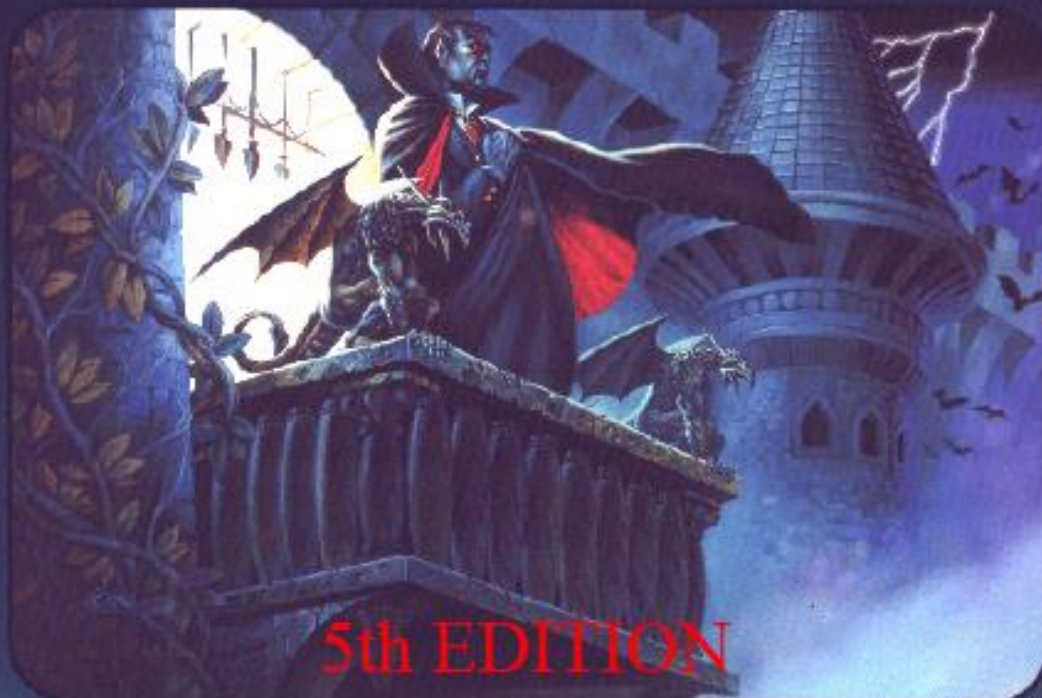


Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Official Game Adventure

Ravenloft

by Tracy and Laura Hickman



The master of Ravenloft is having guests for dinner — and you are invited. Ravenloft is an adventure for 6 to 8 characters of levels 5 to 7.



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A 5th edition D&D conversion of the original 1e classic module



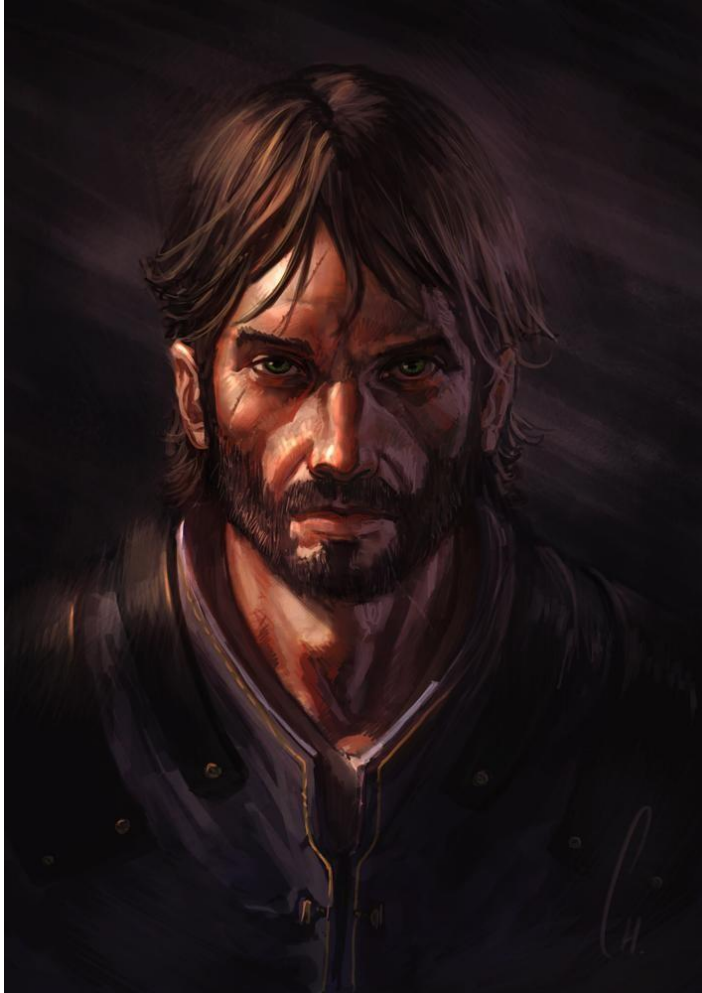
This was our weekend one-shot for the original Ravenloft campaign by Tracy and Laura Hickman. I'd never run, read or played it myself, but now I see why it is so highly praised. And we probably only got through half of it!

The five heroes were all 6th level, and they start at a jovial inn in a small village well outside a dark and brooding forest in the distance.



The heroes all know each other well, quite an eclectic bunch actually, including a minotaur, and they have traveled and adventured together for some time, and now find themselves in this small villa as they pass through. Night has fallen and it is dark and foggy outside, but the tavern is warm and the food is delicious and the ale is flowing and the customers all seem jovial.

Until the front door slams open and a dark figure is seen standing in the entrance, a cold wind whipping past him. Conversations grow silent as he stands there silently surveying the patrons, and then his gaze lands on the PCs and he heads straight to their table.



Swarthy, dark and glowering, strides right up to the seated group and says:

"I have been sent to you to deliver this message! If you be creatures of honor, you will come to my master's aid at first light. It is not advisable to travel the Svalich woods at night!" He pulls from his tunic a sealed letter, addressed to all of you in beautiful flowing script. He drops the letter on the table. "Take the west road from here some five hours march down through the Svalich woods. There you will find my master in Barovia."

The gypsy strides to the bar and says to the wary barkeeper, "Fill the glasses, one and all. Their throats are obviously parched." He drops a purse heavy with gold on the bar. With that, he leaves.

The PCs open the letter – It is from the Burgomaster of Barovia, imploring their aid to come help his daughter.

Hail to thee of might and valor:

I, a lowly servant of the township of Barovia, send honor to thee. We plead for thy so desperately needed assistance within our community.

The love of my life, Ireena Kolyana, has been afflicted by an evil so deadly that even the good people of our town cannot protect her. She languishes from her wound and I would have her saved from this menace.

There is much wealth in this community. I offer all that might be had to thee and thy fellows if thou shah but answer my desperate plea.

Come quickly for her time is at hand! All that I have shall be thine!

Kolyan Indrirovich,

Burgomaster

The PCs ask the bartender if he recognizes the man, and he said no, but from time to time someone will come in with a letter like that. In fact, about a month ago a letter was given to a group, and the bartender recalls the group clearly because one strange fellow wore a LONG BLACK GLOVE all the way up his arm. They went to Barovia too but never came back. So what's up with this town Barovia? What's so weird about it? Patrons make the sign of protection and whisper that it is a dark place and no one should go there.

But the letter CLEARLY mentions much wealth, although the group doesn't understand how this guy knew they were here in the first place. Suspicious, but not entirely unreasonable. But it's too late now to head off into the woods, so they wait until first light and trudge out on foot for the five hour trek through foggy, clammy woods to Barovia.



Many hours later they finally reach an imposing black iron gate. It is not locked, but there is a definite sense of foreboding about the gate. Several party members go

around while a few pass through and they all reconvene on the other side without any problem.

Soon after they see a corpse on the trail, mist covering the body. A letter is clamped in its hand. The body they determine has been dead for days, seemingly ravaged by wolves, and even now they hear an eerie howl in the distance.

The letter is similar to the other one they were given the night before, but in a slightly different handwriting:

***I, the Burgomaster of Barovia send you honor — with despair.
My adopted daughter, the fair Ireena, has been these past nights bitten by a creature calling its race "vampyr." For over 400 years he has drained this land of the life-blood of its people. Now, my dear Ireena languishes and dies from an unholy wound caused by this vile beast. Yet I fear, too, that the creature has some more cunning plan in mind. He has become too powerful to be fought any longer.
So I say to you, give us up for dead and encircle this land with the symbols of good. Let holy men call upon their power that the evil one may be contained within the walls of weeping Barovia. Leave our sorrows to our graves, and save the world from this evil fate of ours. There is much wealth entrapped in this community. Return for your reward after we are all departed for a better life.
Kolyan Indirovich,
Burgomaster***

But the wolf cries are getting louder by the second and the group rushes on, hoping to reach town before something bad happens, but the wolves are far too close and suddenly launch from the woods from multiple directions!





The biggest of the group is a red eyed dire wolf, but the heroes are able to fairly easily cut the monsters down in short time, but more howls echo throughout the woods. Another pack is on the way, so they need to reach the (safety?) of Barovia as soon as possible.

A hard rain begins and the fog thickens and an early nightfall arrives, but within another half an hour they cross a ridge and find themselves staring down into a dismal, squalid town, and perched upon a mountain beyond, a terrifying castle framed by bursts of sporadic lightning.



They descend to the village and enter the first building with a light, although somewhere else in the village they hear a woman wailing. The sign over the door reads "Blood of the Vine."



The tavern is sparsely populated, just three people sitting in chairs and a bartender who is cleaning glasses and staring at the PCs without saying a word. The patrons look up at the newcomers and then return to their cups.

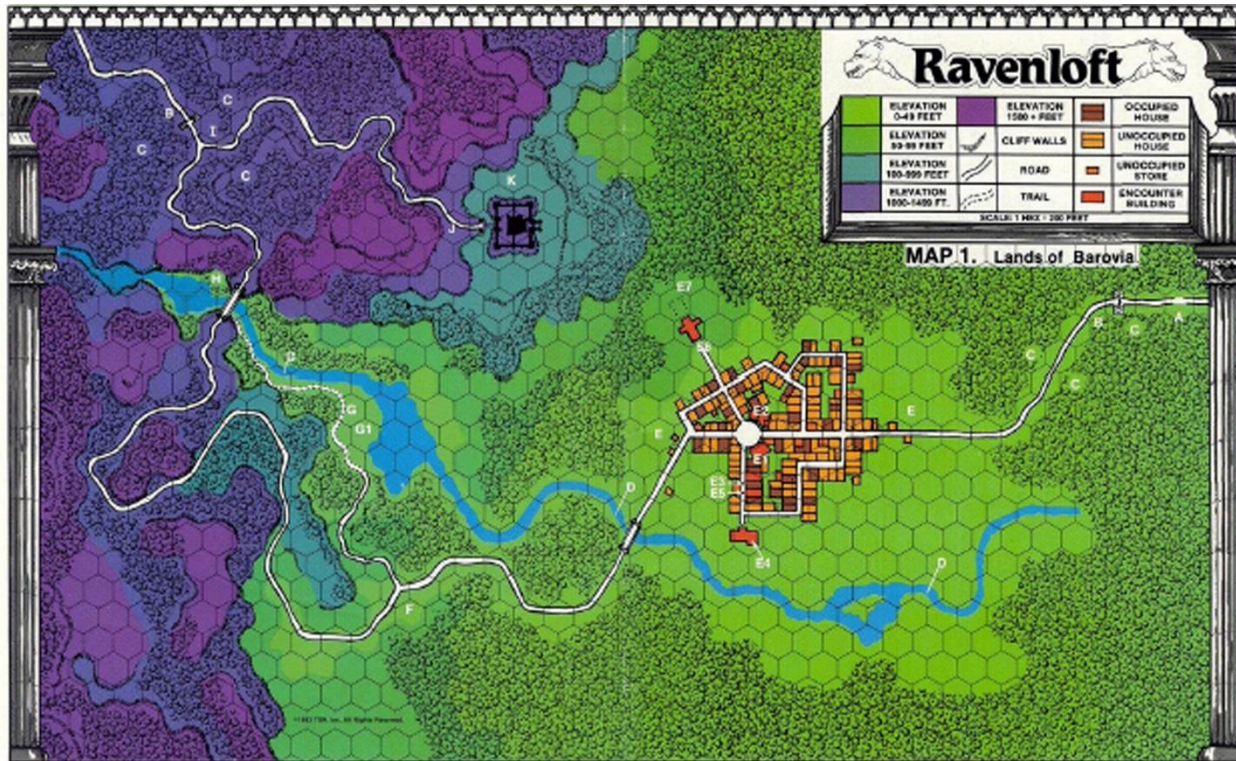
"Where can we find the Burgomaster?" asks Heinrich, the cleric.



"Aye, I know," answers someone. A man sitting alone looks up at them. "I am Ismark, son of the Burgomaster. And he has been dead for 10 days now."

Well, the PCs have some questions for this fellow, and they show him the two letters, one from the guy outside of Borovia, and the other they found in the hands of the dead man in the woods. Ismark confirms that the FIRST letter is not the handwriting of his father, the Burgomaster. He confirms that the SECOND letter is genuine, as his father was desperately trying to find help for daughter Ireena, Ismark's adopted sister. A terrible monster has

become obsessed with Ireena, and Ismark does not know what to do. His father died trying to protect her from constant attacks by wolves and rats at their mansion. Ever since the Burgomaster passed away, the attacks have stopped.



Well there's some more roleplaying here, mostly trying to wrangle answers out of the bartender, but he's a tightlipped arse of a man. Ismark agrees to take the PCs to his home, and if they can indeed save his sister from the vampyr, Count Strahd, then any riches of the town or the castle can be theirs for the taking. But he warns them that others have tried in the past, and no one has ever returned from the cursed castle on the ridge...

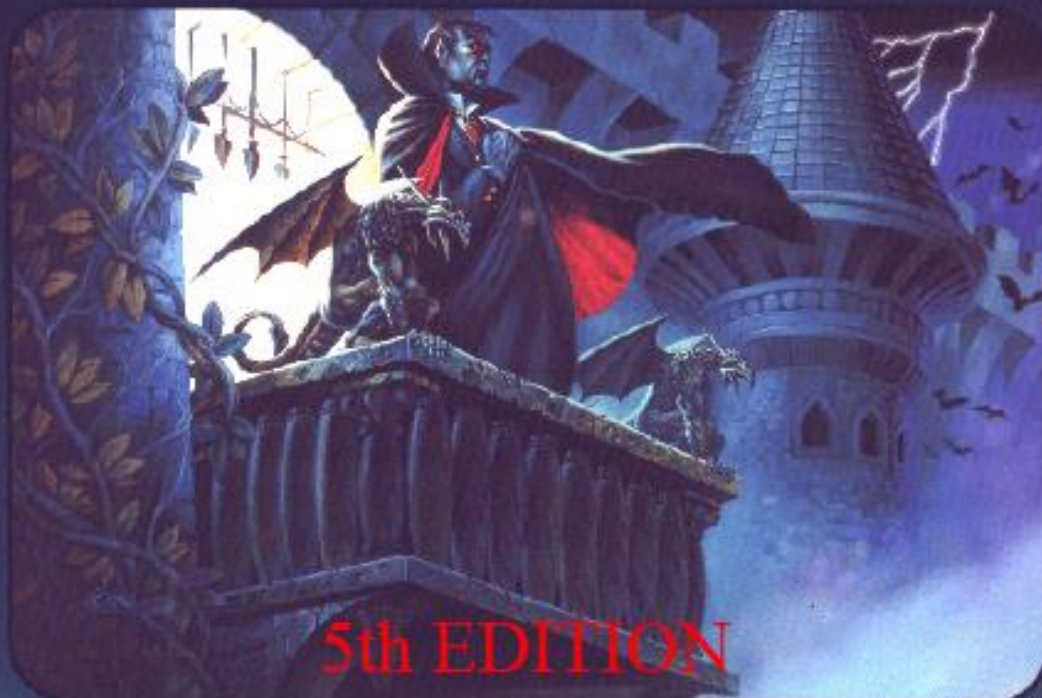
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PART 2

So the group finds themselves at the Burgomaster's mansion, where Ismark lives as well. There are claw marks on the walls and apparent fire damage, and the yard is scraggly weeds. He unlocks the gate and leads them to the front door and they go inside.



The place stinks of death, and sure enough, there is the deceased Burgomaster in one of the side rooms, his adopted daughter Ireena sitting by his side and gently crying.



She is pale and sickly and has a white bandage around her neck. She claims that the vampyr Strahd comes to her room at night, at some point he was invited inside. She does not know why he is so fascinated with her. The villagers have been too terrified to help them bury the Burrowmaster, the way that Strahd is not preying on the village even more has made them think that their house is cursed and will be death upon them all. So the corpse has been left rotting after the last attack by wolves and rats.

The party mentions the letters written by her father the Burgomastser and tells her that they will do their very best to remove this blight upon the land, one who calls himself Count Strahd of Ravenloft. They help carry the corpse out to the cemetery and bury it, and along the way Ismark mentions the ghostly procession of dead souls who frequently exit the graveyard at night and march all the way to the doors of the castle many hours away. This strikes the group as very strange and they want to see this, and find out that it is the dead spirits of over adventurers who came here to slay Strahd and ultimately failed.

This leaves two more people in town to meet: **Mad Mary** and **Father Dominic** of the Church. Mad Mary is the poor, sobbing woman they heard when they first entered town. Her red-headed daughter Gertruda has been missing for days and she fears the very worst. The Count has stolen her.

The PCs feel that Ismark and Ireena will be safer at the Church, even though Ismark tells them that a HOLY RELIC has recently been stolen! Father Dominic is still distraught by this theft, it was the most effective defense in all of Borovia against the vampyr.

The Church sits under the shadow of the mountain's base stone. Father Dominic is inside, fervently praying and lighting candles and incense all around the large, mostly empty chapel area.

Dominic greets them warmly, and soon tells them how dismayed he is that the holy Relic was stolen. He doesn't even know how the vampyr did it! It was an item he should have been unable to touch, so someone else must have been coerced, perhaps the last adventuring party that came through a month ago and also never returned from the Castle. He pulls Heinrich aside and says "I have only one piece of advice...search the library of Strahd, his personal diary there might have clues to his weaknesses!"



But the group has not been in the church very long when they hear howling wolves in the distance. Ismark and Ireena hold each other, terrified. Father Dominic staggers back, gasping. "We are in danger here! He has come for you!"

Through the stained glass windows they see clouds of bats circling the church. Claws begin scratching at the front door and heavy bodies thud against the wood. Then they see a tall, billowing, humanoid shadow floating behind a stained glass window, and then the window EXPLODES.





Strahd's chuckling, vile laugh reverberates through the church (and I did have the most awesome evil laugh queued up with RPG soundmixer for whenever Strahd made an appearance or a mocking departure)

Thousands of squeaking bats suddenly funnel through the shattered glass and swarm around every single person in the room, and then five wolves charge through as well, including one immense white dire wolf.

Strahd is wearing a long black glove up to his forearm that he slowly peels away to reveal a withered, wretched hand attached to his wrist.



Thousands of bats flutter into the church, pecking and flitting at eyes and faces, doing no damage but demanding a DC 12 Dexterity check to launch any spells, and this ruined quite a lot of spells!

And then Strahd points to the Heinrich, the Cleric of St. Cuthbert – “DIE!”

Necrotic energy surges from the hand and enters the cleric, nearly killing him but he struggles up against the onslaught.



But the wolves don't get too far into the church before they're WEBBED, and then a fireball takes out all but the biggest one. Chuckling evilly, Count Strahd soon retreats and the cloud of bats flies out with him and the heroes are left alone and terrified, but glad they're alive. (I think I'm forgetting some details here, but was mostly just a "strike and run" attack by Strahd.)

The group stays in the church overnight for what little safety it might offer, but the vampyr does not return. At dawn they set off, with Ismark's advice to find the gypsy camp, maybe Madame Ava can give them some esoteric advice. It will take them 5 hours to hike from Barovia through the woods and up the mountainside to the Castle.



And about three hours later, after trudging through thick, clinging mists and hearing the howl of distant wolves, they finally see a light in the distance and hear music.



"Can we speak with Madame Ava?" they ask.

"Yes," someone answers.
"She's been expecting you."

They are led to a tent where an old gypsy fortune teller is seated behind a table, a spread of Tarot cards before her. She asks if the group wants their fortune read, and several things are revealed:

1) Count Strahd has taken an item of power, the dread HAND of VECNA, a magic artifact from a long dead lich.

2) He is seeking the blood of heroes to create a simulacrum.

3) Search the highest tower for the Holy Symbol

And with that they're off, trudging through the dark, gloomy forest that is getting foggier and foggier and foggier until they can barely see 20 feet in front of them – and that's when they spot four glowing RED eyes and hear the whinny and neigh of horses.



Now this is just weird, two jet black horses with red eyes attached to an enclosed glass carriage. In fact, it is SO weird the heroes do not enter the doors that silently open, and instead they cut the harnesses from the mounts and trudge up the rest of the steep incline to the horrible castle framed by crackling lightning and howling wind.

Exhausted by the time they reach the top (1 level of exhaustion), they see a wide chasm with a drawbridge down and a heavy closed portcullis behind it. There is no other way

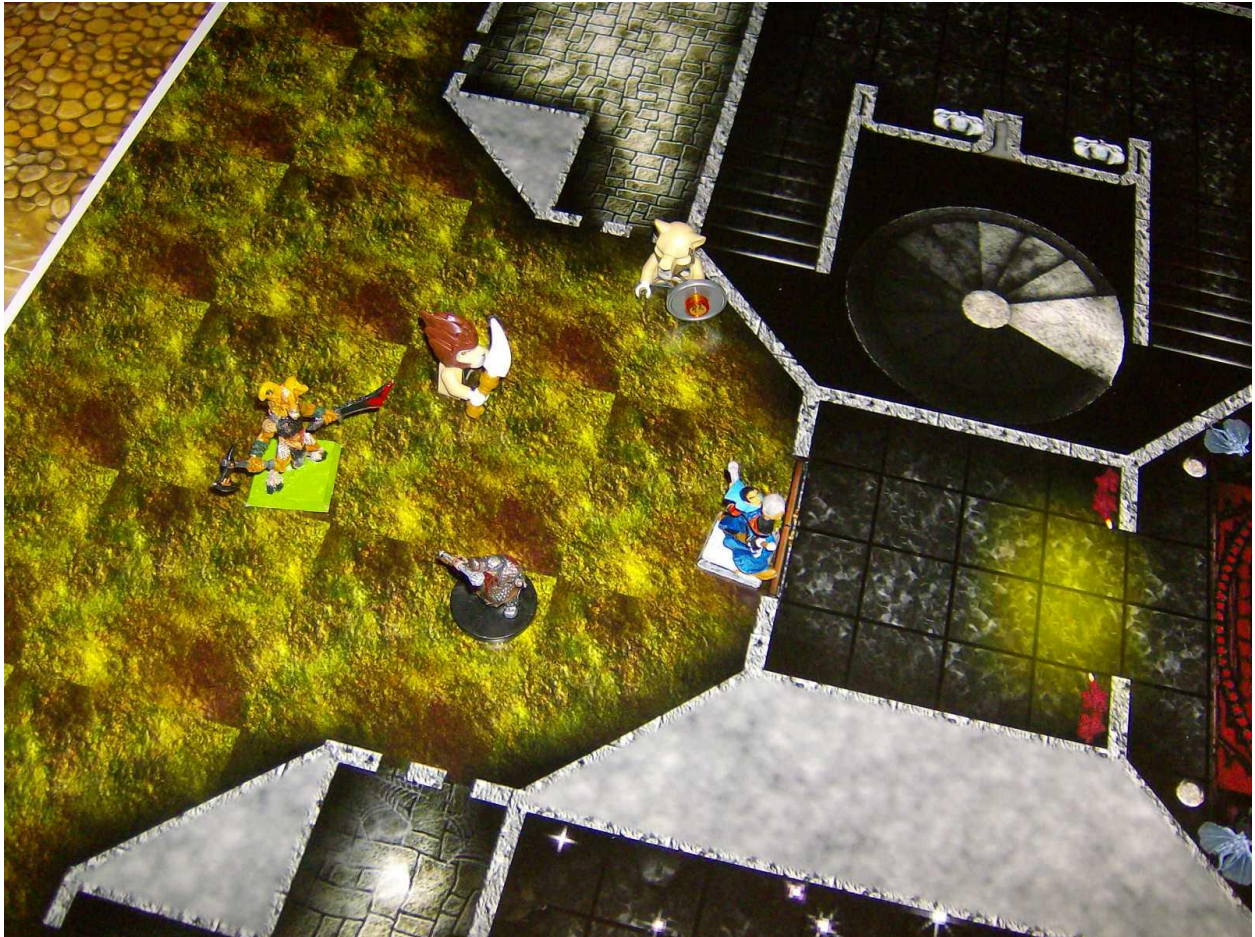
to enter the castle other than to cross the bridge and get under the gate.



It is a dizzying 1000 foot drop to the bottom of the chasm, and the crosswinds over the drawbridge are vicious. They tie a rope off to the minotaur fighter Kinrut, and his cloven hooves warily cross creaking boards until he reaches the other side and lifts the gate. One by one the heroes cross and dip under the portcullis, and finally it is dropped behind them and they find themselves in the rain-spattered courtyard of Castle Ravenloft.

[Note that I spent considerable effort creating a unique soundtrack for this adventure, including rain, wind, lightning, organ music, wolves, laughter, crying, and about 10 different "creepy" tracks]

Torches gutter in the rain and the front doors of the castle are closed. The group approaches, the lion brother rogue Jericho searching traps, and finding none and the doors unlocked, they push them open.



Immediately beyond is a small foyer, flanked on the east side by two stone dragons above a pair of double doors. The rogue is suspicious of the dragons animating somehow and he climbs up higher to investigate, and does indeed see claw marks in the masonry.

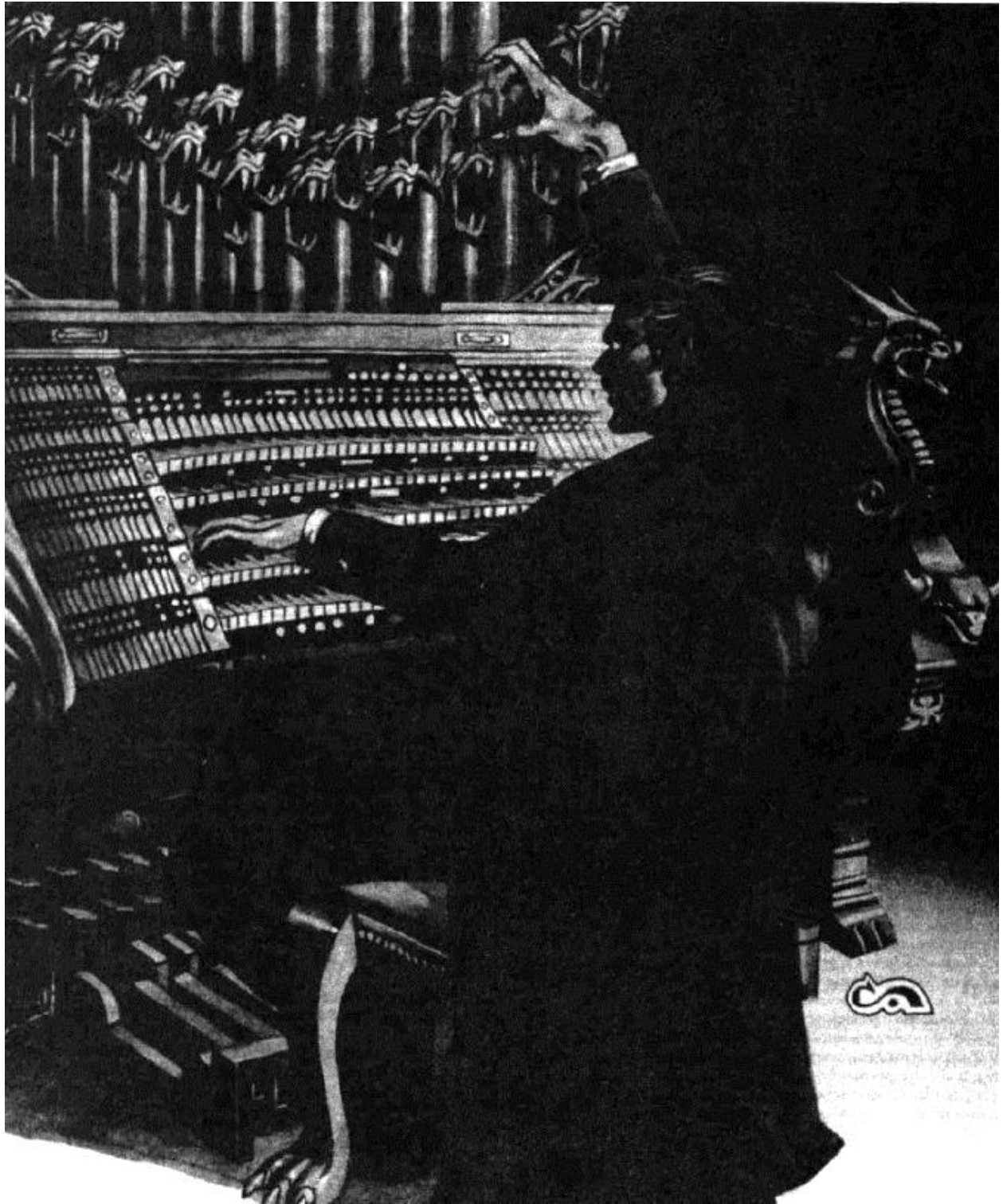
But then the interior doors slowly swing open of their own volition and eerie ORGAN MUSIC wafts in from deeper inside the hideous castle. An intricate tilework pattern in the shape of another large red dragon fills the room beyond, and looking up, they see four stone gargoyles perched in the four cardinal directions up near the vaulted ceiling.



Wide stairs rise to the north, there are closed doors to the east, and an open passage to the south from where the organ music seems to originate.

The group proceeds slowly, scanning everywhere for movement, traps or any hint of danger. Aside from a suit of armor in the foyer, which appears to be empty and propped in a corner, there are some stairs spiraling up into a tower and some kind of light. But the organ music is booming from under some doors to the west, and after some considerable deliberation, the PCs BURST in with weapons at the ready!





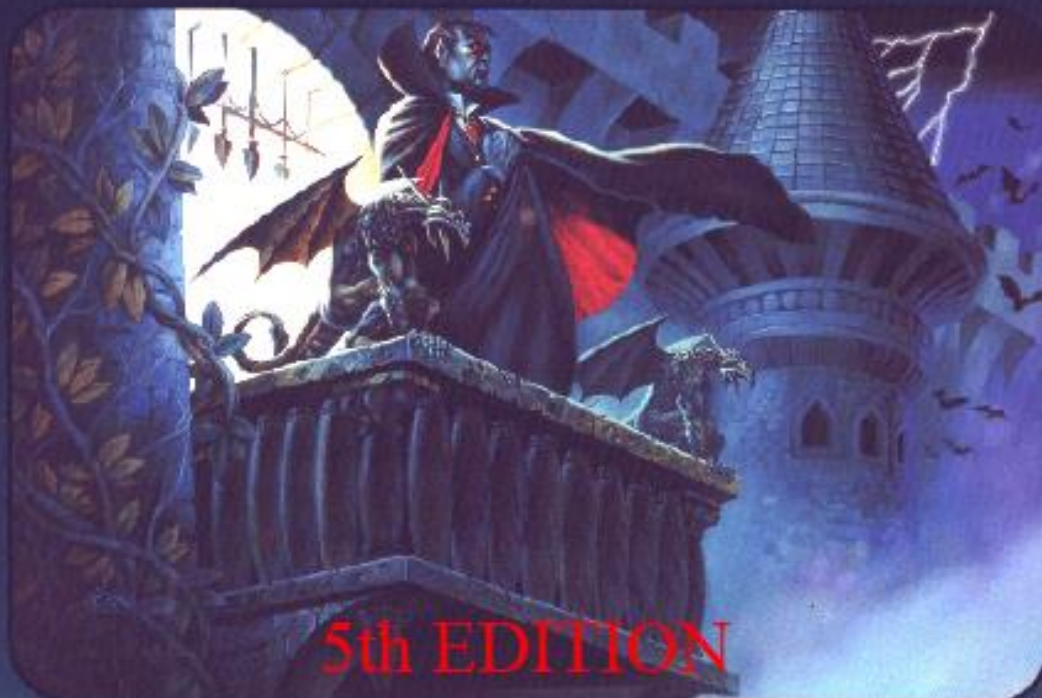
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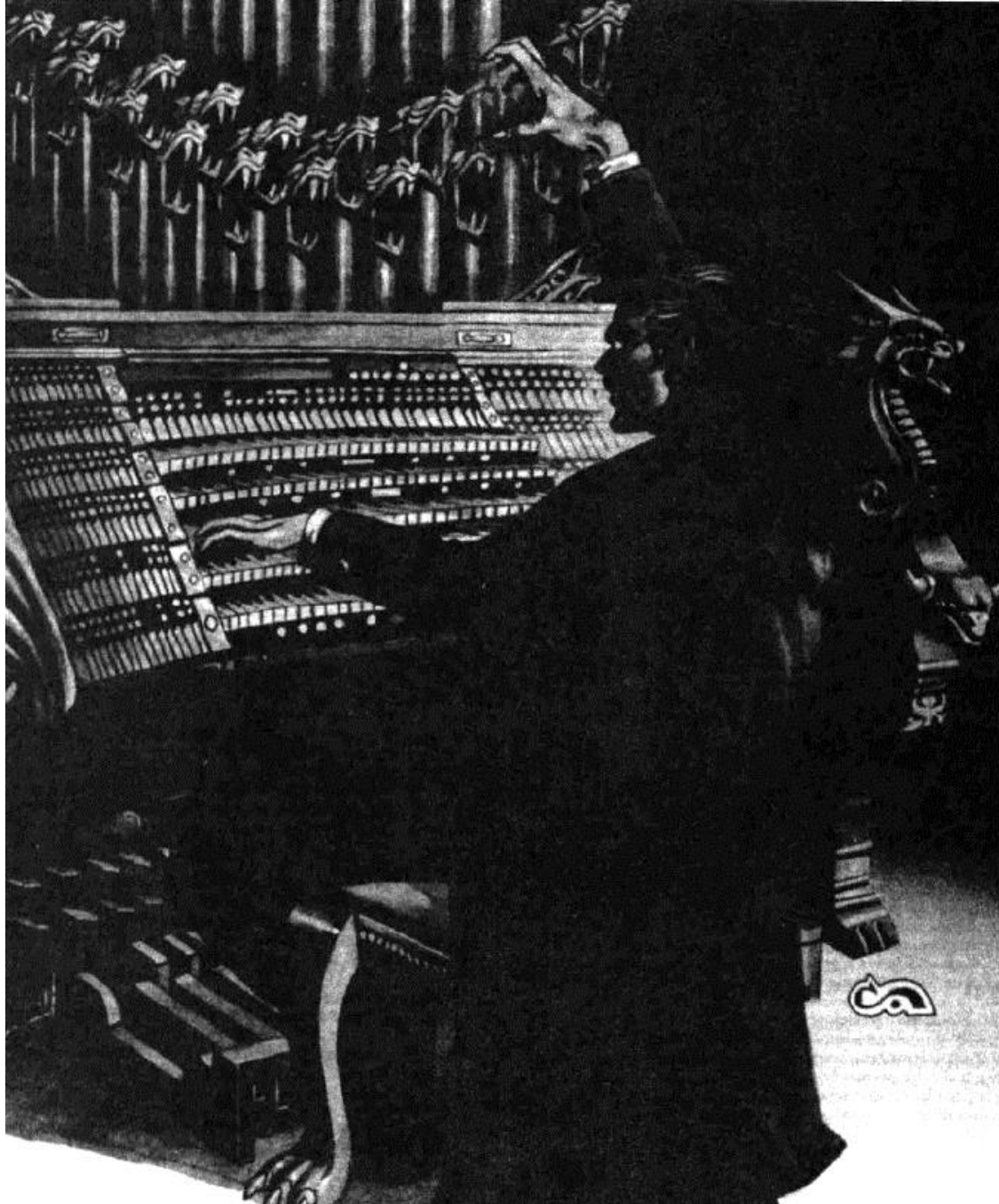
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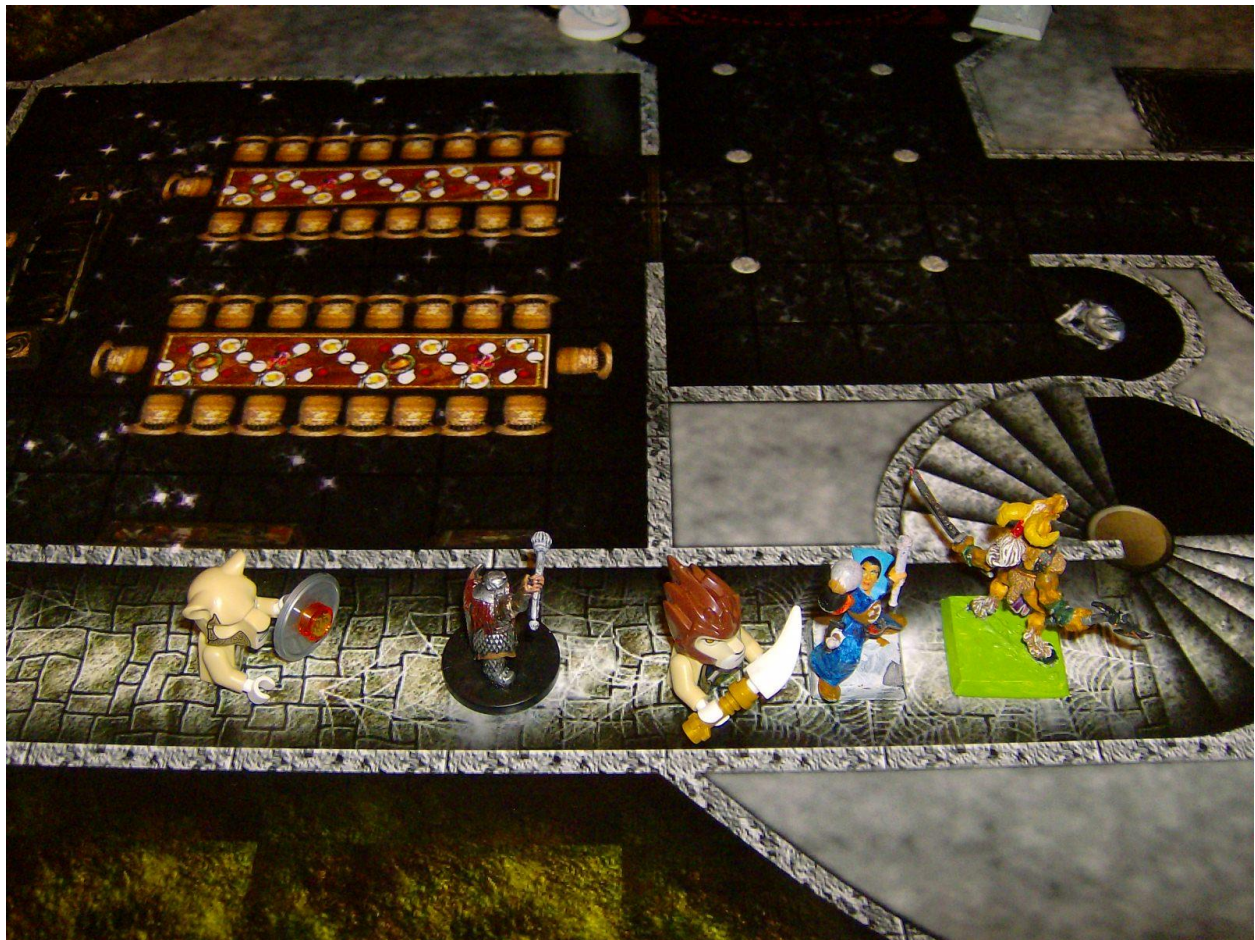
PART 3

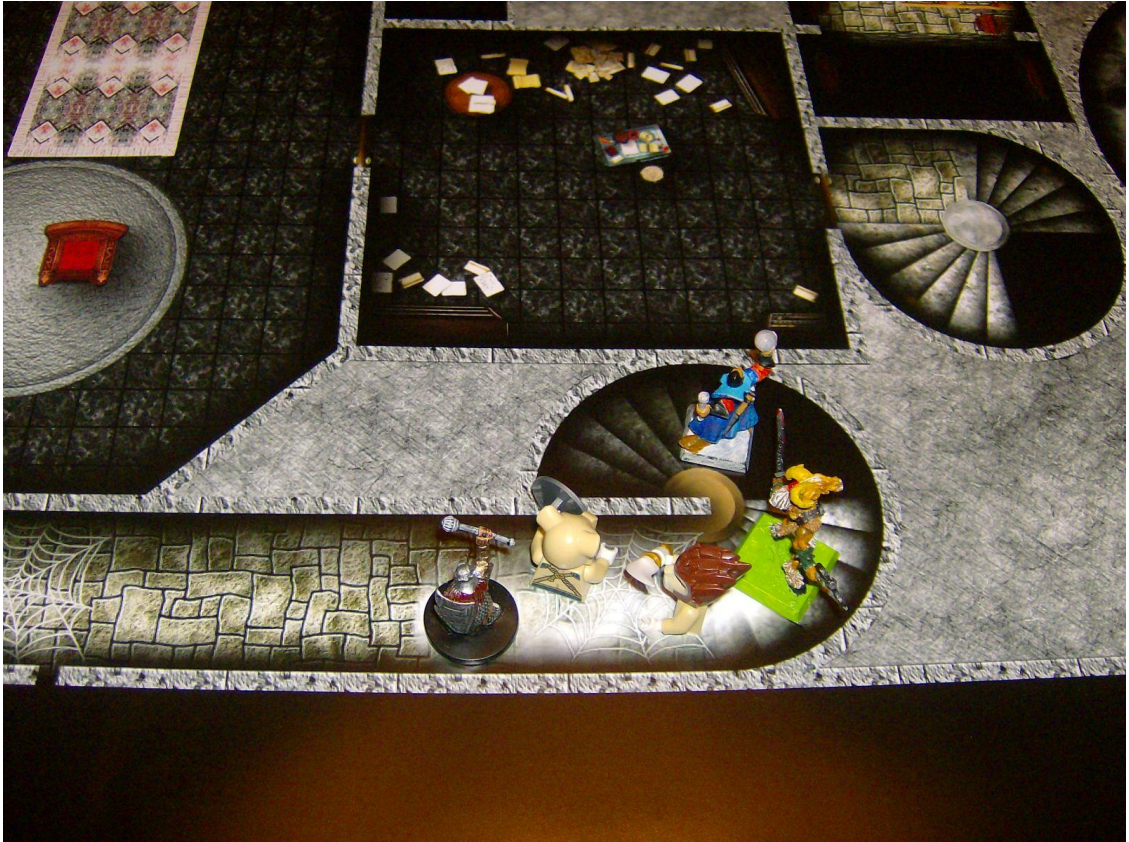


Count Strahd is in a dining room, the tables steaming with hot, fresh food. His back is to the party as he bangs out music from a huge, ugly organ. An attack is immediately launched at distance, but with cruel laughter Strahd seems to vanish as an illusion and the entire chamber is plunged into darkness.

The PCs hear doors slamming all over the castle, and then the rusty grate of chains as the portcullis is raised. They immediately use a light spell to see what happened, and the succulent food on the table is now rotten and crawling with maggots and worms.

They search the organ and find a secret door, and behind the secret door is Strahd! Or rather, fake mannequin Strahd hanging in an alcove of mirrors that created the illusion at the organ. The PCs follow this new avenue and reach a spiral stairway heading up and down, so they elect to go up.





The totally dark hallway deadends into towers with arrow slits and they find themselves looking down on the front lawn below. They backtrack, searching for secret doors and find one! On the north wall of the hallway approximately halfway back to the stairwell.

It opens into a large room with a lavish armchair/throne sitting on a dais, facing them. The door is small so they have to crawl through and then stand up and look all around. Oddly, behind them on the wall, hangs a horrible portrait that the chair was facing. They have no idea who it is.



There is a door on the east wall and some stairs leading down, but they check the door and hear scratching behind it, irregular scratching with stops and

starts. Gearing themselves up for a fight, they fling the door open with magic and CHARGE!

They see an utterly terrified human adult sitting at a desk scratching at a book with a long quill and ink well. He jumps at their entry, squealing, and reaches immediately for a rope dangling from a hole in the ceiling, but the PCs are able to stop him before he yanks on it.

Turns out this fellow is Lief, accountant to Count Strahd and does all of the bookkeeping for the various treasures his master has accumulated. He's not a bad sort, they don't think, just a pawn controlled by a merciless vampyr, and Lief has no recollection of how long he has been at Castle Ravenloft, or even how he arrived. He was about to pull the rope, and all he knows is that when he pulls the rope, BAD THINGS HAPPEN, like when a group of infiltrators came through last month.

The PCs cut the rope so Lief can't reach it and ask him some more questions, namely finding the direction to the highest tower which is where the stolen relic from the Church in Barovia resides (and also the study? I forget).

And then they're off again, climbing another set of dark, winding stairs into the horrible THIRD level of the castle, danger lurking around every corner. A bronze door awaits before them, and after checking for traps the cleric storms through, but the room beyond is a small alcove, and immediate from the left and right slide two utterly silent semi-transparent wraiths!



Here, a horrible fight ensues as the hit point draining undead deal lethal. One of the things is finally destroyed, but the other sinks into the floor, re-emerging not far away in the tight, twisting confines of the stairwell and continues its assault, dropping the gnome Vik with its deadly necrotic touch. This foe is finally taken out as well and Vik is revived, but down some hit points.



They cross into the next chamber, an ancient dining room filled with webs, a tall, teetering wedding cake on the table, green and moldy with age, with only a bride on top and the groom crushed on the floor. They search the room thoroughly and then enter the north door and find the study/library where they were told in Barovia to search for the diary of Strahd to find any weaknesses might have. The library is lavish, and over the east wall hangs a portrait that looks no less than IDENTICAL to the poor girl Ireena, the Burgomaster's adopted daughter, whom the vampyr has been preying upon!



A thorough search of the room reveals two things: 1) The TOME of STRAHD which contains his own handwriting,

I am The Ancient, I am The Land. My beginnings are lost in the darkness of the past. I was the warrior, I was good and just. I thundered across the land like the wrath of a just god, but the war years and the killing years wore down my soul as the wind wears stone into sand.

All goodness slipped from my life; I found my youth and strength gone and all I had left was death. My army settled in the valley of Barovia and took power over the people in the name of a just god, but with none of a god's grace or justice.

I called for my family, long unseated from their ancient thrones, and brought them here to settle in the castle Ravenloft. They came with a younger brother of mine, Sergei. He was handsome and youthful. I hated him for both.

From the families of the valley, one spirit shone above all others. A rare beauty, who was called "perfection," "joy," and "treasure." Her name was Tatyana and I longed for her to be mine.

I loved her with all my heart. I loved her for her youth. I loved her for her joy. But she spurned me! "Old One" was my name to her — "elder" and "brother" also. Her heart went to Sergei. They were betrothed. The date was set.

With words she called me "brother," but when I looked into her eyes they reflected another name — "death." It was the death of the aged that she saw in me. She loved her youth and enjoyed it. But I had squandered mine.

The death she saw in me turned her from me. And so I came to hate death, my death. My hate is very strong; I would not be called "death" so soon.

I made a pact with death, a pact of blood. On the day of the wedding, I killed Sergei, my brother. My pact was sealed with his blood.

I found Tatyana weeping in the garden east of the Chapel. She fled from me. She would not let me explain, and a great anger swelled within me. She had to understand the pact I made for her. I pursued her. Finally, in despair, she flung herself from the walls of Ravenloft and I watched everything I ever wanted fall from my grasp forever.

It was a thousand feet through the mists. No trace of her was ever found. Not even I know her final fate. Arrows from the castle guards pierced me to my soul, but I did not die. Nor did I live. I became undead, forever.

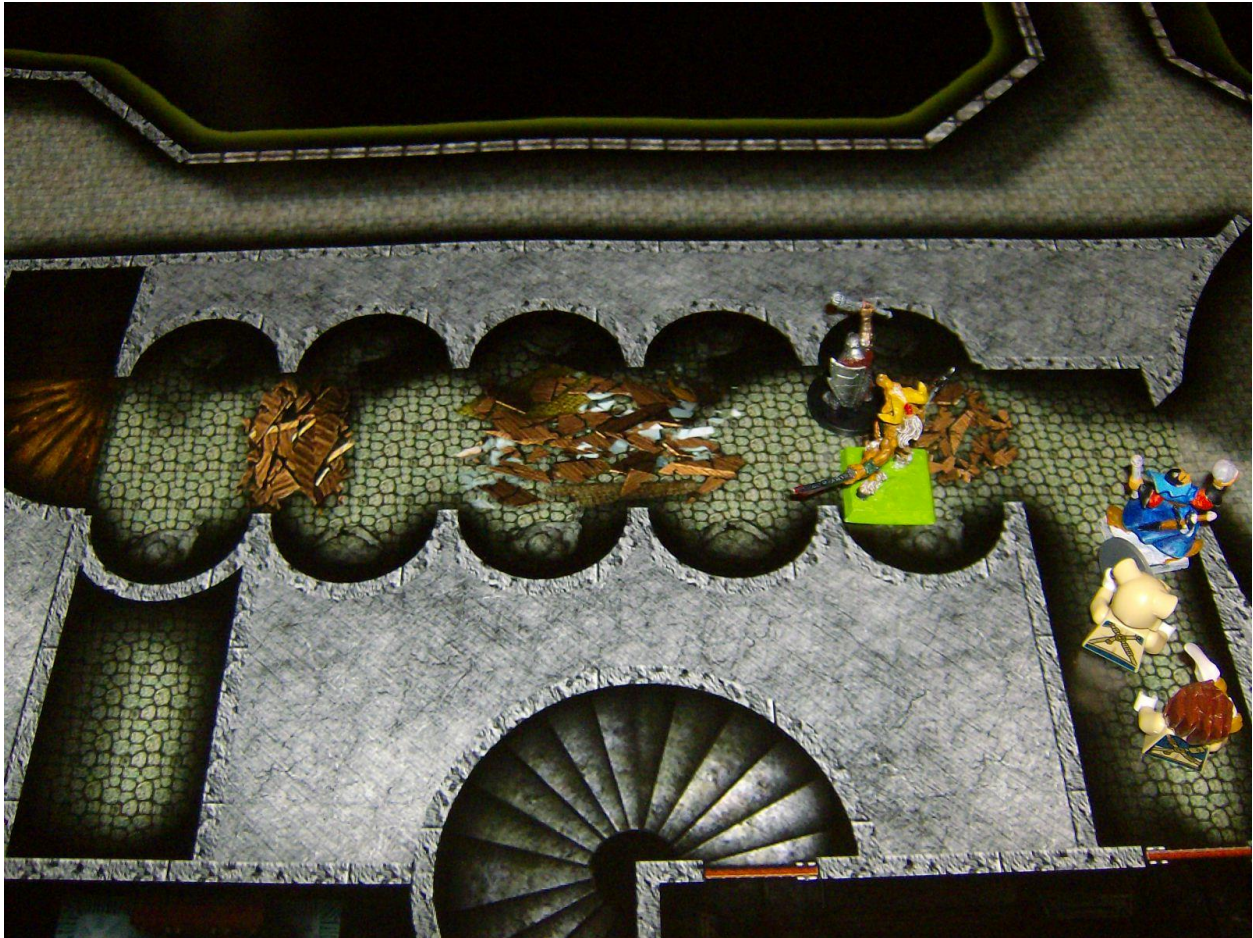
I have studied much since then. "Vampyr" is my new name. I still lust for life and youth, and I curse the living that took them from me. Even the sun is against me. It is the sun and light I fear the most. But little else can harm me now. Even a stake through my heart does not kill me, though it holds me from movement. But the sword, that cursed sword that Sergei brought! I must dispose of that awful tool! I fear and hate it as much as the sun.

I have often hunted for Tatyana. I have even felt her within my grasp, but she escapes. She taunts me! She taunts me! What will it take to bend her love to me?

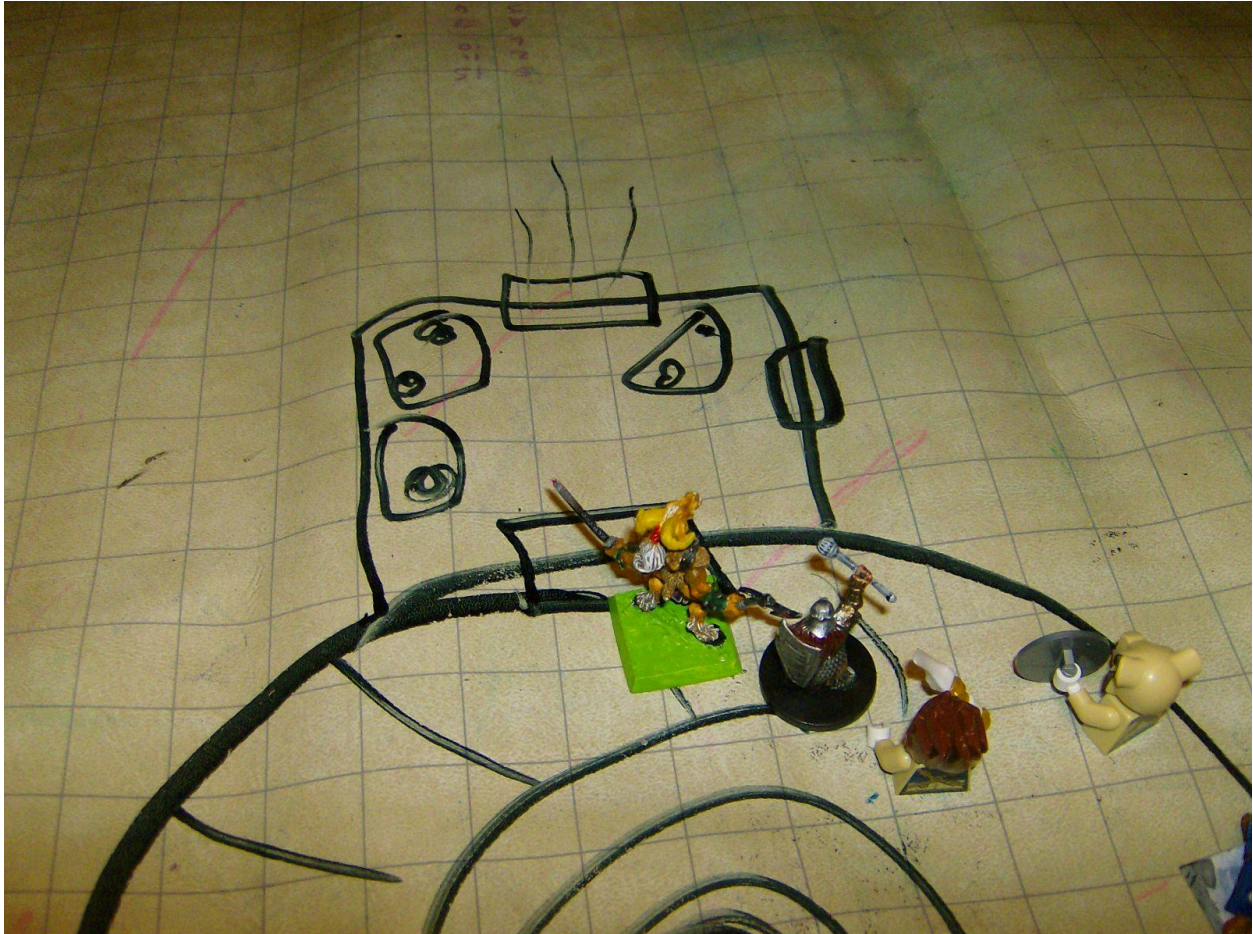
I now reside far below Ravenloft. I live among the dead and sleep beneath the very stones of this hollow castle of despair. I shall seal shut the walls of the stairs that none may disturb me.

and 2) a secret door behind the fireplace, activated by withdrawing the poker. A stone door slides open and the heroes quell the flames, and the cleric steps into a very small chamber with a dead man holding one hand to his throat and the other holding a torch. There are two torch sconces in the room, one with a snubbed torch, and an iron chest against the north wall.

This stinks of a trap, so using magic they keep well back and fling the lid of the box open with magic. Poisonous green gas immediately jets out and fills the small room, so the heroes retreat and shut the secret door, hoping to wait it out and let it dissipate. In the meantime they search a nearby passage and find a long, eerie hallway filled with alcoves and statues adjacent to another tower winding, up, up, up. Low moans emanate from this obvious **MURDER HALL** so they elect to take the stairs, the only obvious choice.



They begin the climb up a steep, steep stairwell, stopping at landing with a door and ultimately look inside to find a room with SEVEN cats lounging on fur-covered, dusty chairs in some kind of sitting room. A single barred window allows light into the room and there's a door on the east wall.



A few seconds later the cats are obliterated with magic and the PCs proceed to the next room, which is connected high off the ground to one of the central towers. Here, a bubbling, foul-smelling cauldron occupies the center of the chamber, and the wall cases are filled with glass vials of strange spell components such as “mare’s sweat” and “eye of newt.” They hear a click from another door, and finding it locked, the door is picked the minotaur steps through. Seven magic missile spells are instantly launched at him, but the minotaur was fortunate to have a shield spell in place and the entire barrage of golden darts are deflected. Seven hideous witches have overturned all the furniture and are hunkered behind it, but an immediate *fireball* clears every

single one of them out with a burst of flame and sends glass and debris exploding from the windows and sets the room on fire.



The witches spellbooks are retrieved and then it is up, up, up the tower to the next landing that leads out onto a rain-slicked walkway that leads to another tower. The wind howls outside and lightning sporadically flashes, and it looks dangerous crossing over, it would be a devastating drop to the ground below, so as a precaution FEATHER FALL is cast, with the option to embrace anyone within 60 feet who falls. Kinruck the minotaur holds the rope while the others maneuver across one by one, and they all make it safely across..

...until Kinruck feels an icy cold hand clamp onto his shoulder.

Count Strahd has secretly come up behind him, and the minotaur is all alone on this side of the tower.



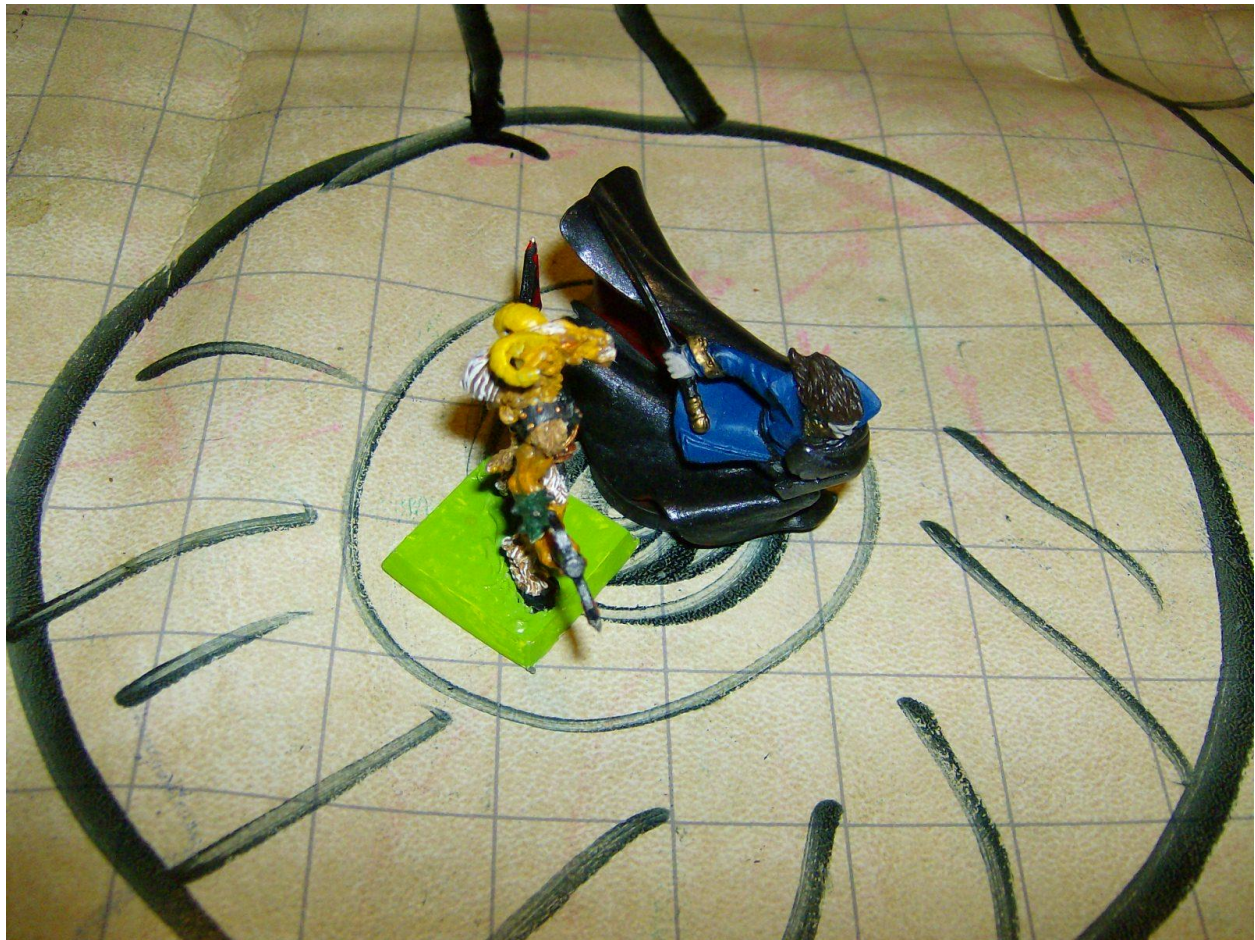
And HERE ensues a deliciously deadly battle upon the rain-soaked parapets of Ravenloft!

The minotaur spins, Strahd trying to grapple him, the rope still tying the PC off to the last person that crossed the slippery catwalk. Several ranged attacks are launched, but it is here that Strahd's true nature as a legendary creature fully unfolds and the PCs realize just how horrible he truly is. Plus, he has the hand of a lich.

Ultimately Strahd snaps the rope and the minotaur is pulled STRAIGHT down the central stairwell along with the vampyr, which instantly triggers Feather Fall on everyone, and then the minotaur and Strahd are fighting Maxtrix-style in 60'/ round freefall toward the bottom of the tower.

Of course the others weren't just doing nothing the whole time, they try to help, and one of the halflings RACES across the slippery pavement...and trips and slides clean off the catwalk.

Featherfall kicks in and he is able to glide down and land atop one of the rooms where the PCs annihilated the witches, but now the group is split THREE ways with Strahd maniacally laughing down in the dark recesses of the core stairwell as it fights the minotaur.



The cleric and gnome manage to clamber across the slick catwalk to help their friend while the other Halfling brother climbs to the top of the far tower to find the stolen Holy Relic said to be able to defeat the dreaded vampyr, so the party is now split 4 ways.

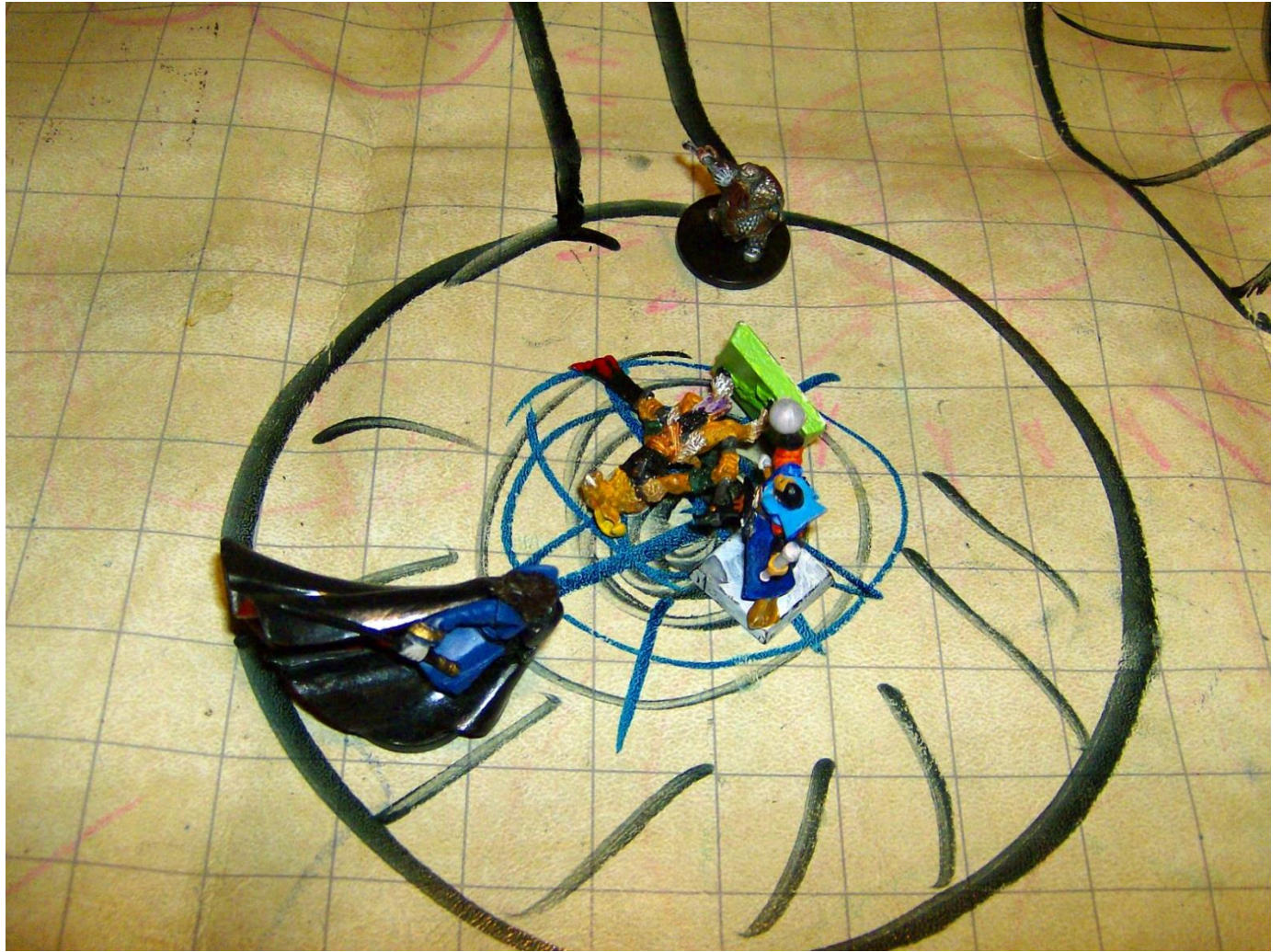
The minotaur is subjected to a Finger of Death by Strahd, which doesn't kill him but does not him down dangerously low. Kinruck manages to grab onto the stairwell and halt his descent, but Strahd follows up with a Sleep spell from the dreaded Hand...and the minotaur drops again, this time asleep and helpless.

The cleric and gnome reach the top of the stairwell and see the two combatants fluttering away into darkness, and at this point a Web spell is cast below them, something anchoring in between the minotaur and vampire horizontally across the tower! Still asleep, Kinruck drops into the web and is instantly entangled and still asleep and a good ways from the other two PCs.

Meanwhile the lion halfling Jericho reaches a magically locked door at the top of the tower, this time definitely rigged with a trap. He is able to disarm it and plunges inside to find the stolen Holy Relic floating inside yet another detonation circle of explosive runes, but these is also able to disable. Failure here could have very likely killed him, and all the others would have seen was the exploding top of the tower.

Some more shenanigans ensue but ultimately the last they see of Count Strahd – for now – is his pasty white face descending into darkness, his cackling laugh echoing up at them.

This was easily the most epic, terrifying fight I've run in a while, and probably the highlight of the entire adventure, even more so than the conclusion, which is coming up next time.

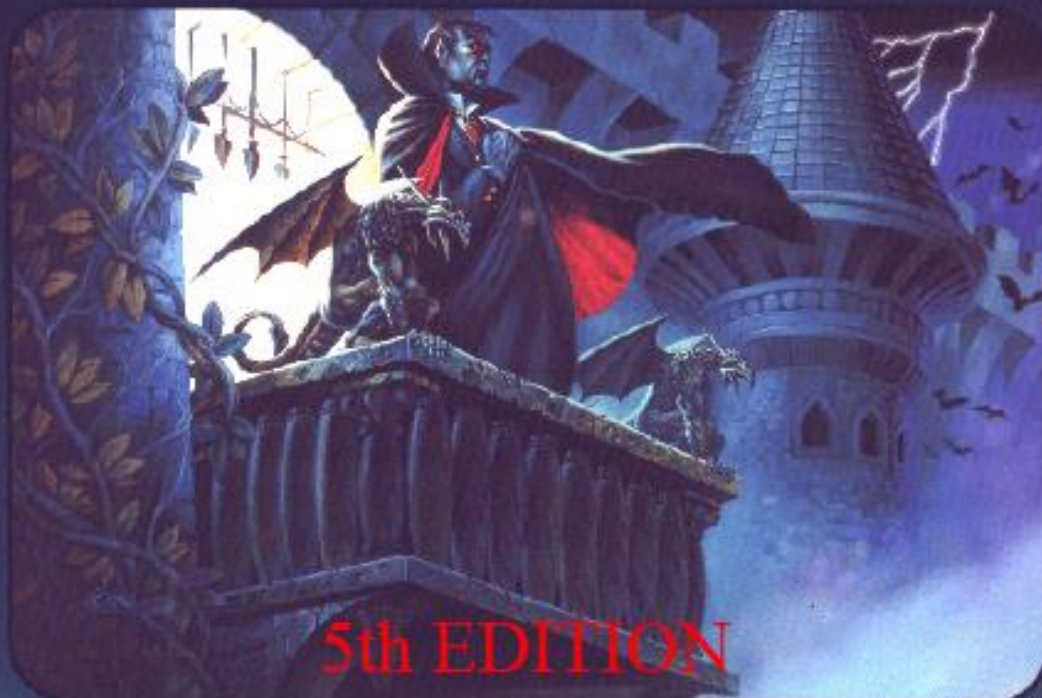


Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Official Game Adventure

Ravenloft

by Tracy and Laura Hickman



The master of Ravenloft is having guests for dinner — and you are invited. Ravenloft is an adventure for 6 to 8 characters of levels 5 to 7.



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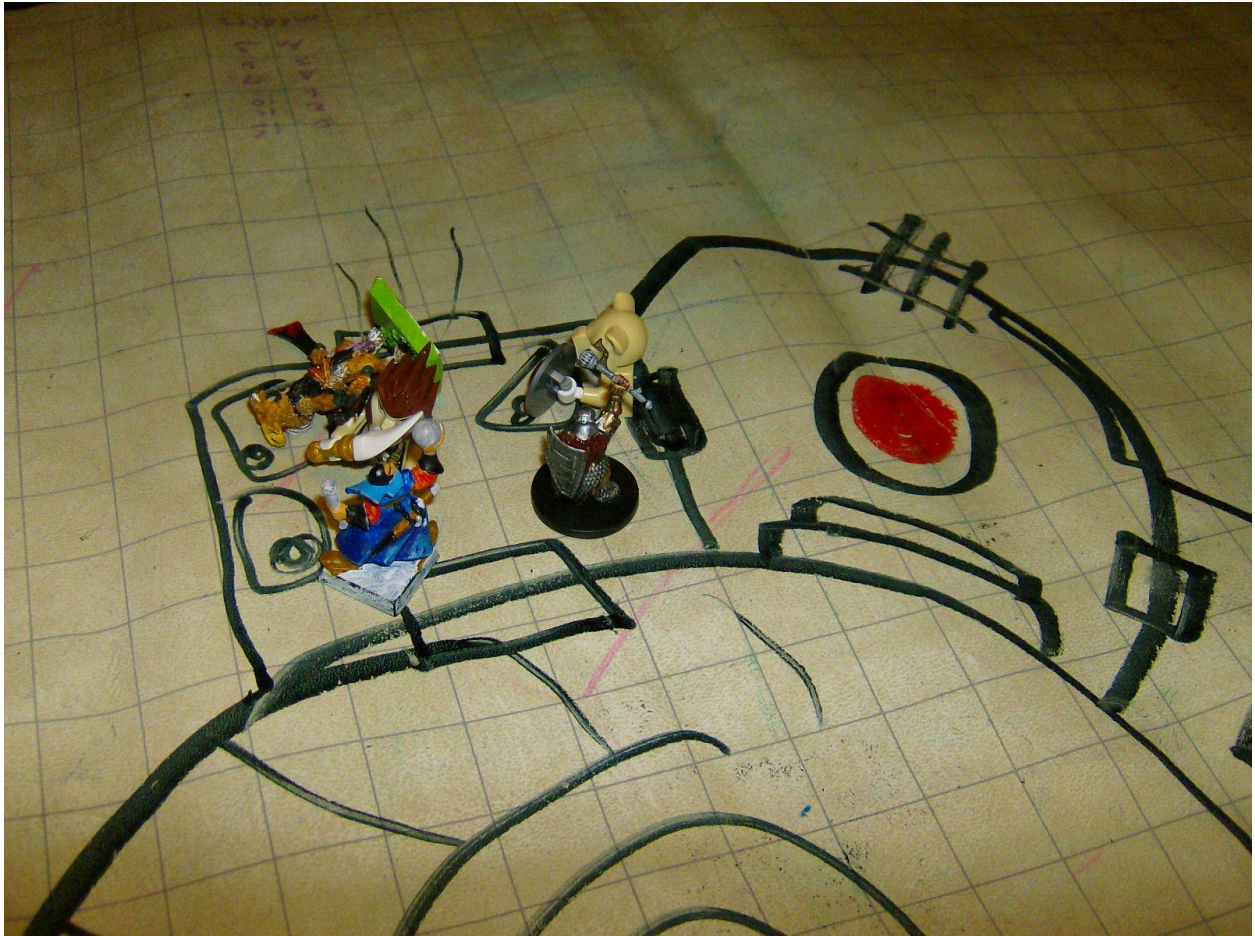


A 5th edition D&D conversion of the original 1e classic module

PART 4

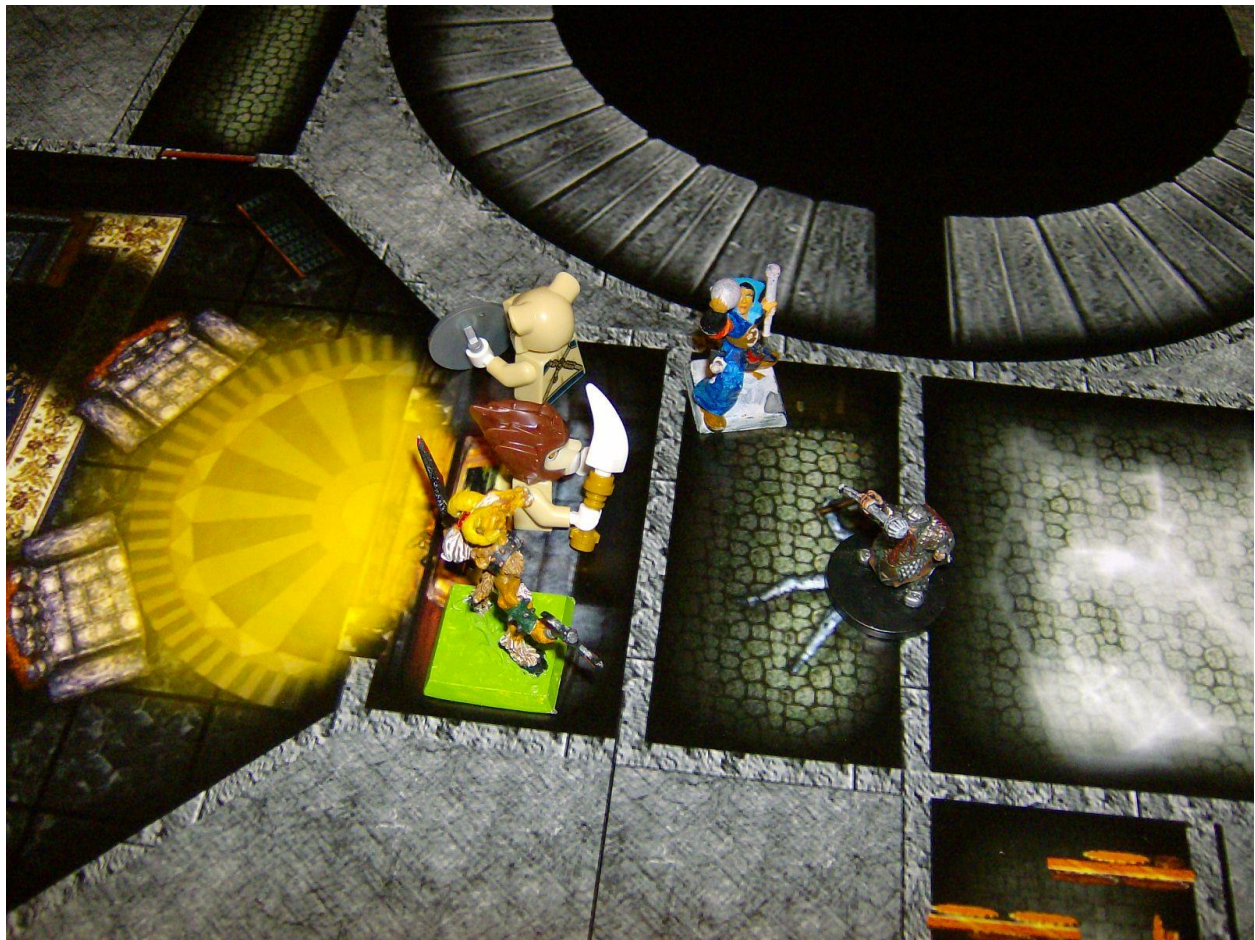
So, after an epic, brutal fight on the rain soaked parapets of the castle, Count Strahd has descended into the darkness, laughing, planning his next move and the PCs don't know when he will strike again. They are utterly terrified of him by now and finally realize just how horribly powerful and dangerous he is, even when alone.

They manage to regroup and hole up in the one of the rooms where they blasted the cats and witches, catching their breath with a short rest and hoping nothing bad ambushes them.

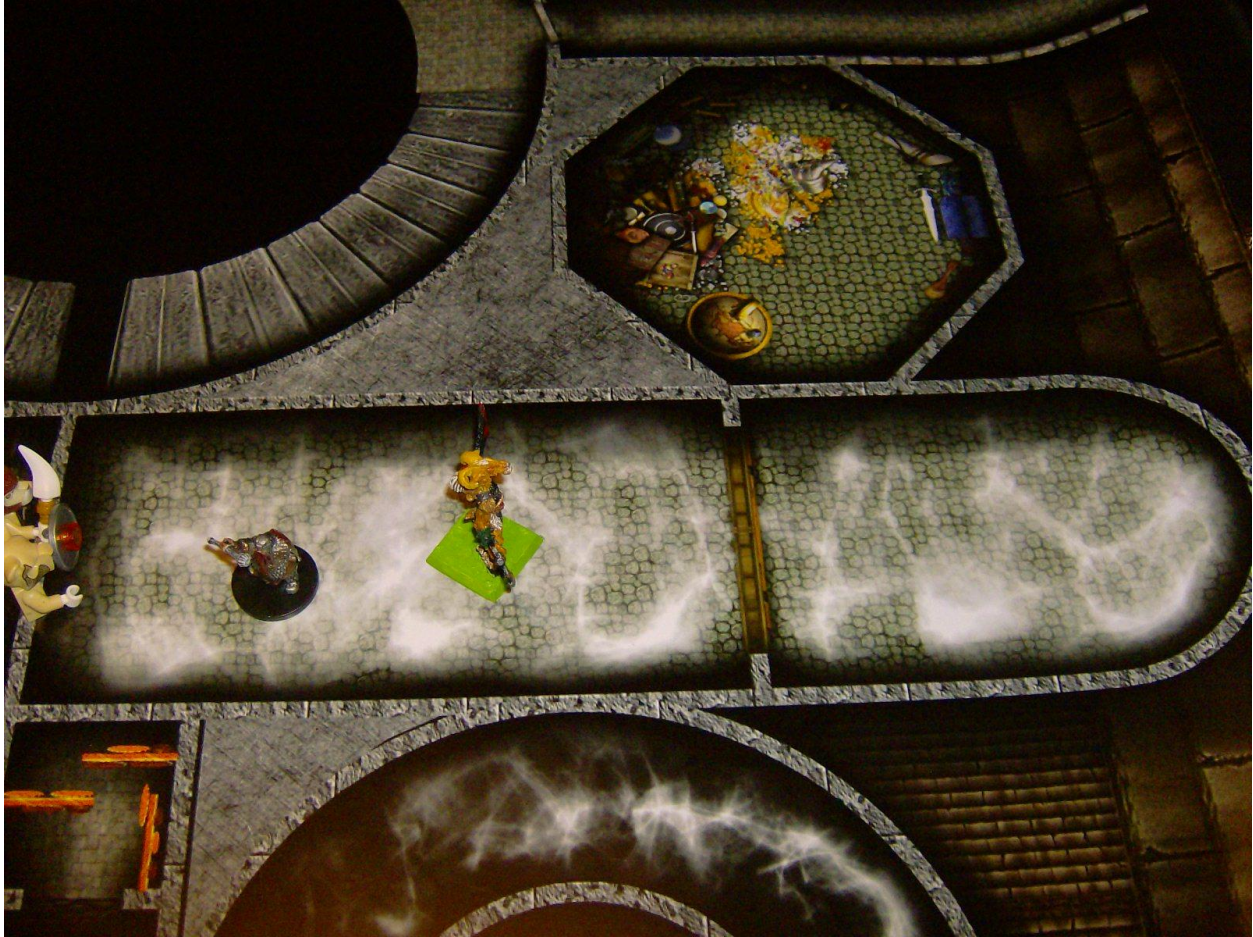


They're lucky and are able to gather their senses and try to figure out where and what to do next. They finally have in their grubby paws the HOLY RELIC stolen from the Church of Borovia, but the cleric Heinrich has no idea how it works exactly or what it will do, but he knows it should greatly amplify his ability to turn undead. He might just get one shot at it though, so it better be the right shot.

In the meantime they head back down to the study and the secret room with the poison gas, as that seemed suspicious and they never got the chance to thoroughly search that little room or even the box.



By taking the torch from the dead man's hand and placing into the empty sconce, they find that a secret door opens, revealing a long opaque hallway of swirling mists inside the castle that surely cannot be natural. They can't see more than fifteen feet through the fog. Practically ANYTHING could be in there.



The minotaur warrior advances first into the darkness, carrying a bright light source and finally finds a large pair of double doors blocking the passage. They don't appear to be locked, so using magic once again from a distance, they thrust them open!

Huge shapes move in the gloom beyond and they hear stone grinding, and two rocky automatons stomp toward them, fists raised to pummel the intruders to bloody smears.



Heinrich the cleric is hit twice, and hit HARD, dropping him dangerously low, and attacks and magic mostly bounce off of these two foes. The PCs realize very, very fast that they are outclassed and outgunned; these two guys are nearly invincible!



The golems are just knocked down by the minotaur's bullrush here, and are quick to stand and pursue them all to the end of the corridor.

The heroes disengage and retreat to the study, launching hit and run attacks at the golems and trying to lure them in closer with illusions, but they're only able to do just very minimal damage, with significant risk to themselves is something goes wrong, but they suspect that these two monsters would not be behind two secret doors and a hall of mist unless they were guarding something valuable, and besides, the map has a treasure hoard CLEARLY right there. 😊

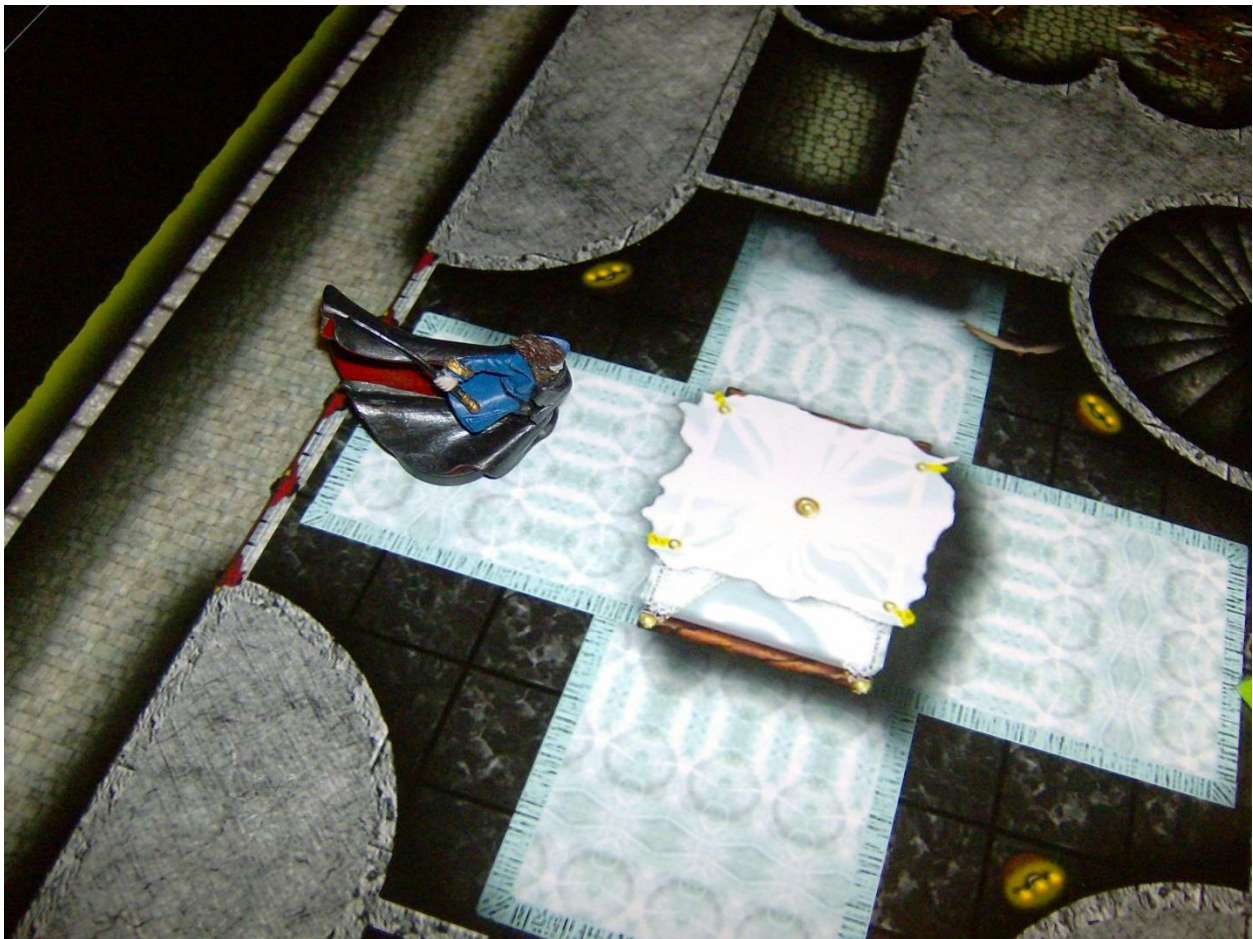
But even as they have their attention focused toward the east, suddenly from the WEST, NORTH and SOUTH, three doors bang open and maniacal laughter rolls fourth followed by **Count Strahd** himself, two **vampire spawn** and two **wight warriors!**



The players win initiative, and this was seconds from becoming a down and dirty fight to the death...but then Heinrich the cleric uses Turn Undead and calls forth the holy judgement of St. Cuthbert upon these foul abominations!

The vampire spawn and the wights are immediately turned and flee back the ways they came, and Strahd is not turned but he retreats immediately to the room behind him, the large double doors slamming shut. The holy brilliance from the relic continues to burn and glow like hot white fire, and the PCs continue the chase, bursting through the doors and finding a bedroom of some sort with a large canopy bed, and behind the bed, next to some open windows, Strahd is holding a small redheaded girl in his arms, his wickedly sharp talons gently brushing at her neck. This must be GERTRUDA they surmise, she matches the description, the daughter of Mad Mary in Borovia who was wailing over the disappearance of her daughter.

“LEAVE THE RELIC HERE AND THE CHILD LIVES,” the Count boldly says.



Now the PCs had a lot of internal discussion if they should use the Relic here or not, they don't really know what it does, and it's only a one-shot chance, and

despite everyone telling the cleric “Save it for later and a better opportunity!” Heinrich raises it anyway and shouts at the top of his voice: “St. Cuthbert condemns you to the hells you abomination of nature!”

Holy radiance bursts forth from the relic, blinding and stunning Strahd who drops the girl. He was just mere seconds from transforming into a bad and flitting out the window, drawing the PCs down to the lowest levels of the castle and to even more devious traps and monsters, but in the few rounds that they have available now, the vampyr is trapped in a radiance like the sun, and the heroes quickly surround and stab and slice and nail him with every attack they have at their disposal.



[WHAT IN THE HELL IS THAT WHITE ARROW DIE??]

The vampyr Strahd suddenly dissolves into fine, roiling mist, but he is still stuck in the holy radiance of the relic for an entire round, unable to escape, and with an unearthly shriek the Lord of Ravenloft is finally destroyed.

This conclusion came much faster than expected, but it was due to the item being used just at the right time, and rolling well. If anything else had gone wrong the Count would have been free to keep up the attacks from a much more defensible position within the bowels of the castle, and likely kept this adventure going another 6 hours!

Sunlight peeks through the clouds and for the first time in many years, a patch of blue sky is seen above Castle Ravenloft.

Relieved and joyous, the PCs keep on pecking away at the golems until after HOURS have figuratively passed the automatons are dropped, and they discover the secret hoard of Strahd hidden beneath another secret door.

They grab everything, including the bewildered but uninjured girl Gertruda, and, exit the castle before anything else catches wind of them. The girl is returned to her mother, the citizens of Borovia celebrate, and Ireena knows she is finally free from the clutches of a horrible monster.

The heroes have achieved the impossible, and laden with their treasure, they bravely return home along the path, confident that the creature known as Strahd will never return (oh yeah, and they took **the Hand of Vecna** too!)

THE END