

SOOTWYN BARROW

THE GRIT SYSTEM REMIX





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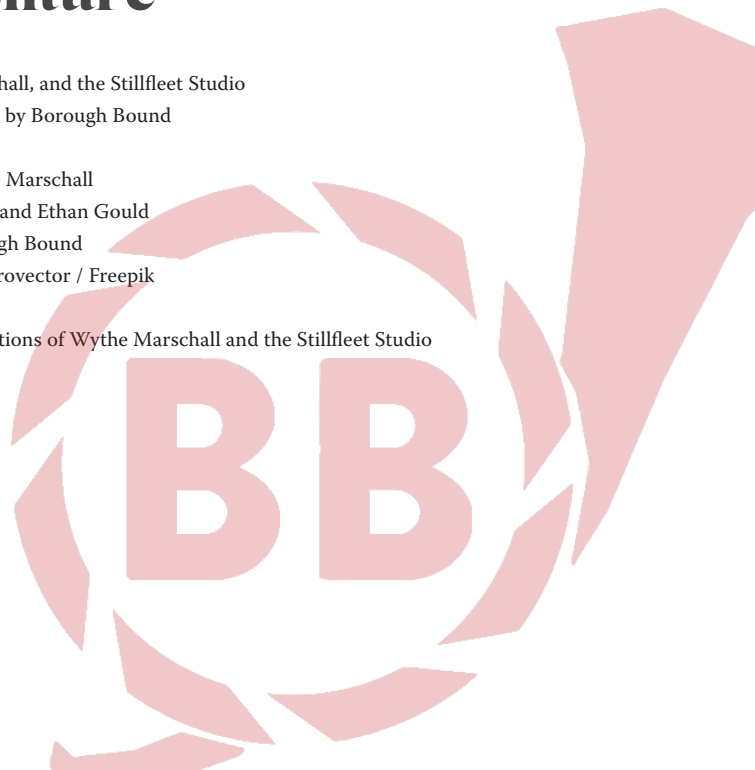
**a Borough Bound × Stillfleet Studio
mini-venture**

by Borough Bound, Wythe Marschall, and the Stillfleet Studio
based on original content by Borough Bound

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beast skull icon by macrovector / Freepik

The Grit System, *Stillfleet*, and *The Fourth Day* are creations of Wythe Marschall and the Stillfleet Studio

2023



Part the 1st

Introduction



Something a little different

The following venture is an authorized adaptation of the work of [Borough Bound](#), who create unique speculative cities—fully illustrated, mapped, and soundtracked—for use in TTRPGs. This version of the venture provides rules for running it using the **Grit System**, which is the system underlying the sci-fi game [Stillfleet](#). That said, this venture occurs in a fantasy-horror setting and is rogue-like in nature. Here, curses and other magicks are real. Thus, we have changed all science-fictional terms to their fantasy equivalents and provided pre-generated fantastical (anti-)heroes at the end.

If you like this setting and adaptation, please consider supporting both Borough Bound and Stillfleet on Patreon. The Stillfleet Studio is currently working on two different fantasy games using the Grit System, one wacky (*The Sometimes Kingdom*) and one melancholy (*The Fourth Day*). Each offers unique new twists on the core rules and plenty of bizarre powers, encounters, and items. The present venture has been adapted per the rules of *The Fourth Day* by Wythe Marschall.

Where is Sootwyn Barrow?

The intention of this mini-venture is to provide the first standalone playable fantasy scenario for the Grit System, the system that underlies *Stillfleet* as well as other forthcoming games by the Stillfleet Studio.

That said, Sootwyn Barrow can easily fit into the game world of *Stillfleet* proper. To start, the city may exist on a province: we suggest an already-medieval and haunted-feeling minor province such as Pays, Pazūzūn, or Uricon.

Sootwyn Barrow may also be a sort of Escheresque nightmare-scape—a purgatory or hell for a party of void-miners who have run afoul of or been killed by a cthulhicate such as the Dreameater Baku (of course) or the Mindfang Raa'dthazel (an *yllythnar* aligned with the Antiprism).

If you run this venture in the context of a *Stillfleet* campaign, please read all instances of “magic” as “the hell science,” “spell” as “hell science power,” and so on.

On Malgath—the world of *The Fourth Day*—Sootwyn Barrow can be placed anywhere in the temperate zones of Vanat—perhaps along the densely wooded border of the tiny baronies of Lwutrestel and Mirrobrak in the Slumbering Realms.

The Fourth Day at a glance

The Fourth Day is a dark fantasy Grit System game set in a world populated by ageless sapients such as **Dvergarim** (“Dwarves”), **Ælfir** (pron. “EEL-fear”—“Elves”), and **Marak** (“Angels” or “Devils”) as well as—of course—distinctly not-ageless humans.

This world has experienced four “days” (centuries-long ages): during the **First Day** (the age of philosopher-queens), the slow and steady Dvergarim, few in numbers, ruled the wild world from beneath the mountains. They meditated on creativity and magick, eventually crafting companions—the Ælfir—in order to share their joy in creation. The new sapients quickly outnumbered the Dvergarim, who were by and large content to remain in their deep-hidden ateliers. (Dvergarim found above-ground today are like sleepers in *Stillfleet*—amnesiacs, outcasts, and survivors.)

During the **Second Day** (the age of feudal baronies), the relentlessly energetic Ælfir ruled the world from the diverse above-ground lands, developing what we might call constitutional politics and magick-fueled mass media. Their day ended when the elites among the lithe immortals of the wood and plains and ice voted to create their own companion-creature—but one with a built-in curb against the usurpation of worldly power: mortality. Despite this curb, the new people, humanity, were prideful and fecund. Where the immortals’ cultures had grown out of leisurely hours of experience, the mortals’ were born of privation, oppression, necessity, and haste. Thus humans fought elves for control of the world in the **All-Song War**, weapons rapidly advanced in power, and darkness reigned.

At the close of the war, all were exhausted. A new generation looked in horror upon the actions of the old regime. This was the dawn of the **Third or Final Day** (the age of liberal nation-states and capitalism), after which there were to be no more wars—no more “history” in the bad old sense. All conflicts would be replaced with trade. All camps would find some way to agree and prosper together. (And with many half-elves now populating the lands between the queendoms of the immortals and the mortals, this was imagined to be inevitable.)

Over time, power consolidated around a single peacemaker—according to the myths, a sorcerer and scientist without parallel who devolved the functions of surveillance, invention, law, policymaking, and the ordinary management of civil society onto thinking machynes. Elected prince of peace over mortals and immortals alike, this leader took the title of **MALGÄTHI**, the meaning of which has been lost. They were to be the last prince, because after them, politics itself would

dissolve—thanks to techno-magickal planning and the tireless labor of their many powerful “consultants” (biomechanical golems called Marak)—into a smooth skein of productive, reproductive, and purely entertaining activities, machyne-controlled, no longer requiring or even allowing the involvement of the masses...

Something went wrong, so badly that today much of the world’s land is an inhospitable waste in which only the Marak can dwell. The wastes creep westward from the irradiated ruins of the MALGÄTHI’s Thronelands. Today, the name of the world itself has been lost: people call it “Malgath,” so as not to forget the hubris of the past. Today is the noon of the **Fourth Day**: the age of the post-apocalyptic reformulation of societies—of rediscovery or repression, ecosocialism or ecofascism, unity in the face of climate disruption or xenophobia and warlordism. It is your day.

Differences between games

Because *The Fourth Day* is a Grit System game, it works interoperably with *Stillfleet*: you roll dice corresponding to different scores, using COM to attack, MOV to dodge, WIL to perceive, and so on. Even without providing a quickstart rulebook (yet!), you can easily GM and play through this venture if you are familiar with the rules of *Stillfleet*. Suffice to say, here “magick” is used in place of “the hell science” (though magick is also viewed with great suspicion by most people), day-cult affiliation re-

places hustles and teloi (cults grant characters advantages and constrain them with disadvantages, like hustles), and there are far fewer technical artifacts.

In fact, the main mechanical difference between the games is that, in *The Fourth Day*, complex technical and magickal artifacts are extremely rare, and there aren’t as many powerful missile weapons or forms of highly effective armor made of neomaterials. Characters must rely more on their own powers and pre-industrial weapons (swords and arrows). Otherwise, players familiar with *Stillfleet* will not find the rules surprising.

Beyond mechanics, this game explores a different set of political tensions than those explored in *Stillfleet*: in *The Fourth Day*, the memory of the failures of liberal democratic governance and capitalist production and exchange are only a few centuries old—not millions—and thus still raw. At the same time, unlike in the case of the Worshipful Co. and its many clients/partners/victims, the societies of *The Fourth Day* are fully medieval. Should they rebuild a techno-magickal industrial base or not? How should they organize themselves, now that enclaves based on immortality are broken, in retreat, or forever changed by migration?

These are the themes simmering beneath your explorations of cities of rainbow-colored tiles haunted by the magi-holographick “ghosts” of the dead Chromatocracy of the Sapphire Ælves before they retreated into their castles floating above the high Idlespires... Like we said: it’s your day to live!

Mapping Sootwyn Barrow

The map at right depicts the Unsanguine Gate and the main road through the once sleepy—but now sleepless—village of Sootwyn Barrow. A later map shows the outside of Vasile’s grand tomb, to the east of the village.

For more maps and variants, head to boroughbound.com/sootwyn-barrow.



Part the 2nd

Sootwyn Barrow



Cursed to be unsanguine; lords of an unholy cemetery; a Stain on the soil

There is a town astride a tomb on an earthen mound. This town is sick. Its residents linger in unlife, serving the brutal lords of their Barrow. The land is scarred with wicked magicks, and all those who enter carry the Stain. There is no returning from ***Sootwyn Barrow***.

When you enter this town, you are cursed with the ***Sootwyn Stain*** (see below). This mark renders you unliving and unliving. Once scarred by curse, there is no hope. The only end to the suffering is the unavoidable slow embrace of the void... not a true “death,” but a reduction to constituent parts: fear, bones, and a severed life force in the clutches of a vampyre king.

Vasile Albescu (see “The false vampyre”) and his consort Ingrid Dreth’al (see “The cemetery”) have constructed these magicks to serve wicked aims. The Sootwyn Stain is a tap that drains vitality from those foolish enough to enter the nightmarescape. Victims gradually degenerate into skeletons under Ingrid’s control while Vasile—a refined “vampyre” who avoids drinking blood directly when he can—feasts on the ambient life force he has stolen. The dark siphon is amplified by terror, and so Vasile has tasked the beastmen Beshik and Haun to further antagonize anyone cursed with the Stain.

The vampyre king of the unsanguine, the unlying necromancer, and the sporting beastmen duo. These four vile creatures are ***Lords of the Barrow***, and they have caused untold anguish for naïve travelers, captured criminals, and would-be heroes alike. The town is a blight on the realm, but it is one that neighboring nobles and their knights have given up trying to cleanse. None have overcome the Sootwyn Stain, and none could dare face the Barrow Lords. There is no hope. At least the Barrow Lords never leave their domain... or at least, they haven’t yet.

What is Sootwyn Barrow?

Sootwyn Barrow is more *dungeon* than city. Yes, there is a town and there are inhabitants, but most everything in Sootwyn Barrow is an immediate threat to the adventurers. This is a spooky, gothic town filled with classic monster tropes.

Adventures in Sootwyn Barrow will tend to follow a particular rhythm. The players wake up in the Twilight Bethel, do their best to make their way into Vasile’s tomb, and then inevitably die, only to reawaken back in the

chapel. An ideal quest in Sootwyn Barrow will involve roughly 3 to 5 “loops,” with each attempt dramatically different based on both chance and the consequences of the players’ actions. In order to make these sessions satisfying, it is strongly encouraged that you balance encounters such that the odds are stacked against the players. They should only be able to succeed by exploiting weaknesses in their foes, mastering their environment, and finding creative solutions to the known threats.

There are a few keys to remember when GMing Sootwyn Barrow:

- ✦ **The players cannot die** and will always reawaken in the Twilight Bethel at sunset.
- ✦ **The Barrow Lords and their servants also cannot die**, but they may begin each evening wherever they please.
- ✦ **Escaping** before seeing the adventure through is possible but comes with a massive drawback for the adventurers (see “The Sootwyn Stain”).
- ✦ **The other creatures are intelligent:** they remember the adventurers’ actions and will change their plans and strategies accordingly. As the players learn, so too do the monsters.
- ✦ **There should always be an element of randomness.** This isn’t *Groundhog Day*. The monsters aren’t locked into a set routine. If you want this to be a truly scary adventure, the players need to be frequently surprised.
- ✦ **Keep combat quick.** This arc will get tedious if every casual skeleton battle takes hours.
- ✦ **Failure is an option.** If the players get defeated enough times, you can decide that their PCs devolve into skeletons and then tell them to roll up new characters. There’s no fun in running this over and over until it gets boring.

Why go to Sootwyn Barrow?



Most travelers know to avoid the town. Some know to avoid it but choose to enter the accursed deadlands nonetheless. Some are deposited outside the gates as punishment for a crime. None who enter ever leave. That said, there are still reasons to travel to Sootwyn Barrow:

- Heroism
- Punishment
- Saving a loved one
- Seeking immortality via the Stain
- Stopping the bands of roving skeletons
- Treasure!

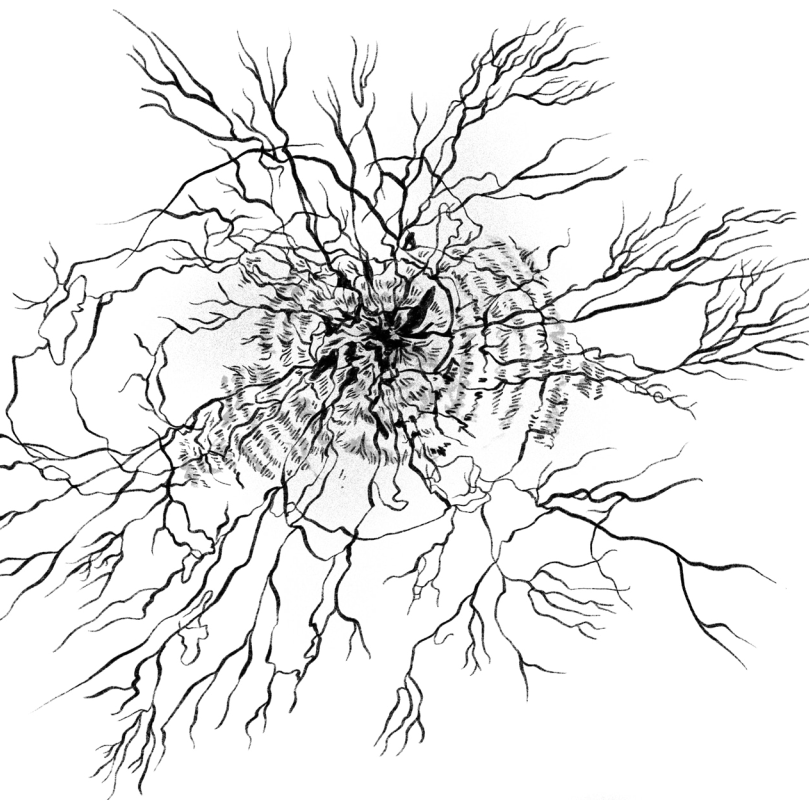
‡ Vasile Albescu is not really a vampyre. However, you should always refer to him as “the vampyre king,” and it should be exceedingly difficult for the players to discover the truth of his pathetic existence before they reach his tomb.

The Sootwyn Stain

Once a traveler enters the Barrow, they receive the curse. It does not matter whether they open the gate or hop over its iron bars. It does not matter if they tunnel below or soar over it magickally. Any sapient being who makes their way across that threshold gains the mark.

The Sootwyn Stain appears somewhere on the traveler’s flesh (or scales, exoskeleton, etc.) and cannot be removed by any means. If the traveler attempts to carve it off their skin—or even amputate the afflicted body part—the Stain will reappear somewhere else in a searing burst of dark magick. There have been tales of travelers who have willingly flayed themselves alive to remove the taint of the mark. Of course, by the next sunset, their torn skin had returned.

The Stain appears like an additional set of veins, rippling and throbbing across the skin of any it afflicts. Some have also compared its appearance to that of a fungus, a lichen, the rings of a tree, or a spider web. The truth is that the Stain is unrelated to any naturally occurring phenomenon. It is an eldritch drain that takes a uniquely profane shape. Once a traveler becomes afflicted, they will likely see the wicked pattern all across Sootwyn Barrow.



Effects of the Stain

The Sootwyn Stain is a complex curse.

The first effect that victims will likely notice is a profound weakness to the daytime. When the sun rises, anyone who has fallen prey to the Stain suffers immense pain and then falls unconscious. This effect persists no matter where the victim flees, and it does not matter whether or not they can see the sun. There are tunnels deep under Sootwyn Barrow, carved by desperate travelers hoping to escape the painful burst of energy that knocks them unconscious each sunrise. There is no breaking free from the curse, no matter how deep one goes or even if one can manage to escape the city. When the sun rises, the victim falls. When the sun sets again, the victim rises.

This is the moment when many victims will discover a curious side effect of the curse: any injuries incurred during the night gradually heal during the daylight hours. Amputated limbs regenerate, parasites wither, and potent toxins are purged. Even death can reverse itself. The Stain will not allow one to find relief in passing. A slain victim returns to life between sunrise and sunset. A destroyed body will materialize out of thin air if it has to.

Were it not for the *rest* of the curse, this would be an unbelievable blessing. The Stain is—in one idiosyncratic way—a form of immortality. Of course, there is a catch.

Over time, a victim of the Stain becomes increasingly *unsanguine*. The Stain saps the victim’s lifeforce, replacing hope and vitality with malaise and weakness. Those bearing the mark lose focus, can’t think straight, and abandon prior convictions. In time, skin, muscle, and organs slough off, though the victim is fully numbed to the pain by then. In the curse’s final stages, all that remains of the marked traveler is an animate skeleton, barely conscious and loyal only to the Lords of the Barrow.

GMing the Stain

The Sootwyn Stain is the central mechanic of this venture. It will dramatically impact how you run sessions in Sootwyn Barrow, transforming the standard pace and rhythm of your sessions. It will likely take some getting used to, both for you and your players. It also requires a bit of buy-in. Once the PCs have entered Sootwyn Barrow, you are committed to seeing this through.

And if one of your players says, “oh, but I have a power/spell/item that prevents me from getting cursed!” tell them that this curse is far more powerful than whatever they were planning to use. Perhaps throw them a bone and allow them to avoid one of the effects—maybe the searing pain caused by the sunrise.

HOW THE STAIN WORKS

When a PC drops to zero pool (dies) or makes it to dawn while cursed by the Sootwyn Stain—that is, after entering Sootwyn Barrow once—they revive the next night just after dusk in the Twilight Bethel with full HEA and GRT. They are free of all non-magickal conditions (*bleed, burn, etc.*), although powerful magicks that last more than one day may still be in effect. They regain lost limbs, and they gain no scars other than the marks of the Stain itself.

During the night, healing powers work normally on individuals afflicted with the Stain, but ordinary pool recovery through resting does not. (Plus, this would require finding or creating a safe place to rest in the middle of the haunted town while being hunted by beastmen and skeletons.) The dreamless day-sleep caused by the Stain replaces “rest” in any conventional sense.

In addition, each night upon waking, each PC must make a standard (6+) **WIL/resist world** check: failure on this check means that the Stain’s unsanguinity has progressed, and the character’s will (WIL) score drops by one die type. A failure with WIL d4 drops the die to d3, and a failure with WIL d3 leads to permanent character loss. Note, you can boost these checks, but a roll of 1 is always a failure. (And the spent GRT can be hard to regain given the lack of pool recovery and the likelihood that you’ll shortly be in a running fight with beastmen and skeletons.)

Players: ham this up! Each time you die and rise again, you lose a little bit of vitality; the Stain creeps like warm, dark gray lichen across your cheeks; you cough painlessly, with a subsonic hint of rattling bones... When you fail a check against the Stain, *definitely* act up: you’re becoming a skeleton! It’s freaky!

The Unsanguine Gate

A gnarled, wrought iron fence surrounds Sootwyn Barrow, with its sharp edges pointed inward. The Barrow Lords are not concerned with keeping people out but with keeping them in. It’s trivially easy to climb this fence from the outside and jump down into the village beyond, thereby irreversibly cursing oneself.

However, the more ceremonial entrance is through the **Unsanguine Gate**. Any traveler who makes their way through this gate is seen as honorable in the eyes of the Barrow Lords and is allowed to choose where the Sootwyn Stain appears on their body. It is also said that the beastmen are extra impressed by those who elect to announce their presence with such an audacious arrival.

Visitors who travel through the gate wake up with gifts from the sporting duo in their pockets: **badges** left over

from the Third Day that look like emerald biomechanical beetles filled with pomegranate seeds—cut-open, wriggling, dying, but never dead. Each of these is worth 60 guilders to a collector in a major city. (If a beetle is squashed, however, it spews forth a column of intense light, acting as a beacon so that the hunters can track them down and do battle...)

Regardless of how the party enters the city, the fun begins immediately. If the sun is up, the adventurers collapse and wake up in the Twilight Bethel at sundown. If night has fallen, the nightmare commences at once.

The Twilight Bethel

In most instances, new arrivals spend their first evening in Sootwyn Barrow terrified and running. When eventually the sun rises, or they are slain by one of the town’s vile inhabitants, they awaken in the **Twilight Bethel**, a chapel on an upper floor of one of the malformed towers in the village.

Skeletal servants, now immune to the sun’s harmful rays, are tasked with tracking unconscious victims and hauling them back to the Twilight Bethel each day. The Barrow Lords once left their comatose subjects to remain where they fell, but after a few too many complications, they decided it was best to collect each Stained drifter and bring them to a central location.

Every night, the adventurers awaken in the Twilight Bethel. They see stone statues of the Barrow Lords mocking them for yet another failed attempt at escape. If there are other travelers in Sootwyn Barrow who have yet to become fully unsanguine, they are here in the small moonlit chapel as well.

The Twilight Bethel is, in some ways, a safe space. The beastmen do not hunt indoors, and the haunted beings who live in town will not terrorize their prey until the hopeless travelers exit the chapel. Many terrified victims have withered away without ever leaving the Twilight Bethel, emerging from the tower only when they’ve become an unthinking skeleton.

Note, there are likely to be a few other heroes and/or victims in the Bethel on any given night. One fellow traveler is a poor young wretch who, at this late point in the course of her Stain, only remembers a single word. There isn’t much left of “**Fetch**” (she/her). She has little flesh. Her name isn’t even “Fetch”; that’s just what the beastmen call her, as it’s the word she says over and over.

The other person whom the PCs are likely to meet in the Bethel is a once-proud paladyn, **Ser Denith of the Rainsbury Court** (he/him), whose resolve has been shaken by his constant murder at the hands of the beastmen.

Ser Denith of Rainsbury Court Human (Benath'wani) Paladyn (soldier)

VITALS				
COM	MOV	REA	WIL	CHA
d12	d10	d8	d4	d8
HEA	GRT	DR	VIBE	
30	20	3	Aging braggart	

COUNTENANCE

Time and time again, virtuous champions have entered the unholy grounds in an attempt to purge the evil within. Ser Denith is one such knight, a decorated hero of one of the baronesses that rules the kingless “kingdom” of Benath. (He will tell travelers about this political celebrity in *extensive* detail if asked.)

Despite his training and multiple successful tours of duty on behalf of the kingdom, Ser Denith is ill-prepared for the dangers within Sootwyn Barrow. He wields a greatsword (ultimately impotent against endlessly regenerating villains) and is well stocked with auspicious Dvergarim runes, supposedly borrowed from the oldest above-ground hermitage of the Cult of the First Day (absolutely useless against the dark magicks of the Stain).

Unfortunately, Ser Denith failed to bring adequate resolve. Each night, it's a coin flip of whether he will even muster the strength to exit the Twilight Bethel. The beastmen consider him a non-threat and are disappointed by his weak attempts to fight back.

Hints scattered across the village

It is entirely possible to run Sootyw Barrow adventures without doling out additional hints about how the party can progress. However, it is generally advisable to provide at least a few insights about how the adventurers might escape from Sootwyn Barrow and rid themselves of the Stain. Consider presenting one or more of the hints below to provide some direction.

- There is an **inscription** beneath each of the statues of the Twilight Bethel. Each explains the identities of the Barrow Lords, extolling their virtues as dark masters in needlessly flowery language. Though these plaques may overstate some qualities of the Barrow Lords, they at least provide useful epithets: “the sporting beastmen,” “the unlying necromancer,” and “the dignified vampyre king of the unsanguine.”
- Adventurers might recall a **nursery rhyme** that they heard in their youth:

*Sootwyn Stain, ever will it drain
Wash away the evil of the vampyre bane
Down below the tomb, in a moonlit room
A rock atop the water wipes away the doom*

- Past victims of the Stain have left behind **hastily scrawled notes** from what they had learned about Ingrid: details about her illusory lodging, her tempestuous relationship with Vasile, and her control over the Barrow's skeletons. The beastmen have not yet learned to read and thus don't recognize the significance of these notes.
- Though the Sootwyn Stain drains adventurers of their awareness and mental fortitude, the curse also fundamentally brings its victims closer to Vasile. The party may find that they have **visions** of Vasile's tomb and its unholy contents. They may have nightmares of the creation of the Stain or of the fail-safe Vasile created for himself.
- Malicious denizens of the Barrow—flying serpents, saw-faced devils, and the like—might betray the Barrow Lords in a seemingly trivial way: spreading **gossip**. They may let slip the name of the Venerated Pumice or perhaps nudge the party to consider the fact that this town *controlled by a vampyre* is bisected by flowing water.
- The crows here can be bribed, and they know much more than they let on. If the party can decipher their circuitous, riddle-laden **corvine monologues**, they can glean quite a bit about Sootwyn Barrow.

Beshik and Haun: the hunter beastmen

Adventurers are likely to meet their first Barrow Lords sooner than they might expect. **Beshik** (he/him) and **Haun** (he/him) are self-described “**beastmen**,” creatures of incredible strength, neither human nor animal. Beshik and Haun are ruthless killers, exceptional trackers, and voracious eaters. Each evening, they set out into the Barrow to terrify anyone bearing the Stain, killing them only when there is no more fun in the chase. To be clear: Beshik and Haun love to feast on the flesh of their quarries—flesh which, of course, regenerates at sunset—but they get a far more primal pleasure from the hunt.

Beshik and Haun love an especially challenging hunt. On the rare occasion that an adventurer truly impresses with their ability to evade capture or fight back, Beshik and Haun extend an offer: spend an hour drinking with them every other night. Adventurers so honored wake up in the Twilight Bethel with a map and a key.



Beastmen

(Beshik and Haun)

HEADCOUNT

2

VITALS

COM	d12+1	HEA	48
MOV	d8	GRT	24
REA	d4	DR	2 (thick pelt)
WIL	d10		
CHA	d4		

HABITS

- Stuffing frogs with homemade explosive powder
- “Ambushing” you with a crossbow—as the other sneaks up behind you
- Watching, satisfied, as skeletons drag a victim’s body off to the Bethel

DOGMA

Macho ultraviolet self-perfection //////

ATTACKS

Each round, each beastman burns 4 GRT to **attack twice**, mixing and matching attacks as appropriate:

- **Bite, befoul’d with rot**, 3d4+2 damage plus *venomous*: a bitten target must make a 7+ **WIL/resist world** check or else lose the use of the bitten limb (disarming them) or—if bitten on the rear, pelvis, torso, neck, or head—see their MOV score drop by 1 die type for 24 hours; the target chooses the effect.
- **Claws, as sharp as knives**, 2d6+2 damage plus *bleed 2* (each hit inflicts 2 damage per round thereafter until the wound is treated).
- **Crossbow, solid-steel**, 2d4 damage (lead bullet) plus *stun 1* (1 in 6 chance of stunning target for 1 round).
- **Frog-grenade, improvised**, 2d10+2 damage plus *burn 1* (each hit inflicts 1 cumulative damage per round until the fire is doused—fire spreads!) and *area-of-effect*: this damage affects everyone within 5 M of the target. Note, each night, each beastman only makes 2 frog-grenades.
- **Machete, tremendous**, 2d12+d4 damage.

POWERS

- **Assess, double tap, explode, maximize, slay**
- **Antimagickal nanofibrules** (passive) – Threaded underneath a beastman’s hide are invisible ancient Third-Day technologies that repel magick: the first spell cast directly on them each night simply fails; this costs the beastman 8 GRT (they have no choice in the matter).
- **Consume** (standard) – A beastman can stop and eat flesh of any kind to restore their power: eating roughly a pigeon’s worth of flesh restores d10 GRT. (Note, any kind of meat works: they delight in snacking on fallen foes.)
- **Massive strike** (passive) – Whenever a beastman rolls a 9 or higher to attack and successfully strikes a foe, they automatically inflict *double damage*. (Note, NPCs do not boost checks, but the beastmen do have COM d12+1.)

GEAR

Besides weapons, the pair have little in the way of worldly possessions. In addition to the wine in the Champions’ Grotto, they also maintain a collection of bone fragments, displayed as a sort of crude mosaic double-self-portrait, in one of the houses of the village. A Yiricone petty noble or a Sapphire Ælf collector in Bluehold will pay 250 guilders for this macabre “outsider art” masterpiece, though it would be a pain in the ass to transport.

STORY NOTES

Like other Marak, the ancestors of Beshik and Haun were hybrid gator-bear-human warrior-nobles created to serve the technocratic sorcerer-emperor called the MALGĀTHI, centuries ago during the Third and Final Day. In the world after the Cataclysm—the Fourth Day—these beings found themselves exiled from human and Ælfir societies. Generations later, two of these so-called “beastmen” found themselves working as killers for hire.

Since being hired, beknyghted, and de facto adopted by Ingrid and Vasile, Beshik and Haun have taken on many of the affectations of their favorite former foes. Skilled paladyns, clever wizards, and dignified aristocrats alike have provided the beastmen with challenging hunts. Now, Beshik and Haun don personae not dissimilar from those of past victims of the Stain. The beastmen speak articulately and walk through the Barrow’s alleyways with an air of swagger and total command.

The beastmen have a role to play in Sootwyn Barrow beyond just sating their urge to hunt and kill. Vasile and Ingrid have entrusted the duo with protecting them. Despite the power of the Barrow’s magicks, there is always the tiniest possibility that clever travelers might escape the western village, charge through the cemetery, descend into Vasile’s tomb, and unmake the dark majesty of the Barrow. Beshik and Haun are thus the primary defense against this threat. While many more dangers await adventurers who travel east out of the haunted village, few ever make it that far. The beastmen rarely fail to kill their marks before the midnight hour.

Champion's Grotto

So long as Beshik and Haun have suitable drinking partners, they will delay their hunt by one hour on odd-numbered days, choosing instead to relax in the musty cellar they call "*the Champions' Grotto*." Should the adventurers accept the invitation, they'll be welcomed into the dank bar with open arms. Beshik and Haun always hope to honor their most devious prey, not out of the goodness of their hearts, but as encouragement. They want competent adventurers to keep trying, night after night, until, at last, they succumb to the Stain.

The beastmen walk a difficult tightrope: they need to *terrify* their victims to amplify the effects of the Stain, but they also want to make sure that victims feel motivated enough to leave the Twilight Bethel. Over the years, they have found that an invitation to the Champions' Grotto is the best way to stoke that fire.

The Champions' Grotto is a bar of sorts. It certainly was some sort of drinking hole in the distant past before the town had been remade with Vasile and Ingrid's magicks. Now, it is little more than a dusty cellar filled with stores of wine that are difficult to replenish. The bar stays locked at all hours and is not protected by any sort of protective hexes. The adventurers could break into the Champions' Grotto, assuming they are never honored with a key.

Other than the beastmen, there is only one person likely to spend any time in the Grotto: *Senza the Cutthroat* (she/her).

Senza the Cutthroat

Human (Valer) Wasp (assassin)

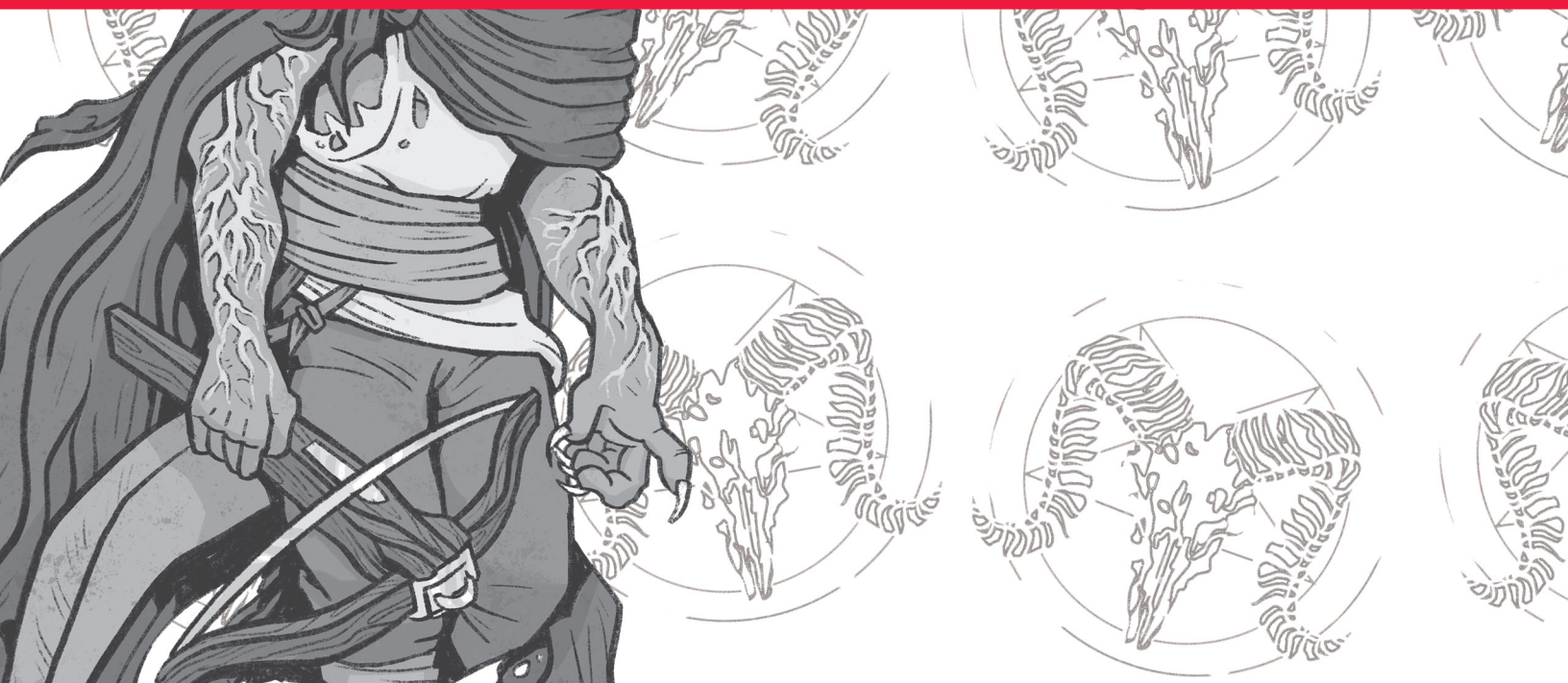
VITALS				
COM	MOV	REA	WIL	CHA
d10	d12	d6	d6	d8
HEA	GRT	DR	VIBE	
25	25	2	Natural born killer	

COUNTENANCE

Those whose hearts are already filled with a profound darkness may find that one or another aspect of the Sootwyn Stain does not take hold. Senza the Cutthroat made a solemn pledge to an Old One many moons ago, and thus her lifeforce is "spoken for." The Sootwyn Stain has still taken hold of the amoral assassin, but she is not slowly withering away like so many other victims in the Barrow. Instead, she regenerates night after night, regardless of where she travels.

Senza still occasionally visits Sootwyn Barrow to check in on her friends Beshik and Haun. They make for good company, and she loves regaling the duo with tales of the outside world. Adventurers will either run into Senza in the Champions' Grotto, sharing a drink with the bestial hunters, or they'll cross paths with the efficient killer in the moonlit streets of the village.

Note that Senza can play two very different roles depending on when you decide to introduce her. She can either be a neutral third party during cocktail hour at the Grotto, or she can add a wrinkle to battles with the beastmen once the players feel like they've learned what to expect.



Roleplaying the beastmen

As the first Barrow Lords the party is likely to meet, Beshik and Haun will almost certainly be frequently recurring characters in Sootwyn Barrow. It is crucial for the tone of the adventure that they are unpredictable and relentless. They ought never to attempt to defeat the party in the same way twice, and should the party avoid confronting the beastmen on their way to Vasile's tomb, the beastmen should follow them east into the graveyard.

Their aim is to scare the party. The beastmen will howl and flash their glowing eyes before disappearing around corners, toying with the party as long as they can. However, they will not allow the party to approach Vasile's tomb without a fight.

Beshik and Haun can speak, and they will taunt the party eloquently, though in their characteristic gruff voices. If the adventurers impress the beastmen and gain an invitation to the Champions' Grotto, the beastmen speak openly, asking questions of the party's origins, their travels, and their intentions for their remaining days before becoming unsanguine. More than anything, Beshik and Haun do their best to encourage the party, reminding them that the best they can hope for while they wither away is temporary glory as exceptional prey. There is no escape, but there is virtue in fighting until the very end.

Beshik is the more talkative of the two and is generally the more curious. Haun is softer-spoken but more brutal in battle. This does not necessarily mean that Haun is more deadly; simply that he is more aggressive. In most instances, this increased predictability is a liability.

Defeating the beastmen

Beshik and Haun are Barrow Lords. They are akin to demigods in the tiny enclave they've carved out for themselves. They can be killed, but only temporarily. When the sun sets again, they rise anew. As such, permanently destroying Beshik and Haun is impossible unless the party can unmake the magicks of Sootwyn Barrow altogether.

Until the party is able to address the very curse itself, they must confront the beastmen again each evening. Luckily, if the adventurers are smart and powerful, the two hunters need not stand in the party's way. There are various ways to get past the beastmen:

- ✦ The adventurers always have the option to **kill the beastmen**, if only for the night. Battles against the Beshik and Haun are brutal, but the party may find an advantage in numbers, arcane trickery, or clever strategy.
- ✦ If they are quick and stealthy enough, the party might be able to **evade the beastmen**.
- ✦ Should the party adequately impress the beastmen, they receive an invitation to the Champions' Grotto. The beastmen will wait at least one hour for the party to arrive. The party can use this to their advantage and **get a head start on the beastmen**. Beshik and Haun don't respond well to being snubbed, however. This opportunity will likely only present itself once.
- ✦ The bestial hunters are blessed with the magick of Ingrid and Vasile, but they have no spells of their own. As such, the party may be able to **trap the beastmen**, either with a potent hex or more traditional methods (a snare, a foothold trap, etc.). It may even be possible to trap the beastmen for more than one day at a time, though Ingrid will send her minions to attempt to free the duo.



Part the 3rd

The cemetery



The absentee sorceress; the skeletal legion; the charnel gardens of terror

To the east of Sootwyn Barrow's derelict village lies the town's cemetery. Skeletons from ages long past stalk the grounds, defending Vasile's tomb against determined adventurers. Animated jointly by the Sootwyn Stain and the unique magicks of *Ingrid Drethi'al* (she/her), these skeletons are the primary minions accomplishing tasks on behalf of the Barrow Lords.

There is no way around the cemetery. If the adventurers hope to reach the lair at the Barrow's pinnacle and confront the "vampyre king," they will have to trudge their way past tombstones and skeletal guardians. In all likelihood, they will have to do so repeatedly.

Each time they make their way through the gauntlet, they will be faced with new challenges: skeletons in unique formations, twisted creatures emerging from the stream or the clouds above, and ambient deadly magicks coaxed into existence by the necromancer in hiding. Worst of all, unless the party has already dispatched Beshik and Haun, they are endlessly hunted by vicious beastmen across the desolate plain.

To defeat the Barrow Lords and rid the world of the Sootwyn Stain, adventurers will have to be somehow both consistent and unpredictable. The skeletons—under Ingrid's leadership—will adapt to the party's plans. A stealthy break along the creekside may work once, but they should know that Ingrid will position her skeletons with extra precision next time the adventurers attempt their long march east.

GMing the cemetery

Sootwyn's Barrow cemetery is exceedingly malleable. So long as you run it with skeletons and place Ingrid somewhere inside, you should be good to go. Your two biggest concerns should be 1. tweaking the **balance** on the fly to make sure that progressing through the cemetery is challenging but fair and 2. maintaining a consistently horrific **mood**.

- ⌘ **Ingrid does not want to confront the players directly.** She is terrified of giving up information that will undermine her plans and thus avoids adventurers at all costs. If cornered, however, she will fight. While fighting, she is still susceptible to her own curse, and the players can exploit this until the fight is over.
- ⌘ **Ingrid's lair should not be easily detectable.** Players

Ingrid Drethi'al

Human (Qudelane) Fen Wytch (necromancer)

VITALS				
COM	MOV	REA	WIL	CHA
d4	d8	d12	d12	d10
HEA	GRT	DR	VIBE	
15	35	0	Mad scientist	

COUNTENANCE

In many instances, Ingrid can be a background character. If the party does discover Ingrid, they have an opportunity to completely hijack the adventure. She cannot lie and cannot keep herself from answering questions. If the party finds her lair and breaks in, they can probably get a few key answers out of her before she can manage to kill them (using whatever spell you can think of). Alternatively, she'll cut out her tongue, and the party may be able to temporarily defeat her while she's maiming herself. If Ingrid dies, she will of course return the following night, but the party will gain a massive upper hand on the trek to the tomb in the meantime.

The best-case scenario is that the players ask questions about the origins and nature of the Stain, providing you an opportunity to provide some much needed exposition mid-combat. This adventure works totally fine even with the players in the dark about the backstory of Sootwyn Barrow—after all, the main purpose of the adventure is to act as an experimental recursive dungeon crawl—but uncovering the full narrative can be a satisfying additional objective for curious players. In either case: it's important to note that Ingrid can only tell the truth about facts that she knows. Otherwise, she truthfully replies, "I don't know."

Short version: Ingrid is a tragic villain. She fell in love, toyed with dangerous magick, and now she's dug herself a deep hole. She has no choice but to try to get out of it with darker and stranger methods. She is growing her skeleton army for a purpose: she wants to perform an even darker rite to properly revive Vasile. Her greatest hope is that an actual vampyre—**one of the MALGÁTHI's closest courtiers, infused a thousand years ago with a Second Blood of blue nano-magickal repair-homon-culi**—will someday end up in Sootwyn Barrow, in which case she can beseech them to grant Vasile "genuine" vampyrism instead of the abominable facsimile she has gifted him. There is no way to convince her that death is preferable to seeking a complete recovery.

should only be able to discover it by coaxing information out of one of the other creatures in the Barrow or through experimentation (i.e., poking at the brambles).

- ⌘ **The skeletons are a mob.** Treat them like an environmental hazard. Realistically, battles against a massive swarm of skeletons should feel distinct from the epic hunts and duels with the beastmen.
- ⌘ **The skeletons are never fully in Ingrid's control.** They do her bidding because she tends to their needs and does not lie to them. Ingrid's magick animates them, but it does not bind them. As such—unlike the beastmen—they can be swayed by adventures who tap into their simple desires.

‡ **The cemetery is flexible.** If you've got some fun little horror encounter you want to sneak into your Sootwyn Barrow adventure, this is the place for it. Who's to say there *isn't* a scythe-wielding, skull-headed, flame-haired rider or a parade of spectral laborers carrying a maypole float through the cemetery?

The skeletons

There are a lot of goddamn skeletons in the cemetery. In mechanical terms, there are as many mobs as you need, though only 1 can reach a given location during a given hour; this gives a victorious crew the ability to get away.

Many of these skeletons were in Sootwyn Barrow decades or centuries before the Sootwyn Stain began. The Stain did not bring life to these skeletons, but Ingrid's sorceries did. Over the course of years, Ingrid painstakingly breathed life into each of these heaps of bones. She gave the skeletons the strength to exhume themselves and then provided each with a new direction to follow: *find bodies. If they live, extinguish them. When they are dead, bring them to the Twilight Bethel...*

SKELETONS AT NIGHT

Throughout much of the evening, the skeletons wait. Experience has taught Ingrid that the best way to defend Vasile's tomb is strategic positioning. Before sunset each evening, the skeletons form ranks, hiding behind tombstones and trees, lying in wait on the streambed, or perching in trees with bows drawn. The exact positioning changes nightly to keep those courageous enough to escape the beastmen guessing.

When they sense an adventurer making their way east, the skeletons charge. Ingrid has no ability to control these skeletons directly, so they attack mindlessly, abandoning strategy and instead striking predictably. Scimitar-wielding minions approach the adventurers, bowmen fire, and only those who have been commanded to stay in hiding until the last possible moment act with any restraint.

Once the skeletons have begun to attack, it is difficult for Ingrid to force them to regroup. It is not so simple to reform ranks, and thus the initial gambit often leaves the skeletal army in disarray. They are still quite effective, however, because a random assortment of murderous skeletons is nearly as effective at killing as a well organized militia.

SKELETONS DURING THE DAY

Ingrid's orders change dramatically during the daytime. All skeletons are to disperse, collecting any slain travelers both inside the Barrow and within a few miles of the city's gate. As always, the goal is twofold: protect Vasile's tomb (by making sure travelers do not wake in its vicinity) and collect more bodies to feed the Stain.

Immune to distraction and without needing to eat or sleep, a skeleton with orders can travel over 30 miles in a single day. Walking tight circuits near Sootwyn Barrow's borders, the likelihood on any given day that Ingrid's minions might find an errant traveler is nontrivial. And so the skeleton army grows. More skeleton means more total distance traveled, and more access to vulnerable travelers.

Optional rule for premature death

It can be demoralizing for players to have their adventurer die early in the night, even knowing that it will be possible to return the following in-game sunset. A single evening in Sootwyn Barrow might last a full session or more, so having one party member die early on means one of your friends is going to have nothing to do until the rest of the party falls or the sun rises. Consider using the following optional rule to give your friends something to do while they wait for the Stain to bring them back to life.

When an adventurer is killed early in the night, their body and soul may end up in a liminal form of existence, both alive and dead simultaneously, partially autonomous, partially in the hands of the Barrow Lords. They become a **zombie**, unable to speak and barely sentient. Ingrid is unaware that such a creature is not yet fully unsanguine, and thus she commands the pseudominion as though they were. The zombie still wants to help their allies, but must also serve their dark master.

Whisper or send a private message to the player with the newly undead character. Give them a secret counterproductive task to accomplish while the rest of the party continues their adventure. This could be something like triggering a trap, splitting the party, or stealthily disarming the crew's knight. So long as the player attempts to accomplish this deed, Ingrid won't become suspicious. The zombie can continue to travel with the party provided they keep up the ruse. If Ingrid figures out that the zombie is still working with the party (i.e., because the player chooses not to pursue their secret goal), Ingrid will send the full brunt of her skeletal forces to assail the party.

Skeletons

(mob of bone-people, enthralled to Ingrid)

HEADCOUNT

1, as a mob

VITALS

COM	d8	HEA	66
MOV	d6	GRT	40
REA	d3	DR	0
WIL	d20		(plus <i>bony</i> , see below)
CHA	1		

HABITS

- Noisily chasing a confused family of raccoons into a hedgerow
- Drumming out a complex military march on each others' bones
- Standing at attention in a long, winding queue, as silent as snow

DOGMA

Necro-influencer fan-worship



ATTACKS

Each round, the mob **automatically** inflicts 8 damage on each attacker in melee range. In addition, the mob attacks **every** PC once, regardless of range. The mob has a wide variety of weapons, a few of which are given here as examples:

- **Cold dead heads**, 8 damage plus *mobbing*: automatically affects every target in melee range.
- **Morningstar**, 2d4 damage.
- **Osseus boomerang**, d4 damage (ranged) plus *spinning*: on an attack roll of 6 or higher, this cleverly sculpted shoulderblade strikes 2 PCs instead of 1.
- **Pike cut down to the length of a javelin**, 2d4 damage.
- **Rusty cutlass**, d8 damage.
- **Sharpened handless bone-arms**, d6 damage plus *bleed* 1.
- **Shortbow**, d6 damage (ranged).
- **Unhewn branch**, d8 damage.

POWERS

- **Bony** (passive) – Skeletons suffer half damage, rounded up, from attacks with bladed, edged, and piercing weapons, including bullets. (Blunt weapons work normally.) They cannot be affected by *bleed* or *burn* caused by fire (though *burn* from acid affects them normally).
- **Drag down to hell** (standard) – Instead of attacking a given PC, the mob can burn 10 GRT to pull them down to the ground and hold them there. (Picture many skeletal arms pushing up through the dead dry Sootwyn earth...) The affected target can continue to attack, but they now automatically suffer 16 damage every round until they burn 1 standard action to wrestle themselves free, or someone else burns 1 standard action to yank them up and away. (Note, the 16 automatic damage replaces the ordinary 8 automatic damage.)
- **Hyper-animate** (free) – The mob may at any point receive a boon from its creatrix: mechanically, the mob can burn 8 GRT in order to gain an additional COM die; this can be used to double the attack check against 1 PC or to make 1 additional attack, against any target, at the end of the round.

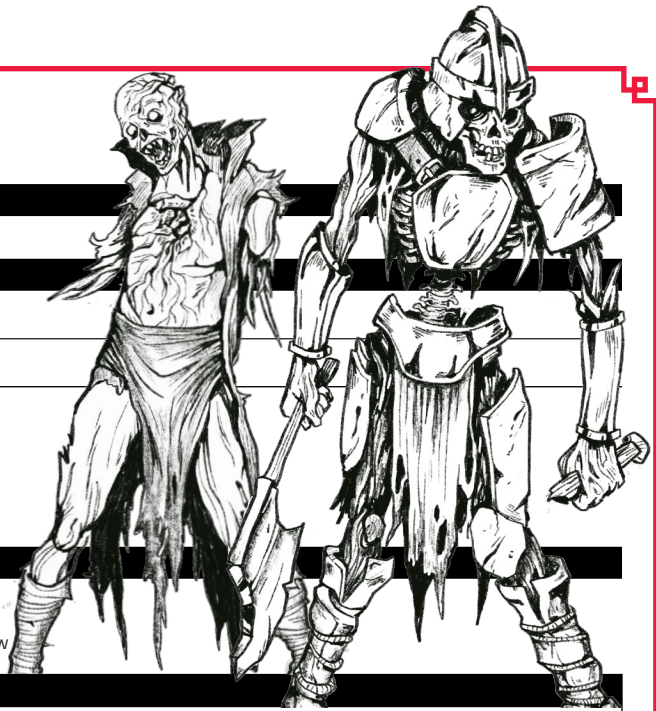
GEAR

Skeletons hold nothing but bones and weapons, except by accident. A given mob has 2d100 guilders worth of random currency and antique knickknacks distributed across its constituent bodies, jammed into crevices and rotting boots.

STORY NOTES

Once animated, skeletons *crave purpose*. It is a terrifying thing, even for a shambling undead bone-person to find oneself newly awakened, with no memories and no aspirations. As such, anyone who can provide animating energy and fulfill this need for direction gains immense sway over a skeleton. Ingrid can provide both, and she has proven herself trustworthy. That said, if the adventurers can somehow provide them with a new, clearer purpose—especially one backed by magick (or by a sufficiently zany empathizing-with-skeletons scheme)—then they may abandon Ingrid.

The necromancer makes a strong case for herself, however. When she can, Ingrid invigorates the skeletons, channeling her sorcerous magick to hyper-charge a given skeleton with intoxicating vitality. This temporary boon of enhanced vigor is like a drug to the barely thinking skeletons. They know that if they repeatedly fling themselves at adventurers, Ingrid may choose to give them her most precious gift: a flow of focused energy akin to true life. This more than anything motivates the skeletons to action. (Note, this is the power *hyper-animate*, above.)



Yet more skeletons

VARIANTS

The above rules cover a **proper mob** of dozens of reanimated dead. An **individual skeleton** of human origin has the same scores but only HEA 6 and GRT 4; their attacks, individually, inflict d8 damage. But Ingrid's experiments have resulted in a large number of other, rarer bone-monstrosities.

The reanimated skeletons of large birds ("**pale crows**"), for example, can fly and solve complex puzzles compared to ordinary skeletons (REA d6) but are easily distracted (WIL d4). Skeletal crows will track the PCs far and wide, periodically descending to alert mobs of (majority-human) skeletons as to their movements.

Other experimental subjects are now hybrid creatures of plant and bone. Shaming "**bramble-bones**" are skeletal humans fully enwrapped in thorny vines and branches. While slow (MOV d4), their attacks inflict *stun* 3 (they have a 3 in 6 chance of stunning a target for 3 rounds). Great numbers of brambles can easily overrun unwary travelers, trapping them until a proper mob—or the beastmen—can arrive.

Finally, some skeletons are hybrids of humans and zogs (great riding chickens), mules, donkeys, capybara, alpacas, or horses. These "**grim centaurs**" are swift (MOV d8) and typically prefer to wield shortbows as weapons, attacking and retreating in quietly clattering flurries as opposed to marching with the untiring steadiness of a proper mob.

For maximum horror, generously pair human-skeleton riders with grim centaurs—et voila, you have created the Barrow Lords' **anti-paladyns**!

Your own skeleton army

The skeletons love receiving infusions of magical energy. If the players suss this out, they may just be able to win the skeletons over. If the party's wytch offers arcane enchantments of any kind to the skeletons, they may just opt to defect from Ingrid's service.

Dealing with the skeleton army

Most parties will opt to simply kill the skeletons or run through the cemetery once they get the gist of the adventure. It will seem like an unavoidable labyrinth—and that's okay! You can certainly let the players explore other zanier solutions (blending in with the skeletons, swimming stealthily upstream, siccing the crows on them), but the default option should be to just run past them, fighting as they go.

Note, with growing reserves of minions, Ingrid will soon send out expeditionary forces far and wide to retrieve the ancient magicks necessary to correct her earlier great work—i.e., the Stain (see below). These marauding bone-mobs can easily provide the impetus for local potentates to hire mercenaries to investigate just what is going on in Sootwyn Barrow.

The unlying necromancer and the birth of the Stain

The cemetery is the domain of Ingrid Drethi'al. She rules over the sprawling maze of tombstones, hedges, and crisscrossing streams as though it were her fiefdom and the skeletons her serfs. Though none ever see her, Ingrid's presence is always known: after all, the Stain, the skeletons, and the ambient horrors of the Barrow are all her doing.

The Fen Wytch Ingrid Drethi'al first came to Sootwyn Barrow when the Baron Vasile Albescu neared death. The two had been pen pals for a decade, and when they finally met, at the behest of a dying Vasile, their love became intimate.

Neither could cope with the quickly approaching demise of the deeply sick baron. They schemed together, hoping to find either a cure for Vasile's chronic ailments or a remedy that could take hold beyond the grave. After many fervent evenings of study and lovmaking, they concocted an experimental dark magick that they believed might just work. It relied on a poorly understood phenomenon known as "transference" as a means of transmitting lifeforce to a host. Vasile had reservations about the spell—the magick reeked of Third-Day devilry—but they forged ahead anyway.

Alas, the cold day arrived, and Vasile passed away. The townsfolk buried their beloved baron, and Ingrid conducted her eldritch ritual. She descended into the crypt and scored Vasile's flesh and bones with the mark that would come to be known as the Sootwyn Stain.

A rush of dark magick descended on the town, tearing it apart and cursing its inhabitants. In the days that followed, Ingrid gave herself the same mark, adorning her flesh with the unholy sigil using her enchanted tattooing needle.

In a sense, the grand new spell worked. Vasile rose from his tomb. But he was not well. The spell woke Vasile, but it did not return him to life in the manner that she had hoped. As with each of Ingrid's skeletal minions, there was a piece of him missing.

In the process, Ingrid too lost a piece of herself. To this day, she does not understand the arcane calculus of why, but she can no longer lie. **When anyone dares ask a**

question of her, she is compelled to answer truthfully. She may not even lie by omission. She has even tried to cut out her tongue, but the Sootwyn Stain regenerates the tongue against her will.

Ingrid's lair

Ingrid is vexed by her strange affliction. She desperately wants to keep Vasile safe in his tomb while she scrambles to find a true cure for death, some form of full revival sans caveat. And yet, she knows she might accidentally give away crucial secrets were an adventurer to catch her by surprise. As such, she has constructed for herself an illusory lair, a den hidden among a seemingly impenetrable thicket of brambles.

Inside, Ingrid has collected all of Vasile's dusty textbooks, many of his luxuries, and the various arcane baubles she towed with her from her far-off homeland. Ingrid spends her days in relative luxury commanding her skeletal minions with arcane gestures from her occult Third-Day *tattooing needle*: whoever holds the needle can burn 8 GRT per mob to telepathically communicate with any number of geographically distant groups of skeletons (or, in theory, other undead). This communication is impressionistic and low-fidelity, but it ignores obstacles and doesn't require hearing (or, well, being alive). In addition, anyone holding the tattoo needle can grant the power *hyper-animate* to any group of skeletons (see "Skeletons," above). Note, the needle does not affect Vasile, who is too overcharged with raw magickal power to be controlled by this artifact.

Meanwhile, between bouts of minion-commanding and refueling (eating and sleeping), Ingrid rifles through tomes. By now, she has read every book in Vasile's collection, but she is certain she must have missed some detail about vampyrism, transference, and resurrection. There *must* be a way.

Defeating the necromancer

Even if the party approaches Vasile's tomb with the explicit intention of unmaking the "vampyre king," Ingrid will never interfere directly. She always deploys skeletons en masse. Ingrid is cowardly, but hers is a practical cowardice. She knows that attempting to slay the party herself is likely to only get her in trouble. Thus, "defeating" Ingrid is never a requirement for escaping the Barrow. Like the other Barrow Lords, she is imperfectly immortal and will return the subsequent night if killed, anyway. Instead, the party's primary goal should be to get through the cemetery unscathed. This is more a question of dealing with the skeletons than with Ingrid.



Part the 4th
The tomb



The false vampyre; the unhallowed hollow; the end of the curse

Vasile Albescu, the former baron of Sootwyn Barrow, was laid to rest in a tomb befitting a king. His former vassals—now skeletal thralls in the employ of Ingrid Drethi'al—adored their baron. He was a kind, generous, and scholarly leader who cared for his people. His untimely death was a somber occasion, brightened only by the pride the villagers felt when they gazed upon the great tomb they built for their beloved baron.

The tomb still stands to this day, barely weathered by the elements, protected in part by the same magicks that fuel Vasile's undeath. Inside, a maze of corridors is lined with mosaics outlining the baron's great deeds: providing the townsfolk with a free education, hosting extravagant public harvest festivals, and building the complex sewer system that kept the village clean and the citizens healthy.

Alas, the tomb has been perverted. The Sootwyn Stain has tarnished Vasile's crypt, sealing its majesty in protective wards but corrupting its inner architecture. Where once the tomb was orderly and grand, now it is twisted, gnarled, and labyrinthine. All of this was Ingrid's doing. The dark magick that drained the village of its life also reshaped the tomb—tunnels cut into the little hill for which the town was named. Adventurers who enter the strange maze find that it warps itself before their very eyes. This town is cursed, and the tomb is the epicenter.

GMing the tomb

Vasile's tomb is the site for the climax of the venture. Once your players arrive here, they will have to make their way through a brand new “meta-dungeon.”

- ⌘ **The tomb can function as a “save” point.** Once the players reach Vasile's tomb for the first time, you need not rehash the earlier stages of the evening ad nauseum. If the players die while exploring the tomb, you can essentially “tax” each of the adventures with a certain amount of semi-random damage and loss of GRT or physical resources in exchange for skipping right to the tomb's entrance. (Although, since they can't recover pool normally, you don't *need* to tax them.) You can even have the party reawaken in the tomb's entrance. Avoid anything that will be boring!
- ⌘ **The tomb's structure is constantly warping.** Any subterranean maps or map assets you have can slot in nicely

here. You can either generate a new random map each time the adventurers arrive, or else shuffle certain details.

- ⌘ **Remember: spam the world with horror!** The concentrated magick of the Stain is a great excuse to throw all sorts of eldritch nonsense at the players while they explore. Ghosts, arcane traps, sentient slime, whatever.
- ⌘ **Vasile is unpredictable.** Tease the players with the final boss battle by having him attack briefly before disappearing deeper into the lair. This is his domain. He's inarticulate and doesn't look like a vampyre, so the players may not even realize that it's Vasile.
- ⌘ **The tomb is the “boss level.”** If you've accidentally made the combat too easy leading up to the tomb (i.e., the players arrive on the first night), add a massive battle the moment your players enter. Give your players a taste of the tomb, and then tweak the difficulty for subsequent runs.

Outside the tomb

Vasile's tomb sits on the eponymous Sootwyn Barrow, a mound of earth in which the village's former barons are buried. These rulers were each far crueler than Vasile was in life, and their burials were appropriately less grand. Their skeletons have undoubtedly joined Ingrid's legion, though it is difficult to distinguish between nobles and peasants among shambling piles of bones.

After the adventurers cross the stream in the cemetery, they have to ascend the hill while *skeletal archers* (1 mob) perched atop the tomb fire volleys of arrows. It will be a mad dash to the tomb's entrance every time: because Ingrid's minions cannot enter Vasile's tomb, they will do anything in their power to make sure the party cannot reach the entrance.

THE TOMB'S DOORS

Vasile's tomb has but one entrance, a set of towering double doors enchanted with a powerful ward that repels any who do not bear the Sootwyn Stain. In theory, this seems to be irrelevant; after all, all who enter Sootwyn Barrow are cursed with the Stain, right? In practice, this small incantation has a powerful effect. It means that three types of creatures cannot enter the tomb: Ingrid's skeletons (as they have been rendered completely unsanguine, and thus no longer bear the curse), animals and pets accompanying the adventurers (who are immune to the Stain because they lack full sapience), and truly wicked beings who are already sworn to another evil master *such as an Old One or the MALCÄTHI's dread automata in the ruins of the east.*

Note, though the skeletons cannot enter the tomb,

adventurers slain while inside can still reawaken in the Twilight Bethel. Strange MacGuffin-creatures that are native to the crypt will deposit the adventurers outside the doors each morning—unless the GM decides that the tomb is the save point.

THE TOMB'S ROOF

The party may decide to climb the tomb in an effort to survey the surrounding terrain, seek out an alternate entrance, or destroy the elevated archers. If they do, they come across the *thick notebook* of one **Dyzek Mazur** (he/him), a Red Dwarf explorer who has conducted extensive research in Sootwyn Barrow. It is up to the GM if Dyzek has fully succumbed to the Stain by the time that the PCs arrive, or if he is merely dying. Either way, his notes are hidden on the roof, and he or his remains are elsewhere, inside the tomb.

Dyzek's notes are painstakingly detailed, revealing many details about Sootwyn Barrow. The notebook describes Ingrid's enchanted tattoo needle, the ascendancy of Beshik and Haun, the shifting layout of the crypt below, and the effects of the Stain upon leaving Sootwyn Barrow. In all likelihood, these notes will prove invaluable to any traveler who stumbles across them.

Unfortunately, these notes also present a disappointing array of misinformation. Dyzek encountered Vasile on numerous occasions, but did not realize it; he believed the great skeletal beast in the tomb was some sort of vampyric thrall under Vasile's control. Dyzek also believed there to be a secret source of power in the town's sewers, a red herring that may lead to countless failed expeditions into the rancid tunnels beneath Sootwyn Barrow's western quarters. Finally, Dyzek surmised that the Venerated Pumice is a myth intended to draw travelers to Sootwyn Barrow.

One detail may be of particular relevance to powerful adventuring parties. Dyzek's notes reveal the location of his legendary flanged mace *mazuga*, a weapon he forged himself before arriving in Sootwyn Barrow. The dwarven explorer crafted the mace as a means to easily shatter the cemetery's skeletons. It can effectively smash through armor, but it excels when crushing animate bone. He buried the mace under a bed of conspicuous corn poppies behind the tomb.

Mechanically, *mazuga* is a mace of green-black ostrich egg of craquelure-covered metal with a long handle that, when swung, geometrically increases in mass and emits a low howl. Swinging it costs 3 GRT (per attack) due to its strange weight. *Mazuga* inflicts 6 damage plus *stun* 2; i.e., it has a 2 in 6 chance of stunning an opponent for 2 rounds. Against fragile opponents—such as those who have the power *bony*, including Vasile—the weapon inflicts 12 damage instead of 6.

Dyzek Mazur

Gvar (Red Dwarf) Strifsmith (artisan)

VITALS				
COM	MOV	REA	WIL	CHA
d8	d8	d12	d3	d8
HEA	GRT	DR	VIBE	
20	30	3	Friendly ghost	

COUNTENANCE

Dyzek (pron., "DEE-szhek") can be someone powerful who is willing to help the party fight Vasile or someone on the verge of becoming unsanguine. (He started with WIL d10+1.)

For pure horror atmosphere, it may be best to just leave the notes and let your players wonder what ill fate befell Dyzek, but folks may be pining for the social aspect of roleplaying by the time they reach the tomb. If your charm-focused players really want to chat up an NPC, introduce Dyzek before he finishes rotting.

Vasile's cairn

If the party explores behind the tomb, they come across Vasile's cairn. This modest pile of stones seems innocuous, and indeed, its construction was unrelated to Ingrid's dark magick. Some among the village viewed Vasile's tomb as profane in its grandeur. They felt that such a noble ruler ought to have a more traditional and grounded burial marker. Thus, they built this cairn as a way to honor their baron in a way that felt more appropriate given their customs. Adventurers may interact with the cairn in a number of ways.

- ⌘ If a traveler offers a *benediction* in the presence of the cairn, the effects of the Sootwyn Stain on Vasile's bones temporarily weaken. See below for what counts as a benediction. Mechanically, a benediction makes an ultimate battle against Vasile quite a bit easier: **a benediction saps much of the magick reanimating Vasile, reducing his HEA and GRT by 13 each.** (Note, these exigencies are included in his encounter block.) The adventurers can offer a benediction at the cairn each night; if they do not, then Vasile retains full pool.
- ⌘ **Disturbing** the cairn—knocking it over—alerts Vasile to the party's presence and fills him with rage. He exits the tomb to fight the party immediately. This heedless assault robs the Barrow Lord of the advantages that his lair typically provides: Vasile has damage reduction (DR) 4 while inside of the tomb thanks to his nearness to the dark magicks of the Stain, but only DR 2 outside. (Note, this exigency is included in his encounter block, below.) Disturbing the cairn only works once; subsequent attempts summon a *brick bully* instead of the false vampyre (see below).



Brick bullies

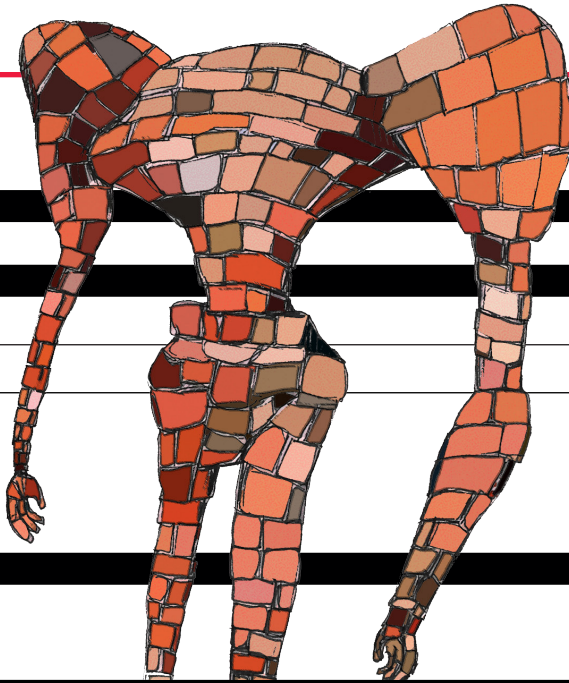
(ceramics given paranoid life)

HEADCOUNT

d3+1

VITALS

COM d10	HEA 40
MOV d4	GRT 30
REA d3	DR 3 (fired-clay)
WIL d12	
CHA d4	



HABITS

- Kicking a skeletal raccoon over and over, into dust
- Arranging loose bricks in zigzagging lines (“drawing?”)
- Kneeling, building a miniature replica of the tomb

DOGMA

Architectural monomania



ATTACKS

- **Smash**, d10 damage plus *bleed* 1 (internal bleeding) and *heavy*: a brick bully’s fists ignore non-magickal DR.

POWERS

- **Double tap, explode, maximize**
- **Ceramic** (passive) – When struck by a blunt weapon, a brick bully suffers damage normally. When struck by a non-blunt weapon, a brick bully suffers the *minimum* possible damage, before damage reduction. Magickal weapons and spells affect brick bullies normally.

GEAR

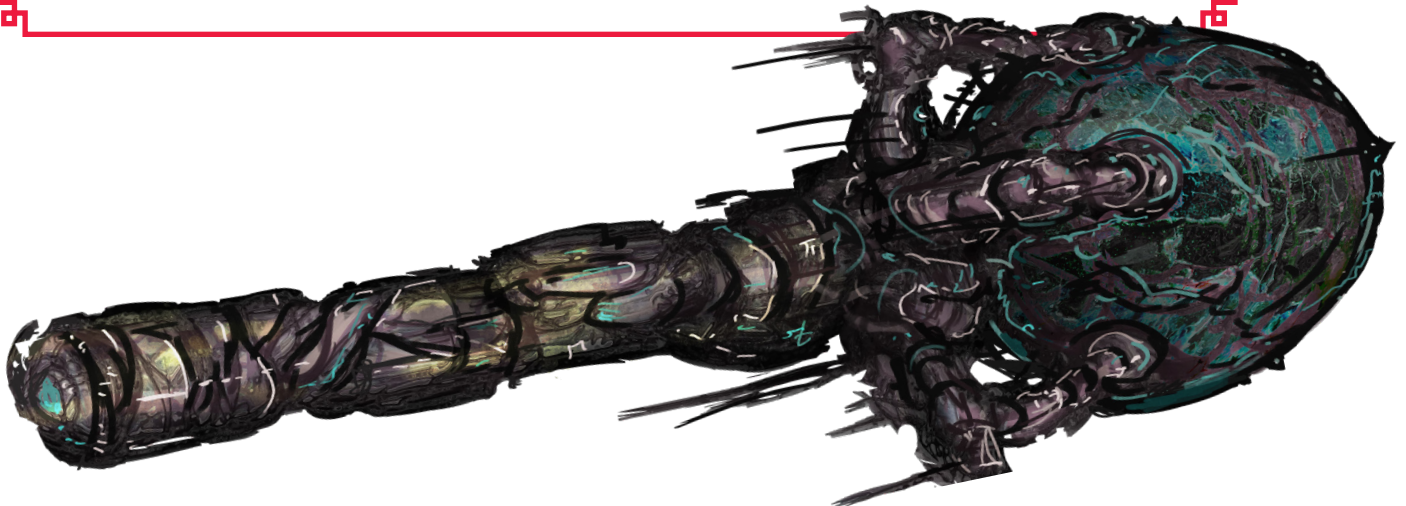
The brick bullies have and require nothing other than the tomb itself. They are person-shaped entities made of bricks, cobblestones, grit, and a small quantity of dirt, mycelium, worms, silverfish and beetles—and that is all.

STORY NOTES

The villagers who built the tomb in advance of the baron’s death lined it, floor to ceiling, with thin red-brown bricks, interrupted here and there by pastoral mosaics. The bricks—made over years with this purpose in mind, hauled up the Barrow and inside the new tomb, and then smashed and scattered by Vasile—began to absorb surplus magickal energy and self-organize...

Unlike Vasile or the skeletons, these new organisms never possessed a sense of self: they aped the nearest autonomous form of appropriate size—the false vampyre—and grew into very tall, stooped-over, skinny, faceless, big-limbed, ceramic humanoids.

Today, these so-called brick bullies do not “serve” Vasile exactly, but the tomb itself, which for them includes Vasile. Roughly as smart as adult dogs, the bullies are periodically destroyed by Vasile only to reform over the following weeks. They are instinctively aggressive toward outsiders, but they are neither evil nor cunning; more like lumbering white blood cells than “golems.”



⌘ Ingrid's skeletons cannot approach the cairn, and as such, adventurers are safe in its vicinity. Furthermore, the **stones** act as powerful repellents against the skeletons, wards against Ingrid's magick. So long as the party has one or more stones in their possession, skeletons avoid the adventurers at all cost.

Mechanically, "offering a benediction" at the cairn means simply taking the time to acknowledge the tragedy that has befallen the town: as far as feudal landlords go, the baron was a kind and intelligent soul, interested primarily in helping his people prosper and survive the ongoing waves of migration and armed conflict brought on by the so-called dying of the natural world (at least in the rich east) at the end of the Third Day. Vasile became more selfish in old age by giving in fully to the intensity of his love for Ingrid—but even then, he kept his people in mind and planned to undo her great work (see "The Venerated Pumice").

If the adventurers in any way acknowledge the cairn as a marker of a life partially well-lived, a personality more complex than that of a bestial murder, or a love so strong it collapsed into—essentially—a magickal black hole, then their benediction works. Be generous, but make them say *something* meaningful.

Note, the effects of the cairn are great secrets to reveal if a player uses the power *augur* or *find clue*, or if they ask to make a **WIL/perceive** check and the result is 9 or higher—but they have to specifically ask!

INSIDE THE TOMB

Though Vasile's tomb is tall and impressive from the outside, most of its winding corridors stretch down into the Barrow below. The large atrium through the double doors once housed Vasile's body, but any details of the tomb's original layout have been erased by its ceaseless architectural evolutions.

Throughout the tomb, colorful molds and lichens seep out of the stones, thrumming with the stolen life that the Sootwyn Stain provides. The dark halls reek of death and decay, though no bodies presently wither inside. Instead, bizarre creatures in various states of undeath wander the halls, enlivened accidentally by the Barrow's ambient magick.

The false vampyre

When the Sootwyn Stain stole the lifeforce of the newly dead baron's villagers, Vasile Albescu, the *false vampyre king*, rose. Turgid with malevolent energy, Vasile had no choice but to return from death. He and Ingrid believed that the transference ritual that would bring Vasile life was synonymous with the MALGÄTHI's refined vampyrism: he would be able to "borrow" small amounts of energy from different living things in his environment, never aging, never having to resort to blood-drinking.

They were wrong. The Sootwyn Stain is wholly unrelated to vampyrism, and Vasile Albescu is no vampyre, refined or otherwise. He did not rise as Ingrid's dignified casanova of the night, but instead a horrific, gnarled skeletomuscular abomination. He possesses no control over his urges. He is a monster of a variety that Ingrid never intended to create.

Roleplaying Vasile

The "vampyre king" is the total inversion of what players are likely expecting. He is far more bestial than the supposed beastmen—creatures who are, at the very least, honorable in their dedication to a proper hunt. He is not studied nor methodical nor suave. He simply thrashes about wildly, killing indiscriminately with arcane blasts of energy or deadly swipes of his razor-sharp limbs.

It is crucial to the adventure that Vasile's entrance is a shock. Your players should have little time to catch their breaths the moment they encounter him. However, it should also be exceedingly clear that this is Vasile. Describe how swirls of lifeforce visibly surround and suffuse him. Describe the obvious scoring of his bones with the Sootwyn Stain. Describe how the tomb itself seems to oscillate in concert with his unpredictable movement.

Vasile can understand speech, but he can barely speak. In combat, he should struggle to utter single words: "kill," "curse," "Ingrid," "mine," etc. However, as the adventurers attempt to speak and reason with him, he should visibly react. If the players mention the Venerated Pumice, he ought to demonstrate maximal aggression in an act of desperate self-preservation. If they speak of Ingrid, he may cower for a moment, knowing that he once loved the sorceress, but also feeling conflicted; in the depths of his psyche, there is still a tiny piece of Vasile that knows that this is all her fault. Fundamentally, Vasile is not rational, but there is a trace of true understanding buried deep inside.

The false vampyre

(Vasile Albescu, baron of Sootwyn Barrow)

HEADCOUNT

1

VITALS

COM d12+1	HEA 66 / 53*
MOV d10	GRT 53 / 40**
REA d6	DR 4 / 2
WIL d20	(the Stain's raw power plus bones; if lured out of the tomb, he loses the former)
CHA d4	

HABITS

- Lying on the ground in a heap, sucking in Stain-mediated energy
- Sniffing out the adventurers and charging at them headfirst, straight through a wall
- Perching on a throne of bones, listening for Ingrid's voice, which never comes

DOGMA

Irrational mood swings***



ATTACKS

Note, Vasile gets **2 standard actions** per round.

- **Bite**, 2d12 damage plus *painful*: a struck target is so distracted by pain that they must make a 6+ **WIL/resist world** check the next time the target acts.
- **Razor-sharp bony hands and elbows**, d12+1 damage plus *bleed* 3.
- **Wall-smashing punch**, 3d12 damage.

POWERS

Note, Vasile gets **2 standard actions** per round.

- **Agitated** (special) – Vasile can use any 2 standard actions per round—whether attacks, powers, or some combination—against 1 or 2 targets.
- **Bony** (passive) – Vasile suffers half damage, rounded up, from attacks with bladed, edged, and piercing weapons, including bullets. (Blunt weapons work normally.) He cannot be affected by *bleed* or *burn* caused by fire (though *burn* from acid affects him normally).
- **Regenerate** (standard) – Vasile can burn 4X GRT to recover X pool every round for 2X rounds. He can allocate this pool to HEA or GRT, each round. For fast play, simply read this as: after he takes damage, Vasile spends 1 of his 2 actions and burns 8 GRT to recover 2 HEA every round for 4 rounds.
- **Sling rancor** (standard) – Vasile can burn 10 GRT and roll dCOM to telekinetically hurl a massive stone or a field of sharp rocks and other debris at a target. If he hits, he inflicts 6d4+4 damage. If he misses, everyone nearby—including Vasile—suffers 3d4 damage

GEAR

While Vasile keeps nothing on his person, he was buried with riches befitting his high station. Scattered within the tomb are 350 guilders and 2d10 recoverable art objects, each of which is worth d100 guilders. Picking through the rubble within the tomb for all of the coins, gems, chains, rings, brooches, and statuettes (e.g.) takes over an hour and can't be accomplished while Vasile lives.

STORY NOTES

Vasile wanders the halls of his tomb day and night, perpetually unsated by the seemingly limitless lifeforce flowing into his chambers. As vital essence pulses through his malformed body, the stones around him beat in turn. He and the Sootwyn Stain have become one, a ceaseless siphon of dark energy. The curse, the corpse, and the tomb, all inextricably intertwined.

The creature that was once Vasile is hyper-violent and unthinking in a way that will stagger adventurers who have become accustomed to the methodical hunts of the beastmen. He will lash out desperately at any creatures in his vicinity, telekinetically flinging pieces of the tomb in wide, destructive arcs. His bony extremities, sharpened on stones throughout the tomb, can slice through armor and pierce shields. In combat, he flails wildly, thrashing and undulating with each of his horrid limbs in violation of physics and biology alike.

Vasile wants everyone who has ever lived to become trapped in the Stain. After all, he is the Stain manifest, and the Stain must grow and sustain itself. He will not let anyone survive the tomb. He will kill them and thrust them back out into the night.

* See "Vasile's cairn" regarding the benediction.

** See "Vasile's cairn" regarding the benediction.

*** Either nihilism, sadism, warlordism (when piqued), and/or the lowest expression of anarchism.



The Venerated Pumice

Vasile had discussed magick with Ingrid for weeks prior to his untimely demise. Ultimately, however, he decided he would prefer not to tamper with such dangerous arcanæ. He begged her to promise she would not enact the ritual against his will. And yet he knew that Ingrid, heartbroken, would charge ahead anyway, greedily snatching Vasile back from the afterlife.

And so Vasile ensured that he had a fallback plan. He worried about what sort of unlife the Stain might bestow upon him. Thus he had a sacred First-Day artifact buried alongside him in his tomb: the *Venerated Pumice*. The scholarly baron had tracked down this treasure as soon as Ingrid began discussing unholy revival.

The pumice is a form of essentialized magick negation, a sort of arcane disinfectant. Rub the pumice on any alchemically fortified creature, any ward, or any enchanted artifact, and all supernatural properties emanating from within are scrubbed away.

The Venerated Pumice can be used after combat to cleanse the tomb, Vasile, the brick bullies, the skeletons, any travelers in town, and the entire barrow free of the Stain. This lifts the curse, and all those who have been trapped in Sootwyn Barrow but are not yet fully unsanguine soon fully recover. They once again find sunlight a joy, and they lose their immortality.

Mechanically, the process of cleansing the tomb of the Stain takes only a few minutes; cleansing the Twilight Bethel and the cluster of buildings near the Unsanguine Gate takes a few hours; and cleansing the entire town, including its fields and cemetery, takes the better part of a day. There is no cost to this work other than time, and the other Barrow Lords have no magickal means of stopping the process once it begins—though the beastmen fight back, if they weren't killed earlier in the evening. (Ingrid gives into a deep, dark fit of melancholy and does not resist the annihilation of the return of her stolen years.) Note, the Stain may be tied to Vasile, but it has gripped the entire Barrow. Fully cleansing the city of this poisonous magickal radiation requires more than simply relieving the false vampyre of his cursed quasi-consciousness.

During combat, the Venerated Pumice can be used as a weapon of sorts, although this is not its purpose. Against foes not marked by the Stain, including skeletons, it is merely an ordinary rock (and not a particularly hard one): as a blunt weapon, it inflicts d4 damage.

Against foes empowered by the Stain (the beastmen, Senza, the brick bullies, and Vasile), the Venerated Pumice inflicts 2d4 damage, ignores damage reduction, and saps GRT equal to whatever damage it inflicts from the

target. That GRT flows into the environment nearby, healing it. Note, since the wielder is presumably also affected by the Stain, they should wear gloves: the Venerated Pumice burns anyone affected by the curse as though reversing frostbite.

FINDING THE ANCIENT STONE

Vasile had faith that *should something go wrong*, he would at least be able to wipe away his sins, erasing himself from undeath and unlife altogether.

Unfortunately, that was not to be. The same magicks that have rendered Vasile unthinking and feral have also bestowed him a degree of self-preservation that his dormant rationality cannot overcome. In the back of his mind, Vasile desperately wants to use the stone to destroy himself and the Stain with it, but the overflowing lifeforce that feeds him will not allow it.

Alas, this too was a potentiality Vasile had foreseen. And so he taught songs and fables to the children of Sootwyn Barrow and neighboring villages. Nursery rhymes speak of the “vampyre bane” and the “floating stone.” Perhaps someone would connect the dots, venture into the tomb, and free the cursed baron from his profane existence.

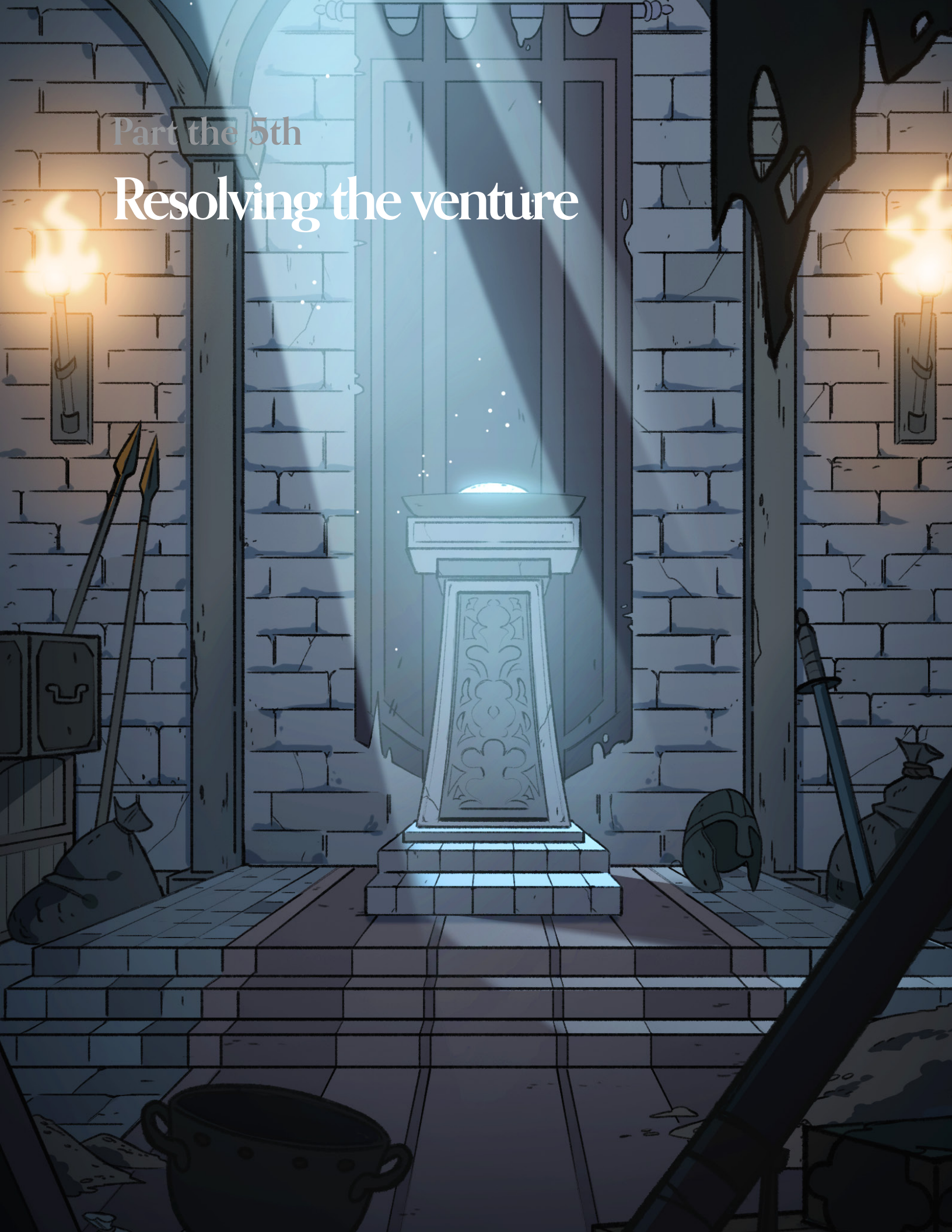
Should the players descend deep enough into the Tomb to find the Venerated Pumice, they may use it to eliminate the Sootwyn Stain once and for all, scraping away the curse embedded in Vasile's bones.

Ultimately, **it is up to you where the players might find the stone in Vasile's tomb.** The children's song describes it as “down below the tomb, in a moonlit room,” but that may no longer be the case. After all, the tomb reshapes itself each evening. Perhaps Vasile keeps it close by, or maybe he has buried it deep in the lowest bowels of the crypt. It could even be buried within the chest of a brick bully.

Searching the entire tomb takes at least an hour and cannot happen during combat. And even if Vasile is led away out of his crypt, the brick bullies remain faithful guards of its depths (as do any other denizens that your nightmarish creativity spawns). That said, certain powers (*augur, find clue, track*) may allow the adventurers to immediately locate the Venerated Pumice (or Vasile, if he is hiding). Just keep in mind: they still have to learn of its existence and seek it out!

Part the 5th

Resolving the venture



Defeating Vasile and unmaking the Stain

Like the other Barrow Lords, Vasile can only be defeated temporarily under normal circumstances. His corporeal form may be destroyed in direct combat, though even this will be exceptionally difficult. Vasile has the accumulated lifeforce of hundreds of former villagers and errant travelers alike, and this powerful essence spills out from him in a stream of violent chaos. Nevertheless, a party that possesses great strength and employs wise tactics may be able to crush Vasile into dust. Some tools throughout the Barrow may prove useful during bouts with the false vampyre:

- ⌘ Offering a blessing at Vasile's cairn will weaken the invigorating energy of the Stain.
- ⌘ Dyzek's legendary mace mazuga was designed to smash bones, and Vasile's bones are just as susceptible.
- ⌘ Speaking of Vasile's former life as a benevolent noble or of his romance with Ingrid may temporarily distract him from the fight, creating an opening for the party.
- ⌘ Vasile's heedless violence can work against him. He is easily distracted by nearby sources of lifeforce. If the party can lure other powerful creatures to Vasile or sacrifice one of themselves, the Barrow Lords will doggedly focus on his immediate prey in lieu of peripheral threats.

Once the party has downed Vasile, the only way to eliminate the Stain for good is to purge it with the Venerated Pumice. This legendary stone will neutralize the transference magick that binds Vasile to Sootwyn Barrow. Even if Vasile's body is temporarily destroyed, the Stain may lash out, animating the stones and slime around the party in an effort to protect itself. Should the party persevere, however, they will give Vasile a proper death and expel the blight from Sootwyn Barrow for good.

Aftermath

There are a few different flavors of ending possible for this adventure. The standard conclusion involves the party defeating Vasile in combat, recovering the Venerated Pumice, and then permanently eliminating the Stain. If the party succeeds, Ingrid's age catches up with her, killing her and ending the spell that animates the cemetery's skeletons. Beshik and Haun cease to be immortal but do not die immediately unless the party defeated them earlier this evening. The blight that taints Sootwyn Barrow gradually lifts, and people eventually return to the village as tales of its haunting fade into memory.

Alternatively, the party may fail. If they try repeatedly to end the curse, they may turn unsanguine before they can complete their quest. If this happens, Ingrid continues to build her skeletal army until she can either lure in a vampyre to grant Vasile the rebirth she seeks for him, or until a different party of adventurers succeeds where the first group failed.

There may be other spins on the tale as well. Perhaps the party is able to revive Vasile in some more humane manner. Will he shed the evil of his cursed form or reign terror on the surrounding countryside? Will Ingrid accept the new incarnation of her paramour, or will she resent the creature he has become? Maybe the party will seek to join Ingrid in her quest, or maybe they'll set off with Beshik and Haun to hunt nearby villages...

If your party is particularly creative, they may yet propose other stranger conclusions to this quest. Which options are viable will depend on the tenor of your campaign. Are the adventurers heroes who can help to shape the future of this realm? Or is this a tale of true horror in which their agency is stripped away?

Avral

OF PEYCHAR, MARABOUT OF THE CYRCLE OF MOTHS

Identity

Background	Human-Valer
Class/vocation	Leech/Skindancer (Shapeshifting Shaman), level 1
Cult	The Second Day, also called the Cult of Rhythm (Curiosity, Knowledge, Instinct)

Scores

COM	d6	HEA	24 maximum
MOV	d12	GRT	22 maximum
REA	d10	DR	1 (robes of leaves & shells)
WIL	d8		
CHA	d6		

Background powers

- ‡ **Battle-hardened (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +3 to rolls related to strategy in combat, including surprise attacks and retreats (**MOV/run**), but not standard attacks or called shots.
- ‡ **Rust-blooded (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +6 HEA [factored in].

Class powers

- ‡ **Feed (hour)** – When not under direct threat, you pass around the jerky and booze for a while. Burn 6 GRT: you and everyone with you regains +dCHA +your level in pool, to be distributed between GRT and HEA however they like. Note, this takes one hour—not five, like normal resting.
- ‡ **Heal (standard)** – You practice trauma medicine, using your training and a small kit of useful plants. Burn X GRT and treat a person, you or someone else: that person regains X +your level HEA. Healing also cures bleed, burn, stun, and other non-Weird conditions. Heal can be used on someone with 0 HEA: in this case, the person receiving healing wakes up, groggy and weak, and can act. In any given 24-hour period, heal can only be used on the same person twice.
- ‡ **Listen (hour)** – You talk to someone, and they feel much better: at no cost other than time, one person, not you, regains your dCHA +your level GRT. This requires a safe environment (quiet room, empty tavern, private tent). Listening only works once per day on the same person, but you can listen to more than one person per day.
- ‡ **Dance in your skin (two-round)** – Your true form is that of a beast: in your case, a small flying predator. At will, you may burn 2d6 GRT and transform into this type of beast, if you are presently in human form, or back into a human guise, if a beast. While a beast, you cannot speak, but your scores remain the same.

‡ *Owl (barn, screech, true, white-faced, wood) or microraptor* – In beast form, you can fly. You can attack once per round for d3 damage. In both forms, you can detect Weird events within 25 M and speak to all magickal beasts.

- ‡ **Heal land (five-hour)** – As a ritual, instead of resting, you may choose to heal a small patch of blighted land. This costs no grit, but you do not regain pool while healing the land. In the future, however, you and your companions recover pool completely after 5 hours of rest at this location.
- ‡ **Wear both skins (standard)** – Burn 3d4 GRT: for the following number of rounds equal to your level +1, your form becomes huge and grotesque, both beast and person, and your powers shift: your natural attacks now deals dCOM or dMOV damage, whichever is higher. You gain +2 DR and become immune to lead weapons (bullets), but you now take double damage from silver and Ælf-steel weapons. You automatically intimidate all non-Skindancers who fail a WIL check. In addition, as a free action, you can regenerate 1 HEA per round per level by burning 2 GRT.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Canny** – You gain advantage on REA/know checks.
- ‡ **Mutable** – You suffer disadvantage on **WIL/resist** checks.

Weapons

- ‡ **Beak (in normal raptor form)** – d3 damage, melee range
- ‡ **Beak (when wearing both skins)** – d12 damage, melee range, +2 DR

Gear

- ⌘ **Pet wolf-dog** – COM d6, MOV d6, REA 1, WIL d4, CHA d4, HEA 10, GRT 1, bite inflicts d6+1 damage
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – Explorer's gear (crampons, picks, torches, traps), worth 4d4 guilders

Appearance

- ⌘ You are heavily tattooed: every inch of your body has been inked over. Over your shell armor, you wear a rough cloak matted with fur and twigs.

Backstory

- ⌘ Before entering the druidic mysteries, you worked as a praefectus casati (tax collector) for the narcissistic "Fenlaird," Baron Hrat, in the Slumbering Realms. Today, you are a healer, mystic, and—as needed—either a small flying beast or a grotesque hybrid monster. Your natural-monastic order, the Cyrle of Moths, is dedicated to flying by night from region to region, healing landscapes that were scarred by the wars of the ancient past and—when possible—preventing the spread of the irradiated desert of Tanath.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ You were told about Sootwyn Barrow by your seniors in the Cyrle and became intrigued, or else your seniors instructed you to travel there and investigate. Whatever is going on in the blighted town can't be good (in any sense) for animals, plants, and people.

Geegax

THE TREMULATOR

Identity

Background	Gvar (“Red Dwarf,” “Radiation Dwarf”)
Class/vocation	Rider / Berserker (Nomadic Warrior), level 1
Cult	The Third or Final Day, also called the Cult of Force (Power, Control, Sacrifice)

Scores

COM	d12	HEA	20 maximum
MOV	d8	GRT	23 maximum
REA	d6	DR	2 (living armor—huge, hungry beetles)
WIL	d10+1		
CHA	d6		

Background powers

- ‡ **Basilisk eyes (standard)** – Stare at a target and burn 4 GRT; you take 2 HEA damage; your target takes dWIL (your WIL) +your level HEA damage. Your target does not get to dodge. Every time you use this power, your non-gvar colleagues become slightly more suspicious of you.
- ‡ **Centered (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +1 WIL [factored in].
- ‡ **Environmental resistance (permanent)** – You don’t have to breathe air, and you can withstand wild temperature and pressure swings. You cannot survive strong acid, lava, etc., any more than any other species.
- ‡ **Perfect nightvision (permanent)** – You can see in total darkness.
- ‡ **Tourmaline shards (passive)** – Anyone who attacks you in hand-to-hand combat takes 2 HEA damage per attack, whether or not she is successful at inflicting damage on you. Your unarmed attacks also do dCOM+2 damage instead of dCOM. You make everyone slightly afraid all the time: –1 to seduce checks.
- ‡ **Cut down (free)** – When you successfully hit a target, you can burn 5 GRT and roll dCOM again: if you get a 6 or higher, you can choose to kill the target outright. If you cut down more than one opponent per combat, make a dWIL check: if you fail to get a 6 or higher, you lose d8 GRT and are visibly shaken.
- ‡ **Endure (passive)** – When you reach 0 HEA, if you have any GRT left, you don’t become prone. You can keep fighting until you win and don’t have to fight any more—at which point you immediately fall prone, exhausted—or you run out of GRT and die.
- ‡ **Explode (passive)** – Whenever you roll the maximum value on a damage die, you may burn 1 GRT to roll again, adding the new result to the total damage. This can go on as long as you continue to burn 1 GRT per roll and to roll the maximum value on the given die.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Strategic** – You gain advantage on damage rolls with one weapon [greatsword].
- ‡ **Unbalanced** – You suffer disadvantage on checks related to escaping.

Weapons

- ‡ **Greatsword** – 2d6 damage, melee range, 2 automatic damage (shards), trained
- ‡ **Fists** – d12+2 damage, melee range, 2 automatic damage (shards)

Class powers

- ‡ **Fight (passive)** – Your unarmed combat damage is now dCOM instead of d2.
- ‡ **Slay (standard)** – Instead of a normal attack, you may burn 6 GRT and attack twice on the same initiative. Slaying does not allow you to take non-attack standard actions or to move more than 5 M.
- ‡ **Train (passive)** – Every level, choose one specific type of weapon in which to train. Whenever you attack with a weapon in which you are trained, you may burn 5 GRT, before rolling to hit, to roll twice, taking the higher result. This power stacks with other forms of advantage. [Greatsword, factored in.]

Gear

- ⌘ **Lump of magnetic ore** – It glows unfra-red (only Gvarim can see this spectrum) in the presence of bugs
- ⌘ **Sack** – Full of bone dice and ox jerky
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – Suit of armor, up to and including chain-mail, worth up to 35 guilders [living armor, factored in]

Appearance

- ⌘ You wear some kind of ancient Gvarheimish automaton's head, hollowed out and beaten into shape, as a helmet. You don't like wearing clothing, other than your beetle-armor, since down below the earth is always a perfectly cool temperature.

Backstory

- ⌘ In the great underground ruin—city of Gvarheim, no sport is more popular than Murderdrome... And yet after only a few fights—all successes for you—you decided that you had had enough truly pointless bloodshed and set out, westward, where you encountered this group.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ You heard that Sootwyn Barrow has bested more than a few supposed champions. Why not see for yourself!?

Hreda

THE UNMEMORIOUS

Identity

Background	Gytrash (“Horseheaded One,” “Horse Golem”)
Class/vocation	Rider / Ranger (Sharpshooter), level 1
Cult	The New Day, also called the Cult of Entropy (Liberty)

Scores

COM	d10	HEA	18 maximum
MOV	d8	GRT	21 maximum
REA	d8	DR	1 (leather buffcoat)
WIL	d12+1		
CHA	d4		

Background powers

- ‡ **Calm hands (permanent)** – You gain a bonus to REA/make/repair checks equal to your level.
- ‡ **Centered (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +1 WIL [factored in].
- ‡ **Equine sensorium (free)** – You can smell traps, hidden doors, and enemies around corners on a successful perceive check. (You must intentionally ask to make this check.)
- ‡ **Existentialist (special)** – Under duress, you question your existence and suffer a –2 to all attempts to escape—whether rolling to flee, make a called shot, etc.—until you make a WIL save at a penalty according to how long this crisis has persisted: –1 per day during a crisis such as being jailed; –1 per hour during a firefight that you’re obviously losing; –1 per minute while drowning, etc.
- ‡ **Hale (once/level)** – You gain +2 HEA every level, including first.
- ‡ **Horseboxing (standard)** – Attacks with your meaty fists deal d8 or dCOM damage, whichever is higher, and you can attack with them twice per round.
- ‡ **Hungry (permanent)** – You must eat twice as much as a human. If you can’t eat at least one large meal in a given day, you suffer disadvantage on all rolls until the next time you eat.

Class powers

- ‡ **Fight (passive)** – Your unarmed combat damage is now dCOM instead of d2.
- ‡ **Slay (standard)** – Instead of a normal attack, you may burn 6 GRT and attack twice on the same initiative. Slaying does not allow you to take non-attack standard actions or to move more than 5 M.
- ‡ **Train (passive)** – Every level, choose one specific type of weapon in which to train. Whenever you attack with a weapon in which you are trained, you may

burn 5 GRT, before rolling to hit, to roll twice, taking the higher result. This power stacks with other forms of advantage. [Longbow, factored in.]

- ‡ **Ambush (two-round)** – Burn 6 GRT before you attack. If you successfully hit your opponent, you inflict double damage. If you are 5th level or higher, you may spend another 6 GRT on hitting to inflict triple damage instead.
- ‡ **Hunt (passive)** – When you attack a target whom you’ve tracked down or fought at any point in the past, you can burn 2 GRT to inflict an extra d10 damage. In this one case, you can burn this GRT after rolling to see if you hit.
- ‡ **Tame (standard/hour)** – You either tame a strange beast (not an intelligent being), or find and then tame one:
 - ‡ If you’re already standing near a beast, you can burn 2 GRT as a standard power to calm it so that it won’t eat you. You may then burn 8 additional GRT and spend an hour working with it to make it your loyal pet.
 - ‡ If you are not already near a beast, you can burn 2 GRT and spend 3d4 hours searching to find a beast to tame.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Courageous** – You gain advantage on **WIL/resist** checks.
- ‡ **Selfish** – You suffer disadvantage on **CHA/deceive** checks.

Weapons

- ‡ **Well-made longbow** – d8+d4 damage, 200-M range, trained
- ‡ **Fists** – d10 damage, melee range, can attack twice per round

Gear

- ⌘ **Ancient techno-magickal firewand** – Blowtorch, does not require fuel other than air; it's small and great for starting fires in the wild
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – None: instead, you have medium-important contacts in two different locations of your choice. These are either allies or people who owe you favors. If you are in a contact's location, you can call in a favor, one time

Appearance

- ⌘ You are an eldritch biomechanical golem—a gray, seven-foot-tall humanoid with a horse's head. You have one eye and wear an eyepatch over the other. (Magickally, this does not affect your depth perception.) You wear dull, rugged hunter's clothes.

Backstory

- ⌘ Before striking out on your own, you worked as a mercenary for the rebellious and famously cruel Queen of the Rust in Vale-of-Vanat.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ You heard that Sootwyn Barrow is an entire town suffering from an existential crisis. You figured that whatever crisis is going on beyond its gate may offer you insights into your own lonely condition. Or at least you'll see a new part of the world. Who's to say? A random walk is often its own reward.

Dr. Rev. Hynsi Qitish

OF RODESHYVE

Identity

Background	Halush (“Shortling,” “Half-Dwarf”)
Class/vocation	Leech / Physicke (Academic), level 1
Cult	The First Day, also called the Cult of Stillness (Creation, Patience, Practice)

Scores

COM	d6	HEA	12 maximum
MOV	d6	GRT	19 maximum
REA	d10	DR	0 (no armor)
WIL	d12		
CHA	d8+1		

Background powers

- ‡ **Imperfect nightvision (permanent)** – You suffer no penalties for low visible light as long as some spectrum is being emitted in trace amounts.
- ‡ **Insight (standard)** – Burn 1 GRT and make a REA check; if successful, you have a minor epiphany: you detect a lie or confirm a truth in conversation, find a useful common item, remember something useful, etc. This insight is subject to GM review.
- ‡ **Lucky (special)** – Whenever you roll a natural 1, you may burn 1 GRT to reroll. You may do this once per real-life game session, per level.
- ‡ **Pleasant (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +1 CHA. But... your maximum COM die type is d10 [factored in].
- ‡ **Travel lust (free)** – When traveling, as long as you have never been in this exact location before, you may make a WIL check. If you do, you gain +2 on your next action. If you come back here, you can no longer use this power.
- ‡ **Listen (hour)** – You talk to someone, and they feel much better: at no cost other than time, one person, not you, regains your dCHA +your level GRT. This requires a safe environment (quiet room, empty tavern, private tent). Listening only works once per day on the same person, but you can listen to more than one person per day.
- ‡ **Discover (three-hour)** – Burn 3 GRT, wrack your brain, and search or work for 3 hours: you find or create any non-magickal object that might conceivably be in this area or could be easily made with the resources on hand. This can be exactly the item the group needed. You can also reduce the time required by spending more GRT; each additional point shaves off 15 minutes from the search.
- ‡ **Find clue (once-per-session/standard)** – You find something genuinely useful, plot-wise. You can find a clue toward whichever plot you want, but you should make your choice clear to the GM. This clue is specific: you don’t necessarily understand the bigger picture, but you know what you need to do next.

Class powers

- ‡ **Feed (hour)** – When not under direct threat, you pass around the jerky and booze for a while. Burn 6 GRT: you and everyone with you regains +dCHA +your level in pool, to be distributed between GRT and HEA however they like. Note, this takes one hour—not five, like normal resting.
- ‡ **Heal (standard)** – You practice trauma medicine, using your training and a small kit of useful plants. Burn X GRT and treat a person, you or someone else: that person regains X +your level HEA. Healing also cures bleed, burn, stun, and other non-Weird conditions. Heal can be used on someone with 0 HEA: in this case, the person receiving healing wakes up, groggy and weak, and can act. In any given 24-hour period, heal can only be used on the same person twice (whether by you or you and another healer).
- ‡ **Research (delayed–standard)** – You have read many eldritch tomes, and you now understand how to uncover secret wisdoms. Burn 10 –dREA GRT, minimum 2, and ask any answerable (short) question. At the end of the round, after everyone else in initiative has acted, you work out the answer, or a nameless spirit—thing whom you slyly contacted replies with it. This answer may be vague, depending on the question, but will not be malicious, a lie, or incomplete.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Centered** – You gain advantage on **WIL/perceive** checks.
- ‡ **Unconcerned** – You suffer disadvantage on **MOV/initiate** checks.

Weapons

- ⌘ **Scalpel** – d4 damage, melee range

Gear

- ⌘ **Doctor's bag** – With basic healing equipment and medical supplies
- ⌘ **Powerful city-dwelling ally of some sort** – A noble patient, e.g. (you choose): your ally will help you once per adventure in any way that she can
- ⌘ **d8 preparations of the drug gazun** – 1 hit of gazun heals d6 HEA; every time you use gazun, you have a 1 in 10 chance of becoming addicted
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – Artisan's tools (for a smith, cobbler, weaver, tea seller), worth 5d8 guilders

Appearance

- ⌘ You have a large scar on the left side of your face. You wore the semi-fancy clothes and bolo tie of a rural doctor.

Backstory

- ⌘ Before finding religion, you worked directly for the Halush mafia of Rodeshyve as a comedian.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ One of your old Mafia patrons once had loved ones in Sootwyn Barrow and wants you to check out the situation and report back. Or, if you can, fix it. You're a doctor, right? You heal things? Heal the town, and it could earn you some major favors in Rodeshyve.

Orolen'Urath Ulquzun

OF RAADRAAX DISTRICT

Identity

Background	Snow Ælf
Class/vocation	Rider / Paladyn (Knyght), level 1
Cult	The Third or Final Day, also called the Cult of Force (Power, Control, Sacrifice)

Scores

COM	d12	HEA	22 maximum
MOV	d10	GRT	15 maximum
REA	d6+1	DR	4 (chainmail, -3 penalty on non-dodge MOV checks)
WIL	d8		
CHA	d6		

Background powers

- ‡ **Imperfect nightvision (permanent)** – You suffer no penalties for low visible light as long as some spectrum is being emitted in trace amounts.
- ‡ **Mythril-tipped weapon (item)** – Choose one melee weapon: it gains bleed 1 (bleed causes damage every round until treated). If you lose this weapon, you can call upon your union to replace it, but that will take some time.
- ‡ **Pistol expertise (permanent)** – You are trained (+3 to attack/parry) with all pistols.
- ‡ **Wise (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +1 REA [factored in].
- ‡ **Command (standard)** – Burn 5 GRT and give a non-suicidal command to someone who understands you; that person must act upon the command. This is not a magickal power, however, and is thus can be overruled by magick.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Strategic** – You gain advantage on damage rolls with one weapon [horse pistol].
- ‡ **Unbalanced** – You suffer disadvantage on checks related to escaping.

Weapons

- ‡ **Horse pistol** – 2d10 damage, 25-M range, can be shot every other round, +3 to attack, trained
- ‡ **Bastard sword** – d12 damage, melee range, mythril-tipped (adds *bleed* 1)

Class powers

- ‡ **Fight (passive)** – Your unarmed combat damage is now dCOM instead of d2.
- ‡ **Slay (standard)** – Instead of a normal attack, you may burn 6 GRT and attack twice on the same initiative. Slaying does not allow you to take non-attack standard actions or to move more than 5 M.
- ‡ **Train (passive)** – Every level, choose one specific type of weapon in which to train. Whenever you attack with a weapon in which you are trained, you may burn 5 GRT, before rolling to hit, to roll twice, taking the higher result. This power stacks with other forms of advantage. [Horse pistol, factored in.]
- ‡ **Bark (free)** – Shout a quick suggestion to aid a companion: burn X GRT, max your level +1; someone else receives +X to her next roll. This can stack with boost.
- ‡ **Chain attack (free)** – If you take down a target—that is, kill, reduce to 0 HEA, incapacitate, or otherwise physically dominate him—you can immediately burn 2 GRT to make another attack on that same turn against a new foe within 5 M.

Gear

- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – Suit of armor, up to and including chainmail, worth up to 35 guilders [chainmail, factored in]

Appearance

- ⌘ One of your front teeth is silver, the original one having been knocked out by a yutti (snow beast). You wear a colorful tabard over your banded armor, and a fine Sile'mesh tunic underneath.

Backstory

- ⌘ Before swearing an oath to the undying Erl-Kyng of Silemar, the glacial techno-city-state of the Snow Ælves, you worked as a professional hunter of yutti, defending the families who live beyond your city's walls.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ The Erl-Kyng's spies travel far and wide. One of them reports that there is a powerful eldritch disturbance in Sootwyn Barrow. Someone must travel all the way there and investigate firsthand. The fortress-kingdom of the Snow Ælves has not stood for over a thousand years without careful attention to all manner of strange activities across the world.

Thraath Hides-the-Sky

A WASTREL

Identity

Background	Zaavyar (“Fanged One,” “Lizard Golem”)
Class/vocation	Witness / Wasp (Assassin), level 1
Cult	The New Day, also called the Cult of Entropy (Liberty)

Scores

COM	d12+1	HEA	21 maximum
MOV	d8	GRT	23 maximum
REA	d6	DR	4 (scales)
WIL	d6		
CHA	d10		

Background powers

- ‡ **Fangs and claws (standard)** – You can attack three times in one round for d8, d4, and d4 damage (fangs, claw, claw).
- ‡ **Martial (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +1 COM [factored in].
- ‡ **Scales (permanent)** – You have natural damage reduction (DR) of 4 [factored in].
- ‡ **Venomous bite (permanent)** – Anyone struck by your bite must pass a WIL check or take an additional d10 damage and become stunned for a number of rounds equal to your level. Subsequent bites become lethal on failed checks.

Class powers

- ‡ **Con (standard)** – Burn 4 GRT and tell a lie: everyone believes it, no check required. This is not a weird power and won’t work forever, if the lie is unreasonable or easily disproved, but it will allow you to fool anyone briefly.
- ‡ **Read (standard)** – Regardless of what you’re encountering, if it’s kinda humanoid at all, you can quickly get a good sense of who they are, what they want, and how to communicate with them. Burn 4 GRT and make a REA check: if you succeed, you fluidly establish lasting contact (if you don’t speak the same language) or a meaningful rapport (if you speak the same language). If you fail, you establish some sort of contact but anger your new friends in doing so. The GM should secretly raise the difficulty of the REA check to 7 if the entities you’re reading are already definitely suspicious, or 9 if they are hostile.
- ‡ **Smooth over (standard)** – You can calmly smooth over misunderstandings—the kind that doom many adventures: burn 3 GRT for an easily remedied bad situation (difficulty 5 CHA check), 5 for a difficult one (difficulty 6), and 7 for a near-impossible one (diffi-

culty 7). Roll a CHA check. If you succeed, all works out (for now—you can always re-blunder). If you fail, roll another CHA check: success on this one means you haven’t made the situation worse; failure incites your interlocutors to attack immediately. (N.B., in actual game play, this is arguably the most useful single class power.)

- ‡ **Ambush (two-round)** – Burn 6 GRT before you attack. If you successfully hit your opponent, you inflict double damage. If you are 5th level or higher, you may spend another 6 GRT on hitting to inflict triple damage instead.
- ‡ **Murder (standard)** – Sidebar with the GM: hatch a plot to kill one target, and then burn X GRT. The plot must make some kind of sense, and you have to be the one to actually “pull the trigger.” X must be greater than the level of the target, minimum 2. Whenever the time is right, roll dCOM to attack the target (even if you’re using poison, etc.). This roll can be signaled secretly to the GM using a pre-arranged signal. (“I roll to parry” = murder, e.g.) The target rolls dMOV or dWIL to resist, depending on the nature of the attack (stabbing vs. poison, e.g.). For every 5X you spent when plotting, your target suffers a –1 on their roll to resist. If your final result is equal to or greater than your target’s, they immediately die.
- ‡ **Sting (free)** – You know how to pierce the thickest of armor. Burn 2X GRT: your next successful attack ignores X DR. This power works even against magickal armor but is not itself magickal.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Courageous** – You gain advantage on MOV/sneak checks.
- ‡ **Selfish** – You suffer disadvantage on WIL/perceive checks.

Weapons

- ⌘ **Fang, fang, bite** – d8, d4, and d4 damage, melee range; bite is venomous
- ⌘ **Hatchet, well-made** – 2d4+1 damage, 10-M range

Gear

- ⌘ **Picaresque tools** – Garrote: grants you advantage on **COM/grapple** checks when you ambush your target
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – None: instead, you have medium-important contacts in two different locations of your choice. These are either allies or people who owe you favors. If you are in a contact's location, you can call in a favor, one time

Appearance

- ⌘ You are an eldritch biomechanical golem—a six-foot-tall, bipedal monitor lizard with vaguely human vocal cords. Many of your large, dark red scales are adorned with piercings. You wear simple, dark gray artisan's clothes that help you blend into most urban settings.

Backstory

- ⌘ Before joining up with a professional group of venturers, you were an urchin, a mysterious wanderer unwelcome in majority-human lands. People were intrigued by you, however, and you learned quite a lot about the various peoples of Vanat.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ You've found that most people are simply too afraid of consequences—physical, social, moral—to explore dark and supposedly dangerous places. (Hell, most don't even turn out to be that bloody dangerous.) This "Sootwyn Barrow" place sounds like somewhere you might fit in, or at least make a buck.

Vermillion Fist

PERIPATETIC LAIRD—SCION OF CSAKVARRIN

Identity

Background	Human–Northerner
Class/vocation	Witness / Courtier (Spy), level 1
Cult	The First Day, also called the Cult of Stillness (Creation, Patience, Practice)

Scores

COM	d8	HEA	18 maximum
MOV	d10	GRT	22 maximum
REA	d6	DR	0 (no armor)
WIL	d6		
CHA	d12		

Background powers

- ‡ **Ælfín contraband (item)** – You begin play with a well-made Snow Ælf gun of your choice and 100 bullets. It's stolen, and the owners want it back... [Factored in.]
- ‡ **Slasher (permanent)** – When you strike with a bladed melee weapon such as an axe or sword, you may burn 4 GRT; if you do, you inflict +1 *bleed*. This is cumulative.

Class powers

- ‡ **Con (standard)** – Burn 4 GRT and tell a lie: everyone believes it, no check required. This is not a weird power and won't work forever, if the lie is unreasonable or easily disproved, but it will allow you to fool anyone briefly.
- ‡ **Read (standard)** – Regardless of what you're encountering, if it's kinda humanoid at all, you can quickly get a good sense of who they are, what they want, and how to communicate with them. Burn 4 GRT and make a REA check: if you succeed, you fluidly establish lasting contact (if you don't speak the same language) or a meaningful rapport (if you speak the same language). If you fail, you establish some sort of contact but anger your new friends in doing so. The GM should secretly raise the difficulty of the REA check to 7 if the entities you're reading are already definitely suspicious, or 9 if they are hostile.
- ‡ **Smooth over (standard)** – You can calmly smooth over misunderstandings—the kind that doom many adventures: burn 3 GRT for an easily remedied bad situation (difficulty 5 CHA check), 5 for a difficult one (difficulty 6), and 7 for a near-impossible one (difficulty 7). Roll a CHA check. If you succeed, all works out (for now—you can always re-blunder). If you fail, roll another CHA check: success on this one means you haven't made the situation worse; failure incites

your interlocutors to attack immediately. (N.B., in actual game play, this is arguably the most useful single class power.)

- ‡ **Capture attention (standard/ongoing)** – When you flirt, tease, or sing, others cannot act without passing a WIL check whose difficulty equals 5 + your level. You cannot take other actions while capturing attention, but this makes a great distraction.
- ‡ **Coax (standard)** – After you charm someone in any way, as a standard action, you can ask one question: the target must answer truthfully, immediately, without omission. Note: this is not a magical power.
- ‡ **Faint (free)** – Whenever you would take damage, you can roll your CHA against the WIL of another person's within 10 M. If your result is equal or higher, then that person takes the damage instead of you.
- ‡ **Steal (standard)** – Name a stealable object (or over-hearable or glance-at-able phrase or password, etc.) and burn d8 GRT. Roll a dMOV + your level check. If you succeed, you steal the thing without being caught. If you fail, the entity from whom you're stealing makes a dWIL check: if she succeeds, she catches you; if she fails, you still didn't steal the thing, but at least you didn't get caught. A 1 is always a failure.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Centered** – You gain advantage on **REA/make/repair** checks.
- ‡ **Unconcerned** – You suffer disadvantage on **MOV/sneak** checks.

Weapons

- ‡ **Rifle, Ælfín, large-caliber (.38)** – 2d8 damage, 400-M range, two-handed, doubles as a club, stolen!
- ‡ **Longsword** – d10 damage, melee range, can add *bleed* 1 for 4 GRT

Gear

- ⌘ **Picaresque tools** – Lockpicks; d3 doses of poison (target rolls WIL check, difficulty 7, to resist total paralysis for 30 minutes); clothes and cosmetics that will disguise you as another gender
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – Fine artist's gear (for a painter, sculptor, musician, parfumeur, chef), worth 5d8 guilders

Appearance

- ⌘ Your plain but well-crafted jewelry indicates your social status among the montane tribes. Ritual and non-ritual scars further adorn you and indicate your experience as a warrior. Under your ceremonial birch cloak, you wear uncommon furs and the fine clothes of a noble.

Backstory

- ⌘ As the child of the great chieftain Zar the Unyielding, Laird of the Byržas Hills, Regent of Csakvarrin, you were expected to become a great warrior one day. You did not disappoint. Unfortunately for you, five older siblings must wear and then cede the Crown of Birch before you can do so. Thus you wander!

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ There is no place for a sixth child among the Byržas people. It is better for everyone that you wander. It is best, of course, if your wandering reflects well upon your upbringing. This Sootwyn Barrow is far from home, but if its own people are in need of aid, then the Byržas will approve when you give what aid you can.

Volx the Improbable

“INQUISITOR OF ENIGMAS” (SELF-STYLED)

Identity

Background	Human–Yiricone
Class/vocation	Wytch / World Eater (Void Wytch), level 1
Cult	The New Day, also called the Cult of Entropy (Liberty)

Scores

COM	d4	HEA	12 maximum
MOV	d8	GRT	26 maximum
REA	d12	DR	0 (no armor)
WIL	d10		
CHA	d8		

Background powers

‡ **Urban (permanent)** – In cities and towns, you gain a +2 bonus to flee, perceive, search, sneak, and track checks. Outside of cities and towns, you suffer a –2 penalty to resist world checks (but not resist other checks). Note: Sootwyn Barrow is technically a town.

Class powers

- ‡ **Cast (standard/varies)** – You can use magick. You begin play knowing how to safely cast 3 spells chosen from one of three lists according to your vocation. Casting is usually a standard action but may vary by spell. Spells have widely varying grit costs. After first level, you learn new spells according to your vocation [3 per level].
- ‡ **Detect magick (standard)** – If you suspect someone is using magick near you (or on you!), you may take a few moments, burn 2 GRT, and call for a perceive check: if you make the check, you learn some general information about the nature of the magick happening currently. You don’t necessarily learn who is causing this Weirdness, but you learn what is going on, in broad terms.
- ‡ **Pass (passive)** – Whenever someone suspects you of being a wytch, you may claim to be something else. Instead of rolling CHA to deceive your target, you may roll WIL. If your roll is equal to or higher than your target’s she believes you are not a wytch (until/unless you cast a spell), and you recover d2 GRT.
- ‡ **Borrow breath (ten-minute, usable once per day)** – Drain your dWIL +your level GRT from another intelligent being within 3 M. This sapient does not feel anything; her GRT simply flows to you. This takes ten minutes and does not require a quiet environment.

- ‡ **Call Weird (standard, usable once per day)** – When you let your brain do what it wants to do, strange things happen... Burn d3 HEA. You gain a Weird die that you may add to any roll of your choice or convert into so much GRT (roll for it). At first level, your Weird die is a d6. Using a Weird die is a free action, and it goes away as soon as you roll it. Calling Weird does not require a quiet environment, nor must your hands be free, but you must be able to focus. Whenever you call Weird, you suddenly appear strange: Your skin appears discolored or slimy; you smell like ozone or rotting figs; your hair stands on end and emits a pale blue-gray glow, etc. This gives you away, if you are pretending to be normal.
- ‡ **Memorize (ten-minute/free)** – In addition to weaving the Weird in real-time by casting, you may prepare spells in advance by “memorizing” them in order to unleash a storm of magick later. To memorize a spell, set aside the grit that it costs; this GRT is unavailable to you until you cast the spell, after which you may recover it normally. Memorizing a spell takes ten minutes; casting a memorized spell is always a free action, regardless of the listed casting time. This means that, at a high GRT cost, you can cast more than one spell per round!
- ‡ **Con (standard)** – Burn 4 GRT and tell a lie: everyone believes it, no check required. This is not a weird power and won’t work forever, if the lie is unreasonable or easily disproved, but it will allow you to fool anyone briefly.

Cult powers

- ‡ **Courageous** – You gain advantage on **WIL/resist** checks.
- ‡ **Selfish** – You suffer disadvantage on **WIL/perceive** checks.

Weapons

- ⌘ **None**

Gear

- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – None: instead, you have medium-important contacts in two different locations of your choice. These are either allies or people who owe you favors. If you are in a contact's location, you can call in a favor, one time

Appearance

- ⌘ You wear inappropriately fancy clothes at all times.

Backstory

- ⌘ Before you were disgraced and had to seek out paid work (how low!), you served as a court mindologist for Her Majesty, Queen Fyannah IX, Sovereign of Uricon and Laird of all Vanat (&c., &c.).

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ You hope that, by freeing Sootwyn Barrow of whatever terror affects it (or, rather, by being seen to have done so), you can restore yourself to the good graces of Her Majesty, Queen Fyannah IX, and thereby restore your privileges at court, essentially cutting you free from the strings of petty economics.

Spells

- ⌘ **Ask of the ages (ten-minute)** – Burn 8 GRT and ask one question: reaching out through the dimensions you get the answer. You cannot learn exactly what will happen in the future, but you can get a good idea based on the current situation. You can always learn what happened in the past or is the case presently.
- ⌘ **Emulate (standard)** – Burn 5 GRT: you alter your appearance to exactly mimic that of someone or something else for a number of hours equal to your level. You can become indistinguishable from someone else, or from a tree or rock. You can turn into air. That said, you are easily detected if someone bumps into you, because your mass does not change.
- ⌘ **Spook (standard)** – Burn 2 GRT: you scare one intelligent being for a number of rounds equal to your level. Someone who is spooked loses d6 from all rolls that involve dangerous conditions, including combat. Spooked beings must make standard WIL checks to use Weird powers. Spooked beings do not necessarily run away from you.

Yaris Cuelcoran

OF BLUEHOLD

Identity

Background	Half-Ælf (half Sapphire Ælf, half human–Peychari)
Class/vocation	Wytch / Spiral Walker (Blood Wytch), level 1
Cult	The Second Day, also called the Cult of Rhythm (Curiosity, Knowledge, Instinct)

Scores

COM	d8	HEA	14 maximum
MOV	d6	GRT	23 maximum
REA	d6	DR	0 (no armor)
WIL	d10+1		
CHA	d12		

Background powers

- ‡ **Imperfect nightvision (permanent)** – You suffer no penalties for low visible light as long as some spectrum is being emitted in trace amounts.
- ‡ **Killer instinct (permanent)** – You gain a +2 bonus to rolls to determine damage.
- ‡ **Pass (free)** – Choose either your Ælfir or human heritage [Sapphire Ælf]. When you first encounter a person or group, you may burn 4 GRT and pretend to be either an Ælf or human. Anyone doubting you must pass a normal WIL check at a –4 penalty in order to confirm their suspicions.
- ‡ **Self-sufficient (permanent)** – You gain a bonus of +1 WIL [factored in].
- ‡ **Sing without sound (standard)** – Read the mind of another: burn d6 GRT and roll CHA. Your target rolls WIL. If your result is equal to or greater than hers, you quickly read her thoughts. You have a migraine for an hour and are NOT happy. You may use this power a number of times per day equal to your level +1.

Class powers

- ‡ **Cast (standard/varies)** – You can use magick. You begin play knowing how to safely cast 3 spells chosen from one of three lists according to your vocation. Casting is usually a standard action but may vary by spell. Spells have widely varying grit costs. After first level, you learn new spells according to your vocation [2 per level].
- ‡ **Detect magick (standard)** – If you suspect someone is using magick near you (or on you!), you may take a few moments, burn 2 GRT, and call for a perceive check: if you make the check, you learn some general information about the nature of the magick happening currently. You don't necessarily learn who is causing this Weirdness, but you learn what is going on, in broad terms.

- ‡ **Pass (passive)** – Whenever someone suspects you of being a wytch, you may claim to be something else. Instead of rolling CHA to deceive your target, you may roll WIL. If your roll is equal to or higher than your target's she believes you are not a wytch (until/unless you cast a spell), and you recover d2 GRT.
- ‡ **Drain (ongoing, usable once per day)** – You pull the vitality from your environment. Burn X GRT, where X is equal to or less than your level +1, and meditate: every living thing within 5X M of you, intelligent or not, takes X HEA damage per round. Starting on the second round, you gain +1 GRT for every intelligent thing that takes damage, up to X. After X rounds, you have drained all that you can. This power is not subtle; anyone being drained feels weakened and immediately searches for a suspect.
- ‡ **Evoke (special/free)** – Instead of casting a spell you actually understand, name any one you want. Then, as a free action, burn d20 GRT and make a WIL check. If you succeed, you may use the spell as described, also paying the associated GRT cost. If you fail, you don't lose your action for the round (trying is a free action), but you do lose the d20 GRT. [Note, this power requires a spell list.]
- ‡ **Surge (special/free)** – You can cast spells in ways that defy the understanding of even the most erudite scholars of magick: when cast a spell, burn the requisite GRT +X more GRT, where X is equal to or less than your level x3. The effect of the power is now +X, whether that applies to damage, damage reduction, duration in minutes or hours (whichever is used in the spell's description), or any other measurable effect. If the effect is not measurable, it is amplified a ginormous amount. X minutes after using the power, you feel weak and cannot cast any spell for X rounds. You smell sweaty and can't speak in whole sentences.

Cult powers

- ⌘ **Canny** – You gain advantage on **CHA/deceive** checks.
- ⌘ **Mutable** – You suffer disadvantage on **MOV/dodge** checks.

Weapons

- ⌘ **Hand crossbow** – d6+2 damage, 10-M range, concealable like a pistol
- ⌘ **Longsword** – d10+2 damage, melee range

Gear

- ⌘ **1 minor cordial of healing** – Heals d8 HEA
- ⌘ **Large pet insect** – Your pet cannot attack, but it provides you a +1 bonus on **CHA/intimidate** checks
- ⌘ **Venturer's pack** – Rations, water, torches, hemp rope, first aid kit—enough of each for one venture lasting up to 24 hours
- ⌘ **Cult gear** – A full bar with plenty of your favorite booze (Yiricone eel malt, Ælfshine, etc.), worth 4d4 guilders

Appearance

- ⌘ You smoke a hilariously large pipe. You wear fancy urban clothing (stolen) with a few practical nods to the traveling lifestyle, including a fine wide-brimmed hat.

Backstory

- ⌘ You have always had a knack for getting people's attention—which has been a blessing and a curse. Lately, before joining this group, you've taken to playing the role of a traveling pharmacist.

Reason to travel to Sootwyn Barrow

- ⌘ You have heard impossible tales about Sootwyn Barrow. You must see for yourself. Likely, rubes will be rubes, and you can benefit from their credulity regarding the efficacy of magick to stave off or even reverse death. On the off chance that Sootwyn Barrow is actually dangerous, well, that sounds like a fascinating narrative feather to add to your metaphorical cap.

Spells

- ⌘ **Glisten (standard)** – Burn 10 GRT and roll dCOM to grab an opponent within 5 M: you overcharge the natural field of electromagnetic energy around your body and then direct it to flow onto an opponent, inflicting 6d6 damage in a single successful touch attack. If you miss your attack roll, you and your target both suffer 3d6 damage instead.
- ⌘ **Link thoughts (standard)** – Burn 2d4 GRT: you gain Weird telepathy with every person in sight for a number of minutes equal to your level. You can continue the telepathic conversation after this point by burning 1 GRT per minute. You can decide who is able to speak to whom. There is no limit to intelligent participants, but you must be able to sense all of them, and they must be physically near to you.
- ⌘ **Pour honey (standard)** – Burn 4 GRT: you induce one intelligent target to take a single action that will not harm herself. If you want her to harm herself, burn an additional 4 GRT and roll dCHA; your target rolls dWIL; you win if your roll is higher than or equal to your target's.