

The Black Keep of Stanlaw

Austin Rode and David Stucker

Three centuries ago, the wicked baron Godric constructed this keep outside of the hamlet of Stanlaw. From atop the hill, the baron maintained a reign of terror over the village, studying dark sorceries, pursuing forbidden knowledge, and consorting with demons. One night, the keep was struck by a bolt of lightning, killing the baron and all those inside.

Stanlaw: A small village with a few houses, an inn, and a marketplace. The keep sits atop a barren hill, upon which nothing will grow, and covered with the bones of birds and other small animals.

The tower contains fragments of a crystal ball, shattered and charred. On the largest piece is the negative image of a handprint.

The lord's chamber contains a bed, a chest, tapestries, a desk with a bell and candelabra, and a copy of the Book of Dead. An armor-clad figure remains gripping the ladder to the towers above, withered and twisted. His armor is of a style from the past century.

The great hall contains long tables and benches, along with silverware. Skeletons litter the floor, seemingly fallen all at once in the throes of a depraved feast. An overlooking gallery contains several small tables and chairs, along with a lute and a book of rhetoric. Looking down, you are briefly stricken with a vision of the wicked revelries below.

Inside, the walls show signs of fire, and the floor is covered with the innumerable bones of dead birds and small animals. The tattered remains of tapestries are stirred by the wind from an open window.

A cellar-like storage space. Contains ruined tools and hardware, along with a strange stone jar decorated with an animal head on the lid (a canopic jar), a strange, scaled hide (that of a crocodile), and a large gold oil lamp — souvenirs of the baron's travels.

GM's Note: Baron Godric, also known as the Witch of Stanlaw was a scholar of dark magic and forbidden knowledge. During his life, he made numerous trips to distant lands to gather lost knowledge and artifacts. His most fruitful were to the desert lands lying far to the south. There, within an ancient rock cut tomb, he found papyrus manuscripts said to hold the secrets of life and death. It would become the center of his occult practice, culminating in a dark ritual in the presence of his gathered consorts — all within meeting their doom as a bolt of lightning struck the keep. The ruin has been seemingly cursed, and the baron's spirit still haunting its parapets; his treasure never looted, and his sorceries unlearned.

A wealthy man, the baron's chest contains 127 pence, 32 groats, and 13 nobles, along with a ruby worth one pound. A golden lamp worth seven pounds is in the cellar, along with the baron's other curios.

The baron's spirit takes the form of a partially skeletal revenant, charred and burned. Despite rumors otherwise, he is unwilling to grant an audience, instead howling and shrieking madly, cursing those who disturb him, and striking with his sword.

Curses (1d8):

1. Exsanguination
2. Horrible disfigurement (head on backwards)
3. Collapses ruins
4. Turns all treasure to lead
5. Strangulation
6. Turns your tongue to stone
7. Burns you alive from the inside out
8. Total amnesia

Rumor Table (1d6): While in the village, have each party member roll for a rumor they hear about the ruins.

1. The last man who visited the ruins returned strangely and horribly disfigured (True)
2. The baron and his consorts held a debauched feast on a fast day, the wicked revelers inside perishing to a man as the keep was set ablaze by lightning. The only survivor was a servant, spared because of his good spirit. (True)
3. The baron trapped a demon in a gemstone to guard his great treasure. (False)
4. The baron was falsely accused of sorcery in life and murdered by his rivals. (False)
5. If you stand atop the tower at the witching hour, the baron will appear, granting an audience. (False; he is liable appear anywhere at any time)
6. At the witching hour, every living thing on the hill is stricken dead. (True)

The entrance is 15' up, the wooden stairs long rotted away, the nearby retaining wall crumbling and unsteady.