

The Tome of Strahd is an ancient work penned by Strahd. The book is bound in a thick leather cover with steel hinges and fastenings. The pages are of parchment and very brittle. Stains and age have taken their toll, but some of the first section is readable.

You parse through the book and find the majority of it written in cipher or notes in a curious shorthand that must be unique to Strahd. The readable beginning section looks to be a key with the title “War & Peace” that may contain clues to deciphering later chapters. Later sections of the key are blurred as if water damaged, and are unreadable.

It is here that you hand out the “War & Peace” key section

Investigation Check

- DC10: You determine that the cipher of the first two chapters are the same. The first chapter is titled “War”, the second “Peace”. The latter two chapters are titled “Love” and “Power” but the key sections for those are blurred with water stains.
- DC17: You feel the water stains of the key section, and can feel crisp lines of ink that do not match the visible texture. The stains appear to be an illusion hiding the written text underneath.

The first section of the book, “War & Peace” contains hints for the cipher for both the chapters “War” and “Peace”. Players can choose either chapter to start attempting to decipher, and they can choose the chapters “Love” and “Power” when the respective key sections are unlocked.

The key sections “Love” and “Power” are indecipherable due to a 4th-level equivalent spell that’s something between “Programmed Illusion” and “Illusory Script”. The magic can be detected with Detect Magic and if dispelled, the sections are wiped blank for 24 hours (or you can allow it to unlock the key sections). The key sections “Love” and “Power” are unlocked upon reading key words in the respective chapters, such as “Tatyana” in Andral IV/Souls II, or “Amber Temple” in Andral V/Peace IV. They can also be unlocked if players have the book open and speak the key words.

Unlocking a section requires an Investigation check and at least 2 hours of dedicated time for Research. Players can choose which available chapter they want to roll for. One player can assist another in the attempt, granting advantage if they roll to Help. Any player who investigates the book has a -5 passive perception for the duration of the two hours.

Higher rolls can succeed for up to two sections of one chapter, provided they have the same tile (Andral IV & Andral V can be unlocked together, but Andral V and Markovia cannot).

Source for entries is from this [reddit post](#).

The interpretation of the history between Strahd and Andral/Markovia is from [this post](#).

More on the [fanés here](#).

Key Sections

War & Peace

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, renamed for my father as we 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 father and I built for them. Ravenloft. They came with a younger brother of mine, Sergei, nearly grown, and I had never known him. He was handsome and youthful. I hated him for both.

Love

*unlocked if players get **Andral IV** or **Souls II**; getting both reduces DC of all Love entries by 5*

Unlocked if the tome is open and the word “Tatyana” is spoken

From the families brought to 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.

Power

*unlocked if players get **Andral V** or **Peace IV**; getting both reduces DC of all Power entries by 5*

Unlocked if the tome is open and the words “Amber Temple” are spoken

I have studied since then from the scrolls and tomes I obtained from the Amber Temple of Mount Ghakis. I have learned much about this land of Barovia. Ancient beyond the simple folk of the valley, with hidden powers. I visited the three fanes and claimed their power for my own. Their servants now serve me, and thus I have become the Land.

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 its light I fear the most, but it cannot harm me now. The dark power I made a pact with blanketed this land in mists. Little else harms me. 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 the hollow castle of despair. I shall seal shut the walls of the stairs that none may disturb me.

Chapter 1 - War

Andral I

DC10

When I brought my father’s armies to this land, among them was a bright young acolyte of the Morninglord named Andral. His sermons inspired the troops and boosted their morale as well as their faith. As we subjugated the native druidic and barbarian tribes, he sought to spread the worship of his god amongst the nature-worshipping primitives. He was a kind soul, often advising me to temper my wrath and show mercy toward our enemies. In him I found a trusted confidant and advisor.

Andral II

DC15

Andral trained a protégé to succeed him, a fiery young woman named Markovia. She found herself on the front lines with my men, healing and supporting them in battle. Whereas I was hardened, even sharpened by the prolonged campaigns, she seemed to grow more and more horrified with the suffering and injustice of warfare. She questioned my methods and motivations in the war effort. At first, privately. But when I would not back down against my enemies, she openly criticized the war and my command. “Monster! Predator!” she proclaimed against me. For this open defiance I could have had her executed. But I stayed my hand and reminded her that her service in my army was voluntary. Though Andral sought to mediate our dispute, she abandoned her commission and founded an abbey near the camp in Krezk.

- Due to the mention of “Markovia” the players notice the similar word in a later section. Allow them to roll again for “Markovia”

Andral III

DC20 - reduce to 15 if Andral I & II are obtained

When I pacified the heathen wood elves, Andral believed they needed to be shown the light of the Morninglord and abandon their primitive practice of abstract nature worship. When I felled the mighty silver dragon Argynvost and slaughtered his entire order of loyal knights, he was profoundly silent. Shortly thereafter, he too abandoned me. I hear he has settled in the developing hamlet named Vallaki.

- PC are able to roll again for Peace for the Silver Entry:
- The name Argynvost... you’ve seen this elsewhere in the book. Flipping back and forth, you are able to compare it to a later entry in the Chapter “Peace”. Roll investigation again.

Andral IV

DC20 - reduce to 15 if Andral III is obtained

Neither Andral nor Markovia, nor any of their followers, have indicated they would attend the wedding of Sergei and Tatyana. I admit I find myself wanting for their wisdom and counsel in this trying time. Rahadin, loyal he may be, makes for a poor conversationalist.

Andral V

DC20

I saw my old friend again. Age had weathered his face, and there was a deep sadness in his eyes. He had secretly organized a group of druids and shapeshifters and angry young men to resist me. How dare he defy me, the rightful ruler of this land by succession! He claims to know my magic, ignorant of the vast wealth of lore I have discovered in the Amber Temple. His followers attacked me in a cowardly ambush, and made frighteningly short work of my spawn and guards. He held me in place with an ancient holy symbol, and not yet fully accustomed to my new body and powers, I struggled to resist. But when he hesitated to deal a fatal blow, I became as mist and escaped. My vengeance will be swift. Even now my werewolves and spawn and undead are assaulting the remnants of his forces. Your days are numbered, old friend.

Markovia

DC20

With the forbidden lore of the temple on Mount Ghakis, I have become an unpredictable foe indeed. Yet it was this hubris which led to the humiliating wounds I received at the hands of Markovia. Apparently incensed by Andral's recent death, she marched with a small force of clerics and armored champions and broke through the gates of Castle Ravenloft. Never have I seen such zealous ferocity in battle as when that woman wielded her mace against me. Channeling the burning anger of her god through her martial instrument, it was all I could do to parry her blows and survive the onslaught. Had she accosted me anywhere but inside this lair, I must admit she may have been victorious. Unbeknownst to her, the castle is a creature of chaos which bends to my will. Calling upon its dark powers and my unnatural regeneration I was able to outlast her. Her burning flame nearly extinguished, I granted her a hero's death. As a gesture of respect I have interred her bodily remains in the crypts below Ravenloft.

Chapter 2 - Peace

Souls I

DC10

The dark cycle of reincarnation has reached its limits. Across my realm are children born hollow. These subjects have but a scrap of the soul necessary to a mortal. Though otherwise ordinary, they are especially dour, fearful, and unimaginative. But of greatest interest to me is that I find no sustenance in their blood. Some vital essence is lacking. It is no more nourishing than sand to a thirsty man. I will study this to pass the time. I am certain there are many disappointed and hapless parents in Barovia who can be convinced to surrender their hollowborn children to my care.

Souls II

DC15

I know I am not mad. I am seeing familiar faces reborn. Something in the mists is trapping the souls which would pass beyond -- forcing some sort of reincarnation among my people. Do the Dark Powers mean to taunt me? Trap an entire people in an endless cycle of misery alongside my own? Perhaps they torment me with false hope -- that my Tatyana will be reborn too.

Barovia I

DC 10

The Vistani and I have reached a place of mutual respect. They are content with my rule, and I do not trouble them.

Barovia II

DC 15

The great roc of Mount Ghakis remains a danger. I pacified it during my great campaign, but I fear it may soon prey upon my people if the lakes grow barren. That privilege is reserved only for me.

Barovia III

DC 20 - reduce to DC15 if Barovia II is obtained

Baba Lysaga now dwells in the marsh-ruins of Berez. We remain on good terms. She is powerful, and dangerous. She too has communed with the Dark. There is something aloof about her; I will keep her at a distance. I would not soon make an enemy of that witch.

Barovia IV

DC 20

Exethanter's mind is eroding. On my most recent visit to the Amber Temple I found him delirious and distracted. He seems unable to remember much, save his magic. I do not envy the lich, nor do I pity him. It would seem that I chose all the more wisely in the means of immortality.

Silver

DC 25 - Reduce to DC20 if Peace IV or Andral III is obtained

Vladimir's accursed silver knights have slain another adventuring band. From what I witnessed while scrying, the knights slew them for seeking my destruction. I do not understand why my mortal enemies, servants of Argynvost, would defend me. Perhaps he wishes to bear witness to my eternal sentence.

Chapter 3 - Love

*If both **Andral IV** and **Souls II** are obtained, reduce all DC by 5*

Tatyana I

DC 20

This foolish deva believes me the fool. This holy man seeks to free me of my sins through lust of the flesh. I will allow him to continue as long as I can hold his attention. He is no threat to me while he continues in his perverted folly. I have no interest in his depraved gift; it is wholly unnatural to desire such an abomination. Tatyana will free me. When she returns, she will have me.

Tatyana II

DC 25

The Dark Powers have cursed me. Each time I am within reach of Tatyana, she is met with tragedy. I was so close. She craved me. Pleaded for me to stay. Yet I returned to see Tatyana's blood had stained the earth before I could have it all for myself. The leadership responsible will have my undivided attention. I am the land, and I will curse the river valley they so treacherously stewarded.

Tatyana III

DC 30 - reduce by 5 if Tatyana II is obtained

Perhaps I have been wrong. Perhaps it is not reunion with Tatyana that will be my escape. Perhaps it is replacement? Can I find another to govern this realm in my place? I must take care not to show weakness. I must take care not to show reluctance. No one must know how hollow I feel; how empty my omnipotence is in absence of satisfaction. My immortal, eternal image as the ruler of this dominion must never come into question. I must observe from afar.

Heart I

DC25

The Heart glows with purpose. It has become living. The circles of masonry about the tower its ribs, the great bastion its chest. The tests on the condemned proved the heart will use the tower itself against invaders. My will sustains it, but it is mere glass, fragile, ironically mortal. With it, I am sheltered from the unthinkable. Yet, I cannot prove reckless. The antimagic field around Khazan's tower separates me from the Heart. I must be cautious of such places.

Heart II

DC30 - reduce by 5 if Heart I is obtained

I have learned to bend the very Land itself to my will. I have hardened my Heart of Sorrow. The Morninglord's radiance can no longer sear my flesh so long as my Heart remains steadfast. The sun itself is but a minor nuisance to me now. For I am the Ancient. I am the Land.

Dusk

DC 30 - reduced to 15 if Andral III or Heart II is obtained. Can be obtained out of order.

The crime of the elves is beyond all measure of forgiveness and justice. I should have eliminated them when I first conquered this valley centuries ago. I have ordered the death of every female elf in the valley for what they have done to Patrina. Despite their comeliness, the elves will never know womanly comfort among their own kind. Despite their longevity, they will fade from existence as I outlive them.

Chapter 4 - Power

*If both **Andral V** and **Peace IV** are obtained, reduce all DC by 5.*

*If **Heart I** is obtained, reduce all DC by 5*

Fanes I

DC 20

The witches of Barovia come to me for their succor, now that I hold the power of the fanes. I am as a god with supplicants, the likes of Kossuth or Kelemvor. Nothing can turn them against me now. They are fully under my thumb. Yet the hags have not submitted in this way. They are wiser, perhaps. Or perhaps they seek to take my power.

Fanes II

DC 22

Baba Lysaga has outlived all of her counterparts. She has unlocked a secret to immortality, but not like Khazan, Exethanter, or myself. She bathes in the blood of beasts during each new moon. I infer that grave misfortune befalls her if she fails to complete this ritual. I suspect the influence of Mother Night.

Khazan I

DC 25

Khazan has indeed granted profane life to his armor, as he claimed. "Mere rubbish," he calls it, but I see the potential. He has conferred upon it a blessing of the Dark Powers from Amber Temple. An ambitious plea, indeed. All "blessings" of the Dark Powers come with a dear price. I know too well.

Khazan II

DC 27

I have succeeded in granting my old battle armor the same form of sentience Khazan gave to his own. I have empowered it with my will and the might of storms and instructed it to defend the castle. In great need I may summon it to myself and don it with a word, provided the damn thing hasn't stumbled off a parapet and shattered itself.

Khazan III

DC 30

Khazan's ambitions have claimed him. The Dark Powers never share their gifts easily. His mind is eroding. He calls himself Exanther, now. As my architect, the remains of his memories hold value.

Khazan IV (untitled to players)

DC 32

Stellar.

P.S. Khazan is a fool to make his password his own name.

Exethanter

DC 35

I cannot be sure, but I believe his life soul to be stored near his chambers. I could pry and find it, but I fear that would lead to hostilities, which aren't worth my time as it stands. Little remains of his memory. I must record the passwords of the Amber Temple so that they do not pass into the mists of eternity.

Dhaviton.

Thangob.

Shalx.

Etherna.

Other Notes:

- I was influenced to change it up because my players are enjoying reading out letters and such they've gotten so far, and the Tome of Strahd RAW is really really long... Sounds exhausting to have to read out all at once.
- If a party spends 4 hours a day and aces all of their checks, this takes 16 days to fully unlock, 4 days per chapter. Completely unintended, but glad it worked out that way.
- At most I'd give a party 3 tries per day, spending 12 hours straight studying the book. The whole thing can be unlocked in just under 6 days this way.
- If Strahd realizes they discovered the book, he would not immediately attempt to kill them. He trusts his own ciphers. It would only be once they start clearly acting on the information that he would feel concerned.