

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.

Contents

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|----|
| 1 | The Pitch | 1 |
| 2 | What Makes It Sing | 3 |
| 3 | Clocks & Pressures | 5 |
| 4 | People and Positions | 7 |
| 5 | Structure at the Table | 9 |
| 6 | Signature Set Pieces | 11 |
| 7 | Mechanics Integration | 13 |
| 8 | End States & Consequences | 15 |
| 9 | Running Notes | 17 |
| 10 | Quick-Start Appendix | 19 |

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.