

# Ravenloft I6 Playability Guide

## Part I

By Drew Griffiths · vaultsoftheodd.com

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**Editorial note.** This guide works from I6 itself. Where it reaches beyond the module, it says so. The itinerant clan the module calls "gypsies" is named Rhenari throughout, following the convention set out in Section 2. Direct quotations from the module retain the original wording. The printed "First Counsellor to Baron von Zarovich" on Crypt 25 is treated throughout as a typesetting error for "First Counsellor to King Barov"; Barov is Strahd's father, and the printed "Baron" is not a rank but a corruption of the name.

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## 1. Campaign placement

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### 1a. The four seals

Barovia is isolated four ways, not one. The fog is what the module foregrounds, but on its own it would be insufficient. Four reinforcing seals together produce the actual state the module describes. Two of them preexisted Strahd. The other two he set in motion.

- **Fog.** The magical layer. Strahd-generated, activates on exit as a neutralised poison that re-asserts the moment a traveller leaves the valley. The fog disappears on Strahd's destruction.
- **Economics.** The commercial layer, downstream of the fog. A route travellers do not return from sheds traffic regardless of what alternative routes offer. Over centuries the pass drops off regional trade, then off the maps, then out of common knowledge as a working route at all.
- **Terrain.** The physical layer. Mountains pressing the valley on at least three sides, a single practical approach, forested slopes discouraging off-road travel, weather compounding difficulty across most seasons.
- **Neighbours.** The political layer. Surrounding powers are either too fragmented to notice, too strong to be safely provoked, or too thinly populated and migratory to supply either investigation or prey.

Strahd built the fog. The economic seal follows from the fog. Terrain and neighbours he did not build, but he has been careful across centuries not to disturb them.

### 1b. The pass, once useful, now avoided

The valley's infrastructure implies past prosperity. Barovia was once a working kingdom with a royal line under Barov and Ravenovia, a castle, a burgomaster, a priesthood, and a merchant class. The pass was commercially active during the royal era and through the

years before Strahd's pact.

What ended it was Strahd's appetite. After the pact he began killing. Not only the wedding, and not only at the castle. Anyone inside the valley was potential prey, and so was anyone passing through. Travellers and traders went missing. Disappearances on a trade route do not stay quiet. Merchants' guilds notice their people fail to arrive. Relatives make enquiries. Neighbouring rulers hear the complaints. Sooner or later investigation comes.

The fog is Strahd's answer to that. It is a defensive work, not a territorial one. Its function is to stop anyone with cause to look for the missing from reaching him. Once it was in place, the valley sealed. The fog is a neutralised poison: breathed once, it infuses around the vital organs and activates the moment a character leaves Barovia. No one who has entered the valley can leave without the Rhenari's potion or Strahd's destruction. The module is explicit that the potion cannot be found by the party. Investigators who approached the pass saw the fog, heard the warnings, and turned back before breathing it. Those who entered did not return. The folk warning about the cursed valley where the road itself kills you is the downstream account of all of this, carried outward by the Rhenari on their own travels and by the few who turned back at the fog's edge without entering.

The residual users are the Rhenari, smugglers avoiding customs, fugitives avoiding patrols, and the occasional desperate traveller who has outrun the warning or discounted it. The Rhenari charge extortionate rates for physical passage in their own wagons, which they alone can drive through the fog. The potion Strahd gave them is real but never for sale. A separate anti-vampire potion they hawk to arriving adventurers is the scam. People who fail to emerge are not missed. The smuggler's employer assumes he absconded, the fugitive's pursuers assume he escaped abroad, the merchant's family lists him as lost on the road, which is technically accurate.

### 1c. Strahd's restraint

The placement flanks Strahd with neighbours his own intelligence tells him to leave alone. The valley offers a fixed population trained across generations, a controlled flow of victims via the Rhenari, a defensive perimeter in the fog, and the undisturbed quiet that has let him survive. Expansion loses all of it. The sphere of darkness he pursues, per the Fortunes Goals table on p.7, reads more easily as insurance and tactical flexibility within his domain than as a plan for external predation.

### 1d. Published settings, all passing the four-seal test

**Greyhawk.** Central Yatils, with Perrenland to the east, Ket to the south, and the Wolf and Tiger Nomads to the north. Ket is the strong organised neighbour, Perrenland the fragmented tempting one, the Nomads the low-yield migratory frontier. The setting's existing overland clans can stand in for the Rhenari without strain.

**Mystara.** Altan Tepes mountains between Karameikos and Thyatis. Traladaran culture is directly Wallachian-coded, meaning almost the entire I6 naming layer lands without adjustment. Karameikos is the fragmented tempting neighbour, Thyatis the strong organised one. The Dymrak Forest is a ready-made Svalich woods analogue.

**Forgotten Realms.** Galena Mountains between Damara and Vaasa. Damaran naming is Slavic and needs almost no adjustment. Damara is the fragmented tempting neighbour, Impiltur the strong organised one, Vaasa the hostile northern seal. Published 1987, so this is an adaptation exercise rather than period-appropriate.

## 1e. Generic placement for homebrew

A mountain valley flanked by a fragmented tempting neighbour, a strong organised neighbour, and a low-yield frontier, accessed by a decayed trade route that regional folk warn against. The valley's own culture should be insular and drifted, distinguishable from any of its neighbours. A pre-Strahd royal era matching the Barov and Ravenovia frame explains the castle, the burgomaster, the church, and the merchant class. The pass should have been commercially viable during this royal era and through the years before Strahd's pact, with its closure following the pact and his subsequent predation. Any setting that can supply these elements can host Barovia without strain.

## 1f. The patron problem, why the party is in Barovia

The module delivers the party into the valley without explaining why they accepted the job. Someone engaged them. Someone had a reason. The four-seal framing in 1a and the causal history in 1b supply the answer directly: a neighbouring power has a Barovia-shaped gap in its intelligence, and outsiders are the natural instrument for closing it.

The patron's problem is exactly the problem the fog was built to produce. Over decades or centuries people have been going missing on the valley's pass. Merchants, traders, travellers, and in time the investigators those disappearances produced. Anyone official sent in has not returned. The neighbouring kingdom knows something is in the valley. It does not know what. It cannot see in. Its own scouts are inside the pile of the disappeared, and sending more is throwing additional officers after the ones already lost.

An army is the other available instrument, and it is worse than the problem. A mountain valley with a single practical approach favours the defender at every turn. The force that enters the valley is not the force that emerges, assuming any force emerges. The political cost of a visible military operation against a neighbouring territory is high. The diplomatic cost of the operation failing is higher. And the patron still does not know what is in there. An army cannot investigate, it can only fight, and it cannot fight what it cannot find.

Outsiders are cheaper, lower-profile, and deniable. A group of adventurers with the right capabilities and no official ties is a contractor, not a soldier. If they succeed, the patron has solved a long-standing problem at no visible political cost. If they fail, they were freelancers acting on their own initiative, and the patron has lost nothing it owns. The commission is therefore an intelligence commission first and an adventure second. Find out what is in the valley. Find out who is behind the disappearances. Find out whether it can be ended, and end it if it can.

The specific patron depends on the setting. In Greyhawk, Ket is best placed to commission the work, large and organised enough to have lost caravans and officers, strong enough to retain outsiders discreetly, and sufficiently close to the valley that ongoing losses sit in its ledger. Perrenland is the plausible secondary hire, smaller, more fragmented, with the same losses but fewer resources to absorb them. Tusmit is adjacent and militarily capable but primarily occupied with Ket and Ekbir, which makes it a secondary patron: affected enough to fund the work, not invested enough to lead it. In Mystara, Karamaikos or Thyatis fills the role, with Karamaikos as the closer, more directly affected party and Thyatis as the larger imperial hand. In the Forgotten Realms, Damara is the patron that has lost the most and Impiltur the one with the organisation to commission the work on Damara's behalf.

What this gives the DM at session one is a reason the party took the job and a patron who expects something in return. Information, at minimum. A report, a map, a name. Ideally the destruction of whatever is running the valley. The commission also gives the DM a lever for

the campaign after I6 if the DM wants to use it: the party has a relationship with a real power that now owes them something, and a valley that has been closed for generations has just been reopened.

### **1g. The valley after failure, and how it continues**

Barovia does not return to a prior state when a company fails. It continues.

The dead remain dead. Houses stand empty or are taken by others. Offices do not vanish; they are filled. A burgomaster is replaced. A priest is replaced, or the church falls quiet until one is found. Those who survive adjust to what has happened, and what has happened becomes the condition under which the next company enters the valley.

This is the same movement described at the smaller scale in Section 4e. There it is Strahd who learns and alters his use of the castle from night to night. Here it is the valley itself that does the same from one span of time to the next. Nothing is undone. It is only taken forward.

The practical effect is that repetition does not produce familiarity. A party entering Barovia after a failure does not encounter the same village with different faces. They encounter a village that has already absorbed the failure. The marks of it are visible in who holds authority, which doors are shut, which are watched, and which stand open because no one remains to close them.

Tatyana's return follows the same rule. She returns, but not into the same place within the village's structure, nor under the same conditions. The soul persists. The life does not repeat.

This matters because Strahd's attention follows her, and his attention shapes the pressures the party encounters. Where she stands within the valley determines how those pressures are expressed. Whether she is protected, exposed, constrained, or moving freely shapes the form his attention takes.

The castle remains what it is. Strahd's methods are already established in Sections 4c and 4e. What changes here is where and why they are applied: the cycle's new conditions determine where his attention falls and which of his standing capabilities the valley draws him into using.

A DM running Barovia more than once should alter the offices, the relationships, and the local memory of prior failure accordingly. The burgomaster in the second run is not Kolyan, and the party is arriving into whatever the first run left behind.

What continues is the valley as it has become, not the valley as it was.

## **2. Names, keep what works, change what does not**

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Keep the names as written where they land without friction. They are the module's original voice, and they travel well. Where a placement makes a name feel out of tune, rename it. The itinerant clan the module calls "gypsies" needs a setting-native name in any adaptation, both because the English term has become contested and because a local name reads as lived-in rather than imported. What must survive is the essence of each character and relationship: Strahd's pride and pact, Sergei's murder on the wedding day, Tatyana and Ireena as the same soul across centuries, Madam Eva's sight and divided loyalties, the

dynastic frame of Barov and Ravenovia, and the specific roles of the village and castle NPCs. Names serve that essence, they are not the thing itself.

The guide uses **Rhenari** throughout for this clan. Rhenari is both collective and singular: "the Rhenari," "a Rhenari." No suffix, no folk or people or kin construction; the name stands on its own in the way Vistani does in later Ravenloft material, without being Vistani.

Direct quotations from the module's text retain the original wording. Elsewhere, Rhenari.

*Further reading: a companion note on the site sets out the fuller argument for this naming convention.*

### 3. Overview and how to run the module

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The module's requirements for the party, set out on p.2, are six to eight characters within a 30 to 40 total level budget at levels 5 to 7, all of good alignment, and at least one fighter of 4th level or higher. The fighter requirement is load-bearing for the module's intended resolution, and waiving it requires conscious replacement of that function. The module is built to work best with a wholly good-aligned party, partly because Strahd's manipulations of the morally ambiguous complicate the ending the module builds toward, and partly because the tonal register of gothic horror works better when the party are unambiguous protagonists rather than shades of grey.

What the module does not require explicitly but the encounter design assumes is a balanced party with the four core AD&D roles covered. A group without a cleric tends to break down in the crypts and under Strahd's bite. A group without a wizard tends to exhaust its damage options against Strahd's hit points and regeneration. A group without a thief typically loses PCs to traps that no other class can reliably locate or disarm. The fighter is mandated by the text. The other three are strongly implied by the content.

This guide is scoped to the module as a published text. Adaptation to specific virtual tabletops, AI map generators, or other modern platforms is left to the DM. The prep logic set out here applies equally to in-person pen-and-paper play, online voice, any VTT, and any future format. What the party must look like, what the spellcasters should prepare, and what the DM should internalise before session one does not change with the delivery medium.

#### 3a. Group composition

The four-role baseline is fighter, cleric, wizard, thief. Any party can add a second of each, or add a paladin, ranger, druid, or dual-class character as specialist cover, provided the total level budget of 30 to 40 is respected.

At 30 total levels with six characters (five average), the baseline is tight. Each role is filled by one PC with no redundancy. A fallen cleric leaves the party without healing or turn undead in the middle of a vampire module, which is typically the run's end.

At 40 total levels with six characters (six to seven average), the party can afford a second front-line fighter, a second spellcaster, or a dedicated specialist. This is the recommended configuration because it gives redundancy at one or two roles without bloating the table.

At seven or eight characters closer to level 5 each, the party has redundancy at every role and can absorb casualties, but it also moves slowly and spends more session time on group

decision-making. Larger groups need firmer DM pacing.

**Hitting the character count with modern table sizes.** The six-to-eight-character requirement assumes 1e-era tables, which ran larger than modern groups. A DM running with four or five players today has two main routes to the numbers the module expects.

First, each player runs two characters. This was standard 1e practice. It keeps the PC count up without adding seats, doubles each player's tactical interest, and gives them a built-in backup when one of their characters falls. Downside is cognitive load per player and slower turns while each one resolves two actions per round.

Second, recruit henchmen before the party enters Barovia. AD&D 1e gives each PC a Charisma-based henchman limit with loyalty and morale rules governing their behaviour. High-Charisma PCs can bring two or three along, which scales the party to the module's intended size without doubling each player's character load. Henchmen are run by the DM under instruction from the recruiting PC in combat, take a half share of XP and treasure, and can be chosen by role to plug gaps, a second cleric for healing redundancy, additional fighters for the front rank, a specialist thief for the castle traps.

A useful design move is establishing at session zero that henchmen can be promoted to full PCs when their recruiter falls. The module has no designed replacement NPCs, and a henchman who has been with the party since arrival in Barovia steps seamlessly into the empty seat. Flagging this upfront encourages players to bring henchmen as genuine characters rather than disposable retainers, which in turn makes their eventual promotion feel earned rather than mechanical.

### 3b. The cleric, the adventure's keystone class

The cleric is the adventure's single most important class. Turn undead is the primary offensive tool against a significant fraction of the module's opposition, including the zombies, skeletons, ghouls, and wraiths scattered through the castle, and the vampire himself when turned at higher cleric levels. A cleric who is not prepared to turn aggressively and repeatedly throughout the module is playing the wrong character.

The cleric also supplies healing, disease recovery, poison neutralisation, protective wards, and anti-caster disruption. The spell list has to cover offensive, defensive, and recovery functions simultaneously. Critical prepared spells at levels 5 to 7, by spell level:

- Level 1: Cure Light Wounds (multiple copies), Protection from Evil, Bless
- Level 2: Hold Person, Silence 15' Radius, Spiritual Hammer
- Level 3: Cure Disease, Prayer, Dispel Magic, Remove Curse
- Level 4, if the cleric is 7th level: Cure Serious Wounds, Neutralize Poison, Protection from Evil 10' Radius

Critical notes on selection: Protection from Evil blunts Strahd's charm gaze and disrupts the undead he summons, so prepare at least one. Prayer is a standing combat buff that repays the slot inside one round. Silence 15' Radius shuts down an enemy caster at range and can be cast on an unwilling target who fails the save. Spiritual Hammer gives the cleric a ranged damage option in rounds when healing is not required. Neutralize Poison is the standard AD&D response to poison effects, though the module does not explicitly confirm it works against the fog (see 1b for the fog's mechanics). Remove Curse covers several module-specific cursed items that the party is likely to pick up and attempt to use.

### 3c. The wizard, damage and utility

The wizard's role is reliable damage and high-leverage utility. Offensive spells have to account for the environment and the target. Strahd makes saving throws well, has substantial hit points, and the castle is a warren of tight spaces where area effects either endanger the party or waste themselves on stone walls.

Magic Missile is the reliable choice against Strahd specifically. No save, automatic hits, multiple darts per casting, and the damage stacks across castings. A wizard with several Magic Missiles prepared contributes more to the vampire's defeat than one relying on a single Fireball held in reserve. Fireball and Lightning Bolt look dramatic on paper and rarely deliver in practice here, though they remain useful against softer opposition in open terrain.

Critical prepared spells at levels 5 to 7, by spell level:

- Level 1: Magic Missile (multiple copies), Protection from Evil, Shield
- Level 2: Invisibility, Mirror Image, Knock, Web
- Level 3: Dispel Magic, Haste, Fly, Protection from Normal Missiles
- Level 4, if the wizard is 7th level: Stoneskin, Dimension Door, Wizard Eye, Ice Storm

Critical notes on selection: Dispel Magic is the most important utility spell in the book. The castle is full of Strahd's active magic, and Dispel Magic opens doors, disarms effects, and interrupts his concentration spells during combat. Haste on the fighter doubles their attack rate during the Strahd confrontation, which is frequently decisive against a regenerating opponent. Stoneskin on the Sunsword carrier converts them into a durable frontline piece for the endgame. Invisibility lets a wizard or thief scout ahead of the main party without tripping Strahd's spy network at every corner. Knock bypasses locks that the thief's skill check misses.

### 3d. The thief and the fighter

The thief's primary role is trap detection and disarming. The castle contains several traps that kill PCs outright on a failed save, and Find/Remove Traps is the only reliable way to locate them before they trigger. The thief should scout ahead during exploration rather than walk in the front rank. Backstab is a bonus against living opposition and ineffective against most of the undead the party will face, which puts the thief in a support rather than damage role at the module's upper levels.

The fighter is the Sunsword carrier. They need to arrive with a magical longsword or be willing to swap to the Sunsword when it is found. Plate or chain armour, a shield unless two-handed, a missile weapon for situations where Strahd retreats into flight or mist form, and the highest hit point total of the group. The fighter takes the front rank in every combat that is not scouted.

### 3e. Prep conventions from p.2

The remaining items on p.2 are prep rather than interpretation. The DM needs to have them internalised before session one, but they do not require developed argument.

**Duplicate-area mapping.** The module presents certain keyed locations in pairs, with the Fortunes reading (Section 5) determining which of each pair is used for the actual playthrough. The locations affected are Strahd's starting position, the Tome of Strahd, the

Holy Symbol of Ravenkind, and the Sunsword. The DM resolves the card draw during prep and marks the chosen location in each pair on the master copy before session one. Attempting to resolve this mid-session breaks the tempo and can accidentally telegraph the draw to the players.

**Statistics abbreviations.** AD&D 1e stat-block shorthand, defined on p.2 and assumed throughout the module. AC, MV, HD, #AT, Dmg, SA, SD, AL, and the rest. A 1e DM will know these. A DM coming from a later edition should spend a few minutes with p.2 before prep to make sure the stat blocks read cleanly during play.

**Torch and lighting conventions.** Per the module's stated radius on p.2. Lighting matters because the castle is unlit, several encounters turn on the distinction between light and darkness, vampires have specific relationships to sunlight and lesser light sources, and a party without reliable illumination cannot navigate the deeper interior. The cleric's Continual Light is worth noting here as a module-usable spell for sustained exploration, since it does not consume torch stock or attract encounters the way a burning flame does.

**Dexterity and constitution checks.** Roll d20, equal to or under the relevant stat to succeed. Non-standard for 1e general rules, specific to I6's handling of physical hazards the module does not want to resolve as saving throws. Used for dodging sudden traps, climbing hazardous terrain, resisting the fog's effect on first exposure, and similar situations where a save mechanic would either be too generous or too harsh.

**The victory condition.** Strahd's destruction ends the adventure. The module states this explicitly. Once the vampire is destroyed, the fog dispels and the valley is released from the curse. This matters for two reasons. First, it gives the DM a clear endpoint and confirms the campaign does not continue inside Barovia after Strahd falls, which also means the DM does not need to prepare content beyond the climax. Second, it removes the burden of "what happens next in the valley" from I6's design remit. The aftermath belongs to the DM's wider campaign if they choose to take it there. The module's work is done at the climax.

## 4. Count Strahd Von Zarovich, who he is and how to play him

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The module opens with Strahd speaking in his own voice on p.2: *"I am the ancient. My beginnings are lost in the darkness of the past. I am not dead. Nor am I alive. I am undead, forever."* This is the figure the DM is preparing to play. He is ancient, self-conscious of his ancientness, and self-defining. He is not a monster that has forgotten it was once a man. He is a man who has chosen to outlast his own death and is still choosing, night after night.

The note on p.3 tells the DM what this means for preparation. "The entire adventure centers around the vampire. Always keep in mind the motives of the vampire, how he moves about, and what his cunning plot is. You must play Strahd in the same way the players play their characters." The instruction is to know Strahd thoroughly before session one, in memory rather than on the page. The stat block, the spell list, the intelligence cycle, the three scripted strikes, the harassment pattern, and the goals set by the Fortunes reading all need to be at the DM's fingertips. Looking things up mid-session is where the vampire loses his advantage.

What the PCs want and what Strahd wants are not mirror images. The PCs win by destroying him. Strahd wins by completing his goal as set by the Fortunes reading in

Section 5. Depending on the draw, that may mean killing the party, charming or suggesting them into working against their own, draining one of them into an undead servant of his own, or simply holding Ireena and continuing as before. His victory modes include subversion, not only slaughter. A party that leaves the valley alive but with a PC in his service, or with Ireena in his possession, has lost the adventure as surely as if they had all fallen.

The destruction the module calls for is hard-won, not handed over. The DM's job is to make Strahd cost the party something before he falls. Every fight that depletes their resources, every bargain they refuse, every attachment he exploits, every trap that thins them before the climax, these are the texture of his defeat. A Strahd who dies easily is a Strahd the DM did not play. The advocacy for him set out in the three principles below is the price of a climax worth reaching.

#### 4a. Who he is

Count Strahd Von Zarovich, styled "The First Vampyr." Lord of Castle Ravenloft and ruler of Barovia. He is the genius-level intellect that the stat block specifies, not inference from behaviour. He is a 10th-level magic-user who has spent centuries studying, which means his tactical repertoire extends beyond his vampire powers into prepared magic. He is a vampire of the full classical type: energy-draining, regenerating, charming at a glance, gaseous and batform at will. His alignment is chaotic evil.

Behind the statistics is a man who has built his entire circumstance to express himself. Castle Ravenloft on its 1,000-foot pillar dominates the valley in every direction. The peasantry serves him. The fog keeps the world out. He is the biggest figure in his geography, and he has arranged things so that this remains true. One reading of why he stays, set out in 1c, treats the fog and the neighbours as the constraints he has been careful not to disturb.

His manipulation of those around him follows the same pattern. Ismark, the burgomaster's son, is the immediate example. A well-meaning man who asks the party to save his sister without grasping that his love for Ireena is itself the lever Strahd is using against him. The module's wider cast is populated with similar levers. Strahd does not threaten the party directly until he has to. He works through their attachments, through the fear he has spent centuries conditioning into the peasantry, and through the ritualised courtesies of a noble host receiving guests under his own roof. A DM playing him well plays a manipulator first and a monster only when manipulation has run out.

One further note worth holding in view. The module gives the DM Strahd's own account of his origin in the Tome of Strahd, covered in Part VIII Section 1c, and the Tome is propaganda as well as memoir. Strahd's pre-vampire history, the dynastic situation he arrived into, and the true sequence of events leading to Sergei's murder do not fully match the version he preserves. The gap between the two matters because it changes how the DM reads his self-presentation at the table.

*Further reading: the Holy Symbol article on the site sets out the reconstruction against the prologue of Vampire of the Mists.*

#### 4b. Capabilities

*Vampire abilities.* AC -1, 55 hit points, regenerates 3 hp per round, can only be hit by +1 or better weapons, immune to sleep, charm, hold, and the standard vampire-immune effects. Melee attack does 1d6+4 damage and drains two life energy levels per hit. 18/76 strength.

Gaze-charm on any character meeting his eyes, save vs spells at -2 to resist. Gaseous form and large-bat shape-change at will. Cannot enter a building until invited, and will work on charming a character into inviting him.

*Magic-user spells, 10th level.*

- 1st: comprehend languages, hold portal, protection from good, sleep
- 2nd: invisibility, locate object, mirror image, ESP
- 3rd: fireball, gust of wind, suggestion
- 4th: polymorph other, polymorph self
- 5th: animate dead, distance distortion

The spell list tells its own story about how he fights. Animate dead is the source of his Strahd zombies. Invisibility, polymorph self, gaseous form, and charm combine into someone who does not meet the party on open ground unless it suits him. Fireball is his unambiguous combat spell, held in reserve for a moment where the party is clustered and the collateral damage to his own servants is acceptable. ESP and locate object support his intelligence network. Suggestion is the social-combat spell, used against a charmed or isolated character to make their betrayal look like their own choice. Hold portal is defensive, sealing a door long enough for him to reposition or vanish.

The list on p.3 is Strahd's memorised repertoire during the adventure, not the ceiling of what he knows. He is 10th level and has had centuries to acquire spells. The module allows him to re-memorise between encounters when he retreats to rest, which matters more than it looks because it means his loadout after a first engagement will not be the same as his loadout before it. The DM should treat the stat block as a snapshot and adjust his prepared spells between engagements based on what he has seen the party do (see 4e).

#### **4c. How he operates**

Strahd keeps a network of spies and servants through Barovia. They report to him four times daily at dawn, noon, dusk, and midnight. At each report there is a 60% chance he knows where the PCs are. If he knows, he attacks within two hours, at the time and manner of his choosing. The DM should track the six-hour clock privately through the adventure and roll d% at each report. On 60 or under, Strahd has the party's position and is planning. On 61 or above, the party has another six hours of relative obscurity before the next check.

Strahd can appear anywhere the Fortunes of Ravenloft reading places him, subject to having been forced to his tomb. He is not confined to the castle despite the 90% in-lair rate. The castle is where he is by default, not where he must be. For the adventure as played, the Fortunes location is where he is, and the DM should treat it as such. This is one of the reasons Section 5 must be run during prep.

Against the PCs directly he has three scripted strikes available, each usable once across the whole adventure.

- Strahd attacks a single PC in person for five melee rounds, then leaves.
- Strahd summons 10 to 15 Strahd zombies. All must attack at the same time in the same place.
- Strahd summons 3 to 12 worg wolves. All must attack at the same time in the same place.

Each strike is a one-use resource. Once spent, it is not repeated. This forces the DM to save strikes for moments where they land hardest rather than spend them on the first 60% hit of the adventure. A poorly-timed zombie summons on the party's first night in the village burns an asset that would have been decisive later in the castle.

Separate from the scripted strikes, Strahd runs a harassment pattern every night the PCs stay anywhere other than Castle Ravenloft. He arrives with worg wolves and bats, attacks for five melee rounds, and withdraws, leaving his hollow laughter in the distance. The harassment is not meant to kill, it is meant to wear the party down and fray their nerves. Wolves attempt to breach doors or windows on d6 rolls of 1 or 2 per turn. Bats interfere with spell components, forcing dexterity checks to cast. Indoors, the invitation rule binds Strahd, who cannot enter a building until someone inside invites him in. He tries to charm a character into doing so. Neither Strahd nor his wolves ever attack Ireena Kolyana. Anyone paying attention will notice the omission.

#### 4d. The three principles of play

The module sets out three principles on p.3 for running Strahd well. They are not suggestions, and the DM's job is to hold all three at once.

- *Strahd chooses when he attacks.* The module's instruction to "play him as a genius" is not operational on its own. See 4e for what that means in practice. The mechanical core of the principle is that when Strahd knows where the PCs are, his attacks happen on his timing, not on the clock and not on the DM's convenience. He picks the moment where his advantage is highest and theirs is lowest. If the party is resting, he arrives. If the party is divided, he arrives on the weaker half. If the party is fleeing, he intercepts at a chokepoint. The module's own responsibility framing puts the work firmly on the DM: "It is your responsibility to see that the vampire uses his abilities to his greatest advantage."
- *Strahd knows when to withdraw.* He fights only while winning. If a fight turns, he leaves. Gaseous form, polymorph to wolf or bat, or summoning other creatures to cover his retreat. He does not die fighting, because he has eternity. The DM should be willing to have him break off mid-combat without embarrassment. Losing one fight is data for the next, and the next will be on terms he sets.
- *Strahd's attacks depend upon his goals.* He brought the PCs into Barovia for a reason, determined by the Fortunes of Ravenloft reading in Section 5. His specific plans for achieving that goal are listed with each goal in the module. Without running the Fortunes before play, the DM does not know what Strahd wants and cannot play him coherently.

Reinforcing all three is the module's stated stake from p.2: "When the vampire, Strahd von Zarovich, is destroyed, the adventure is over. You must use every power available to the vampire to keep him (and the game) going." The DM's advocacy for Strahd is not bias, it is the engine the module runs on. Every abandoned opportunity, every telegraphed attack, every fight pressed past the point of sense is a piece of the adventure the party does not get to earn.

All three principles rest on the same requirement: the DM has to play Strahd as a thinking intelligence, not as a stat block. The next section is what that looks like in practice.

#### 4e. What genius looks like at the table

"Play him as a genius" is hollow advice for most DMs, who reasonably observe that most people are not geniuses and cannot perform one on demand. Genius is not cleverness, it is a level of abstraction above the current encounter. A tactically competent NPC picks the right option in the moment. A genius NPC treats each encounter as training data for the next, invests in capabilities that pay off three fights later, and operates on the problem of defeating the party as a whole rather than winning any particular fight. Strahd has centuries of this kind of work behind him. He has also had centuries to refine his library, his laboratory, and the infrastructure of his castle into a purpose-built apparatus for defeating intruders.

The lists below unpack genius into specific behaviours the DM can consult during prep and play instead of generating brilliance from scratch. Three layers: the pre-cached layer, which is what centuries of experience have already settled; the learning layer, which is how he uses this adventure itself to improve; and the resource layer, which is what the castle and his preparation give him beyond the p.3 stat block.

### **The pre-cached layer: things he has already gamed out.**

- *Fight the whole party together in open ground.* He has done the math. One vampire against five to eight adventurers with a cleric and a fighter is a fight he loses. Turn undead alone can end him. He does not take that fight, and will not regardless of how attractive the short-term opportunity looks.
- *Underestimate the cleric.* He knows exactly what turn undead does to him. Any scenario where the cleric is intact, conscious, and facing him is a scenario he declines or exits.
- *Rush to take Ireena in the first week.* The party has just arrived. He does not yet know their capabilities. Patience lets him learn, and the soul of Tatyana has returned before and will return again if this attempt fails. Urgency is the party's problem, not his.
- *Appear in person for every attack.* The three scripted strikes are a resource, not a default. Most of his presence is through servants, through atmosphere, through letters and invitations, through reported sightings and rumours. Staying off-screen preserves both his mystique and the party's strategic uncertainty.
- *Threaten to kill when he can threaten to keep.* A vampire's worst implied outcome is not death, it is subversion. A PC joining his court as a charmed servant or one of his undead is worse for the players than a PC death. He knows this, and his pressure on the party reflects it.
- *Break his own rules for short-term advantage.* The invitation rule is inconvenient but he respects it. He works within his constraints because working within them is part of what makes him him. The constraints are his dignity.
- *Destroy the village.* He needs it. The population is his long-term food supply and his ritualised power base. He terrorises but does not exterminate.
- *Engage the Sunsword wielder on the Sunsword's terms.* That fight only goes one way. He fights the party before they find it, after they have lost the carrier, or in circumstances where he can isolate the Sunsword from its wielder.
- *Leave himself without a retreat option.* Every room he enters, he has already identified the escape: gaseous form through which window, which shaft, which chimney. He does not commit to a confined space without an out.

- *Break a formally given word.* Noble honour is part of his self-conception. If he says he will not harm the party tonight, he will not. Tomorrow is another matter. This makes his parleys worth taking, which is itself part of the trap.
- *Explain himself.* He does not monologue his plans. In conversation he is charming, evasive, occasionally cryptic. He gives the party nothing they can use against him and lets their own projections fill the silence.

**The learning layer: how he uses this adventure to get better.**

Strahd does not play each encounter in isolation. He plays the problem of defeating this specific party, and the encounters are his information-gathering mechanism. After each engagement he withdraws to his study (K37, described in the Fortunes Places table as "a place of wisdom, warmth, and despair" where "great secrets are there") and conducts an after-action review. The DM should run this review explicitly during prep or between sessions, not just handwave it as character.

- *What worked and what did not.* Which attacks landed, which missed, which spells the party had prepared, which they did not. If the cleric turned his zombies, he notes the cleric's apparent level and adjusts. If a wizard threw Magic Missiles through his Mirror Image, he knows next time to lead with a different screen.
- *Who the threats are.* He identifies the load-bearing PCs: the Sunsword carrier, the cleric, the wizard with the right spells. Subsequent operations target those threats first, not the softest PC. Taking out the cleric leaves the party incapable of turning undead or healing through a prolonged fight, which is worth more than picking off a weaker character.
- *Where the vulnerabilities are.* He watches for friction inside the party, for attachments he can exploit (Ismark's love for Ireena, a paladin's code, a PC's backstory), for patterns in their watch rotations and resting habits. Each observation becomes leverage in the next encounter.
- *Spell re-selection between engagements.* The p.3 spell list is his current loadout, not his whole repertoire. When he has time to rest and re-memorise, he swaps in spells that counter what he has just seen. Facing a party that charges into melee? Next time he has Web ready (if available) or leads with Sleep for lower-level henchmen. Facing a heavy-Magic-Missile wizard? Next time he starts with Protection from Good and Mirror Image already active. This is within the p.3 list's flex (other 1st and 2nd level spells can be swapped at rest) and within the wider repertoire a 10th-level magic-user would plausibly have access to from his library.
- *Adjusting victim selection for the intelligence network.* If one spy failed to notice the party, he replaces them. If a particular villager developed sympathy with the PCs, that villager has an accident or is replaced. He is pruning and reinforcing his information system in real time.

The DM's practical move is to keep a brief log during the adventure: which PCs did what, which spells the party burned, which encounters turned on which moment. Between sessions, spend five minutes as Strahd reviewing that log. What would he change? What would he prepare? That review is where genius lives.

**The resource layer: the castle as apparatus.**

Crucially for play, Strahd need not be static. The module describes the castle in its resting state: every keyed item, every creature, every trap sits where it was placed. A DM playing Strahd as an active resident can reasonably have him reconfigure that state in response to

the party's approach. An item in the wrong place by the module's room text is not evidence he cannot use it; it is evidence of the room as described before the party arrived.

The survey below distils the module's own room-by-room text into categories Strahd thinks in. Directly keyed items are cited. Inferred affordances of a 10th-level magic-user with centuries of residence are flagged as DM's call.

*Observation points.* The Dining Hall (K7) holds the clearest example: floor-to-ceiling mirrors between which the module stages a charming illusion of Strahd himself at the organ, conversing for three rounds while Strahd is elsewhere. The mirrors, and a dedicated mirror room south of K7 from which the illusion is projected, make K7 a working scrying-and-projection stage rather than a dining room. Strahd can open any engagement with a mirrored double, read the party's first reactions, and only step in later when he knows what he is dealing with. He can also relocate mirrors from K7 to any other room he expects the party in.

*Forced relocation.* The Trapworks (K31) is a 230-foot vertical shaft with a stone compartment moved up and down by screws, connecting the Larders corridor (K61) up past Strahd's personal floor, ending at the Landing (K47). Riders on the roof of the compartment are crushed against the shaft top for 3d10 damage. Strahd does not need to fight the party from where they enter. He can split them with a closing portcullis and transport one half to a different floor entirely, then address the halves separately on terrain of his choosing. The Dungeon Hall (K73) operates on the same principle through weight-sensitive trap doors that teleport triggered characters into sealed underwater cells at K74 and K75, where Strahd attacks lone characters if he can. The module's own text names him as the one who arrives when these traps fire.

*Standing relocation magic.* The Pantry (46A) in the Larders, by the module's own wording, contains a distance distortion effect making the room appear longer than it is to disguise the iron doors beyond. Distance distortion is one of Strahd's 5th-level memorised spells and the room is an example of it running as a standing ward in his castle. The crypt teleports (crypt 32 to K86, with the return alcove in K86 east) let him move between the catacombs and his own tomb without passing through the intervening floors. Other rooms in the castle operate on the same principle, relocating characters who trigger them. The individual cases are covered in Part V with the keyed rooms.

*Summonable forces inside the castle.* The Maid's Hall (K32) houses Helga, a charmed-vampire servant who attacks only when she can do so without the full party present, which is to say she fights Strahd's fights for him on his terms. The Witches' Cauldron (K56) holds seven witches with collective spells including burning hands, charm person, magic missile, shield, and shocking grasp, plus a spellbook containing fear, curse, and cloudkill. The witches' familiars wait in K54, alerting them at first sight of the party. The Catacombs (K84) hold 3,000 bats that hunt by night and return at dawn. The Facing Guardians (K35) post two wraiths outside the Dining Hall of the Count. The Office of Vengeance (K72) houses a shadow demon. The wolves and bats from the nightly harassment pattern have their base here too, not in the Svalich woods. Strahd commands or can command all of these.

*Stored magical items and resources.* The module places specific items in specific rooms, most of them in the duplicate-area list that the Fortunes of Ravenloft reading resolves. The Icon of Ravenloft on the altar in the Chapel (K15), the Treasury (K41) contents, the Brazier Room (K78) scrolls and potions, Sergei's plate mail at (K85), the crypt items including the Crypt 37 hoard, the dungeon sword at (K74): all are module-placed. The portable ones, the scrolls and potions and minor weapons, a DM playing Strahd as an active resident will

consider whether he has moved in anticipation of the party's approach. A servant ordered to carry the Icon to a K74 cell and drown it in the black water would be one such move, and within character.

*Animated defenders and traps that run themselves.* The Guardian Portrait in the Landing (K47) casts levitate and hypnotic pattern to hold characters in place until Strahd commands release. The Guardian of Sorrow, a living tower at K20, attacks with halberds, shakes its spiral staircase, and costs dexterity checks every round to stay on the stairs. The two iron golems in K78 activate on the hourglass timer. The King's Worship Place (K28) has two Strahd zombies hidden in thrones facing away from the entrance, attacking anyone who looks around. The three statues in the King's Audience Hall and the catacombs' wraiths, wights, ghosts, and spectres populate the deeper floors. Strahd does not have to be present for any of these to do their work.

*Escape and retreat infrastructure.* The castle is built for his exits as much as his dwelling. The High Tower Shaft (K18a) is his primary gaseous-form route, running 390 feet from the catacombs up through the chapel to the peak. The Smokestack (K52) runs 60 feet down from the rooftop into his study fireplace, damaging intruders but trivial for him in gaseous form. Beyond these, a network of secret doors connects his personal floor to the treasury, the tower, and the larders. The DM should have these routes mapped before session one so his exit from any fight is immediate rather than improvised. The full list is in Part V with the keyed rooms.

*His personal apartments.* The Dining Hall of the Count (K36) sits at the heart of his floor, with a centuries-old wedding cake still on the table, a dropped groom figure on the floor, and a bride figure intact atop the cake. This is not a trap, it is a preserved tableau. It is the room he kept after Sergei's murder and Tatyana's death, and it sits next to his Study (K37), which is his active workspace. The Bedchamber (K42) holds Gertruda, daughter of Mad Mary, whom Strahd has not yet bitten. The module's text: "He is intent on his current plot and is saving her for later." The Closet (K44) holds 28 capes and black formal wear, his active wardrobe. The Bath Chamber (K43) with its iron tub completes the suite. This is a lived-in residence, not a dungeon level.

*Infrastructure and personnel he does not command.* The Icon of Ravenloft is lawful good and actively hostile to him. He cannot touch it. The Tower Chapel in the Eastern wing "radiates a strong feeling of good. Nothing will attack PCs here, even the vampires" by module text, which makes it a sanctuary inside his own house that he cannot close. Sergei's tomb accepts any lawful good character without resistance, reading the intruder and choosing to open. The Guardians (K87) block anyone not of good alignment from reaching Barov and Ravenovia's tomb (K88), which means Strahd cannot enter the crypt of his own parents. These are the constraints he lives with, and they are not accidents of the module. They are the structure his own pact imposed on his domain, and they are where the party can reliably find ground he cannot reach.

## 5. Fortunes of Ravenloft, the card reading

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The Fortunes reading is the module's randomisation engine. It determines three things: where Strahd and the major treasures actually are (Table 1, Places), what modifiers apply when the party fights at those places (Table 2, Modifiers), and what Strahd is trying to accomplish during the adventure (Table 3, Goals). Every run of I6 is different because the reading is different. Without it, the module falls apart: the duplicate-area mapping from 3e

has no resolution, Strahd's starting position in 4c is undefined, and his motivation from 4d's third principle is blank.

The module's own instruction on p.4 is unambiguous: "You must run this card reading before playing this module." This is not a suggestion for flavour. Running the Fortunes at prep is how the DM turns an abstract dungeon into a specific scenario with a specific villain doing a specific thing.

## 5a. Procedure

The card deck is a standard 52-card deck with the 2s, 4s, 6s, 8s, 9s, and jokers removed. That leaves 32 cards in four suits of eight. As an alternative, roll d8 for card value (3, 5, 7, 10, J, Q, K, A maps to 1 through 8) and d4 for suit (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades).

The reading draws five cards. The module's arrangement places them in a specific spread on p.5, but the outcomes of each table are what matter for play rather than the spread's symbolism.

- First card determines the location of Strahd's starting position.
- Second card determines the location of the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind.
- Third card determines the location of the Tome of Strahd.
- Fourth card determines the location of the Sunsword hilt.
- Fifth card determines Strahd's goal.

The card's *value* maps via Table 1 to one of eight places in the castle for cards one through four, and via Table 3 to one of five goals for card five. The card's *suit* maps via Table 2 to a combat modifier at that location (+1/-1 on the to-hit and AC axes in the four possible combinations).

## 5b. The three tables, summarised

**Table 1, Places.** Eight locations in the castle, each keyed to a card value and each marked by a flavour-text omen the DM reads to the party at the Tser Pool card reading. The eight:

- 3: Study (K37). "A harbor for the mighty and powerful, a place of wisdom, warmth, and despair."
- 5: Treasure Room (K41). "A carefully hidden place of great worldly wealth."
- 7: Chapel of Ravenloft (K15). "Amid the ruins of a place of supplication."
- 10: High Tower Room (K60). "Dizzying heights that all loathe to travel."
- Jack: Crypt of Sergei Von Zarovich (K85). "A fallen prince of old."
- Queen: Crypt of Ravenovia (K88). "The mother's place."
- King: King's Audience Hall (K25). "A king's throne."
- Ace: Crypt of Strahd (K86). "The very heart of darkness: his home, his source."

For each of cards one through four, the result fixes one of the duplicate locations from 3e. Crucially, if the same card is drawn for multiple items (possible because the deck is shuffled between draws, not depleted), the items co-locate. The Ace result for multiple items puts the Sunsword hilt, the Tome, or both in Strahd's own coffin, which changes the climax's geometry significantly.

**Table 2, Modifiers.** Four outcomes keyed to suit.

- Hearts (+ in the module's notation): PCs gain +1 to hit and -1 (bonus) to AC. Powers of good aid them.
- Diamonds: PCs gain +1 to hit but suffer +1 penalty to AC. Skill blessed, protection compromised.
- Clubs: PCs suffer -1 to hit but gain -1 (bonus) to AC. Strength sustained, victory slowed.
- Spades: PCs suffer -1 to hit and +1 penalty to AC. A dark shadow of evil over that place.

The modifier applies only to combats fought at the specific location the paired card drew. It does not apply to the adventure as a whole. A Hearts draw for the Sunsword location gives the party +1/-1 only when they fight in that room, not everywhere.

**Table 3, Strahd's Goals.** Five goals, each keyed to card ranges rather than single values.

- 3 or 5: *Strahd seeks a new bride.* Standard in-module motivation. Pursuit of Ireena as Tatyana reborn. Nightly bites, the long game, the marriage plot. This is the goal the module's surface narrative assumes throughout.
- 7 or 10: *Strahd wants to turn a PC into a vampire.* Active subversion. He charms a lone PC, isolates them, casts polymorph other to transform them into a vampire, places them in his coffin, polymorphs himself into that PC's likeness, and attempts to join the party as the transformed PC, claiming to have found a way out of Barovia. The intent is to carry his identity into another country, with the Rhenari moving his coffin dirt. This is the subversion mode named in 4's opening, made specific.
- Jack or Queen: *Strahd wants to make a magical sphere of darkness.* He is missing only a black opal, the last piece of an ancient apparatus he has been assembling over centuries. He believes mistakenly that one of the PCs is carrying a black opal. He charms lone PCs, sends them back to the party with the question "Do you have the black opal?", and when he discovers none of them do, turns on them. The 1c reading about a "sphere of darkness" as insurance rather than expansion applies here.
- King: *Strahd wants to win the love of Ireena Kolyana.* Not her capture but her affection. He charms the entire party and makes them attack Ireena. He then swoops down to rescue her from them, hoping the rescue turns her heart toward him. He wants her willingly, not by force. Softer than the bride goal, more psychologically complicated.
- Ace: *Strahd wants the Sunsword.* He knows a random fighter PC has been unknowingly carrying the Sunsword blade. He wants to destroy the weapon before the hilt is reunited with it. If the hilt is found and reunited, the Sunsword becomes a real threat to him. This is the goal where Strahd's urgency is highest, because the Sunsword carrier does not know what they have until the hilt is recovered.

Each goal comes with module text giving Strahd's specific plan for achieving it. The DM must read the relevant goal's full description before play, because his behaviour across the adventure depends on it. The p.3 principles are general; the goal is specific.

## 5c. When to run the reading

The module permits two configurations.

The first, which the module requires, is at prep. The DM runs the reading alone before session one, records the results, resolves the duplicate-area mapping from 3e, and plays the adventure with those results fixed.

The second, which the module explicitly permits on p.4, is in-fiction at Madam Eva's tent during the adventure. If the PCs visit the Tser Pool encampment and pay for a reading, the DM runs the reading aloud at the table, and the new results substitute for the original ones. The items move. Strahd's goal may change mid-adventure. The castle reconfigures.

Both configurations are valid. The in-fiction option has a dramatic payoff (the players hear the omens in their own game, pointing them toward specific locations in ways Madam Eva chooses to misdirect or clarify). It also creates real work mid-session as the DM re-marks the master map and reconsiders Strahd's plan. A DM running their first I6 should consider prep-only. A DM on a second run, or one comfortable with the module's moving parts, can open up the in-fiction option.

A third configuration worth considering, not explicit in the module but implied by the wording "run this card reading again," is the DM redraws privately when the party visits Madam Eva but does not share the reading aloud unless the party asks for it. This keeps the in-fiction reconfiguration available without the player-facing ceremony, which is useful if Madam Eva's presentation has already been established as suspect (and it should be, since the Rhenari serve Strahd per 1b).

## 5d. How to record the reading

Two outputs from prep: a location sheet and a Strahd sheet.

The location sheet lists the four item locations and their modifiers, cross-referenced to room numbers. Sample:

- Strahd's starting position: Study (K37), Hearts. Strahd sits in the overstuffed chair staring into the fire. PCs who fight him here gain +1/-1.
- Holy Symbol of Ravenkind: Chapel of Ravenloft (K15), Spades. On the altar in a shaft of light. PCs fighting here suffer -1/+1.
- Tome of Strahd: Crypt of Sergei Von Zarovich (K85), Diamonds. Across Sergei's chest. PCs fighting here gain +1 to hit, lose 1 to AC.
- Sunsword hilt: High Tower Room (K60), Clubs. In a locked iron chest. PCs fighting here lose 1 to hit, gain 1 to AC.
- Strahd's goal: Queen (Jack or Queen band) = sphere of darkness. He is looking for a black opal and will pursue that line with the party.

The Strahd sheet records the behavioural consequences: what his current goal means for his immediate operations, which PCs he has identified as targets, and which scripted strike he is holding back for which moment. Update between sessions as the learning layer from 4e accumulates observations.

## 5e. Integration with Sections 3 and 4

The reading closes several loops opened earlier in Part I.

3e's duplicate-area mapping resolves here. The four Table 1 draws for cards one through four tell the DM which of each paired location is real for this run. Mark the master copy accordingly.

4c's starting position for Strahd resolves here. The first card puts him in a specific room with specific behaviour the Places table describes. That is where the 60% intelligence check reaches for him on session one.

4d's third principle, "his attacks depend on his goals," takes its content from Table 3. A DM who skipped the reading is working blind on what Strahd actually wants. With the goal in hand, his manipulation pattern in 4a, his spell repertoire in 4b, his strikes in 4c, and his pre-cached behaviour in 4e all line up in the same direction.

4e's resource layer reads differently under different goals. Under the sphere-of-darkness goal, the castle's stored magical items matter more than usual because Strahd is actively assembling an apparatus and the party may stumble onto components he needs. Under the Sunsword goal, Strahd's knowledge of which PC is carrying the blade is what drives his targeting. Under the new-bride or charm-Ireena goals, the Bedchamber (K42) with Gertruda is in the background as a contingency. Under the polymorph-PC goal, the DM needs to note which PC is most likely to be isolated first.

## 5f. The Fortunes reading as part of the world

One last framing note. The Tser Pool encampment and the Rhenari are in Strahd's service per 1b. Their fake anti-vampire potion is a scam. Their information is misleading at best and often a lie. Madam Eva herself, as seer of the Rhenari, almost certainly knows what Strahd wants. Her reading is real sight, but it is delivered inside a relationship of service to the vampire.

What the party hears at Madam Eva's tent is not a disinterested oracle. It is filtered, framed, and potentially directed by someone working for the enemy. The mechanical outcomes of the Fortunes reading are fixed by the cards. The *presentation* is not. A DM playing Madam Eva well has her emphasise the omens Strahd wants the party to follow (the Ace result that sends them into Strahd's own coffin reads like fate rather than trap in her mouth) and de-emphasise the ones he would rather they missed. The cards do not lie. The seer may select what she says aloud.

This does not break the module. The party can still use the reading's information. It just means the information arrives wrapped. PCs who go to Madam Eva expecting a disinterested guide find a seer who sees truly and serves another master. That tension is where the Tser Pool encampment earns its place in the adventure rather than being a flavour stop.

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*This document is a printable companion to the web version at vaultsoftheodd.com. Formatted for A4 and intended for table reference during play.*