

SOOTWYD BARROW



A BOROUGH BOUND CITY

CONTENTS

THE STAIN

WHAT IS SOOTWYN BARROW?	8
WHY GO TO SOOTWYN BARROW?	9
THE SOOTWYN STAIN	9
▶ Effects of the Stain.....	11
▶ Living with the Curse	13
▶ GMing Cursed Adventures	13
▶ Those Unaffected by the Stain	14
THE UNSANGUINE GATE	16
TWILIGHT BETHEL	17
▶ Ser Denith of the Rainsbury Court	18
▶ Fetch.....	18
HINTS SCATTERED ACROSS THE VILLAGE	19
BESHIK AND HAUN: THE HUNTER BEASTMEN	21
▶ The Champion's Grotto.....	22
▶ Senza the Cutthroat	24
▶ Roleplaying the Beastmen.....	25
DEFEATING THE BEASTMEN	26

THE CEMETERY

GMING THE CEMETERY	31
THE SKELETONS	32
▶ Skeletons at Night	33
▶ Skeletons During the Day.....	34
▶ Varieties of Skeletons	34
▶ Adeline	35
▶ Temporary Undeath	40

OPTIONAL RULE FOR PREMATURE DEATH	40
INGRID DRETHI'AL: THE UNLYING NECROMANCER ...	41
▶ The Birth of the Stain.....	41
▶ Ingrid's Lair	43
▶ Roleplaying Ingrid.....	43
DEFEATING THE NECROMANCER.....	45
▶ Revival Magic.....	47

THE TOMB

GMING THE TOMB	51
OUTSIDE THE TOMB	52
▶ The Tomb's Doors	52
▶ The Tomb's Roof	53
▶ Dyzek as an NPC	54
▶ Vasile's Cairn.....	54
▶ Ferdin Tallyview	55
INSIDE THE TOMB	56
VASILE ALBESCU: THE FALSE VAMPIRE.....	58
▶ The Venerated Pumice	60
▶ Where is The Stone?	61
▶ Roleplaying Vasile	62
DEFEATING VASILE AND UNMAKING THE STAIN	63
AFTERMATH.....	64

CHAPTER 1

THE STAIN



**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 unholy 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. This mark renders you undying 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 lifeforce in the clutches of a vampire king.

Vasile Albescu and his consort Ingrid Drethi'al 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 “vampire” who avoids drinking blood directly when he can—feasts on the ambient lifeforce 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 vampire 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 naive 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.

OVERVIEW

WHAT IS SOOTWYN BARROW?

Sootwyn Barrow is a bit different from our other boroughs. For one thing: it's much 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, Halloween-y town filled with classic monster tropes. As such, there will be far more text in these three borough guides concerning how you might actually run sessions here as opposed to purely diegetic lore and NPC descriptions.

Mechanically, 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" below).
- ◆ The other creatures 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.
- ◆ Vasile Albescu is not really a vampire. However, you should always refer to him as "the vampire king," and it should be exceedingly difficult for the players to discover the truth of his pathetic existence before they reach his tomb.

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.

There are many reasons to avoid Sootwyn Barrow, but if you want to motivate an adventure arc in the haunted town, consider consulting the Adventure Motivation table on the following page.

THE SOOTWYN STAIN

7

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 in an aerostat. Any sentient being that 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

D6	ADVENTURE MOTIVATION	EXAMPLES
1	Treasure	Vasile has gathered quite a few luxuries. His tomb was filled with fineries before his death, including the Venerated Pumice. He has also stolen countless valuables from previous victims.
2	Heroism	Sootwyn Barrow has claimed many victims, and the Barrow Lords may be planning to eventually extend their reach. Valiant heroes might seek to vanquish the lords and end the Stain once and for all.
3	Punishment	In nearby villages, residents convicted of particularly heinous crimes are sentenced to enter the Unsanguine Gate into Sootwyn Barrow. To most, this is seen as a punishment worse than death.
4	Roving skeletons	Travelers find many dark ends throughout the realm. When an adventurer is brought to their knees in the vicinity of the barrow, Ingrid's minions will drag their unconscious body into the town for a new round of torture.
5	Seeking the curse	Foolhardy travelers may choose to enter the barrow with the explicit intention of receiving the curse. Perhaps they seek the void, or perhaps they seek its unusual side effects.
6	Saving a loved one	When your younger brother enters Sootwyn Barrow on a dare, will you just let him wither away? Or are you going to jump in and try to save him?

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

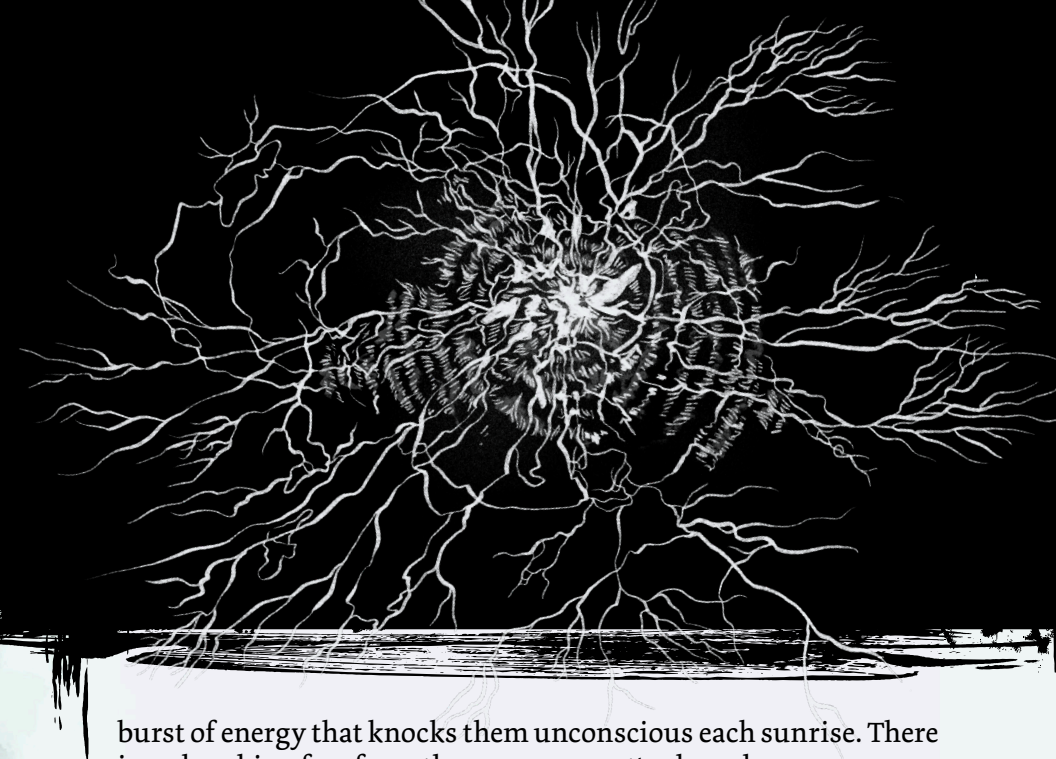
The Sootwyn Stain is a complex curse.

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

GM NOTE: The Sootwyn Stain is the central mechanic of this borough. 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 spell / item / class feature 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.

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 life force, 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.

LIVING WITH THE CURSE

It is possible to live indefinitely with the curse. If an adventurer manages to escape from Sootwyn Barrow and run far away, they may escape the range at which Vasile Albescu is able to steal their lifeforce. They can bear the curse but remain sanguine. They will, however, still suffer the remaining consequences of the curse. Injuries incurred during the night will heal. The sunrise will cause them to fall unconscious. Death will not come.

Yes, adventurers can free themselves of death. All they need to do is bear the curse and escape the haunted village.

Yet again, however, there is a catch. Aging still occurs. A human who grows to 200 years old with the Sootwyn Stain will have little ability to control their bodies, to think straight, or to meaningfully interact with the world. This is a form of immortality, but as with all such magicks, that immortality is itself a curse. The few who have escaped with the Stain have all eventually returned to Sootwyn Barrow so that they may at least embrace

the void of their own accord, joining Ingrid and her skeletal army.

For some adventurers, this may be an acceptable outcome. Traveling at night, recovering from grievous wounds, and putting off any concerns of a true death until a much later time can seem like a fair bargain. If that is a trade they are willing to make, there is no final “gotcha.” One can live with the Stain, though they will not be permitted to die with it. The only ending available to those who take the bargain is an eternity of service to the Barrow Lords.

GMING CURSED ADVENTURES

Some players will decide that this tradeoff is totally fine. If you’re okay with GMing a party of adventurers that fall unconscious every day while the sun is up and then heal back to full health: then great! It’s a weird way to resolve this quest, but it works.

If that sounds exceedingly annoying and unbalanced, or if you just want to make sure your players actually engage with the Sootwyn Barrow con-

tent you've prepared, have the Barrow Lords *hunt them down*. You can act like the party has found a fun loophole for a bit, start a new quest, and then sic two beastmen, a necromancer, and a "vampire king" on them all at once. In the likely instance that the party dies in this encounter, the Barrow Lords can drag them back to Sootwyn Barrow so that the initial quest can resume.

One final option: have the curse mutate. Let the party keep their immortality, but give them various randomly determined debuffs each night. Have them act as lures for monsters. Make them sick, or have them spread a zombie plague. Let them mutate into unholy abominations. If you want the party to be punished for their hubris, you can punish them! You're the GM! Just make sure your players don't feel as though *they* are the ones being punished. This should be a compelling game mechanic for the characters, not a middle finger to your friends in real life.



THOSE UNAFFECTED BY THE STAIN

Certain malignant entities are immune to the effects of the Sootwyn Stain. This may be due to the inherent wickedness of their being or perhaps the context of their creation. Skeletons, zombies, and other barely sentient creatures have no lifeforce to give and thus cannot become unsanguine. Demons and vengeful spirits have evil at their very core and, therefore, cannot be further tainted by the magicks of the barrow. Mystics from neighboring villages have theorized about whether dragons, angels, or elementals could also bear the Stain, but there is simply no evidence one way or the other.

Notably, despite how the Stain manifests, flesh itself does not seem to be a prerequisite. Automaton imbued with sufficient lifeforce have fallen victim, as have sentient fluids, sorcerous homunculi, and carapaced crabmen. So long as a creature is conscious and has the capacity for moral reasoning, they will be vulnerable to the Sootwyn Stain.



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 that 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 often wake up with a few helpful doodads in their pockets—tinderbox, slingshot, and a small mirror—likely gifts from the sporting duo.

14

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



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 will awaken in the Twilight Bethel, a chapel on an upper floor of one of the malformed towers of the barrow 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 more purposeful location.

Every night, the adventurers will awaken in the Twilight Bethel. They will 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 will be 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. No one will attempt to kill the adventurers until they choose to leave. Many terrified victims have withered away without ever leaving the Twilight Bethel, emerging from the tower only when they've become an unthinking skeleton.



GM NOTE: Many NPCs in Sootwyn Barrow are listed as “optional.” The intention here is to give you maximum flexibility for crafting the horror experience you desire. You can totally make Sootwyn Barrow a pure dungeon / combat challenge with minimal socializing and maximally dread-inducing isolation. Alternatively, you can treat this like a real town with lots of inhabitants, only some of whom want to repeatedly murder the party. The latter option is generally better if you want a “horror-lite” experience with plenty of goofy role-playing interspersed throughout.

The only *mandatory* NPCs are the Barrow Lords. You can run the entire dungeon with just those four characters and an army of skeletons.

SER DENITH OF THE RAINSBURY COURT

OPTIONAL NPC

Misguided heroes are the lifeblood of Sootwyn Barrow. Time and time again, virtuous champions have entered the unholy grounds in an attempt to purge the evil within. Ser Denith (he/him) is one such knight, a decorated hero of some far-off king, a king he will tell travelers about in *extensive* detail.

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 blessed greatsword (impotent against endlessly regenerating villains) and is well stocked with holy water (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.

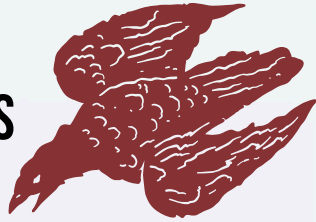
16

FETCH

OPTIONAL NPC

There isn't much left of “Fetch” (she/her). She has minimal awareness of her surroundings, few memories, and worryingly little flesh. Her name isn't even “Fetch”; that's just what the beastmen call her, as it's the main word she says over and over. Fetch has been in Sootwyn Barrow for a *long* time, but she has been quite slow to deteriorate. She still makes her way into town each night, usually slain quickly by a casual swipe of skeleton's blade. Though she is more-or-less nonverbal, she will make a point each evening to gesture to the statues in the Twilight Bethel, pointing out each of the Barrow Lords and saying their name reverently. Who's to say what she gains from this minor ritual.

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 vampire 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 VAMPIRE BANE
DOWN BELOW THE TOMB, IN A MOONLIT ROOM
A ROCK ATOP THE WATER SURELY 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 lodger, her tempestuous relationship with Vasile, and her surprisingly non-magical 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-safes Vasile created for himself.

- ♦ Malicious denizens of the barrow—serpents, minor devils, lingering spirits, 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 vampire* is bisected by flowing water.
- ♦ The crows are not truly genuinely to anyone. They 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. They do not remember their childhoods or their parents, only that their earliest memories were of hunting big game in distant forests as a pair. Beshik and Haun call themselves brothers, but who's to say? It is unclear whether they were truly “born,” or the twisted creations of a long-dead sorcerer, or perhaps wicked manifestations of the wilds.

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 quarry—flesh which, of course, regenerates at sunset—but they get a far more primal pleasure from the hunt.



Though they were once purely bestial, barely able to speak, they have since adopted many of the affectations of their favorite former foes. Skilled knights, 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 Sootwynn 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.

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 will extend an offer: spend an hour drinking with them every other night. Adventurers will wake up in the Twilight Bethel with a map, a key, and an invitation.

THE 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 Champion's 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.

D8 BEASTMEN STRATEGIES**DESCRIPTION****1**

Leap from the rooftops

The duo lies in wait atop one of the town's spires. When they spy the party, both beastmen let out menacing howls and descend. They may attack the party or climb back up to the rooftops for a second scare.

2

Methodical patrols

The beastmen divide the town into discrete zones and patrol each alleyway, nook, and cranny with meticulous regularity.

3

The bloodied bait

Beshik covers himself in blood, appearing to have been nearly slain by one of the other victims. When the party approaches to finish him off, he gives up the ruse. Haun sneaks in immediately after, and the fight begins.

4

Among the skeletons

Instead of hunting in the western village, the beastmen wait in the cemetery to the east, plainly visible. As soon as the party exits the village, they attack alongside Ingrid's minions.

5

Separate the party

By whatever means necessary (traps, distractions, silent snatching), the beastmen separate the party before eliminating them one at a time.

6

Study the party

The beastmen stealthily study the party's actions until they approach the edge of the village. Only when they near the cemetery does Haun attack. Beshik will then watch and continue to study unless he needs to join the fight.

7

Ranged strike

The beastmen learned to fire crossbows from a surprisingly deadly foe a few years back. They still prefer to fight up close, but they do occasionally switch to ranged attacks to keep opponents guessing.

8

All-out assault

As soon as the sun sets, the beastmen burst into the streets with their claws bared. They savagely strike at anything that crosses their path, animate or otherwise—a return to their bestial essence.

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 Champion's Grotto is the best way to stoke that fire.

The Champion's 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 Champion's Grotto, assuming they are never honored with a key.

SENZA THE CUTTHROAT

OPTIONAL NPC

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 (she/her) made a solemn pledge to a dark God many moons ago, and thus her life force 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 Champion's 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.

The beastmen are not *efficient*. Or rather: efficiency is not their aim. 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 Champion's Grotto, the beastmen will 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 will 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 far 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 will 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**. It is possible to avoid confronting Beshik and Haun altogether until the party is slain, achieves their goal, or falls unconscious with the rising sun.
- ◊ Should the party adequately impress the beastmen, they will receive an invitation to the Champion's 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**. They should be warned, however, that the Beshik and Haun don't respond well to being snubbed. 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 even 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 eventually send her minions to attempt to free the duo.



GM NOTE: Depending on the sort of campaign you're running, you may allow for other means of permanently defeating the beastmen. Perhaps a particularly eloquent (or devious) party can convince the duo that they will find more pleasure in hunting dangerous foes in the wide world outside the barrow. Alternatively, they may persuade the beastmen to fight back against the other Barrow Lords. A sufficiently potent cleric may even invoke their God to dispel the beastmen's immortality. For a standard horror campaign, though, these options should only be considered as a last resort if the players are beating their heads against the wall.

CHAPTER 2

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 Dreth'ial, 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 "vampire 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, unholy 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 will be 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.



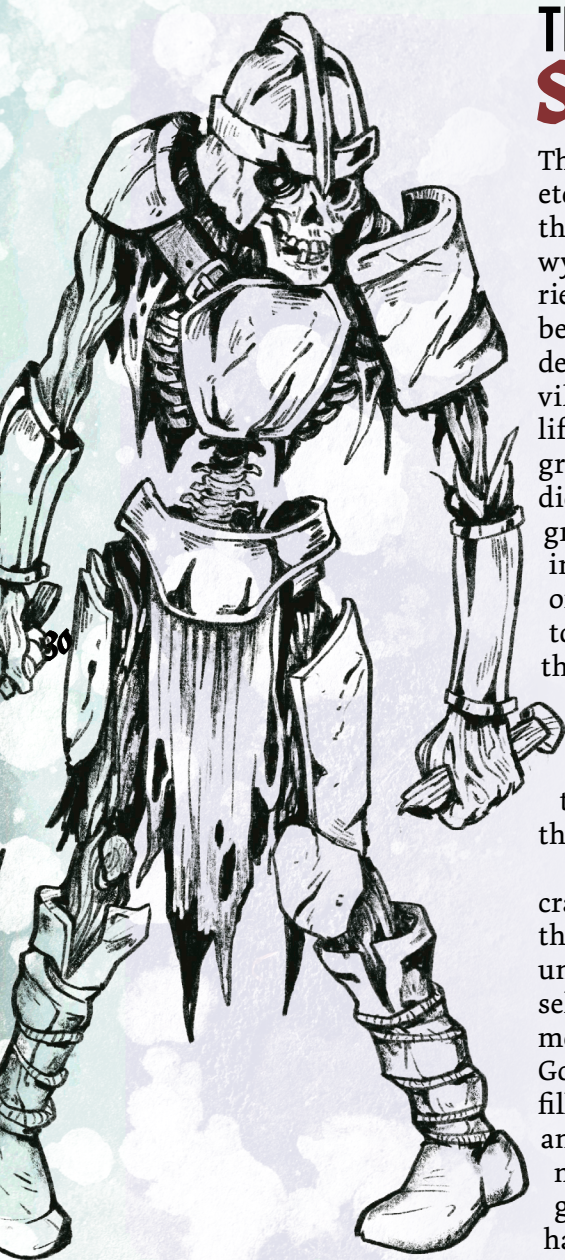
GMING THE CEMETERY

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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 consistent horror mood.

Here are some notes to help you prep and then run your sessions in the cemetery:

- ♦ 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 should only be able to discover it by coaxing information out of one of the other sentient creatures in the barrow or through experimentation (i.e. poking at the brambles).
- ♦ If your system allows it, you can treat the skeletons more like an environmental hazard than traditional combat. 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, 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* an evil clown or a ghost parade in the cemetery?



THE SKELETONS

There are a lot of goddamn skeletons in the cemetery. Many of these skeletons were in Sootwyn Barrow decades or centuries before the Sootwyn Stain began, long-forgotten former denizens of adjacent towns and villages. The Stain did not bring life to these skeletons, but Ingrid's more directed sorceries did. Over the course of years, Ingrid painstakingly breathed life into each of these lifeless 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.

Once animated, skeletons crave purpose. It is a terrifying thing, even for a shambling undead bone-man to find oneself newly awakened, with no memory, no aspirations, and no God. As such, any who can fulfill their need for direction and animating energy will have immense sway over a skeleton. Ingrid can provide both, and she has proven herself trustworthy.

She has “blessed” them with the Stain, keeping them persistently unliving and immune to the permanency of a true death. When she can, she invigorates them further, 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.¹

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 spy 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 adventures, bowmen fire, and only those who have been commanded to stay in hiding until the last possible moment act with any restraint whatsoever.

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.

1 Note that 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 mage provides arcane enchantments and blessings to the skeletons, they may just opt to defect from Ingrid’s service.

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 or 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.

A given skeleton can cover a surprising amount of territory during the daylight hours. 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 at the very least nontrivial. And so, the skeleton army grows.

Here lies at least a portion of Ingrid's greater scheming. More skeleton means more total distance traveled. More distance traveled means more and more access to new travelers. There may eventually come a time where the total number of minions under Ingrid's control begins to grow exponentially. In fact, she has already begun deploying some small reserve of skeletons to patrol *outside* the confines of the barrow on select nights. Ingrid's army grows... but to what end?

VARIETIES OF SKELETONS

Though biased adventurers tend to conceive of all skeletons as a single variety of generic monster to confront, the reality is that no two skeletons are the same. Ingrid's animating power affects all skeletons equally, but the diversity of travelers taken by the Stain has led to a notable heterogeneity of skeletons in Sootwyn Barrow. When crafting skeletal encounters, consider rolling on the Skeletal Quirks table.

GM NOTE: Some of the skeletal quirks on the following pages may not be the right fit for the mood you're trying to evoke. If you don't want a silly skeleton encounter, just skip anything that doesn't jibe with the tone of your adventure.

You should also note that these quirks need not impact the mechanics of your skeletons. If you don't want to overcomplicate encounters, you can just use this as incidental flavor text.

ADELINE OPTIONAL NPC

Each skeleton in Ingrid's employ may use different tactics to harry adventurers, but they are not meaningfully distinct in terms of personality. They have no memory of their former lives, and the magick Ingrid uses to animate each of them is functionally identical. Every skeleton, thus, is little more than a drone, a being with only two desires: acquire lifeforce and fulfill a given purpose.

Adeline (she/her) is an exception. Against all odds, she remembers her life. She remembers her despicable village. She remembers the trial where she was accused of witchcraft. She remembers getting deposited in Sootwyn Barrow and slowly withering away. Now, all she wants to do is serve Ingrid and someday return to her village to exact revenge.

Like the other skeletons, Adeline cannot speak. She can, however, communicate with sign language ("speechless communication" was one of the crimes that convinced her village she practiced witchcraft). The adventurers may just be able to communicate with Adeline, though she is likely to be exceedingly antagonistic toward anyone from nearby towns.

- 2 Uses their former tombstone as a blunt weapon
- 3 Roams alongside their pet dog (also a skeleton)
- 4 Has exceedingly sharp fangs (though not a vampire)
- 5 Has no teeth, but chooses to bite victims anyway
- 6 Animated incorrectly; has hands where their feet should be
- 7 Has no hands, but forearm bones are sharpened to deadly points
- 8 Head on backwards
- 9 Dwarven skeleton; extra hardy
- 10 Gnomish skeleton; very small
- 11 Giant skeleton; very large
- 12 Wizard skeleton; retains no knowledge of former life, and thus indistinguishable from other skeletons
- 13 Missing both legs, but pursues foes while crawling
- 14 Ribs are strangely resonant and tuned in a whole-tone scale
- 15 Was buried with iron prosthetic arm, which they retain in undeath
- 16 Married couple was buried together, and now their bones have fused into a double skeleton
- 17 Had osteoporosis; extremely brittle
- 18 Large flightless bird skeleton
- 19 Has gold teeth; valuable if stolen (will not regenerate on sunrise)
- 20 Wields the bones of other skeletons as weapons

- | | |
|----|---|
| 21 | Wields a bow and arrow |
| 22 | Has unsettlingly long fingers |
| 23 | Missing skull; wanders aimlessly |
| 24 | Throws daggers |
| 25 | Wears exceptionally resilient chain mail |
| 26 | Spins recklessly when fighting |
| 27 | Centaur skeleton |
| 28 | Four-armed skeleton |
| 29 | Has rotten bones; emits a horrid stench and attracts pests |
| 30 | Alligator skeleton; quick in a straight line, deadly bite |
| 31 | Large boar skeleton |
| 32 | Former prisoner; still in shackles |
| 33 | Wears a dark cloak that acts as perfect nighttime camouflage |
| 34 | A normal human skeleton, but gallops on all fours |
| 35 | Ritual sacrifice victim; unholy sigils carved into their bones |
| 36 | Walks with a cane; unsheathes a rapier from within when in combat |
| 37 | Inexplicably flammable bones |
| 38 | Cannot walk, but wields a lengthy polearm |
| 39 | Wears a helm covered in spikes |
| 40 | Just a giant skull that rolls around and rams into people |

D6**CEMETERY ENCOUNTERS****DESCRIPTION****1**

Ghostly maypole dance

Spirits are reveling around the maypole. They don't seem antagonistic, but the skeletons are giving the ghosts a wide berth. Does the party dare intrude on the dance to avoid the skeletal assailants? And just who are these spirits?

2

Crow riddles

The cemetery's crows are clearly sentient and yet immune to the Stain. They approach the adventurers offering cryptic riddles. If the party can answer correctly, the crows will provide invaluable information they've gleaned about the barrow.

3

Animated brambles

Ingrid's spells have gone a bit haywire. The thorny brambles that surround her illusory lair are lashing out at travelers. This is exceedingly dangerous, but it may indicate to the adventurers that there's more to the brambles than it would seem.

4

Unlucky hero

An ill-fated traveler got a jumpstart on the party, making his way quickly to the cemetery. He was only recently felled by the skeletons, meaning his loot is there for the taking if they feel like fighting through the skeletons that surround his Stained corpse.

5

Hands in the stream

Scores of detached limbs lie at the bottom of the stream. They'll grasp at any adventurer that gets too close. The grip won't loosen until the prey has ceased breathing.

6

Unsanguine duelists

Most victims of the Stain fall under Ingrid's control long before they've fully shed their muscles and skin. These half-corroded zombies will pose a much greater threat than comparatively weak skeletal combatants.



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:

TEMPORARY UNDEATH

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 this creature is not yet fully unsanguine, and thus she commands the pseudo-minion 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.

Allowing your player to do *something*—even something limited!—means your player won't get bored and lose focus. Plus, this mechanic adds the extra wrinkle of forcing that player to subtly undermine their party in order to retain the opportunity to keep helping. This trick will probably only work once, so make it count!

INGRID DRETHI'AL

THE UNLYING NECROMANCER

The cemetery is the domain of Ingrid Drethi'al (she/her). 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 BIRTH OF THE STAIN

The Sorceress Ingrid Drethi'al, a stranger to this land, first came to the nameless town that was to become Sootwyn Barrow when the Baron Vasile Albescu neared death. The two had been pen pals for a decade, exchanging musings on history, philosophy, and the secrets of the arcane. Though it was never explicitly expressed, there was a deep, intellectual affection between the two. 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 love-making, they had concocted an experimental dark magick that 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 devilry—but they forged ahead, studying and preparing for all possible outcomes.

Alas, Vasile passed away before they could put their hex into action. The townsfolk buried their beloved baron in a crypt on a tall earthen mound beyond the cemetery. Heartbroken, Ingrid conducted the unholy ritual anyway, a wicked incantation that she

would have never considered were it not for their ill-fated romance. 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 magic 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 an enchanted tattooing needle.

In a sense, the 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. Like her skeletal minions, there was a piece of him missing.²

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 supernaturally compelled to answer truthfully. She may not even lie by omission. She

2 There's more to this story, of course. If you want a full understanding of Ingrid, Vasile, and the Stain, read more in *Sootwyn Barrow 03: The Tomb*.





has tried to cut out her tongue, but even her tempered version of 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 his death, some form of full revival sans caveat. And yet, she knows she might accidentally give away crucial secrets were an adventure to catch her by surprise.

As such, she has constructed for herself an illusory lair, a sorcerous den hidden among a seemingly impenetrable thicket of brambles.

It is no secret that the cemetery is Ingrid's stomping grounds, but adventurers who make it out of the town will likely be confused about where Ingrid actually is. Is she underground? Invisible? Or is she simply one of the skeletons? The truth is far both far simpler and far more devious: her home is concealed by the malformed thorns—an impressive illusion—and it is exceedingly unlikely that an adventurer is going to investigate the unwell-

coming tangle while hounded by scores of skeletons.

Inside, Ingrid has collected all of Vasile's dusty textbooks, many of his luxuries, and the various arcane baubles she had towed with her from her far-off homeland. Ingrid spends her days in relative luxury commanding her skeletal minions with arcane gestures from her occultish tattooing needle. Meanwhile, she 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 vampirism, transference spells, or divine resurrection. There *must* be a way, she believes.

ROLEPLAYING INGRID

In most instances, Ingrid should be a background character. The beastmen and other NPCs may *reference* Ingrid, and it should be clear that she is the one manipulating the skeletons, but unless the party discovers her lair, it is quite acceptable for the necromancer to be a part of the "lore" without being a visible participant.

The reasons for this are quite simple: 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. 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.

42

The best-case scenario is that the players ask questions about the origins and nature of the Stain, providing you a perfect 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. If the party asks about secrets of the universe or whatever, she'll truthfully reply "I don't know."

Unlike the beastmen, 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 vampire will someday end up in Sootwyn Barrow, in which case she can beseech them to grant Vasile genuine vampirism instead of the abominable facsimile she has gifted him.

Ingrid is also exceedingly vain and unlikely to trust the players even if they can credibly offer to help. If the party suggests that maybe she can work to unmake the Stain and/or give Vasile the true death that he likely seeks, she will lash out. There is no way to convince her that death is preferable to seeking a complete recovery.

DEFEATING THE NECROMANCER

Even if the party approaches Vasile's Tomb with the explicit intention of unmaking the "vampire king," Ingrid will never interfere directly. She will always deploy her skeletons en masse. Ingrid is cowardly, but it 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.

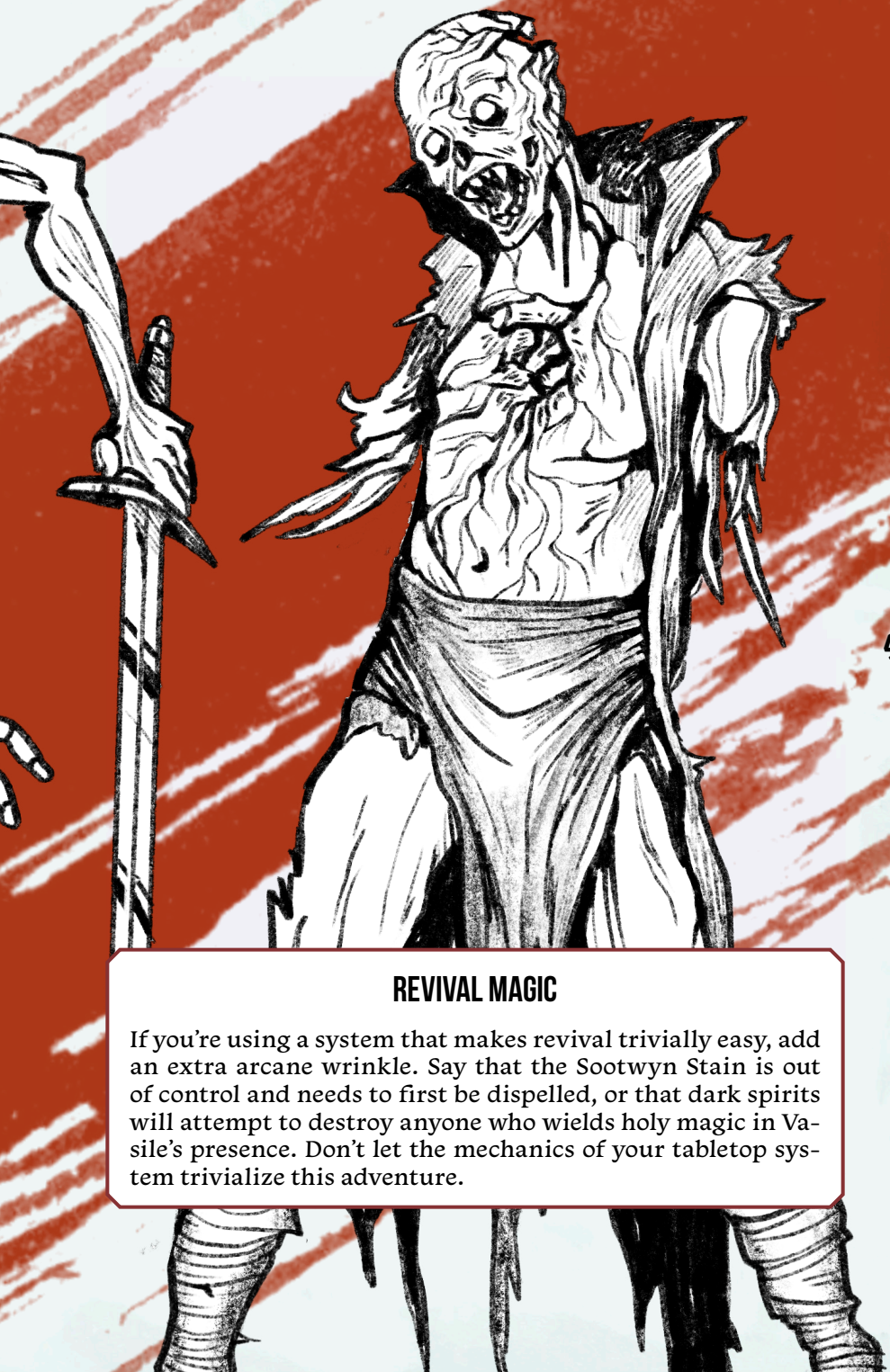
Instead, the party's primary goal will be to get through the cemetery unscathed. This is more a question of dealing with the skeletons than with Ingrid. As with the beastmen, a number of approaches are viable:

1. The skeletons cannot be permanently destroyed, but the party can **carve a path** to their destination. Unlike Beshik and Haun, the skeletal minions are not expert hunters. They will pursue the party, but the party need not dispatch the entire force just to gain entry to the tomb.
2. Ingrid gives commands to her skeletons by tracing eldritch sigils in the air with her magic tattooing needle. If the party steals **the needle**, they could completely eliminate Ingrid's ability to direct her minions. They'll still put up a fight, but they'll be completely disorganized.
3. There is nothing that binds the skeletons to Ingrid's service. The party could convince them to **join their cause**, turn on Ingrid, or flee into the wider world. They will have to offer some means of powerful animation and a straightforward purpose to guide their undeath.
4. There is a narrow possibility that the party may be able to **work with Ingrid**. She will only work with parties that can *truly* revivify Vasile,³ freeing him from his loathsome incarnation. She will kill one of the adventurers and force the others to demonstrate the ability to perform such a miracle.

3 See the note "Revival Magic"

GM NOTE: Most parties will opt to simply kill the skeletons and/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 always be to just run past them, fighting as they go.



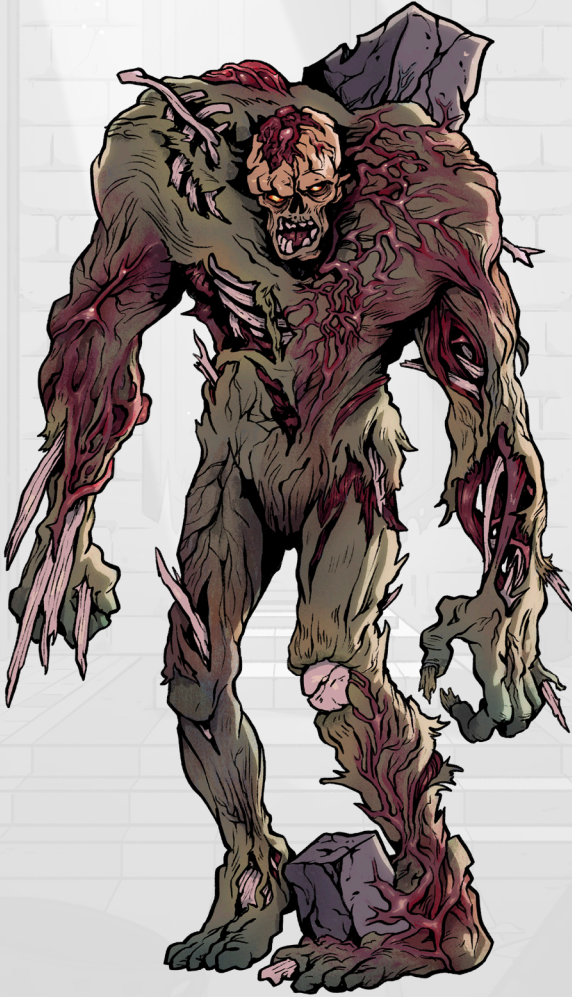


REVIVAL MAGIC

If you're using a system that makes revival trivially easy, add an extra arcane wrinkle. Say that the Sootwyn Stain is out of control and needs to first be dispelled, or that dark spirits will attempt to destroy anyone who wields holy magic in Vasilie's presence. Don't let the mechanics of your tabletop system trivialize this adventure.

CHAPTER 3

THE TOMB



The False Vampire
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 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' un-death. 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. Were any traveler to make their way into the tomb, they would behold snapshot after snapshot of a baron who gave back to his fief, earning a saint's burial.

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 lifeforce also reshaped the tunnels carved into the barrow itself. Adventurers who are able to enter the strange maze may find that it warps itself before their very eyes. This town is cursed, and the tomb is the epicenter of profound evil.



GMING THE TOMB

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Vasile's Tomb is the site for the climax of any Sootwyn Barrow adventure. Once your players arrive here, they will have to make their way through a brand new "meta-dungeon" within the haunted deadlands.

Here are some tips to help streamline adventures inside the tomb.

- ◆ 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 resources in exchange for skipping right to the tomb's entrance. Alternatively, you can have the party reawaken in the tomb's entrance. Avoid anything that will be boring!
- ◆ Any subterranean maps or map assets you have can slot in nicely here. Since the map is constantly warping, you can either generate a new random map each time the adventurers arrive, or else shuffle certain details.
- ◆ The concentrated magick of the Stain is a great excuse to throw all sorts of spiritual nonsense at the players while they explore. Ghosts, arcane traps, sentient slime, whatever.
- ◆ Vasile is chaotic, and the Stain should make him exceedingly unpredictable. Tease the players with the final boss battle by having him attack briefly before disappearing deeper into the lair. This is *his* domain. Assuming he *doesn't look like a vampire*, your players may not even realize that it's Vasile.
- ◆ If you've accidentally made the combat too easy leading up to the tomb (i.e. the players arrive on the very first night), it's advised to add a massive battle the moment your players enter. Just a whole heap of tomb guardians paired with a highly damaging trap. Give your players a *taste* of the tomb, and then tweak the difficulty for the subsequent run.

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 had been in life, and—to no surprise—their burials appropriately less grand. Many of their skeletons have undoubtedly joined Ingrid's legion, though it is difficult to distinguish between nobles and peasants among shambling piles of bones.

After adventurers have crossed the stream in the cemetery, they will have to ascend the hill while skeletal archers perched atop the tomb fire volleys of arrows. It will be a mad dash to the tomb's imposing entrance every time. Ingrid's minions cannot typically enter Vasile's Tomb, and thus they will do anything in their power to make sure the party cannot reach the mausoleum's entrance.

50


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, *any* 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 sentience), and truly wicked beings who are already sworn to another evil master.

Though the skeletons cannot enter the tomb, adventurers slain while inside still typically reawaken in the Twilight Bethel. Strange creatures that tend to the crypt will deposit the adventurers outside the doors each morning, or the tomb itself may undulate and spit the party out in a grotesque architectural contortion.



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 are likely to come across a book of notes from one Dyzek Mazur, a half-dwarven explorer who conducted extensive research in Sootwyn Barrow before eventually falling to the Stain.

These notes are painstakingly detailed (though written in shaky handwriting) and reveal 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 that 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 vampiric thrall under Vasile's indirect 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. This couldn't be farther from the truth. Ingrid is actively seeking to dispel rumors of the powerful stone to keep away travelers who would use it to undo the Stain.

One final 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 through animate bone. He buried the mace under a bed of conspicuous corn poppies behind the tomb.

DYZEK AS AN NPC

If you'd prefer more active roleplaying, you can include Dyzek as a living NPC instead of letting players read through his notes. You can either present him as someone powerful who is willing to help the party fight Vasile or someone on the verge of becoming unsanguine. For pure horror atmosphere, it's 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 charisma-focused players really want to chat up an NPC, show them Dyzek *just before* he finishes rotting.

VASILE'S CAIRN

If the party explores *behind* the tomb, they will come across Vasile's Cairn. This modest pile of stones seems innocuous, and indeed, its construction was wholly 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 religious traveler offers a benediction in the presence of the cairn, the effects of the Sootwyn Stain on Vasile's bones will temporarily weaken. Mechanically, this ought to make an ultimate battle against Vasile quite a bit easier.
- ◆ Disturbing the cairn or knocking it over entirely will alert Vasile to the party's presence and fill him with rage. He will exit the tomb to fight the party directly. This heedless assault will rob the Barrow Lord of the advantages that his lair typically provides.
- ◆ Ingrid's skeletons cannot approach the cairn, and as such, adventurers will be safe in its vicinity. Furthermore, the stones act as powerful repellents against the skeletons, holy wards against Ingrid's magick. So long as the party has one or more stones in their possession, skeletons will avoid the adventurers at all cost.



FERDIN TALLYVIEW

OPTIONAL NPC

A benevolent lord is a true rarity in any kingdom. Heredity, wealth, and feudalism rarely sow the seeds for altruism. None knew this better than Ferdin (he/him), a peasant who had lived under the rule of a tyrannical baron before finding refuge in Sootwyn Barrow. Ferdin lived a happy life under Vasile's rule, and thus he honored the fallen lord by spearheading construction of the cairn behind the tomb. A trace fragment of Ferdin's spirit still lingers near the cairn, beckoning the party nearby. Ferdin's ghost is unaware of any holy properties the humble burial marking might possess, but he will happily regale the party with tales of the compassionate lord who once ruled the village.



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 may *once* have been where Vasile's body was laid to rest, but any details of the tomb's original layout are now long forgotten.

Throughout the tomb, strange molds and alien fungi seep out of the stones, thrumming with the stolen lifeforce that the Sootwyn Stain provides. The entire tomb reeks of death and decay, though no bodies inside presently wither. Instead, bizarre creatures in various states of undeath wander the halls, enlivened accidentally by the barrow's ambient magick. When populating the tomb with monsters, consider rolling on the Tomb Denizens table

D6 TOMB DENIZENS**DESCRIPTION****1** Slime Barons

Not all prior barons of Sootwyn Barrow ended up as skeletal minions. Some fused with the tomb's viscous slimes. These lumbering, oozing, monstrosities are covered in festering pustules and strike with the studied expertise of former fencers.

2 Brick Bullies

The Stain can inadvertently transfer lifeforce haphazardly, occasionally giving life to inert matter. Brick bullies are violent amalgams of the tomb's own architecture, invulnerable to all but the crushing blow of a mighty hammer.

3 Memory Echoes

The initial creation of the Stain flooded Vasile's corpse with dark energy. Some of this magick wrenched nightmares from his fragmented memory. Imaginary or otherwise, many such psychogenic ghouls linger to this day, tormenting intruders.

4 Bellicose Wolves

Most animals cannot fall prey to the Stain, but some apex predators were tainted in unique ways. Dire wolves from the surrounding countryside became hyperaggressive in the wake of Ingrid's ritual. At least one pack has taken up residence in Vasile's Tomb.

5 Cancerous Mold

The wicked mold that grows in the cracks of the tomb's stonework can multiply and expand rapidly when it perceives a nearby threat. This can block passages, release toxic spores, and glue sabatons to the floor.

6 Other Adventurers

The Stain can play tricks on the minds of even the most experienced of knights and mages. It is altogether possible that a party trapped in the Tomb may see any other travelers as potential villains.

VASILE ALBESCU

THE FALSE VAMPIRE

When the Sootwyn Stain stole the lifeforce of the newly dead baron's villagers, Vasile Albescu 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 vampirism. They believed, in fact, that the hex they had concocted was exactly the same power that vampires used, but more "refined," free from the depraved reliance on blood.

They were wrong. The Sootwyn Stain is wholly unrelated to vampirism, and thus: Vasile Albescu is no vampire. He did not rise as Ingrid's dignified casanova of the night, but instead a horrific, gnarled skeletal abomination. He possesses no control over his urges nor any semblance of the thoughtful noble he had been in life. He is a monster of a variety Ingrid had never intended to create.

56

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, rambunctious, 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 makeshift whetstones 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. And so, he will not let anyone survive the Tomb. He will kill them and thrust them back out into the night.



THE VENERATED PUMICE

58 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 arcana. He lamented that his time with Ingrid would be cut short, but he also knew that the powers she sought were too dangerous. He had resolve. He begged her to *promise* she would not enact the ritual against his will. And yet, he knew that Ingrid, his heartbroken lover, would likely 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 and understood the potential shortcomings of this magick. Thus, he had a sacred artifact buried alongside him in his tomb: the Venerated Pumice. The scholarly baron had tracked down this treasure as soon 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 divine ward, or any enchanted artifact, and all supernatural properties emanating from within are scrubbed away. This is an exceedingly *dangerous* premise, as there are fragments of divinity within each of us. Who's to say what happens to the soul when every spark of otherworldly energy is erased?

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 life force that feeds him will not allow it.

Alas, this too was a potentiality Vasile had foreseen. He knew there was a chance that in his mangled and unholy form, he would be unable to do the deed himself. And so he taught songs and fables to the children of Sootwyn Barrow and neighboring villages. Nursery rhymes speak of the “vampire 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.

WHERE IS THE STONE?

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. Alternatively, you can decide that Ingrid discovered Vasile’s “betrayal” and took the stone from him, stashing it away in her hidden lair.



ROLEPLAYING VASILE

The “vampire 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.

Crucially, any strategies the party may have prepared to deal with an *actual vampire* will prove ineffective. He has no aversion to sunlight, garlic, or religious iconography. He has no heart to pierce. He can cross moving water and enter any building he desires without gaining permission, though he is unlikely to leave his tomb unless someone has disturbed his cairn.



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 life force 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 vampire:

- ◆ 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 short-lived 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 life force. 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 the proper death he has earned 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 will catch up with her, killing her instantly and ending the spell that animates the cemetery's skeletons. Beshik and Haun will cease to be immortal, but will not die immediately unless the party defeated them previously on this evening. The blight that taints Sootwyn Barrow will gradually lift, and people may eventually return to the village as tales of the haunting fade into memory.

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

62

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 par amour, 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 that can help to shape the future of this realm? Or is this a tale of *true* horror in which their agency is stripped from them?

