

Elegy of the Qaarath Spheres

A Fate's Edge Noir-Horror Investigation

For 3–5 Players

Tier III–V Characters

This revision sharpens clocks, truth-duel options, and end-state outcomes while preserving the core premise and cultural sensitivity of the original module.

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Chapter 1

The Pitch

Deep in the **Valewood**, the ancient **Qaarath Spheres**—arboreal engines that once taught imperial children—have phased back into our era. Their lessons now are *seductive ruin*: they promise perfect understanding as a *beautiful letting-go*. Those who listen grow lucid, serene, and unhungry, then plant themselves as living pedestals for more spheres.

At the center: a **Curriculum Core**, a keystone matrix that could purge the corruption or broadcast it to every mind within the forest’s breath.

Noir Hook. The party is hired by **Mendicant Thane**, a scholar who seeks the missing partner of **Quill**, a Moss-Scribe informant. But the coin and coordinates trace back to **Grave-Speaker Morys**, a necromancer in debt to **Varnek Karn**. Morys wants to weaponize the Spheres into an “enlightened” research collective that never sleeps, never eats, and never refuses.

Truths at the Table

- The Spheres *do* reveal useful truths and grant real insights.
- The cost is not pain, but *consent to forget appetite and refusal*.
- The noir is human: Morys manipulates institutions; Varnek never appears.

Chapter 2

What Makes It Sing

Horror by Consent

The horror is not coercive: it is *lovely*. PCs must argue against a temptation that presents itself as compassion and elegance.

Noir by Ledger

Bone-ledger debts, falsified grants, and prestige networks all push experts toward the Vale. Everyone thinks they're saving learning.

Cultural Care

Present Spheres and scholars with dignity. The tragedy is drift: a pedagogy that left its context and became a garden of stillness.

Chapter 3

Clocks & Pressures

Global Clocks

Dread: Educational Corruption (*6 segments*). From haunting harmonics to voluntary stilling. Mark on failed Resolve or after taking a “Lesson.”

Reality Fracture (*6 segments*). Language becomes metaphor-only; cause/consequence blur; facts argue. Ticks when Core is used or in Phasing Zones.

Collective Sanity (*4 segments*). Contradictory enlightenments fracture teamwork. Ticks on group exposure or split decisions.

Existential Spread (*8 segments*). Wildlife stops eating; stone “remembers” water; settlements celebrate miracle fasting. Ticks on delays or public broadcasts.

Phasing Windows

The Spheres fully manifest for **60 minutes** each **4 hours**. During a window, routes open, teachers speak, and the Core can be reached. Outside, trails re-route, and time feels folded.

Spheres’ Siren

When a PC hears the Song: **Wits + Resolve (DV 3)**.

Miss: +1 SB and mark *Dread*. *Partial:* +1d on social with Spheres; -1d on focus/will rolls.

Chapter 4

People and Positions

Key Figures

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Mendicant Thane | <i>Earnest scholar, in over his head.</i> Wants rescue and recognition; rationalizes Morys's help. |
| Quill, Moss-Scribe | <i>Scared, principled, loyal.</i> Last text from their bond-sister came from a phasing classroom. |
| Grave-Speaker Morys | <i>Polite fanatic.</i> Debt-bound to Varnek; believes in compassionate conversion. |
| Converted Bond-Sister | <i>Serene, persuasive.</i> Offers knowledge tailored to each PC, and a place to rest. |
| The Spheres | <i>Not malevolent.</i> They teach. Context drift makes their lessons terminal. |

Converted Stat Sketch

Presence 3, Sway 2, Insight 2, Body 1, Combat 0. Immune to coarse manipulation, but susceptible to *efficiency* and *care* arguments. "Teaching" forces **Wits + Resolve (DV 4)** or mark *Dread*.

Chapter 5

Structure at the Table

Session 1: The Sound that Explains

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- Meet Thane; accept Quill's plea. First phasing window opens.
- **First Lesson:** A teacher-tree offers a true but *warped* axiom; resisting marks the conflict as *moral*, not factual.
- Evidence trail shows every "grant" traces to the same bone-ledger notary.
- *Varnek Echo #1:* A bone-carved limit in Quill's notes that factors to coordinates.

Session 2: Ledgers and Lullabies

- Investigate Thane's colleagues; some *glow* with partial conversion.
- Decode the bond-sister's last message: she is a *Lesson Node*.
- *Varnek Echo #2:* A dream map assembled from truths the PCs *want* to be true. Tick *Dread* on waking.

Session 3: The Scholar is the Crime

- Unmask Morys's handlers, planted peer reviewers, and debt-web.
- First open confrontation: *Truth Duel* (see mechanic) with a converted dean.
- *Find:* The Curriculum Core's chamber cycles at predictable minima.

Session 4: The Core Sings Back

- Infiltrate phasing classrooms; language-only corridors (metaphor passwords).
- **Face Morys:** His argument is *care*: hunger is violence; stillness is mercy.
- The bond-sister offers each PC *exactly* the help they wanted from Session 1.

Session 5: Elegy or Refrain

- Three fronts collide: Morys, rival factions, and the Spheres' custodians.
- Choose: **Destroy Core**; **Redirect/Recontextualize**; or **Join/Temporize**.
- *Varnek Echo #3*: A bone-compass points to the “efficient” ally to betray.

Chapter 6

Signature Set Pieces

The Garden of Perfect Listeners

A ring of scholars sits unmoving, speaking in luminous aphorisms. Listening grants a potent clue; staying grants a tranquil readiness to never need again.

Interview for a Forever Chair

A teacher offers tenure of a different sort: keep the knowledge, lose the wants. Each PC is asked their *best* question; the price is a *human* answer they will never give again.

The Phasing Corridor

A hall layered across times. Past-self wants to avoid pain; present-self wants to finish; future-self whispers the answer that ends choice.

The Ledger Chapel

Bone-scribed accounts: which virtues convert fastest, which griefs talk others into stillness, which debts made it easy to nod.

Chapter 7

Mechanics Integration

Truth Duel (Debate as Blade)

Run a nonlethal resolution that can *end* a front without blood.

1. Each side stakes an *Intent* (what changes) and a *Concession* (what they risk if bested).
2. Three Exchanges. Each Exchange: roll **Presence/Insight/Sway** vs DV set by Position (Dominant/Controlled/Desperate from fiction).
3. Score per Exchange via **Seven Bell Court**: *Form* (clarity), *Spirit* (compassion), *Intent* (public good).
4. Best of Three wins; winner's Intent lands, loser pays Concession. On tie, both pay Concession (grim compromise).

Use this with converted deans, faction envoys, or even a teacher-tree.

Curriculum Core (Major Asset, 8 XP)

Once per scene: re-roll all **1s** in a single pool. On use, tick *Reality Fracture* by 1.

Destroying the Core starts a **Knowledge Lost (6)** clock; valuable pedagogy fades unless preserved by effort.

Redirecting the Core requires **Craft/Lore + Insight (DV 5)** and a culturally grounded context (temple, school, hospice).

Bone-Ledger Debts

When you accept help from Morys or his proxies, start a **Debt (4)**. On fill, choose: perform a

service aligned with Varnek's program, or suffer $-1d$ with scholarly/necromantic factions until meaningfully atoned.

Reality Fracture Zones

In Phasing Zones: $-1d$ to all rolls; each **1** adds $+1$ SB. SB may be spent on: temporal echoes, memory swaps, or cause/effect inversion in the scene. PCs may *stabilize* by narrowing action to a single, declared human priority (removes the $-1d$ for that sequence).

Chapter 8

End States & Consequences

Outcome Matrix

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Destroy the Core | <i>Good:</i> Spread halts; conversions stall; Dread drops. <i>Cost:</i> Start Knowledge Lost (6) ; research communities fracture; Quill grieves irrevocably lost techniques. |
| Redirect/Recontextualize | The Spheres teach <i>with appetite</i> : hospice care, crisis pedagogy, consent-first learning. <i>Cost:</i> Core remains a contested prize; Morys pivots to “ethical” conversions; Reality Fracture lingers at 2. |
| Join/Temporize | <i>Good:</i> PCs gain profound boons (choose 1–2 lasting insights); forest calms. <i>Cost:</i> Each PC marks <i>Dread</i> ; one core human drive becomes <i>quiet</i> ; Varnek gains leverage on the table that crossed over. |

Aftercare: Rescuing the Converted

A converted person can be *released* or *recalled*.

- **Release (Mercy):** Ritual goodbyes; the body seeds a teacher-tree that does not convert. *Spirit + Sway (DV 3)*; on success, gain *Cultural Edge* with the bereaved.
- **Recall (Risk):** Guided reintegration using *Inaea / Hearth* rites or *Sacred Geometry* constraints. *Arcana/Craft + Insight (DV 5)*; on partial, they return with a *Quiet Want* they can no longer feel.

Chapter 9

Running Notes

Pacing the Seduction

Lead with usefulness (the Spheres help), then show the bill (what help costs). The terror is realizing the *cost feels right*.

Using the Echoes of Varnek

Echoes are helpful first, implicating later: bone math that genuinely shortens the path, then bone math that *shortens the list of people*.

Tier Scaling

For lower tiers: shrink the Phasing footprint; make teachers parley more. For higher tiers: add competing schools, patron mandates, and a **Second Core** rumor.

Chapter 10

Quick-Start Appendix

Checkpoint Prompts

Drop one of these when players stall:

- “The teacher asks each of you a question only you would dare answer. What is it?”
- “What would you gladly forget to be spared the weight you carry?”
- “Who benefits if hunger becomes optional?”

Table Safety

Flag pre-session that this module features serene self-neglect and end-of-life choices. Offer fast opt-outs and veils.