

Shadows of Esteren



O~PROLOGUE
PLAYER'S GUIDE




SHADOWS OF ESTEREN

O. PROLOGUE

A medieval role-playing game with a horrific and gothic influence

"Not doubt, certainty is what drives one insane."

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche



Credits

**Coordination of the
"Shadows of Esteren" series**
Nelyhann

**Editorial Coordination
of Book 0 - Prologue**
Nelyhann

**Conception, Development,
and Redaction**
Nelyhann & Aldo "Pénombre" Pappacoda

Original Copy Editing
Pascal B., Krêsterion, Valentin, Nelyhann,
Aldo "Pénombre" Pappacoda, Clovis,
Merryneils and Guillaume "Ikaar" Vasseur.

Art Director
Nelyhann

Layout
Asami

Cover Art
Bruno Laurent

Interior Artists
Yvan "Gawain" Villeneuve,
Bruno Laurent,
Christophe Bouvet,
Fred Pinson,
Rémi "Remton" Le Capon,
Nicolas Jamme and
Olivier "Akae" Sanfilippo.

Logo
Nelyhann

Cartography
Christophe Bouvet

2

English version Credits

**Editorial Coordination
of Book 0 - Prologue**
Nelyhann and Clovis

Translation
Odliiz

Copy Editing
João Bento, Franck Bouvot, Nicolas
Bowyer, Clovis, Franck Florentin, Chris
Fournier, Natalie Gallecier, Véronique
Lejeune, Stuart MacDonald, and Ian Stone.



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Agate Editions, 84 rue du président
Wilson 92300 Levallois-Perret, France
Contact, questions, distribution:
esteren@agate-editions.com



Chapter I

Origins





Introduction to the Universe

The Guiding Concepts of the Game

This chapter aims to give the reader the keys to comprehend the world of Shadows of Esteren. Though not exhaustive, it gives a rundown on the main concepts of the game and lays the foundations of the setting.

Multiple Antagonisms

The main culture described in Shadows of Esteren is that of the Tri-Kazel peninsula. Of an essentially medieval nature with Celtic inspirations, it borrows some elements from more modern times. This culture has to face several threats that weigh on its survival and identity. Indeed, foreign, religious, and scientific ideologies endeavor to supplant the local traditions and transform the relationship between man and nature. Humans must also be wary of the Feondas, a threat as ancient as it is dreadful, which remains beyond understanding. Finally, economic and political rivalries are far from non-existent.

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A Dark Atmosphere

Life in Tri-Kazel is laden with various perils, related to men, to their environment, and to far more sinister things. The aim of Shadows of Esteren's universe is to describe a world in which words such as “starvation”, “plague”, “war”, and “fear” are a concrete reality. In spite of this, Esteren is not about picturing a hopelessly desperate game universe, but rather an atmosphere in which fear, horror, and death are never far away and can crop up at any moment. Thus, the Feondas are a real threat, but one which is not supposed to show itself at each game session. Many Tri-Kazelians are already frightened enough by the idea of catching a glimpse of some misshapen creature lurking in

the shadows of the woods while they stand guard over the fortified walls of their village. The Players will embody Characters who will have more opportunities than the average human to directly face this threat, but it is not intended to fill each eventful moment of your game sessions. Just consider every aspect of simply surviving, as well as the political and philosophical problems of the peninsula, and you will see that it is not necessary. The horrific deeds committed by men to further noble and not-so-noble causes, the disgust when facing squalor and its daily abominations, the true risks and after-effects of each combat... they all draw the outline of the game's dark atmosphere. The Characters

are not doomed to suffer some hideous fate, or a grim and ineluctable destiny. Simply, if they achieve great things, it will not be because of the intervention of a higher power, or because they're "the chosen ones". They will be the only architects of their success.

Rules Centered Around Psychology

The system has been designed so that each Character is defined by his psychological orientations—the Ways—rather than by characteristics that determine the level of his physical or mental aptitudes. Each psychological aspect—each Way—whether strong or weak, is at the same time potentially an asset and a flaw for the Character. No one is perfect; no one is superhuman. Everyone does his best with who he is, and who he'll never cease to be. So as to better reflect the impact of the prosaic or more supernatural horrors that await the Characters, a complete sanity system will be detailed in the game's core book, entitled *Universe*. A simplified version is presented here in order to manage the scenarios included in this Prologue. In a nutshell, each Character has tendencies that predispose him to certain forms of mental illnesses. Here again, there's no trick, secret formula, or hidden asset. Everyone has his personal weaknesses and must strive to survive and pull through with them. There is no race of exotic nature or possessing amazing abilities... apart from the Feondas, which are rightly perceived by humans as a threat.

A Shocking, Sometimes Horrifying Supernatural Aspect

Magic, in various forms, can be found everywhere in the world of Esteren. It is accessible to the Players, assuming they create Characters who are related to one of the traditions and philosophies that make it possible to go beyond purely human abilities. Nevertheless, such magic is neither trivial nor omnipresent. It remains mysterious, often unfathomable, and those who use it can arouse respect and admiration, but also fear and aversion. We also wanted supernatural phenomena—and in particular the Feondas—to retain a fabulous dimension; fabulous in the original meaning of the term. In that way, *Shadows of Esteren* is founded on two essential notions. First, the supernatural is disturbing; sometimes

beautiful, but most often frightening. Secondly, it most often manifests unexpectedly, or makes its presence felt without patently showing itself. The simple possibility that something supernatural could occur is often in itself alarming, even frightening. The Tri-Kazelians are not timorous people; most of them lead a rough and often dangerous existence. But they never consider the supernatural, or the possibility of wandering alone in unknown places, without apprehension. The Characters embodied by the Players might be less worried, since they will be rather more familiar with such things. But they will be in just as much danger as the others. No one can claim that he knows everything there is to know about the occult, and no one suspects what is really hiding behind all that. Because, in the end, the title "*Shadows of Esteren*" does not only represent the threats lurking in the dark corners of the town or beyond fortified walls, but also secrets with an impact beyond suspicion, which affect Esteren and its inhabitants in a way they are far from having any idea of.

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Horror in *Shadows of Esteren*

Even if it's not the only genre which is explored, horror has a predominant place in Esteren's universe. On a cinematographic level, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* is a major inspiration: a progressive slip toward horror, where madness and the occult progressively gain ground.

Here are a few other elements to show how this genre has been explored:

⊗ The Horror of a Revelation

For Esteren, the literary definition of horror must be kept in mind: a feeling of dread mixed with admiration in front of a vertiginous reality. A particular importance has been given to the precise moment of this confrontation. However, for the shock of such a revelation to occur, it will be useful to depict an environment which will first appear as down-to-earth. Thus, Esteren's universe may at first appear sober; this is on purpose. This principle tones down supernatural elements and everything else which could be related to the gore genre—at least to begin with. However, little by little, uneasiness will creep in this daily life, shifting it into the unspeakable. This basic principle has prompted the structure of the different books of the series. The first book, *Universe*, aims to depict the Esteren universe the way it is perceived by its inhabitants. The *Book of Secrets*, exclusively intended for the Leader, will shed light on the backstage of the universe and give him tools to prepare the revelations the Characters will be led to face.

⊗ A System of Modular Scenarios

In the official scenarios, the Leader will be free to decide on the degree of horrific and supernatural elements he wants to include, according to his own tastes and sensitivity in this matter. This system of modular scenarios, used in this Prologue, gives the Leader several game options depending on his wish to heighten this or that aspect of the horrific genre (suspense, psychology, supernatural, gore, etc). Such options are presented in the form of asides suggesting optional scenes and setting advice.

The Universe of the Game

Esteren is a world little known by its inhabitants, who cannot estimate its dimensions. To begin with, Shadows of Esteren is essentially focused on a small part of this vast world; namely on the Tri-Kazel peninsula, which is located west of a territory simply called The Continent. More will be revealed about the Continent in the future, and it is for now only alluded to, mainly in relation to the impact it has on the peninsula's inhabitants.



The Tri-Kazel Peninsula: Rough and Beautiful Landscapes

Tri-Kazel's landscape is mainly mountainous. The great range of the Mòr Roimh crosses the peninsula from one side to another, ending in the east with the gigantic Asgeamar Mountains, which form an almost insurmountable natural wall. On the other side, the occidental territories of the Continent spread. Immemorial forests of multiple shades cover most of the peninsula's plains and plateaus. They are rich in vegetal specimens of all kinds, and also shelter many animal species. Tri-Kazel is bordered on its occidental side by the Furious Ocean, a wind-beaten sea on which navigating is practically suicide. The weather of the peninsula is therefore quite chilly, windy, and fickle. If some regions are fertile and reasonably sheltered, others must endure the snow, frost, and oceanic winds. The humans who live on

Tri-Kazel often have to face great difficulties in order to survive. Many isolated communities only have the Varigals as ties with the outside world; these are men or women who are simultaneously guides, messengers, and news bearers. Nevertheless, tales and archaeological vestiges bear witness to the presence of humanity throughout the millennia. It seems that some tribes had already spread through the mountains when the Aergewin came: an ancient time during which humans were forced to battle hordes of misshapen beings, some of them of truly monstrous size. In that regard, such a threat has not been entirely eradicated...

The Three Kingdoms: Between Tradition and Modernity

The ancient tribes of Tri-Kazel were federated nine centuries ago by three brothers, exceptional men who left their names as their legacy. Thus, three kingdoms sharing strong ties, named Gwidre, Reizh, and Taol-Kaer, perpetuate the memory of these ancient heroes. The very name of the peninsula, Tri-Kazel, precisely refers—in the ancient tongue—to this division and collective identification, on both a geographical and political level. The old clans have gradually disappeared in favor of a feudal system, and the Osag tribes, in southern Taol-Kaer, are the only ones to actually perpetuate the old customs. Nevertheless, these traditions have not disappeared and are still passed on by groups and individuals who still have an active role in the society of the three kingdoms. Hence, the bards are still welcomed and retain significant political influence on the ruling class. In many villages, the Dàmàthairs still raise the children of the community. Lastly, the Demorthèn, who, since time immemorial, have been the intermediaries between humans and the spirits of nature, continue to guide the people, although their power has diminished over the last few generations.

The Demorthèn Cult

The Demorthèn are both the spiritual guides of the Tri-Kazelians and the holders of secrets that are able to influence natural spirits. Scattered throughout the peninsula, they devote themselves to maintaining the balance between the needs of the human community and the preservation of the surrounding nature. Their powers are extraordinary, but they endeavor to use them with moderation in order to respect their rigorous ethics.

Tri-Kazel and the Rest of the World

Book 1 – Universe mainly focuses on the kingdom of Taol-Kaer, but its neighbors are not ignored, and a lot of information about them can be found, making it possible to easily use them as settings for adventures. The following releases of the Shadows of Esteren series will reveal more on some notions already mentioned and will focus on territories beyond the Tri-Kazel peninsula and on some aspects of Esteren that not a single inhabitant suspects the existence of.

The Influence of the Continent: Science and Religion

Until recently, Tri-Kazel hardly kept ties with the Continent and knew nothing—or close to nothing—about its vast territories. Over the last two hundred centuries, things have somewhat evolved, without true relationships being established. Two Continental nations, the Confederation and the Great Theocracy, have indeed made contact with the inhabitants of the three kingdoms. Quickly, the Continentals offered the Tri-Kazelians wholly new perspectives, as well as new sources of preoccupations.

The Temple and the Religion of the One God

The missionaries of the Great Theocracy strove to convert the peninsular people to their faith that claims the existence of a One God, creator of Esteren and master of its destiny.

Ever since one of Gwidre's kings converted to the Temple, the institution has established itself strongly in the kingdom. It is little appreciated in Reizh or in Taol-Kaer, especially since the War of the Temple which took place half a century ago. Though the situation has noticeably calmed down since the war, a deep chasm has obviously been created among the formerly brotherly kingdoms.

Magience: a New Science

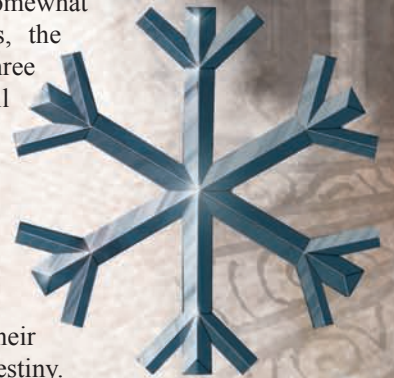
In Reizh, the envoys of the Confederation quickly aroused enthusiasm thanks to their miraculous tools. The Magientists, a scientific order initiated into remarkable knowledge, proved that their machines could greatly improve the lot of the people. Thanks to Magience, running water, public lighting, and other wonders are gradually becoming more and more common, at least in the towns of Reizh and in the great cities of the other kingdoms. However, Magience is entirely based on the use of the Flux, an energy which comes from matter itself, whether rock, plant, or even dead or living flesh. The process leading to the creation of this miraculous fluid, which fuels the Magientist machines, requires large quantities of raw material, and also produces pollution. Above all, it goes against the peninsular people's traditions of respecting nature.

A Culture in Peril

For a long time, these traditions have been kept by the mystic and wise Demorthèn, who were in the past years present in almost all the communities of Tri-Kazel. Today, this is no longer the case. In Gwidre, the adepts of the One are determined to supplant the old beliefs and they oppose those who try to lead people astray from true faith. The situation is more contrasted in Reizh and in Taol-Kaer, where the Demorthèn have maintained a strong influence. The kingdom of Taol-Kaer is where they are still the most respected. Still, the Talkérides do not forbid the missionaries of the Temple from entering their territory, and rely more and more on the Magientists, who consider that man can and must take the upper hand over the forces of nature.

Factions and Antagonisms

At first sight, each of the three kingdoms appears strongly tied to one of the main ideologies: the Temple's monotheism, the Demorthèn ancient traditions, and the Magientist science. To a certain extent, reality matches this appearance, but each philosophy has official and unofficial proponents throughout the whole peninsula. Although the Temple is clearly dominant in Gwidre, the situations in Reizh and Taol-Kaer are far more complex. The arguments which divide the peninsula's inhabitants are as much linked to old rivalries as to problems of political centralism, resource access, social inequalities, or ideological divergence. Finally, it would be inadequate to say that Tri-Kazel is under a Continental invasion. In truth, people who were born in the Great Theocracy or the Confederation are very rare in Tri-Kazel; it is mainly their beliefs and knowledge assimilated by the Tri-Kazelians which change the peninsula's society. Magience may make technological wonders possible, but the faith of the Temple can invoke absolutely genuine miracles. As for the Demorthèn, they have their own kind of powers, being able to call upon the C'maoghs, the spirits of nature.



Living in Tri-Kazel

At first sight, Tri-Kazel is a feudal society, with three nations sharing the same origins, the same monetary system, and a common language. Yet, the reality is noticeably more complex.

Clan System and Feudalism

Most aristocratic families linked to the three kings by vassalage come from the old clan chiefs. Adding to that the geographic isolation of many communities, most Tri-Kazelians feel far stronger ties with their local lord or native village than with the kingdom they are subjects of. Moreover, they share an identity formed around a common language, in a bounded geographical and historical area. The villages still perpetuate the ancient system of the Dâmâthairs, who are charged with ensuring the protection and education of the children gathered under their guardianship, giving their parents the necessary time to contribute to the works and tasks that ensure the survival of the community.

Emergence of a Clergy

The Demorthèn used to have a special status in society and formed an elite, both because of their gifts and their relatively small number. Recently, they have had to face not only the ideas, but also the changes brought by the Temple's missionaries. A new social class has emerged in Gwidre besides the nobility and the commoners: the clergy. This concept spread to the other kingdoms, although much less successfully. Above all, it concerns a continuously increasing number of people who aren't appointed by a master and secretly initiated, as it is the case with the Demorthèn, but who willingly enter religious schools which are always ready to welcome adepts. The training there is far more formal and homogeneous than the initiation to the old beliefs which the Ionnthèn, the Demorthèn apprentices, must follow.

Magience and Scientific Culture

Similarly, the Magientists have been allowed to create training schools. They teach the basics of their knowledge to those who have to maintain and use their Artifacts, those devices powered by Flux. In these schools, they also train their future members, and more generally, they encourage the access to a scientific culture without any of the "superstitions" linked to the Temple and to the ancient faith of the peninsular people. A certain number of young people see in these ideas the means to ascend in their society through scientific or technological accomplishments, very different from the traditional ennoblement which finds its roots in a history filled with oaths and armed struggles.

Thus, various forms of ambition or social tension have been building for some generations and have stuck, sometimes visibly, but generally in an underlying way, on political, ideological, and military issues. This occurs locally as well as at the kingdoms' scale.

Isolated and Fragile Communities

The geography and the weather of the peninsula somewhat isolate the human communities which have settled in the mountains, and which must strive each year to survive through winter. The tensions among the kingdoms are related with the quarrels and rivalries opposing the lords of each region. Long-standing hostilities have been fueled by political or ideological complications.

The Cities: Uncertain Shelters

In great cities, safety is ensured to some degree, but prosperity is not guaranteed for all, far from it. Epidemics and famines hit unexpectedly, and the biggest cities are even weaker than the mountain communities, which are used to surviving through reliance on their own resources solely. Despite a long history, since we are in the 907th year after their foundation, the Three Kingdoms have few important cities. The people of Tri-Kazel remain on the whole a rather mixed ensemble of communities used to some autonomy and wary in their hospitality. Indeed, not all of them are necessarily pleased to house strangers.

Globally, the situation is not truly desperate, but happiness and safety are still far-fetched notions for the majority of Tri-Kazel's inhabitants. Moreover, the rise of cities offers some possibilities, though with very real restraints and risks.



A Harsh Weather

Esteren's world also has to face threats of a more general extent: it has to undergo icy seasons, occurring every four centuries. The current generation is living through one of these periods, which should still last several decades. It impacts directly on the life of the poorest, as well as on the wealthier, though not as much. It is especially noticeable in the mountains, where snow and frost lead to isolation during long freezing months. Lastly, the humans, whatever their beliefs or allegiances, must keep their eyes open for the monstrous Feondas that lurk in the dark.

The Feondas: a Threat Lurking in the Shadow

The contacts with the Continentals have allowed the Tri-Kazelians to find out that they share a problem as unsolvable as ancient with the people from beyond the Asgeamar. Indeed, in living memory, humans have always had to deal with the Feond threat. In the ancient tongue of Tri-Kazel, the word "Feond" simply means "the enemy", and no other sort of relationship with these entities has ever been established. Still today, they fundamentally remain an enigma. The Feondas are beings whose origin and nature are still much discussed. Some seem to be animals or plants that have undergone abnormal transformations. Others take on much more shadowy, even disturbing, shapes. Some of them parody humanity in atrocious ways, going as far as to wear funeral masks stolen from the bodies of desecrated graves. Some particularly horrifying crimes bring people to believe that the Feondas could even possess the minds of the weak, or take a human form and infiltrate the heart of towns. More dreadful still, some Feondas are said to animate the corpses of men or beasts in order to strike at living men.

A Mysterious Enemy

No one knows the exact intentions of these creatures, which neither build cities nor exert power over a territory, as the old clan chiefs used to do. The Demorthèn consider them to be the expression of death and destruction unleashed by chaotic natural spirits. The adepts of the One see in them demons which only deserve sword and torch. As for the Magientists, these rational thinkers from the Continent, although most of them see in them natural predators that must be neutralized by humanity, they are divided between more or less far-fetched theories. Still, the Feondas are there, and have always been.

The ancient and mythical time of the Aergewin speaks of the titanic fights the humans of the peninsula led against them. Guided by the Demorthèn of old, the tribes of Tri-Kazel fought against the monsters and succeeded in surviving until the end of that terrible wave. Some tales and cave paintings show creatures of a sometimes huge size, greater than any known animal; colossal beings which wandered throughout the world and slaughtered men, or destroyed one another in terrible battles. That time is over and the Feond threat has never been as strong as it was in the ancient times. However, it hasn't completely subsided either.

A Continuous Threat

Although they sometimes attack a well-defended town, the Feondas don't seem to have an understandable plan or strategy. In the highland villages, years can go by before the shadow of a Feond is seen; and then, suddenly, a horde can appear and overwhelm the protectors of the community. The Feondas don't take prisoners, spare no one, and their behavior is truly alien. Thus, to varying degrees, all Tri-Kazelians live in fear. By merely walking away from a village's walls or leaving the road, one can feel the presence of frightening beings lurking in caves, dark groves, and swamps.

Some Sources of Inspiration

The particular atmosphere of Shadows of Esteren is drawn from different sources of inspiration, including notably: Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, Tim Burton's universes, especially that of *Sleepy Hollow*, Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*, as well as *Berserk*, Kentaro Miura's manga.

Summary of the Game System



his summary of Shadows of Esteren's game system includes everything required to play the scenarios found in the chapter "Omens". Although some very important aspects, such as sanity, are only briefly mentioned, they will still have an implicit importance in each scenario.

The Ways and the PCs' Interpretation

In Shadows of Esteren, the PCs don't have characteristics that assess the level of their physical or mental skills (Strength, Intelligence, etc). These attributes are determined by Advantages and Disadvantages assigned during the creation of the Character.

However, each PC has five Ways, which are characteristics that determine the major traits of the Character's personality:

- ⑧ **Way of Combaticiveness:** This Way reflects a PC's pugnacity and obstinacy.
- ⑧ **Way of Creativity:** The ability to imagine, to be inventive; resourcefulness.
- ⑧ **Way of Empathy:** The bond linking a PC with his environment, and the ability to feel the emotions of another person.
- ⑧ **Way of Reason:** Deals with the fields of rationalization and intellect.
- ⑧ **Way of Conviction:** Determines the power of the ideals guiding a PC's life, whether they are religious, related to a personal code of honor, or something else entirely.



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Interpreting the Rating in a Way

Each Character will have a rating ranging from 1 to 5 in each of these Ways. Having a high rating in any particular Way is not necessarily better than having a low rating; each alternative brings its share of advantages and drawbacks. For example, a Character with a high rating in Combaticiveness will be more energetic, strong-willed, and effective in a fight, as his Combaticiveness will improve his Attack rating while fighting. However he will also have a tendency to be impulsive and nervous; he may have difficulty in handling situations where calmness is required. To have a minor rating in this Way leads to a Character who is calm and thoughtful, but who may sometimes lack spine, or even be apathetic. For another example, having a high rating in Reason has nothing to do with one's intelligence level. This rating is about reflection and rationalization. One can be very thoughtful while being dumb, which is much more common than commonly believed. In contrast, someone with a low rating in Reason can be bright if the PC takes a corresponding Advantage.

The Ways: a Tool for Interpretation

There are no strict rules defining precisely what a given rating in a Way entails. Of course, examples will be given to help Players and Leaders figure out what they mean. Going back to the Combaticiveness example, having a high rating can be a quality as much as a flaw.

⑧ **Qualities:** assertive, optimistic, dynamic, instinctive, etc.

⑧ **Flaws:** impulsive, brash, proud, stubborn, etc.

In the same way, a low rating can be considered as a virtue as well as a handicap.

⑧ **Qualities:** calm, phlegmatic, levelheaded, etc.

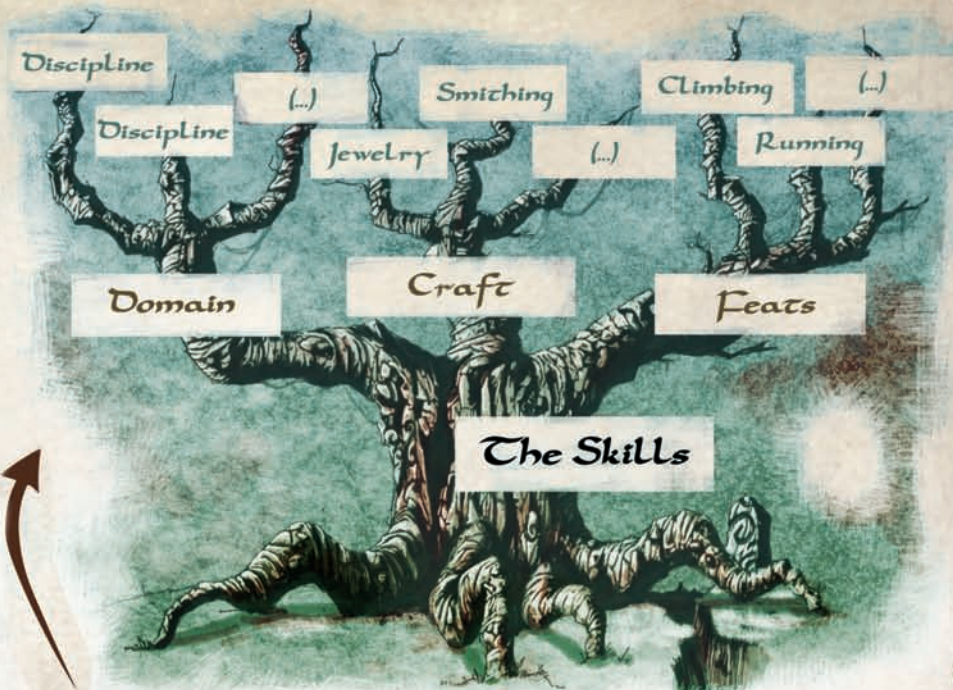
⑧ **Flaws:** pessimistic, listless, sad, etc.

During the game, the Player can define what each rating means to him, which can help him to draw the main features of his PC's personality. Thus, the Ways can become a real tool to ease the Players' interpretation of their Characters. Book 1 - Universe gives a full list of such qualities and flaws linked to the five Ways (cf. Book 1 - Universe, page 210).

Skills

The knowledge and individual abilities of each PC are simulated by the skill system. In Esteren, skills are divided into sixteen main Domains, each one branching into several Disciplines; specializations within each Domain.

A rating in a Domain can reach a maximum level of 5. When it has been reached, the Character can keep improving but will have to acquire one or more particular Disciplines, representing a specialization in the concerned Domain. The rating of a Discipline ranges from 6 to 15.



The 16 Domains

These form the trunk of a Character's Skills. The maximum level in a Domain is 5. To advance further, specialization is required.

The Disciplines

These are the extensions of a Domain and represent specializations in a particular technique or knowledge related to this Domain. They are rated from 6 to 15.



A rating in a Domain applies for each action related to such a skill field. For example, a PC with a rating of 4 in Natural Environment will use this rating when he is in a situation requiring this Domain (hunting, tracking, orientation, etc.). A PC with a rating of 2 in Shooting and Throwing will use this rating with a throwing weapon, a bow, a crossbow, etc. However, if he has the appropriate Discipline for the action at hand, he will of course use the rating in this Discipline—which is higher—instead of the Domain's.

The 16 Domains

It must be noted that several Domains can overlap; for example, one can treat an injury by using any one of the following Domains: Natural Environment, Science, Magience, or Demorthèn Mysteries. In gaming terms, the effects will be similar, but the method changes: treating someone applying scientific principles won't be the same as treating him by relying on the ancestral knowledge of the Demorthèn. In *Shadows of Esteren's Book 1 – Universe*, an exhaustive list of specializations (and therefore, of Disciplines) is given for each Domain (*Book 1 - Universe*, p.196 to 199).



Each Domain is related to a Way by default. For instance, Craft is linked to Creativity, while Close Combat is linked to Combativeness. More details are given in the "Resolution of an Action" section.

Here is a quick description of each Domain's application:

- **Craft (Creativity):** Gathers the techniques and know-how of manual work, as well as the various plastic arts. It includes Jewelry, Clothing (sewing, weaving, etc.), Cooking, Distillation, Mining (exploiting ore deposits), Ironworks, Sculpting, etc.
- **Close Combat (Combativeness):** This Domain includes all melee-fighting techniques.

Interpreting a Skill's Rating

Here is an interpretation of the various levels of a Domain:

- 0: no knowledge in this Domain
- 1 to 2: novice, the Character has some superficial understanding
- 3 to 5: creditable knowledge, but not highly specialized

Afterward, the Character may train in a Discipline, which corresponds to a specialty in this Domain. Here is an interpretation of the Disciplines' levels:

- 6 to 9: professional level
- 10 to 12: expert
- 13 to 14: master
- 15: true legend

- **Demorthèn Mysteries (Empathy)**: Apart from the Demorthèn, only the Ionnthèn (their apprentices) or long-standing allies can have access to this Domain. It gives access to the techniques and knowledge making it possible to call upon the Sigil Rann (the art of Ogham). It also includes skills in Medicine, Herbalism, etc.

- **Erudition (Reason)**: Erudition encompasses general knowledge, particularly reading and writing. It covers many fields of knowledge: Astronomy, Doctrine of the Temple (ideology of the Temple, the six Ordinances and the six orders), Geography (knowledge in orientation and ability to read a map), Heraldry, etc.

- **Feats (Combateness)**: Related to all physical actions, including going beyond one's limits (Acrobatics, Running, Climbing, Swimming, etc.)

- **Magience (Reason)**: This Domain gathers the knowledge and know-how linked to this Continental science: Flux Knowledge (knowing where to find Flux, the different types of Flux and their properties), Flux Extraction, Flux Refining, Artifact Repair, Medicine, etc.

- **Natural Environnement (Empathy)**: This Domain measures the Character's ability to survive in the wilderness as well as his knowledge of the rural environment. A Character competent in this Domain will have an understanding of Agriculture, Animal Knowledge, Camping, Survival, Orientation, etc.

- **Occultism (Reason)**: Occultism is a Continental discipline little known in Tri-Kazel; it gathers esoteric beliefs and theories about magic and phantasmagorical creatures. It also deals with the study of sanity as well as the treatment of associated disorders via hypnosis.

- **Perception (Reason)**: This Domain gathers skills linked to observing, noticing details, and staying alert.

- **Performance (Creativity)**: This is the practice and knowledge of stage arts. A bard's Domain of predilection, it also relates to all kinds of games and entertainment.

- **Prayer (Conviction)**: This Domain covers the knowledge and rites of the religion of the Temple. It provides the skills to study the enigmas of theology and, for the most devoted of adepts, to access the Miracles granted by the Creator.

- **Relation (Empathy)**: This Domain includes rhetorical techniques and knowledge (Sweet Talk, Charm, Intimidation, etc.) It also deals with manners related to life in society and education.

- **Science (Reason)**: This Domain gathers specialized knowledge and processes such as Architecture, Botany, Knowledge of Mental Troubles, Geology, Engineering, Medicine, etc. Magience is not included in this Domain.

- **Shooting and Throwing (Combateness)**: This skill is used for ranged combat but also for throwing a grappling hook, for example.

- **Stealth (Empathy)**: Domain of furtiveness and obfuscation, used to avoid being spotted and remain hidden.

- **Travel (Empathy)**: A Domain gathering all kinds of appropriate knowledge and techniques for traveling and living in the open: Carriages, Cartography, Riding, Orientation, etc. Some Disciplines are exclusive to the Varigals or to those who have had the privilege to learn about their trade.

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Resolution of an Action

When an action with an uncertain outcome is attempted, or when the knowledge of the PC is tested, the Leader can ask a Player to make a Resolution Roll to determine whether the intended action is a success or not. In such cases, the Player then rolls a ten-sided die (1D10) and adds the result to the rating of the Domain (or the Discipline) appropriate to the action, as well as to the associated Way. To succeed, the Player must reach a number above or equal to a Difficulty Threshold set by the GL. Thus, the resolution system can be summed up this way:

1D10 + Domain (or Discipline) + Way must be equal to or greater than the Difficulty Threshold



As part of this prologue, the skill rating of each premade Character already takes into account the addition of the Domain and of the Way; the Players can use them directly, adding them to the result of the die.

-Summary of the Game System-

Yldiane tries to sidle by without being noticed. Her Stealth level is 7 (2 in Stealth + 5 in Empathy). The Player who embodies her will find this number in the "Skills" part. He just has to roll 1D10 and add the result to 7.

The Difficulty Threshold

This threshold is chosen by the GL before a Resolution roll, and takes into account the difficulty of the intended action:

Difficulty Level	Difficulty Threshold
Easy	8
Standard	11
Complicated	14
Difficult	17
Very Difficult	20
Exceptional	25
Heroic	30
Superhuman	35

Yldiane tries to sidle by. The only sentry seems to be dozing but still glances around occasionally. The Leader considers it a Complicated (14) action. The Player rolls 1D10 and gets a 6; he adds it to his Stealth skill (7), and obtains a result of 13: a failure... the Leader describes the scene as the sentry suddenly turns toward Yldiane!

Automatic Success

If the addition of a PC's Way and Domain (or Discipline) exceeds the Difficulty Threshold without him having to roll a 1D10, his success is considered to be automatic. It is then unnecessary to roll a die.

Contested Actions

When two Characters make contested actions, both make an ordinary Resolution roll. The one with the highest total gets the upper hand.

Survival Points

Each PC is given three Survival Points. In a critical moment, he can use them to obtain one of these effects:

- **Re-make a failed die roll.** Note that the new result will be applied, even if it is worse than the first.
- **Ignore pain.** For one Round, the PC ignores any penalty due to a damaged Health Condition (see the following section about Health).
- **Get back on one's feet.** Using two Survival Points, he can empty the "Agony" box and get back on his feet.

Survival Points do not replenish automatically, but a PC can buy them back with Experience Points.

About the Use of the Game System

Shadows of Esteren's game system has been conceived to support the atmosphere and not to hinder the action because of an overbearing technical aspect. Keep a simple principle in mind: if a die roll would break the rhythm of a sequence, decrease the dramatic intensity, or reduce the emotional charge of a scene, don't do it. The Leader should encourage the Players to play their PCs and limit the use of the game system to a minimum.

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Health

Each time the PC gets a damage point, the Player ticks a box in the Health Condition chart. The paragraph "Calculating Damage", in the section dedicated to Combat, shows how to determine how severe the injuries suffered during a fight are. When a line is filled, move to the next one, and so on, until the last box is ticked. Each Health Condition inflicts particular penalties that apply to every roll (-1 for the Okay Condition, -2 for the Bad Condition, etc).



For NPCs and creatures controlled by the Leader, a simple scale is used. For instance, for a brigand, the Health level will be indicated as follows: 19(G)/14(O)/9(B)/5(C). That way, if the brigand loses Health Points and goes down to 14, he will be in an Okay Condition (-1 penalty), then from 9, in a Bad Condition (-2 penalty), etc.

Agony

When the "Agony" box is ticked, the Character collapses and dies if nobody intervenes within 1D10 minutes. A Difficult (17) First Aid or Medicine roll is necessary to save the Character, who regains consciousness 1D10 hours later (the Player then unticks the "Agony" box).



A Character who rests can recover up to three Damage points for each twenty-four hours: one point for a night's sleep, a second one if he is provided adequate care, and a third one if he rests during the day.

Healing and Resting

A successful roll in Science, Demorthèn Mysteries, or Natural Environment, with a Complicated (14) Difficulty Threshold, made just after an injury, gives back one health Point.

Combat

A fight is divided into Rounds. In this introductory book, a simplified combat system will be used, deliberately leaving aside several elements that could unnecessarily complicate a first session. Each Round is divided into three phases and is regulated with the resolution system formerly described (see the "Resolution of an Action" part):

1. Determining the order of action
2. Resolving the action
3. Calculating Damage

1. Determining the Order of Action

For this, compare the protagonists' Speed ratings. The one with the highest rating acts first.

The sentry, having seen Yldiane, points his spear at her and is about to call for reinforcements. Yldiane draws her weapon and pounces on him. She has a rating of 9 in Speed. The sentry has a rating of 6. Therefore, Yldiane is the fastest; she is first in the order of action. The Leader describes the first phase of the resolution: "Before the sentry knows it, you are on him, weapon in hand!"



2. Resolving the Action

Each fighter then makes his Resolution roll according to the predetermined order of action. The Attack rating is used, to which the result of 1D10 is added. The Difficulty Threshold to beat here is the Defense rating of the opponent. If the result of this roll overcomes the opponent's Defense rating, he is hit.

Yldiane has the initiative. The Player rolls an 8 on his die, which, added to his Attack rating of 7, gives a result of 15. The sentry has a Defense rating of 9; he is hit!

Fighting Attitudes

Here is a word about one aspect of the combat system that is not mentioned here. Each Character has five different Fighting Attitudes representing how he can behave during a fight: standard, offensive, defensive, fast attack, and movement.

According to the chosen Attitude during a Round (and following the Potential rating defined in Book 1 - Universe), the Attack, Defense, and Speed ratings can be modified. For example, in an offensive Attitude, the Potential is added to Attack but subtracted from Defense, showing the risks taken by the PC. The Attitude system aims to encourage the Players to describe how their PCs behave during a fight.

3. Calculating Damage

A successful Attack roll means that at least one blow hit during the Round. If this is the case, the Player adds the Damage of his weapon to his Attack roll. The Defense of the opponent is subtracted from this total score, which gives the margin of success of the attack. Finally, the Protection rating of the opponent is subtracted from this margin of success (these subtracted points represent the Damage absorbed by the defender's armor). The final result equals to the inflicted Damage points.



Margin of success - Protection rating
= Damage points

Yldiane got an initial Attack rating of 15, to which the Player adds the Damage inflicted by her weapon (2 points), which totals 17. Her adversary's Defense rating is subtracted from this total rating (17-9), which gives a margin of 8 Damage points. The sentry wears thick leather armor and carries a shield that together soak a total of 3 Damage points. Still, Yldiane inflicts 5 Damage points, which is a serious injury. The Leader ticks 5 boxes on his Health Condition chart; the sentry is in an Okay Condition, so the wound causes him a -1 penalty for all his future rolls.

Now it's the sentry's turn to attack; the Leader rolls a 5 on his die. Added to his Attack rating, his Attack roll equals 13. The Player takes a look at Yldiane's technical characteristics and sees that she has a Defense of 12. She is hit! The Leader adds to the sentry's Attack roll the 3 points inflicted by his long sword, which makes a total rating of 16, and a margin of 4 (16-12). Fortunately, Yldiane's leather armor soaks 2 Damage points; she only takes 2 points from a glancing blow.

As the dice are rolled and ratings are compared, the Leader and the Players should describe the scene so as to make it more life-like: "Yldiane, you pounced on the sentry, and before he had the time to react you managed to badly wound him! However, his armor resists, and your opponent then strikes back, cutting into your arm."

End of the Round

Once everything is resolved, the Round ends, and a new one begins.

-Summary of the Game System-

Sanity

In Shadows of Esteren, the handling of sanity plays a large part in the game system. This Prologue will give a brief outline of it.

During the game, the PCs will be led to experience exceptional events that may leave a mark on their personalities, which are defined by the rating of the Characters' Ways. As a result, there are Aspects (Consciousness, Instinct, and Trauma), an Orientation (rational or instinctive), and Character Traits. All these elements are determined at the creation of each PC.

Mental Disorders

One last element is determined during the creation of a PC: the latent mental disorder, which will take hold if madness gains ground. Therefore, each PC has a specific latent pathology, related to his personality and history. Book 1 - Universe details twelve disorders and their progression. For this, a gauge is used, ranging from 1 to 20, with every 5-point segment leading to a degradation of sanity. The states are balance, symptom, syndrome, and finally, madness.

Mental Resistance Rolls

When a PC faces very harsh scenes on an emotional level, the Leader may ask the Player to make a Mental Resistance roll. The Difficulty Threshold is secretly set by the Leader, according to the intensity of the situation. Therefore, its level will not be known by the Player: the Leader simply asks him to make a roll and to tell the result. This way, the Player will not know whether this roll has been a success or a failure, or the amount of Trauma points he may have taken.

Mental Resistance Roll	
Difficulty Threshold	Trauma Points
11	1
14	2
17	3 (1)
20	5 (2)
25	10 (3)

In the case of a success, the PC endures the experience, unless the mental shock is important, in which case he still suffers the Trauma points indicated between brackets.

Premade Characters

The included templates in the following pages use the leading principles of Shadows of Esteren's game system. Here is a reminder regarding the meanings of the words used:

- **Ways:** There are five Ways, which are the main features of a Character's personality.
- **Skills:** The indicated rating is the Domain's rating added to the Way's; in case of a Resolution roll, this rating will directly be added to a 1D10 result and compared to the Difficulty Threshold determined by the Leader.
- **Advantages and Disadvantages:** If a PC has a particular quality (strong, bright, lucky, etc.), or a fault, it will be indicated here. These specifics are translated into bonuses and penalties. These are already included in the rating indicated for Skills, Attacks, etc.
- **Sanity:** Indicates the level of a Character's Mental Resistance as well as his amount of Trauma points (from the balance between his Ways) at the start of the game.
- **Combat:** Gathers Attack, Defense, and Speed ratings. Also indicates the PC's Protection level.
- **Survival Points:** Indicates the number of Survival points.
- **Stamina:** The PC's general constitution, his resistance to illness, poisons, etc. Barring exceptional cases, this value is usually 10.
- **Health:** This chart keeps track of the PC's potential wounds.



Use of Sanity in the Scenarios

The Leader can make use of the Sanity rules during the scenarios included in the "Omens" chapter. In this case, and with the Loch Varn scenario in particular, Players and Leaders are encouraged to improvise a Character's descent into madness, if he takes enough Trauma points.

What Next?

Shadows of Esteren's Book 1 - Universe includes all the necessary details by describing the Demorthèn's magic and the Temple's miracles, the use of Magience, a complete sanity system, illnesses, experience and advancement, etc. The resolution system includes critical successes and failures, Luck rolls, and a system directly involving the Ways: the Tests. To summarize them, going through a Test means to confront the Character with his own tendencies, represented by the Ways. The higher a particular Way is, the harder it is to act against it.

Yldiane, Varigal

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 5. Reason: 2. Conviction: 1.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 7. Erudition: 4. Feats: 6. Natural Environment: 9. Perception: 7 (Discipline: Alertness: 8). Relation: 6. Shooting and Throwing: 5. Stealth: 7. Travel: 10.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Mentor (Jarn).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 4.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 7 (Carath Damage: 2. Short Sword Damage: 2). Defense: 12 (Protection: 2). Speed: 9. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 10.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3.

Yldiane was born in Melwan and is the granddaughter of the Demorthèn Wailen. As a child, she was already curious and smart, and she used to ask countless questions to her Dàmàthair. Her parents' death by illness, followed by her older sister Adeliene's sudden departure for Dearg's Vale at the age of seven, saddened her and left her dismayed. She had much trouble getting through these two events, which happened on the same year. Her grandmother took care of her and thought about initiating her in the Demorthèn arts, but Yldiane didn't have much affinity with this mystical vocation and Wailen soon gave up on the idea. Yldiane was too absent-minded, thinking about other places, about her sister, or her parents she would never see again, questioning herself about anything and everything. Slowly, she convinced herself that another life was waiting for her, somewhere. Elsewhere. Thus, at about fifteen, she was nicely surprised when she met Jarn, a Varigal nicknamed "the slashed". The young girl was captivated by the fantastic tales of the traveler who soon invited her to join the ranks of the Varigals. Yldiane jumped at the chance and, after two years of rigorous training under Jarn's guidance, she began a solo career in the kingdom of Reizh, where she delivered several packages to various addressees. The everyday wandering was very far from the romantic image she had formerly had: bad weather, fear, violence, and sometimes even strange things lurking in the dark... Nevertheless, she stuck to this feeling, this certainty that somewhere, her life was waiting for her, just over the next crest, just on the other side of the next valley. After difficult months in the north of Tri-Kazel, during which she made enemies, Yldiane headed back toward Taol-Kaer with a new delivery package for Tulg Naomh. This mission gave her the opportunity to go through her native village, Melwan...



Personality

Character Traits: Intuitive / Impulsive

Latent Disorder: Elation

Yldiane is an intuitive and curious young girl, very aware of her surroundings. She is particularly fond of independence and is fine with being alone... at first glance, at least, for the disappearance of her relatives as a child deeply marked her. In Melwan, she has only one friend, Arven, whom she has known since her childhood. Yldiane's spontaneous temper can sometimes make her impulsive, although she knows of her fault and tries to channel it. As a Varigal, she has already risked her life on various occasions, and she knows a lot of stories regarding fellow members who died from excessive curiosity or bravery. And yet, despite her efforts, she struggles in vain against her nature, and when she doesn't feel in danger or under any real risk, she becomes careless. Sometimes, she wonders what she is really doing on the road, but she is not the introspective type.

Upon returning to Melwan, Yldiane found herself in an uncomfortable position. Her grandmother is now rather cold toward her, and her friend Arven is more than ever obsessed by her military career. And above all, Melwan is very close to Dearg, and even though Yldiane hardly remembers her sister, she finds herself thinking of her more and more.



Equipment

Yldiane owns a complete set of Varigal gear: tent, rope, grappling hooks and pitons, several maps, a hurricane lamp of Magientist conception giving a bluish light (called "portable Nebular" and powered with mineral Flux), five mineral Flux cartridges (each one can fuel the Nebular for 12 hours), writing utensils, as well as first aid gear. She is equipped with studded leather armor, a short sword, and a Carath (a Varigal traveling stick).

Health Condition Chart

Good	○○○○○
Okay -1	○○○○○
Bad -2	○○○○○
Critical -3	○○○○○
Agony	○



Arven, Fighter

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 3. Reason: 1. Conviction: 4.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 10 (Discipline: Swords: 11). Erudition: 3. Feats: 9 (-1 for extended actions).
Natural Environment: 5. Performance: 3 (+1 bonus). Perception: 5. Relation: 6 (+1 bonus).
Shooting and Throwing: 8. Stealth: 5.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Ally, Beautiful.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Fragile.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 2.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 10 (Sword: 11. Long Sword Damage: 3. Crossbow: 8. Crossbow Damage: 2).
Defense: 9 (Protection: 4). Speed: 8. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 9.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3.

Arven was born in Melwan. Very soon, she became Yldiane's friend, as the two little girls were raised by the same Dàmàthair and shared a certain adventurous spirit, which led them to do some foolish things and to endure the consequences. However, contrary to her friend, Arven quickly developed a taste for military training, which she diligently followed. The savage attack on Melwan by Feondas seven years ago sealed her vocation of fighter. Shattered by her parents' brutal death during the attack, she swore to kill those who would dare to strike out at Melwan, whether humans or Feondas. After several years of apprenticeship, she was noticed for her courage and her boldness, and got to work for the Mac Lyr family. The knight Aessan became her mentor, and she found a solid ally in him. The young woman developed conflicting feelings for the warrior, and does her best to get his respect and recognition. Although she is a commoner, Arven knows that with a noble patronage she could become a knight, an ambition for which she obsessively strives. She doesn't care about titles or lands, but she is attached to military values that elevate the art of fighting; values without which a warrior is not that different from a wild animal, according to the young woman. Arven doesn't know yet if, at this moment, she should apply for the prestigious order of the Hilderins, or if she should stay at the Mac Lyr's disposal. Aessan clearly made her understand that a good career in the Hilderins requires serious support, but that it can bring glory and certain recognition. On the contrary, staying with the Mac Lyr's could be considered as a lack of ambition, but protecting the vale from its threats is a very honorable prospect as well.

Health Condition Chart	
Good	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Okay -1	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bad -2	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Critical -3	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Agony	○

⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Upright / Bold
Latent Disorder: Frenzy

Arven is a courageous and committed young woman who believes in the values of chivalry. She dreams of joining a prestigious order like the Hilderin knights, but even a simple rank of knight attached to the Mac Lyr family would fulfill her expectations. She suffers from a fragile health, a weakness for which she can't forgive herself: she tends to double her efforts and her boldness to compensate for her weak breath, which can drive her to some reckless acts. Despite her beauty, Arven thinks neither about wedding nor about romance, and would have easily been viewed as a tomboy a couple of years ago. However, the knight Aessan has done his best to somehow soften the manners of his often uncompromising protégée. Notably, he taught her some old bitter-sweet soldier ballads, which made Arven aware of other facets of a warrior's life she didn't have a clue of: the death of a comrade-in-arms, short-lived love stories, incapacitating injuries, fear, age... Her resolution remains intact, but she begins to understand that her ideals will be often and strongly put to the test. Her friend Yldiane's recent return worries her: she would like to hear about her journeys as a Varigal, but she fears that Yldiane has become roguish, making a living out of schemes and petty thefts, which would end their friendship.

⊗ Equipment

Arven is equipped with chainmail armor, a long sword, a crossbow, and a large round shield with the Mac Lyr's symbol, a Caernide head on a green and gold background. She also has a large leather bag with traveling gear, a rope, torches, and a blanket.



Ean, Archer

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 2. Reason: 4. Conviction: 1.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 6. Craft: 5. Erudition: 6. Feats: 7 (+1 bonus to rolls related to agility). Natural Environment: 5. Perception: 8. Relation: 5. Shooting and Throwing: 10. Stealth: 6 (+1 bonus). Travel: 3.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Nimble.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Enemy (corrupt knight).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 3.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 6 (Bow: 10. Bow Damage: 2. Short Sword Damage: 2). Defense: 12 (Protection: 2). Speed: 7. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 10.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3.

Ean was born in Tulg Naomh, the capital city of Tulg's dukedom, where his parents run a very reputable tannery. As a young boy, he quickly showed skill in archery, and he soon accompanied his father in his expeditions into the open country, so as to provide the family trade with quality hides. Yet, Ean aspired to something else, and the city life soon showed him a different way to use his natural skills. In the beginning, he mainly acted out of idleness, playing tricks or spying on conversations that didn't concern him. Although he began to enjoy the thrill of risk, he became twice as careful and wary as he discovered some unsavory truths about apparently respectable people. He developed a kind of cynicism and, one thing leading to another, began to spy on some people's doings on behalf of anonymous employers. The information he had to collect from his target had as little chance to escape him as the animals he hunted. Profit came along with some enticing rivalry, as he soon came to compete with a young girl commonly dubbed "Azurine" for her gray bluish eyes, the only recognizable feature through her helmet's visor. More than once, the two spies had to look for the same pieces of information. Ean wanted to know more about the mysterious young woman, but never succeeded in discovering her identity. Apparently, she had no public life and seemed to live in Tulg Naomh's shadows. However, sudden events forced the young man to leave his native town, before light was shed on this mystery.

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One night, as he was searching for some clue about suspicious deliveries, Ean overheard a conversation between an influential knight and an official of the Currency House, the royal institution dealing with the making and transportation of funds. Their discussion was obviously about the misappropriation of a hefty amount of Daols. Unfortunately, Ean was spotted and had to leave the town in order to flee the corrupt knight's wrath. He withdrew into the mountains, leaving only an evasive note to his parents behind him, and eventually reached Melwan's village. From his hideout, he contemplated on a way to strike down the corrupt knight. With that aim in mind, he is trying to get accepted by the locals, the Mac Lyrs in particular, whom he sees as formidable potential allies.

Health Condition Chart	
Good	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Okay -1	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bad -2	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Critical -3	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Agony	○

⊗ **Personality**
Character Traits: Persevering / Unreliable
Latent Disorder: Paranoia

Ean is a young man who is determined in his deeds. Once his decision is made, nothing can stop him. This said, he tends to turn to the highest bidder and doesn't really care about his promises. He can appear immoral to many people. Patient and observant, Ean is crafty, but his greatest qualities remain his perseverance and his tenacity. His morality is flexible and even thin, and he sometimes has a hard time getting used to the mountaineers' behavior, who are far more considerate of their collective interest than city dwellers, and far less respectful of their neighbors' private life. He keeps most of his assessments to himself, and, although he is often fed up with Arven's aggressive and idealistic naivety, Ean can't deny he's attracted to the young girl and sometimes regrets his own lack of conviction.

⊗ **Equipment**

Ean is armed with a short sword and a bow, and he wears studded leather armor. He owns some consumables and travel gear in a bag, tools to pick locks, a spy-glass, and several knives.



Liam, Scholar

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 1. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 3. Reason: 5. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 3. Craft: 6. Demorthèn Mysteries: 7. Erudition: 9 (Herbalism: 10) (+1 bonus). Magience: 7. Natural Environment: 4. Occultism: 7. Perception: 7. Relation: 3. Sciences: 9. Travel: 4.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Well-read.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 2.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 3 (Short Sword Damage: 2. Knife Damage: 1). Defense: 13 (Protection: 0). Speed: 4. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 10.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3.

Originally, Liam was set on being Wailen's disciple, replacing the young Ionnthén Adeliàne, who had suddenly left the city. However, the young man had trouble embracing the cult of the spirits of nature, as he couldn't help but question everything, even the most basic of things. He would spend his time in reflection, never blindly trusting what he was being taught, and always asking questions which no one could really answer. After several years, Wailen told him that he should give up the idea of finishing his apprenticeship, and she sent the Ionnthén back home. It was a difficult moment for Liam, as he sincerely wished to become a Demorthèn. Fortunately for him, he found a way to express his intellectual curiosity and freedom of mind with Venec, Melwan's apothecary. Indeed, the old man was neither a follower of the traditional cult, nor an adept of Magience, let alone a follower of the Temple's religion. He was curious about all of these subjects, and was even highly interested in the theological enigmas of the Temple's church. But, contrary to most people who are looking for answers and for absolutes, Venec strove to judge everything fully, without prejudices, but with wisdom and restraint. Liam benefited from his master's vast erudition, using his workshop to access different books and documents about various subjects.

Now, this cornucopia of knowledge is starting to run dry, and other preoccupations put aside for a while are resurfacing. For a couple of years, Liam's main cause of concern has been his older brother, Terent, who never succeeded in finding his place in the community. Terent left Melwan two years ago, only coming back unexpectedly and sporadically, and remaining vague about his activities. According to some people, he has become a Varigal, but a persisting rumor has him being part of the Dark Feathers, a band of brigands running wild mainly in the nearby vale of Dearg. Others state that he has been seen prowling in Loch Varn's vale. Liam has trouble picturing Terent as a bandit, but he could not help but notice, during their last encounter, his brother's stance, betraying a man who is used to carrying a sword at his belt.

Health Condition Chart

Good	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Okay -1	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bad -2	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Critical -3	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Agony	○

⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Resourceful / Irresolute
Latent Disorder: Elation

Liam's freedom of mind is what characterizes him the most: like his mentor Venec, he finds interest in everything, without his curiosity being bound by some dogma. All sources of knowledge are valuable in his eyes. But from his open mind also comes his biggest weakness: a persisting doubt on the direction he's going to take in his life. Taking over Venec's shop? Traveling toward big cities in order to develop his knowledge? What would he do then: scribe, herbalist... or even doctor in a big city? Once, he even thought about becoming a Magientist. Those who do not know him often and wrongly judge him as an absent-minded dreamer. On the contrary, Liam has his feet on the ground despite his curious and perpetually active brain, and this is indeed his problem. He is often indecisive, because he has trouble weighing the alternatives, and he then hides behind complex discourses which aim to present the possible choices as well as to help himself make a decision.

⊗ Equipment

Liam owns a satchel with various parchments, writing devices, a magnifying glass, a torch, medicinal herbs, and first aid gear. He carries a short sword and a knife.



- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 1. Creativity: 5. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 6 (+2 bonus). Craft: 8. Demorthén Mysteries: 8. Erudition: 3. Feats: 6 (+2 bonus to rolls related to strength). Natural Environment: 9. Performance: 9. Travel: 6.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Colossus.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 1.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 8 (Claymore Damage: 4). Defense: 11 (Protection: 2). Speed: 5. Potential: 3.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 10.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3.

Mòr was named that way because of his impressive physique; his name means “colossus” in the ancient Tri-Kazelian tongue. He comes from Melwan, where he spends his time between Nar’s forge and Neala’s stables. As he was an orphan, he was taken in by the blacksmith Nar, who taught him ironworking. Despite some promising tries, this apprenticeship did not come to much, as Mòr was too much of a dreamer to work with the care and the consistency expected by Nar. Therefore, the former knight tried to train Mòr in the use of weapons, without much more success.

This situation exasperates Nar, who cannot stand to see his adopted son daydreaming instead of training in a useful trade for the community: nature gave him remarkable strength, and Mòr has to make good use of it. The young man doesn’t lack good will, and he readily agrees to help when asked, but his withdrawn and melancholic nature always gains the upper hand. Fortunately, old Demorthén Wailen has taken Mòr under her wing and the young giant seems to have good aptitude to become, at last, the trainee that the Demorthén has been looking for so long. He is much more hardworking and enthusiastic than when Nar showed him the art of iron or of fight, even if Wailen is often annoyed by his dreamy nature.

Actually, Mòr feels much more comfortable and serene by the side of Neala, a Caernide breeder from Melwan. His calm nature allows him to have a privileged relationship with animals; he loves spending hours with the cattle, whether caring for it at the stable or taking it out in the open. Furthermore, Mòr has become fond of music ever since he heard Neala singing and playing the lute. As thanks for his valuable help in the stable, the young woman, who had noticed his interest in music and singing, offered him a lute of his own. Mòr spends more and more of his time far from the village, playing his lute, when he is out with the animals.

Health Condition Chart	
Good	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Okay -1	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bad -2	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Critical -3	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Agony	○

⊗ **Personality**
Character Traits: Calm / Absent-minded
Latent Disorder: Melancholia

Mòr’s build strongly contrasts with his temper. The young man likes the tranquility and loneliness of the open nature with the Caernides. He is secretly in love with Neala but keeps his feelings for himself because he fears to lose the young woman’s affection. As shy as he is musically gifted, he doesn’t sing but plays the lute wonderfully. No one in the village knows of his skills, since he only plays alone, far from the village. Even Neala would be astonished if she heard him play. Mòr takes his Ionnthén vocation very seriously and always pays close attention to Wailen’s teachings. He tries to be exemplary, in order to obtain the recognition and pride of Wailen and of his adoptive father Nar, two people who mean a lot to him.

Mòr is otherwise a soft-hearted and tolerant man, able to accept everyone’s nature, be it Arven’s determined personality, Ean’s silent irony, or Liam’s convoluted explanations. Yldiane somehow fascinates the Ionnthén, because she left Melwan to live her dreams and travels all around the vast world. Mòr is filled with all kinds of dreams and has a pretty naive idea of the peninsula, but the young woman’s tales made him want to see more of Tri-Kazel.

⊗ **Equipment**

Mòr wears thick studded leather armor. He has a large two-handed blade, a Claymore that his adoptive father gave him, which he only uses as a last resort. When he leaves somewhere, he brings along a bag with torches, some camping equipment, a sizable gourd, and first aid gear. He also hides his most precious object, his lute, in the bag.



Urvan, Adept of the Temple

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 5. Empathy: 4. Reason: 1. Conviction: 3.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5. Craft: 7. Erudition: 2. Natural Environment: 7. Perception: 4 (+1 bonus to rolls related to hearing). Performance: 10. Prayer: 8. Relation: 9. Shooting and Throwing: 4. Stealth: 6. Travel: 6.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Keen Hearing.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 3.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 5 (Long Sword Damage: 3. Crossbow 4. Crossbow Damage: 2). Defense: 10 (Protection: 4). Speed: 6. Potential: 3.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 10.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3.

Urvan wanted to be a bard, but his devout parents left him to the good care of the clergy, so that he might become a soldier of the One. Urvan's father has nothing but contempt for those who refuse the One's truth, and he does not forget that his own father died during the War of the Temple against Reizh's heathen soldiers. Raised from his early childhood in the Temple's faith, Urvan is a sincere believer, but too sensitive and dreamy according to his family. Unfortunately, once in the Blade knights' order, the armed side of the church in Gwidre, he did not make a good reputation and did not try to please his superiors. From reprimands to punishments, Urvan eventually got a disciplinary sanction. He has to go for a "pilgrimage" to inspect several sites abandoned during the War of the Temple in Taol-Kaer. The idea is to force him to pull himself together by exposing him to the dangers of the road and to the hostility of the Talkéride pagans. He escorts Jaber, a Temple's Vector, an austere man he gets along with, as the Vector quickly understood that Urvan has a good heart, but simply lacks the firmness and discipline the Temple's Blades are required to have. The two men have been on the road for two months already, and they have visited a few isolated clerics in the mountains, as well as several abandoned churches and chapels. Since they passed Taol-Kaer's border, both of them have been noticeably tenser. Jaber explained to Urvan that a chapel dedicated to a local saint is to be found in Loch Varn's vale and that in Dearg's vale, there is a monastery held by two representatives of the Temple. For the first time in his life, Urvan is in a country where the religion of the One is not considered as the official truth, and where the Temple's clergy has no authority.

Dressed in the light gray tunic of trainee adepts, lined with the Blades' red, Urvan knows that he will not be welcome. Lots of Talkérides were killed by the Blade knights during the war, half a century ago. He fears the hostility of Taol-Kaer's pagan highlanders toward him and Jaber, and he seriously doubts he will be able to protect the Vector. The possibility of such a situation makes his fertile imagination run wild.

Health Condition Chart	
Good	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Okay -1	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bad -2	○ ○ ○ ○
Critical -3	○ ○ ○ ○
Agony	○

- ⊗ **Personality**
Character Traits: Poetic / Absent-minded
Latent Disorder: Mental Confusion

Urvan is sensitive and not very self-confident. He has not completed his initiation yet, and fosters doubts about his commitment. He does believe in the One, but must he fight and kill to serve him? He hopes that the Creator understands and forgives him, especially now. When he goes back to Gwidre, if he is to survive the perils of the Talkeride valleys, he knows he will have to be determined about his future life. The Temple only deserves a sincere devotion, without ambiguous feelings. Often, the young man glances at Jaber, wondering if the vocation of Vector wouldn't be more suitable for him than that of Blade. But he also fears that his shyness would prevent him from preaching with the due conviction and assurance. In the end, Urvan fears the future, first because of the dangers of his current journey, but also, and especially, because he is afraid of making a choice that will engage him for the rest of his life, when he is not at all convinced he has the required qualities and willpower.

- ⊗ **Equipment**
 Urvan has a long sword, a crossbow, chainmail armor, and a shield engraved with the Temple's symbol. He owns a prayer book, maps, traveling gear, a gourd, a hurricane lamp, and two doses of oil.



A medieval role-playing game with a horrific and gothic influence

Shadows of Esteren is a medieval role-playing game with horrific and gothic overtones. Drawing inspiration from Celtic myths, this universe has a discreetly fantastic side under a bleak, realistic surface. This world is populated by humans who have to cope with a harsh daily life and supernatural threats lurking in the dark. Focused on investigation and survival scenarios, Shadows of Esteren is a game in which the atmosphere and the interactions among the players are paramount.

Prologue "Player's Guide" will be your first journey into the universe of Shadows of Esteren's role-playing game, You will find:

- **An Introduction to the Universe.** Familiarize yourself with the main concepts of the game, as well as with a general presentation of the universe.

- **A Summary of the Game System.** All the necessary elements to grasp Shadows of Esteren's system and play your first scenarios.

- **Six Template Characters.** Illustrated and ready-to-play Characters: Yldiane the Varigal, Arven the fighter, Ean the fugitive, Liam the scholar, Mòr the Ionnthén, and Urvan the Blade knight.

