# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Kresk I**

## The Atmosphere in Kresk

Unlike the dreary and depressed Village of Barovia and super corrupt Vallaki, Kresk is a much more tight-knit town. While the town itself is sizable, most of that space is taken up by the residents’ farmland. Kresk’s actual population is comprised of no more than a couple hundred people. It’s the kind of place where everybody knows everybody’s business. The town is quaint. It’s communal. It’s home.

## The Story of Kresk

Here’s where things branch off from the written campaign. This is where I expanded on the written material a lot. Preemptively, I’d like to say that I borrowed and adapted quite a bit from the narratives found in the Adventure League modules of Curse of Strahd. Specifically, I added content from “The Broken One” and “The Tempter” modules.

I'd also like to say that in this version, not a single NPC is "good." Every single one is corrupt in some way or has some sort of crime in their past. I really wanted Kresk to mess with my players, showing them that the people they trusted each have darkness in them. There will also be some hard decisions coming their way: to forgive these NPCs, punish them, or make sure they see justice? There's no right answer, but this will sure as hell mess with their morals.

### The Setup

* **Food Stores for Winter**
  + Winter is fast approaching this year and Kresk is getting ready to hunker down. The cold kills what few crops they have (mostly root vegtables) and their farm animals must be carefully tended too and distributed evenly so that everyone survives the coming months. This happens every year and the locals are used to preparing for Winter.
* **The Burgomaster’s Son is back from the Dead**
  + In this version of Kresk, the events of “Something Old” should already have occurred prior to the PCs arrival.
  + Essentially, the Burgomaster’s last remaining son, 14-year-old Ilya, has recently died from natural illness. In a last ditch effort to save their child, both Dmitri and his wife, Anna, took Ilya’s body to the Abbot in hopes that the holy man could revive the child. Having Dmitri go to the Abbot, rather than having the Abbot come to Dmitri, keeps the Abbot a bit more mysterious in my opinion.
  + However, Ilya was dead for about a month before his parents finally got the idea to take him to the Abbey. The Abbot, while compassionate, doesn’t perform such miracles after someone has been dead for so long. He knows the consequences could be dire. But after seeing the extent of Dmitri and Anna’s despair, the Abbot relents and raises Ilya.
  + Outwardly, Ilya is completely normal. He’s healing well and he’s very happy to be alive again.
* **Livestock is going Missing**
  + Recently, the town’s main livestock count in coming up short. Mainly, the collection of sheep shared by the village is dwindling and nobody knows why.
  + From the established fact that those animals are needed for the locals to survive the winter, this is a really big deal to Kresk. The town’s survival could be compromised if this keeps up.

### What’s happening to the Sheep?

* + This is the immediate story quest that will present itself to PCs on their arrival, and solving it will unravel a whole lot more.
  + Ilya is Actually a Monster
    - The truth is Ilya Kreskov did not come back from the dead quite right. The Abbot warned that there might be consequences to bringing back someone who had been dead for more than a few days, but even he couldn’t have guessed what’s happened to Ilya.
    - Ilya’s body and soul have been tainted from his time in the Barovian afterlife. He’s been cursed with gluttony, to the point where he is perpetually hungry. At first, this only means that he eats bigger meals than a normal child would, which is easily excused by the fact that he’s been recently revived. However, as time goes on, Ilya’s hunger grows and grows to the point where it physically pains him unless he’s eating something. It eventually gets to the point where Ilya is quite literally always starving to death.
  + And you guessed it. That’s where the sheep are going. Anna Kreskov, in a desperate attempt to save her son, has been quietly stealing livestock to feed him. She knows that something’s not right with Ilya’s growing hunger, but she also loves her son too much to let him die a second time. Dmitri has no knowledge of this and is kept busy with running Kresk.

### Endgame

* + After Ilya’s hunger destroys Kresk’s food stocks, he moves on and starts eating the residents instead. All of this will eventually culminate into a fight with Ilya’s pained and monstrous form. By this point, his hunger will have stolen any humanity he has left as well as altered him physically.

So that’s great and all, but how does this story present itself to your players? Here's the step-by-step adventure.

## Part 1

### Prior to Kresk

* In order for this to go more smoothly narratively, there are a couple things you should establish prior to the PCs reaching Kresk. You can do this in conversations with other NPCs throughout their journey.
* There’re rumors that the great and holy Abbot of Kresk brought someone back from the dead. Because Kresk is so closed off from the outside world, these rumors are pretty nondescript. But it’ll drop a nice hint to your party before everything goes down. It’ll also plant a seed that resurrection is possible if one of the PCs die in game, which comes in useful later.
* The weather in Barovia is pretty stagnant, but it’s technically autumn when the players start the campaign. Really, Barovia has two main climates. For spring, summer, and autumn, everything is on the chillier side of temperate. The normal Barovian environment. Winter, however, involves intense frosts and exceptionally long nights, but not necessarily heavy snowfall. Luckily, winter only lasts a couple months. Establishing the coming winter will help make the missing livestock a big deal to your players. It’ll also probably inspire more than one “Winter is coming” joke. ;)

### Staying in the Burgomaster’s House

* When your players get to Kresk, they’ll end up staying in the Burgomaster’s house. Remember, there aren’t any inns in Kresk since the town doesn’t welcome outsiders. Taking up the empty beds in Dmitri’s house is the player’s main option for room and board.
* At dinner that night, you should play up the family dynamic. Dmitri, Anna, and Ilya are a lovely family and they overall have a kind disposition.
* Things to bring up during dinner:
  + - Ilya has a huge appetite. He doesn’t talk much throughout dinner because he’s busy stuffing his face. Play this up as amusing; a growing boy who needs his nutrition. Dmitri might even laugh and tell Ilya to “Slow down and remember to breathe!”
    - Dmitri and Anna are happy to tell the party that their son is back from the dead. It’s the greatest miracle in their lives, after all, and they see no reason to hide a blessing of the Morning Lord. They freely talk about the Abbot’s kindness and extraordinary power. Evening mentioning this should chime some alarm bells in your players’ heads.
    - The people of Kresk all work together to survive. Dmitri doesn’t mean to be rude or forward, but he’d very much like the players to help out around town; to earn their keep so to speak. If the players ask how they can help, Dmitri will tell them about the preparations for winter and, inevitably, the missing sheep.

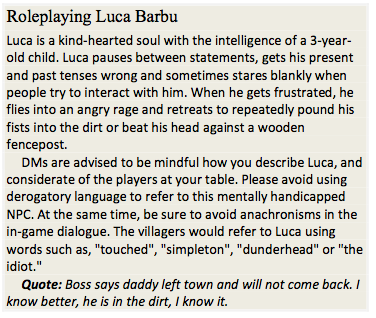
### Exploring Kresk

* In the following days, the players will likely want to make good on helping out Kresk. There are other things they may wish to do at this point as well and you should totally let them. They have time before Ilya’s hunger consumes him. For instance:
  + - Players can go explore the Shrine and Pool.
    - Players may want to go straight to the Abbey. This will likely be a longer dalliance, but still isn’t any problem.
* If your players do avoid the livestock issue, make sure to keep hinting at it. The longer they wait, the more worried the Kreskites become about making it through the winter. Each time the players see Ilya, he’s eating. Hint away!

## Part 2

### Investigating the Missing Livestock

* When your players show interest in figuring out this little mystery, you should get things rolling with a bang. Quite literally overnight, all the sheep in Kresk’s collective pen have gone missing. However, not only are they missing, but also the farm is covered with blood.
* Depending on where your players are, you’ll need to weave this in a little differently.
  + - If your players want to look into this the morning after their dinner with the Burgomaster’s family, have a local villager burst into the home in the morning asking for Dmitri’s help. Unfortunately, Dmitri, Anna, and Ilya are all out at the moment, so your PCs will have to do.
    - If your players are somewhere else in town or are returning from the Abbey, have a local run up to them in a panic. The Burgomaster is requesting the players’ immediate assistance.
* **Luca Barbu**
  + - The commotion will lead the players to Luca’s farm. Luca is the village simpleton and essentially a gentle giant. Though he’s not bright, he can look after the sheep with his heart of gold. Unfortunately, Anna Kreskov has been using Luca’s mental handicap against him to steal sheep for her son.
    - I took Luca directly from the Adventure League modules. This is the description they give of Luca:

[](https://preview.redd.it/qjmioa31z1811.png?width=376&format=png&auto=webp&s=1bd7d466cb2900123084f23c8a541616808dc703)

* + - Luca was supposed to be watching the sheep and is the only one in charge of them. Despite his mental handicap, he does a really good job of this. He’s kind of a sheep whisperer. Luca’s a better fit for the job than players might first think.
    - Luca’s father, Costel Barbu, used to help keep track of the sheep as well. However, he recently died. Costel left a couple weeks earlier to go and see about the missing wine deliveries. Unfortunately, he had an unfortunate encounter with some wolves and never returned.
* **Finding the Clues**
  + Your players will have a little time to look around the sheep pen and question Luca. Here are some facts about the scene of the crime.
  + In the Sheep Pen
    - There were supposed to be over three-dozen sheep in the pen. They usually have closer to 50, but Anna’s continual theft over the last couple weeks has dwindled their numbers. Now, all three-dozen remaining sheep are gone too.
    - Ilya devoured the sheep, skin and bones, leaving little behind. So there actually isn’t that much blood in the pen. Certainly not enough to encompass so many sheep. There are also no carcasses and only a few scattered sheep bones.
    - The only footprints in the pen are sheep and human.
    - The few sheep bones left behind have bite marks on them. A well-rolled skill check can tell your players that the markings were made by rows of sharp teeth, not unlike a shark bite.
  + Questioning Luca
    - I also took this directly from the printed module, "The Broken One", so I’ll share that here.

During the investigation Luca fixates on one of the characters and declares that they are friends. It might be whichever character first showed him any kindness, the character with the highest or lowest Charisma, or—ironically—the prickliest and gruffest member of the party. Luca refers to this character as his “friend”. This chosen character has advantage on all skill checks made to persuade, intimidate or deceive Luca, though failure in these checks can send Luca into a rage. Luca is willing to tell his "friend” what he knows about the disappearance of the livestock. Luca won't volunteer any information; the characters have to ask targeted questions, but they can learn the following:

- The fence is broken. Today Luca went to get stones to fix the fence. All day Luca is getting stones. (The fence is not broken; this was Anna's idea to get Luca away from the sheep pen that Luca has fixated on. Luca wasn't there to witness Ilya come and eat all the remaining sheep.)

- Luca can't count the sheep cause he got kicked in the head.

- Daddy went away. He never said goodbye. Luca thinks Daddy is in the dirt.

- Luca's favorite sheep is Brownie. Brownie was nice to Luca and always let him pet her. One-day Brownie was gone. Eugen said Luca is just a dunderhead but Luca knows that Brownie is gone. Brownie is in the dirt.

## Part 3

### The Mob Cometh

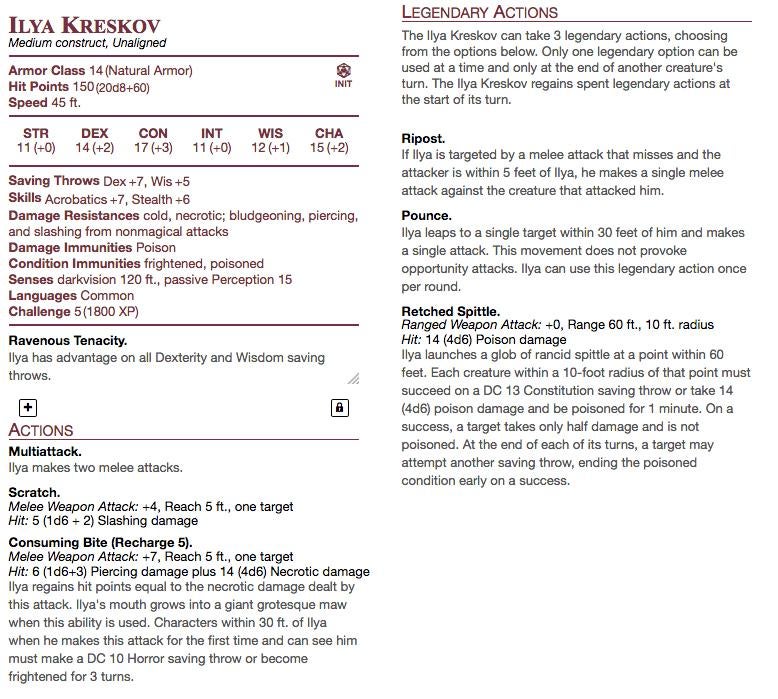
* When you decide the time is right, the situation will further escalate. Word has gotten around that Kresk's main livestock is gone. With winter right around the corner, they're a big chance they might starve in the coming months. What was once an anxious worry over a handful of missing sheep is quickly turning into full blown panic.
  + - As your players proceed with their investigation, villagers begin to gather around Luca's farm. You can mention them in passing as simple "onlookers" there to see the carnage. But as their numbers grow, their tensions rise.
    - Anna and Dmitri Kreskov also show up during this time. Dmitri enters the sullied farm wide-eyed and stunned. He's shocked by the missing sheep and as scared as the rest of his people. However, he's doing his best not to show his fear, staying silent instead. While Dmitri's silence doesn't hinder matters, it also doesn't help them.
* **Anna Ignites the Mob**
  + - Anna was not present to see Ilya eat all the remaining sheep and certainly didn't advocate the act. This was Ilya acting on his own due to his frenzied hunger. However, Anna still loves her son more than anything and is willing to do whatever might be necessary to save him. Seeing what's become of Luca's farm, Anna knows that her son's ailment is in danger of coming to light.
    - Anna uses the heightened fear of the spectators to insight a mob. She openly shouts above the crowd that Luca is at fault, claiming that he is the reason the sheep are gone and that Kresk will starve. She's more than willing to use poor Luca as a scapegoat if it means protecting her boy.
    - Even though this is a calculated move on Anna's part, you should play it like she's simply voicing the Mob's collective thoughts. Anna herself is very worried about her son, so describing her as wide-eyed and afraid wouldn't be inaccurate. Your players just won't figure out her real reasons for being so scared until later.

### How your PCs react.

* During the Mob confrontation, the players can do a few different things. "The Broken One" module gives a decent write up of each of these options, but I'll summarize them for you here. No matter what happens, they all end with a scream coming from somewhere in the nearby streets.
* **Calm the Mob**
  + - Luckily, Kresk is quite small and so is the mob. There are no more than fifty-ish people present at this time. It is very possible for your players to calm the mob with reason and words.
    - Let your players have some time to role-play. This might be a great time for your charismatic player character to step up to the plate.
    - Should the PCs manage to quell the mob, go ahead and spare a moment to mention that Anna looks downright pissed. However, before they can investigate, a scream echoes from somewhere nearby.
* **Fight for Luca**
  + - Your players might be filled with righteous indignation that the mob is going after a sweet soul like Luca. Your party may fight back against the mob.
    - However, if the fighting results in the death of a villager, the mob will dissipate rather quickly as they are overcome by fear. Your party will earn a pretty bad reputation as murderers in Kresk. Even though they're right in defending Luca, the local Kreskites will never forget that the party killed their own. They won't be as trusted or as welcome in Kresk after this.
    - Otherwise, the encounter will end the same as calming the mob, with Anna's angry glare and a scream coming from somewhere nearby.
* **Flee with Luca**
  + - The party may just "nope" the heck out of there, grabbing Luca and making a break for it. You should have a tense little scene where the party is actively running from the mob.
    - This ends when the party turns a corner and sees a woman in the middle of the street as she lets out a loud, anguished scream.
* **Throw Luca to the Mob**
  + - Maybe everything fails. Maybe you've got some morally questionable players. Maybe your players have decided that Luca is at fault from misinterpreting some evidence. Either way, it is entirely possible that your party might just hand Luca over to the mob.
    - Should this happen, describe the horror to your players as Luca is swallowed by his fellow Kreskites and beaten to death. Luca's meant to be an innocent, so letting this happen should make your players feel pretty awful.
    - When Luca is dead, the Mob turns angrily towards the party. It is then that the scream comes from town.

### Confronting Ilya

* **The Scream**
  + - The scream comes from a woman in town. Ilya, still starving even after devouring all the sheep, has turned to eating people to satiate his hunger. This woman, a random villager, was on her way to investigate the commotion of the mob when she stumbled across Ilya hunched over and eating another villager.
    - When the party hears the scream, they likely rush off to investigate. They'll arrive just as Ilya dives at the woman to attack her. The final battle will quickly ensue after this.
* **Ilya Battle**
  + - Ilya has turned into a monster. He's completely emaciated, his bones pushing up from beneath his pale skin. He's covered in blood - both sheep and human - and he thinks of nothing but quenching the hunger that's causing him so much pain. When he opens his mouth, his jaw quite literally unhinges and peels open down the sides of his neck, revealing rows upon rows of sharp, jagged teeth.
    - Should your party try to call out to Ilya to try and talk to him, he openly weeps and begs for food. His hunger is quite literally killing him and he's in so much agony, reason can't find him.
    - Here's the stat block I used for Ilya:

[](https://preview.redd.it/fu3zaqwdj2811.jpg?width=778&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=87eea5022a1e20251c246c9f3252f5fea766ce81)

### Onlookers/The Remaining Mob

* Should other commoners still be with the party when the fight gets started (if they were chasing the party through the streets for example), the civilians turn and flee in terror at the sight of Ilya. They don't want to stick around with a monster on the loose, after all.

## Aftereffects

* When the battle is over and Ilya is slain, there's still some things to be wrapped up.
* **Anna**
  + - After Ilya is dead, Anna bursts from the crowd and screams, "No!" She rushes over to Ilya's body and weeps over him.
    - The players should be able to tell from her reaction that it's likely Anna knew what was going on all along. If the players take the time to question her, she admits to everything. If the players chastise her, she merely says, "He's my son. What else could I do?"
    - What happens to Anna is entirely up to your players. They just killed the worst monster Kresk has seen in decades, after all. They currently have huge sway over the town. Most likely, the villagers will want to give Anna a public trial that will probably result in her execution or exile. Your players can heavily influence this decision. Maybe your players actually forgive Anna and convince the rest of Kresk to do the same. It's really up to them.
* **Dmitri**
  + - Dmitri is a totally broken man after this. Not only is his last son dead, but said son is the murderer of other villagers. His wife may also have been executed or exiled at this point. On top of everything, Kresk doesn't have enough food to make it through the winter. Dmitri lapses into a catatonia from the heartbreak.

With Anna and Dmitri pretty much out of the picture, it's now up to the players to save Kresk from starvation. Luckily, there's a rich lady in the woods beyond Kresk that may just have enough to go around. Stay tuned for my write up and revisions of the Fidatov Manor, the next step in rescuing the people of Kresk. I'll also be doing a much shorter post on Kresk's shrine and another long one on the Abbey. Enjoy!

- Mandy

# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Kresk Part II - Fidatov Manor**

So, your players are in Kresk and they've unraveled the mystery of Ilya Kreskov. Anna is most likely either dead or exiled and Dmitri is mentally catatonic. Lastly, Kresk's main food stocks are mostly wiped out and they most certainly don't have enough for the town to survive the coming winter. Kresk is panicking as the villagers realize they're all going to starve. What in the world are we going to do?

## Custom Maps

Guess what, guys! I actually created my own custom maps for this adventure. There's a super simple map included in the Adventurer's League module, but I really wanted to give it some umph. I used Mike Schley's map assets pack to put these together, along with some fun photoshop skills. Copy the link for the maps, but take out the spaces of course. Enjoy!

# <https://imgur.com/a/KE3r6Df>

## Story Overview

Finding some extra food stores for Kresk involves going on another mini adventure. To reiterate, I heavily borrowed and adapted the following plot from CoS's Adventurer's League modules, "The Broken One" and "The Tempter."

### Fidatov Manor

* + The players will get a clue from Luca Barbu, Kresk's village simpleton, that leads them to the Fidatov Estate.
  + When they arrive, the players will find the fanciest mansion they've seen in Barovia thus far. Not only that, but Lady Fidatov is actually hosting a ball that day. Players will be whisked away into a world of lavish finery, food, and music, before finally meeting the lady of the house.
  + Lady Fidatov will gladly entertain her guests, as a well mannered woman should, but in the end flatly refuses their request to aid Kresk.

### A Curse Takes Hold

* + Shortly after nightfall and Lady Fidatov's refusal, a curse suddenly takes hold of the manor. All the guests fall over dead and the house itself rapidly ages and deteriorates before the players' eyes.
  + The players will likely want to know what in the world just happened and start exploring. They'll find some documents and letters detailing a tragedy that has befallen the house as well as evidence of a horrible curse.
  + They'll also find that the heart of this curse might be somewhere in the center of the Fidatov family hedge maze... along with the family's amassed treasure.

### The Maze

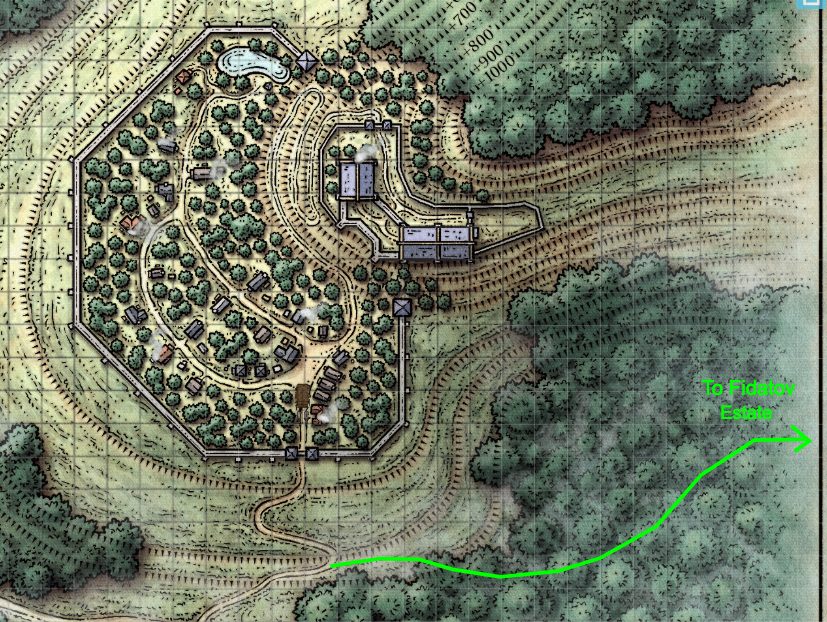
* + Wanting to lift the curse will lead the party to the maze. They'll have to brave the maze and the beast that guards it in order to get to the center.
  + Once in the center, the party will show down with a ghostly version of Lady Fidatov, who is actually a being mixed with the very essence of the curse. Once defeated, the curse is lifted.

## The Fidatov Family

Here's a bit of history on the Fidatov family and the role they play in my version of Barovia.

### Location

* + The Fidatovs are one of the oldest families in Barovia and have amassed a great deal of wealth and land throughout the years.
  + The estate isn't just the manor, it's the main house, some large gardens (including the hedge maze) and some surrounding farms, all technically owned by the Fidatovs. The peasants who work the farms are all pretty much vessels of this aristocratic family.
  + The estate is not actually located in Kresk, but instead is in the surrounding woods. It's not isolated enough to have many threats from the wilderness and Strahd respects the family enough to protect the estate from most harm. That is, until the curse took over of course.

[](https://preview.redd.it/25omqp6t4m811.png?width=827&format=png&auto=webp&s=8925344eafca4c0b77e08d72dec6a2c218a7c598)

### Profession

* + The Fidatovs are primarily known as mixture of bankers, architects, and locksmiths. They're very good at managing money as well as building vaults to keep said money safe. If there's a complicated lock or a guarded building anywhere in Barovia, the Fidatovs are most definitely the creators.
  + Because of the Fidatov's expertise, the manor itself is very well built. There is more than one door with an advanced lock that even a rogue with thieve's tools would have trouble cracking. And the detailed locking mechanism on the family tomb in the center of the maze is nothing to sneeze at either.
  + The Fidatov's history with locks and buildings doesn't stop with the physical, however. Certain ancestors in the family were also known to have dabbled in magic to strengthen their creations.
  + In this version, one of the Fidatov ancestors is actually the architect behind Castle Ravenloft. Artimus Fidatov's model of Ravenloft can be found in the Amber Temple, where Strahd had it moved to keep the plans safe from his enemies during construction. Artimus is not in Ravenloft's crypt however, but in the Fidatov family crypt instead.
  + Van Richten's Tower is also an original Fidatov creation, long abandoned by the family. The magic and mechanisms that make up the tower were all experiments made by long dead ancestors.

### The Manor

* + The main house of the Fidatov family is a grand thing to behold. Though only two stories tall, it's an architectural marvel, made of mostly marble and detailed finishings.
  + The doors throughout the manor are not made of wood. Instead, each one is a heavy iron piece with a hollow center filled with a series of gears and mechanisms. Once locked, these mechanisms all snap into place to make the most fortified doors in pretty much all Barovia. The Fidatovs liked locks and vaults, remember. The doors throughout the manor are extensions of that fact.
  + As a result, the manor doors are nearly impenetrable. To completely knock them down and off their hinges would require a DC 35 Athletics check. The locks are so intricate that to pick them would require a DC 30 Dex check. Even a high level rogue with thieves tools would have trouble in this house.
  + Every door in the house has a separate, unique key. However, there is a single skeleton key capable of opening every door in the house. Lady Fidatov has left the skeleton key with the head servant of the house since he would use it far more than she.
  + Despite the locking mechanisms, most doors in the manor are always unlocked for convenience. The doors to the outside are locked each night by the head servant, Taltos, after Lady Fidatov turns in for the evening. And the doors to the art gallery and the private study are always locked unless the lady herself is inside the rooms. Lady Fidatov carries the two separate keys to these rooms on her person normally.

## Lady Marilena Fidatov

Marilena is currently the only Fidatov left in her line. When the players meet her, she's in her late twenties. She's the head of the house and owner of the estate and funds.

### A Mathematician

* + Unlike her forefathers, Marilena has no gift for architecture or magic. However, she is something of a mathematical genius. She's that person that counts cards at a blackjack table without actually meaning to simply because she can't turn off her brain.
  + Marilena keeps tedious care of her books, managing the estates and funds of not just her family, but of a collection of other noble families in Barovia.
  + The only person in Barovia better at bookkeeping and mathematics is Lief Lipseige, the old man currently living in Ravenloft. When Lief finally dies of old age, Strahd plans on entrusting his bookkeeping to Marilena as a replacement.

### Snooty, But Kind

* + Marilena is most definitely a high-born lady. She's got all the manners of a queen and has expensive tastes. However, she doesn't actively spurn or abuse the poor or low-born. Instead, she pities the less fortunate, giving them the same sort of attention one might give a favored pet.
  + Marilena isn't one to actually bully another person, but she can be condescending. She enjoys picking on others in the same way a school girl might tug on another's pigtails just to annoy them.
  + A couple examples from my campaign:
    - The rogue in my campaign canonically can't read. He has street smarts in spades, but literacy isn't something he picked up. When Lady Fidatov showed the party her library, she asked the rogue what his favorite kind of stories entailed. He gave a vague reply about stories with lots of adventures. Marilena then specifically picked a book off the shelf and gifted it to the rogue, telling him that it'd certainly meet his tastes. The rogue was very gracious and thanked her, never knowing that she'd just given him a cookbook.
    - The warlock in my party is the only girl on the team and she's been quite literally dragged through the mud more than once. During the ball, Lady Fidatov actually whisked the warlock away to her walk-in closet and had a mini Pretty Woman session with her. She had a wonderful time dressing up my warlock in pretty dresses, the same way a young girl might dress up a doll.

### The Ex-Boyfriend

* + Lady Marilena was actually engaged to Dmitri Kreskov for a time, originally arranged by her father before his passing. Neither of them really loved each other, but it was decent match. Dmitri stayed in the relationship for the Fidatov money while Marilena stayed in the relationship for the Kreskov name and influence.
  + However, when it became clear to Marilena that Dmitri only wanted her money, she ended the relationship. She had no feelings for the man either and saw no reason to continue their dalliance.
  + Unfortunately, Dmitri was downright pissed when Marilena broke off the engagement. He was young and hot-headed at the time and wanted revenge.
    - First, he argued with Marilena and they had a very public fight, much to Marilena's embarrassment. Manners and saving face mean quite a bit to Lady Fidatov, so this was particularly insulting to her.
    - Then, Dmitri got a horrible idea. He managed to get his hands on some poison and snuck it into the wine for Marilena's upcoming party. IF AT ANY POINT during this module, the players investigate the wine cellar, they'll be able to find an empty vial wrapped in a handkerchief. The handkerchief has the initials D.K. stitched into the corner.
    - Even though Dmitri only meant to poison Marilena, he actually ended up poisoning all the guests at the ball. That evening, everyone in the Fidatov house died horrible, violent deaths.

## The Curse

As the poison took hold of Marilena, she openly shouted in frustration, cursing whoever had done this to her and begging anyone who would listen for help. And, strangely enough, someone answered. One of the Dark Powers heard Marilena's call and laid a curse over the entire estate, farmlands and all.

### An Eternal Groundhog's Day

* + Marilena desperately wanted more time. And so, the Dark Power that answered her gave her all the time in the world. Marilena and the entire Fidatov estate are cursed to relive the same day, over and over, forevermore. The catch, however, is that the ending poisoning and deaths are much more grotesque and violent at the end of each night. Here's the general sequence of events.

### Morning and Daytime

* + The Fidatov estate is alive and working. The farmers tend their crops and Marilena readies her home for the party that night. Servants bustle around the manor as they too prepare for the festivities, cooking fine foods and getting the musicians in place.
  + Many of the guests are already onsite and are staying somewhere on the estate. The journey to the estate can be hard for some of the more distant upper class families, so Marilena graciously lets them stay for a few nights when they visit. Some guests will stay in the main manor and others in some of the surrounding buildings on the estate.

### Afternoon

* + By the late afternoon (about 3pm), the party gets started. Most of the guests have arrived and everyone proceeds to have a marvelous time. There's food and wine to go around and many of the guests take part in dancing.
  + The conversations are pretty superficial. The guests themselves all know each other from similar parties and engagements, so they don't have much new to talk about except idle gossip.
  + It is around this time that Dmitri's paid servant slips the poison into a barrel of wine in the cellar.

### Evening

* + Shortly after nightfall, Lady Fidatov remarks that she isn't feeling very well and retreats to her private salon with the aid of her head servant, Taltos. Shortly after, Taltos races from the room in a panic and declares Marilena dead.
  + All at once, all the guests begin to wretch. They vomit blood and endure great pain. This wasn't how the real deaths occurred on the first day. Yes, they were poisoned, but the guests all died more subtly from it. These deaths are much more grotesque and amplified by the curse.
  + The house rapidly ages and the bodies rot. The house itself suddenly looks like it's been abandoned for decades, with floors sagging and walls caving in. The bodies age as well, but not as much. They appear to have been there for only a few days. They're covered with flies and maggots and are still juicy.
  + Lady Marilena's soul merges with the curse and manifests as a banshee above her body. She wails and flees to the family crypt to guard her treasure, which she believes in under attack. Remember, the crypt is in the center of the hedge maze.
  + Lastly, a handful of ghouls manifest in the manor. They were drawn to the bodies somewhere along the line and then got swept up into the curse as well, becoming permanent fixtures of the manor at night.

### Dawn

* + At morning's first light, everything resets. The manor is restored and the guests are alive. The servants get to work on readying the house for the party and no one remembers the previous night, not even Marilena.

The Fidatov Estate has been living the same day for the last fifteen years. The entirety of Barovia has appropriately aged around them, and yet they stay the same, never the wiser. Every so often, a relative of one of the missing guests comes looking for them, and is either swept up into the curse or killed by it. After a time, people stopped looking into the Fidatovs and their lands.

**IF YOUR PLAYERS KILL MARILENA DURING THE DAY**

This can definitely happen, especially after the players discover Marilena's soul is somehow tied to the curse. They might figure it's easier to go after her human self during her party than the horror fest that occurs after dark. If this happens, however, it only expedites the curse for that day. The moment Marilena is murdered, all the guests begin to die as usual and the house instantly ages. A darkness falls over the estate like a faux nighttime, still brighter than actual night, but dark nonetheless. The following dawn, it all resets.

## Part 1

Now that you know the background of this house, how does it actually tie into Kresk and your players? Here's the step-by-step adventure.

### Luca's Letter

* + Sometime during the events of my last post, Luca Barbu should give the player's the following note. The letter was meant for his father, but was never received because of Costel's recent death. Luca has held onto the letter because of its link to his father, but hands it over to the party member he's deemed "his friend." This may happen if a party member saves him from the mob, or perhaps after defeating Ilya. Whenever the party does receive the letter, they won't have time to properly react to it until after they've defeated Ilya anyway, so the timing isn't terribly crucial.
  + Lady Marilena actually did receive whatever note Costel sent her about Ilya and his worries. And Marilena responded to the note before the party began that day and therefore before the curse took hold that night. The next day, she had no memory of receiving or responding to a letter from Costel Barbu.

*My Dear Costel,*

*Forgive my abruptness, but you are in grave danger. The boy you describe clearly carries a dark curse. You must flee with your son to my estate. We have ample stores laid up for the winter and can shelter your family and friends. Please do not trouble yourself with a response, I will see you soon enough.*

*Your friend in joy and strife,*

*Marilena Fidatov*

### Arriving at the Manor

* + The players will inevitably follow the promise of provisions to the Fidatov Estate. If they ask anyone from Kresk about the Fidatovs before leaving, the townies can tell them that they're a wealthy family. No one in Kresk has really heard from them for a long time, but there's rumors the house has lavish parties almost every night!
  + When they get to the front doors, the PCs are greeted by Taltos, the head of household. He's a little pompous, but very obviously cares about the estate and Lady Fidatov. The party will likely have to negotiate with Taltos to get into the house. Mentioning Kresk or Dmitri at all will definitely get them in, though Taltos will likely frown at their adventuring attire before doing so.
  + When they get inside, they will be relieved of their weapons (not allowed in the house, of course!) and find that the party has gotten started. Try to guide your PCs so that it's late afternoon when they arrive, and they walk into a party of well dressed people and extravagant foods.

### Party Mingling

* + Taltos will leave the PCs to mingle with the guests for a little bit. They'll probably want to take the opportunity to mingle. The guests certainly like talking with the PCs. They're so used to the same old, boring crowd, the adventurers are quite interesting to them.
  + At this point, certain rumors to drop during the mingling include:
    - Lady Fidatov recently broke off her engagement with Dmitri Kreskov. Yes, that Kreskov! What do you mean his wife? You must be talking about another Dmitri, dear.
    - The Fidatovs are renowned for their architectural work. Did you know one of their ancestors actually built castle Ravenloft?
    - The gardens here are lovely! You should walk them before the sun sets today. But make sure to avoid the hedge maze. They say no one can go in there but Lady Fidatov herself without getting lost.
    - The location of the family crypt is a big secret. Each time we gather for one of Marilena's galas, we like to take guesses on where it might be. My bet is that it's somewhere in the cellar!

### Meeting Lady Fidatov

* + When Lady Fidatov meets the party, she's delighted to have guests. Though she wouldn't normally invite lower born people to her events, she's still a very gracious hostess.
  + Before talking about Kresk or anything else the party mentions, she insists on taking them on a tour of her manor. It's more of a peacocking situation, with Marilena showing off her finery and wealth and making small talk. As she makes her way through the tour, there are several little moments where role-play can be fun.
    - In the library, she may gift a player with something from her collection. To rent of course. She's not one to deny literature to the curious.
    - In the ballroom, she may invite one of the party members to dance. Play her up like it might just be an insult to refuse her. Even if the PC rolls a terrible performance check and utterly fails at dancing, Lady Fidatov is more amused than anything. A good quote for this moment from the AL module: “Can you dance? I say that a person who can’t handle the waltz can’t be trusted to handle anything else, either, if you know what I mean.”
    - In the dining room, food is being laid out for an elaborate feast. One of my favorite quotes from the AL module should be used here. "Oh, you simply must try this. It's to die for."
  + Lady Fidatov does NOT take the tour through the kitchens (too many servants), the bedrooms upstairs (propriety, for goodness sake!), her private salon, her private study, or the art gallery.

### Asking for Help

* + When the tour is finished, Marilena takes the PCs to her private meeting room on the first floor. It's there that she hears them out on Kresk's plight. If Dmitri comes up, she refuses to acknowledge it, staying silent from manners alone and tactfully avoiding the subject. Remember, with the curse in place, Marilena only broke up with Dmitri a few days ago, not fifteen years ago. Their public fight is still very fresh to her and she is quite bitter.
  + Because of the breakup, Marilena is feeling horribly resentful. She downright refuses to help Kresk or Dmitri. She claims it's nothing personal, but it very much is.
  + However, Marilena isn't about to take out her frustrations on the messengers. She compliments the PCs' honor and invites them to stay for the rest of the ball and then for the night. They can then return to Kresk in the morning, well rested.
  + If the players are more insistent or are making some pretty good arguments to sway her, you can have Marilena relent a bit. Have her tell the players that she'll take the night to consider their proposal. They'll speak more on the matter the following day. This should be reasonable enough for your PCs.

## Part 2

Now your players are staying the night. Let them enjoy the rest of the evening, perhaps even get into some light hearted shenanigans. My players spent fifteen minutes tactfully stealing a fancy man's fancy hat. It was one of the most smoothly implemented plans they've had thus far, actually. And then, when you're ready, the curse takes hold. Here's a nice excerpt, somewhat edited, from the AL module to help narrate this moment.

*The shattering of glass halts a dozen conversations all at once. Lady Fidatov sways slightly and motions discreetly to Taltos, who helps her from the couch and out of the room—Taltos closing the doors behind them. Moments later, a terrible scream rips through the manor.*

*The musicians play on for a moment and then stop, confused as to why everyone has stopped dancing. All conversation comes to a halt. The doors crash open and then Taltos barges back into the room. “Poison! The Lady has been... “*

*Suddenly, a finely dressed guest coughs and stumbles. He puts his hand to his lips and it comes away covered in blood. He falls to his knees, choking and clutching at his throat. All around you, the rest of the party guests begin doing the same. Some fall to the floor while others rush for the exits.*

*All around you, the guests gag, retch, and fall to the floor— their bodies twitching and wracked with spams. Candles and lamps flicker as a chill wind rips through the room. The screaming continues, louder and more insistent than before, one voice of terror becoming a chorus.*

After the transformation is over, here's one last little excerpt.

*The elegant manor house has transformed into a scene of horror and destruction. Everything seems to have changed; fine draperies now hang tattered and rotted, the floors are stained and cracked, and even the walls and ceilings sag a bit.*

*Everywhere you look you see the dead: piled in corners, splayed across the back of a chair, hanging limply in the jagged glass of a shattered window. Though the immediate danger seems to have passed, you think you can still feel the slosh of wine within your own belly...*

At one point during all this, go ahead and have your players roll some constitution saving throws. They aren't part of the curse, so they're not actually in any danger of poisoning, but they certainly don't know that. Don't tell them the results of their throws and if they ask, only say, "You'll see."

## Part 3

Next up is a sort of scavenger hunt through gory hell. In short, your players will learn that Marilena's ghost is the source of a curse and that she's hiding in the family crypt. They'll have to learn the location of the crypt (In the center of the maze) from some notes in Marilena's private study. However, the study is locked pretty heavily, so they'll have to find Taltos' body to get the Manor's skeleton key.

Once they figure out the location of the crypt, they'll also learn that the crypt is locked by a complicated, twin locking mechanism. They'll need 2 different family crests, which also dual as keys, to open it. These can be found in the art gallery. Once they've retrieved the crests, they'll be able to head to the maze and the crypt in the center.

### Marilena's Ghost in the Private Salon

* + This will most likely be the party's first stop. Marilena was the first to go down from the poison, so they'll want to investigate her.
  + When they enter the salon, they find Marilena's corpse laying on a central couch. You should describe to your PCs how the area around the corpse seems to ripple and warp, almost like a distortion in their very reality. They feel like if they could just touch it, they might figure out what's happening. You know, some nice description-y thing like that.
  + Suddenly, there's a rush of wind and Marilena's ghost rises out of the body. Marilena is a very confused spirit. She looks at the party in surprise and screams at them, asking, "What have you done to me!?" She then mutters a series of run-on statements that don't make much sense before declaring that she's going to go rest with her family. She doesn't care that they're dead, she knows they'll be comforting! May everyone else rot in hell!
  + Marilena then flies through the walls and out of the room in the direction of the gardens. Make sure to note that she takes the distortion with her, implying that the key to fixing whatever just happened is linked to her spirit.

### The Skeleton Key Found on Taltos' body

* + So now the PCs are going to have to figure out the location of the family crypt. Even if they're not quite sure that's what they're supposed to do, they'll likely want to explore the manor anyway. Inevitably, they'll discover the two locked doors to the gallery and study right next to the salon.
  + Eventually, they'll wonder upstairs. I placed a pack of 5 ghouls in one of the old guest rooms for a short encounter. At this point, my party was level 6 and cut through the ghouls pretty easily. It was nice to compare to their first ghoul encounter at the Death House, oh so long ago. Those ghouls hurt them pretty badly back then so I think it felt kind of empowering to them to be able to win this fight so easily.
  + Taltos' body is in a secret room beyond Marilena's walk-in closet.
    - The secret room was more of a private praying room for Marilena. She didn't use it very often since she wasn't terribly religious, but there's an altar in there to the Morninglord along with a collection of rarer books.
    - The secret room lies behind a wall mounted mirror in the closet.
  + What happened:
    - Firstly, remember that the curse sort of fast-forwards time each night. One night curse-time encompasses several days would-be-real-time. That's why the bodies rot and the house ages. In the eyes of the curse, these days of rot actually took place, but crams them all into a single night, every night.
    - Taltos fortunately hadn't had any wine the night of the party. He'd been very busy working and hadn't indulged himself. Unfortunately, he was therefore one of the only level headed witnesses to the mass execution of Lady Fidatov's party goers.
    - Taltos wasn't the only one who hadn't partook in the wine. A handful of other guests and at least half the servants remained unaffected as well. However, seeing everyone dying pushed most of those people into a frenzied panic. They blamed each other for the poisoning and actually attacked one another, guests killing servants and servants killing guests. Taltos hid during most of this carnage.
    - When it was over, Taltos was the only one left alive. In the aftermath, he followed a sort of inner, compulsive need to keep up the house and tried to clean up some of the bodies. But after a few days without sleep, he realized the futility of his actions and took his own life.
  + When the players find the secret room on the second floor, they'll find Taltos and the skeleton key. They'll also find his final note, detailing what happened.

*Lady Marilena is dead.*

*She is gone. Gone, along with everyone else. I swore to her father that I would serve this household as long as I lived in exchange for my life... the life of a simple thief at that... and serve I have. I have been by my Lady's side since she was a young girl and watched her grow with pride.*

*And yet, now it has all ended and I am at a loss..*

*There was something in the food. In the wine, perhaps? Perhaps both? I know not. But without warning, Lady Marilena fell ill and died, followed by the majority of the guests. The few who were left fell into a panic and turned murderous against one another. I hid like a coward and then like a fool thought I could somehow make things better by cleaning up what was left behind.*

*I see now that there is no point. No point to taking care of this house when the Fidatovs no longer live. I wish to join them. I wish to join my Lady.*

### The Location of the Crypt found in the Private Study

* + Skeleton key in hand, the PCs are now able to open the two locked doors on the first floor. One goes into the private study.
  + Most of what's in the study includes old books on taxes records and money keeping. Boring really, but very important to bankers. Theres also a little money in a chest for a player that'd like to nick it.
  + But most importantly, the PCs will find Lady Fidatov's private journal with the following entry:

*The time has come to break things off with Dmitri. He has been an enjoyable plaything, but he grows increasingly insistent that we should marry. He believes himself irresistible, that I am in love and therefore stupid. But I play the game far better than he realizes. To think that I would give over not just my fortune, but dominion over my lands, over my very life, to a man? The idea sickens me.*

*The servants tell me that he has been roaming the manor at night, looking in the library for clues to where the vault might be hidden. Such foolishness. My father was no fool, and neither is his daughter. There is no vault because my ancestors stand eternal guard over our treasure in our crypt. Only the twin crests of the greatest scion of our family, Valetian Fidatov, can open the way and disable the wards. Well, the second-greatest scion of our family, after me, of course. Two crests for two fountains in a terrible labyrinth... such a wonderful trick.*

*Dmitri was never going to get what he wanted, but he is still going to be upset when I end our dalliance. I shall tell him tonight and send him on his way quietly. I don’t want him to make a scene at my party next week. And besides, perhaps there will be a new suitor or two to consider...*

* + This should tell the players all they need to know. The family crypt is at the center of the maze and to open it, they'll need two family crests. The locks to the crypt are hidden in the maze under the guise of fountains. Put the two crests in the two fountains, and bingo, the crypt opens.

### The Crests/Keys found in the Art Gallery

* + Now here's where I put in a pretty intense battle. I put it in mostly cause I thought it'd be spooky and interesting, but turns out it almost wiped my party. But, after thinking about it, I think I'd still do it the same way.
  + The Crest Location
    - The art gallery is filled with a mixture of portraits, mirrors, and mounted crests. It doesn't take too long for the players to come in, look at the crests and read the plaques to figure out which one they need.
    - However, when they find the appropriate plaque, the crest isn't there. It's missing off the wall!
    - Then, the players notice a mirror on the opposite wall. When they look in the mirror, the crest is mounted where it's supposed to be in the reflection, but not on the wall in real life. Naturally, players will try to investigate. When a player touches the mirror, their hand goes right through. They're able to step through the mirror and literally into a mirror dimension.
    - BUT. When a player steps into the mirror, their reflection steps OUT. Dun dun dun!

## The Unintentionally Super Intense Mirror Battle

You know, there's probably something out there about not having your PCs fight their evil twins. There's probably a nice little post, saying, "Hey, it's hard bro!" But alas, I did not find that post. Thus began the session where I almost made my players literally kill themselves. Here's how:

### Mirror Room Origin

* + So this is actually really simple. Like I've said before, the Fidatov family is known for their complex locking mechanisms, and they've been known to use magic to make those mechanisms even more effective.
  + Once upon a time, a Fidatov mage was trying to figure out a complex way to hide items from those who might steal them. So they created a mini mirror dimension connected by 5 mirrors that could produce a shadow/reflection protector.
  + The mirrors and their magic were created to guard objects. In this case, the Fidatov crest. The master/ruler of these mirrors is always the currently head of the Fidatov line, currently Marilena. She has no need to visit the family crypt very often, so the key stays within the mirrors.
  + Marilena keeps the art gallery locked to protect others who might stumble upon the mirrors. She knows how dangerous they can be and wants no one to fall accidentally into this magical defense mechanism.

### The Physics/Rules of the Mirrors

* + The mirrors create a reflection dimension of the room in which they're placed. They can only reproduce a limited amount of space within them, so taking the mirrors outdoors would be completely useless. If the the space they're reflecting is too large, no alternate dimension will be produced at all.
  + All five mirrors must be reflecting the same space for the magic to take hold. If one mirror is taken from the others, no alternate dimension is produced.
  + Objects and spells can pass through the mirrors without interference. If someone were to throw a dagger at their Reflection, for instance, it would pass through the mirror into the other dimension and actually hit the Reflection (if it beats the AC like a normal attack role of course). Similarly, if a Reflection casts a spell, it can be cast through a mirror and into the real world.
    - This means that the mirrors cannot actually be broken in the real world. If someone tries to swing at the mirror, their weapon will just pass through. A person would have to remove the mirror from the others, thus deactivating the mirror dimension, to turn it into a normal mirror. Then it can be broken.

### The Reflection Monsters

* + When anyone (PCs and NPCs alike) step in front of one of these mirrors, they create a Reflection. A Reflection copies all the traits and abilities of its creator, but exists entirely within the mirror dimension.
    - This also extends to the creator's current physical health. If the creator of a Reflection only has 5 HP left out of 30, a Reflection with also only have 5 HP.
  + To create a Reflection, literally just make copies of all your PC's character sheets. Those are the stats you need.
  + A Reflection's sole purpose is to guard a certain object, assigned by the mirror's master. They do this unrelentingly and will kill without prejudice if the object is threatened.
  + A Reflection cannot be reasoned with. It is a construct that has no soul or mind of its own. However, it can speak, if only to mimic the voice and words of its creator.
  + If the creator of a Reflection dies (i.e. a PC), the Reflection also disappears.
  + A Reflection cannot leave the line of sight of at least one of the mirrors. If it does, it ceases to exist.
  + If the Reflection's creator leaves the line of sight of all of the mirrors, the Relection also disappears.
  + If a Reflection is reduced to 0 HP, it disappears. However, it can be reproduced if a person exits the room and then reenters the room, thus creating another Reflection.
  + Even though a Reflection is, yes, a reflection, it can move independently during the battle. It doesn't have to actually copy all of its creator's actions/movements.
    - However, a Reflection might choose to do so anyway in order to confuse other party members. This plays a nice little game of Which is the Real One!?

### Results of the Mirror Battle

* + I can imagine this might go differently in other campaigns with different parties, but this was a super intense fight for mine. My players were pretty broken and bleeding by the time they escaped the room, and they didn't even have the crest by the end of it. One of the sneaky Reflections rolled a nat 20 on a slight of hand check on their turn to pickpocket the crest from a PC.
  + My players ended up locking themselves in the study for a long rest, trying to survive the night. However, this turned out to be a good thing. Because when they woke up, they discovered the Manor all nice and beautiful again. The guests, Taltos, and Marilena didn't recall ever having spoken to them either. Without taking that rest, my players would never have discovered the Groundhog's Day effect of the curse.
  + My players were then able to intimidate and persuade their case to Marilena that something was UP. She and all her guests were poisoned and they needed the crest for the family crypt now.
    - Marilena, as the ruler of the mirrors, was able to go and retrieve the crest for them without incident, so they didn't need to fight their reflections again.
    - Then, they were off to the maze. Marilena abjectly refused to go to the maze with them, showing obvious fear about the place as well as being more than a little bitter about being strong armed into giving up the crest.

## In Summary

At this point, the players know there's a curse and they've got the keys they need to break it. Marilena's ghost must be expunged to stop all this and she's in the crypt at the center of the maze. Stay tuned for the maze and the finale of the Kresk story saga!

*Lady Marilena is dead...*

*She is gone. Gone, along with everyone else. I swore to her father that I would serve this household as long as I lived in exchange for my life... the life of a simple thief at that... and serve I have. I have been by my Lady's side since she was a young girl and watched her grow with pride.*

*And yet, now it has all ended and I am at a loss...*

*There was something in the food. In the wine, perhaps? Perhaps both? I know not. But without warning, Lady Marilena fell ill and died, followed by the majority of the guests. The few who were left fell into a panic and turned murderous against one another. I hid like a coward and then like a fool thought I could somehow make things better by cleaning up what was left behind.*

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*The time has come to break things off with Dmitri. He has been an enjoyable plaything, but he grows increasingly insistent that we should marry. He believes himself irresistible, that I am in love and therefore stupid. But I play the game far better than he realizes. To think that I would give over not just my fortune, but dominion over my lands, over my very life, to a man? The idea sickens me.*

*The servants tell me that he has been roaming the manor at night, looking in the library for clues to where the vault might be hidden. Such foolishness. My father was no fool, and neither is his daughter. There is no vault because my ancestors stand eternal guard over our treasure in our crypt. Only the twin crests of the greatest scion of our family, Valetian Fidatov, can open the way and disable the wards. Well, the second-greatest scion of our family, after me, of course. Two crests for two fountains in a terrible labyrinth... such a wonderful trick.*

*Dmitri was never going to get what he wanted, but he is still going to be upset when I end our dalliance. I shall tell him tonight and send him on his way quietly. I don’t want him to make a scene at my party next week. And besides, perhaps there will be a new suitor or two to consider...*

# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: Kresk III, or How I Made a Maze Work**

The next sequence of events will finish up my Kresk Saga. In an effort to give a bit more body to this little town, I inadvertently added 3-4 extra sessions worth of content which adapted story from the CoS Adventurer's League Modules, "The Broken One" and "The Tempter."

If you've seen my previous posts, you'll know that Kresk is currently in danger of starvation. Winter is fast approaching and they don't have enough food for the whole town to survive. The players followed the promise of help to the wealthy Fidatov Estate, which seemed to have more than enough provisions to help Kresk in the coming months. Unfortunately, they also discovered that a terrible curse has overtaken the estate. The land is stuck in a perpetual Groundhog's Day, where they gather for a party during the day and then everyone dies in the evening.

At this point, the players will have found two family crests which double as keys. By placing these crests into two fountains in the Fidatov maze, the players can unlock the gates to the family crypt. There, they'll confront the warped soul of Marilena Fidatov and finally break a fifteen-year-old curse.

## Why Mazes Typically Suck in D&D

Mazes are a bit of trick in Dungeons & Dragons. You'd think that a maze would be super for this kind of game, right? Well, unfortunately, there's a lot that makes them hard to handle.

### On The Surface

* + Theater of the Mind
    - If you're used to playing without maps, you rely on theater of the mind. And this is usually pretty awesome. I personally love playing with old fashion descriptions and role-playing.
    - However, you can't exactly describe a maze without it getting boring. "You come to a crossroads. Do you go left, right, or straight? Uh oh, a dead end, turn back and try again."
    - This can get hard to keep track of and become tedious for players, rather than being the fun puzzle it's supposed to be.
  + Real Life Playing
    - I personally play almost exclusively online using Roll20. It's convenient and easy for me and my friends to play every week. I've also been able to meet some wonderful people along the way that I would never have encountered in my neck of the woods.
    - However, if you play with your friends in real life using a printed battle map, a maze can get pretty tricky.
    - First and foremost, all your players are looking down at the maze from an overhead view. They can easily see which way to go, so the puzzle element gets washed away pretty quickly. There's a huge difference between being in a maze and looking down on one. What might seem like a simple solution is totally lost when you're actually walking it. And your players might have hearts of gold and never dream of metagaming. But it's hard not to do so in this case, even unintentionally.
    - Trying to use coverings and such to block the visuals on a printed map will get pretty messy and disorganized in this case as well.

### The Root of the Problem

* + However, you could argue that all dnd dungeons are mazes. So why do dungeons work so well in theater of the mind and in printed battle maps, but mazes do not?
  + Whether you're playing with theater of the mind, printed battle maps, or online simulations, nothing changes the fact that mazes are boring. There're some twists and turns and dead ends, sure, but either way it's just a matter of time before your players get to where they've got to go. It's really no different than walking a straight line between two cities with nothing happening along the way, like a long and boring road trip where the scenery is all the same.

## Making Mazes Interesting

### The Player Platform

* + I really hate to be that person, but I must say if you can use Roll20 with dynamic lighting for your maze, do so. It's really, really worth it. It gives the closest feeling to actually being in a maze. There's no overview for your players to unintentionally meta and it's entirely possible for them to get real life lost. Plunging the maze into darkness, where PCs only have torch light to guide them, also adds a level of mystery that you just can't duplicate when you're all sitting around a table.

### Put on the Pressure

* + Solving the maze is a foregone conclusion. It's going to happen. In order to make it interesting, you've got to amp up the stakes. Put some pressure on the party so that they feel rushed. It's not just about solving the maze, but solving it quickly. Here are a couple ways to do that:
    - There's a literal time limit. Maybe the building is going to self destruct in 20 turns. Maybe the maze is slowly filling with water. Either way, if the players don't move quickly, they're going to die here.
    - It's a race. Maybe there's a rival party somewhere in the maze also trying to reach the same goal. You've got to get through faster than them.
    - There're monsters in the maze. One wrong turn could mean another battle. As the maze wares your party down, they'll tread more and more carefully.
  + Also note that these are all things we see in normal dungeons too.

### Give a Better Goal

* + Most mazes have pretty simplistic goals. If you google some mazes, they're literally about getting from point A to point B.
  + The more complicated mazes are the ones with the goal in the center. But even those are, again, about getting from the entrance to the center or vise versa.
  + If you can find a way to make the goal of the maze a bit more interesting, that'll automatically make the maze more worthwhile. Even better, if you can put some extra stops between points A and B, the more your players will have to search for.

## The Fidatov Maze

Now, back to the main story. The finale to the Kresk saga involves making it through the Fidatov family maze. The maze I created is based off one I found on google. I just spruced it up a bit for looks and to better fit a grid. Otherwise, the maze is a pretty simple one. It's not terribly complicated or impossible to solve, especially looking at it as a whole. But by using the Dynamic Lighting I mentioned, my players had a more difficult time with it than I thought they would.

### The General Look of the Maze

* + This is a hedge maze, so all the walls are made of - you guessed it - hedges. The hedges are 15 feet high and are quite dense. Though it is possible to push through them, it's quite difficult. The hedges themselves actively resist interference and clench together if they sense intrusion.
  + In addition, the hedges are coated in dew. At first glance, this appears to come from the lingering mist that shrouds the ground throughout the maze. However, should a player examine the dew, they'll find that it's more oil-like in texture and seems to come from the very pores of the leaves.
  + The hedges are almost entirely immune to destruction. If someone were to try and hack away at them with a blade, or burn them away with fire, they rapidly regrow to fill in the damaged sections. Any damage done to the hedges is healed within seconds.

### An Aura of Magic

* + The Fidatov maze in and of itself is magical. There're spells laced into the very walls. Remember, this maze was created not only to protect the family crypt, but also the family treasure within the crypt. The Fidatov ancestors went through a lot of trouble making this maze intricate and impenetrable.
  + If any of your players try to look for it, they can sense magic coming from the very leaves of the maze.

### The Main Gates

* + The main gates are wrought iron and lead straight to the central mausoleum. However, they are totally locked and magically warded. If a player tries to Misty Step through the bars, or use any other form of magic to bypass them, the PC will simply appear the same distance in the opposite direction, potentially getting pushed further into the maze and separated from the party.
  + The wards also prevent physical, non-magical passage into the central area. If a player were to try and climb over them, for instance, they would have the same result.
  + There are other smaller iron fence pieces surrounding the center of the maze, but these are not gates. They are not meant to open and are similarly warded against passage.

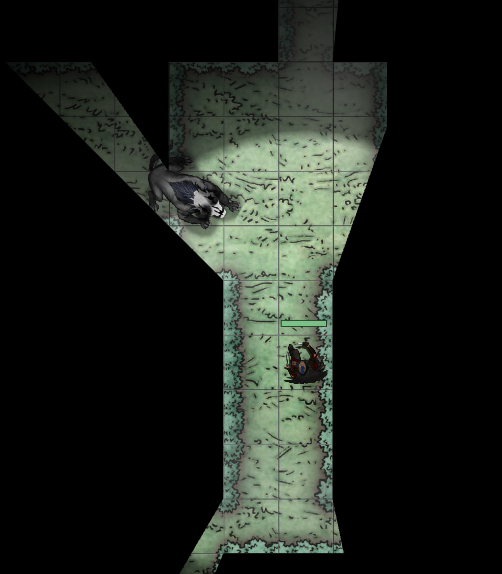
### The Fountains/Locks

* + There are actually eight different fountains within the maze. The ones that are actually locks are the two identical, small, circular fountains in the upper left and lower right hand corners. Everything else in the maze is completely benign and decorative. That won't stop your players from worrying about them though.

## The Death Hound

Here's where I upped the ante significantly. I'd already given my players a decent goal for this maze. They aren't just going from Point A to Point B, they're unlocking a secret area. On top of that, they must make two pit stops at the fountains before reaching their destination. This gave them something more to look for along the way.

And then I gave them the Death Hound. The Death Hound is a heavily altered hell hound of my own creation, its only purpose to guard the maze. I wanted to evoke a sense of terror from my players and boy oh boy did this thing do just that. The entire time they were in the maze, this hound persistently hunted them down, only a few feet behind them at every turn. They would turn a corner in the darkness, and the hound would be just across the way, looking at them. Friggin terrifying.

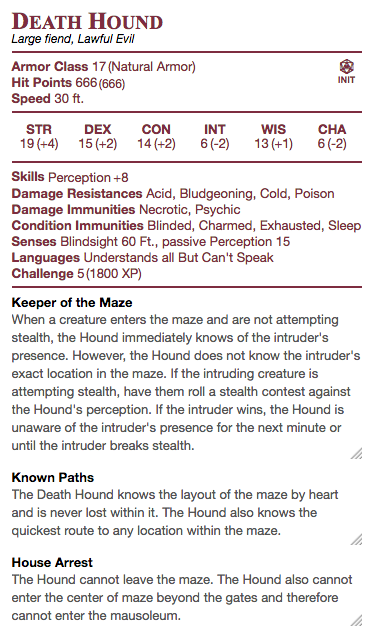
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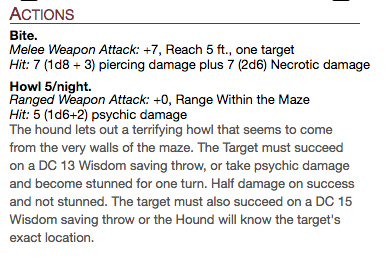
### Origin

* + The Death Hound is a fiend summoned from another dimension. One of the Fidatov ancestors decided that the magical maze wasn't protection enough, and dedicated decades of his life to the dark arts in order to build its strength. In the end, he formed a blood pack with this hound and magically attached it to the maze.

### Too Strong to Kill

* + I wanted the Death Hound to be a frightening force. If my players were able to just walk up and kill it, it wouldn't be all that scary. So I specifically designed it to do decent damage, though nothing insta-killing. On average, one attack from the hound could take about half a party member's HP. Scary, but not utterly crushing.
  + However, the hound can also take an obscene amount of damage in return. Outlasting the Death Hound in a battle is pretty much impossible.
  + After only a couple rounds of battle, your party should realize they're better off running from the beast. And so the chase begins!

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[](https://preview.redd.it/0qthkfcn2o811.png?width=386&format=png&auto=webp&s=2f232b4f41f967f743c275708f1029807ac51599)

## Running the Maze

### Keep the Turn Order

* + As soon as your players enter the maze, have each of them and the hound roll initiative. They'll have their movements and actions to use throughout the maze as the hound hunts them down.
  + As soon as the hound senses an intruder, it will go ahead and use its howl ability to figure out their exact location. It'll then start taking the shortest route to that location.
* And that's pretty much it. That's how my players and I had a horrifying, thrilling, super fun session with a maze. I made a demon dog stalk them for a couple hours. ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

## The Family Crypt

Your players have located the two fountains and placed the crests within each, thus unlocking the main gates. Yay! Your players have also managed to outrun the Death Hound and make it to the central crypt. Double yay! Now we get to the final confrontation.

### The Treasure

* + If you're looking at my map, the treasure pile is hard to miss. Your players will find it hard to miss as well.
  + The thing is, the treasure is cursed. Of course it is. Completely separately from the curse holding Lady Fidatov and her estate, for that matter. This hoard was magically enchanted as yet another security measure by Fidatov mages.
  + If a PC takes some of the treasure they'll be inflicted with the following trait:
    - ***Cursed by Greed.*** Blinded by greed, you have been cursed by an ancient family. Because of this, you are affected by a permanent bestow curse. While so cursed, you have disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws made with an ability score determined randomly by the Dungeon Master. After 5 in game days, you will also have disadvantage on all your attack rolls. After 5 more in game days, you will also take 1d8 additional necrotic damage from any spell attack that hits you.
    - This curse can only be removed by returning all that you took to the Fidatov crypt or to the Fidatov Matriarch/Patriarch.
  + If a PC acquires this trait, I would advise that you don't tell them. Instead, let the curse present itself slowly in their actions. There's only so many times you can tell them to roll with disadvantage before they start figuring something is up.

### Fighting Lady Fidatov

* + Marilena Fidatov's soul is quite literally infused with the curse that holds her estate. It's attached to her anger at Dmitri and to the grief of her untimely death. The curse in an of itself prevents Marilena from ever truly dying, which was her wish. However, the backlash of her curse has caused everything the PCs have born witness to thus far.
  + For the sake of this battle, use the stat block for a banshee for Marilena's ghost.
  + As soon as a PC touches the treasure, Marilena's ghost appears above the main altar. She shouts, "No! No. Why are you here? This is my family and you desecrate their rest? I won't allow it! I won't!"
  + She starts off with a wail attack, and then the battle begins. If, by chance, all your PCs fail the save, you can sneakily have the wail reduce them to 1 HP instead of 0 HP. The kindness of DMs knows no bounds, am I right?
  + I also added 6 skeletons to the fight, which rose from the stone coffins on either side of the room.
  + Believe it or not, this fight was actually smooth going, especially compared to the Death Hound and the Mirror Battle that came earlier.

## The Curse Lifted

When the party defeats Marilena's ghost, her form shrinks into itself. Then, all at once it bursts into light and sends a wave of force out in all directions that physically knocks the party to the ground. And then everything is quiet. The party will likely cautiously collect themselves before heading back to the Manor.

### 15 years later

* + With the curse lifted, the past 15 years of the same repeated day never happened. Instead, time passed as it always should have, minus the poisoning.
    - ***When Marilena pleaded for her life, the Dark Powers answered her. They cured her and her guests from the poison. But that cure also came with a price.***
    - ***With the curse broken, that price no longer has to be paid.***
  + The new timeline holds that Lady Fidatov's party occurred 15 years ago without incident. When it was done, the guests all returned home safely and moved on with their lives, as did Marilena herself.
  + However, the current plight of Kresk still stands. The Fidatov house had nothing to do with Dmitri getting married to Anna, having children, or loosing those children to illness. Ilya still turned into a monster and ate all the livestock, so Kresk is still in trouble.

### Emerging from the Maze

* + When the PCs exit the maze, a servant in the gardens will spot them and rush off to tell Taltos and Marilena. The PCs will then be ushered into a meeting with Marilena, who appears a little older but just as beautiful.
  + Marilena doesn't remember the PCs. In this timeline, she never met them. Neither did Taltos or anyone else for that matter.
  + She'll ask them why they were in the maze and how on earth they got out in the first place. Marilena knows of the maze's many defenses, the Hound included. Its dangers are the main reason the maze if off limits to literally everyone but herself. At your own discretion, you may even have her mention the curse on the family treasure.
  + The PCs are free to tell Marilena about the curse and all that happened. Depending on how they go about it, she may or may not believe them. But emerging from the maze is a feat in and of itself to her, so she's inclined to be a bit more accepting.

### Helping Kresk

* + The years have softened Marilena. When she was younger, she was much more full of herself and prone to elitist attitudes. Now, she's more patient and has an overall gentler nature. Her breakup with Dmitri is also ancient history that no longer bothers her.
  + If and when the PCs bring up Kresk again, Marilena has no problem putting together stocks and rations for the town. She arranges a servant to go to Kresk and begin getting the appropriate calculations for her numbers.

### Marilena's Daughter

* + This is purely flavor that you don't have to use at all. It may not even come up in your game. But I liked the idea, so I'll lay it down for you.
  + Since time has passed, Marilena now has a nine-year-old daughter named Genevieve. Genevieve doesn't have a father. If asked, Marilena might mention a brief romance with a traveler (definitely not Dmitri) and say something about the uselessness of men. Marilena wishes for Genevieve to take over the Fidatov household one day.
  + You might have a cute little scene where Genevieve comes in and is introduced to the party. She's even more evidence that time has moved on.

## Conclusion and Choices

And with that, Kresk is saved! With Lady Fidatov's assistance, they'll have enough food to go around and last the winter. There are just a few little things to consider now.

### The Cursed Treasure

* + Have any of your players stolen some of the Fidatov treasure? Remember to enact the curse so that it slowly worsens as the campaign continues. Even your greedy players should want to return that gold after a while.

### Dmitri

* + As far as Dmitri is concerned, he did set up the poisoning of Lady Fidatov. However, something must have gotten lost in translation because obviously nobody was poisoned.
  + In this timeline, Dmitri decided that the mix up was for the best and let himself cool down. He decided he would have regretted committing a murder and is glad it didn't happen.
  + However, your PCs most certainly remember what happened! They know that Dmitri didn't just kill Lady Fidatov, but also mass murdered her whole party. Because it didn't happen in this timeline, does that mean he is no longer responsible? Does Dmitri deserve to punished? His children and possibly his wife is now dead. Is that punishment enough?
  + All of that is for your PCs to decide. And their choices should be interesting. ;)

As always, I hope you enjoyed this piece and find it useful in your game. Don't worry, I haven't forgotten about the Shrine to the White Sun or the Abbey. Until next time!

- Mandy

# **Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd: The Abbey of St. Markovia**

The Abbey of St. Markovia is one of the more interesting locations in CoS in my opinion. It has a great map, some very interesting NPCs and a disturbing, yet classically horror premise. And yet, the plot treatment of this area bothers me to no end. I ended up giving the location a little bit of an overhaul.

## Everything I Don't Like About the Abbey As Written

Okay guys. I don't know if it's just me, but the as written treatment of the Abbey drives me crazy. The entire location feels like it's made up of various, interesting elements, but they're all disconnected and lack some kind of strong, umph.

### Two Separate Body-Snatcher Plots

* + In the as written campaign, there are two Frankenstein-esque subplots in the same location. One involves the mongrelfolk and their madness and deformities and the other involves miss corpse bride, Vasilka. There's no real way these two subplots are connected and they seem to exist independently of one another.
  + Both involve experimenting with cutting and sewing body parts (and/or genetic splicing, you get it), so why weren't they intertwined, either in their backgrounds or purposes?

### Vasilka's Parts

* + Vasilka is supposedly made up of different dead people from Kresk. However, Kresk only has a population of about 75 people. How many people have died in the last few years in a town that size? Even if we accept that Vasilka is made from dead grandmothers and grandfathers, the elderly would have had to pass away in the last, what, 5 years to still provide viable parts for her?
  + Or perhaps Vasilka is made up of a range of aged corpses, some of them many decades old. But if that were the case, why is Vasilka so well preserved? Shouldn't she be quite obviously decayed? Or have bony parts? Does the Abbot have the power to rejuvenate long dead flesh?

### The Abbot's Overall Intelligence

* + Yes, I know that the Abbot is technically a deva and not quite as familiar with the customs of mortals as he could be. But I still think he should be smart enough to at least consider some points. Like, for instance, that Strahd won't take just any bride, especially one incapable of speech. Or perhaps that a single dress shouldn't make a difference, especially since Strahd's giant friggin castle probably has lots of pretty dresses and tailoring a wedding dress for a bride shouldn't be an issue for the lord of Ravenloft.
  + The Abbot just seems way too juvenile in his presentation, especially for a god-like being. His goals and desires don't seem to fit into the overall story.

### The Players' Lack of Quest

* + Even disregarding the above issues and accepting the Abbey as a solid location fit for exploration, why would players need to involve themselves?
  + The Mogrelfolk
    - So, the mongrelfolk exist. What are players supposed to do about them, if anything at all? As written, the mongrelfolk seem more like an exhibit at a museum, there to gawk at but not to do anything with. There's no agency involving their plot line.

### The Dress

* + I can't be the only person annoyed that this whole location's plot hinges on a wedding dress in another town. The entirety of the Abbot and Vasilka's main quest is fetching that gawd awful dress.
  + In order for this quest to even start, players will have to know the dress exists, which means that not only will they have to have been inside the burgomaster's mansion, but also have gone into the burgomaster's private chambers (likely illegally). The chance of players backtracking to seek out a dress is slim to none.
  + And even if players know the dress exists and where to find it, Vallaki is most likely up in flames by this point in the campaign. Who knows if a random dress would even survive the chaos that is Vallaki.
  + And let's say that players do manage to return to Vallaki, get the dress, and deliver it to the Abbot. Then what? Does the Abbot march Vasilka to Castle Ravenloft for presentation? If he does, will the players even be there to witness the result? Probably not.
  + Or, if you're a kind DM, opening a tailor shop somewhere in Kresk and getting the players to commission a dress might be an option. But doesn't that feel somewhat cheap story-wise?

## The Abbot

The Abbot is the heart of the Abbey plot line. He's the piece that makes the whole location work. So I've spent the majority of my time focusing on him. Here's what I've come up with.

### What the Abbot Knows

* + The Abbot knows that Strahd is immortal. In the Abbot's own words, Strahd sold his soul to a dark god and now is a permanent fixture in Barovia. The Abbot doesn't know that this dark god is Vampyr and doesn't quite understand the nature of the Dark Powers. He only knows that they exist, swimming in the mists that surround Barovia, waiting to corrupt the souls of innocent people.
  + If asked for more details about these dark gods and their connection to Strahd, the Abbott openly admits his lack of knowledge. However, he does mention an old temple (The Amber Temple) up in the mountains said to hold a vast library. Though the Abbott has never been there himself.
  + The Abbot long ago accepted Strahd's permanence in Barovia. He doesn't believe that Strahd will ever be killed or otherwise displaced and that trying to do so is a fool's errand. Instead, he's decided that Barovia's only hope is to make Strahd happy, therefore changing the vampire's heart. A happy Strahd is bound to be a good ruler and never ever hurt his people, after all. ;)

### What the Abbot Wants

* + The Abbot went about researching the source of Strahd's torment, and discovered Tatyana. Or, rather, discovered her existence in Strahd's past. The Abbot knows that Strahd was once in love with Tatyana and that she died in a terrible accident. However, the Abbot doesn't know that Strahd was the reason she died in the first place.
    - I really wanted to save the full reveal of Strahd's backstory with Sergei and Tatyana for the Tome, so didn't want the Abbot to recite it fully.
    - Additionally, the Abbot probably wouldn't find the information relevant. What matters to him is that Strahd's love is dead, not how she died.
    - Of course, if you want Tatyana's suicide to be more public knowledge, then that's totally up to you. Maybe you've already had the Vistani tell the story or something. The only reason I kept it quiet was for the Tome.
  + The Abbot knows that no one can replace a person's true love, and instead has decided to resurrect Tatyana for Strahd... in the only way he knows how. The Abbot doesn't have the power to raise the ancient dead. And even if he did, he would need some of Tatyana's corpse, which was never found. So instead, he's decided to stitch together a new Tatyana and summon her soul to the vessel, memories and all. That way, she won't be some reincarnated replacement, but the real Tatyana (not counting the seams of course).

## Roleplaying the Abbot

* + The Abbot is easily one of the most difficult NPCs to role play in the campaign because he has no basis in humanity. Even Strahd was once mortal. The Abbot is the closest thing you'll get to a playable god and that can be hard to fathom. Here's what I did to get into the mind of the Abbot:
    - Imagine that you live in a city filled with people. They're all normal human beings, just like you. One day, you decide to go for a drive outside the city and end up is a small, abandoned neighborhood. It's a little creepy, sure, but nothing you can't handle. Just a bunch of empty houses.
    - Then you come across one house that's just sad to look at. It's leaning a bit the wrong way and the wood looks all gnarly and rotten. This poor house is just dying to be knocked down and it's hard not to feel sorry for it. So, you're like, "Hey, why not?" and you go inside.
    - You find this old, dark house is infested with rats. The rats aren't used to people (most have never actually seen a human being in their lives) so they're a little skittish of you, but not outright terrified. And they're a little gross and you don't really want to handle them or anything, but you sort of feel sorry for them in the same way you feel sorry for their house.
    - So you decide to stay for a while. You find the rats are somewhat comforting in their simplicity. They're so little compared to all the problems you have back in the city. And sometimes when you share your food with them, they get really friendly and a little cute. You know, in a Remy the rat sort of way. Occasionally a rat gets mean and bites you, but you're able to absolutely crush that rat so quickly it's not a problem.
    - One day while you're living in the house, you spot this huge, fat, mean rat that all the other rats are scared of. And this thing is so nasty even you'd have trouble dealing with it. So, you decide that you're going to help this little rat colony get rid of the big rat somehow. You start catching rats and holding them down and sharpening their nails. Sometimes, you accidentally squeeze too hard and the rat dies, but that's okay. There's plenty more.
    - But at the end of the day, they're just rats. And this is just a little break from the city.
  + In case it's not obvious, the Abbot is the human, the other humans are other celestials, the house is Barovia, the rats are mortals, and the fat rat is Strahd.
  + When I'm roleplaying the Abbot, this is the mindset I use. I look at my players like they're fascinating little vermin. Yes, they're interesting, but I don't have an emotional attachment to any of them. If they're nice to me, great. If they're mean, I'm like, "stop that it's gross." And if they attack or overtly threaten me, it's time to kill a rat.

## Vasilka

### Tatyana's Lookalike

* + At some point in the last century, the Abbot obtained an old sketch of Tatyana (the real one from ages past) and has made Vasilka in her image. Vasilka looks almost exactly like Tatyana (Or Ireena if she's with the party. Or a PC if you replaced Ireena as such).
  + The only problem is that Vasilka is still an empty vessel. She may look like Tatyana, but she most certainly is not the woman herself. And the Abbot knows that. He's desperately trying to find a way to both locate Tatyana's soul and, afterwards, bind it to Vasilka. While he can do this with the recently dead, the ancient dead are another matter.

### Soulless

* + Other than her appearance, Vasilka is still a Flesh Golem in this version. You can still use that stat block if you need to.
  + Otherwise, just run Vasilka like a living doll. She sits and smiles, but her eyes are completely void of emotion and recognition. She has no sense of self or an understanding of her surroundings and she has no capacity for language.

### What's in a Name?

* + As an added bit of flavor, you might say that "Vasilka" loosely translates to "vessel" in Celestial. The Abbot doesn't want to call her Tatyana until she *actually* is Tatyana, and so has settled on the nickname for now.

### Forever Young, Forever Dying

* + The Abbot just has one itty bitty problem with the vessel he's created: the parts that make up Vasilka don't last. Though he has used a combination of magic and science to preserve her quite well, her parts do eventually decay and require replacing.

## The Abbot's Practices

### Things I Got Rid Of

* + There's no more grave robbing for body parts. The Abbot doesn't get his parts from Kreskite graves. I eliminated the corpse part of this plot entirely.
  + I also completely nixed the mogrelfolk's origin story in the Belview family. As written, they were a family that wanted to be more powerful and went to the Abbot for... genetic enhancements, I suppose? That's no longer true.

### What's Really Going Down

* + The Abbot has been collecting willing individuals to "borrow" body parts from over the decades. When he takes a body part, he eventually replaces it with a morphed animal limb or attachment. The procedure to properly harvest and replace body parts can take months, however, to let the patient's body appropriately accommodate the changes. This is especially true when the Abbot turns to splicing genes. Growing a tail or a new arm can take a while.
  + The surgeries are also extraordinarily painful and performed without sedation (as an angelic being, the Abbot has likely never experienced physical pain and doesn't understand it), almost always leaving the patients completely mad, a danger to both themselves and to the normal populace. The Abbot then locks these people - the mongrelfolk - away for their own safety.
  + Sea Witch
    - I've rationalized this plot by comparing the Abbot to Ursula from The Little Mermaid. Once every few years, an unfortunate Barovian comes to him looking for a miracle. The Abbot happily provides one if he can, but asks for a price.
    - "Bitten by a werewolf? Oh, you poor thing, of course I can help. A man of the cloth would never leave someone in need. But perhaps.... if you don't mind me saying, you do have lovely fingers. And your cheeks are quite rosy. An excellent complexion. How about you let me borrow them and I'll make sure you never fear the moon again?"
    - "What a terrible cough! You sound like the grim himself is on your shoulders. And no other physician could help you? For shame! Don't worry, you've come to the right place. You won't leave my Abbey unwell; I swear it! However, even I need a small penance, you understand. I find myself in need of a leg, actually. Now, now, don't frown. I'll make sure to give you a new one, no, a *better* one."
  + Though the Abbot fully intends on letting his patients leave after his procedures, their broken minds prevent him from doing so. And if he's already taken a leg, they why not a patch of skin from the back or an ear and a nose? They're already insane and won't be leaving. It's best they keep donating towards the cause...

### Changes to the Abbey

* + To accommodate this changed plot, I've also changed a couple areas of the Abbey.
  + **The Hospital (S21)**
    - There are no enemies in this room; no shadows. Instead, five of the fifteen cots are occupied by the Abbot's most current patients. Four women and one man have been bound to their beds (with the same sort of bindings you would see in a mental institution) and are heavily bandaged.
    - Should PCs enter the room, the woman on the nearest cot reaches out her arm towards them. Or, rather, the bandaged stump where her arm should be. Her left foot is that of an enlarged eagle talon. However, the transplant has taken poorly and either needs to be redone or grown with a genetic splice. The talon as it is completely nonfunctional. The woman simply whispers, "help" over and over again.
    - The others are in similar conditions, each missing pieces of themselves or in the process of being turned into mongrelfolk. None have maintained their sanity and are overcome with fear or anger if spoken to. I imagine that each of these patients have been here for a number of years, staggering their arrivals. If a PC latches onto these NPCs and asks for their story, feel free to make one up. Just remember to keep the basic story the same: they were desperate and the Abbot helped them, but for a price.
  + **The Loft/Belfry (S17)**
    - The only thing I would change here is the shrouded body on the table. The body is another prototype flesh golem, with a similar look as Vasilka. She has no name and is technically alive, but is far less maintained. Her parts don't match quite as well and some are withering and in obvious need of replacement.
    - Instead of maintaining this body as his final work, the Abbot has been using her to test methods of binding long dead souls to a vessel. He's not targeting Tatyana's soul in this case, but any soul in general. He figures once he has a method figured out, binding Tatyana's soul to Vasilka will be no problem.
  + **The Abbot's Mindset**
    - The Needs of the Many
      * I feel it's important to reiterate that the Abbot doesn't feel like he's doing anything wrong. Though his patients scream in pain and beg him to stop, he also knows that they already agreed to the procedure and so it must be alright. And when his patients end up insane afterwards, it's just an unfortunate outcome. The Abbot actually feels he's doing these new mongrelfolk a favor by giving them homes away from the rest of Barovia.
      * And even if the Abbot does recognize some of the horror behind his actions, he easily believes that the ends justify the means. Sometimes a few must suffer in order for many to thrive. The battle against the darkness always has sacrifices.
    - Fickle Gods
      * It's also worth noting that the Abbot is hardly vengeful. If anything, he's quite forgiving and slow to anger. If a patient of his avoids payment, for instance, he's not the sort to hunt them down in a mindless pursuit. In enough time, he'd likely forget them altogether unless they show up at his Abbey again.
      * Remember, to the Abbot, each person he helps is just another rat. They all sort of look and act the same to him, so faces and names don't generally stick. And if one rat disappears, a replacement usually appears sooner rather than later.
    - With the Players
      * When the Abbot is with players, remember to keep his answers about the mongrelfolk vague. If they ask who/what the mongrelfolk are, the Abbot paints things in only the best way. He's not trying to fool the players (you are, but the Abbot isn't, lol), but instead he really believes in the righteousness of his own actions.
      * He'll tell PCs about how each mongrelfolk came to him after losing hope; that their own families had abandoned them and they had nowhere else to turn. If asked about their animal parts, the Abbot insists that the mongrelfolk asked for their changes. And the Abbot only wants them to be happy and safe, nothing more.
      * And if players find the hospital, the Abbot has similar answers if questioned. He insists that the operations were his patient's own desire and that his pursuit of Tatyana is righteous. "My patients, in their desperation, have become a part of something so much greater than themselves. I understand your doubt, but you needn't worry. They had nowhere else to turn and now I have given them purpose. And I certainly will not abandon them. Whatever I take I make sure to give back tenfold."
      * Additionally, the Abbot should be completely unashamed of his practices. He doesn't make a real effort to hide them. If players get caught in the hospital or jailed hallway, the Abbot simply approaches them with curiosity. He shouldn't get angry or seem flustered. Such emotion suggests that he recognizes the depravity of his own actions, which he doesn't. It would also make him feel more human, and you certainly don't want that.

## In the Campaign

### Ilya and His Mother

* + Most recently, Kresk's Burgomaster lost his last remaining child, a fourteen-year-old boy named Ilya, to sickness. However, through a miracle of the Abbot, Ilya has been brought back to life. This is both canonical in the book and also detailed more thoroughly in my own [Kresk expansions](https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/8w8488/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_kresk/).
  + To accommodate the Abbot's new plot line, I imagine that Ilya's mother, Anna, brought his corpse to the Abbot for resurrection. The Abbot made Anna a deal: her son's life for her skin in the coming years, as he had no need of it yet.
    - The Abbot had been recently blessed with a new patient: a druidic woman from the forests who had been set upon by wolves. Mortally wounded, she'd crawled her way to the Abbey and begged the Abbot's help in broken Common. She is now one of the patients in the hospital and the most recent addition. If found, she lies on her stomach with thick bandages around her abdomen. The skin on her back has been removed and is in the process of healing, along with her other wounds.
  + Within the next year, the Abbot will likely call on Anna to pay her dues. That is, if no other patient appears first. Like I said before, the Abbot is quite fickle, which is really good for Anna.

### Resurrection Services

* + Really the only reason players should end up at the Abbey is for resurrection or healing. There really aren't any other hooks to this location and, frankly, I don't think you need another. PC death is not uncommon in CoS, even after modifying the campaign. And the Werewolf Den is right next door, offering a source of lycanthropy. The Abbot is one of the few people in Barovia capable of stopping the curse. It's more than likely your party will visit the Abbey.
    - They might also go see the Abbot after dealing with Ilya in my Kresk expansion, inquiring as to the source of the boy's beast hood.
  + No matter how players end up at the Abbey, the moment they see the mongrelfolk gravediggers, they'll be asking questions XD.

### Finding Ireena

* + If players bring Ireena to the Abbey (or the PC you replaced Ireena with), the Abbot is *thrilled*. At first. For a moment, he believes that Tatyana has already come back to life and is ready to find her true love again. However, on finding out that the reincarnation doesn't possess Tatyana's memories and is therefore the equivalent of a cheap lookalike, he's severely disappointed.
  + The Abbot becomes much more invested in the PCs' adventure at this point. He'll happily guide the players in directions that might restore Tatyana's memories, like the Amber Temple (for its library and mythical magics) or Castle Ravenloft (for its familiarity to Tatyana). He'll even offer his resurrection and healing services for free, provided the PCs show interest in restoring her as well.
  + If, however, PCs openly oppose the Abbot and his goals, he's not pleased. The Abbot will go about trying to abduct Ireena (or the Ireena PC) in order to steal her soul. This can lead to a rather interesting plot line if you let it develop, one where the PCs have to escape the pursuit of an angel or break out their friend from Frankenstein hell.

### An Eventual Battle

* + If players don't have Ireena, the Abbot will ask one of his prices for his services. And that, of course, can get interesting. If players are charismatic, they can easily avoid paying upfront (which will put them in the same place as Anna Kreskov). But if they leave and keep coming back, the Abbot is more and more likely to realize he's being duped. The same can be said if the players keep putting off restoring Ireena's memories, or if the PCs allow Ireena to die or something equally horrible.
  + At one point in the campaign, the Abbot's patience will grow thin and he'll demand payment. Luckily, this should be on the party's third or so visit, putting them at a higher level than the 6-ish of their initial visit. You can then run this location as the dungeon it obviously wants to be, with a battle between the players, a flesh golem, Vasilka, the Abbot, and half a dozen (or more) loyal and/or crazy mongrelfolk.

## Conclusion

With these changes, I personally think the Abbey is more streamlined. Instead of a mosh of content, the goals and NPCs are clear. The location is, mechanically, for healing and resurrection. The Abbot wants Ireena, not a dress. And player choices and actions can lead to a finite outcome: the death of the Abbot and the stop of his depravity.

These changes are also quite fun if and when the players find out the Abbot's secret. Remember, unless they go exploring, players won't find the hospital or the other mongrelfolk. Once players know, it becomes this beautiful mental dilemma in which they weigh how much they need the Abbot for future resurrections and how moral it is to let his practice continue in the meantime. Plus, the Abbot's general nonchalance about to horror taking place in his Abbey can make him *really* scary.

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As always, I hope this helps you guys. And I also hope this isn't too dark of a change for you either XD. Let me know what you think and thank you so so much for reading!

- Mandy