

## CHAPTER 2

# THE CEMETERY



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## The Absentee Sorceress The Skeletal Legion The Charnel Gardens of Terror

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To the east of Sootwyn Barrow's derelict village lies the town's cemetery. Skeletons from ages long past stalk the grounds, defending Vasile's Tomb against determined adventurers. Animated jointly by the Sootwyn Stain and the unique magicks of Ingrid Drethi'al, 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

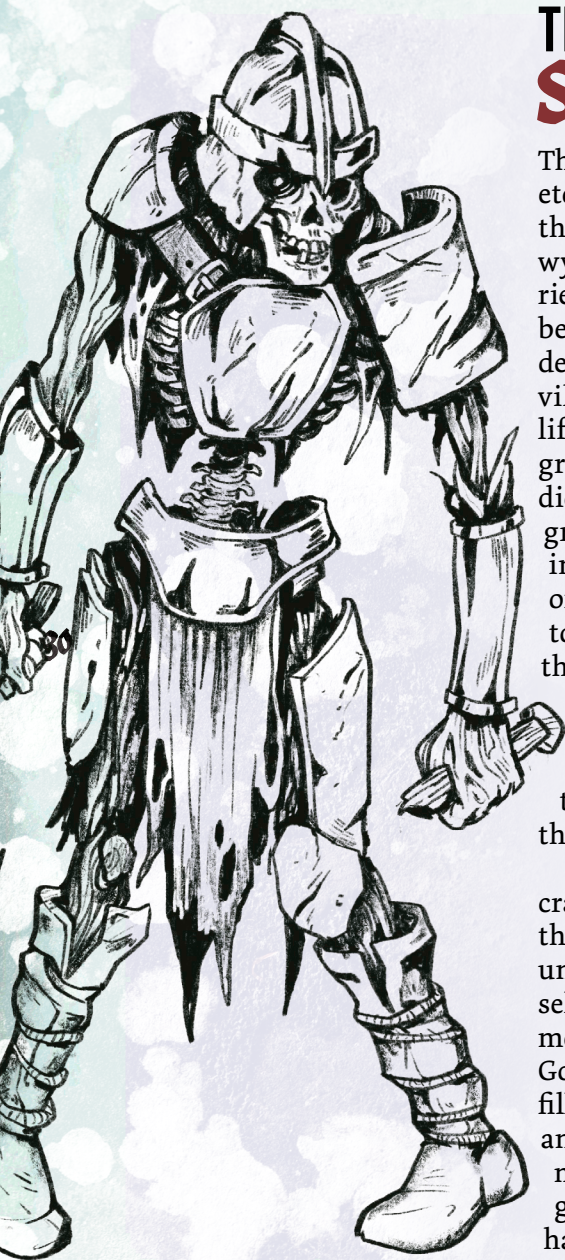
## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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 not unfair 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.<sup>1</sup>

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## **SKELETONS AT NIGHT**

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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.

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## **SKELETONS DURING THE DAY**

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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 be sapped by 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.

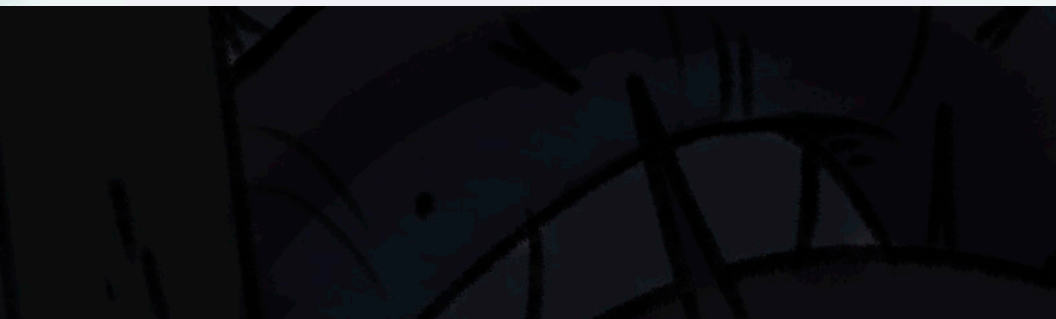
Here lies at least a portion of Ingrid's greater scheming. More skeleton means more total distance traveled. More distance traveled means more and more access to new travelers. There may eventually come a time where the total number of minions under Ingrid's control begins to grow exponentially. In fact, 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?

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## **VARIETIES OF SKELETONS**

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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 variety 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 convicted 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

**2D20**

## **SKELETAL QUIRKS**

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

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### THE BIRTH OF THE STAIN

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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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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## INGRID'S LAIR

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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 unwel-

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.

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## ROLEPLAYING INGRID

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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.

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 directly 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 the 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 could **steal 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,<sup>3</sup> 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 Vasil's presence. Don't let the mechanics of your tabletop system trivialize this adventure.