

Credit and Disclaimer

I took a lot of inspiration from MandyMod's post on the Dark Powers, so go give that a read too!
https://www.reddit.com/r/CurseofStrahd/comments/9zswmf/fleshing_out_curse_of_strahd_runnng_the_dark/

I highly recommend reading DragnaCarta's Curse of Strahd:Reloaded. That is where I got the mountain people mentioned in below from.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FAqpWAJ_yLePTKogV2_TFFhjp2ezWSPIKYyLWjrVbbM/edit

I took a lot of the Dark Powers "intro" speeches from the Elven Tower:

<https://www.elventower.com/the-dark-gifts-the-amber-vaults/>

Disclaimer: I do not own any of the art used for the Dark Powers. If you know who the art belongs to, please let me know so I can give credit is due. I collected this art over a year ago and did not track where I got it from, because at the time I thought it was just going to be used by my players

Warning: Some of the information below is specific to my campaign, and may contradict the book in small ways. There are fewer Dark Powers listed than there are sarcophagi in the book (I said that more of them were destroyed in my campaign for reasons stated below)

Intro

I expanded on the Dark Powers a lot for my run through of Curse of Strahd. This was largely inspired by one of my players, who put in his backstory that he had been captured and experimented on by a cult, and as a result of this experimentation he had been driven slightly insane. He didn't have much information on this cult, so I took that idea and ran with it and decided that cult was attempting to contact one of the Dark Powers (specifically, Sykane)

Hierarchy

The Dark Powers have a hierarchy, and they are all fighting with each other to gain more power. The three most powerful Dark Powers are Vampyre, Tenebrous, and Zhudun, in that order (these are conveniently the three Dark Powers that are more separated from the others in the Amber Temple). The other Dark Powers want to rise in the ranks, but do not currently have the power needed to do so. How do they gain more power? Deals. Making deals with mortals makes the Dark Powers stronger. The deals are all unique to each individual Dark Power, with no two offering the same thing. Recently, Sykane has grown more powerful (partly in thanks to those cultists mentioned before), and has destroyed two other Dark Powers (his should be the only sarcophagus in-tact in his room). He is currently the most powerful of the "lesser" Dark Powers, but is not yet strong enough to challenge the "greater" Dark Powers.

Strahd and Vampyre

Currently, the most powerful Dark Power is Vampyre, and that is all thanks to Strahd. The deal made between Strahd and Vampyre was mutually beneficial. Strahd unlocked the secrets to vampirism and immortality, and Vampyre gained power over the ruler of Barovia, and by extent, of Barovia itself. This catapulted Vampyre to the top of the Dark Power hierarchy. During this campaign, he is the most powerful Dark Power because of the access to the land Vampyre gets through Strahd.

However, this is not a happy relationship. While both parties benefit, they both loathe each other. Strahd controls the mists, keeping all of his subjects trapped. However, Vampyre also can control the mists to some extent, and keeps Strahd himself trapped, fearing he would lose control over Strahd should he have the ability to leave. Strahd resents this control, and Vampyre resents Strahd's arrogance and how he resists his control.

Making and Breaking Agreements

Making a deal with a Dark Power is simple: touch the sarcophagus and agree to the terms (note: I only showed my players the Dark Powers picture if they touched a sarcophagus). When discussing the terms, the players are never directly told what the benefit or consequence will be. The only way to find out is to make the deal. Alternatively, any Dark Power can reach out to a character that has recently died and offer them a deal in return for their life (this was going to be my backup in case any of my PC's died).

A deal can be broken in one of two ways: a greater restoration spell, or by making a deal with a more powerful Dark Power.

Greater restoration can end "One curse, including the target's attunement to a cursed magic item". A deal with a Dark Power is a little more complicated than that, so a Wisdom check is required to successfully break the connection. The DC depends on the strength of the connection. Connections are strengthened by using the gift from the Dark Power. The more the gift is used, the harder the connection is to break. An unsuccessful check results in backlash from the Dark Power of 2d6 psychic damage to both the person casting greater restoration and to the person with whom they have a deal.

Characters can alternatively make a deal with a stronger Dark Power to break their existing connection. They can only ever have one connection at a given time. In my campaign, Sykane could have broken a deal with one of the lesser Dark Powers, and the greater Dark Powers could have broken a deal with any of the lesser Dark Powers (including Sykane).


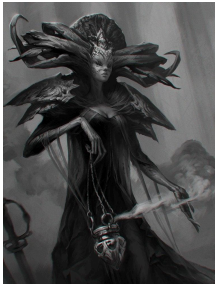

Once Connected

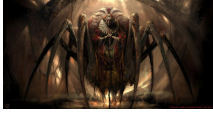
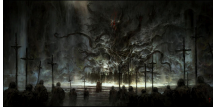
Once the deal is made, the character should be able to use whatever gift was granted to them. They also gain a telepathic connection to the Dark Power. While this allows them to talk to their Dark Power, that doesn't mean the Dark Power will respond. The Dark Powers are selfish beings, and are only interested in what is best for them. They may offer aid occasionally through this link, but that is strictly to protect their "investment", not out of any actual concern for the person they made a deal with.



Below is a table of fall of the revamped Dark Powers, including a picture, what the player hears when they first touch the sarcophagus, the gift they are given, and the consequence. I will include anecdotes from my own campaign below the table as examples.

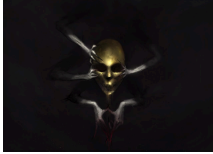
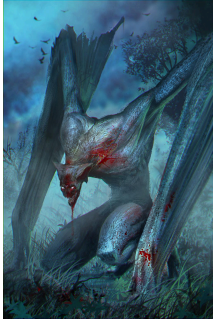

Note 1: Sykane does not have an intro because he was already tied to one of my players

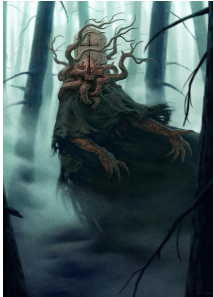
Note 2: I'll admit I never decided on a consequence for a deal with Vampyre or Tenebrous. I wavered between taking control away from the character should they achieve vampiredom or lichdom or coming up with another consequence. However, even if my players took a deal with Vampyre or Tenebrous (they didn't), those two Dark Powers have extra steps involved before actually becoming a Vampire or Lich (refer to the book for details), so I did not think this would be a problem

	Name	<i>Intro</i>	Gift	Consequence
	Sykane, the Soul Hungerer		Ability to change shape	Cha decreases by 2
	Fekre, Queen of Wounds	<i>My name is Fekre, Queen of Wounds. I bid you to accept my gift. It is one of great power. You will be known as one who controls wounds at your command, regardless of the age. Your name will reek of power.</i>	Restore permanent wounds (loss of limbs, etc) (once/long rest) The limb is red and grotesque and has the ability to hurl fire	Each time you use this ability, a random stat will decrease by 1 (roll d6 to determine which) 1=strength 2=dex 3=con 4=int 5=wis 6=cha
	Savnok the Inscrutible	I am Savnok the Inscrutable. You can hear me only because I am letting you, no one can ever read or disrupt my mind. And this power can be yours too, if you accept it	Mind blank spell for one year	You go insane while the spell is in place OR Wisdom decreases by 2

	Tarakamedes the Grave Wyrmling	I am Tarakamedes, the Grave Wyrmling. I offer you a gift of dark power. With it, the sky will be yours and you will find no limit.	Skeletal wings with flying speed of 50'	Walking speed decreased -5'
	Shami-Amourae the Lady of Delights	Ah, a pretty traveller from far lands. When I roamed the world like you, all desires were within my reach. My very word was enough to collect anything or anyone I wished. Do you wish to be as persuasive as I used to be?	Suggestion spell with DC 20 (once/long rest).	Susceptible to suggestion. Disadvantage on all charisma saving throws.
	Drizlash, the Nine-Eyed Spider	A mortal like you is always limited to the ground, do you wish to expand your horizons to walls and ceilings? Spiders can do that, why can't you? Their power is here to take. You just have to reach for it.	Ability to climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.	Lose an arm. Unable to use weapons that require two arms
	Dahlver-Nar, He of Many Lives	How many lives have you lived? Oh, I see...I can feel your lifeline. It's the only one, and there will be no more for you. Unless you accept this gift, that is. I can offer you a sample of immortality.	Auto-reincarnate spell three times.	Healing spells have no effect on you
	Zantras, the Kingmaker	I am known as Zantras, the Kingmaker. They named me such because I hold the power to give you the influence and aura of a king. I can feel it'd do you well. But if you accept, never again will you surrender yourself	Charisma increases by 4 (max 22)	All other stats decrease by 1

		to others. Your will shall supersede anyone else's.		
	Khirad, the Star of Secrets	I am the Star of Secrets and no information shall be hidden from me. Or from you if you accept this deal. Do you crave to know all that which lies beyond your mortal perspectives. It's all here.	Scrying spell (once/long rest)	Your voice is now a whisper, unable to yell.
	Great Taar Haak, the Five-Headed Destroyer	I am the Great Taar Haak, the Five-Headed Destroyer. Weak as you are you'll never scare an insect. I offer you the strength of fire. FIRE! You will then show your friends how strong you are!	Strength increases to 25	Dex decreases to 6
	Yog the Invincible	Interesting...hmmm....you appear healthy, but you could be more. I offer you the resilience of Yog the invincible. Without it, you're just swine. You need this blessing if you are to succeed.	HP max increases by 30	The extra strength takes its toll. You have disadvantage on all constitution saving throws.
	Seriach, the Hell Hound Whisperer	I am Seriach, the Hell Hound Whisperer. I have a special affinity for those foul beasts. See, they come to me when I so wish it. If you accept this gift, I can share them with you, for as long as you take care of them.	Summon two hellhounds (once/long rest)	Vulnerable to cold Everytime the hellhounds are summoned roll a d20. <5 they aren't friendly to you and attack you

	Zrin-Hala, the Restorer	I am Zrin-Hala, the Restorer. I was going to offer you the gift of Restoration, but I can tell you are in need of something else. Something more...specific. A power to deal with the spawn of Vampyr.	Ability to break Strahd's hold on a vampire spawn (once/long rest). They are still spawn but no longer under his control	When you break Strahd's hold, it takes a toll on you, so you follow any direction you hear for the next 24 hours
	Vampyr	So you come here seeking the ancient power source which brought Count Strahd von Zarovich to where he stands. It is curious you are interested in acquiring what he has. Are you trying to fight fire with fire? You must know this gift is not free to take, like so many others in this place. No, there is a price. The price is blood, flowing red and fresh from a recent kill. But not just any blood. It must be the blood of one who loves or reveres you, slain by your hand. If you drink that blood the deal is sealed. Or else...your own blood shall suffice, as long as you're slain by hateful enemies. Only then shall you achieve the glory of immortality.	Learn how to become a vampire	Under Vampyr's control/influence (maybe he'll make you a version of Barovia?)
	Tenebrous	I will exclusively converse with sentient beings educated in the arts of magic. Nothing else interests me more, and you should feel the same. There's not enough time in a life time to unravel all the	Learn how to become a lich	Under Tenebrous' control/influence

		<p>secrets hiding in the weave....What's that? I can hear you thoughts, did you know? I can hear your lament, you'll never be able to know and learn everything. You are mortal and shall never know all arcane secrets. But there is a way to abandon mortaldom and advance. A way to achieve immortality. A secret way to hide one's soul away from the body in order to protect it. I can feel your knowledge of magic is very far from achieving this goal, you are not useful to me. But I feel potential. I'll give you the secret, the arcane recipe. The rest is all on you, maybe some day you'll come back and thank me, just like Exethanter did. Do you accept?</p>		
	<p>Zhudun, the Corpse Star</p>	<p>You're searching for power, I know. Just like many others you come seeking the power over life and death. I am Zhudun, the Corpse Star. I am the master of death. However very few know there is a price. Death is a veil which surrounds the soul, if you want to take it away, you have to wear it yourself. That's how I ended up here, but I can still share a little of that power with you. Just enough for you to make one very</p>	<p>Ability to resurrect one person regardless of when they died. This can only be used once, then the connection with Zhudun is gone.</p> <p>The resurrected person has 25 HP, and these 25HP are connected to the character. If the character takes damage, the resurrected person takes damage, and vice versa.</p>	<p>Corpse-like appearance, following undead traits: -vulnerable to radiant damage -healing doesn't work -HP decreases by 25</p> <p>Once the resurrection is used, the character loses the corpse-like</p>

		important decision.	If the resurrected person reaches 0HP, there are no death saves. Their body immediately starts to decay to the state it was in before they were resurrected	appearance and undead traits.
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Dark Powers in Practice

Below I'll describe what happened with each of the Dark Powers in my campaign (not all of the Dark Powers were used)

Sykane:

As stated above, one of my players had an existing connection to Sykane thanks to a cult that had experimented on him. They had been experimenting on him because he is a changeling and has the ability to shapeshift. Throughout the campaign, he was plagued by nightmares from Sykane, and occasionally premonitions. He had several dreams that hinted at the Amber Temple as a place he needed to go. At one point, Strahd was coming to intercept the party and Sykane sent a telepathic message to the player to "RUN". Because the cult had reached out and forced a connection between the player and Sykane, this was not a typical deal. Sykane took the cult's forced connection as the character's acceptance of the deal. Because the character was a changeling, and Sykane is the Soul Hungerer, when the player arrived at the Amber Temple and made contact with Sykane's sarcophagus, Sykane demanded "his faces" (ie his shapeshifting ability). When he refused, his charisma decreased by 1. When he refused again, his charisma decreased again. The third refusal resulted in him blacking out. When he came to, he realized that he needed to break this connection. The attempt at using greater restoration failed so he went to one of the greater Dark Powers to try to sever this connection (see the Zhudan section).

Savnok:

When Mordenkainen was defeated by Strahd, he actually died and was brought back to life by Savnok. This deal is why Mordenkainen is insane when the players first meet him. My players took Mordenkainen to Kresk and were able to use the Pool to heal his madness, but this did not sever his connection with Savnok. When they arrived at the Amber Temple, Mordenkainen started complaining about a headache, and it only got worse the farther into the temple they went. When they entered the room with Savnok, Mordenkainen collapsed in pain as he suffered a mental attack from a pissed off Savnok. One of the players touched Savnok's sarcophagus in an attempt to stop the attack, and managed to convince Savnok to release Mordenkainen in exchange for some of his wisdom. The player took a -2 hit to his wisdom and Mordenkainen was saved. Two greater restorations brought back his depleted wisdom.

Fekre:

Three characters made deals with Fekre in my campaign (2 NPCs and one PC).

I changed Izek's story so he actually got his arm through a deal with Fekre. The players met him before they knew about Fekre, so they did not know why his arm was like that. By the time they learned about Fekre, they had already killed Izek.

The other NPC was Sigrid, the daughter of the Chief of the Mountain People of Yaedrag. It is a tradition with the Chiefs of Yaedrag for each Chief to make a deal with a Dark Power that would benefit the Mountain People. On her journey to the Amber Temple, she was attacked by the roc. All of the people who traveled with her were killed, and she lost her leg. The players helped her get to Fekre's sarcophagus, where she made a deal to regrow her leg. Because she was already missing a limb, she made a deal to have her own leg regrown rather than gain the ability to regrow other people's limbs. Her new leg is red and grotesque, but functional and strong. She later learns that she has gained the ability to hurl fire from it (equivalent of a firebolt).

In my campaign, the Abbott's power is connected to his wings. When Strahd removed them, he lost most of his power. A simple regenerate spell would reattach his wings, but not restore his power. He needs something greater. The Abbott mentioned to the players that he had heard rumors of such a power in the Amber Temple. One of my players made a deal with Fekre specifically so he could restore the Abbott's wings. He was confused when nothing bad seemed to happen when he first made the deal, and was horrified when used the power and realized his stats randomly decreased. This did not stop him from using it several times:

- he restored the arm of a Vistani woman, taking a -1 to dex. This ended up being bad because he did not warn her about the fire element, and she ended up burning down half of the Vistani village outside of Vallaki because she did not know how to control it (the players had to help put the fire out)
- he restored the hand of another player's father, who had lost it when trying to escape from the werewolves when Strahd attacked. He took a -1 to cha
- Mordenkainen had been captured, and Strahd cut out his tongue to prevent him from casting most of his spells. The players managed to rescue him, and the player restored his tongue, taking a -1 to con (yes, this resulted in a fire-breathing Mordenkainen)
- he restored the Abbott's wings mid-battle against Strahd, taking a -1 to strength and resulting in him no longer being able to wear the heavy armor he had equipped (this was quickly resolved by Strahd simply taking his armor)

Tarakamedes:

The current chief of the Mountain People had taken a deal with Tarakamedes and has massive, skeletal, black wings as a result

Shami-Amourae:

Blinsky had taken a deal with Shami-Amourae, which is why he was successful at selling such awful toys. He also used this ability to get Lady Wachter and her "bookclub" acquitted of all crimes. The players figured out what was happening and killed him

Tenebrous:

Tenebrous has a deal with the two lichs: Exethantar and Khazan

Khazan ended up being a major player in my campaign. Strahd mentions in his tome that he has Khazan's body, but not his head. So I made it so Khazan had attempted to break his connection with Tenebrous, which pissed him off, and as a result Tenebrous will not allow him to regenerate into his full body. Khazan is now manipulating the Mountain People into making deals with the Dark Powers, trying to find the right one to help him break the connection with Tenebrous. The players eventually manage to kill both Khazan and Exethantar.

Zhudan:

My player that had the connection with Sykane made a deal with Zhudan to break the connection with Sykane. Because Zhudan is a greater Dark Power, it worked. The players eventually decided to use the resurrection gift on Strahd's mother (Strahd had Mordenkainen under control of a vampiric charm, and they made a deal with him to resurrect Strahd's mother in exchange for getting Mordenkainen back). She is resurrected, and the player returns to his natural looking state, but realizes he now has a physical connection with her (she gets a papercut, and he also gets a papercut at the same time). When the final fight breaks out, Strahd's mother attempts to stop him from fighting, and Strahd ends up accidentally killing her with one hit (I increased Strahd's stats considerably, so he hit like a truck). The player also took the damage she took, and her body started to decay before anyone had a chance to heal her. This drove Strahd crazy with grief, leading him to make mistakes that the players exploited to finally defeat him.

Moving Forward

Because Tenebrous has lost both of his lich's, he has lost power, and because Fekre's power has been used so much throughout Barovia, she is gaining power. Post-campaign, Fekre will rise to be a greater Dark Power, while Tenebrous becomes a lesser Dark Power. My campaign is now transitioning into Out of the Abyss, and I am going to have some of the Dark Power, now free from the mists, make deals with the demons from that campaign and be the root cause of all the chaos (and who knows, we may see a resurrected Strahd at the end)