can retreat after the chaos. The Vistani don't particularly care about Vallaki burning. They consider it a shameful loss of life, but aren't sad enough to help.
  + If the PCs are lacking for a goal, Luvash will ask the party if they might happen by the Winery to see about their missing shipment of wine. If the PCs still have Ireena, they'll probably want to bring her to Kresk next. Luvash will tell the party that the Winery is on the way.

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I think that's it. Gosh, I ended up writing way more on Arabelle than I thought I would. But hey, whatever. I did warn you all about how much I love her. ;)

# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Vallaki - St. Andral's Orphanage

Vallaki is a huge town with a lot going on. So obviously I needed to add an extra location to the town and make it even more exciting. XD Anyway, St. Andral's Orphanage is an optional location and mini adventure that I've developed to fit easily into the CoS chapter. I've created a completely original map to go with it as well. Feel free to add the orphanage in your campaign or omit it entirely, but I think it's a fun little adventure I've come up with. ;)

In this adventure, players will follow Milivoj the Gravedigger to the orphanage and discover an evil headmistress, Ms. Minchin. If players delve deep enough, they'll also find out that Ms. Michnin may not be so evil after all, and the real problem lies with a possessed child named Felix.

## Other Pluses that the Orphanage Provides:

* A plot hook into the Werewolf Den
* A potential introduction for players into the Demiplanes of Dread
* Additional story pacing for the Bones of St. Andral quest
* An appropriate location to leave the rescued children from Old Bonegrinder
* An expanded use for Milivoj the Gravedigger

Updated, Pretty Version on the [DM's Guild](https://www.dmsguild.com/product/263575/St-Andrals-Orphanage)

# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Vallaki - The Reformation Center

We've established that Vallaki is a strict place. We've also established that breaking the law in this town is a pretty big deal. Between the stocks, public hangings, and the Burgomaster's private beatings, you don't want to break the rules here.

However, one thing I was relatively unsatisfied with was the lack of a jail like structure in Vallaki. There are only so many criminals you can put in the stocks, after all, and the closet in the Mansion is pretty darn small. And so the Reformation Center was born. This is an entirely optional extra location that I developed for CoS, complete with its own original maps.

## The Vallakovich Reformation Center

In this extra location, players will find a jail ruled by three elven mages who use their magics to condition and brainwash people's minds. Players who break Vallaki's laws may find themselves apprehended and sent to the Reformation Center.

* The Reformation Center provides the following to the CoS module:
  + A more overt display of the tyrannical government in Vallaki
  + Added consequences for less cautious and more violent player characters
  + A source for Victor Vallakovich's magic
  + An extra event following the Festival of the Blazing Sun
  + An expanded and more functional use for city guards

I'd like to thank everyone in the discord who helped me expand, edit, and flavor this module! You all are the absolute best! <3

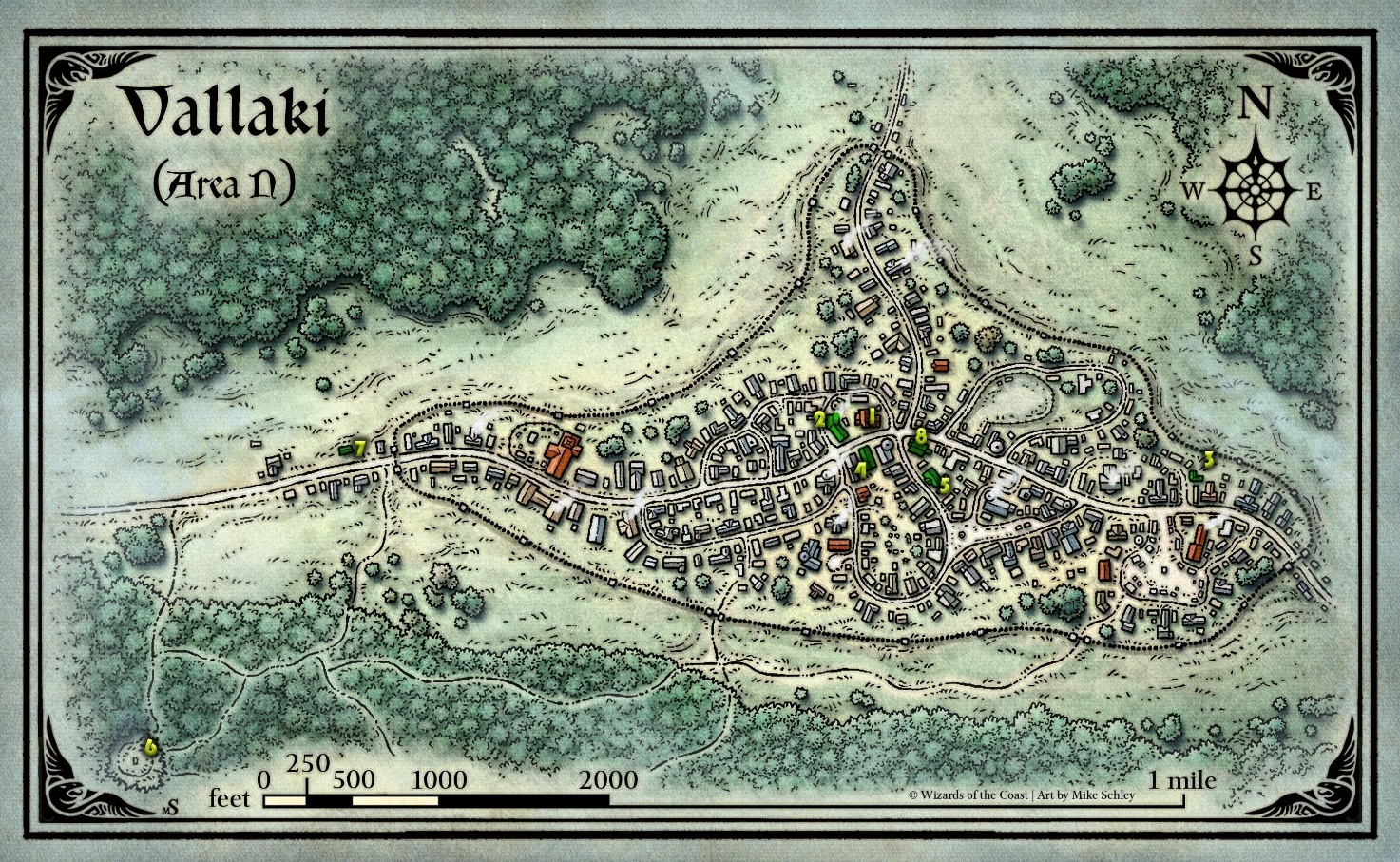
Find the Adventure [Here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KqBDputrtiy1litqPi46enCvh5uj9Lq-XNcm9NGF6W4)

# Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Shops and Shopkeepers

This is a bit more of a simple post. Except for Bildrath's Mercantile, we don't really have any decent shops in Barovia. Even Vallaki, the biggest town in the realm, only notably has a toy shop, a coffin shop, and that overpriced and understocked Stockyard. It'd be awfully nice to have a list of more useful places of business throughout the land, now, wouldn't it? Well, here you go!

## Vallaki

Honestly. Why doesn't Vallaki have some sort of defined shopping district? Sure, they've got the Arasek Stockyard, but that feels more like a storage facility than a series of shops. Plus, selling gear at *five times* the PH price? Lawrdy.



### 1. Inn/Tavern

### 2. Blacksmith and Leatherworker

* + ***Name: "Thimdul's Armaments"***
  + ***Owner: Piersym Rowley***
    - Rowley is an old grizzled veteran who's blind in one eye and half blind in the other. However, he knows good steel by touch and smell alone. Rowley used to be a Vallakian guard, but left very young to apprentice a dwarven adventurer named Thimdul, who'd become trapped in Barovia by Strahd's will. Thimdul died of old age many years ago and Rowley carries on his craft.
    - Rowley and his couple of shop keep assistants are responsible for making all the weapons and armor for the city guard. However, Rowley hates the Burgomaster and happily gives discounts to the PCs if he suspects that they're working against Vargas. If a PC ardently supports Vargas, Rowley sells them a subpar weapon at normal price that will break in combat on a roll of 6 or lower.
    - Rowley is a master weaponsmith, but isn't terribly gifted with armor. He sells only light and medium armor as a result, but can tell players about a legendary armorer he once heard about living in Kresk (Grygori Strum's Grandfather). If the players are looking for bows and crossbows, he can tell the players that Vallaki gets their stock from the Dusk Elves.

### 3. Apothecary

* + ***Name: "The Third Eye Potions and Sundries"***
    - This is a tiny shop pushed off to the edge of town. Vallaki's general bigotry drove Anya's wares away from the central shopping district.
  + ***Owner: Anya Trevali***
    - Anya is half Vistani, half Dusk Elf and bares the mixed features of both her parents. As a young woman used to being an outcast, Anya stands tall under societal pressures and has proven her worth with her craft. She buys, sells, and trades unique potion ingredients, including plant and monster parts. However, she resolutely refuses to deal with anyone who shows her blatant disrespect. Anya has a harsh tongue and no room for bullshit. When she sets a price, it's usually pretty fair, if slightly skewed in her favor, and she absolutely does not haggle.
    - This is where players can get potion ingredients, weird material components for spells, and potions themselves. They can also find things like healer's kits here.

### 4. General Store

* + ***Name: "The Dusklight Supply Shop"***
  + ***Owner: Bethel***
    - Bethel and her late husband, Herey, hated the Burgomaster's rule. However, they were found out and whisked away the Reformation Center. Bethel was brainwashed pretty quickly and sent back out into the world. Herey wasn't so lucky and is still imprisoned.
    - Bethel was always sweet natured and absentminded. But after the brainwashing, she's become quite simple and mentally broken. She now thinks the concept of Strahd is the most terrifying thing in the world and while she certainly finds the festivals boring, she always volunteers to help with them and does her due diligence for the town. Bethel is easily haggled and will believe almost anything, provided it isn't about the Burgomaster or Strahd. If the players talk too openly about their distaste for the Burgomaster, Bethel is quick to panic and fetch the guards.
    - This place sells a menagerie of standard craftwork gear, including rope, candles, torches, lanterns, crowbars and most standard adventuring equipment. In general, imagine anything that might be used to build houses or patch wagons and your players can find it here.

### 5. Bookshop

* + ***Name: "Yonvich and Sons"***
  + ***Owner: An elder man named Yonvich and his three adult sons, Yonvi, Sven, and Yenva***
    - The bookshop doesn't have a huge variety of literature available, as the Burgomaster's library has the bulk of Vallaki's knowledge. These guys serve more as a printing press which they use to copy books for more production, as well as bookbinders. They have a plethora of parchment, calligrapher's tools, empty journals and other such items available for sale.
    - Yonvich and Sons is also solely responsible for printing the posters for the Burgomaster's weekly festivals. Stacks of fliers from various events can be found around their shop.
    - These men are pretty straight shooters. They care more about the books they make than turning a prophet and sell their wares at average prices.

### 6. Fletcher/Bowyer

* + ***Name: "Celegal's Hovel"***
    - This isn't an official shop, but rather Celegal's home where he does his work. It's located outside Vallaki's walls, around the Vallaki Vistani camp.
  + ***Owner: Celegal***
    - Celegal is a Dusk Elf woodworker who makes ranged weapons, specifically bows, crossbows, and their ammunition. He trades his wares with Vallaki in exchange for goods for the other Dusk Elves.
    - Unlike the other stoic and off-putting Dusk Elves, Celegal is timid and shy. He likes being helpful and puts his all into his work, making each bow a true work of art. Celegal is actually one of the youngest Dusk Elves, and was only thirteen when all the female elves were slaughtered.

### 7. Herbalist

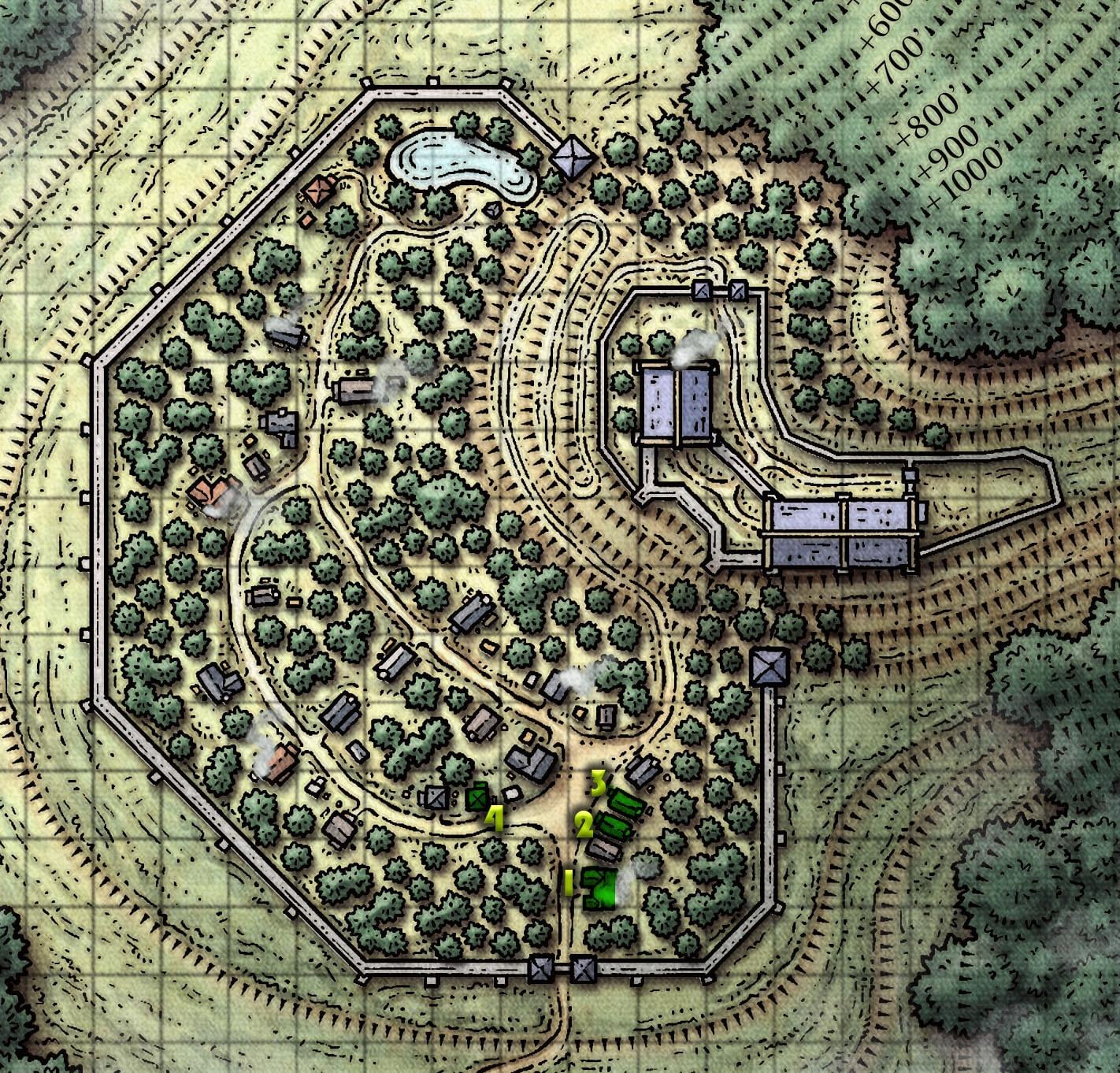
* + ***Name: "Jeny's Shack"***
    - Jeny lives in a tiny hovel with dirt floors and vines climbing through the wooden walls. This isn't an official store, but instead can only be found if someone else tells you about her.
  + ***Owner: Jeny Greenteeth***
    - This is an optional use of the witch found in the AL modules and other Ravenloft lore. Jeny might be really evil in your campaign, but I made her more like a tricky grandmother figure in mine. In my game, she's actually an archfey stripped of her power when Strahd came to the valley. She's the swamp fane, as found in this Fanes of Barovia post, and she's waiting to be reinstated.
    - Jeny is an old woman with an eye for mischief. She knows just about every plant in Barovia and is a master potion maker. She takes no nonsense from anyone and loves playing pranks on people with her potion making. For instance, she sells a love potion meant to "help men in areas of physical conquest." However, if Jeny senses her buyer is adulterous (or is just an overall pompous butt to her), she sells him a "faulty" version of the potion which makes his entire manhood grow long, course hair for a month.

### 8. Tailor Shop

* + ***Name: "The Beast's Rose"***
  + ***Owner: Gili and his wife Lottie***
    - Gili is a monster of a man. Though human, he stands nearly seven feet tall and has a hefty bulk to him. He's also got one of those resting cavemen faces that makes him look pretty darn scary. However, Gili is a lover, not a fighter, and is a major pacifist. He likes pretty things and delights in making beautiful clothing.
    - Lottie, in contrast, is short, petite, and heartbreakingly beautiful. She's kind and shy and her intrinsic grace inspires her husband's finest work. These two are one of the sweetest and most sincere couples you'll find in Barovia.

## Kresk

Kresk is already a small, communal town that's very self-sufficient. They almost never get visitors and instead of buying and selling, have more of a barter system, which leaves little need for traditional commerce. So, their shops are less stores and more like houses of trade.



### Inn/Tavern

* + Joke's on you, there is no Inn. Remember, Kresk doesn't like outsiders and keeps their gates firmly closed. Why would they need an Inn? Instead, visitors often stay the night in a local's spare bedroom.

### 2. Tailor Shop

* + ***Name: The Swyft House***
    - Because Kresk works mostly off a barter system, this is less of a shop and more the owner's home where they also work.
  + ***Owner: Mr. Taylor Swyft and his wife, Steph***
    - Taylor the tailor is a short man full of excitable energy. He's primarily responsible for making and mending clothing for the town, but loves to fashion beautiful and unique wares in his spare time. Such things always come at a cost of course. Taylor has an eye for fine clothing and will pay quite a bit for the unicorn rug found at the Vallaki Vistani camp. "Is... is that... a real Vanderkov?" Taylor's prices are always a bit high unless the players earn his favor.

### 3. Blacksmith

* + ***Name: The Strum House***
    - Because Kresk works mostly off a barter system, this is less of a shop and more the owner's home where they also work.
  + ***Owner: Grygori Strum***
    - Grygori is a mediocre blacksmith at best and makes mostly nails and horseshoes. However, his grandfather was quite the gifted smith before he died, leaving a few sets of extraordinarily made heavy armor behind (1 set of plate armor, 1 set of chain mail armor, and 1 set of half plate armor). Grygori is only capable of mending broken armor and doesn't make anything new, but he's pompous enough to overinflate his capabilities. He'd be willing to part with his grandfather's armors for a hefty price.

### 4. Thrift Shop

* + ***Name: "Lady Kate's Wonder Emporium"***
  + ***Owner: Old Woman Katerina***
    - Old Woman Katerina is a super quirky old gal with a heavy cockney accent. She's a hard-core hoarder and rates things on how interesting they are rather than worth. Her shop has an assortment of random items and trinkets, a few of which may be magical (at your discretion).
    - Katerina only trades. She will not accept money because she finds coins boring. If you want to buy an item from her shop, you must leave something interesting behind. Sometimes the trades favor the players. Sometimes they favor Katerina. She doesn't care, though, because it's fun.

And that's my list of shops and shopkeepers in Barovia, complete with personalities to help spice up your players "gone shopping" role plays. As always, I hope somebody finds this useful! :)

- Mandy