

FREE PREVIEW

THE GLEANING

A Narrative Hall Campaign Codex

FOLK HORROR · A VILLAGE WITH A SECRET · THE BARGAIN ·
SYSTEM-AGNOSTIC

A few opening pages of the campaign. The full campaign, with every scene, NPC, map note, and handout, is the complete download on narrativehall.com.

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HOW TO USE THIS CODEX

This is not a rulebook. It contains no statistics, no encounter math, and no system mechanics. It is a **story bible**, a complete, dread-soaked folk-horror world with a season-long descent, a full cast, mapped places, and a session-by-session shape you can run with any tabletop system you already own.

You only need three things in your head before the first session.

1. **The premise.** Barrowmere is a remote valley village that has never known grief, blight, or a bad harvest, because, generations ago, it gave its sorrow and its dead to the thing in the land, the Neighbour. The debt is renewed each year at the Gleaning. The players are outsiders who arrive as the rite draws near, and a village that never loses anything has urgent need of something new to give.
2. **The tone.** Folk horror. Pastoral, hushed, and *wrong*. The warmth is the trap. The dread is slow and rises like water. There is no monster to stab, you survive Barrowmere by understanding its bargain and choosing what to do with it before the Gleaning falls.
3. **The fair-play promise.** This is a real horror mystery, run honestly. Every wrongness is a clue. The truth of the bargain is always there to be uncovered by paying attention. The players can lose, but never to a trick. They lose by failing to understand in time.

A note on horror, and on safety. This is a campaign about grief, sacrifice, and a community trapped in a terrible mercy. It is dread, not gore, the worst things happen at the edge of the lamplight and in what the players slowly understand. **Use a safety tool** (an X-card or a quick lines-and-veils chat) at session zero; this codex flags the heavy beats so you can pace them with your table. Keep the violence offstage and the dread in the air, and it will land far harder than blood ever could.

A note on the uncanny. Barrowmere's horror is folkloric, not statted: the land itself is wrong, the dead come back changed, the road won't let you leave. Wherever the supernatural bites, you'll find a short **Light GM Hook** sidebar on how to stage it in your own system, always as fiction first, never as a monster manual.

CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

Some valleys the map forgets. Barrowmere is one, a fold of green hills around a deep dark mere, one road in and the same road out, often closed by mist for days at a time. It is, by every measure, the loveliest place you have ever been. The fields never fail. The children never sicken. The old folk are hale past any natural age and the young are kind and unhurried and content. The corn comes in golden every year without exception, and the village holds a harvest rite called the Gleaning that is the warmest, most beautiful festival you will ever attend. And if you walk up to the little church of St. Cuthwen's and through its tended, flowered, immaculate churchyard, you will notice, once someone points it out, and not before, that there are no graves in it. None. Not one stone. In a village this old.

There are no graves because nobody in Barrowmere dies the way you and I die, and nobody grieves. Generations ago, in a season of famine and plague that should have ended the village, Barrowmere's people went up to the old barrow on the hill and down to the deep mere and made a bargain with the thing that lives in the land, a thing they have learned never to name, and call, when they must, **the Neighbour**. The bargain is this: the Neighbour takes the village's grief and the village's dead, and in return Barrowmere never suffers loss again. No blight. No fever. No empty chair that aches. The dead are *given* rather than buried, and the grief that should follow them is given too, so that the village goes on, golden and gentle and untroubled, forever.

But the Neighbour must be fed, and its hunger grows, and so every year at the Gleaning the bargain is renewed, a sorrow given, a life given, the debt kept current. For a long time the village fed it from within, quietly, terribly, a tithe of its own. But a village can only give so much of itself before it has nothing left to give, and the Neighbour is hungrier every year. Which is why Barrowmere has learned to be so very welcoming to strangers. An outsider brings something the bound villagers no longer can: fresh grief, an unbound life, a soul the bargain hasn't already spent. Outsiders make the best Gleaning of all.

The players are outsiders. They come to Barrowmere, stranded by the mist, drawn by a vanished friend, lured by its impossible loveliness, or simply lost, in the weeks before the Gleaning. They will be welcomed with a warmth that is entirely real and entirely a trap. They will slowly notice the wrongness: the churchyard with no graves, the neighbours who cannot weep, the cottages of people who "moved away," the road that turns them gently back. And they will come to understand, with the rite closing in like the mist on the one road home, that

Barrowmere's perfect peace is a debt thirty generations deep, that the village both pities them and needs them, and that the only ways out of this valley are to break a bargain older than the church, to run before the Gleaning falls, or to be the thing that is given.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Five ways to strand a party in Barrowmere. Mix them, the best tables give each player a different reason they can't just leave.

The Vanished Friend. Someone the players care about came to Barrowmere, for the walking, for the quiet, for a job on a farm, and stopped writing. The trail leads into the valley. The village remembers them fondly and says, warmly, that they “moved on.” Their cottage is empty and swept and waiting. *Best for parties who want a personal reason to dig.*

Stranded by the Mist. A breakdown, a wrong turn, a sudden white-out on the moor road, and the players come down into Barrowmere with no way out until the weather lifts, which, the villagers assure them with great kindness, it will, soon, after the Gleaning. *Best for parties who want the trap to close on its own.*

The Inheritance. One of the players has inherited a cottage in Barrowmere from a relative they barely knew, a relative the village speaks of with odd, fond reverence. The locals are delighted to have a Barrowmere family come home. They have been expecting you. *Best for parties who want belonging to be the bait.*

The Loveliest Place on Earth. The players came on purpose, a folk-music weekend, a harvest festival they read about, a photograph too beautiful to ignore. Barrowmere is everything the brochure promised and more, and the Gleaning is the night everyone comes for. *Best for parties who'll walk into the warmth with their eyes open and learn to dread it.*

The Investigators. The players have a reason to ask questions, a journalist on the trail of a string of rural disappearances, a researcher of old customs, an official chasing a paper anomaly (a village that records no deaths). The questions are reasonable. In Barrowmere, reasonable questions are the most dangerous kind. *Best for parties who like to follow a thread into the dark.*

Want the rest?

This is just the opening. **The Gleaning: Campaign Codex + GM Kit** is ready to run: a complete, system-agnostic kit you can drop into any tabletop game.

Get the full download at

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