

FLESHING OUT CURSE OF STRAHD: DEATH HOUSE

CHAPTER 2

A Guide and Expansion by MandyMod



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Fleshing Out Curse of Strahd is a series of expansions and elaborations to the main *Curse of Strahd* campaign. The full series is a DM tool that attempts to add depth to various NPCs, streamline confusing plot lines, fill in plot holes, and alleviate some of the stress associated with TPK inducing encounters throughout the

campaign.

As such, information presented and included throughout the series is designed to overwrite some of the information in the original text. For instance, if *Fleshing Out* refers to Ireena Kolyana as the natural born daughter of the Village of Barovia's burgomaster, this is taken as fact, even if the printed text states otherwise.

However, *Fleshing Out* is in no way meant to completely replace the original *Curse of Strahd* campaign. It instead is a companion guide, used properly by reading and referencing the original text to incorporate the overwrites detailed in this series.

For a more in-depth and casual look at the thinking behind the changes in *Fleshing Out*, please refer to the original posting of the series on Reddit. Find the series under username [u/MandyMod](#) on the [r/CurseofStrahd](#) subreddit.

CREDITS

Written by: [u/MandyMod](#)

Edited by: [u/DragnaCarta](#)

Encounter Balancing: Cory Rodus

GM Binder CoS Theme Creator: [u/AeronDrake](#)

Cover Art: Death House by [James' RPG art](#), purchased licensing agreement with artist

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Interior House Art: [Public Domain Adobe Stock](#)

Baby Walter Image: [u/jpaganrovira](#) Free Supplement used with artist's permission

All Other Various Art: DM's Guild Creator Resources

[1] Quote from CoS:Reloaded: [u/DragnaCarta](#)

[2] Mr. Durst's Suicide Letter: From the video game, *Layers of Fear*, by Bloober Team. Slightly modified to match Death House.

Escaping Death House Skill Challenge: Wyatt Trull on the [DM's Guild](#)

I would personally like to thank both my editors and the entirety of my followers on the subreddit for your ongoing support and feedback. I love you guys from the bottom of my heart.

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ARRIVING IN BAROVIA

Whatever adventure hook you use to transport your players into Barovia, it is recommended that you regardlessly end the hook with the Creeping Fog encounter. The players do not simply run into a strange mist, but instead choose to camp within it. The following morning, the party wakes to find themselves in a foreign land.

Slowly waking up to find that they no longer recognize their surroundings will be both disorienting and isolating to players, two very important emotional beats for a gothic horror campaign.

MEAGER BEGINNINGS

Consider limiting the amount of gear available to your players once they are taken by the Creeping Fog. If you are introducing your party to the campaign with the Death House adventure, as this guide assumes you are, the Durst manor contains a multitude of gear and makeshift items that will both incentivize exploration and force players to get creative with their survival. Your players will learn to utilize their environment and appreciate every flask of oil or kitchen knife they find.

Lacking gear also means your players will be more inclined to run and hide from encounters, once again pushing that pervasive horror theme. Your players will quickly learn to feel powerless in the face of Barovia's many dangers. The resulting anxiety is ideal for the overall tone of *Curse of Strahd*.

To utilize this adventure hook modification, have your party awake from camping without the majority of their gear. To expedite this process, reduce their normal starting equipment to the following list. If their starting equipment does not automatically include some of the following items, like a spellbook, they do not gain one from this list.

Players should now start with:

- 1 set of clothing from their background.
- Up to 2 trinkets of their choice from their backstories. These trinkets should have no mechanical use or value.
- A waterskin OR a coin pouch with starting gold from their background.
- A dagger OR an arcane/holy/druidic focus.
- A spellbook

MOM SAYS THAT A HOUSE IS LIKE A BODY,

and that every house has eyes. And bones. And skin. A face... This room is like the heart of the house. No, not a heart. A stomach. It put on different faces so that we would be still and quiet... while it digested. I'm like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster and the monster feels my tiny little movements inside.

- Nell, *The Haunting of Hill House*

APPROACHING DEATH HOUSE

Firstly, move the location of Death House outside the Village of Barovia to better guide 1st level players to the adventure without additional distractions. This also alleviates confusion to the setting as to why such an openly cursed location is in the middle of a town.

Once players emerge from the misty woods and find themselves on the Old Svalich Road, they inevitably begin a slow march towards the Village of Barovia, no matter which direction they chose to travel.

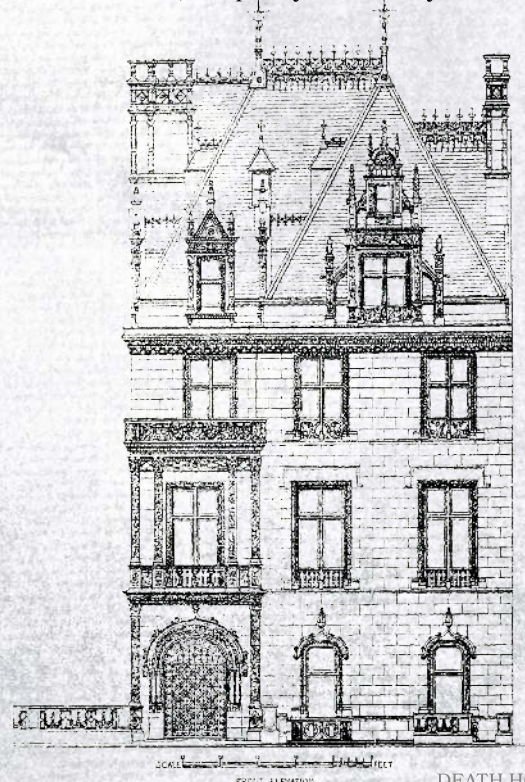
On the road, shortly after passing through the Gates of Barovia (Area B) but before exiting the Svalich Woods, they come across a small hamlet offside the main road.

As you trudge down the lonely, dirt road, you come across a fork in your path. One path continues on into the distance. The other is short and leads to a cul de sac with a few sorrowful buildings rising out of the mist. Faintly, you hear the frightened cries of a child.

The Durst family home sits between two other abandoned buildings in the middle of the cul de sac.

The building on the left is wider than the Durst home, but only two stories tall, and was once a home for field hands when the Durst farmlands were functional. The woods reclaimed the farms centuries ago and little evidence is left of the family trade. If the building is explored, players find it devoid of furniture and rotting, the wooden floors sagging under years of neglect.

The building on the right is an old, ruined stable, fit for both horses and carriages. However, the building is little more than ruins now, completely devoured by the elements.



DEATH HOUSE

DEATH HOUSE OVERVIEW

The following changes to the background of Death House add depth to the plot and tie up certain loose ends in the original adventure, such as why Walter is pictured in the family portrait when he was stillborn canonically. This page also provides an overarching theme to Death House and a short adventure summary to help Dungeon Masters prep the adventure.

DURST FAMILY HISTORY

Before Strahd The Durst family was an upper class household during the time Strahd first conquered the valley. The family gained wealth and affluence as the primary providers of grain and flour to the nearby Village of Barovia, their fields just on the edge of the Ivlis river basin.

The Beginnings of the Cult. After Strahd's arrival, the Durst household felt the weight of their new lord's darkness as it spread over the land. While Mr. Gustav Durst fell into a chronic depression, his wife, Elisabeth, became manically obsessed with her own aging.

Aware of the rumors of Strahd's age-defying magics, Mrs. Durst turned to the arcane, determined to find the answer to eternal youth. To that effect, she started a cult with other members of the upper class, her husband complicit in her actions. During their practices, Mr. and Mrs. Durst locked away their children, Rose and Thorn, to preserve their innocence of the cult's activities. The cult would capture and sacrifice travelers, servants, and neighbors alike on the altar in their basement in hopes of achieving their goal. Unfortunately, they were never successful.

The Nursemaid's Bastard. As Mrs. Durst's mental stability withered, Mr. Durst found himself pulling away from his marriage. He fell into the arms of his children's nursemaid, the gentle and fair Margaret. Their affair resulted in Margaret's accidental pregnancy.

As Margaret's belly swelled with life, Mrs. Durst lost herself in jealousy and hatred, convinced her growing age was the reason for her husband's adultery. Overcome with her own madness, Mrs. Durst came up with a terrible plan.

The Fall of Durst House. A few months after Margaret gave birth to her child - a healthy, baby boy named Walter - Mrs. Durst snuck into the nursemaid's suite and murdered her. After hiding the body, Mrs. Durst took Walter to the basement and sacrificed the infant in an unholy rite, accompanied only by her most trusted cultists.

The sheer atrocity of this sacrifice attracted the notice of a Dark Power. Amused by the depravity and desperation of the act, the evil god granted Mrs. Durst and her cultists the immortality they so craved - by turning them into ghouls and ghosts.

Mr. Durst, upon discovering what his wife had done, was so overcome with guilt and grief that he hanged himself in the basement. With no adults left to remember them, Rose and Thorn starved to death in their room.

However, the cultists were not the only ones transformed by this final sacrifice. Mrs. Durst's final rite, so perverted and malignant in its nature, transformed Walter himself. This act of betrayal twisted and broke the infant's soul and body, morphing Walter's spirit and flesh into an enormous, horrible monster that anchored the Dark Power's curse to the very foundations of Death House.

THE THEME OF DEATH HOUSE

The Death House module has one core theme: A rotten heart in need of purification. The entire curse of the house originates from Mrs. Durst's corruption, marked not by her dwindling outer beauty, but by her abhorrent soul. Additionally, the physical heart of the house and source of its curse is the ritual chamber deep beneath its foundations. This theme comes to a head in the final encounter with the flesh mound, who's heart is the corrupted infant, Walter.

Whenever possible, seed the theme of a rotten heart throughout Death House. Not only will it make the adventure feel more cohesive, but it will also foreshadow the solution to defeating the flesh mound in the basement.

For example, if players try to eat a piece of fruit from the pantry, the food appears fine but has a rotten interior. Or, if the players investigate one of the children's dolls in the attic, it squirms and a large bug crawls out from inside. Use such encounters and descriptions to indicate Death House's theme.

ADVENTURE FLOW

Players will start the module after finding themselves magically transported to a foreign land by a mysterious fog. After wandering down an abandoned road, seemingly without end, they find Death House in a lonely cul de sac. Outside the house, they meet Rose and Thorn, two young siblings who were scared out of their own home by the howls of a mysterious monster in the basement. The children bid the party to go in the house and check on their baby brother, Walter, on the third floor.

Once players enter the house, they become trapped within. Upon reaching the third floor, they discover a drastic shift in the atmosphere of the home as well as the ghost of the former nursemaid. After further investigation, they learn that the house was once host to series of cult sacrifices, and that even Rose and Thorn themselves are naught but spirits.

Unable to leave, the party pushes forward, finding the entrance to the basement. In these dark catacombs, they eventually find the ritual chamber and summon what remains of Walter's body and soul. Purging Walter of darkness frees Death House from its curse, causing it to crumble into the earth. The party races to the exit, happy to escape once and for all.



QUICK REFERENCE

NOTABLE NPCs

Name	Description	Name	Description
Rosavalda "Rose" Durst	10-year-old child of the Durst family. Ghost statblock.	Gustav Durst	Durst family patriarch, currently dead in the basement
Thornboldt "Thorn" Durst	7-year-old child of Durst family. Ghost statblock.	Walter Durst	Bastard baby of Gustav and the nursemaid. Flesh Mound statblock.
Elisabeth Durst	Durst family matriarch. Ghost statblock.	Margaret	Family nursemaid. Specter statblock.
		Lancelot	Old dog in the conservatory (Area 10). Mastiff statblock.

TREASURE & GEAR

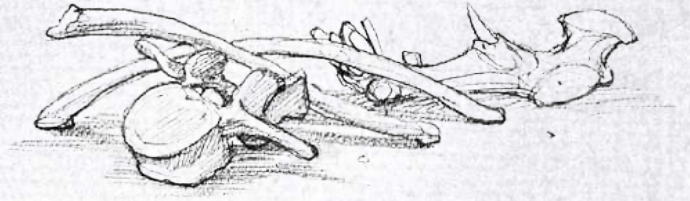
Loot	Location	Other Information
Longsword	2:Main Hall	Has a windmill cameo worked into the hilt. Mounted above fireplace.
Heavy Crossbow, Light Crossbow, Hand Crossbow, 60 bolts	3:Den of Wolves	In a locked cabinet, DC 15 to open with thieves' tools. The players can use the key in the upstairs study to open this cabinet at your discretion.
Oil lamp, Jar of Ink, Quill Pen, Tinderbox, Letter Kit	8:Library	All these items are in or on the desk. The letter kit contains a red wax candle, four blank sheets of parchment, and a wooden seal bearing the Durst family's insignia (a windmill)
Iron Key	8:Library	This key is in the desk and can be used to open the children's room upstairs. At your discretion, it may open other doors or locks throughout the house.
Leather Armor	9:Secret Room	The skeleton wears a set of leather armor that is salvageable for player use.
Darts	9:Secret Room	There are 3 darts in the skeleton. While no longer poisonous, they are salvageable for player use.
3 Blank Books, 3 Spell Scrolls, House Deed, Windmill Deed, Signed Will	9:Secret Room	All contained in the chest. The books are worth 25 gp each. The spell scrolls are of <i>bless</i> , <i>protection from poison</i> , and <i>spiritual weapon</i> . The windmill deed refers to Old Bonegrinder. The will bequeathes all the properties to Rose and Thorn.
Jewelry Box and Contents	12:Master Suite	The jewelry box on the vanity is made of silver with gold filigree (worth 75 gp). It contains three gold rings (worth 25 gp each) and a thin platinum necklace with a topaz pendant (worth 750 gp).
Cultist Treasures	25:Well and Cultist Quarters	The various chests contain 11 gp and 60 sp in a pouch made of human skin, three moss agates (worth 10 gp each), a black leather eye-patch with a carnelian (worth 50 gp) sewn into it, and an ivory hairbrush with silver bristles (worth 25 gp).
Silvered Shortsword	25:Well and Cultist Quarters	One final chest contains this sword. This is perhaps the most valuable item in Death House to the party.
Crystal Orb	31:Darklord's Shrine	The orb in the statue's hand can be used as an arcane focus and is worth 25 gp.
30 Torches and 15 Candles	34:Cult Leaders' Quarters	These many lights are in a crate in the wardrobe.
Cult Leaders' Treasures	34:Cult Leaders' Quarters	The footlocker contains a <i>cloak of protection</i> , 4 potions of healing, a chain shirt, a mess kit, a flask of alchemist's fire, a bullseye lantern, a set of thieves' tools, and a spellbook containing the spells: 1st level: <i>disguise self</i> , <i>identify</i> , <i>mage armor</i> , <i>magic missile</i> , <i>protection from evil and good</i> and 2nd level: <i>darkvision</i> , <i>hold person</i> , <i>invisibility</i> , <i>magic weapon</i>
Gold Ring	36:Prison	The skeleton wears this ring, worth 25 gp, on one of their bony fingers.

EXTRA GEAR

The following table contains a set of possible gear to award players if you choose to use the Meager Beginnings addition to the adventure hook.

While this list contains a good deal of discoverable gear, you might be surprised by your players' creativity. If your party comes up with additional ideas towards gathering gear, like trying to use the antlers of the stag head in the den as a weapon, consider allowing the addition with an adequate check. In general, finding simple gear within the limits of the environment requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Creating their own simple gear requires at least an hour of time and proficiency with a set of tools or a skill associated with the gear they are attempting to create, as well as a check of the Dungeon Master's discretion.

During character creation, take note of the standard gear your players should have for their classes. If you find a major discrepancy between the available gear in Death House and what they need to fight, consider altering some of the gear on these tables. Perhaps the longsword mounted above the fireplace in Area 2: Main Hall is instead a pair of crossing rapiers. Perhaps the set of crossbows and bolts in the cabinet in Area 3: Den of Wolves are instead bows and arrows. However, don't overindulge your players and don't be afraid to force them to make due with what they find.



Gear	Location	Description
Shield	1B:The Entrance Foyer	A decorative shield emblazoned with the Durst coat-of-arms (a stylized golden windmill on a red field), hangs on the wall of the Foyer. A player can use this shield as real equipment if they think to take it.
Cloaks	2B:Cloakroom	The hanging black cloaks in the closet can be used as blankets.
Oil	1st & 2nd Floors	All the wall sconces on the first and second floors contain oil that can be lit. However, that oil can also be meticulously drained and collected into a single pot of oil.
Torches	1st & 2nd Floors	Some of the assorted fireplaces contain logs which can be used as makeshift torches. A player can roll a DC 14 Intelligence (investigation) check to retrieve one torch per fireplace.
Fire Pokers	All Floors with Fireplaces	Most fireplaces in the house have an accompanying set of fireplace tools. A fire poker has the statistics of a sickle and can be used as such.
Playing Cards	3:Den of Wolves	While not technically combat gear, a deck of cards can go a long way in role-play for the right player character. The deck is located in the unlocked cabinet.
Food	4:Kitchen & Pantry	While the food tastes bland and cannot leave the house without rotting, it can be eaten within the house to satisfy daily food requirements.
Dagger	4:Kitchen & Pantry	The players can find up to 2 kitchen knives that can be used as daggers.
Armor	6:Upper Hall	The four suits of armor in this hall are mainly decorative, but can be deconstructed and pieced together to make two sets of scale mail. This process takes an hour and required a DC 15 Intelligence check to complete. If a player character has proficiency with blacksmiths tools, they succeed the check automatically.
Spears	6:Upper Hall	Each of the four suits of armor holds a spear.
Armor	11:Balcony	Once the animated armor is defeated, it's plate armor is quite damaged. However, what can be salvaged is a single set of chain mail from beneath its outer plate. Recovering the chain mail takes an hour.
Sheets, Blankets, Soap, Healer's Kit	14:Storage Room	Outside their basic material use, a character proficient in medicine can use the sheets and soap to make a set of bandages equivalent to 5 charges of a healer's kit. This process takes an hour a requires a DC 12 Wisdom (medicine) check.
Club	14:Storage Room	The broom in this closet can be used as a club.
Clubs and Greatclubs	18:Storage Room	The cluttered furniture in this room can be broken down into clubs and greatclubs. Doing so takes an hour.
Daggers	35:Reliquary	There are two knives in the reliquary that are grotesque and nonmagical, but still functional. They are the bone dagger and the dagger with the skull set into the pommel.

ROSE AND THORN

The children outside Death House are Rose and Thorn. Rose, age 10, attempts to sooth her crying younger brother, age 7, as the players approach.

Rose and Thorn are projections of the ghosts within the house, and don't register to abilities like Divine Sense. However, these children are the same children found later in the module. They simply possess altered memories and consciousnesses that are removed from their ghostly selves. Rose and Thorn appear corporeal and are indistinguishable from living children. Rose and Thorn do not know they are dead and cannot remember the events of their demise.

TERRIFYING ART

The portrait of Rose and Thorn found in the module, though atmospheric, does not inspire trust. It is not recommended that the illustration be shared with players.

ROLE-PLAYING THE CHILDREN

As the players approach the distressed children, Rose immediately stands at attention, pushing her brother behind her protectively. Throughout the following conversation, Rose is the primary speaker. Rose, though just as confused and afraid as her brother, hides her distress well. She is brave, determined, and hopelessly protective of Thorn.

As players question Rose, they can learn the following information:

- There's a terrible monster in the basement. The children don't know what the creature looks like, but they can sometimes hear its screams coming from the floorboards. The screams were especially loud tonight, frightening Thorn.
- The children's parents are in the basement trying to wrangle the monster. They have done so on many occasions. Rose and Thorn are not allowed in the basement for their own safety.
- Rose and Thorn were supposed to be watching their baby brother, Walter. He's in the nursery on the third floor.
- The children's nursemaid, Margaret, recently quit the family. Rose is now in charge of taking care of her younger brothers, Thorn and Walter.
- Though the household used to have servants, none remain. The house is currently empty, save Walter.

Once Rose feels the adventurers are of sound intentions, she asks them to go check on Walter in her stead. Though she claims she cannot bear to leave Thorn, she is actually equally afraid of entering the house.

Should the players express interest in investigating the monster, Rose tells them that their parents will surely come back from the basement in a few hours. The party can talk to their parents about the monster then, should they desire. However, their primary goal should be finding Walter.

Quote: *"I'd go in with you... I would! But... You see, Thorn needs me out here. And I can't leave him."*



EXPLORING DEATH HOUSE

In order to further lure your players into Death House, it is recommended that you avoid supernatural or otherworldly happenings on the first two floors. It is also recommended that you run the majority of Death House through theater of the mind to streamline your session.

If players are more goal-oriented, they will most likely attempt to skip most of the first two floors on a direct route to finding Walter. Even if you began the adventure with the Meager Beginning addition, temporarily avoiding exploration is not necessarily a bad thing. Remember that on the first two floors, the players should not yet know the house is haunted and believe that pilfering the items within is stealing. However, once they discover that Death House is not what it seems, they can return to the first two floors to more thoroughly loot the house without moral qualms.

FEWER BATTLES

Remove the following monsters from the module to refocus the adventure on the narrative and otherwise increase the survivability of Death House.

- The **broom of animated attack** in area 14.
- The **grick** in area 28.
- The **shadows** in area 31.
- The **mimic** in area 33.

RESTING IN DEATH HOUSE

Should players decide to take a short or long rest in Death House, they may be accosted by a haunting. Roll a d6 to determine what they might experience.

d6	Haunting
1	The PC hears a faint chorus of screams coming from beneath their feet, several stories down. Though the screams sound human, they also possess an ethereal quality suggesting they are not natural.
2	The PC hears footsteps walking the halls. After a moment, the footsteps approach the PCs' door and then never sound again.
3	The PC hears squeaking and scratching as a family of rats moves through the walls.
4	The PC hears the light footfalls of children playing on the floor above. Their laughter drifts through the air.
5	The PC hears a woman's gasp of surprise suddenly cut short by a sharp, squelching sound. There's a tumble outside the door to the PC's room and when they look, a pool of blood flows under the frame. After a moment, the PC blinks and the blood is gone.
6	As the PC dozes, they hear the grief stricken voice of a man whisper in their ear. "I never wanted this," he says. The PC suddenly feels the tightening of an imaginary rope around their neck and are jerked awake.

TRAPPED

Once the party fully enters the house, they are unknowingly trapped within.

The mists of Barovia slowly close in around the house, pressing against door frames and windows. Anyone who attempts to leave the house and go into the fog experiences the effects of the mist found in Chapter 1 of the *Fleshing Out* guides, and are eventually spit back out into Death House.

Once the party begins to explore, there may come a time when they decide to check on the children. However, when they do so, they find Rose and Thorn mysteriously gone and the mist shrouding the front portcullis.

If some player characters choose to wait outside with Rose and Thorn, they watch as the mist slowly closes in on them. Rose, clearly worried about the unnatural fog, drags Thorn into Area 1B and begs the remaining party members follow them. Once these player characters are inside the house, they turn their backs to Rose and Thorn for a second and turn to find the children mysteriously gone.

The only way to escape Death House is to deal with the monster in the basement.

THE FIRST AND SECOND FLOOR

6: THE UPPER HALL

While the first floor contains equipment, but few points of interest regarding storytelling, the second floor contains encounters and information the players would highly benefit from obtaining. However, goal-oriented parties may completely ignore the second floor in favor of finding Walter. To encourage a bit of exploration at this juncture, read the following when the party reaches the second floor.

You see that the second floor landing is just as elegant as the first, with wood paneling and a large, marble hearth on the back wall. Above the hearth is a family portrait of an aristocratic man and woman and their two smiling children, who you immediately recognize as Rose and Thorn. Cradled in the father's arms is a swaddled baby, which the mother regards with thinly veiled scorn.

There are standing suits of decorative armor flanking two pairs of doors. One set of doors is wooden and cracked open. A quick glance within reveals a warm study. The other set of doors is set with stained glass and you can see the warm glow of lamplight coming from within. As you watch, you see the light flicker as someone moves behind the door.

The open door leads to the study and the stained glass doors lead to the conservatory. The figure moving in the conservatory is Lancelot the dog, detailed on the next page.

8 & 9: LIBRARY AND SECRET ROOM

In the letter from Strahd to the Dursts, change the word “stillborn” to “bastard.” Finding the letter does not reveal the secret door to the basement from Area 21. Only speaking to the children in Area 20 will open the path.

Should the players seem less exploratory, place the letter from Strahd in the desk for easier discovery and to streamline the storytelling of Death House. However, keep the other treasure hidden to reward further investigation.

10: CONSERVATORY

The players can find a frightened old hound dog hiding beneath the harpsichord. The dog wears an aged leather collar bearing the name, “Lancelot.” Lancelot belongs to Mad Mary and Gertruda in the Village of Barovia. After Gertruda’s disappearance, Lancelot wandered into the woods in search of the girl, but instead found Death House. Lancelot is rail thin and starving, terrified of any character who approaches him. However, he can be coaxed from his hiding place with a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, rolled with advantaged if offered food.

Lancelot offers the players an alternative choice for the sacrifice in the “One Must Die” sequence later in the adventure.

THE THIRD FLOOR

Remember that the third floor is cold, unlit, and dusty. The change in atmosphere should be palpable as the party ascends the stairs and should be the first real sign all is not well in Death House.

FIGHT! THE ANIMATED ARMOR

The fight with the armor should not be long or terribly difficult, but instead be used as a scare tactic.


The first player character to pass in front of the armor awakens it and it receives a surprise round. For that opening round, it uses its action to try and shove the player character over the stair railing. If successful, the player character falls two stories and takes 2d6 fall damage. Even if the shove is unsuccessful, mentioning the threat of the fall and the damage should be enough to frighten players.

After the initial shove, the armor fights as normal and should go down in two or three rounds. If the players flee the fight, the armor does not leave the landing, returning to its stasis once the third floor is vacated.

11: SECRET DOORS TO THE ATTIC

Replace both the secret doors leading to the attic with normal doors. Having children pass through a hidden door to get to their room doesn't make much sense.

The door leading from Area 11 to the attic staircase is heavily boarded up and locked and cannot be broken through with sheer strength. A player with a crowbar or similar tool can slowly pry away the boards with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. An additional DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves’ Tools) check can be made to pick the lock or a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to break down the exposed door. This entire process will take about an hour with successful checks.



The difficulty and time it would take to open this door encourages the players to explore and meet the nursemaid before heading to the attic through the alternate door in her suite.

12: THE MASTER BEDROOM

Place the following unsent letter in Mrs. Durst's jewelry box on the vanity.

My Dear Mrs. Petrovna,

Your advice on dealing with the unwanted fiend in my home is very good advice indeed. Tonight's ceremony will proceed as planned when the moon is at its highest peak - without, of course, the attendance of Mr. Durst. I must agree with you that, yes, with such an innocent sacrifice our proceedings may have better results. Although, "innocent" is not quite the term I would use.

My Thanks,

Mrs. Elisabeth Durst

15: NURSEMAID'S SUITE

Margaret. The nursemaid, Margaret, is a non combative ghost. Unlike the first iterations of Rose and Thorn, Margaret is both see-through and incorporeal. A naturally modest and shy individual, Margaret presses her beautiful, ghostly form into the corner of the room in order to hide from the party. If outright attacked, she screams in terror and disappears. But if approached with caution, she willingly talks to the party, quietly introducing herself and bidding the adventurers welcome.

Withdrawn and shy, Margaret does not fully understand how or why she died. She is confused, and frequently jumps between awareness and ignorance of her own state of undeath, sometimes in the same sentence.

Margaret speaks fondly of Mr. Durst but doesn't mention their affair out of propriety. If the players ask her outright about Walter's parentage, she smiles sadly and simply says that it is not her place to speak of such things.

Margaret expresses clear love for the three children of the house, Rose, Thorn, and Walter. But if Mrs. Durst is brought up in conversation, her smile fades. Though Margaret doesn't speak poorly of the lady of the house, players should sense from her mannerisms and answers that Margaret is afraid of Mrs. Durst.

Approaching the Crib. Margaret willingly lets the players check the cradle in the adjacent room once they've assured her of their good intentions. However, the cradle is empty.

When Margaret learns of the missing baby, she frowns in confusion and distress. "He must be with his brother and sister!" she proclaims. She then floats through the door to the attic staircase (formally a mirror in the as-written adventure) in anxious search. If players pursue her, she's disappeared and does not reappear for the rest of the adventure.

THE ATTIC

Once players reach the fourth floor, they should be enticed by the only locked door in the attic leading to the children's room. If players lack lock-picking abilities or seem hesitant to knock down the door, remember that there is a key to this room in the study.

18: STORAGE ROOM

Should the players find the nursemaid's body, they can match the clothing on the corpse with Margaret's ghostly clothes with a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check.

If the players somehow missed meeting Margaret in Area 15, she appears now. Upon seeing her own corpse, Margaret dissolves into disbelieving tears. "No!" she cries. "What happened to me?!"

She then flies through the floor towards her rooms, where she remains should the players wish to confront her further. By the time the players reach Margaret in her suite, she has already forgotten seeing her body and proceeds with the normal encounter in the Nursemaid's Suite section of this guide.

20: CHILDREN'S ROOM

Once players discover their remains, Rose and Thorn reappear within this room. Though this time, they appear ghostly and transparent.

Upon seeing their bodies, Rose and Thorn suddenly regain the lost memories of their deaths. Though saddened, they are surprisingly at ease with the revelation. If asked about their acceptance, Rose tells the players she thinks, deep down, she always knew she was dead.

Rose also expresses honest remorse for unwittingly trapping the party within the house. She admits it was not her intention and if she had had her memories, she would have warned them away instead of bidding them inside.

While still entirely ignorant of the cult, Rose can now offer the party new information:

- The children's parents would lock them in their room to keep them safe while they dealt with the monster in the basement.
- The monster sounds like horrible screaming from the basement. It was their parents who told them it was monster after they inquired about the screams. Their parents told them nothing of its nature.
- Rose could hear Walter's wailing the last time she and Thorn were locked away. She doesn't know why he was taken or who could have done so, but she worries for the baby's safety.
- Margaret never quit the family. Margaret was supposed to come check on Rose and Thorn if they were locked away for too long, but Margaret never came.
- Rose and Thorn starved to death. They were "so very hungry, but no one came when we cried. And then the hunger went away and we grew very cold and went to sleep."

Though Rose knows it is too late for she and Thorn, she begs the players to find out what happened to Walter and their parents. And, if the monster still lives, she asks them to destroy the creature. She wishes no one else come to harm from the beast.

If the players didn't explore much and lack gear, Rose informs the party that her parents kept some hunting equipment in the den on the first floor. She encourages them to take what they need to slay the monster.

Rose then reveals the secret staircase to basement by referring to her dollhouse.



THE BASEMENT

Players are now **Level 2!**

Once the players get to the basement, they do not hear chanting as described in the original adventure. Instead, they hear the distressed cries of a baby coming from Area 34 (Cult Leader's Quarters). Once players investigate Area 34, the crying stops and a distant, unintelligible chanting begins to rise from Area 38 (Ritual Chamber).

At this point in the adventure, the party should correctly suspect that their only means of escaping Death House is by dealing with the monster in the basement. Now, they seek only to find the creature. They should follow the baby cries to the encounter with Mrs. Durst and confirm the vast majority of their suspicions, and then follow the chanting to the ritual chamber.

FIGHT! SWARM IN THE CRYPTS

The encounter with the **swarm of insects** is easily avoided and overlooked. However, a player character that unwittingly wanders into Elisabeth's crypt is accosted by the swarm. You might initiate this encounter by having a short, horrific description of the player character opening the stone door and seeing the massive cloud of insects crawl out of the walls and onto the player character.

Overall, this encounter should be relatively short. Its main value comes from the first turn of combat which should scare players effectively. However, the longer this fight goes on, the less frightening it becomes. It is therefore recommended you end the fight on round 2 or 3 regardless of the damage dealt by the players.

If possible, be sure to denote that the swarm emerges only from the area around Elisabeth Durst's crypt to foreshadow her corruption.

25: WELL AND CULTIST QUARTERS

Add the following item to the chest in 25C.

Cultist's Logbook. *Bound in grimy black leather, this journal maintains a list of names, physical descriptions, and the negative results of some event.*

One of the head cultists maintained this logbook as a record of the cult's victims. The second column logs the physical description of each victim named in the first column, while the third column bears a single word for each entry: "Unsuccessful."

27: DINING HALL

The bones littering this room are from the ghouls alone. The cult did not practice cannibalism.

Additionally, remember to remove the grick encounter.

FIGHT! GHOULISH ENCOUNTER

As the ghouls are the undead forms of the former cultists, they retain some vestige of their former selves. They mindlessly repeat any or all of the following phrases as they attack the party: "Beautiful. We're so beautiful"; "Nothing can hurt us"; "We are perfect. We are immortal"; and "Help us live forever." [1]

The ghouls in this encounter begin hidden in the earth and have total cover while buried. Once a player character steps into the intersection and triggers the encounter, the party is surprised. The ghouls have lost much of their mental faculties in their undeath, but are still intelligent enough to understand the players. They prioritize attacking any player character to insult their appearances, provided they can reach that character, and otherwise attack the party member nearest to them on any given turn.

Depending on the route the players travel, consider moving this encounter to Area 25 (Cultists' Quarters) or 27 (Dining Hall). You want this encounter to be relatively difficult and drain the party's resources.

31: DARKLORD'S SHRINE

Remove the shadow encounter from this room.

Have any player character that touches the orb or statue make a Wisdom saving throw. This saving throw requires no DC and has no positive or negative results, but simply is meant to frighten the players as you withhold the possible results from them.

Regardless of the saving throw, Strahd becomes aware of the party's presence in Death House and in Barovia once they interact with the statue.

34: CULT LEADER'S QUARTERS

Remember to eliminate the mimic encounter from the previous chamber.

Use the following flavor text to describe the room to players.

As you enter the next room, you find a makeshift, underground bedroom. A large, wood-framed bed with a rotted feather mattress takes up the bulk of the space. On the near wall sits a wooden wardrobe and at the foot of the bed is an aged footlocker. Above the bed, hanging from a taut noose, is the corpse of a man in a black suit. One of his withered, bony hands clutches a crumpled note.



The corpse here is Mr. Durst, who hanged himself after the fall of his family. The note in his hand is a suicide letter which reads:

My Beloved Children,

I wish I could do what all fathers do and tell you that monsters aren't real. But it wouldn't be true.

Life can create things of exquisite beauty. But it can also twist them into hideous beings. Selfish. Violent. Grotesque. Monstrous. It hurts me to say that your mother has turned into one such monster, inside and out. And I'm afraid the disease that afflicted her mind has taken hold of me as well.

It sickens me to think what we've put you through. There is no excuse. I only ask of you, though I know I do not have the right to do so, to try and forgive us. I despise what your mother has become, but I love and pity her all the same.

Rose, I wish I could see you blossom into a strong, beautiful woman. Thorn, I wish I could be there for you the way I couldn't be for Walter. But I can't. This is what I deserve.

Goodbye [2]

Once players read the note, the far earth hewn wall shakes and Mrs. Durst, now a **ghast**, crawls forth. Unlike the ghouls, Mrs. Durst retains the ability of higher speech as well as her memory, but has completely succumbed to her own dark whims.

She wears a tattered, once-beautiful red dress overlain with a black robe. The neckline of her dress hangs low, revealing an open and rotting chest cavity within which players can see her literal black heart. Her lips and gums have gone black with rot, and her smile shines with madness. At this point, she bears only a vague resemblance to her own portrait.

Mrs. Durst has gone completely insane. She is arrogant to an extreme, and shuns her dead husband, calling him a lecherous traitor who deserved his death. She speaks unkindly of Walter and the nursemaid, and writes off Rose and Thorn as bothersome nuisances. She is vulgar and speaks in a hissing, gurgling voice. She is also convinced of her own beauty and relishes her immortality.

Should the players ask her what she did to Walter, she invites them to descend further into the basement and "see for themselves."

FIGHT! MRS. DURST

While players can most certainly leave Mrs. Durst after their conversation, most parties will feel the need to execute her for her crimes. Should a fight occur, it should be relatively easy. Though Mrs. Durst hits hard and poisons those near her, the party has advantage in numbers. The fight shouldn't last more than a couple rounds.

If you should desire a more difficult encounter, consider giving Mrs. Durst a multiattack and doubling her hit points. A pair of **ghouls** might also emerge from the back room and attempt to pincher the party during the encounter.

35: RELIQUARY

Replace the 13 items in the reliquary with the following list. Each item is representative of the various locations in the *Curse of Strahd* campaign.

- A bloodstained wooden sun (Village of Barovia)
- An aged Tarroka deck, in such foul condition some cards are unreadable, rendering the deck useless (Vistani)
- A hag's severed finger (Old Bonegrinder)
- A dagger carved from human bone (Vallaki)
- A broken silvered bolt (Van Richten's Tower)
- A jar of severed raven talons soaking in wine (Winery)
- A crown made of black vines (Yesterhill)
- A desiccated frog lashed to a stick, easily mistaken for a *wand of polymorph* (Berez)
- A cracked egg containing the skeletal remains of a deformed, infant dragon (Argynvostholt)
- A large, pure white feather (Abbey of St. Markovia)
- A small wooden coffer containing a dire wolf's withered tongue (Werewolf Den)
- A chunk of amber resin (Amber Temple)
- A dagger with a bat's skull set into the pommel (Castle Ravenloft)

THE FINAL ENCOUNTER

When the Dark Power accepted Mrs. Durst's final sacrifice, Walter was transformed into a terrible monster, a vessel for the cult's hatred, arrogance, and depravity bound within an innocent babe. This abomination now demands what the cult once gave freely: sacrifices.

Upon entering the ritual chamber, Area 38, players see a small bundle sitting on the center dais. It is about the size of an infant completely shrouded in black cloth. Upon closer inspection, the bundle isn't moving and shows no signs of life.

ONE MUST DIE!

The first player character to step onto the dais summons the cultist projections that surround the room. The bundle on the altar unfurls to reveal a single dagger.

If the party refuses to make the requested sacrifice, the cult is angered, and summons Walter. If the party makes the requested sacrifice, the cult chants victoriously, and summons Walter anyway. Either way, players should feel as though they have made a grave error.

Consider giving this encounter a timer of about 10 minutes, placing a literal ticking clock on the screen or at the table. Most parties will not need all the allotted time, but the countdown will instead pressure the players and promote anxiety as they discuss possibly sacrificing one of their own.

SIMPLIFIED CHANT

When it is time to summon Walter, simplify the summoning chat to, "Come, demon! We awaken thee!"

FLESH MOUND

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48)

Speed 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius),
 passive Perception 10

Languages None

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Innocent Heart. Walter's infant corpse lies in a cavity at the heart of the Flesh Mound, suspended by several fleshy tendrils. Whenever the Flesh Mound takes damage, chunks of gore drop away to briefly reveal Walter's screaming form. A creature can use an action to try and forcefully remove Walter from the heart of the mound with a strength (Athletics) check. The DC for this check starts at 30, but is reduced as the Flesh Mound loses hit points. At 105 hit points, the DC is 26. At 81 hit points, the DC is 22. At 63 hit points, the DC is 18. At 51 hit points, the DC is 14. At 45 hit points or fewer, the DC is 10. When Walter is removed from the Flesh Mound, the Mound instantly drops to 0 hit points and is destroyed. Should the Flesh Mound drop to 0 hit points with Walter still attached, the baby is automatically freed.

Actions

Multiaction. The Flesh Mound makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage. On a hit, the target must make a DC 14 strength Saving throw or be pushed back 10 feet.

The Cult's Depravity. Any creature within 60 feet that can see the Flesh Mound must make a DC 14 intelligence Saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage and gain 1 stack of the Cult's Depravity as it is assailed with horrible visions of the cult's sacrifices in the ritual chamber. The target takes half damage and is not afflicted by a Cult's Depravity stack on a successful save. Any target afflicted by the Cult's Depravity takes 1d4 psychic damage at the start of its turn, which increases by 1d4 damage per stack accumulated. An afflicted target can use their action to shake these visions entirely and eliminate all existing stacks of the Cult's Depravity.



FIGHT! THE FLESH MOUND

This encounter completely replaces the shambling mound.

When the **flesh mound** is summoned, the dirty water filling the chamber ripples as something moves beneath the surface. A host of bones, flesh, and disparate body parts come together from the water, collecting into a massive, shifting heap of gore centered above the altar. The portcullis slams shut and initiative begins.

Through the course of battle, the flesh mound prioritizes pushing enemies away from it to protect Walter. It will flip between using its slam attacks and its Cult's Depravity action about every other turn. While the chances of downing a character with a single attack are slim, the fight will quickly turn into a battle of attrition as the party watches their resources slowly dwindle and their hit points drain. By the third turn of combat or so, the party should figure out that the crying baby within the mound is the source of its power. Don't forget to describe the quick revealing of the baby each time the Mound takes damage. If the players come up with an alternative answer for removing or stopping Walter, such as trying to heal the baby or a clever use of a spell, you might consider rewarding them by lowering the DC for the Innocent Heart trait or otherwise watching the Mound dissolve.

Throughout the battle, feel free to embellish the terrible visions from the Cult's Depravity action. The visions might be of illusory cultists that attack the afflicted, very similar to the effects of a *phantasmal force* spell. These illusions grow in number as the target gains stacks of the ability.

INCREASING DIFFICULTY

If the party has recently rested or contains characters of higher than average hit points, consider raising the Cult's Depravity damage to 3d6. If the party contains a high number of characters, consider raising the Flesh Mound's multiaction to three slams.

ENDINGS

After the final battle, the Death House adventure can conclude in one of two ways.

On one hand, the house may begin to self-destruct, forcing players to flee. This race to the finish can give the module a memorable and dramatic ending.

On the other hand, the players may be quite beaten after their final encounter, ending the battle with fallen party members. If the players seem to need time to recover or seem keen on laying the spirits of the Durst family to rest in the crypts, a more peaceful ending may occur.

Choosing an ending for Death House will come at the discretion of the Dungeon Master.

FLIGHT FROM DEATH HOUSE

In this ending, once the flesh mound is defeated the Death House is considered purged of its curse. Rose and Thorn's ghosts appear to the players one final time. While still transparent, they now have a soft radiant glow about them and project an aura of peace. Rose thanks the players for rescuing Walter and for finally ending the darkness of their home. But before the conversation can continue much longer, the ground shudders and the ceiling cracks, raining debris on the players. Rose proclaims that without the curse to hold the house aloft, it will soon crumble. She and Thorn shout at the players to run! The player characters must flee before the house is swallowed by the earth.

For this ending, it is recommended that you run the *Escaping Death House Skill Challenge* by [Wyatt Trull on the DM's Guild](#) for this ending.

A skill challenge is a mechanic from 4th Edition that allows the players to make a series of skill checks to overcome obstacles in a montage-like scene without tracking hit points. The skill checks must be shared amongst the players, forcing them to work together and allocate their strengths and weaknesses for each obstacle.

Trull's skill challenge follows the players as they run through Death House, desperately seeking escape.

However, it is recommended that you alter the majority of the supernatural obstacles in the challenge in favor of more natural challenges to incorporate the changes in this guide. At this point in the adventure, the Death House is no longer cursed, making scythed doorways and similar obstacles feel out of place. Instead, you might describe a door stuck in its frame from the shifting foundation or a support beam suddenly falling into the party's path.

The following edits are examples of such changes that are recommended for the skill challenge to better fit this guide.

- Area 21: The Secret Staircase. Instead of the giant spider, you might have the ground shudder and a character lose their footing, falling down the staircase. The party has to act fast to stop their fall!
- Area 27: The Dining Hall. The illusion of the dying man on the table is attracting a coming horde of ghouls, not cannibalistic cultists. Players hear their rasping voices in rounding the corridors, similar to those of the ghouls they would have already encountered in the basement.
- Area 0: Courtyard. Alternatively, Rose and Thorn appear struggling to hold the gates open for the players. They shout, "Hurry! We can't hold it much longer!" This preserves the children as allies to the party, rather than enemies. *Persuasion* can be used to foster the children's will to hold the gate longer. *Acrobatics* or *Athletics* can be used to make a final mad dash for the exit. *Perception* can be used to spot a large rock in the dirt one child can use as a foothold.

Once players escape Death House, the house itself is swallowed into the dirt.

LAI D TO REST

In this ending, Death House falls silent after the players complete their final battle with the flesh mound. The players have the option and the time to tend to their fallen party members, further explore the house, collect loot, rest, and place the remains of the Durst family in their tombs.

When the party has placed the last of Dursts to rest (optionally including Margaret and Mrs. Durst), they turn to see the ghosts of the family, who appear as they would have in life. Mr. Durst cradles a laughing Walter. Rose and Thorn smile at the players. Mrs. Durst, if present, stands to the side and weeps in clear remorse of her actions and mouths, "Thank you". The ghosts then dissolve into light and disappear forever.

When players exit the basement, the house is old and rotted, but devoid of any further supernatural haunting. Death House is now completely normal, a structure left to slowly dissolve into the elements.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Once players escape or leave Death House, they become **level 3!** The party will likely choose to take a long rest in the cul de sac before heading down the Svalich Road towards the Village of Barovia.