

RAISING THE STAKES

THE ESSENTIAL CURSE OF STRAHD COMPANION

VISTANI CHARACTER BACKGROUND

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CURSE OF STRAHD

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A MODULE GUIDE FROM LUNCH BREAK HEROES

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This guide was made possible through the generous support of the following patrons.

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VISTANI CHARACTERS

Vistani are unique among the people of Barovia in that they can leave that cursed land whenever they please. And yet, even more remarkably, they choose to live in Barovia, most of the time. Their reasons for this are manifold: some of them just never knew any other life, some serve Strahd, and some work against Strahd and don't want to abandon the people of Barovia. The Vistani are a unique culture with strong traditions, rooted in their unique position as travelers between Barovia and the other planes.

The information here will allow you to create a playable character with a Vistani background for use in your game. This can be in *Curse of Strahd* or any other adventure of your choosing.

"We had a hard long day on the road behind us, and were desperately looking for a place to camp among this inhospitable wilderness. The howling of the wolves had followed us the whole day, and we could not find any spot that seemed defensible. This is when we noticed the campfires through the trees—and very different sounds echoed through the woods: music, singing... and bright laughter! It's dangerous to approach any other travelers in these lands—you never know if you're about to wake up with a knife in your back if you share a camp with strangers—but we were desperate enough to chance it.

As we slunk from the trees and into the brightly lit clearing, the music stopped for a beat—but then the people in front of us were all smiles and open arms, waving us closer and pressing mugs of mulled wine into our freezing hands. Every inch of their wagons was carved with cheery patterns and painted in bright, colorful scenes. Their dashing clothes and cheerful manner seemed to push back all the darkness around us and warmed our hearts more than the brightest campfire.

We knew, of course, who they were in an instant, even though none of us had ever exchanged so much as a nod with their folk before—Vistani. I know not if the old tales to frighten children still have some truth to them; all I can say is that they took us in as if we were their own, that night. We shared food and stories, and I know not if all I saw that night was trickery or true magic—it did not seem to make much difference. When we awoke the next morning, however—they were gone. Wagon and horse; men, women and children—gone, as if the wind had scattered them like a handful of leaves. I cannot account for it to this day, and it does strike me as creepy, I cannot lie. But I know this—if you ever encounter a Vistana, you'll not likely forget them soon."

— Habalt Grent, Barovian fur trader

VISTANI TRAITS

VISTANI FREEDOMS

One of the most central motivations for any player character in *Curse of Strahd* is to escape Strahd's cursed land. Since nobody can pass the mists of Barovia without perishing, unless Strahd is defeated, they immediately gain a strong incentive to confront Strahd. For Vistani characters, this is not the case—they can leave Barovia whenever they please. Consequently, Vistani characters need a different motivation to participate in this adventure. This could be that they have seen the evil the devil Strahd has done first hand all their life, and they feel compelled to finally put an end to him.

The feeling of being trapped is a strong contributor to how well *Curse of Strahd* works, as an adventure setting. The feeling of having nowhere else to go supports the horror of the setting and drives the characters inexorably towards the final confrontation with Strahd. Additionally, having to rely solely on what resources they can scavenge from Barovia and the allies they make here, gives the adventure a very unique flavor. Playing a Vistana could potentially disrupt this, so it may be good to have a chat about this with any Vistana player beforehand. You might also want to impose a limitation for travel through the mists for your Vistana player. Maybe crossing the mists is possible only at certain pre-ordained times, such as the winter solstice, even for Vistani. Or maybe Strahd has taken note of the player character and taken away that Vistana's ability to leave Barovia.

FAMILIES AND CLANS

Vistani usually grow up in tight-knit families, which are embedded into wider—often sprawling—clan structures. Vistani have, throughout their varied history, often been ostracized by other cultures, always the foreigners, even in the lands they grew up in. This is the main reason they have learned to rely on each other to such a great extent. It is not that they are isolationist or aloof by nature; it is a lifestyle pressed on them by circumstance. Vistani typically thrive in their families, and stick together through good and bad. As in any family, there can be conflict, but the Vistani take care of their own and resolve any conflict as amicably as possible.

Each Vistani family is part of a larger clan structure called a "tasque". These tasques form a sort of extended family and culture that each Vistana is a part of. One who is familiar with Vistani culture can often discern which tasque a Vistana is from within a few minutes of meeting them.

GLAMOROUS WANDERERS

Many Vistani wander away from their families, be it alone or with groups of friends or found families, at least for some periods of their lives. Some Vistani stay away from their families forever, finding happiness among foreigners, while others return home eventually, happy to fall back into the loving arms of their blood relatives.

A proud Vistana is often instantly identified, standing out with their confident demeanor and bold appearance. However, some people and cultures still harbor prejudice against Vistani. As such, some Vistana will choose to blend in to the local culture rather than stand out while traveling.

Many people are enticed by the reputation of Vistani as entertainers and craftspeople, and by their knowledge of magic and lore, and treat them as honored guests. Anyone who spends time with a Vistana, and has an open mind, usually learns that the negative prejudices against Vistani are not true at all.

MAGIC AND MYSTERY

There is an air of mystery surrounding the Vistani. Some of it is carefully cultivated by the Vistani to keep themselves safe, and some of it is attributed by superstitious outsiders. It is true, however, that some Vistani have an uncanny knack for magic and even a gift for supernatural foresight.

Regardless of their actual abilities, Vistana often make a living as entertainers, amazing their audiences with their sheer skill, magic tricks, and true magic alike. It is thus difficult to tell when a Vistana is actually performing real magic and when they are using carefully crafted phantasmagoria.

THE VISTANI AND STRAHD

Strahd has made some Vistani his servants. Most of the deeply prejudiced and suspicious Barovians therefore assume that all Vistani do the devil's bidding. This is not so—a great many Vistani actively work against Strahd. They have long played a complicated double-game with the lord of Barovia, often making difficult decisions oscillating between the two conflicting poles of not tipping-off Strahd to their true intentions and not perpetuating his evil.

Strahd often does not know which Vistana he can trust, but he is bound by his own oath—made long ago—to protect them and offer them safe passage through the mists of Barovia.

VISTANI NAMES

Vistani are given a name at birth, or within their first few months of life if their parents are more traditional and first wish to see if the child will live before they form any lasting attachment by giving it a name. It is not unheard of that a Vistana later changes their given birth name or adopt an epithet. Each Vistana is born into a close-knit family and usually a wider, often sprawling, clan structure. Most Vistani are tightly integrated into this social network and wear their family name proudly.

Male Names: Advan, Alexi, Alin, Andari, Bartolome, Cyril, Giacomo, Inarin, Keldro, Mateusz, Mikhail, Nikolaus, Petja, Raul, Vinchenzo, Zsalev

Female Names: Aisha, Arabella, Daria, Ethel, Eva, Gitana, Ina, Ingrid, Isabella, Lara, Leyla, Lucia, Magdalena, Marcella, Marushka, Reluca, Tal

Family and Clan Names: See the different Vistani *tasques* below.

Vistani Epithets: Madam, Monsieur, Old, the Wanderer, the Seer, the Magnificent, the Gentleman

VISTANI TRAITS

Vistani derive certain traits from being rooted deeply in their shared traditions.

Ability Score Increase. Reflecting the versatility of the Vistani, you can increase one ability score of your choice by 1.

Age. Vistani generally live as long and age as quickly as other humans, although some seem to have unnaturally long life spans.

Alignment. As freedom-loving people, Vistani tend towards chaotic alignments, across the whole spectrum from good (if they oppose Strahd) to evil (if they serve Strahd). Neutral alignments are common as well, while lawful alignments are rare among them.

Size. Vistani have the same range of height as any other group of humans. Your size is Medium.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Mistwalker. You can pass through the mists of Barovia unhindered, but you cannot take anyone not of Vistani blood with you.

Vistani Curse. As an action, you can curse another humanoid. You can target another humanoid within 30 feet of you that you can see. You can't utter another such curse before finishing a long rest, and the previous one ends as soon as you utter a new curse.

The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw to avoid the curse. The saving throw DC is 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier. The curse lasts until you utter another curse, end it as a bonus action, or until it is removed with a remove curse spell, a greater restoration spell, or similar magic.

When the curse is uttered, you suffer a harmful psychic backlash, representing the toll upon your soul for interfering with another creature's mind or body in this way. You take this damage whether the curse takes effect on the target or not. For this reason, many Vistani use their ability to curse others sparingly and reserve this for people who dealt them a grave insult or injury. The amount of the psychic damage depends on the severity of the curse you invoked.

You can choose the curse's effect from the options below, which increase in severity as you gain levels:

- The target's appearance changes in a sinister yet purely cosmetic way. For example, the curse can place a scar on the target's face, turn the target's teeth into yellow fangs, or give the target bad breath. When you utter this curse, you take 1d6 psychic damage.
- Starting from 5th level, you can curse a target to gain disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws tied to one ability score of your choice. When you utter this curse, you take 3d6 psychic damage.
- Starting from 9th level, you can blind or deafen a target, or both. When you utter this curse, you take 5d6 psychic damage.

Evil Eye. As an action, you can target a creature within 10 feet of you that you can see. This magical ability, which the Vistani call the Evil Eye, duplicates the duration and effect of the animal friendship, charm person, or hold person spell (your choice), but requires neither somatic nor material components. The spell save DC is 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier. If the target succeeds on the save, you are blinded until the end of your next turn.

After you use Evil Eye, you can't use it again before finishing a long rest. Once a target succeeds on a saving throw against your Evil Eye, it is immune to the Evil Eye of all Vistani for 24 hours.

Languages. Vistani can speak, read, and write Common and one additional language of their choice, that they learned on their extensive travels. The speech of Vistani may be liberally peppered with colorful phrases and proverbs, and is sometimes colored with the particular accent of their clan.

VISTANI TASQUES

Each Vistana grows up with the traditions and customs of their tasque. A tasque is, loosely speaking, a kind of Vistani "nation", although it is more accurate to think of them as collections of clans with a shared history and similar culture. Vistani gain additional features based on their tasque ancestry.

BOEM TASQUE

The Boem tasque values artistry, storytelling, and companionship. They are renowned performers and generally outgoing, always glad to meet new people and show their skills. More than any other group of Vistani, members of the Boem tasque are driven by an insatiable wanderlust. Because they interact with foreign cultures and people of vastly different temperaments on a regular basis, Boem Vistani are easy-going and skilled in defusing potentially dangerous situations.

Boem Tasque Family and Clan Names: Bogarav, Corvara, Naiat, Radanavich, Simiuka, Skurra

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 2.

Persuasive. You have proficiency in the Persuasion skill.

Charming and Disarming. You know the friends cantrip. When you reach 3rd level, you can cast the charm person spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. When you reach 5th level, you can cast the calm emotions spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Charisma is your spell-casting ability for these spells.

KALDRESH TASQUE

Many of the Vistani's most lauded craftspeople and artists come from the Kaldresh tasque. The Kaldresh value hard work and dedication to their chosen craft. They often travel to trade their goods, but they usually travel less light than other Vistani—they prefer wagons to horses, and lavishly decorate and outfit their mobile homesteads. Among the Vistani, they come closest to sedentary homemakers.

Kaldresh Family and Clan Names: Equaar, Kamii, Kulchevich, Moslavaric, Vatraska

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2.

Crafting Expertise. You gain proficiency with one type of artisan's tools of your choice. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses your chosen tools.

Magic Touch. You are adept at improving manufactured items of all kinds on the fly but, while quickly applied, your magic touch sadly is not permanent.

During a long rest, you can spend 1 hour honing the properties of a mundane weapon, shield, or set of armor. The chosen item gains +1 to attack rolls and damage rolls if it is a weapon, or +1 to AC if it is a shield or a piece of armor. The improvement lasts for 24 hours or until you apply your magic touch to another item.

MANUSA TASQUE

The Manusa tasque is the most enigmatic among the Vistani. They are generally more introspective, and value history and arcane lore greatly. The Manusa tasque has produced many great magic practitioners, combining an innate talent with their tasque's accumulated knowledge. Tales of great seers and even a non-linear relationship with time among some of the Manusa clans have further added to their mystery.

Manusa Family and Clan Names: Canjar, Hyskosa, Tekash, Zarovan

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 2.

Traditional Knowledge. You have proficiency in one of the following skills of your choice: Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion.

Precognition. You sometimes receive flashes of sudden insight into the immediate future. These only ever pertain to others, for no Vistana can see their own future. When one of your allies you can see within 30 feet of you fails a saving throw, you can use your reaction to allow them to repeat the saving throw, as you shout out just in time to alert them of the coming danger. Your ally must use the new roll. After you used this trait, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.