Shadows of Esteren



1- Universe



1. Universe

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

"There are mysteries which men can only guess at, which age by age they may solve only in part." Bram Stoker

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ForgeSonges is a collective of authors and illustrators gathered under the form of an association, whose goal is to create quality game material. Check for news and the latest publications of the collective on http://www.forgesonges.org

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Foreword

You are holding in your hands “Book 1–Universe”, the first book of the Shadows of Esteren role-playing series, which can be read by Players as well as Game Leaders. This foreword will allow you to comprehend such a new world more easily, by clarifying some of its guiding principles.

Part One: a Subjective Presentation

The first part of the book is dedicated to a description of the world, which you will discover through a collection of letters, reports, and research works belonging to an old lord. It will allow you to share the point of view of the natives of Tri-Kazel, and to familiarize yourself with their way of perceiving the world around them; an untamed region of the world where magic and fantastic events manifest at the margin of one's daily life. Indeed, in the universe of Shadows of Esteren, there are neither fantasy peoples such as elves or dwarves, nor magicians casting fireballs. Most supernatural or magical manifestations are relatively subtle and the universe is fundamentally gritty and realistic.

An Intuitive Game System

Soon, it will be your turn to travel over these untamed lands and face their mysteries. This premise shapes the second part of the book, dedicated to the game system which essentially explains how to resolve the most common actions, defines mechanics for Demorthèn Arts, Magience, Miracles of the Temple, and Sanity. Therefore, it gives you the tools to create and play your alter egos, the Player Characters. Shadows of Esteren is a game of atmosphere where immersion and interactions among the Players have priority over any kind of simulative gameplay. This is why the game system has been designed to be intuitive and easy to become familiar with.

The Horrific and the Gothic Imagery

Esteren is a harsh medieval world where Characters will be confronted with horror and multifaceted threats. Gothic tradition can be found in awe-inspiring landscapes where the forces of nature rage, a perfect setting for tragic and passionate stories. As for horror, it is dealt with in its classical, literary sense, which means a violent feeling of dread mixed with wonder in front of a vertiginous reality. The stress is put not on disgust or repulsion, but rather on the very moment of the confrontation with mysteries and the strangeness of the world.

A Universe with Secrets

Esteren is a universe hiding many secrets that the Characters embodied by the Players may come to discover, at least partly. For horror to creep in at the very moment when such revelations take their whole extent, it is advisable to first depict an environment that will, at first, seem familiar. Therefore, the universe of Esteren may at first seem down-to-earth; this is on purpose. Such a choice sets supernatural elements–and everything that could be related to the horrific–aside, at least to begin with. However, little by little, disquiet will invade such a common daily life and introduce unfathomable things.

A Complete Series

Such a way of dealing with the horrific, and the basic principle of the revelation have guided the structuring of the series' various books. The goal of this first book, “Universe”, is to depict the universe of Esteren as it is perceived by its inhabitants. Most of the time, supernatural, horrific, and fantastic elements only appear between the lines, since they do not represent the daily life of most natives in this world. Although nothing more is required to play, the truth of things will only be revealed in its matching piece “Book 4–Secrets”. This book, intended for the Leader only, will fully disclose the ins-and-outs of the universe, and give the reader tools to portray the revelations the Players will experience.

Player Characters in the Game

Although Esteren is a harsh world, the depths of which hide unfathomable secrets, it does not imply the Characters embodied by the Players are doomed to perish; their survival, and above all, their success, will depend on their ingenuity and bravery. The advancement of the Characters, symbolized by an experience system, gives the Players a great liberty and many development possibilities. Complete player aids, proposed on page 176 of this book, will also help Leaders and Players to define the place of the Characters in the universe of Esteren.

Cross-media

From the start, Esteren has been conceived to exist simultaneously on several media, which echo one another. The goal is to favor the involvement of the Players/readers in this universe while introducing them to different experiences. Role-playing holds an important place in this desire to present the reader with a rich interactive experience; it makes it possible to enter the universe of Esteren and to play various Characters for unique adventures.

Other media have been designed to complement such an experience, namely:

- "Of Men and Obscurities". The original soundtrack of Esteren's universe, whose first opus was composed by Delphine Bois, will introduce you to a mysterious atmosphere, sometimes delicate, sometimes unsettling.
  You can hear samples on www.myspace.com/esteren

- "The Mac Lyrs' Legacy". Following the tradition of Point-and-Click adventures (such as Monkey Island, Broken Sword, Runaway, etc.), this video game has the Player follow the journey of Yldiane, exploring with her a typical region of Tri-Kazel's peninsula.

Influences

Many works have been an inspiration to build the universe of Esteren. It would be hard to list them all, but here is a selection: In cinematography, Mel Gibson's Braveheart, for its landscapes, its roughness and its romanticism; Tim Burton's Sleepy Hollow, as well as Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula, have strongly influenced the victorian and gothic dimension; Stanley Kubrick's The Shining is a major source of inspiration for the interpretation of the horrific: a slippery slope toward horror, where madness and supernatural elements take an increasingly important role.

On a literary level: Mary Shelley and her Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus, Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Cthulhu mythos, Graham Masterton, and Stephen King are the main sources of inspiration.



Prologue

Doern turned around the moment he heard the first footsteps echoing through the wide marble-flagged corridor. Feeling anxious, he peered intently at the indistinct figure progressing in the quivering light cast by the torches. It was without surprise that he made out the weary, wrinkled face of his lord.

Yet, Wylard had not always been like that. Quite the opposite; his natural charisma and presence had allowed him to follow after his father without any opposition from the other lords and with the blessing of the people connected with his family. He was a respected, caring, just man, and a good administrator on top of that; a rarity among his peers, most of whom spent the majority of their time engaged in power struggles.

But everything seemed to fall apart when his wife, the lovely Edel, and their two fair children, were slaughtered by Feondas. They had gone on a courtesy visit to Edel's father, a robust old man who had lost his wife a few years before. They never made it back. Their horribly mangled corpses had been found lying on the side of the road. Their faces were twisted with pain, and their eyes still seemed to gaze at some last horrid vision. In order to spare Wylard the sight of such an atrocity, their remains had been buried without letting him see them. His mind clouded by anguish, his body overtaken by an immense weakness, he had not insisted…

But two nights after the burial, in a fit of madness, he dug out the bodies of his dear spouse, his son, and his daughter with his bare hands. He had read horror in their eyes and in the atrocious wounds their flesh bore. He spent a long time staring at this dreadful sight, as if hypnotized, before his servants found him at dawn, lying on the ice-cold crypt floor, affectionately holding the maimed corpses against himself. From that dark day, Wylard was but a mere shadow of his former self. Of course, his madness did not manifest itself permanently, and he remained lucid most of the time. But his hazy eyes, his pale complexion and grief-ravaged face were frightening. And in spite of all the love his people bore him, they found it more and more difficult to obey his orders.
For a long time, Doern stared at his lord who had stopped at the threshold of the great room, his eyes lost in the contemplation of the shadows that clouded the high vaults. He waited for Wylard to step away from the chimeras the darkness concealed, and then pulled him a seat.

"Thank you, my good Doern. Always taking care of your old master."

"But you are still young..." he could not help but answer.

"Quite the shameless flatterer you are. You know well I am not. My vitality is giving out faster than other men's. It will not be long before I join my father in his tomb."

"Don't say such a thing, Lord Mac Readan. You still have many days to live."

Wylard gave a light burst of laughter that showed all the extent of his derision. He smiled at Doern.

"Did you bring me what I asked you to?"

"Yes, my lord. There are your documents." He pointed to a thick file of parchments squeezed between two leather covers.

As far as Doern remembered, his master had always collected all sorts of documents, manuscripts, and sketches that he had often paid a fortune for, or that some passing bards had offered him. They dealt with various subjects; with the peninsula's different regions, but also with trading or crafts. Among those documents were a few letters sent to him by faraway family members.
For many months after the grim disappearance of his wife and descendants, Wylard had completely left his collection aside. However, for some time, it seemed his passion for his old manuscripts burned anew, his research focusing on the acquisition of documents related to Feondas. Regularly, he would read them entirely once more, taking notes feverishly and comparing them again and again.

Wylard held out his hand and Doern brought him the file. The old lord untied the laces that held the leather covers together and took out the first parchment. He began to read furiously, poring over the lines written in red ink which he knew by heart…
Again, he read until dawn, when he fell into a nightmarish sleep. Afterwards, he resumed reading, scarcely taking time for a few sips of the brandy Doern had brought him.

When he was done with all of the parchments, late at night, Wylard drew a long sigh. He had spent a small fortune to obtain new documents depicting a roughly accurate panorama of Tri-Kazel's history and of its current state. Tensions were clearly visible between the kingdoms of Taol-Kaer, Gwidre, and Reizh, founded nearly a thousand years ago by three brothers who, at the time, yearned to federate the bellicose clans occupying its whole territory.
Taol-Kaer had kept strong ties with the ancient Demorthèn traditions. On the contrary, Reizh had–at least partially–adopted the so-called progressive ideas of the Magientists, those strange inventors from the Continent. As for Gwidre, it had appointed the One God dogma as the official faith. That was the origin of the infamous War of the Temple, the aftermath of which could still be strongly felt, even today. Gwidre had invested itself with the holy mission of imposing Soustraine's religion everywhere in Tri-Kazel, and the alliance of Taol-Kaer and Reizh had barely prevented it from doing so. Today, both the landscape and the mentalities of the people bore the stigmas of that conflict.
Much more interesting than this detailed panorama of the peninsula were the numerous passages about the Feondas. Indeed, those terrifying creatures that had destroyed his life and those of thousands of men and women were widely dealt with in the various texts. And he had noticed unknown details that he had hastily underlined with excited strokes of the pen, details that might allow him to enact his vengeance…

Wylard gave a sinister laugh, already imagining the first steps of his plan.

"Doern," he suddenly called, his voice producing strangely deformed echoes against the darkened vault.

"My lord?" answered a sleepy voice near by.

"Come here."

The servant obeyed straightaway, his gait uneasy, his eyes carrying the burden of an uncomfortable night.

"Doern, I read all of these texts with great interest. I know very well that each of them reflects but a part of the truth. They are not about facts, but opinions and sometimes imperfect knowledge. However, they show our peninsula as it is in its inhabitants' hearts. Each one defends his piece of certitudes and beliefs almost as fiercely as a wolf defends its territory.

Maybe we are all but living at death's door? Maybe we are all surviving as we can, our heart crushed by sorrow, our mind stricken with madness, and our chest filled with fear? Fear of seeing the monsters that murdered our kin leap from the shadows and devour us alive…

But you see, Doern, I can feel a solution taking form. It is here, in all of these sentences that I read over and over again with attention. Soon, I will be able to take action and break myself from this consuming idleness."

"My lord… could you finally have found what you have been looking for?" Doern's voice was laden with awe.

"Not yet Doern! But it should not take long." He paused, staring at the parchments for a while, then resumed. "Feondas have nothing in common with us. They may take our appearance or physically look like us, but they do not think like us. They follow goals we do not know and probably cannot even imagine. They can strike anytime, without any apparent reason, spreading death and destruction among our families like that, just like that… just like glancing at someone.

But as dangerous as they are, I am certain we can fight them. I will not keep living any longer with the haunting memory of a slaughter I was unable to prevent. It is time for me to act, and you will help me, Doern."

"But… how could I help you, my lord? You know well that I am a poor fighter."

"That is not what I am talking about. I've spent entire days trying to extract useful information from these manuscripts, and focusing has become increasingly more difficult for me. I will need a fast thinker like you to help me. It will now be your turn to read these precious writings and analyze with the greatest attention all the passages dealing with Feondas, even remotely. There must be some clues I missed." Wylard drew a weary sigh. "Sometimes, my mind starts wandering and the meaning of the words becomes unclear.

However, do not neglect the other subjects, Doern, for they will tell you much about our peninsula. The knowledge they contain will allow you to deal adequately with some seemingly unimportant clues. As you know, I have spent many years gathering these documents, and some of them are invaluable. I have also kept some personal letters that will help you."

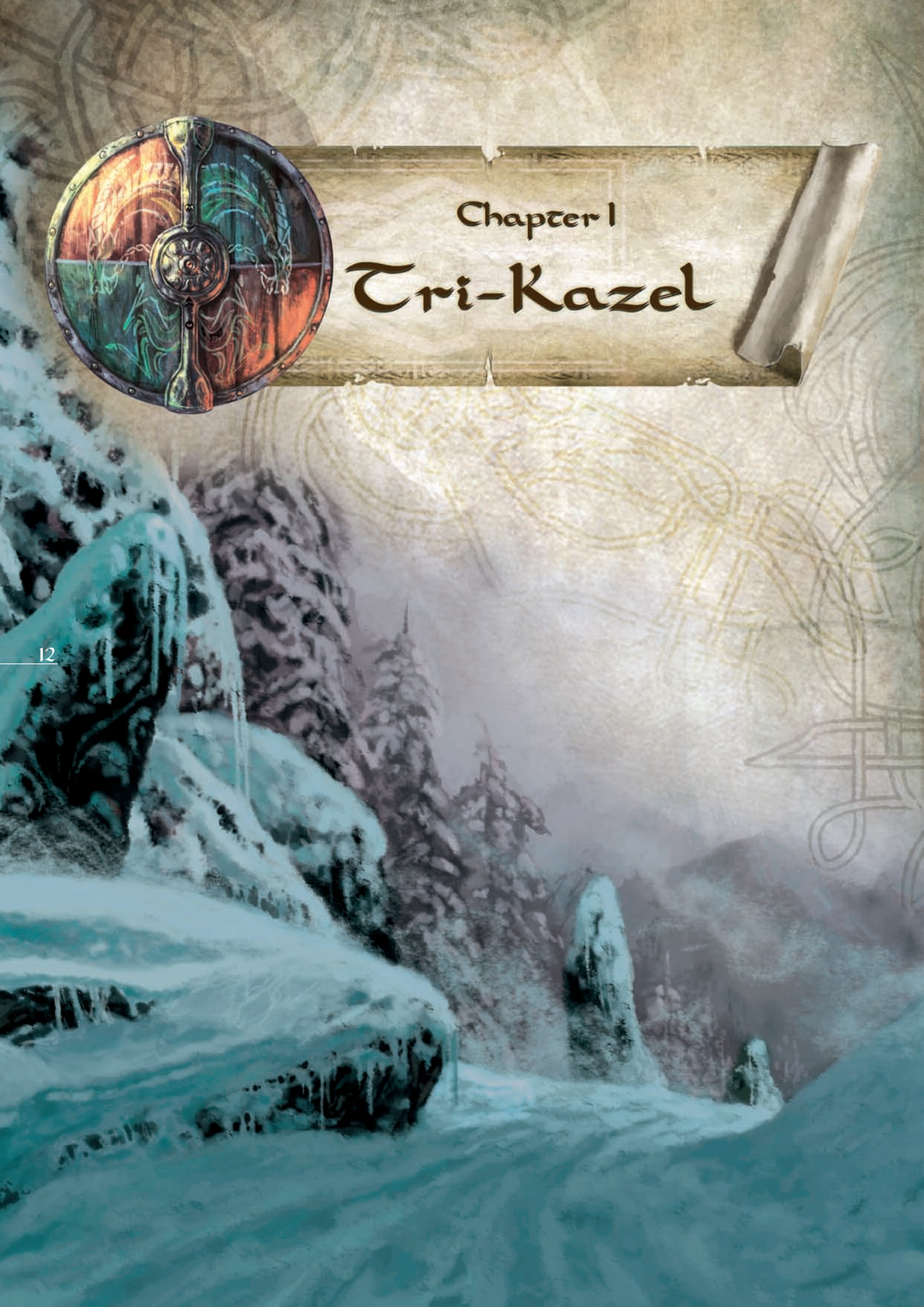
Doern kept silent. He looked down at the documents spread on the table for a while. His eyes burned with a new ardor and he held out his hand to take one of the parchments on which he could make out the presence of a wax stamp, broken long ago.

"I am exhausted Doern," Wylard whispered with a weary voice. The energy that had come to him upon reading the documents was wearing off. The lord's face was deeply lined and his eyes seemed to have been pushed back into their sockets' deep shadows.

"I will see that you are conducted to your bedroom." Doern clapped his hands, and hasty footsteps could be heard straightaway. Moments later, two young women came in with worried looks on their faces. Doern briefly gave them instructions and they gently helped Wylard get up.

Soon, the three figures vanished in the corridor's trembling shadows.

Doern sat down on a chair and began reading the parchments without delay.



Chapter 1
Tri-Kazel

The slightest noise could be heard in the vast corridor. Torches crackled in the rusty brackets and cracking sounds came every now and then from the high ceiling, where vermin crawled.

But none of that could disturb Doern. He was wrapped up in the contemplation of the parchments that were so invaluable to his master. The first pages were letters sent by Wylard's niece, Céliane, daughter of his brother Baorig.

Doern had met them once, on the occasion of the birth of Wylard's son. That was several years ago, and Céliane was still a child at the time. Doern cautiously turned over several sheets where Wylard had drawn pictures and taken notes. He focused on a load of manuscripts, the characteristic writing of which caught his attention. It was an account signed by the bard Jos Mac Peran, an exceptional artist whose talent was rumoured to be entrancing. At first glance, it was a narration of the last royal council of Taol-Kaer. How Wylard had managed to obtain such a rare piece remained a mystery to Doern. However, one thing was for sure: he was now holding that precious manuscript in his hands.

Many things were told about bards' writings, particularly Jos Mac Peran's. A reader would find himself so engrossed by their contents that he would end up in an illusion, reliving the narrated events. It was also said that one could get lost forever in this artist's works. However hard Doern repeated himself that all of this was only a myth, he could not help but feel some fascination, mixed with fear, toward bards.

The following document was a long letter about Feondas, which had been sent to Wylard by a Varigal named Dalaigh. At the castle, it was a sure bet that his lanky figure would show itself once a year, at the beginning of summer. Wylard would provide lodgings for the Varigal for a week, sometimes a little longer; in exchange, Dalaigh would tell him of his travels and give him news of the whole kingdom, and sometimes even of lands beyond it.

Doern quickly skimmed through the ensuing papers: a report of an assembly of Baldh-Ruoch's Council, letters from a Reizhite academic named Maeve Oan, other Varigal tales such as Osvan Tadd's about the Tarish people, documents about the neighboring kingdoms of Reizh and Gwidre, and even about the mysterious Continent…

He suddenly stopped when he recognized the seal of the Mac Iseanor family, close friends of the Mac Readan, particularly of Wylard's late wife, Edel. Doern sighed as images from the past came back to him, long before the grim event that had overthrown their lives. He dismissed the sadness that crept into his mind, put the bundle of parchments back in a proper order, and began reading the first pages…





Chapter 1
Tri-Kazel

The children had gathered around Céliane. The young woman was watching them affectionately as they played and laughed heartily. Ranging between six and thirteen years old, they were part of the second age circle. They were Fearìl's future. Since she was little, Céliane had known she wanted to become a Dàmàthair, tutoring the children of her village, as her late mother had done before her. Céliane loved children; she loved their vitality, their spontaneity. She yearned to have one of her own, and was eagerly awaiting her wedding with Eoghan, which would take place in the next spring.

For some time, she had been feeling a gnawing apprehension; some vague, unpleasant sense of foreboding. Was it because winter was drawing near? Or because of the anxious look on Baorìg, her father, that she had noticed on a previous evening? As a Demorthèn, he was the community's spiritual guide; one of its most important figures.

Landscapes of the Peninsula

Céliane shrugged away from her reverie as the children went silent and stared at her. She smiled:

"We will resume from where we last stopped. Soon, some of you will enter the third age circle, and it is important that you know our peninsula. Fearìl, our small community, is located in the north of the largest and southernmost of the three kingdoms, Taol-Kaer, and the lands that surround us are vast."

"There's the mountains!" said one of the youngest.

"Yes, there are, Teren, those are the Mòr Roimh, which means 'High Lands' in our ancient tongue, and even now we call them so. Our valley is located at the heart of these mountains, which go all the way through the length of our peninsula and occupy most of its surface."

"What about the Cordillera?"

"'The Asgeamar', according to our ancestors. Its mountains are even more massive than the Mòr Roimh and separate our peninsula, at the far northeast of the kingdom of Reizh, from the Continent. The Mòr Roimh may still well be a deadly obstacle for ill-prepared travelers, but the Asgeamar Cordillera is said to be impassable, and no one knows exactly how wide it is."

Céliane paused. The mere evocation of the Continent, this mysterious faraway land, could spark the imaginations of the children.

"But let's get back to Tri-Kazel. On each side of the Mòr Roimh, there are hills, plateaus, and a few spreading coastal plains. About seven hundred and fifty miles separate the Asgeamar Mountains' foothills from Hòb's Cape, located at the southwestern extremity of the peninsula. According to you, how many days of travel are necessary to cross such a distance?"

After a moment of hesitation, the oldest one ventured an answer:

"Last summer, a Varigal passing by the village told me it takes at least seventy days!"

"Yes, it's true. Allowing for a few days to rest, that is what it takes."

The Mountains

"Now I will tell you about our region in more detail. Our vale is located in the dukedom of Tulg, in the occidental part of the Mòr Roimh. Further to the west, at the foot of the mountains, spreads the Sighing Forest."

"And there are broad-leaved trees; oaks!"

"Yes Lena, you are right. But when you go up a little, the ground quickly becomes broken and steep, and conifers quickly take the place of broad-leaved trees. Higher yet, the snow never melts. Even in our vale, it lingers on until the middle of spring."

"Dàmàthair, when will we be allowed to leave the village and go to the mountain?"



"Soon, at the next age circle… you are still children and you must know that the beauty of the surrounding landscapes hides many dangers. Some paths run along steep cliffs, and snow may hide chasms. Our vale is fairly well-off, because it is crossed by one of the dukedom's main roads. It is large and allows mounts and caravans to pass by. Nevertheless, every trip in the mountain must be carefully prepared, unless you would risk your life. What is more, the caverns and chasms of the Mòr Roimh hold dark secrets that very few people are brave enough to face. The growls and grumbles you can hear do not come only from the swift streams; the shadowy depths are inhabited, notably by Feondas. Those creatures attack anyone they happen across, from lone travelers to heavily defended convoys. The threat of an attack can weigh heavily, and can wear out travelers and beasts, even if nothing happens."

Céliane knew it was important that children understood well the dangers of the region, even if it frightened them. Unfortunately, what she had said was no exaggeration, for the mountains did hide many deadly traps…

Rivers and Seas

“Now children, it’s time to come inside!” Céliane clapped her hands, and the small group that was playing and bickering near the Dàmàthairs’ house gathered around her. In this early afternoon, the mist lingered on in Dearg's vale and gave the village a ghostly look.

“Come in! We will go on with our lesson from the last time about the peninsula. Today, I propose to tell you about the rivers and seas. There are many streams in Tri-Kazel, particularly in its eastern half. In fact, there are in this region three rivers that flow into the ocean: the Donir, which runs near the capital city of Reizh, the Tealderoth, which constitutes a natural border between Reizh and our kingdom, and finally the Klaedin, which waters our capital city of Osta-Baille and ends its course at Tuaille, the stilted city. Two other rivers with a lower flow, stemming from small mountain streams, irrigate Gwidre. You all know of the Kreizhdour, which runs on the other side of our vale and marks the border between our kingdom and Gwidre’s. It is hardly frequented by merchants as, unfortunately, its banks are sometimes witness to skirmishes between the troops of the two kingdoms.”

“It is because of the War of the Temple?” asked a little girl.

“Yes. Have you heard the story told by the bard who passed by the village this summer? It was about two childhood friends living in the hamlet of Telh, not far from here, who were separated because of this war. This story is an illustrative example of how this period was a disaster for all of us; a bitter fight between two kingdoms that were formerly brothers. Fortunately, things have settled somewhat… I will conclude regarding the rivers by telling you about the Pezhdour, further north, which is the main source of irrigation for the great plain of Gwidre. Channels have been dug by men, often at the cost of many lives, sometimes leading the river very far from its original course and often at the cost of many human lives, to carry its waters to the fields. These constructions are often damaged, but they are essential to the cultivation of the crops necessary for the survival of our communities.”

The children were particularly studious today and were listening attentively. Céliane smiled to herself.

“Now, let us talk about the seas and oceans. The western coasts of the peninsula face the Furious Ocean. Its raging waters have never allowed the Tri-Kazelians to become a seafaring people.



When you go a few miles away from the coast, the currents quickly become extremely violent, driving the boats toward the shoals, with dreadful winds tearing the sails, and waves that can submerge the unwary. The few Tri-Kazelian boats are small fishing coasters, which remain as close to the shore as possible, like Tulg Naomh’s… On the other side, on the eastern façade, an inland sea spreads, which the sailors name “Sea of Shrouds”. Like those of the Furious Ocean, its waters are treacherous and very few boats venture far from the shores. Because of this, the many islands surrounding the peninsula remain unexplored most of the time, even if we know that some of them are inhabited. This explains why, in all times, the islands have been the source of legends for the inhabitants of Tri-Kazel. Maybe you have heard of the Tri-Sweszörs, the Three Sisters, located in the Reizh gulf. They are said to house communities that have remained faithful to the Demorthèn traditions, worshipping the sea spirits.”

The Three Sisters Archipelago

It is said that on the Tri-Sweszörs islands, as our ancestors named them, the Demorthèn would regularly make sacrifices in order to appease the wrathful spirit of the oceans, Loch. On top of the cliffs, at the bottom of which huge waves crash, Caernides would be hurled down and disappear in the foam. Likewise, men would be killed by being tied up on rocks before high tide. There are also stories about spellbinding bards with painted faces named Céili. Those tales are part of the folklore of the Emerald Crescent's region, but very few peninsula men have dared to venture into those wild islands to find out…

Climate

This morning, Céliane was accompanied by her father. On occasion, the Demorthèn would take part in educating the community's children. Baorìg was only forty, but his worn skin showed how many years he had spent in the middle of nature.

"Sit down, children. This morning, I will tell you about our peninsula's climate." The man cleared his throat. For some days now, he appeared worried, and this did not escape the children who were watching him in complete silence.

"Seasons in our mountainous region are harsh, in comparison to how they may be in other, more coastal regions. Here in Fearìl, we have always made do with this, and without complaint. However, although the coasts bring the advantage of a warmer weather, their skies are often covered with clouds coming from the ocean and bringing hard rainfalls. I had the occasion to go to the region of Louarn, near the great marshes of the West. The ground there is so wet that a horse and its rider could sink into it."

The Demorthèn would often travel far away, and it was one of the reasons they were respected and admired.

"Generally speaking, the south is much more humid than the north of the peninsula. Indeed, northern winds are drier, arider, and harsher too. The Ast is the most obvious example: that dry wind from the Gwidrite littoral has caused many deadly fires. For us Demorthèn, Ast is a restless natural spirit that only appropriate rituals can placate. Unfortunately, in those regions dominated by the religion of the Temple, those practices have fallen into disuse and Ast blows all the harder. In spite of that, the hills, the plains, and plateaus of Gwidre are not deserts; they are even intensely cultivated in some places, and have their share of storms, even if those are less frequent than in the southwest of Taol-Kaer. In the plains, summer sometimes makes it warmer, but from the first days of fall, the weather gets colder and it's generally the time of the first snowflakes. The snowfalls can cut a village off from the rest of the world for entire weeks, and the high winds turn into fearsome blizzards. This phenomenon does not only concern high altitude communities; sometimes, during some winters, it may happen that the entire peninsula is snowbound. Rivers freeze, nature becomes quiet and a traveler mad enough to go out may walk for weeks without meeting a living soul."

Tugarch'

Dearest Wylard,

Today, I told the children about Tugarch'. Maybe you have heard numerous times about that legendary metal spoken of in the myths and stories of the Aergewin? We got to see some depictions of weapons forged by artisans from that faraway time. As far as we know, only weapons made of Tugarch' could bring down the gigantic Feondas that roamed the world at that time. But the knowledge was lost, and no one knows how to forge this metal anymore. It is said that Tugarch' shatters at the slightest impact when poorly wrought. Worse than that, however, I heard from a Varigal that the known mines of Tugarch' seem exhausted and all the efforts undertaken to find new ones turned up unsuccessful. Anyway, it seems like a good lead to fight against those monstrous Feondas that keep infesting our regions.

Here in Fearìl, fall has definitely come and snows are premature. My father told me of his worries; he foresees a hard winter for our community. For a few weeks, great murders of crows have been flying above our village; let us hope it is not a bad omen!

Your devoted niece,

Céliane

The Inhabitants of the Peninsula



"Now, I will tell you about the inhabitants of the peninsula. We are all descended from the clans that lived on these lands for millennia. Thus, our vale was first inhabited by the Mac Govrian clan, before the two villages, Fearìl and Dearg, developed. The Tri-Kazelians survived the Aergewin, Feondas, and an inhospitable nature; this made us a sturdy people united against adversity. Unfortunately, on this last point, things have somewhat changed with time. We have already talked about the War of the Temple that made the three kingdoms fall into chaos and left strong grudges.

Some communities pay particular attention to preserving themselves from ideas coming from the cities, which they consider to be a perversion. Such is the case of the Osags, proud warriors anxious to live according to the traditions. They say their lineages go back to the most ancient known clans.

We also know that, a very long time ago, survivors of a threatened people of seafarers landed at the southwest head of Tri-Kazel. The Tarish, as we call them, have for the most part mingled with the Tri-Kazelians. Nowadays, it is said there only remain a few groups of nomads who claim to be descendants of those refugees."

"I know a Tarish!" Little Lena's big smile indicated that she was delighted to share such an uncommon acquaintance with the rest of the group.

"Ah yes, Lena! Tell us about that if you want."

"Her name's Mirna and she lives in Dearg. She came to Fearìl once."

"Ah, yes, it is true," answered Céliane. "She is indeed a Tarish, but from what I know, only one of her parents is part of that people. Well, it is a good example. You'll most probably meet half-breeds rather than actual Tarishes, but you may still recognize them by their high cheekbones and aquiline nose. Finally, I must tell you about the Continentals. Two centuries ago, a few groups of people from the Continent came to settle on our land. Some brought their new science, the Magience… we know very little about it here, but some cities have overtly adopted it. Other Continentals, the adepts of the Temple, brought their religion claiming the existence of a single god. I have been told that Continentals look very particular, but I have never met one. From what I know, there have always been but a few. Yet, it is said one can easily recognize those who have blood from the Continent in their line, by their large height and slender figure."

Populations

Records from the Temple indicate that there must be about six hundred thousand inhabitants in Gwidre. There are slightly fewer in Reizh and approximately twice as many in Taol-Kaer. Almost half of this population is less than twenty years old and apparently, only one person out of ten lives in a city. In many regions, it is possible to travel for days without meeting a living soul. Some milder lands are home for many villages and communities. However, there are more cities in Tri-Kazel than one might think at first. The most known are the three kingdoms' capital cities, but other towns form hubs for notable commercial and intellectual exchanges. Yet, on the whole, the presence of man on the peninsula remains negligible if compared to the great spaces and wild lands that surround it.



The Clans' Heirs

My son, if you want to understand our lands and our communities, you must know our clans. A long time ago, before the unification of the kingdoms by the three brothers, the population of Tri-Kazel was shared between more or less settled clans. Even if our world has changed a lot, those clans still exist in some remote regions. In our kingdom, the Osags living in the Lands of Dèas are certainly the proudest representatives of those traditions. Numbering between thirty and two hundred individuals, their clans are highly independent, as they are not under the control of the royal power and have always lived according to the ancestral ways and customs. For example, when a conflict arises between two clans, it is quickly settled by a one-on-one combat between two fighters representing the rivals. It frequently happens that the Ansailéirs, the communities' chiefs, duel in person. Sometimes, a greater number of warriors meet at an agreed-upon time to fight. Yet, this does not mean they won't organize a common feast on the next solstice!



The Inguards

The Inguards are set in places often far from civilization. Those bastions are built to keep watch over strategic places, such as some mountain passes, as well as to spot the movement of possible hordes of Feondas. The pay is often high, encouraging seasoned warriors to enlist for a few years, but the majority of the manpower is made up of soldiers undergoing disciplinary punishment, young people on duty for their lord, and heavily-sentenced brigands. Life in those bastions is very hard, for the arrival of supplies is not always assured, and relationships are very tense. Furthermore, discipline is very harsh for the soldiers; some stories about Inguards falling due to mutiny encourage the current leaders to be very firm.

Flora of the Three Kingdoms

Flowers have a significant part in the creation of colored pigments, such as the famous Gwylmith, the yellow color of which is used in painting and dyeing. This small plant grows in the plains, flowering into a magnificent golden color in summer, which leaves luminescent spots on the fingers when its petals are slightly squeezed. Some flowers have taken on a symbolic meaning, such as the Crimson Promises. They always grow three at a time, which is why they are always mentioned in the plural. The round petals of those flowers are of a deep red color. Folklore has it that if an oath is made while holding Crimson Promises, it will eternally have to be held… For a neophyte, a day of picking can finish with a tragic end, for some plants are toxic and others hide their true nature, such as some Feondas of vegetal form attacking those who dare approach too close.

Fauna and Creatures of Tri-Kazel

"Dragons do not exist anymore?" Little Teren looked as disappointed by this revelation as he was relieved by it.

"During the Aergewin, huge creatures, Feondas that some legends describe as dragons, roamed over our peninsula. But they now only exist in tales, like the giants that are said to hide deep inside the mountains. Today, it is time we study the fauna of our peninsula."

Céliane took out an old worn book illustrated with many pictures; the work of a bard who had lived in Fearìl long ago. Since then, the Dàmàthairs used these illustrations as a support for teaching.

"You all know about the Calyre," resumed Céliane. "It is a caprine animal, short haired, with a cream-colored brown-striped fur. It has a small frontal horn it uses to search through berry bushes. It is an excellent, docile climber that provides quality wool and sour milk used for making cheese."

"There's horses, too!"

"Yes, which are mainly found on plains. Their cousin, the Caernide, is more commonplace; its morphology is reminiscent of a horse and a deer at the same time. Frailer than an actual horse, it is a surprisingly light-footed animal, able to jump across dreadful crevasses and to cross the thickest forests without ever getting its antlers stuck in branches. Although its strength does not allow it to carry the same burden as a horse, the Caernide is used for riding and its ease in moving through our lands more than compensates for its relative weakness."

Céliane flipped a page and showed them a big bear-like beast:

"Ah! Tri-Kazel's grizzly bear, a particularly aggressive and formidable species; an adult is commonly about ten feet long and is able to strike down an armored knight from his mount… There, do you know about the Boernac? It's like an ox, only slower and bulkier."

The following page revealed misshapen beings, with wasted, grimacing faces, sometimes looking like men, sometimes like bizarre mixes of several beings. The children remained silent for a moment:

"Those are Feondas, and unfortunately, they do exist… They are responsible for many disasters and the threat they represent justifies the forbiddance of going out of the village alone, as well as all the watch turns each member of the community has to carry out all year long."

"But Dàmàthair, we have never been attacked!"

"Yes, let's hope the spirits of nature will continue to favor us for many generations. You will also learn that our most fearsome opponents are most often other men. We'll talk about all that next time children, it's time to go home!"



Languages

Céliane's notes

Wherever he goes in the peninsula, a Tri-Kazelian will always be able to make himself understood. However, one will easily be able to tell which region he is from. There are many local expressions, and accents have evolved differently. However, it remains that on the whole of Tri-Kazel, only one language is spoken: Tri-Kazelian.

The Ancient Tongue

I have carried my research further on the subject, for many everyday terms come from an ancient tongue only very few peninsula men still use. For example: "Feond", which means "foe"; or "Daedemorthys", which evokes the lack of respect toward nature shown by the Magientists; or "Demorthèn", which simply means "guide". Those are but a few examples. It is known that Demorthèn have kept quite a lot of those ancient terms, particularly in their nomenclature of plants. For their part, the Osag have partly kept the common use of that tongue.
Many wonder why the ancient tongue fell into disuse. Some believe it is the effect of continental influences, and claim they are more ancient than people usually believe. That would explain why Continentals use a tongue with a root quite close to ours. This theory is far from undisputed, for the Asgeamar Mountains remain a practically impassable natural frontier. To some, only the missionaries of the Temple, guided by Jamian, as well as the troops of the Magientist Goran Aznor, have managed to reach Tri-Kazel.

Others mention the fact that some words from the ancient tongue could hold some dreadful power, thus explaining why its use was slowly abandoned. There are various odd conflicting theories about this, but most people do not care and the only certainty is that the ancient tongue is falling slowly but inexorably into oblivion.

Continental

This tongue is said to have some similarities with Tri-Kazelian. From what my father told me, it is seldom used on our peninsula, aside from a few Magientist lodges in the kingdom of Reizh.

Tarish

It is obvious that the Tarish have their own language, which has no relationship with our current tongue, or with what we still know of the ancient tongue. Its tones are truly strange, and no one seems to have figured it out yet. Many wonder about the origin of those people. It is difficult to know more about this subject, for the Tarish remain very secretive about their history and culture.

Books

The majority of books are handwritten and remain rare and precious. Adepts of the Temple and Magientists from the Continent are capable of printing, allowing for a larger diffusion of writings. In Gwidre, I have heard that mainly religious books are printed, while Reizh has the advantage of a more varied literature. Schools and universities, financed by the supporters of the Continent's ideals, teach writing to their pupils, but also contribute to spreading the opinions of the Magientists and the adepts of the One. In our parts–the capital city of Osta-Baille aside–books remain rare and are almost always in the hands of the leading citizens. Nevertheless, Varigals strive to arouse some curiosity toward the written word with their illustrated almanacs, which include proverbs and agricultural maxims.

Reading and Writing

In Tri-Kazel, oral tradition remains the norm. In the peninsula's communities, everything is transmitted by word of mouth as in the clans' time. The fact that only a small part of the population is able to read and write is the major reason for this. However, in the cities, an important rise in literacy can be noticed. The construction of libraries and universities contributed to spread the teaching of reading and writing. Despite this tendency, those who know how to read and write remain a minority compared to the whole population. Without the teaching from my mother–who herself studied reading and writing in Tulg Naomh–I would certainly never have had the occasion to learn to draw and read letters.



Cartography of Tri-Kazel

My dear Nephew,
I know how you are haunted by a yearning for an impossible evasion, seeking escape through books and tales as you remain ridden to this bed which your illness may never allow you to leave. Unknown things have their share of intoxicating mystery; all the more when one knows them to be inaccessible. And, my duties requiring so much of my time, I have so little of it to dedicate to you.
All I can offer you are these few bits of knowledge and rumors about those places whose strange names you keep murmuring when you strain your eyes reading that old map you treasure so much. I know you are already well aware of the villages and hamlets of our good kingdom of Taol-Kaer, so I will tell you about our neighbors from Reizh and Gwidre; so close and yet so far away for you. I hold hope that you will find here some distraction from your daily ordeals. If you enjoy it, I will endeavor to find more information about these places, as well as others. Travelers seldom pass through our little domain, but I know of one or two Varigals who should be able to add some spark to these few lines.
Forgive me for the lacks in the information contained in these pages. As you know, I am but an unrefined, uneducated lord from the countryside. My greatest joy is having learned to read, and I know we are alike in that.
With all my love,
Your Uncle




Gouvran
2
16
3
Fionnfuar
Farl
11
Dullfrost
12
10
15
21
20
7
Baldh-Ruoch
6
Reizh
Kalvernach
Crail
9
Leacach
19
Expiation
13
14
Cliffs of No Return
8
Mòr Forsair
Aelwyd Saogh
Kel Loar
1
Tri-Sweszörs
Archipelago
Ard-Monach
Buidh Meall
Les collines jaunes
Seòl
Osta-Baille
Mòr Forsair
Buidh Cuideam
Sad Hills
Koskan
Gaineamh
The Great Beaches
Smaràg
Sea of Shrouds
17
Cairns' Island
4
30 mi

Legend of the Tri-Kazel's map

1- Alliance Bridge:
As far as people can remember, there has always been a bridge there. The last time it was reconstructed was soon after the War of the Temple, and it has been given its current name to remind people of the new bonds forged between Reizh and Taol-Kaer during this conflict. Believe me, it is a heartwarming sight.

2- The Ashen Archipelago:
Three active volcanoes have been recorded in this unpopulated group of gray rock islands. It is rumored that every now and then, the kingdom of Gwidre sends an expedition to collect enormous amounts of volcanic ashes for the fertilization of the kingdom's northern lands. I find it a dubious endeavor, for the results must be disappointing compared to the efforts taken.

3- Broken Stones:
In the past, the Demorthèn from the north of the peninsula used to gather there for the Tsioghair. This is where, several decades ago, the Temple's authorities fought the practitioners of ancestral traditions, the power of the One God facing the ogham of the Life-Tree's adepts. After the Demorthèn were defeated, the ritual stones were pulled down and a church was built so as to conclusively dedicate this place to Soustraine's god. It is told that the priest, as well as his successor, disappeared without any trace. In the end, the church was abandoned. I think–and I doubt I am the only one–that there is nothing the Temple's congregation could do when faced with the wrath of the spirits of nature who were offended by that slaughter.

4- Cairns' Island:
According to Albrech, strange piles of rocks arranged in lines can be found there. They are scattered here and there on the island, and are all alike except for how time has individually eroded each cairn. No one has ever been able to find out who could have assembled these strange piles. The island has a bad reputation, but according to our cousin, the nearby waters are particularly full of fish. However, nobody stays there for long, as several disappearances are reported each year, despite the fact that fishermen who settle there during the busy season never wander away from their boats.

5- Calvary:
A great inhabitable island on which the Temple supposedly has built several monasteries. It is said that a sinister prison designed to keep some of the king's enemies is also maintained, but no one knows for sure what actually takes place there.

6- Candlewood:
A Varigal once told me that in the past, under the cover of darkness, even the neighboring lumberjacks could see numerous will-o'-the-wisps there. Adepts of Magience consider it to be nothing more than a natural phenomenon. Demorthèn, on the other hand, consider these groves a holy place, and have it that those lights are C'maoghs; spirits of nature that come here to gather. These last decades, will-o'-the-wisps have become increasingly rare and trees have gotten shriveled and sickly. Nobody knows why, but many think that the Feondas multiplying in the surroundings are responsible for this.

7- Carmine Chasm:
No one knows why vegetation in this chasm is of a beautiful, vivid scarlet. Grass, flowers, and leaves all have this strange color, irresistibly reminiscent of fresh blood. According to an old folk tale, a group of refugees from the Continent was slaughtered there long ago. Many would rather think that the spirits were offended by some terrible sacrilegious act committed there. The few Demorthèn I know have conflicting opinions on the subject.

8- Cliffs of No Return:
The few individuals who managed to come back from this coastline have described it as an immense mineral wall, hostile and impassable. No one knows if someone ever managed to discover a way toward the center of the Continent's mountains. And anyway, what could one hope to find there?

9- Crail:
Craftsmen from this village have acquired some reputation among the neighboring valleys' village chiefs, who pay quite a high price for the curios sculpted from the richly tinted wood of Mòr Forsair. However, I have never had the occasion to see one of those items myself.

10- Crows' Peak:
I heard there are more and more of those black birds near that summit, on the side of which an old castle clings. That keep has been restored by the Nevermore, a family from the Continent who settled there in the last century. Their blazon shows a crow as well, but no one knows whether they adopted it upon their arrival or whether their coat of arms was already like that beforehand.

11- Dullfrost:
This island's name is self-explanatory. Missionary Jamian's ship is supposed to have made port here, as well as some others coming from the Continent after him. I have been told that during the War of the Temple, Reizh attempted to build a military port here in order to guard against a possible naval campaign orchestrated by the faraway Theocracy to help Gwidre. The dreaded enemy never showed, and that does not surprise me. After the end of the hostilities, the island was abandoned. There must only be some ruins and one or two rotten wooden wharfs remaining.

12- Eagle's Peak:
The highest summit of Reizh's mountains, which I have heard can be seen from great distances. I have been told that there are eagles of incredible size–larger than man–that make their nests there. Yet, I know of no one who has seen those fabulous birds, should they really exist.

13- Expiation:
Barely twenty years ago, the Temple's Sigires descended upon the city of Lightrock and arrested several hundred people accused of heresy. Rumor has it that an unfrocked monk led the heretics, and all of them were burnt at the stake. The city was renamed and its new name is quite meaningful regarding its inhabitants' way of thinking. I have heard that

there are more and more of the Temple's faithful going there in pilgrimage. They aim to purify themselves of their faults by accomplishing acts of contrition and penance, which I cannot really manage to understand. I guess that for a Gwidrite, Expiation must be a most holy place. And yet, I know of Soustrainians that would not appreciate such a sinister town.

14- Fairean Ear:
It is a shame I never had the opportunity to gaze at the famous "east viewpoint". It is a cape going toward the sea, and at its extremity there is a magnificent flat rock veined with mica and quartz that is used as a natural altar. In the past, Demorthèn came in large numbers for their Tsioghair, standing in front of the waters and welcoming the sun when it appeared over the horizon, its rays making the old rock's crystals glow. People also regularly came to pay homage to the spirit of the waters, Usgardh. Fairean Ear is still supposedly a gathering place for Demorthèn from Reizh and some of their colleagues from our kingdom. However, the fiercest practitioners of the traditions seem to have abandoned it. It is said that they now gather in the Three Sisters archipelago, away from others.

15- The Fall Tree:
This old elm was thus named for its foliage. It is green when it sprouts each morning, and then reddens until dusk, when it forms a matchless autumnal mantle. On the equinox day, Reizhite Demorthèn gather here and devote themselves to rituals dedicated to the powerful earth spirit, Roimh.

16- Fionnfuar:
Two centuries ago, it was but a village of fishermen. According to the Temple, that is where Jamian made his first conversions. Since then, the town has considerably gained in size and has taken its current name: "holy cold" in the ancient tongue. It is where the sepulture of the missionary is supposed to be, and this is certainly one of Gwidre's most holy places, after the country's great cathedral in Ard-Amrach. Priest Andrev, rector of Fionnfuar's church, sits at the capital city's Great Cenacle.

17- Fools' Spring:
Cousin Albrech, who lives in Smaràg, says that according to the fishermen he knows,, drinking its water induces horrible and usually never-ending nightmares. The few people who have woken up have all gone insane and some of them must even be locked up for their own good.

18- Forest of Whispers:
The oceanic winds, which reach very deeply inland, often blow among the trees and make disturbing rustling sounds. There is word that some travelers go mad hearing those noises. The spirits of these woods must be far from inclined to let humans venture inside. As I have heard, the nearby Sighing Forest is even more sinister. From what I know, it did not prevent Gwidrites and Talkérides from killing one another during the war. Could it be that the evanescent Adhar, the ruler of winds, enjoys playing here at the expense of human minds?

19- Leacach:
Wool coats and tunics from Leacach are highly esteemed for their quality in the whole peninsula, especially in its coldest parts. Your red blanket comes from there as well, and you know how warm it is. For now, the master weavers still refuse to make use of the Magientists' looms, but one of them will start doing so some day, and this is bound to bring numerous problems. I couldn't tell whether the quality of their work will remain the same, but I know some people will refuse to buy products crafted with the help of Magience. Between you and me, I often wonder if something created through those Magientist processes is truly cursed, as some people believe.

20- Norgord's Plateau:
There, you can find an immense quarry that has been exploited for centuries for the exceptional whiteness of its marble. The road leading to the Plateau was built as a result of the Temple's rise in Gwidre, as the One God's adepts make great use of it for their churches. In Taol-Kaer, marble from Norgord is likewise renowned, but both you and I will not see any of it where we live for a long time yet.

21- Pass of Gaos-Bodhar:
It draws the official limit of Reizh and the territories of the peninsula. It is supposed to be the only possible land route to reach the center of the Asgeamar Mountains. However, the road is not maintained, and traveling is perilous in either direction. After that, it would take weeks of walking to cross the mountains and reach the lands of Simahir, a certainly very dangerous swampy area. Yet, it is said that communities or tribes live there, and some even say that their ancestors originated from the Simahir.

22- The Slope of the Fallen:
It is rumored that the path to reach this place takes many victims. As it is, nobody should want to risk his life in such a climb. However, it happens that some mountaineer suddenly finds himself wanting to do so, without anybody knowing why. Some come to their senses and climb down to tell that there is nothing up there, except the bones of their predecessors lying in the sunlight… as if they had just lied down up there and peacefully waited for their death to come.

23- The Wreckers:
According to Albrech, sailors typically say that when your ship wrecks, you're better off drowning than finding yourself alone on these islets, battered by winds and spindrifts. The sea is so stormy that building a lighthouse there has always remained impossible. However, believe me, Albrech is no trustworthy man, especially when he wants to impress some pretty girl.

Chapter I
History



In the large royal council room in the castle of Osta-Baille, sages and scholars had gathered in discussion around a collection of unrolled parchments. In the way of the bard Arenthel, Taol-Kaer's king had decided to have the peninsula's history compiled.

A massive double door opened and Taol-Kaer's king, Erald Mac Anweald, made his entrance. Following him was his wife, Queen Edena Mac Lichorl, accompanied by his most trusted advisor, the Demorthèn Algwich Dert. The monarchs sat down at the council table, Dert staying back in the shadow of the columns. One of the scholars stood up cautiously, bowed, and then spoke:

"Majesty, we are honored by your invitation and by the important responsibility you have entrusted to us. If you will, let me submit our work to you."

The Ancient Times

"We will start where everything began, at the creation of the world. Of course, other beliefs from the Continent exist, but our traditional vision of things is that our peninsula, like the rest of Esteren, was shaped by the elements. Lands, seas, and living beings–such as the Osag people all Tri-Kazelians descend from–are the work of the spirits of nature."

The Aergewin

"The Ancient Times, during which our peninsula was still called Creag, were marked by the horrors of the Aergewin. There are many tales and legends about those cataclysmic times when the peoples had to face monstrous beings. From that obscure era came the word 'Feond' which means "the foe" in the ancient tongue. That is how humans named their opponents."

The scholar unrolled a thick piece of cloth from which he took out a cracked clay vase which he showed to the room. On one of the worn faces, male figures could be made out, gathering around ritual stones engraved with runes. In front of them was a strange hulking creature whose shape looked like that of no known animal.
"It is established that the Demorthèn drove the beasts of the Aergewin away using now forgotten runic invocations."

Different Beliefs

At the present time, the peninsula of Tri-Kazel is composed of three kingdoms with different beliefs. Only Taol-Kaer has remained faithful to the traditional Demorthèn beliefs, worshipping the forces of nature. As for the kingdom of Gwidre, it has embraced the religion of the One God, a divine creator who supposedly gave birth to the world and invented life.

The third kingdom, that of Reizh, turned toward the theories of Magience, which affirm that the world as it is known is the result of chemical interactions between energies they call Flux. These three dogmas lead to very different versions of the creation of the world.

The Sanctuaries of the Aergewin

Legends tell that the Demorthèn created underground sanctuaries, in the center of which they kept safe the secrets of their most powerful rituals. Those places would also contain the sealed tombs of the creatures of the Aergewin.
Some ritual stones engraved with cryptic symbols are said to be clues, allowing one able to decipher them to supposedly rediscover those ancient sanctuaries.

Threats in the Ancient Times

"The last Feondas fled and burrowed deep beneath the surface. It took humanity time to recover from those events. But soon, the creatures surfaced again and started harrying remote communities, in a more pernicious and subtle way than during the Aergewin. They forced the Osag populations to gather in fortified villages. Feond attacks have varied in intensity throughout the centuries, but this threat has never left and we are still forced to deal with it today. Moreover, in those remote times, tides were much stronger, and many valleys were regularly flooded. Added to the Feond threat, these disastrous conditions led the peoples of the peninsula to settle on higher ground."

Birth of the Temple

Another sage spoke:
"His majesty has demanded that these chronicles be exhaustive. I have been instructed to tell you about all of that which relates to the Temple, the official religion of our neighbor, the kingdom of Gwidre. This cult originates from the Continent, more precisely from the region of Chaïna, where the prophet Soustraine supposedly received his first revelations from the Creator. In the peninsular calendar, those events took place 503 years before the Oath-the date of Tri-Kazel's foundation. Since that time, Soustraine and his heirs have preached across the Continental lands carrying the message of the One God."

The Foundations (year 0-160)

"The period of the Foundations begins in the year 0 and ends around the year 160. It sets the political and cultural bases of the peninsula, split into the three kingdoms we know well today."

Foundation of Tri-Kazel

An assistant unrolled a large map on the council table. It was faded and torn in some places. The peninsula was shown there, split into a multitude of small territories. Each bore the name of a clan or village.
"At the time, the peninsula had no political unity to speak of. The isolationist Osag clan chiefs, concentrated at the south of the region, continuously fought between themselves or against northern warlords. Then, three brothers, heirs to the Klardel clan, started a campaign of conquests and expansion that would become a legend. By dint of military victories and diplomatic successes, Taol-Kaer, Reizh, and Gwidre annexed the territories one after another. The bard Arenthel, their loyal friend and advisor, accompanied the three brothers, and played a major role in the negotiations with the clan chiefs.
After almost thirty years of campaigns, the three brothers pronounced the Oath, an edict that split the lands of the peninsula into three independent, although allied, kingdoms. A common calendar for the three kingdoms was inaugurated, and the date of the Oath's promulgation became the year 0. The peninsula was renamed Tri-Kazel–'Three Kingdoms' in the ancient tongue–and the names of the founders were given to the three countries: Taol-Kaer, Reizh, and Gwidre. It was also at this time that the Varigals' guild was founded, under the direction of Arenthel the bard. These men and women had the great responsibility of being the messengers between the kingdoms. Along with the institution of a calendar and a common currency, they ensured stability on the peninsula. The last pillar guaranteeing the perennial renewal of the Oath was established when the kings appointed the center of Tri-Kazel; a place where the boundaries of the three kingdoms symbolically crossed. The citadel of Aelwyd Saogh, the 'kingdoms' heart', was built there in less than fifteen years to be a place where the three sovereigns would meet every ten years.



The Osag Wars

Despite the foundation of Tri-Kazel, some regions remained dissident and bellicose. Beginning in the year 130, the situation worsened in the south of Tri-Kazel when the kingdom of Taol-Kaer fell into war. The rebel Osag clans, in defiance of royal authority, allied and pillaged the southern regions until they reached the gates of Tuaille, the capital city of Taol-Kaer. In the year 158, they were finally driven off, allowing the three kings, descendants of the founding brothers, to claim the whole peninsula as theirs. Thus ended the period of the Foundations. Few clues about Feond incursions from that time are still available to us, but isolated communities likely had to face repeated attacks."



The Last Fight of the Barbarian King

After almost thirty years of wars and pillaging, the royal armies of Taol-Kaer drove the rebel troops back for good. This victory was possible thanks to the unconditional support of the Gwidrite and Rheizhite lords near the borders, who sent the armies necessary to end the siege of Tuaille. The end of the war was symbolically marked by the hand-to-hand fight between King Eblenn the Young, fifth sovereign of the kingdom and heir of the legendary founder Taol-Kaer, and the Osag king, Barabal the Giant, who had united the southern clans. During this iconic fight, Eblenn defeated his fearsome opponent. The barbarian king's axe, with which he was said to have cut off more than a thousand enemy soldiers' heads, was lost during the battle. It was inhabited, rumors say, by the spirits, and people still look for this ancient weapon in the region of the lands of Dèas today.

The sage gave a ceremonious bow to the king before sitting down. Erald Mac Anweald turned slightly toward his advisor, the Demorthèn Algwich Dert. The latter had not moved an inch, but the light in his eyes showed his deep interest in everything that was said.

"Very well! Let us go on, then!" The king clapped his hands before settling back comfortably in his admirably carved oak seat. With visible apprehension, a young scholar, his bearing and looks making his Reizhite origin obvious, stood up.

The Great Centuries (160-360)

"Sire, allow me to tell you about the most prosperous period Tri-Kazel has ever known. After the defeat of the barbarian kings, two centuries of peace came for the three kingdoms. Trade and new technologies flourished. With the development of agriculture, villages multiplied and prospered. During those glorious times, the Demorthèn traditions held sway, with kings and princes surrounding themselves with many advisors chosen among the representatives of the cult of the spirits of nature. Varigals also played a most important role. The three brothers' work had borne fruit. Despite a few border disputes and some stirring from the southern Osag clans, the three kingdoms lived in a harmony that honored the Oath.

Birth of Magience

As you know, it has only been for a few decades that we have had contacts with the Continent, those lands of mysteries beyond the impassable Asgeamar Mountains. Yet, we have been able to establish that the bases of Magience were set at that time, around the year 200 of our calendar. It would seem that the ensuing technologies spread very quickly in the Continental lands, through the Magientists' order, before reaching the peninsula a few centuries later."

The Ice Era (360-450)

"Near the year 360, temperatures on the peninsula fell drastically over the course of a few years. According to the information we have gathered, that climate change also affected the Continent. Winters lengthened, and the mountains' snows thickened and stayed even through the heart of summer. Entire regions were cut off from the rest of the world for a long time. Many fertile plateaus could not be farmed. Within a few seasons, the dramatic consequences of that cooling could be felt. A great part of the peninsula's peoples suffered an unprecedented famine. Many villages disappeared, their inhabitants sometimes sinking to the direst atrocities to try to survive. The White Famine lasted long years and decimated the populations. Along with the increase of Feond attacks, this was truly a dreadful time for the peninsula's inhabitants.

It was only in the year 440 that the climate warmed up significantly. The thawing of the glaciers brought new tragedies, since the ensuing floods and avalanches swallowed entire communities. The three kingdoms emerged bloodless from that icy period, and the newly viable roads allowed forgotten landscapes to be rediscovered. It is possible that more than half the human population disappeared during those frightful eighty years."

"Sage," the Sovereign broke in, "tell us about the political incidences concerning that period of great cold; it is of interest to me."

"The Ice Era's first consequence was to cut the roads between the different kingdoms, your Majesty. In accordance with the Oath, the three kings met every ten years in order to reiterate their alliance and to discuss Tri-Kazel's situation. Unfortunately, the decennial meeting planned in 360, which should have happened as usual at the citadel of Aelwyd Saogh, was marked by the death of King Maelvon of Taol-Kaer. On its way to the citadel, the royal convoy disappeared in the snows and was never found. From that day, those meetings never happened again, and the citadel was entirely neglected. That tragedy illustrates what the situation was for almost a century. The three kingdoms had great difficulties in maintaining a few contacts and each became isolated from the others. The idea of maintaining the unity of the peninsula had given way to the more immediate problem of survival. The Varigals lost a lot of their influence and it is at that time that they became the popular messengers we know today, traveling from valley to valley to bring news, and asking here and there for food and lodging. Following an unending winter of almost a century, the three kingdoms did not look the same, and mentalities had greatly changed."



The Renewal (450-700)

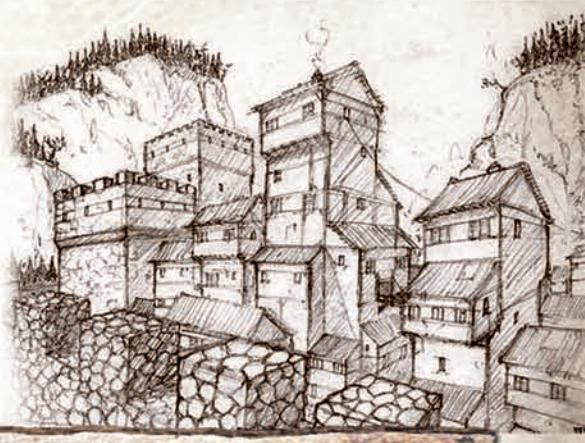
"From 450 to the beginning of the eighth century, the three countries were able to develop again. The strengthening of each kingdom's cultural identity marked this period of rebirth after the Ice Era."

Great Kings and Politics

"In Taol-Kaer, the Renewal's most prestigious sovereigns are indisputably King Hild, who led a fierce fight against the Feond threat, and his brother, Gairn, who succeeded him and founded the order of the Hilderin knights.
In Reizh, King Firgon the Bold marked his time by devoting his reign to the organization of numerous expeditions through the Asgeamar Mountains, trying what nobody had dared before him: explore what was beyond–what we now call the Continent. Very few emissaries of the crown came back, and none of them could find anything more than wild, inhospitable regions.
In Gwidre, King Argaën the Builder distinguished himself by the colossal works he had realized in the capital city Ard-Amrach. During the course of a few decades, the city was transformed by thousands of workers raising walls and increasing the size of the inhabitable districts."

Evolution of the Cities and Peoples

"Though Ard-Amrach was the most imposing city at the time of the Renewal, the other towns of the peninsula also developed. The agglomeration of Klardel, in Taol-Kaer, which had received many refugees during the Ice Era, increased in size and became Osta-Baille, a prosperous merchant city. Downstream, the capital city Tuaille grew in importance as its piers gained ground on the marshes. It is also at that time that the famous stairway city of Tulg Naomh was built, at the north of the kingdom of Taol-Kaer. Reizh's capital city, Baldh-Ruoch, was also extended when the kings of the Renewal expanded the royal citadel looking down upon the town in order to make the peninsula's most beautiful palace."



The First Plague

During the Renewal, the Talkéride town of Osta-Baille expanded impressively. Officially recognized as one of Taol-Kaer's great cities, it became the place where important guilds settled, which made it a paramount merchant town for those going toward the capital city of Tuaille. Foreigners flocked, mainly from Reizh, and the town grew, but it had not been designed for so many people. The already hard conditions of life for its people became catastrophic. Ill-conceived, Osta-Baille had grown too fast. It became a land of miasmas and diseases. Infections multiplied and spread at the speed of a galloping Caernide.
In barely two months, in the heart of the summer of 492, half of the population succumbed to what was named the Mauve Death. The lower town, urgently built below the plateaus when the mountaineers had settled in Osta-Baille, had transformed into a huge open grave. Corpses marked by the plague rotted in the streets and the foul smell they gave off went up toward the plateaus. King Néahart was slow to react, but he finally decided to intervene. He sent an important contingent made of scholars, physicians, and soldiers, who put a stop to the epidemic within little time. For four weeks, a fire consumed the bodies of the victims, spreading a sickening smell of burnt human flesh over the city. With the help of the king's men, the city was saved, and construction works began in order to modernize it. At that time, the town's first aqueduct was built, constructed according to the plans of a scholar from Taol-Kaer. In that way, part of the waters of Deoïr's falls was diverted to allow the inhabitants of each district of the city of Osta-Baille to receive this precious liquid.

The Continental Decades (700-720)

"Majesty, let us now deal with that period of great confusion for our lands. Maybe you will hear some historians claim that our peninsula has known in its history three successive waves of Continental immigration, and that the most ancient one goes back to more than three centuries before the Oath. Nothing proves such affirmations; it is likely that the migrants in question were in fact mountaineers from the Asgeamar running away from the heat wave. Some of them probably originated from the Continental region neighboring the Simahir, situated behind the Asgeamar's spurs. However, it would be incorrect to talk about contact with the Continental culture before the year 702. At that time, we lived alone, without any knowledge of what was happening on the other side of the immense Asgeamar Mountains, apart from a few tales about the Simahir lands. However, at the beginning of the year 702, inhabitants from the region of Gleb, north of Reizh, saw three strange flying ships approaching from the sky. We now know those were Magientist artifacts; they had been heavily damaged during the crossing of the mountains, and caught in a journey longer than planned. Dozens of people emerged from those huge damaged hulks. The group of bold travelers was led by the famous Magientist Goran Aznor. That is how the first actual contact between the Continent and Tri-Kazel occurred."

Arrival of Magience in Tri-Kazel

With an elegant gesture, Queen Edena Mac Lichorl signaled the sage to go on. He proceeded: "Therefore, it was through Reizh that Magience set foot on the peninsula. The men of this expedition quickly made themselves known, thanks to their many inventions and to their artifacts capable of improving the living conditions of many people. But they also became the target of rumors discussing their honesty; the Demorthèn maintained that these inventions went against the laws of nature and that the gathering of Flux necessary for their function was an abomination. In the end, the Magientists' wonders had little echo in the rest of Tri-Kazel, and they could settle only in Reizh, the place where they arrived.

The Missionaries of the Temple

However, it would not be the last time Continentals would make themselves known, for in the beginning of the year 713, a new group arrived. That expedition, led by the missionary Jamian, managed to cross the tumultuous oceans protecting our peninsula and to reach the Gwidrite coasts. Far different from the Magientists, these settlers were adepts of the Temple's religion who, as you know, wish to spread their faith all over the world. The strangers began a long journey across valleys and snow-clad mountain passes, stopping only for a few days at each community. That first expedition was often ill received, and the extremely harsh traveling conditions cost many of the missionaries their lives. Yet, some survived and managed to preserve their beliefs and to convert new adepts."

The Maturity Era (from 720 to present)

"About two decades after the arrival of the first Continentals to the peninsula, their influence began to be felt and to transform the three kingdoms. The decades that followed brought deep and often unexpected changes."

Reizh, Magientist Kingdom

"King Ierónim gave Goran Aznor the right to carry out research in Reizh, in exchange for spreading the secrets of his technology. The king, surrounded with Magientists advising him in every aspect, accomplished great works in the capital city Baldh-Ruoch. In the kingdom's greatest cities, Nebulars, as well as other devices improving the citizens' life, were installed. Serious accidents did occur, such as the crash of a prototype aircraft in the middle of Baldh-Ruoch, which caused a huge fire. Starting from that day in the year 792, flying machines were forbidden by decree. The countryside saw the rise of strangely shaped windmills, which ground grain faster than the traditional sort. The first Magientist universities were founded and opened. The population, at first suspicious, then charmed by these technical advances, saw the kingdom quickly evolve. Reizh's neighbors also began to show interest in these innovations."

Facing the Furious Ocean, a number of missionaries of the Temple perished trying to follow the way shown to them by Jamian. Numerous Tri-Kazelians tried to travel the other way around to reach the Continent, but today nobody attempts such a journey, apart from a few fanatics. Every road across the Asgeamar Mountains is as deadly as the next, and after two centuries of contact with the Continent, the peninsula remains very isolated.
Nowadays, rumors of wrecked ships full of treasures from the Continent present great opportunities for potential treasure hunters. These people, who sometimes gather in small guilds, dive into the rough waters of the open sea, risking their lives, searching for riches about which nothing is known, not even whether they truly exist.



The Temple in Gwidre

"In the year 725, a horde of Feondas managed to sneak into Gwidre's capital city and slaughter thousands of people. The chaos lasted for weeks and made the Gwidrites fear a new Aergewin. In retrospect, that dark page of history seems to have been written especially for the emissaries of the Temple who, led by Jamian, arrived at the hard-hit city's gates shortly thereafter. Gwidre's king, named Eothèn the Magnanimous, received Jamian with his missionaries and carefully listened to them. According to his own words, when Jamian showed him a holy relic recently discovered in the Gwidrite lands, he witnessed 'several genuine miracles', which restored his hope. After two decades of fruitful collaboration, the king finally complied with a request from Jamian, whom he had befriended, and that is how the first church in Tri-Kazel came to be built in 747. No one thought about questioning that decision, for Eothèn, who descended directly from Gwidre, had managed to make his lands peaceful and safe again with the help of the missionaries. Less than thirty years later, in 775, the Temple became the kingdom's official religion. Following the example of the inhabitants from the capital city Ard-Amrach, many Gwidrites were converted in a few years to the religion revealed by Soustraine. In slightly less than a century, the Temple became more influential than the ancient traditions in Gwidre."

"An interesting tale, my friend, but you forgot to specify the Temple's methods of settling in the lands of Gwidre."

Leaning on a gnarled staff, the Demorthèn Algwich Dert had emerged from the shadow and stood at the right of the king.

"The Temple's faithful ransacked the Demorthèn holy sanctuaries and went as far as to bring down the megaliths that had remained throughout our peninsula's history. Moreover, Eothèn's conversion remains very suspicious, and it would not be implausible to suppose that the Temple's envoys have manipulated Gwidre's sovereign."

Dert's committed words spread confusion in the assembly, among which a murmur ran.

However, the Demorthèn signaled them to go on, and the scholars resumed.



Taol-Kaer, between Traditions and Modernity

"The beginning of the period called the Maturity Era is marked by a catastrophe with dire consequences for Taol-Kaer. In the year 748, the northern part of our kingdom was hit by torrential rains, which triggered deadly floods. Deoïr's falls spewed raging waters onto the city of Osta-Baille, which was swallowed by torrents of mud, branches, and rocks dragged from the mountain. The aqueduct of Drachnar quickly gave way, and the waters violently poured into the city's streets, devastating the houses and decimating the population. No one could send for help, as the roads were flooded and the bridges washed away. Slowly, the river's fury ceased, and the water withdrew from the lower town, leaving mud-covered bodies among the debris.

It was a tragedy as striking as the Mauve Death of the year 492, and it was very quickly named the Second Plague. Unfortunately, that was not the last calamity for the Ostians. After the torrential rains, summer came and a blazing sun shone on the city. Diseases and epidemics struck, bred by the decomposition of the corpses and the poorly evacuated

stagnant waters. The survivors of the disaster lived in a precarious situation, and only the heroism of the famous Fùlgyar, son of Ansailéir Merkyon, lord of the city, prevented the worst from happening.
In the middle of the summer of 748, Fùlgyar went alone to look for help, but found nobody who would be inclined or able to help him. He learned from mountaineers that Kailleach, Taol-Kaer's king, was returning home after a journey to Reizh. The hero seized that opportunity and went in search of the king, hoping to meet him on his way. Of course, the chances of success were very slim, but destiny must have intervened, for the young man found the sovereign's convoy. Fùlgyar explained the disastrous situation his town was in, and seeing how pressed and desperate the young man was, Kailleach agreed to go to Osta-Baille. What an exceptional sovereign for daring in such a way to risk his life in a disease-stricken region in order to support his people! The king had come back from Reizh with a strange figure: someone named Athaontú, a high-ranked Magientist, holder of that science's greatest secrets. The scholar wandered through Osta-Baille for two days, inspecting the place to give the king a complete report. One week later, the monarch made a public declaration near the cromlech under which legend has it that Taol-Kaer had been buried. He announced the city would be rebuilt, following new architectural principles, and under the direction of Athaontú."

The king, who studiously listened to the scholars, made a sign before speaking:

"My ancestor Kailleach was a king known for being very close to our traditions in his daily life, and very respectful of the spirits of nature. When he went to Reizh to renew the friendship between the two kingdoms, he discovered the wonders imported from the Continent, and thought it would be good to integrate them to his kingdom, while keeping this ancestral link with nature. He managed to convince his counterpart to an exchange of their knowledge. Kailleach gave one of his knight, Tearg, the responsibility to teach certain techniques regarding the art of war to the officers of Reizh's royal guard; in exchange, Athaontú would teach Taol-Kaer's king the rudiments of Magience. My ancestor could not suspect the side-effects Magience would bring upon our lands, yet I can only give credit to his decision of having Osta-Baille rebuilt, as well as to the talent of this Athaontú. One can only marvel at the magnificence of that city, which undoubtedly is one of our peninsula's jewels! I understand that when he saw it, my ancestor decided to make it the kingdom's new capital city!"

"Indeed, Majesty, King Kailleach came back to Osta-Baille ten years later, and he discovered Athaontú's work. That is how in 758, Osta-Baille was declared capital city of the kingdom, and the royal family settled there. Obviously, Tuaille's people were greatly offended by that decision. Apart from this city, the Magientists' influence remained very moderate in Taol-Kaer, which remained the most traditional of the peninsula's three kingdoms. Yet, it can be speculated that if the War of the Temple had not happened a few years later, Magience would have ended up progressively spreading in Taol-Kaer. It may even have settled here durably, as it has in Reizh."

The War of the Temple

"We approach a very dark period of our history, which has left its mark on numerous families in the three kingdoms. Who among us hasn't lost a grandfather during the fratricidal war that opposed Gwidre to its neighbors Reizh and Taol-Kaer?"
The scholar unrolled a map of the peninsula that showed the current state of the borders.
"It is not presumptuous to think that the great changes brought by the Continentals led to that war: expansionist impulses from the Temple, Magientist experimentations on lands outside Reizh, etc. In Gwidre, Magientists were violently driven away, and only a few of them kept leading their experiments in remote or inaccessible regions. Tensions between Gwidre and its neighbor Reizh didn't stop growing until 857, when King Kaergän, after consulting the Hierophant Tomar, declared war against Reizh; the purpose was officially to put an end to the Magientists' repeated incursions for Flux in the Gwidrite lands. Is that the only reason that drove King Kaergän to follow Tomar's advice? Unfortunately, Majesty, we are not able to give a definite answer to this question."
"Do not worry about this, young savant. Sometimes, it is preferable that some things remain unknown."
The king ended his sentence with a smile full of mystery. The scholar kept silent for a while before going on.
"Very quickly, Taol-Kaer allied with Reizh to counter the Gwidrite offensive and prevent a victory for the Temple. After six years of raging fights, the painful War of the Temple ended with Gwidre's severe defeat. It could have been expected that all the people dead on the battlefield, as well as the almost total ruin of the vanquished kingdom, would have brought the people's wrath on the Temple. But on the contrary, the tragedy brought the already interdependent Gwidrites even closer."

Present Day (864-907)

"Following the War of the Temple, the kingdom of Taol-Kaer kept a cautious distance from Continental ideas and preserved Demorthèn traditions. If Reizh remains attached to the advances of Magience, its countryside, on the other hand, always stayed close to these very traditions. Only Gwidre saw the Temple settle everywhere, from great cities to small villages, and it is a kingdom where Magience is strictly regulated. War has left scars, and tensions remain high at the borders. Taol-Kaer and Reizh grew closer, signing a treaty of alliance aiming to counter possible impulses of conquest from Gwidre. In addition to this rather confusing situation, it also seems important to me to underline that the Feondas have shown to be increasingly aggressive and bold these last generations. The attack of Gwidre's capital city in 725 by a formidable horde can be perceived as a major sign of the increase of the Aergewin's monsters' assaults. During these last decades, reports about the Feondas' agitation in the heart of the forests and of our mountains' gorges, as well as about their attacks against villages and travelers, kept multiplying. At the start of the year 908, which we will soon celebrate, all those difficulties hang over Tri-Kazel and numerous tensions are palpable.
Majesty, that is how our work reaches its conclusion. I hope it will be of use to you in writing your chronicles!"



Chapter 1
Feondas

Dear Wylard,

At last, here is the report about Feondas you asked me for. As you know, being a Varigal, I have wandered across Tri-Kazel for many years, and each road of the peninsula has known the rhythm of my stride. Following your request, I especially wrote down everything I could discover during my latest travels about these dreadful creatures. You probably already know of some of the information enclosed in this document. I hope the rest will be news to you, and that you will learn more by reading these lines. I think I have composed here a short synthesis of our people's knowledge about such a vast subject, and I believe it will help you to better defend your domain against this scourge. Of course, this document is not exhaustive, and we will probably discover more about the Feondas in the times to come. We must learn to defend ourselves as best we can, and maybe one day we will find a way to eradicate this threat and live in peace.

What is a Feond?

On this subject, theories abound. They are as numerous as the steps that lead to the top of the plateaus of Osta-Baille. However, I have been able to draw some certainties from that inextricable mass of conjectures. Feondas cannot be classified simply; they do not specifically belong to any species, but to the fauna for some, to the flora for others, and sometimes even to the mineral kingdom. It is difficult to give a general definition of what a Feond is since their appearance varies greatly. Despite this diversity, they all share the common nature of being terrible monsters that ravage our communities. Some have the appearance of huge wolves; others are like enraged boars of colossal build. Other Varigals told me about trees, the bark of which would sometimes contort itself into a monstrous face and whose clawed branches can quarter a man to pieces.

It remains that most of them have humanoid shapes, and even, in some rare cases, look far too much like humans for my taste. However, their body is very often distorted, stretching into poses that would make the most flexible athlete suffer. Of greatly varying sizes and shapes, they are covered with moss, rock, and wood. Studies on some corpses even prove that these coverings are not merely debris, but part of their bodies. According to testimonies I have heard, as well as what I've seen from my own experience, the shade of their flesh is very strange under these various protrusions, ranging from a mineral gray to a green of the darkest woods, or even showing red or black hues. Sometimes, they are accompanied by beasts as horrible as they are;things that look like atrocious mockeries of animals we know. One could see a monstrous transposition of mankind and its domesticated animals in those freakish groups. But they are not civilized; they are evil by nature and attack our villages, slaughtering our people and our cattle, thus brutishly annihilating entire communities.

The Howling Chasms

There are very few passages allowing convoys to cross the barrier that are the Mòr Roimh. One of them, located at the south of the Dèas lands, formerly allowed the travelers crossing the peninsula from east to west to save a few days, bypassing a detour towards Hòb's Peak. It has not been used for several generations. Osags call that passage "Sianail"; for unexplained reasons, that place has become a nest for Feondas. The noises echoing in those gorges are caused not only by the violent winds, but also by creatures that crawl in the darkness…

Dear friend,

For a very long time, people have been wondering about the origins of the Feondas and their actual motives. As beliefs vary, so do explanations. But who can state he is right? During my travels, I have gathered numerous testimonies; here are some of them.

I heard this first tale from a Demorthèn friend. The Tsioghair's annual gathering he attended that year had been almost entirely about Feondas. This subject can stir trouble among the Demorthèn, for their convictions on it differ. Sellog, an old Osag Demorthèn, caused a sensation when he encouraged human sacrifices in order to pacify natural spirits.

Like him, some conservative Demorthèn think that Feondas, in the same way as other species, are living beings that have a part in the cycles. Sníomh and Aingeal, two bellicose spirits of nature, may have been responsible for the catastrophic proliferation of those creatures, which reached its peak in the Aergewin. Therefore, the problem would not be Feondas per se, but rather their number, which can threaten the balance of the world. According to Sellog, the resurgence of Feond attacks is a sign of the spirits' wrath, which must be appeased through sacrifices. The Demorthèn who share this belief also think it is crucial to fight Magience, for the Daedemorthys' science goes against the principles of respect and humility toward natural forces and stirs up the spirits' anger.

However, not all of the Demorthèn community shares that point of view. To some of them, Sníomh and Aingeal are not simply chaotic spirits; they are malevolent, and the Aergewin was caused by their evil intentions. Without the powers granted to the Demorthèn by the other spirits, the world would have sunk into total chaos. Yet, in those remote times, humans dedicated a respectful cult to spirits; there were many sacrifices and Magience did not exist. To those Demorthèn, making offerings or eradicating the Magientists would be of no use: Sníomh and Aingeal are evil spirits and their offspring must be fought. Of course, those spirits play a part in the natural cycles by incarnating death and destruction, but the creation of Feondas is an abuse that shows their will to destroy our world. Those beasts are not part of the balance; instead, they are a danger threatening it.

Adepts of the One God religion have a totally different vision of the Feondas. To them, these beings are demons whose sole purpose is to corrupt humanity. They are attracted by overly strong emotions and by vices, taking advantage of the weaknesses of men to infiltrate them and spread chaos. That is why one of the ordinances of the prophet Soustraine recommends asceticism and moderation in all things. If an attack targets a pious community, it means that some among it foster impure thoughts. To overcome the Feond threat, one should first overcome one's inner demons. Having had, like you, a traditional Demorthèn education, these beliefs have always seemed strange to me.

Yet, during my travels, I have witnessed some scenes that have troubled my mind. One day, in a Gwidrite community, a horde of Feondas smashed down the log palisades and spread into the village, uttering inhuman screams. The priest shouted to us to gather in the church while soldiers struggled to slow the beasts down. After a few moments of panic, the community managed to take shelter in the holy edifice. Disbelieve me if you wish, but no Feond entered in spite of the poor state of the doors that would not have resisted the charge of a single Caernide! Other similar events would tend to prove that Feondas fear places dedicated to the One God. Troubling, isn't it?

The Magientists I got to meet in Reizh despise the Demorthèn's beliefs, and the priests of the Temple's just as much. As you know, these men of science have developed a theory about Flux, an energy every being and every thing is supposedly composed of. According to their point of view, the Feond phenomenon is the result of an "energetic entropy"; some obscure phenomenon leading to the existence these beings. Indeed, Magientists established that all Feondas are freakish mutations of already existing species. Therefore, they are harmful creatures that must be eliminated. However, I have noted that their theories do not give much attention to the powers possessed by the Demorthèn and the wonders accomplished by the priests of the Temple.

It is time for me to end this letter. I hope you will manage to make your own opinion about the scourge that the Feond threat is.

Your devoted friend, *Kellian*

Behavior

Feondas' behavior may seem at first sight extremely limited, anarchic even, but a more accurate observation can prove that this is not always the case. It is not a rare event that a more or less organized band of Feondas will attack fortified and well-defended places together. Sometimes, you can even make out hints of strategy in some of their movements. Recently, I heard that a Talkéride Inguard had been assaulted and entirely ravaged. The offensive was launched on different fronts at the same time, and during its course, the monsters even dug to undermine the walls. The few survivors could observe that, during those more united and composed phases, Feondas who seemed to be pack leaders looked like they were directing the operations with growls or simply with signs. These Feondas generally have humanoid bodies and, in most cases, wear strange ornate masks with decorative reliefs. Our warriors name them "Drèin", which means "visage" in the ancient tongue.

The Feondas' Masks

Excerpt from a Magientist report

We know Drèins can usually be identified by those strange masks. However, other creatures within their ranks hide their features in such a way as well. These masks cover most of the face, sometimes leaving the lower part of the jaws and mouth free; some circle the head entirely, while others only hide the face. They are all covered with round pictures and carvings; some of them seem to copy ancient funerary masks, or may even have been taken from profaned bodies.

Sometimes, on rare occasions, the body of one of these mask-bearers has been studied, for Feondas' bodies tend to rot very quickly and decompose into a stinking mass. The strangest thing is that it is practically impossible to remove these "masks" from them. It is as if they were part of the Feond itself, or as if it was fastened to its flesh in a way that is beyond us. Most attempts at detaching these masks having failed, it has been concluded that they simply are an integral part of the Drèins' skulls.

Edgar of Jaffren,
Primus Magientist of Kell



As their origin remains unknown, we can only try to define them according to their appearances and actions. Therefore, we can say that Feondas consist of a species of monstrous life forms dedicated to the eradication of mankind. Of course, their goal has never clearly been announced, but what else can we think about creatures that spend their time slaughtering every person they cross paths with?





Humanity against Feondas

As far as anyone can remember, we have always fought Feondas. No text, no tradition, no legend tells of a time when they weren't known and feared. The Aergewin was the time when Feondas were the most numerous and the most violent. In those dark times, Feondas of an immense size wandered the world, spreading death and destruction. Without the Demorthèn, humanity would probably be extinct. Most fortunately, the largest Feondas have disappeared, but others have survived and continue to torment mankind. Like rats hidden in the sewers of our cities, they pullulate and regularly attack our communities.

History proves that Feondas do not act in a steady, predictable way, but seem to go through more intensely aggressive periods that sometimes stretch over several generations. Unfortunately, our time is marked by a notable increase of their attacks. As you certainly know, the amount of attacks also varies with the seasons–fall and winter being particularly dangerous. These creatures seem to prefer cold weather… unless they take advantage of the longer nights and the ancestral fear of darkness rooted in each human being to terrorize us.

An Omnipresent Enemy

You must also know that our whole peninsula suffers from these attacks. However, what you might not know is that the Continent is apparently hit by Feond attacks as well. According to the few testimonies I could gather, the Continentals' situation is similar to ours, and it seems to have been so for just as long. Therefore, the Feond threat seems to hang over the entirety of humanity, and it is high time we put aside all our dissensions in order to unite against it.

If we examine things at a more local scale, we see how each inhabitant learns in his earliest days that one must never wander away from civilized, populated places. Indeed, Feondas are more numerous in wild regions. From what I could observe and hear, they settle in the heart of deep forests, in steep gorges, at the bottom of humid caverns or at the inaccessible sources of rivers. Always inhospitable places man has not laid his mark upon. The more you distance yourself from roads and villages to venture into dark or remote places, the more you risk meeting a Feond. However, some claim they are also in our towns, covered with heavy cloaks or hidden in the sewers, unleashing death, destruction, and chaos in a veiled, vicious way. As for me, I think that this is only tittle-tattle intended to scare children that would be inclined to disobey or to escape their parents' vigilance for a night… On the other hand, it is undeniable that hordes of Feondas have managed to infiltrate the heart of the best-protected cities to spread death on several occasions.

Of the Feondas' Powers

We all know that a Feond generally constitutes a formidable opponent, even for a trained fighter. Their bodies are very resilient, and their strength is generally superior to any man's. But much more than that, they possess very particular capacities and powers that make them truly dangerous.

Feondas of any type can produce poison. A visual examination will not suffice to see which specimens are venomous. So, numerous Demorthèn have studied the subject and developed antidotes, the efficacy of which remains unfortunately uncertain considering the diversity of harmful substances collected. As it is, there have been cases of brave warriors who, several hours after having brought down a Feond, suffered violent fits of shivering, nausea, and convulsions, sometimes leading to a slow, painful death, or only leaving a flicker of life in a profoundly weakened body. Others had to have a deeply clawed limb amputated, to avoid the rot that would spread throughout their whole body. Even more astonishing–and I saw it with my own eyes, Lord Wylard–some of those substances damage the mind, with effects similar to those of the most powerful hallucinogenic plants known to man. Those are only striking examples, a quick glimpse of a long list of effects I have carefully recorded in another document I will send you later. Still, they are representative enough of the dangerousness of these monsters. Facing a Feond, a warrior should always wear an armor preventing claws, fangs, or vines from reaching his flesh, or even better, try not to be injured at all! A light wound may only cause a slight pain, but its consequences can be terrible.

Among the other strange capacities Feondas possess, I heard that some of them can make use of a form of hypnosis. I have been told the story of a Hilderin knight who, after having been struck down by a Feond, was forced to meet its gaze for a few seconds. Afterwards, he maintained he forgot what happened in the three days following that encounter, but testimonies state that he has attacked and slaughtered many people, without saying a word, only growling, as if something had taken possession of his body. I do not know how trustworthy such tales are, but it is better to be ready for the worst.

Of the Struggle against Feondas

The elementary pieces of advice to avoid being the target of Feond attacks are known to every inhabitant in Tri-Kazel, from their youngest days, starting with never leaving the community's precincts alone. That tradition gave our society–large cities aside–a very protectionist side. Children are the responsibility of the whole community, and everyone always watches over them. In the fields, peasants, beasts, and shepherds never stay alone outside. Everybody has to take part in the village's defense, in the maintenance of the fortifications, and even in the militia. Solidarity is a fundamental value in Tri-Kazel, and men who mean harm to others (thieves, brigands, assassins, etc.) are radically punished; we already have enough to handle with the inhuman threat and wish not to waste more time in pointless rambling with the scoundrels weakening us. The most serious misdeeds are punishable by death or banishment; the criminal will have to face his destiny alone in the wilderness.

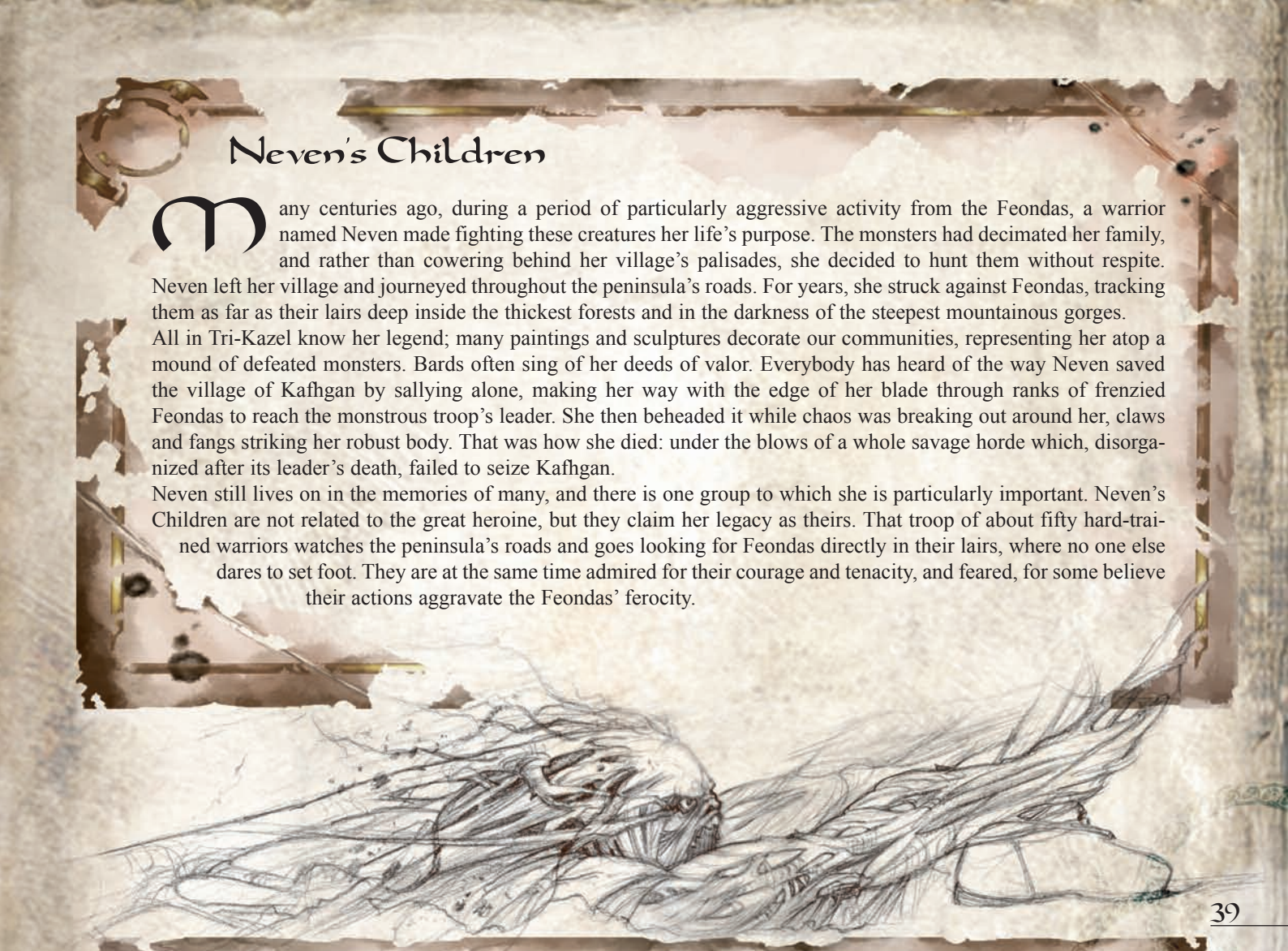
Common sense implies that one should not wander away from roads and marked out ways. Travelers, caravans, Varigals, knight troops, or traveling merchants more or less frequently use those. As Feondas usually appear far from civilized zones, attacks are less frequent along ways built by mankind. At the very least, there is a slight chance that the creatures may be seen approaching, which actually does not improve the odds of surviving such an encounter very much. In deep forests, dangers are even greater: an unwary traveler can be caught off-guard by piles of vines and branches that will turn out to be enraged Feondas, or by a creature hiding under a layer of moss, having almost become part of it.

Neven's Children

Many centuries ago, during a period of particularly aggressive activity from the Feondas, a warrior named Neven made fighting these creatures her life's purpose. The monsters had decimated her family, and rather than cowering behind her village's palisades, she decided to hunt them without respite. Neven left her village and journeyed throughout the peninsula's roads. For years, she struck against Feondas, tracking them as far as their lairs deep inside the thickest forests and in the darkness of the steepest mountainous gorges.

All in Tri-Kazel know her legend; many paintings and sculptures decorate our communities, representing her atop a mound of defeated monsters. Bards often sing of her deeds of valor. Everybody has heard of the way Neven saved the village of Kafhgan by sallying alone, making her way with the edge of her blade through ranks of frenzied Feondas to reach the monstrous troop's leader. She then beheaded it while chaos was breaking out around her, claws and fangs striking her robust body. That was how she died: under the blows of a whole savage horde which, disorganized after its leader's death, failed to seize Kafhgan.

Neven still lives on in the memories of many, and there is one group to which she is particularly important. Neven's Children are not related to the great heroine, but they claim her legacy as theirs. That troop of about fifty hard-trained warriors watches the peninsula's roads and goes looking for Feondas directly in their lairs, where no one else dares to set foot. They are at the same time admired for their courage and tenacity, and feared, for some believe their actions aggravate the Feondas' ferocity.



Protective Circles

It would seem that ancient Demorthèn, at the time of the Aergewin, had powers largely superior to our contemporaries. Among other things, they have since lost the knowledge of protective circles; however, some of these sites are still active. There are places in Tri-Kazel, surrounded by ritual stones engraved with numerous runes, in which Feondas cannot enter. Still, not all stone circles offer such a refuge, and a traveler should only take shelter in those which protective power he is certain of.

Feondas' Weaknesses

I will end this report with a recollection of essential information that will be most useful to you: the weak spots of Feondas. Unfortunately, organizing a systematic, reliable defense is a gamble, since everything depends on the opponent. As these creatures come in shapes, heights, and compositions of various kinds, there is no general rule. Indeed, a creature with rocky skin will be more vulnerable to heavy, bludgeoning weapons, whereas one with bark-like skin will essentially fear fire and slashing weapons. Against some of them, swift and quick fighting techniques are the most suited, while facing others, no one will be more efficient than a heavily armored knight. Therefore, it is advised that members of a garrison have complementary specialties. When the moment comes, you will be able to act more efficiently, by observing your opponents and choosing those among your men who will be the most suited to fight them.

There is nothing left for me to say but good luck,

Dalaigh



Chapter 1
Peoples and Mentalities

The Peoples

Kalvernach's University
Kingdom of Reizh, year 906

Professor Mac Endgad vigorously banged his desk with his long, falcon-headed cane. Behind him, an immense calligraphic map representing Tri-Kazel had been hung.
"Silence!"
In the amphitheatre packed with Reizhite students, the increasingly loud buzzing that had begun to rise immediately died. A pupil hurriedly stood up.
"Professor! How can you affirm that people from Taol-Kaer and Gwidre are like us? They are clearly several centuries behind our kingdom and its great advances!"
The pupil was obviously offended by his teacher's last words. Cheers were heard, which gave him the nerve to go on:
"Where Reizh tries to set up a fairer and more balanced political system, Taol-Kaer stagnates in a barbarous, indecent feudality. The dukedom of Gorm is a sinister example of that. And that is without mentioning their refusal of medicinal improvements that sentences many inhabitants to unnecessary death in the name of absurd beliefs! And what about the kingdom of Gwidre, where the Temple's armies grow more and more threatening, as shown by the exactions committed at the borders last year?"

The pupil remained hanging on to the last words he had just pronounced, which rang for a while in the vast studying room. The teacher retorted with a calm, almost monotonous voice, as if he had had to answer that same question many times.

"It is not that simple. You are here to access a knowledge that will allow you to think twice about this kind of crass, shallow ideas."

New echoes could be heard in the great room, but Mac Endgad reacted more promptly, which brought calm back.
"When I talk about Taol-Kaer or Gwidre's inhabitants, it is in the perspective of our common roots that they are part of Tri-Kazel's people. That is the subject of today's lesson. The question you raise concerning their possible backwardness is distinct from our general perspective."
The professor took a few steps, lost in thought for a moment.

"To bring an answer to that question would go beyond the aim of this class. The advances that the kingdom of Reizh has benefited from in the last few decades cannot be considered as the only standard to measure the success or decline of a civilization. Take this for granted and let us go back to our subject, which is the peoples of Tri-Kazel.".
Professor Mac Endgad turned towards the map and indicated the southern part of Taol-Kaer.
"It is very likely that the birthplace of our Tri-Kazelian civilization is situated in that region of Taol-Kaer, now shared between the dukedoms of Salann Tir and Dèas. Therefore, all of Tri-Kazel's peoples share a link with the primitive Osag people originating from this region. For your edification, the word 'Osag' designates the wind in the ancient tongue. The morphologic difference between Osags and the rest of Tri-Kazelians leads one to suppose that the peninsula may have known one or several waves of colonization in very remote times, long before the formation of the Three Kingdoms. The Osags have exogamic traditions, forbidding them to marry someone of their own clan. However, it is extremely rare that an Osag woman gets married to a man that does not stem from her people. That tradition certainly explains the low dilution of their culture.

Lord Wylard,

You have asked me for a report about those primitive people; these are its first fruits. Forged by their country's windy lands, Osags are generally strongly built and can easily be recognized by the square, massive shape of their faces. I have met warriors from those clans whose skin is nearly as thick as leather. Those typical physical characteristics seem to come from the very hard conditions of their lives. Anyone spending a few years in the south of Dèas will harden or die; those lands are harsher than anything we know in our regions.

Men, as much as women, often sport long hair, plaited and tied. Women are always very active; at the same time huntresses, warriors, and nurses. It would seem that the custom of the Dàmàthairs, second mothers taking the community's children in their charge, originates from those remote people. All Osags have slightly slanted eyes, which is not the case of Tri-Kazelians from other regions. Though the men's faces often have a certain rudeness, Osag women, on their part, can be true beauties.

Tomorrow, I will attend a fight between two clan chiefs. Duels are commonplace among the Osag, and even sometimes include women. They settle all sorts of matters: conflicts between clans, personal disputes, or even a choice between two suitors. Osags frown upon swords and favor axes. Their sense of justice really is very far from that of the Reizhite courts!

Your devoted,
Maeve Oan

We will briefly mention ourselves, the Tri-Kazelians, the population of mixed blood that constitutes the near-entirety of Tri-Kazel's inhabitants. We are generally sturdier than people from the Continent. With time, and an easier life in cities than in mountains, some have lost that characteristic resistance, but we remain worthy descendants of our proud ancestors. In the heart of our peninsula's harshest lands still live the Osags, strong warriors remaining attached to clan traditions and little disposed to abide by royal authority.

Let us now talk about Continentals, and to begin with, remember that in Tri-Kazel, there are still very few people who originate from the Continent. Even if Reizhites from the capital city seem proud to have the same frail build as people from the Continent, very few actually have an ancestor from those faraway lands in their family. Men and women from the Continent are thinner and slimmer than natives from Tri-Kazel, and also have more delicate features, which does not necessarily make them more harmonious. However, apart from these few reductive common traits, it is quite difficult to define precisely the morphological type of people originating from those faraway, ill-known regions.



The last ethnic group that we must attend to is the Tarishes. If the date and place of their arrival is known, their true origin remains a mystery that they themselves do not seem able to solve. Also named 'people from the West' or more simply 'travelers,' Tarishes have marked traits. They have high cheekbones, often clear eyes, a rather aquiline nose, and a slightly matte skin. There still exist a few Tarish clans who wander across the peninsula and whose blood did not mix with the Tri-Kazelians'. You must know that those clans play a more important part in the kingdom's politics than is commonly thought. Beyond the folkloric image of jugglers and acrobats bringing some joy to villages cut off from the rest of the world, the Tarishes are also very good smiths whose services are highly valued by certain lords, who impatiently wait for their annual visit. It is established that some of them are also spies in the pay of some potentates, and others become Varigals…
Today's class is drawing to a close. Thank you for your attention."

Professor Mac Endgad watched the whole amphitheatre as a whisper rose and some pupils were already leaving their seats.

That winter, the Tarishes had offered me a place in their caravan. I was lucky, for I never could have crossed the snowbound vales of the Mòr Roimh by myself. After the apprehension I felt in the first moments, I discovered an astonishing community. Beyond their bronze-colored pomp, the Tarishes gave me the impression of being sad, thoughtful people. Between two festivals in villages where their resounding laughter rang, the journey went by in a silence that made the caravan look like a funerary procession. Sometimes, the crystalline voice of a young woman could be heard, accompanied by a few mournful flutes that broke the heavy silence.

Although the Tarishes are not talkative people, I quickly noticed they were fluent in several languages. The one they used most frequently was a dialect in which I could make out some Tri-Kazelian words mixed with much more exotic sonorities. I will above all remember what one of them told me about that. According to him, the degeneration of their native language illustrated the decline of their community, the size of which was inexorably decreasing. Young men frequently gave up on a harsh traveling life to settle in one town or another in the Three Kingdoms, while young women preferred more and more often being wooed by outsiders. According to that man, one day would come when there would be no one left to continue the travels initiated by those who had long ago landed at Hòb's Cape. The mystery of the Tarishes' origins would then definitely sink with the disappearance of their culture. Since that day, I, the Varigal, have been wondering what is driving me to travel through the world.

Oswan Jadd

The Other Living Beings

"Master, are Feondas a people?"

Edward, the young Ionnthén, stared at his old mentor, waiting for an answer. As he did each morning, he had come to meet with the venerable Aenor in order to perfect the knowledge that would make him a Demorthèn; keeper of nature and of peninsular traditions.

"By thinking in terms of people, you look at the world from a human point of view. And the Triad did not shape the world according to such criteria. Mankind developed in civilizations, gathering around traditions and cultural codes. Such is not the case of all forms of life, but you must not judge them according to that criterion. In the eyes of a Demorthèn, there should be no difference of worth between different forms of life; all of them must be respected, for all of them have a purpose. Each carries within itself the same essential energy; Rindath. That is something too often forgotten, nowadays."

"But… why do those creatures from the forest attack our villages? What is their purpose, except slaughtering everything in their path?"

There was a sudden silence within the circle of megaliths where Aenor and his young pupil stood. The lapping of an idle river flowing a little distance away could be heard, as well as the singing of some birds returning with the first buds. It was a clear, cold day in early spring; light was breaking through the thorny branches of surrounding firs and dimly lit the undergrowth. After a while, the Demorthèn spoke again:

"Landscapes shaped by the spirits of nature will often fill you with wonder, but the principles governing natural laws will often seem unfair or cruel to you. That is how it is, young Ionnthén. Men have to adapt themselves to those laws, and not the opposite. It may be that natural spirits are angry for a reason that is beyond our ken and that their most savage manifestations are unleashed without us knowing the reason. It would be fruitless to try to understand everything, to control everything. The human being must accept his limits and acknowledge his place in the life cycles."

"Are men responsible for that anger?"

"You certainly know that for several generations now, some of Tri-Kazel's inhabitants have decided to forsake Demorthèn traditions to dedicate themselves to science–more precisely, Magience. They think the land is a reserve of raw materials belonging to them and that they can harvest it as they please. They clear forests, dry up bogs, and ceaselessly extend farmlands farther as towns grow. In that respect, we can believe that humans stir up the anger of natural forces. Without respite, you will have to reason with your peers so that they remain humble and respectful towards the environment that gives them life each day. Such was our ancestors' frame of mind, which is today disappearing even in some remote parts of the peninsula's countryside."

The Demorthèn stopped talking for a moment, lost in thought.

"However, do not get entrapped in overly simplistic explanations. Since the dawn of time, well before Magience's abuses, mankind has had to survive the repeated assaults of Feondas. Keep in mind that image of a raging tempest. Man is not necessarily responsible, but he must wait for the spirits of wind to calm down. To go into nature without taking that into consideration would be pure madness."

A Philosophy of Progress

Baldh-Ruoch's council. Kingdom of Reizh, year 906

Magister Alana Naïghan, a member of Baldh-Ruoch's Magientist council, was presenting to the king's advisors her project of building a great hospital so that everyone, regardless of social rank, could access basic health-care.

"Esteemed advisors, I am proud to present to you the royal hospital that should answer the tragic public health problems our capital city suffers from. As you know, the poorest people cannot resort to the services of physicians or healers. It is our good king's duty to protect the most miserable against mundane illnesses, which have been curable by Magientist techniques for a long time now, but which continue to decimate the population of working class districts. The opening of the hospital will be associated with the erection of a new Flux refinery at the north of Baldh-Ruoch in order to provide curative equipment."

The Magister unrolled a plan of the capital city and of its surroundings, on which everyone could discern the site of the future hospital and of the new refinery located in the outskirts of Taelwald's forest. There also was the plant located in the suburbs, built five years earlier, which today gave work to several hundreds of people. In the assembly, a voice boomed. It was Ronan Kaereg's, a man fiercely opposed to most of the Magientist projects.

"This is a scandal! It is because of your accursed plant in the middle of Baldh-Ruoch that those new illnesses have spread, and now, you want to open a new refinery? Your hospital is just a pretext to extract even more Flux, which will only worsen the pollution bred by your stinking installations! You do not care about Baldh-Ruoch's people, and if you want to cure them, you should immediately close that blasted plant!"

Almost instantly, a commotion spread among the assembly, making the vigorous exchanges between the various participants incomprehensible. The Magister managed to speak again:

"Then what do you propose, my dear Ronan? To call upon the Demorthèn so that they come and heal Baldh-Ruoch's people with their weedy mixtures that could poison a Boernac?"

There were a few laughs among the assembly, then the Magister pressed harder:

"You lie when you accuse the district's plant of being the origin of the diseases. Our capital city suffers from overpopulation, and the narrow, malodorous alleys propagate the diseases. Instead of bragging and systematically opposing everything we propose, you should follow the example of Osta-Baille, which, since its reconstruction supervised by Magientists, is a safe and pleasant town! You cannot deny progress all your life; because of people like you, Baldh-Ruoch may become an insalubrious, dangerous city! Your blindness and stubbornness are worthy of the most primitive Talkérides!"

This time, chaos spread among the assembly, and the leader of the royal council had to adjourn the meeting before it transformed into an immense brawl.

Baldh-Ruoch's Plant

The edifice is unique in the peninsula. Three colossal chimneys belching out a thick, white smoke tower above its immense foundations. That plant is dedicated to the extraction and refinement of Flux. It supplies most of the city's Magientist installations and gives work to several hundreds of people. Access to it is strictly controlled, and a militia equipped with weapons powered by Flux protects its entrances.

The plant belongs to Reizh's crown and secret conflicts rage to obtain control over it. Indeed, the king nominates the plant's Administrator, who recruits a council to manage the plant, and ensure its various activities run at their best. The generated riches are enormous, and suspicions of misappropriation, corruption, and financing of occult projects hang heavy over the successive councils. At the present time, Magister Urielle Erzhine carries out the Administrating duties.



Mentalities

The Varigal raised his glass, looking alternately at the two men and the woman who had opened both their door and a bottle of their last hooch product for him, then took a sip of the dark, hot-tasting liquid. The woman stood up, her stool scraping on the wooden planks that covered the floor, as she left the house's great room to come back a few moments later, holding a large loaf of rye bread, some goat cheese, and an old knife.

One of the hosts broke bread while the other cut and distributed thin slices of cheese between everyone, not without some difficulty in that task. They ate in silence for a few minutes, slowly chewing each bite; then a new dose of alcohol was poured into each glass.

"There has been lots of rain in the valley these last weeks, and with the cold weather coming, I thought that if I did not quickly go to the mountain, the path would soon become impracticable because of the snow. Now that I'm here, I thank you for having invited me."

"When the mountain turns white, mountaineers are alone to face the world's dangers," the woman said.

"You're certainly the last stranger we'll get to see for at least six months," one of the men went on, "if the winter isn't worse than last year's, that is. So it's only natural that we take you in; otherwise, who will give us news from the valley?"

"And how come the city folks ain't puttin' you up? They don't wanna hear about us?"

The Varigal stroked his thin mustache, starting to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Apparently, the two men were brothers, and the last to have spoken was backward, which explained his difficulties with cutting cheese, his constant nodding, his uncertain gestures, and his clothing that could easily be qualified as slovenly, even for a mountaineer. Thus, the other one was probably the woman's husband, as well as the head of the family. Both were in the prime of life, almost ten years younger than him, and the presence in the room of a wood cradle indicated they had probably already tried having children.

"Life is harsh here; you are left to yourselves at least half of the year, whereas in the valley, and even more so in towns, life is easier. City-dwellers do not think about survival, they only have one preoccupation: to become richer than their neighbors. A Varigal doesn't bring riches, only information. So, you're called, you're accosted, you're asked plenty of questions without ever having the time to answer… sometimes, you're offered a drink at a tavern, but you're never offered board or lodging. Things have not always been like that. During the nineteen years I have been traveling around the Three Kingdoms, I can tell you people have changed a lot. Now, it's almost only in small remote villages like this one that you can find hospitality, a glass of strong drink by the fireside, and a comfortable mattress for the night… City-dwellers have forgotten about all of that!"

"You must have seen a lot of people with all those travels, and some high society, too."

"I have seen a lot, indeed, many more than I could ever count. And I keep no memory of the majority of them. People are all different, but in each kingdom, you find the same social castes. You're situated on a very particular place on Tri-Kazel's map, near the spot where the three borders meet. Away from the heart of each of the kingdoms, you are influenced by none of them!"

"People from here are humble people, we live thanks to the earth and to our animals. I'd like t'know how other people are."

"Believe me, you're all the better not knowing; you wouldn't understand their preoccupations. But if you wish, I'll tell you more about them, if you're kind enough to let me wet my whistle with your jug."

"Go get some tobacco leaves from the shed, Darek. I'll get a pipe ready for our guest," the man told his brother while filling the Varigal's glass.



The tobacco was minced on the bare table, two big leaves in all, and divided into three small piles; three pipes were scraped clean and copiously filled, and embers were brought in a baked clay pot. Darek was the only one not to smoke: he wiped the table with his hand to gather the tobacco scraps and noisily snuffed them up. Soon, an acrid smoke billowed in the room.

"In Gwidre, in spite of all the misfortune the population may suffer, nobody seems to worry since they all get lost in the mirages of the One God and of promised redemption. Without turning a hair, they accept epidemics, famines, Feondas' attacks, and even seeing their children die."

As he pronounced those last words, he discreetly observed the couple's reaction; she sadly lowered her eyes, suddenly looking very weary, while her man became lost in the contemplation of the embers, his gaze and body still. The Varigal felt cruel, but knew he had guessed right, they had lost at least one child. Mountaineers did not talk about their private lives in general, so he had learned to read their every move, their every expression as others read books.

"They are completely apathetic," he went on, "and only wake up to defend their Temple and its holy relics. There is no laughing to hear in taverns or in streets, even children look sad. They pray, waiting for death like it was a rescue, and try to convince you they hold the only truth, and that you have to join their ranks… As for the Reizhites, they have suffered so much from Temple attacks and ruthless incursions from Hilderin knights that they've become suspicious of their very brothers from Tri-Kazel, and a stranger is never welcome among them, even if he is a Varigal bringing good news. They never invite you in their houses, but also fear that you stay outside. They have become so overprotective of their Magientists' science that they think you're only there to steal their precious artifacts. For them, to live without science now seems impossible, as if you couldn't do without their Nebulars at night, or their water-driving system that brings into their houses that brackish, metallic-tasting water. Yet, very few of them actually benefit from what they call scientific progress, for only the wealthiest districts possess actually functional installations, the other ones being either under-equipped or equipped to the detriment of the most elementary security. Indeed, in the suburbs' filthy streets, it is not rare to see black traces and large cracks left by the explosion of a poorly maintained Nebular… Of course, those are only generalities about the city-dwellers, since the more you go away from urbanized centers, the less you feel the pressure the powerful exert on more modest classes."

"It seems to me you have passed over the Talkérides," the husband said while drawing a long puff from his pipe.

"Indeed, it's good of you to remind me."

The Varigal emptied the bottom of his glass, took an ember with the pincers, put it on the tobacco and took small puffs from his pipe, until the heart glowed red.

"Taol-Kaer is our civilization's birthplace; everything began here and everybody on the peninsula should remember that… With those words they welcome strangers in the capital city; Talkérides know about everything, have already heard about everything, can advise you on everything and always do, as if you weren't capable of understanding things as well as them. They think they are the last heirs of the Three Brothers who founded Tri-Kazel, the two other kingdoms having, according to them, fallen under the Continentals' bad influence. And so, they think they are chosen to play arbiters in every conflict, which brings the abuses we know of from Hilderin knights, all of them acting as shortsighted looters. I'm not fond of them; they're haughty and disdainful, they think themselves superior to their neighbors, and I won't even tell you about their obscene jokes or the insulting terms they use to talk about those who do not belong to their little world. Now, I avoid traveling too far into Taol-Kaer. Anyway, there are



very few interesting things to gather and you're far from being as well received as here…"
His sentence ended with a long yawn, which was quickly echoed by the slow-witted brother. It was late, and it looked like tomorrow would be a cold and windy day; being ready would require some rest. The couple took their leave and left the room. The Varigal wrapped himself in his cape and laid down on the comfortable mattress that had been brought for him to a corner of the room. As tired as he was, he did not immediately fall asleep, for in the fire's glow, he could see Derek's shadow, caught in a backward and forward motion, rocking the cradle and humming in a low voice the words of a lullaby…

The Notion of Kingdom

Extracted from "Peoples, Populations, and Journeys" by Aeldred Firdh

After centuries, you have to admit that as soon as you leave cities and major commercial routes, such a concept is still more a theory than an established fact. The majority of Tri-Kazelians live, as their ancestors did, in villages that are sometimes not very accessible. If the feudal system has officially put an end to the ancient loyalties between clans, they often persist through the simple fact that a good number of rural lords descend precisely from clan chiefs' lineages. Moreover, for the most isolated mountaineers, a traveler coming from the capital city is nearly as exotic as one arriving from the other end of the peninsula. Ancient customs preserve the villagers' sense of hospitality, but they are still careful and sometimes even distrustful. Travelers are often welcomed, as long as they mind their own business and do not stay longer than necessary.
Things slowly change, as Daols take the place of barter and common language is insidiously substituted for local dialects. However, there are also places where people persist in using local speech when there are strangers around. Even in the most frequented cities, taverns and markets swarm with regulars exchanging gossip in local dialect, simply so they can affirm their identities and roots.





Border between Taol-Kaer and Reizh
Year 905

On the hillside of Talamh's vale, Lord Dagon's standards flapped in the wind. Several hundreds of men and women had gathered and formed a mixed battalion. Most of them wore thick clothing and studded leather breastplates. They wielded their farming tools; pitchforks and axes as their only weapons. A few soldiers wearing gambesons and chain mail bore the arms of Talamh's vale on tabards with fading colors. The only horsemen were about ten armored knights, companions in arms of Lord Dagon who was exhorting the battalion:

"We have gathered today to make our lands respected and defend our country's values! Reizh's Magientists think they can get away with anything when intruding in our territory, turning our lands upside-down and poisoning our harvests with their blasted machines! Because of them, our community has lost many of its members! Reizhites have been quick in forgetting the help we have given them against Gwidre's felons. They have yielded to insane fancies from the Continent! Now let our weapons reason with them!"

A clamor was heard among the peasants forming the rag-tag army.

"Death to the Magientists! Death to Reizh's traitors!" they repeated angrily.

Far away, on the opposite crest of Talamh's hills, the first flags with the neighboring Reizhite dukedom's colors appeared. Preceding that small army, three horsemen bearing white flags were approaching. Two emissaries of the Talkéride lord rode to meet them.

"The prince of Reizh demands that your Lordship withdraws his troops and let our Magientists carry on their research works in your domain. In the name of the alliances between our kingdom and Taol-Kaer's, your king gave us the authorization by edict. As his vassal, the duty of Sir Dagon is to abide by that edict and withdraw at once."

The Reizhite horseman had unrolled the parchment bearing Taol-Kaer's royal seal, which authorized the presence of Magientists in Talamh's vale. One of Lord Dagon's emissaries raised his helmet's visor and revealed a scarred face. He pointed to the horseman from Reizh with his gauntleted hand and said with a loud voice:

"The king of Taol-Kaer is not here to see the poison your cursed Magientists pour in their wake! As soon as he knows, he will send Hilderin knights here to reason with you! Withdraw at once and never come back to this valley or it shall become your graveyard!"

In the Talkéride ranks, soldiers and peasants saw the two knights of their lord gallop back. There had been little doubt on the outcome of the negotiations-the battle would certainly happen. There would be a few moments of waiting, to see if the Reizhites would decide to withdraw, before sounding the charge.



Chapter I
Taol-Kaer

Dearest Father,

Here is the news you expected from me. The first days of my journey have been rather hectic, and I only now have the time to settle at a table, to put the following down in writing. I am very proud that among all your children, you chose me to go meet the king in person in the capital city of our kingdom, and in spite of the hazardous journey, I will prove worthy of such a task.

The Drawbacks of Independence

Sire,

I do not blame the sages of the council of Seòl for their wanting independence, but it would seem it has triggered unexpected aftereffects. As a member of this council, it is my duty to inform you of my most urgent concerns. The pressure of the merchant guilds on the policies of this town is becoming worrying. I mean no offense, but your liberality toward them has greatly contributed to that. The council is aware of the interests at stake, but is worried about the consequences. Will our town fall under the thumb of a few greedy merchants when we have just started to free ourselves from the yoke of the capital city?

Your devoted,
Aenor Iben,
Patriarch of the Council

The Dukedom of Seòl

I left our magnificent city of Seòl on a beautiful spring morning, in the month of Giblean; I can still picture your face at the window of your reception room as I descended the stairs leading to the sail wagons' starting decks. As lord of our dukedom, you could not accompany me, for I know how precious your time is. Dealings with merchant princes, diplomacy with neighboring dukedoms, taxes, and the many administrative interferences monopolize all of it. Our high level of independence regarding Taol-Kaer's royal power grants us some liberties, but it also requires us to work on numerous fronts to keep it; which is what I am doing by going to meet the king himself.

Reaching the city's main square, I saw the source of our wealth, the origin of the dukedom's name as well as the town's: Seòl, "sail" in the ancients' language. Under the shadow of the fortified wall and of the great barbican protecting the city's entryway, sail wagons had been aligned. Their drivers were busy checking they were in working order while equipment crates from nearby warehouses were being packed. In order to avoid treacherous currents and monsters haunting the waters, I had opted for such a vehicle. Anyway, there were few boats, as the almost deserted and ill-frequented harbor showed.

The wagon I boarded was fast and small. Without freight and with few passengers, it would easily transport me. So, I found myself traveling

at a swift pace on the Gaineamh, the Great Beaches bordering the south of Seòl. I knew our dukedom was of modest size as its borders only encompass the city and its close surroundings; however, I was surprised when the driver announced before the end of the day that we already were in the dukedom of Gorm. The borders of the kingdom's lordships are hardly watched, except maybe in case of rivalries, as between Tuaille and Osta-Baille.

The Dukedom of Gorm

To my right, the steep and rocky mountains gave way to smoother slopes, covered with vegetation. I caught sight of the first groves of Mòr Forsair, the great forest that covers almost a third of the kingdom. We were moving swiftly on the sandy road, along great seaside beaches, but my mind was taking its time to wander through all the legends concerning the verdant landscape; the best, as well as the worst, is said about it, but I think no one could truthfully boast of knowing all of its secrets.

A Long-Standing Grudge

Sire,

As you asked me, I went to Tuaille's court in order to investigate with utmost secrecy. I was able to hear what was said in the shadows of the alleyways. Nobles from Tuaille still have not forgiven your ancestor, King Kailleach, for depriving their city of the status of the kingdom's capital city, nearly one hundred and fifty years ago today. The population also keeps the memory of it, and considers it a humiliation. This is why your authority is not as respected as it used to be in those lands.
Crossing the border of this dukedom bearing your colors means enduring the worst troubles, and everything is done to complicate the lives of your faithful servants. I do not think there is an actual rebellion brewing, but it would be good to put some order back in this region.

Your faithful,
Axel Cairnbi



Mòr Forsair

An immense, dense and legendary forest, made of broad-leaved and coniferous trees, Mòr Forsair covers a large part of the kingdom of Taol-Kaer. It is crossed by a stream, a tributary of the Tealderoth River. Very few dare to venture deep inside, apart from us Demorthèn who do not fear the numerous spirits of nature that dwell within. There, a human being can go back very close to his roots, to the nature that makes him live. Of course, the great forest is not only inhabited by spirits: many dangers lie in its depths, the dreadful Feondas among them.

Emerald Flux

"Yes, stranger, Flux is the energy Magientists draw from nature, an infamy in itself. In that forest's centuries-old trees flows a crystalline, olive-tinted sap. It is intolerable that Lord Blonag harms it so much with his sawmills' intensive exploitation. His subjects cut into wooded zones at a frightening pace, and nature will probably answer their aggressions violently. From what I know, Blonag, as respectful of the traditions as he may seem, deals with Daedemorthys and sells them those age-old trees that seem full of a Flux those monsters appreciate very much. A sordid trade flows with Reizh's unscrupulous merchants. Each morning on the sea's waters, you can see huge trunks drifting, emptied of their sap and vulgarly thrown away for lack of room to store them! This ignominy cannot last; the Demorthèn of the region must unite!"

-Taol-Kaer-



After a four-day journey, I was told we would make a two-day stop at Smàrag, the dukedom of Gorm's capital city. I was delighted at the idea of sleeping in a bed to relieve my aching body, for sail wagons are as uncomfortable as they are fast.

I took that pause as an opportunity to look around Smàrag, which could be a fine city, overshadowed by emerald slopes, if the sea wind blowing from the first lights of dawn did not carry nauseous emanations up from the harbor and the sewers in every street. Even worse is the sullenness of those bent under Lord Blonag's yoke. Here, he is secretly called "the pig" and is said to be as hideous as he is depraved. He has promoted slavery, hired a cruel militia that commits the worst exactions, and forces the inhabitants to work to exhaustion, without respite.

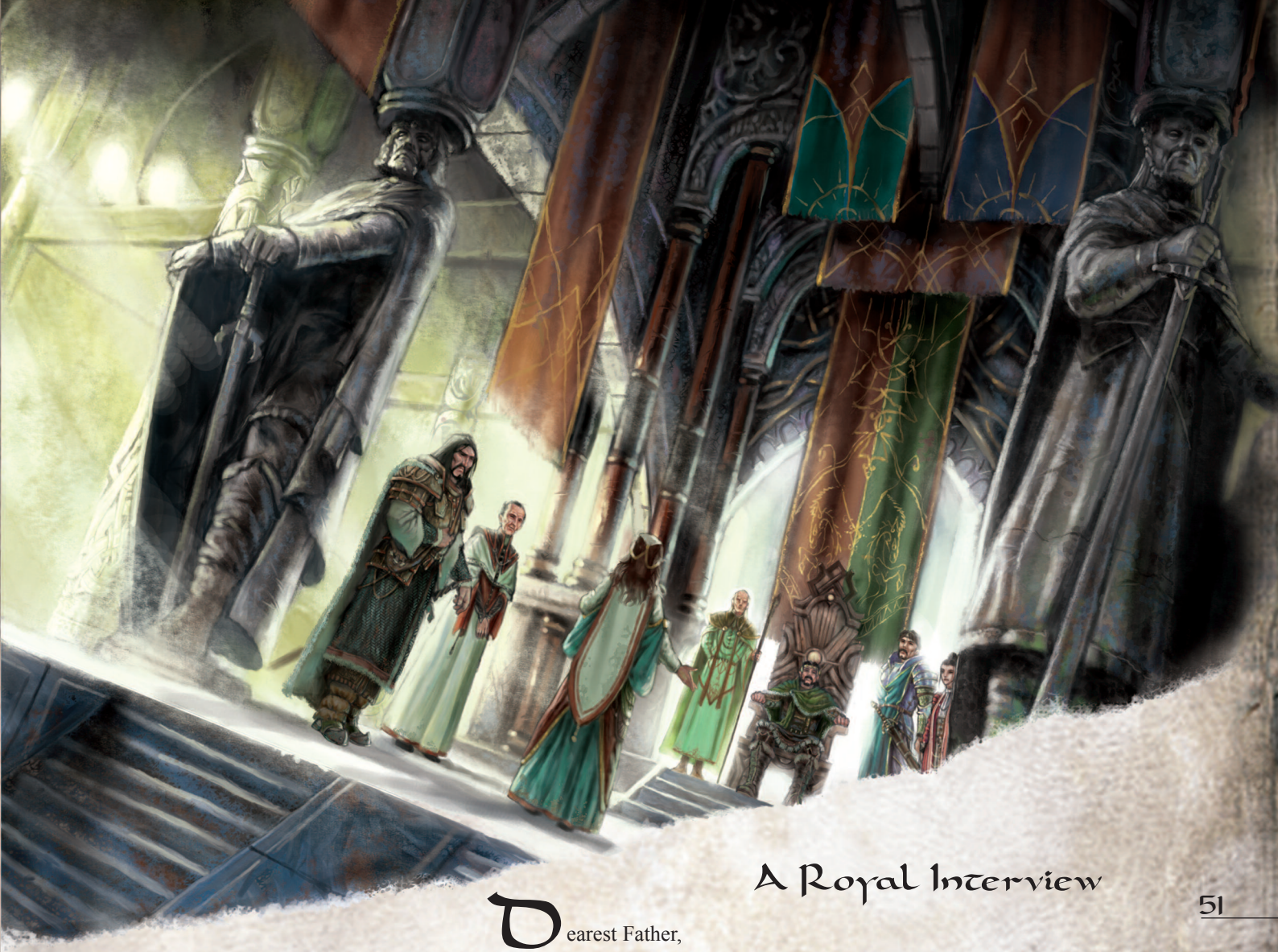
Gorm is our neighbor, and I will personally inform the king of what is happening, but I heard that Blonag pays sufficient taxes to the throne to be left alone. That dreaded lord has already survived two assassination attempts; I secretly hope the next one will succeed…
In the end, when I left, I did not mind going back to the wagon's discomfort and to the smell of spindrift.

The Dukedom of Osta-Baille

Koskan, a Corrupted City

Some time afterwards, I reached the dukedom of Osta-Baille, in which lies our kingdom's capital city, and which border extends to the end of the Great Beaches, after which rocky, boggy coasts take the place of long banks of sand. That is where Koskan stands, a town only sustained by the passage of sail wagons, travelers, and the transit of freight. I had planned to make only a quick stop here, just long enough to find a caravan leaving for the capital city or a Varigal agreeing to guide me. However, I have now been here for three weeks, and it is from here I write to you. The town is swarming with brigands of all kinds, taking advantage of the constant coming and going to perpetrate all sorts of crimes. I became aware of that when I was attacked, my light escort badly hurt, and all my possessions stolen. Believing in royal authority in the very dukedom of our nation's capital city, I went to see the watch. And I was disgusted to discover that here, everyone is corrupt. They considered me to be the troublemaker and threw me in jail! When they finally deigned to free me, I thought it better not to push my luck, but that situation will definitely be brought to the right ears! The daughter of Seòl's lord must not be treated that way! Still, I am now without money. I managed to find some food and to write you this letter, hoping that you can send me some help.

-Taol-Kaer-



A Royal Interview

Dearest Father,

I cannot thank you enough for the few soldiers and the Daols sent to Koskan. Thanks to them, I could leave that town. A raid in order from the Hilderin knights could restore some order there, but even they seem to have lost some of their pride in that region undermined by vices! Then, I traveled north-west, heading for the capital city, Osta-Baille. How happy I was to discover that captivating city I have heard so much about. Whatever ill may be said about them, Magientists are really capable of miracles; the architecture of that city is the most beautiful proof of that.

In the end, I was lucky enough to be received, only two days after my arrival, by King Erald Mac Anweald, direct descendent of one of the three founding brothers of the kingdom's peninsula, Taol-Kaer himself. What thrill! He is a tall man in the prime of life. In his veins flows the heritage of generations of respected sovereigns. I was very nervous, but his kindness reassured me. I could understand that our kingdom is in good hands, even if I had a few doubts about that during my journey. If the members of our dukedom's council could meet our king, maybe it would calm their desire for independence. Our sovereign remains very attached to the traditions that put him on the throne after his ancestors. He knows how to speak to people and be likable. I realized this in the course of our brief interview, wherein I transmitted your words of loyalty, but also your requests for a few additional liberties. Dear Father, I must confess that our king, in spite of his manifest goodness, looks very unfavorably upon such desires of autonomy. It is even said that in some communities of remote valleys, royal arms are trampled underfoot. The king angrily evoked that insult, and proclaimed in my presence that such an affront would be washed in blood.

Therefore, our council should moderate its thirst for independence. On that account, I do not know if our complaints regarding taxes will be accepted. Tomorrow, I must appear before the royal council, which will convey to me the answer; the king himself is very busy, and will probably not be able to receive me again. Consequently, I will finish this letter after this new interview, in order to inform you of the decision concerning your request.

-Taol-Kaer-

The Royal Council

Here, I can only confirm what you had implied: if anything is certain, it is that the king is very well seconded. He is wise enough not to think himself all-knowing and keeps a council to help him with difficult decisions. The court of Osta-Baille is composed of many princes and representatives of the various dukedoms. Most of them arrive during summer and only leave in the following spring, waiting for our peninsula's harsh winters to end before going back home. Then, others take over so that the previous ones can spend time among their people.
The royal council is made up of ten people, including the king and the queen, as well as the kingdom's most eminent personalities. You have told me about the most important of those advisors, who is of course a Demorthèn, a representative of our peninsula's centuries-old traditions. Algwich Dert is still the man you described to me, about fifty years old, but still very fit physically. It is said he regularly goes alone into the forest to meet the spirits of nature there. His voice is steady and his composure is well-known. I also caught sight of Queen Edena Mac Lichorl, a tall, charismatic woman who inspires a deep respect. The council is also composed of the king's younger brother, Gustin Mac Anweald, a warlord whose reputation goes beyond the kingdom's borders. That man has the responsibility of leading the armies of the dukedom of Osta-Baille, and the Hilderin knights are under his orders. He is as good a fighter as a strategist, but also a jovial person, surprisingly direct for someone belonging to such a noble lineage.

The other members of the royal council are relatives of the king and a few of the greatest aristocrats and scholars of the capital city. The sovereign is respectful of our traditions, but he must forget none of the peninsula's authorities. The court and even the royal council sometimes receive guests from Gwidre and Reizh. You obviously know that since King Kailleach, one of the council's seats has always been occupied by a Magientist. Our good king, who wishes to reconnect with Taol-Kaer's traditions, has abandoned that habit. However, Magientists are not totally excluded from the court, as the presence of Emalie Simil shows. This distinguished visitor, who is said to originate from the Continent, has been His Majesty's guest for almost two years. Her mysterious looks are accentuated by a pale face underlined by mauve Mekones undulating under her skin. I still cannot understand how Magientists can make Flux flow under the skin in such a way, which is said to be at the price of awful pains. In order to satisfy everyone, the king has even recently repeatedly invited a representative of the Temple to his council; Miryan Deckhir a priest renowned for his open-mindedness. Miryan knows how difficult the situation of the Temple is in our kingdom, and in spite of pressure from some high Gwidrite dignitaries, tries to pacify the tense situation at the border between Gwidre and Taol-Kaer. Among that cosmopolitan, varied court, I noticed a young woman of barely twenty years you had never told me about, who turned out to be the king's bard. She keeps in the background, her face covered by a strange elaborate domino mask, watching everyone with an amazingly profound stare.

Of the Temple's Influence in our Kingdom

Sire,
You asked for more information about the importance the Temple has taken in our society. Unfortunately, I have to admit we cannot disregard them in our good kingdom. I am afraid their influence will not stop growing, to the detriment of our Demorthèn traditions. However, our customs still live their heydays in rural regions. People from the Temple are generally very ill-received, and to question ancestral popular beliefs brings hostility. There are cases of missionaries of the Temple who have been driven away with stones, and even killed.
On the other hand, where people are more welcoming about new ideas, such as in our cities, the Temple settles more easily. The promise it makes of a better life after death gives hope to those who do not appreciate the idea of their being dispersing and joining the spirits of nature. It is wise of you to have invited a representative of the Temple, for their expansion is undeniable, and it is logical that this religion be represented at your court. However, you are also right to see the Temple as something that could undermine your authority; look at what is happening among our neighbors from Gwidre where the king has become a mere puppet. I can only encourage you to stay on your guard.

Your faithful,
Axel Cairnbi

In the end, the royal council has accepted your requests, allowing more freedom in the management of tax-collection in our dukedom. This promises good things for our city's trade! As I told you, our majesty looks suspiciously upon those who exhibit too great a thirst for independence. In exchange for that decree in our favor, he trusts our family to defend royal colors. As a token of goodwill, and to give you the time to sign the agreement in your hand, I am to accompany a diplomatic expedition to the dukedom of Tulg in order to meet the princes of that remote region. Therefore, this is my last letter from Osta-Baille. In a few days, I will set out to the north, but I hope to see you again as soon as possible, for I miss our land greatly.

An Alliance Mission

Sire,

Following the discussion we had with you yesterday evening, we have accepted the requests from the dukedom of Seòl. That small stretch of land only lives from trade and does not disturb our prerogatives. Should there be a revolt, Seòlians would be too few to pose any threat.
However, we thought it useful to solicit the Duke's daughter to join the mission to Tulg. As you have noticed, she possesses a natural charm and a certain knack for diplomacy, which will certainly help our emissaries. Moreover, she will be the proof that it is possible to obtain some independence while respecting your power. I hope her example will influence the lords of that dukedom.

Your devoted,
Argala Mac Firim

Dukedoms of the West

My Dearest Brother,
I hope this missive attached to the envelope for our father will reach you. Indeed, I have gathered in Osta-Baille all the information you desired for your upcoming great journey on the western coasts. What I have learned only confirms that it will suit you perfectly, with your love of great landscapes and lands left to nature. As you know, in the far western part of the kingdom, there are two dukedoms.

The Lands of Dèas

The Lands of Dèas are composed of Taol-Kaer's southwestern cape at the extremity of the peninsula. That region, much like its inhabitants' hearts, is hard to reach. The land is rocky, steep, and the landscapes have remained wild. The weather is turbulent there, and the lands are swept by northern and southern winds alike. I had been told about the inhabitants of Dèas as boors to whom civilization would do much good. However, after a meeting with a group of emissaries, I no longer believe such gossip. Those people, gathered in warrior clans, call themselves Osags and claim that they descend directly from the peninsula's most ancient inhabitants. They claim to carry the only unmixed blood of all Tri-Kazel, and they fiercely defend this belief. I advise you to be very careful with your words if you go there. Also avoid mentioning your link with royal authority, for it is very ill perceived in those regions. In the Lands of Dèas, an assembly of clan chiefs makes decisions. Demorthèn are very highly thought of, and are always asked for advice. The assembly chooses a leader among its members, who becomes the representative of the dukedom to foreigners; the position is currently occupied by clan chief Isean, a warrior known for his mysticism and respected by all.

Those traditional communities do not gather in great towns, but instead still live scattered around the whole region. Apparently, you can spend entire days traveling without meeting anyone; which does not mean you have not been noticed by the Osags. It is probably due to Demorthèn traditions being so strong that you can find the great Còmhlan there, the most important of ritual stone circles in the whole peninsula. It is said that hundreds of rune-engraved stones stand in concentric circles there, and that Demorthèn from the whole of Tri-Kazel go there for reasons only they know. Still in the same region, I advise you to go to Hòb's Cape, the peninsula's very extremity where ancient Tarishes are supposed to have landed many centuries ago. I know not whether it is still possible to find traces of their arrival.

The Dukedom of Salann Tir

Right at the north of Dèas is the dukedom of Salann Tir, the country of salty lands, facing the ocean. There, the lands and men alike are slightly less harsh than in Dèas, although the two dukedoms look very alike. Unlike Dèas, the royal power was able to establish a firmer grip in that region. A governor named by the king himself endeavors to maintain the unity of the clans under the colors of Osta-Baille; he lives in a castle overhanging a little village in front of the sea, which houses a garrison of Hilderin knights. I was told you could see immense saltmarshes, which make the fortune of a few cultivators. However, more generally, Salann Tir is a rather poor dukedom.

I have learned from the other members of our delegation that the current governor is a theoretician who was schooled at the capital city, a very intelligent but still inexperienced man. Nobody questions his willingness, but many find him incompetent and he is accused of being the cause of the last famine because of his poor management of resources.

I cannot but advise you to visit Tùrsal's alignments, long files of ritual rune-engraved stones. It is said it is a mystical place, venerated and protected by the neighboring clans. Numerous legends are told about it, such as the one saying that the ritual stones are actually a huge army that was petrified by monstrous creatures during the Aergewin.

The City of Tuaille

"Our city may have been abandoned by the royal court, but we can still be proud of it. From a mere fishermen village settled in the Klaedhin's estuary, our ancestors have made it one of Tri-Kazel's greatest fishing ports, thanks to the calmer waters in the bay formed by the delta, among other things. Beyond our doors stretch the Amhan Glas, the gray bogs, which make for a very effective natural defense. Of course, there is a paved road bordering the Klaedhin and leading to Osta-Baille, but it is already congested with caravans and travelers. Therefore, attacking us massively and by surprise is impossible. It will take a lot of courage for those blasted Hilderin knights to come and enforce their royal order in our region!

Tuaille is an architectural wonder. Throughout the centuries, our people have claimed land from the marshes by building numerous constructions on stilts. The old districts, corresponding to the former fishermen village, are high-built, whereas canals allowing boats access to houses and shops cross the most recent districts.

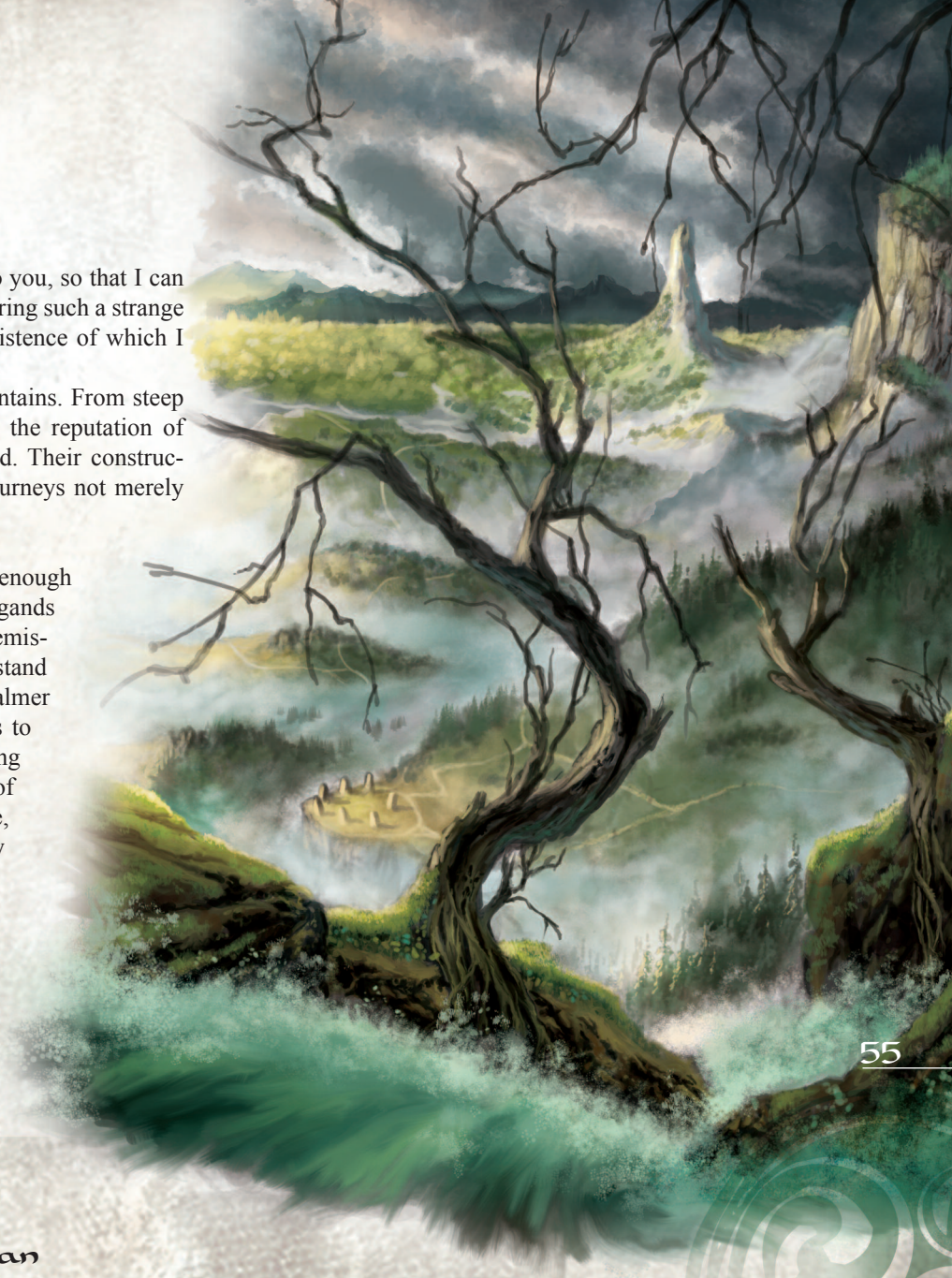
We must remind the king where he comes from; where his power took root. Our action will steadily gain ground. Tuaille will again be the capital city of Taol-Kaer, or will be the one of a new kingdom!"



In the Heart of the Kingdom

Dear Father,
I am happy I can finally write to you, so that I can tell you what happened to me during such a strange journey. I have discovered places the existence of which I did not even suspect.
From Osta-Baille, we went into the mountains. From steep walls to sunken valleys, I realized how the reputation of those who built our bridges was justified. Their constructions are omnipresent, and they make journeys not merely easier, but basically possible.

We have traveled riding Caernides, with enough armed men in our group to keep most brigands away. Discussing with the king's noble emissaries I was accompanying, I could understand that their role was to make the situation calmer in the dissident dukedom of Tulg. So as to limit the risks, the Varigal who was guiding us made certain we could spend most of our nights in inhabited places. Therefore, we slept in remote villages, surrounded by simple palisades, or sheltered in fortresses sometimes amazingly hanging from almost vertical walls.



The Dukedom of Dùlan

After a few days of traveling, we went into the dukedom of Dùlan. Actually, nothing indicated that we had crossed any border as we traveled. However, I was told we were now on the lands of Lord Làn Mac Torrach, who descends from a lineage of the king's cousins. He is a hard, extremely strict man, so much so that in his lands, laws are enforced in an implacable and cruel way. The lord and the royal banner are feared, and public executions, as well as torture, are common. The slightest sign of insubordination can have dramatic consequences. Consequently, Mac Torrach is hated and feared by part of his people, but respected by his army. He was described to me as a muscular and rather impressive man, a warrior capable of cutting a head off with a single slash. I could witness the application of his law of iron and blood with my own eyes. In a village where we had spent the night, we were awakened before dawn by cries. A young man the whole village liked, very poor and resourceless, had picked apples in the garrison's field. It was without further prosecution that that the guards hung him high, claiming that mankind was attacked too often from the outside to have to bear with thieves and traitors.
A powerful and loyal ally of the king, Mac Torrach often receives financial and military aid from the capital city. Truth be told, this is likely because his land shares a lengthy border with Gwidre. Although the war is long over, there are still tensions. Come to that, even if our course distanced us from the border zone, I could see the stigmata of the War of the Temple: there is a good number of ruined fortresses and deserted communities in the region. We went out of our way to avoid a valley covered with tumuli; a burial ground where victims of a terrible battle from that time rest. It is said that the spirits of deceased warriors haunt the place and that sorcerers wander among the cairns in order to carry out obscure rituals. I did not feel much like verifying the truth of those rumors and I was glad we circumnavigated the place. It remains that in the bottom of my heart, I keep some uneasiness from it, and something like a light black veil passes before my eyes each time I remember that dark cavity.

The Dukedom of Tulg

When we were through Siagal's col, the mountainside grew smoother, disappearing far away into the deep forests, revealing the ocean's colors. At the north, the Kreizhdour's course takes the shape of an azure snake, marking the border with Gwidre. That is where we entered the dukedom of Tulg. From the col, one can easily understand, through the landscape and its multitude of barely accessible valleys, the mentality of that territory's inhabitants. Indeed, each community lives according to its own rhythm and in its own way, looking to preserve its independence and to increase its self-sufficiency. Of course, there are a few exceptions, such as that village named Fearil where we spent the night. The Mac Govrian family was totally decimated there, and Hilderin knights from the capital city have taken their prerogatives back. Further on, the lands of Mac Eald's tribes stretch along the river and the border with Gwidre.

I want to dwell a little more upon one place that marked me during our journey, an abandoned Magientist factory we saw from afar. There were a few big warehouses covered with metallic sheets for roofs, as well as several great silos. In places, metallic sticks protruded from the earth, and we could see large girders and rusted mechanisms littering the ground. No one has ventured there in ten years, for the place is said to be haunted by dreadful malevolent spirits, and considering what Magientists are capable of, I can believe it.

Our descent to the dukedom's capital city took a few days. Tulg Naomh is built on the mountains' spurs, facing the sea and the forests below. Built with rocks from the region's cliffs, it is called The Stairway City. The name of the dukedom, which means "rock" in the ancient tongue, actually comes from it. Indeed, the town is composed of many levels, manmade throughout the centuries. Beyond its walls, other terraces stretch, covered with farming plots that supply most of the inhabitants. We have been received by Princess Cortessa Mac Lichorl, Duchess of Tulg, sister of the Queen of Taol-Kaer, and I quickly understood how complex her task in those lands was. What ruler could manage to unite those communities in a lasting way? The representatives of the various regions of the dukedom form an astonishing, mixed assembly. I could understand that plots and betrayals were very common, and that the princess had already avoided several poisoning attempts. I will not dwell further upon the discussions between our delegation and the princess, as some secrets have no place in a letter. Still, the situation here remains very tense.

Magientist Ruins

Your Highness,

I have investigated that ruin of a Magientist factory that is rumored to be haunted. I witnessed with my own eyes that under cover of darkness, people gather there. Dressed with costumes masking their identities, they intone morbid songs around esoteric circles. Most likely, it is a sect of sorcerers and we have here the answers to the strange glows and to the numerous disappearances reported by the inhabitants of the neighboring vales. It may be, Your Excellence, the occasion for you to put to the test the good intentions of Vector Saerën, recently arrived at Tulg Naomh. In Gwidre, religious of the Temple tirelessly hunt down those kind of sectarians; I am certain Saerën would be glad to rid our dukedom of such a threat.

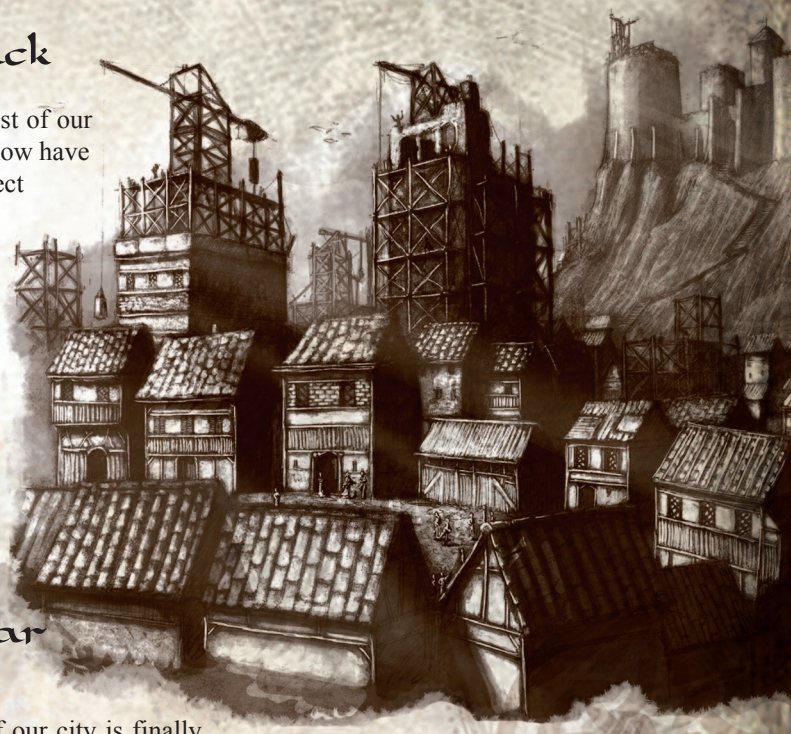
Your faithful servant,

Arym



Preparations for Coming Back

That detour through Tulg, accomplished in the interest of our good relations with the throne, having gone well, I now have to organize my return journey. It seems the most direct way goes through the dukedom of Kel Loar and its windy hills exposed to currents from the littoral. I am glad to leave the more brutish and primitive regions I have crossed and return to civilized provinces. I think I will make a stop at the ducal capital city, which gave the dukedom its name, to visit its famous library which is said to be gigantic. The duke of Kel Loar's open-mindedness and culture are reputed in the whole peninsula. The many intellectuals who have decided to settle in that city are proof of a tradition of the mind.



The Reconstruction of Kel Loar

Dear Friend,
I wanted to announce to you that the restoration of our city is finally almost over. It is now twenty years ago that a Feond raid of unprecedented violence ravaged the city. The Feondas were so numerous that the entire valley was swarming, as if invaded by worms. The slaughter, perpetrated by several of those frightening mask-bearers, was truly horrendous. The survivors' accounts tell that the Feondas had various shapes and sizes, each as monstrous as the others. The walls did not hold. The buildings were torn down, trampled, burnt. The inhabitants were massacred without any distinction. I had just succeeded my father as head of the dukedom, and after that catastrophe, I was distraught, convinced that I could never bring the town back. Then, the Magientists came to help us. Even before the tragedy, they bestowed their gifts upon us, in spite of the controversies it spawned elsewhere in the kingdom. They planned the reconstruction of essential infrastructures, making use of their science and techniques so that the town could rise from its ashes in a reasonable timeframe. These last twenty years were long, but we are reaching our goal, and Kel Loar is even more beautiful than before. Our population can be proud of itself; its efforts were not fruitless.
One day you will come to visit our town to see the buildings that still stand, such as our library or the palace. But you will also see the still-visible marks of the ravages caused by the Feondas, such as Jeath's windmill. Today, it is nothing more than a strange ruin; a structure of steel poles and beams with which lush vegetation intertwines. It is unfortunate, for the Magientist mechanisms it held performed wonders.
I am glad I can therefore invite you again and show you around our new city.

Your friend,
Edgar Corann

I would also like to stop at Eschen, along the coast. You probably know of that mysterious islet, at least by reputation. From the coast, it can only be reached at low tide, when a small rock path assembled by former inhabitants appears. The rest of the time, Eschen is cut off from the world by an arm of the sea in which no one would dare to sail, for its surroundings are almost always covered with a thick white mist that no eyes can pierce.
I would really like to see the circle of stones standing on that islet. I have been told Demorthèn hold a traditional cult there, accompanied with bloody sacrifices in the honor of wild spirits of nature. I have also been told that Feondas have never laid foot on Eschen and that the only people who attempted to settle there have disappeared, leaving behind them their small, empty house less than a year after their arrival.

However, Father, I will not dawdle on my return journey, and I will be delighted to see you again. This is my last letter. I will tell you of many more things directly. Altogether, I have found this journey to be very enriching. Moreover, I was proud to act on your behalf, and I hope I have represented you in the best way.

-Taol-Kaer-

It has been six months since I received that last letter, and my daughter Aoda still has shown no sign of life. The men I could afford to dispatch have lost her trail in the heart of the mountains, near a small village named Terkhên. Since then, nothing. I am in despair. Her escort, as well as the Varigal who accompanied her, have also disappeared. My fears run high. However, even if she is dead, I want to know. There is nothing worse than uncertainty. How foolish of me to send her on mission like that! I ask of you, Lady Edel, help me find my daughter!

Angus Mac Iseanor

Cartography of Taol-Kaer

Dear Brother,

Here is a copy of the map I have referred to during my journey. It is fairly useful, although it is incomplete. I have added several annotations, thanks to many discussions in the capital city and on the road about places which I was not able to see with my own eyes, or which I have not given much detail on. Unfortunately, I could not find more accurate maps of the dukedoms of the west and south which interest you so much.

Take care of yourself, Your sister

Ahman Glas:
The gray bogs are rightly named after their depressing atmosphere and the miasmas of their thick mists. Their waters are full of fish, and also abound with edible plants of all kinds. Unfortunately, many Feondas hiding among the reeds lie in wait for unwary travelers.

Aisir Ceòmhor (the mistway):
Travelers progress along the cliffside following a long chain made of corroded bronze, linking stones that look like they date back to utmost antiquity. Each stone is engraved with Ogham glorifying the air spirit Adhar, who nevertheless seems indisposed to dissipate the surrounding mists: they are so thick it is often impossible to see your own hand at arm's length.

Brégan:
Although its lord bears the title of Duke, everyone knows that Brégan is only one small town among others. However, for about a century, many glassblowers have settled there. Indeed, they favor that welcoming village over the corrupted city of Koskan, and I completely understand their point of view, believe me. Their presence has done wonders for the duke's coffers, and he shows himself at the royal court more than his predecessors.

Caiginn:
This bordering village was attacked, taken over, and taken back again no less than six times during the War of the Temple. In the end, Feondas slaughtered the last soldiers who were still there. Nobody remembers whether those poor men wore Gwidre or Taol-Kaer's colors. The village was rebuilt and fortified because of its strategic position, but often, Feondas still attack its outer walls.

Castle of the Reeds:
A solitary tower and a few wall sections are all that remain of an ancient castle, whose founder has been forgotten along with his reasons for building it in the middle of the swamps. The place is reputed to be haunted but constitutes one of the few refuges for those who venture into the Western Swamps.

Deanaidh:
The only true town of the Lands of Dèas, Deanaidh is a neutral place where Osag clans gather when they trade and when their chiefs establish new alliances. A few merchants from the rest of the kingdom also go there.

Faol Ròd (the Wolf's Breach):
An old Osag tale says that every twenty years, a virtuous warrior must fight a huge wolf covered with thorns and barbs in this narrow pass. The Osags say that no hero has ever survived the fight, but that their sacrifice drives the monster away from travelers coming to Deanaidh from the dukedoms of the east.

Fearil:
A small lumberjack village dominated by the fortress of Smiorail, which guards one of the main roads between Taol-Kaer and Gwidre.

Kaer Daegis:
A small but quite important town, the wood industry of which is well-known in the region, particularly at Kel Loar. You got to see a few samples of the furniture they make in Father's audience room.

Llewellen:
This village, populated with fishermen and salt workers, is the capital city of Salann-Tir, a rather poor dukedom. Its inhabitants are said to be sober, serious, and trustworthy. The ducal castle is an old fortress occupying a nearby cliff, dominating the whole bay.

Ruel's Crossroads:
Named in memory of a Demorthèn who died there in antiquity, when he sacrificed himself to stop an immense Feond that stood "higher than a treetop". A standing stone marks the place where the courageous Demorthèn supposedly fell.

Sad Hills:
According to tales, the villages and towns of the Buidh Cuidearn were suddenly depopulated during the Ice Era. Whether Feondas or an epidemic exterminated the survivors, nobody really knows. There are still adventurous prospectors who come from Koskan and look for ancient iron and copper mines. Whether their efforts are crowned with success or not is another matter.

Sunken Forest:
Bordered by the gray bogs, it is known for its trees with snaking roots and unhealthy foliage, as well as for the numerous Feondas hiding there.

Terkhên:
A fortified village of strategic importance, since no less than four roads lead there. Certainly the most essential agglomeration of the Dukedom of Tulg, after its capital city.

Tilliarch:
Their apple trees are not the finest–far from it–but ancient secrets that make Tilliarch's cider a truly delicious drink are passed down from father to son.

Yellow Hills (Buidh Meall):
The southern wind brings huge amounts of sand here, and moreover, local vegetation is rather rare and stunted. In Seòl, we have established a long time ago that the fabled gold veins, which supposedly gave their name to those hills, do not exist. However, you would be surprised by the number of people at the capital city who believe the opposite.



Legend — Towns · Noteworthy places · Roads · Paths · Border

1. Ahman Glas
2. Aisir Ceòmhor
3. Brégan
4. Caiginn
5. Castle of the Reeds
6. Deanaidh
7. Faol Ròd
8. Fearil
9. Kaer Daegis
10. Llewellen
11. Ruel's Crossroads
12. Sad Hills
13. Sunken Forest
14. Terkhên
15. Tilliarch
16. Yellow Hills



Chapter 1
Osta-Baille

Dear Brother,
You will find in this letter all the documents I could gather about Osta-Baille. I hope they will be useful to you in making preparations for your journey. As you must suspect, nobody here at Gouvran has seen this city with his own eyes, and only a few Varigals have occasionally brought us news from this faraway region. I have even written down for you the story told by one of them who claimed he had met someone named Edwick, a famous bard in Osta-Baille. As manager of our town's small library, I was able to go through all the archives and discover some interesting documents. I also learned that nearly twenty years ago, a member of the Maorl family from Gouvran, Ugaïd Maorl, made the journey to Osta-Baille. His old father told me about it.
Their son had become a Varigal; he was barely sixteen when he left our Gwidrite community to undertake an incredible journey. So as not to cross the dangerous mountains of the Mòr Roimh, he had planned to follow the coastline until reaching Hòb's Cape and then to make his way to the Talkéride city of Tuaille. From there, he was to go upstream to reach the famous capital city of Taol-Kaer. His journey would have lasted more than four months. Unfortunately, after his last letter sent from Osta-Baille, which you will find enclosed, he was never heard from again.
I was also able to get another letter, an anonymous one. There is no manner of appraising the veracity of its words. Be careful and remember the fate of Ugaïd!
Take care of yourself, my brother.

May the Creator protect you,
Preden

History of the City

Please approach, bold travelers from everywhere in Tri-Kazel, approach! My name is Edwick and I will be your guide in Osta-Baille, approach! Before taking you throughout the steep streets of the city, I must tell you of its origin, so that you can best understand the importance of Taol-Kaer's capital city.

Birth

Do I have your full attention? Good! Then let us start from the beginning: the birth of Osta-Baille. It was long ago, a time the people of our kingdom still sing of and celebrate. Scattered clans lived in these mountains. One of them would take a crucial importance; its people lived in the small village of Klardel. Safely set on a high plateau, the community prospered, far from the threat of the creatures prowling around the mountains. Then came the day when three brothers were born, sons of the clan's chief. They were named Reizh, Gwidre, and Taol-Kaer. You all know this story, don't you? Who does not know of the epic tale of these heroes who left to found the Three Kingdoms? Our king, Taol-Kaer, spent his life serving that high purpose, but he always kept the village that had seen his birth close to his heart. That is why he returned here to spend his last days, after abdicating in favor of his son who was reigning from the city of Tuaille. Some of his close relations followed him in his last great journey, and together, they extended the size of Klardel, supervising monumental works such as the construction of the first bridges hanging over the chasms.

Osta-Baille

As the years went by, the population of Klardel increased and the plateaus became crowded, even though people had resorted to tall buildings. In 245, a particularly icy winter struck this region of Taol-Kaer. A great number of neighboring mountaineers, running from the cold, came to take refuge in Klardel, a town better equipped to endure the severity of winter. A new district, built through collective effort to shelter the people from the mountains, was quickly established. It emerged under the high plateau bearing the original village, on the banks of the lake formed by the Klaedhin. Its new inhabitants named it Osta-Baille Guerdie, which means "Under the city looking upon the world" in the ancient tongue.

The Ansailéir of that time thought that name sounded good, and that it actually would be appropriate for a new agglomeration, more important than the old Klardel. After many stormy debates, the town was renamed Osta-Baille. The increasing population made the extension of the city necessary. Everyone, whether Klardelite or mountaineer, put his heart into such a work and many trees were cut down for the construction of houses and for firewood. Over the centuries, attacks and disasters followed, but each time, the city emerged stronger. The most outstanding period was probably when Magister Athaontù undertook colossal projects, which made our town one of the most beautiful of all Tri-Kazel. A few years later, in the year 758, King Kailleach designated Osta-Baille as Taol-Kaer's capital city.



Lár an Baille

The year 857 was a tragic one for Tri-Kazel, for it was at that time that the three kingdoms waged war against each other. The following year the Gwidrite armies, disciplined and more numerous than expected, invaded Taol-Kaer, their incursion reaching as far as Osta-Baille. The faithful of the One God besieged the capital city for several weeks, but to little avail; the assailants had reached the harbor, under the plateaus, but could not take the higher levels. The capital city was self-sufficient, having plenty of water and food in its underground reserves. It resisted the Temple's men, and after a siege with heavy casualties, its inhabitants drove the enemy away.

Many deeds of valor were accomplished during the War of the Temple, in which valiant Ostians of both genders made themselves famous in front of Gwidre's armies. Their tales are told in the "Lár an Baille", the songs Ostian bards created to perpetuate those legends. The people hold in high esteem those warriors who showed bravery, cunning, and strength in the face of the adversity of war.

The Ansailéir

Osta-Baille is led by an Ansailéir who guarantees the town's prosperity. This title comes from the ancient tongue our ancestors spoke and means "guardian". Traditionally, Ansailéir were clan chiefs and had a seat at a community's council. This title is still borne among Osag clans and most of the villages still use it. In important cities, this title is conferred by the king to the person who will be in charge of administrating the town. Angwulf Eober is the capital city's current Ansailéir.

Dear parents,

I have reached my destination. The journey that took me to Osta-Baille was a long and, I confess, laborious one; during these four months, the hardships of the road have tired me. However, my morale soared when I saw the great gates of the lakeside harbor. I am truly impressed by this city that I have been told so much about, and where I had never set foot before. Since I know you never had the chance to gaze at Osta-Baille with your own eyes, I have written my first observations on the city. Of course, I still have much to discover.

The Port

To reach the docks of Osta-Baille, I embarked at Tuaille on a ship named "The Plower" and on which we sailed upstream on the Klaedhin. In some places, the banks of the river have been widened so that two large ships can pass at the same time. But I will not dwell upon the details of my journey and will instead tell you about my arrival. From afar, Osta-Baille is very imposing, justifying with its size and its architecture its status as a great city of Tri-Kazel. When I arrived, the sun was timidly casting its winter-weakened rays on the open gates of the capital city's harbor. Sails down, numerous ships were anchored in the lake and I was lucky enough to see the "Mórgacht", the boat of Taol-Kaer's king. Bân's lake is moon-round, and the harbor takes the form of a crescent on a good part of its periphery.

Welcomed by the unceasing roar of the Deoïr, that never-ending waterfall belched from the mountain's bowels, I remember I was sprinkled with thin droplets when I finally set foot on firm ground. The harbor in itself was swarming with people, travelers, merchants, idlers, or workers coming and going at a steady pace. I learned very quickly that the Arweal family was controlling the docks, for as soon as I arrived, one of its members came to us to record our names in his sizeable ledger. I remember very well his hoarse voice when he asked us about our business and how long we expected to stay in town. He also informed us of a few rules about how we were supposed to behave in town before giving us a pass, which is mandatory to go around freely. It is possible to get one at any entrance of the city, as long as you do not pose a threat to public order. Should you come to visit me one day, remember than you must not leave the areas open to strangers, or you will be sanctioned. Ostians care for their security as well as for their secrets. I could feel people here were somewhat distrustful; but considering the way things are nowadays, who could blame them?

As a Varigal, I did not simply come to visit this city. I had to look for a certain Master Iarann to deliver a small package to him. I think my first ordeal was to find him in that huge city clinging to the mountain. Once I had some information, I knew I had to go to the Scholars' district; however, to reach it, I had to go through almost the entire city. At least that is what I thought.

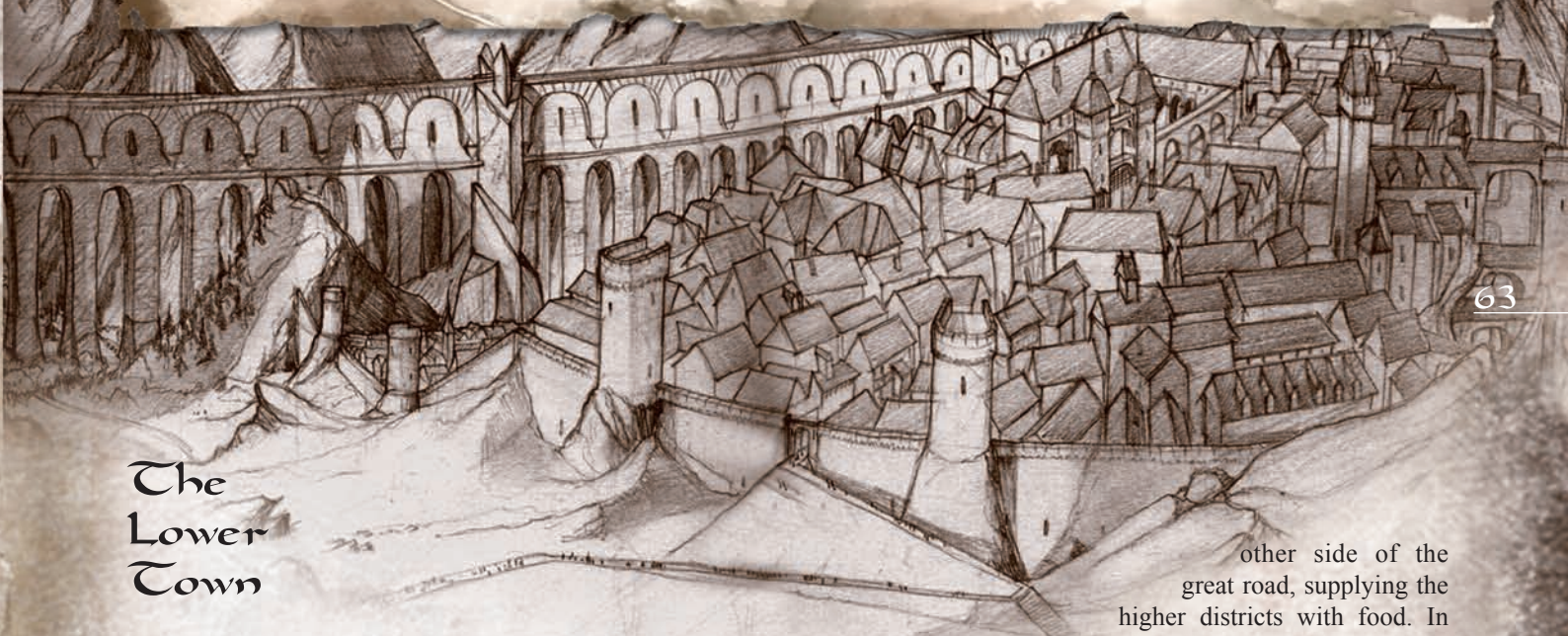
Bân's Company

Note from Preden:

Here is what I found about the Arweal family previously mentioned by Ugaïd. I do not know if such information is still relevant. Make good use of it.

"Born in upper middle-class and leading Bân's company, the Arweal family is at the head of one of Osta-Baille's most powerful guilds and owns the greatest fleet of merchant ships. Currently led by its patriarch Erman Arweal, a robust man with graying hair, the Company appears to be diversifying its activities. It is said to be in contact with various organizations such as the Temple, or Reizh's Magientists. Is it merely gossip spread by competitors, or reality? No one can confirm either version since the Arweal family jealously keeps its secrets. The other striking personality of that family is probably Erman's daughter, Milena Arweal. This young, slender woman is an unrivalled navigator, and is said to be fascinated by adventure and the finding of treasures lost in the deeps. For that matter, the methods she uses to access them remain subject to many rumors and some say she makes use of Magience.

The Arweal family is trusted by the king and enforces security by controlling the arrivals of ships and travelers. This authority and supremacy are envied and contested by numerous rival guilds. The guild of the Mac Niadan family, a powerful ship owner specialized in the escort of vessels transporting travelers or cargo, can be mentioned as an example."



The Lower Town

I followed a long street starting from the docks, which the locals call Osbeal. If I understood correctly, it means "way leading to the sky". It forms a semicircle going through the entire lower town, cutting across Céad and Thabaïr, the two streets coming from the town's gates.

The Osbeal has been built to facilitate traffic within the lower town and to allow quick access to Osta-Baille's harbor and entries. Fifteen yards wide, it allows the larger caravans to circulate easily. It is paved and serviced by a very efficient sewer system dating from the town's rebuilding after the Second Plague, when it was devastated by terrible floods.

The lower town is a city within the city, where one can find all of life's necessities. Most of its inhabitants descend from the mountaineers who established themselves there in the past, or from the people who have come to settle as the years went by. The great majority of those who live here are farmers, breeders, and craftsmen. They keep the capital city alive with their produce: they farm the vast fields on the other side of the great road, supplying the higher districts with food. In Osta-Baille, you could spend your entire life only in this district, without ever having to go up to the plateaus.

After following the Osbeal and Céad, I arrived at the base of one of the two massive peaks bearing Dïol and Trádáil, the two highest districts. The great stairs leading to Dïol have been dug in the rock during the first years of the town's creation. I can hardly imagine the thousands of people who have climbed them through the past centuries. More than one must have lost his breath during the ascension before the Magientists, then under the direction of Athaontú, built great machines capable of quickly going up and down from the lower town to the higher town. To do so, they dug the rock and created a clever system with pulleys and counterweights, the details of which I will spare you. Anyhow, thanks to this, it is possible to quickly carry heavy loads up or down. Likewise, inhabitants can make it to the higher districts in great numbers without having to undertake a tiresome climb.



Dïol's elevators

Designed by Athaontú, the elevators are machines with a carrying capacity of about fifty people or a great quantity of merchandise. There are three of them and they are maintained by workers trained by Magientists. In spite of their vigilance, it sometimes happens that one or two of these devices break down.

Anyone wanting to go on an elevator has to pay two ember Daols. This symbolic sum, paid to the Magientists, ended up bringing wealth to the shops where the elevators' worn out parts are repaired. Located next to Dïol's stairs, these shops face the annoyance of the residents who put up with the noise and pollution of the works going on there. The shops are gathered in a great warehouse watched by a private militia in the pay of the Magientists. The hangar itself is filled with a heap of machines, of various materials, and of spare parts stocked or even abandoned. More than thirty people are employed there.

Suspected of using the money gathered from the exploitation of the elevators to finance occult researches and experimentations, Dïol's Magientists have quite a bad reputation in the capital city. Primus Ector, a gaunt, untalkative man, currently manages their shops.

The Higher Town

The buildings' architecture and the very design of the streets are different according to the city's districts and correspond to the various phases of urbanization. The habitations built on the two plateaus are, for lack of surface area, tall buildings, which led to new storeys progressively being added to the houses. Bridges have been built to link some of them and in the end, viaduct streets were constructed. The whole thing looks messy, and seems to remain standing thanks to some unknown miracle. However, set your mind at rest, dear parents, it seldom occurs that one of those edifices crumbles, at least not naturally.

Dïol is the not-to-be-missed district, the one where strangers mingle with the population. It is the district of travelers and festivities where you laugh and cry, and where alcohol intoxicates Ostians during long party nights. Here, you can find many taverns with owners and waitresses who will gladly welcome strangers as well as Ostians. Actually, this is the only district in which the former have the right to stay to sleep and feast. Speaking about Dïol, I have to tell you about the famous Architects' Square. It is said that at the time of the construction works undertaken by Athaontù, the workers and taskmasters gathered at this square, where many pubs and inns have settled. Today, it is a favored place for passing travelers in Osta-Baille. I also saw a few buildings of interesting architecture, such as what Ostians call an amphitheatre: a semicircular stage located below stairs called "tiers" welcoming the public. The best bards play here, and I already had the occasion to spend some very pleasant evenings here.

I had the opportunity to cross a good number of cities since I left Gouvran and I must say I have never seen a city as safe as Osta-Baille. Between the guards and the Hilderin knights, rogues keep a low profile. However, I have noticed the soldiers are somewhat nervous, which could be explained by rumors of twisted creatures and Feondas, roaming at night and emerging from the sewers. No one is able to offer proof of such stories, but people are truly worried. I have been formally advised not to go out when night has fallen on the city, and I noticed that the windows of many houses have bars on the first floor.

The Modern Osta-Baille

Rebuilt after the Second Plague, the modern Osta-Baille was conceived at the time by the visionary Athaontú. A resolutely modern city, the means required for its remaking were the most important in the history of Taol-Kaer. Osta-Baille has a feeling of Magientist modernity, drawn from the cities of Reizh. It abounds with small revolutions making the lives of the Ostians easier. Sewers, elevators, viaducts, Nebulars, so many innovations that, for that matter, are so rare in the rest of Taol-Kaer. The most beautiful of those accomplishments is certainly the unseen one: the water-conveying system. Athaontú put in place a system using hidden pipes to bring from the heart of Deoïr's falls the water necessary to supply the city.
Since the coronation of King Mac Anweald and his resolute policy for a return to traditions, Magientists have lost a lot of their prestige. Although everybody appreciates the advances they have brought, many people speak of their disdain for the peninsula's ancestral beliefs and traditions. Their official presence being reduced, Magientists keep a very low profile and you can seldom be seen wearing their distinctive clothes in the streets of the capital city.

To me, the bridge linking Dïol with Trádáil is one of this world's wonders. Inspired by Magientist realizations, it is about a hundred yards long and looks down on the lower town. Clinging to the imposing mountain peaks like a spider to its web, it looks like it can resist anything. At its extremities, guards stop passers-by to know of their destination and check the passes they received when they entered the city. My Varigal status allowed me to cross the bridge without much trouble to go into the part of the town forbidden to strangers.

There, I was entrusted to Toscaires, people hired to take visitors in charge. The one who led me to my destination was named Erildin, and we very quickly took a liking to each other. I think I befriended him, and I hope I can introduce him to you one day.

Trádáil is the district of trades and guilds. The buildings are more recent than in Dïol as they were rebuilt after the Second Plague. Relatively unpopulated and abounding with large avenues and squares, it is a place of flea markets, trades, and bazaars. Moreover, a good portion of the guilds have a branch there, so as to be represented in the capital city.
In Osta-Baille, vegetation is a rare thing. Although the houses are often covered with a green moss, its growth favored by the ambient humidity, there are few trees and flowers. That is why the Ansailéir had three great gardens built in Trádáil, where you can find incredible specimens of the Talkéride flora. Those gardens are, I was told, a place where conspirators meet, but also the favored spot of courtesans. The district of Trádáil is the place to go for all of those who come to do business in Osta-Baille. It is very likely that if you are looking for any merchandise or product, you will find what you seek.



Taol-Kaer's Grave

If there is one place to see in Osta-Baille, majestic and bathed in a supernatural aura, it surely is Taol-Kaer's grave, located right in the center of Trádáil. Seven aligned rocks form a cromlech circling a huge marble slab on which is written in the tongue of old: "The hero sleeps the sleep of the just, and shall come back when time crumbles."
A mysterious sentence, from which many legends were born. What is known about the tomb only reinforces the enigma it constitutes.
During the Second Plague, every building was in one way or another ravaged, except for one: Taol-Kaer's grave, which had visibly suffered no damage…

-Osta-Baille

Deoïr's Flowers

This is probably the most known herbalist shop in Osta-Baille. A branch of the Horticulturists, a famous guild of herbalists, this shop contains treasures coming from all of Tri-Kazel. It owns several neighboring greenhouses where gardeners nurture rare plants. The rest of the shop is a vast library where books stand near many misshapen bottles. The heaping of vials and the lack of light necessary for the protection of the most fragile petals give this place an unmatchable atmosphere. The place is run by professor Tallafor, a short smiling man wearing small magnifying spectacles.

The Tugarch' Sword

This armory belongs to the Boilermakers guild, which owes its name to the activity of its creator–Garrick Jamial, a cauldron maker–and constitutes a very powerful guild of armorers in Taol-Kaer. The Jamial family is still at its head today. Their emissaries seek Tugarch' in all Tri-Kazel, and their artisans are rumored to be the last of the peninsula to know how to work that legendary metal. The king often calls on the Boilermakers' services, notably to equip the Hilderin knights, which gives them great prestige in the capital city.

Antiquities of Trádáil

Firmin Floyd was the first antiquary on the plateau and made his fortune at the time of the reconstruction undertook by Magister Athaontú. Owners fascinated by Magientist novelties abandoned many ancient objects. The merchant meticulously gathered things that would otherwise have ended up in a furnace. Little by little, he acquired a unique collection. Today, the Floyd family is a legend in the world of antiquaries. It owns in Osta-Baille a warehouse where the peninsula's greatest collection of ancient objects is gathered. "Antiquities of Trádáil" is the small shop that once belonged to Firmin Floyd. It has been kept by the Antiquaries guild and you can sell, buy, and exchange many objects there.





During my journey, I could only see the district of Uasal from afar, and my Toscaire took care to keep us away. I easily understood that I was not entitled to go there without an authorization and that my social rank probably forbade me from ever penetrating its walls. However, I learned that the nobles are very hungry for knowledge, mainly the Magientists', and that those are more likely than others to gain entrance to this district. Being granted the advice of scholars seems to be favorably regarded in the court and during social events organized by the Ostian high society. The district of Uasal is worthy of its dwellers' ambitions: there is space, fountains, and several high mansions look down on the poor commoners living in indigence. Uasal is resplendent with bright colors, contrasting with the rest of the city of greens and grays.

Below Uasal was the destination of my journey, Saoithín, the district of the Scholars. I remember I was impressed by the place's heterogeneous architecture. It was there, in that old district built according to local traditions, that Athaontú founded his school dedicated to Magience. Some people are convinced that he did not build it in that location by chance, but I learnt nothing in particular to support such a suspicion.

Athaontú's University

Offered by King Kailleach to Athaontú to thank him for the reconstruction of Osta-Baille, the university was built according to the architectural principles of Magience. Twelve years ago, King Erald Mac Anweald shut down this symbol of the incursion of Magience on the peninsula's ancient lands. That closing followed a serious accident in the university: an experiment turned out badly, and triggered an explosion in a laboratory followed by a foul, greenish smoke which spread into the neighboring streets. This emanation contaminated part of the district of Saoithín and cost many people their lives.

Although it has been closed, rumors have it that the building is still used, in spite of the vigilance of the soldiers patrolling the district. Smugglers, courtiers, and Magientists are one after the other accused of going there at night to secretly organize meetings with sibylline motives.

Saoithín is also home to the great library of Taol-Kaer, where invaluable books are read and reread by dozens of curious men and women eager to know the ins and outs of our world's mysteries. I spent a few hours there, and it is a place of exchanges between the various schools of thought and belief, where you can even see Magientists fraternizing with faithful of the Temple. The great library is without a doubt Saoithín's most important place.

To finish, let me tell you about Ríochas, which overhangs Osta-Baille and dominates the city with its imposing height. The king's castle is carved in the heart of the mountain. Only the great walls are visible with their large doors symbolically held open since the end of the great war against Gwidre.

Father, Mother, I will send you another letter soon. I plan to stay in Osta-Baille for a week, and then, I will have to leave. Kiss Deartháir and Iníon, who I will not see grow up. I bear you in my heart. I miss you.

Your son,

Ugaïd

Who Leads Osta-Baille?

Osta-Baille is managed by Ansailéir Eober, seconded in this task by governors who are five in number, one for each district. Ríochas is led by Mastre Gréldir under the aegis of King Erald Mac Anweald.

Each governor chooses three people who stay for a year in the district they lead; they bear the title of administrator. Once a week, the Ansailéir gathers the five governors and their assistants to take care of the city's business. When an important decision comes up, a vote can allow a settlement between conflicting opinions. The administrators bring one vote each, each governor votes as if he counted for three, and the Ansailéir for five.

Districts:

The Lower Town
1 - The Port
2 - Lower Town District

The Higher Town
3 - District of Dïol
4 - District of Tradail
5 - District of Saoithin
6 - District of Uasal
7 - Riochas

Places of Interest
8 - Antiquities of Tradail
9 - Déoir's Flowers
10 - The Tugarch' Sword
11 - Taol-Kaer's Grave
12 - Athaontú's University
13 - Dïol's Elevators
14 - The Osbeal



Do not come!
I refuse to greet you, to encourage you by whatever kindness to think you will be welcome here! A thousand times would I prefer to harm you rather than see you come to this city, seduced by its beauties that are nothing but factitious lies! If you had seen what I have seen! But I do not want you to risk being exposed to those horrors.

Therefore, heed me, do not think I am depicting an atrocious image of the city by some kind of morbid enjoyment. Everything I will be telling you is the exact truth and I hope it will be enough for you not to leave our home.

As you know, I had a hard time finding work, and so, I had to take up everything nobody else wanted. Maintenance of the sewers, rat hunting, night patrolling, grave digging… Believe me, the reality under the surface is very far from what the guides say about the city!

Osta-Baille's Leprous Face

Here is the anonymous text on Osta-Baille I told you about at the beginning of my letter. It seems to have been written by a man who worked there at night. So many are those who narrate Osta-Baille's splendor, whereas the shadows in this city seem to harbor the worst abominations.

Be careful,
Preden

Idyllic Appearance and Actual Corruption

Opportunistic Oligarchy

Anywhere there are riches and power, dogs will struggle for it and will do anything for a little more of it. The more gold there is, the more those who already have some are terrified at the idea of having less than a rival. All of the city's political system is based on patronage, a relation of gifts and dependency. Know the right person, make sure he owes you; that is the key to everything.
Do you want to be taken care of in a dispensary or a hospital? In theory, hygiene in the city is a priority to avoid epidemics. In practice, you'd better give an ember Daol to the guy at the entrance, another to the assistant, and an azure one to the doctor. Double it, at least, if he must be disturbed at night, and more according to the district.
If you are socially above them, then everything is fine. Otherwise, you are useless to them, and the only value they give you is that of your purse. And I am not even talking about the way they look at the "hicks" from the countryside. Oh, some young people are welcome, those who have family here, a place to go, or who simply are extraordinarily lucky. Such is not the case for everyone, and I learned one thing: one should not rely on luck.

Wait-and-see and Prestige

What happens when everyone wants to shine, to let his rival wallow in some disastrous failure, to take his place as quickly as possible in a context in which fortunes can be made by speculating on commerce and science? It is very simple: when there is a risk, everything is weighed according to the political interest there is to draw from it. To seem efficient is much more important than actually being so.
You don't believe me? Let me tell you a story that almost took a turn for the worst. It all began as I was setting rat traps in the sewers along with one-day colleagues in the administration's service. We came upon a purulent, bloated corpse. It was a woman, or at least what remained of her, partly devoured by the rats. At the morgue, we were told she had died from a strange illness. Soon after, we started getting other cases in the port's lower districts, near the sewer's main entrances. We saw the problem coming. We had to find where it came from, and we had a lead pointing to the higher districts. Our superior refused to allow us to investigate there. Why? Other officials would have known there was a sanitation crisis among us. So the district's big shots had the sick ones put in jail; some survived, others didn't. We never knew what caused that, and I wouldn't be surprised should that filthy thing reappear one day, but worse.

Lights and Shadows of Uasal

It's not for nothing that the nobles from the district of Uasal hide behind their walls! Oh, of course, it is very beautiful there: gardens, courts, classy buildings… How can I know all of that when, supposedly, commoners like me should never set foot there?
This law preventing coming and going, it is already a sign of the city's rotting state. When people use their relations to impose laws serving only them, the situation can only degenerate, that's for sure. Small step by small step… Nobles are very far from being innocents worthy of the moral qualities their arrogance credits them with!
In order to ensure themselves idyllic and absolutely perfect days, they make it so that the lesser servants, who are of

course numerous, remain as quiet as possible. It means coming early in the morning or at nightfall to do your work, going through back alleys which are this district's trademark, or through more or less secret passages built by such or such family through the sewers which, as a result, are quite lively. In the whole city, the sewers' network can be traveled, but here, the system was brought to its maximum. Servants, maids, cooks, tutors, artisans for various repairs or delivery boys supplying the reserves… All of these fellows know the secrets of the high society from up close. It is not rare that prostitutes are discretely brought, sometimes very young girls straight from their native countryside.
To work, you must have a mission letter marked with the seal of a family head, so as not to be brutally expelled. Beware, I do not mean that you are just thrown out, but that the guards on duty actually do as they please. Some do not hesitate to take your money, women have to take the soldiers' goodwill out in trade, and occasionally, they decide they don't like a guy's face and murder him, just like that, for "fun"…

Nights of Osta-Baille

A City Under the Surface

Sometimes, I hear travelers say they feel "safe in that magnificent city"… Each time, it makes me want to throw up. During the day, you can still believe safety is guaranteed. But when you live here for a while, you know you must not go out at night unless you have a very good reason, a sharp weapon, and if possible, a comrade in arms. Past the sunset, you should be wary of everyone you come across, and that goes for the guards as well.
The shadows are those of armed beggars, of gangs of lost kids who do not hesitate to beat drunkards to death for the few coins they carry… Bandits are on the prowl, and to them, the only good witness is a dead witness, as it is the only way to avoid ending up on the gallows for robbery. The law refuses to leave people living as criminals alive, but precisely, the threat of being hanged leads them to an even greater violence, to ensure they are not recognized. They dump their victims' bodies in the sewers. They are not all dead when they are thrown away, but the rats and other things take care of finishing them off. The currents drag the body away from the scene of the crime to carry it downward, towards Bân's lake, and rats make identification hard… Actually, investigations on street crimes are practically impossible, and the murderers' impunity is a fact of life.
You can find anything in the sewers, not just victims of aggressions. When someone does not want a child, the newborn is simply abandoned there, left to the rats and to a cruel death in darkness, horror, and despair. And that is not uncommon, believe me, I picked up many lifeless small bodies…
At night, mostly cutpurses prosper, affiliated with such-and-such band for their "protection". At night, the most frightening of faunas considers all the streets lost in the shadows to be part of its domain. Often, they come from the port's district, where prostitution and smuggling feed the most powerful of them.
Others dwell in the sewers to take shelter during the harsh winters. The city depends on its water supply all year long; it is therefore essential that it remains in a liquid state whatever the weather outside. So, the sewers have been built to maintain a fresh, but constant temperature. The poorest take advantage of this to take shelter in spite of the rats, the stench, and the fact that you sometimes discover bodies literally torn apart.
What is the nature of what lurks in there? I do not know. Some talk about Feondas, but I can only say I once saw a figure reminding of a stooping man, moving as quickly as stealthily.

Time of Plagues

And still, all of this is when things are going well! It only takes a bad harvest to see the price of bread soar, waiting lines in front of bakeries, and riots of starving people capable of lynching those opposing their wrath! Shortages are not uncommon, at best one every ten years, they say.
Hunger is always the companion of hatred and sickness. In winter, people mostly die of pulmonary infections, in summer, it is the season of fevers; rats, fleas, and lice multiply. Fountain poisoning has always been dreadfully feared, and in such a case, foreigners are bound to be the first to be accused.
This city welcomes travelers, but at the slightest problem–unemployment, shortage, or sickness–foreigners somehow are in the way. Osta-Baille will never be a home for us. I will leave as soon as I can put some money aside.
Once more, I tell you: do not come here.





Chapter 1
Gwidre

It is now time, young lady, for me to tell you about your father's native kingdom. In Taol-Kaer, there are many unjust and unjustified rumors about Gwidre, most of them linked to the animosity Talkérides hold against the representatives of the Temple. Fortunately for you, your mother is more enlightened than many of her fellow nobles. In spite of my bad reputation maintained by narrow minds, she decided to hire me to perfect your education. I hope that I will be worthy of my function as a tutor and that I will manage to inculcate you in some fundamental truths about our beloved peninsula. Although I am not Gwidrite myself, I have lived among them enough to be able to say I know them well.

The Continual Prayer

A matrix of austerity around a luminous crystal; such is the metaphor that naturally comes to my mind when trying to describe Gwidre's inhabitants, miss. They are said to be stern, taciturn, sad, and cold. Yet, having been among them for a long time, I can tell you that this first impression, as strong as it may be, is very far from showing the truth. It takes time to obtain the trust of a Gwidrite, so that he may freely open his heart and tell you about himself and his country. But then, what fervor, what joy, on your interlocutor's previously rigid features!

To understand the Gwidrites, you have to remember the miracles and promises of Soustraine. The mere mention of the Temple's founder gives them the necessary strength and courage to go on with their daily tasks, without ever giving up in front of adversity's many faces. Gwidrites believe they bear on their shoulders the heavy burden of freeing the peninsula from the Feondas and from the other threats hanging over the kingdoms' happiness, Magientists being among the first on the list. The depth of their devotion to this objective is only equaled by the energy they apply to it. Thus, their taciturn and stern character is but the reflection of their inner concentration.

Gwidrites are indeed continually absorbed with prayer, which is for them an authentic spiritual attitude going beyond the need for words, dogma, or decorum. They never allow frivolities to break the attention they focus on their God. They are all the keepers of the precious light entrusted by the One God and they make a point of not letting this light go out. Therefore, their acts are dictated by alertness and perseverance, and not by some alleged xenophobia.

Far from their image as religious fanatics, widely spread because of the unfortunately bloody actions of extremists, Gwidrites look at existence with utmost lucidity. They consider it natural that religious events mark the rhythm of their lives; ceremonies and sermons concentrate within them Soustraine's message and clearly express the will of the Creator. These are necessary milestones on the road to hope, reminders of what matters; conversely, they also bring to light attitudes one must avoid, for those bring but lies and vanity.

Along the centuries, Gwidrites have acquired a discipline. Its origin lies in the models of firmness and reason that their first monarchs were, and of which Eothèn IV is indisputably the paragon. Respectful of the divine law as well as of the laws enacted by men, they work zealously for the good of the community. Of course, those who do not work toward the general goal are severely reprimanded and they may even spend some time in the rooms of "return to reason". It may seem harsh, or even excessive, but the results stand and Gwidre is a rich kingdom, with a strong army at its service to defend it against inner threats as well as outer ones.

As you can see, miss, we are far away from the untrustworthy stories going on about alleged sacrifices and tortures. Gwidrites hate senseless suffering and pain. Both play a role in religion because they can harden the soul and the body to give them the strength to fight misfortune. In a way, Gwidrites prepare the coming of a future happiness by only enjoying it intermittently. Above all, they know they must remain focused on their objectives if they do not want to give in to discouragement.



The Disappearance of Ritual Stones

The Temple's advent in Gwidre had many repercussions on the life of the inhabitants and, obviously, on their spiritual life in particular. One of the most visible consequences of the new religion's rise to power was the almost systematic destruction of the stone circles, most of them inherited from the faraway Aergewin. The megaliths, after they were roped, were pulled down by oxen or Boernacs. Some were transformed into construction material, but most often, certainly because of an atavistic superstitious fear, they were thrown into streams, the Pezdhour River, or the ocean.

Of course, Demorthèn and people faithful to the ancient traditions violently opposed the destruction of their places of worship. Blood was spilled, lives were broken, but in the end, the Temple relentlessly went on with its task of "liberation", until it had practically erased all trace of the ritual stones from the West's fertile plains. The Demorthèn, along with some of their most zealous followers, fled into the Mòr Roimh Mountains, where they determinedly raised new circles of standing stones in hostile and remote places.

It is told that sometimes, during particularly dark nights, pale figures seem to hover above the ground, tears of blood slowly seeping from their dead eyes, hands held in front of them like vengeful claws. They whisper the names of those who had brought down the ritual stones in the past, and in the morning, the unfortunate ones who were called are found dead in their beds, their eyes wide with fear, streams of blood oozing from the corners...

Tales of Tri-Kazel, Volume I, by Kathryn Kalbeth.



A New Faith

Since the year 775, the Temple has been the official religion of the kingdom of Gwidre. This conversion, initiated by King Eothèn IV, was largely followed by the people. Remote and wild regions of Gwidre may remain faithful to the Demorthèn beliefs, but a majority of the kingdom lives according to the precepts established by the prophet Soustraine.

Exposed Coasts

Let us now examine in greater detail, if you please, miss, the geography of Gwidre; this will surely allow you to understand the influence it can have on the natives' mentality. The kingdom occupies a slightly bigger territory than Reizh, but is much less wide than Taol-Kaer. Ard-Amrach, its flourishing capital city, is located along the Pezdhour. That river, its still waters springing from the Ordachaï Peak before forming a large bed, branches into the Almerine Delta, about three hundred miles to the northwest. Gwidre's only river–except for the Krezdhour in the southwest, which forms the natural border with Taol-Kaer–the Pezdhour has been given a multitude of artificial arms by digging long irrigation canals to supply the western plains with water and silt. These important works were executed under the supervision of the Temple. In its entire eastern half, Gwidre is occupied by the Mòr Roimh, which literally cut Tri-Kazel in half.

Whereas Taol-Kaer and Reizh benefit from the protection of the Mòr Roimh, which stand in the way of the violent, dry northern winds, the plains of Gwidre suffer them directly. The weather is particularly harsh and temperatures seldom rise above seventy degrees in the heart of summer.

During winter, frost is commonplace and temperatures reach negative values, for the most exposed places.

The lush western half of Gwidre is known by the name Abundance. It comprises many lands made fertile, in spite of the hard weather, by irrigation and serving as fields and orchards as well as vast pastures for sheep, bovines, and goats. Typical villages of Abundance always include the high, square shape of the local church or chapel, and the compact figures of small, but sturdy cottages made of wood or daub. Those are circled by the green and yellow stripes of the fields, spreading as far as the eye can see, sprinkled here and there with a few groves of broad-leaved trees and thornbushes. The yellow flowers of gorses and the mauve ones of heaths frame long dirt roads; you can find them growing along low walls or hedgerows delimitating the periphery of the cultivated lands. Many odoriferous plants grow randomly or in flowerbeds disciplined by man's hand, and everlasting winds carry their fragrance through the dry air.

Gwidrites are not famed for their skills as decorators, and it is true that buildings are almost exclusively functional. There are no statues, sculptures, engravings, mosaics, or embellishments. Right angles, robust pillars, small windows letting in little light, massive towers, flat roofs; such is the typical architecture in Gwidre. I will add that many featureless wells and taps are set at every strategic spot of the agglomerations, whatever their size, and must remain unused during the coldest weeks so as to avoid water freezing. This has a very precise reason: eastern winds dry the earth and the materials terribly, and the smallest spark can set a





village aflame as if it was a piece of straw. Therefore, the access to water and the ways of conveying it are, along with the defense against Feondas, the major preoccupation of the inhabitants.

Rumors have it that on the whole littoral border, an evil wind called the Ast–also known as "The Traitor's Kiss"–soft, but terribly dry, sets grass and small trees ablaze with merely its breath. Whether this is true or not, fires have left many scars of charred earth all over Abundance, and using tobacco or any other smoking substance is severely proscribed in the whole region.

Báncloch's Guild

Albanite is a rock of immaculate whiteness, very dense, and extremely resistant. It can only be found at one place in the peninsula, Arden's quarries, located a few miles away from Gwidre's capital city. Most of its inhabitants are convinced that this is a divine gift, although the discovery of Albanite greatly precedes the coming of the first emissaries of the Temple to Tri-Kazel. However, they precisely claim that this holy offering was a sign announcing the favor of Gwidre by the One God.

Either way, Albanite has always been mined by Báncloch's guild, an organization as powerful as the rock's price is high. Three quarters of the stones extracted from the quarries are reserved by royal decree for national use and cannot be sold to the other kingdoms. However, the remaining quarter can be bought at phenomenal prices and only kings and the richest lords of Taol-Kaer and Reizh can obtain some.

Báncloch's guild, owner of Arden's quarries, is immensely rich. At its head is the patriarch of the Mac Mannàn family, Priadn, a cunning and careful man, who never goes without his two bodyguards, Bor and Karadnen, colossi who have sent to the grave more than one thief or debtor. Rumors claim that since the mysterious disappearance of his wife, three years ago, Priadn frequents Mist, the strange mistress of the guild that rivals the Each' Fist, though nobody could ever prove such an assertion.

Of Priadn's two sons, only one plays a role in the family business since the elder lost his mind in mysterious circumstances. Draydn, the younger son, directly supervises the extraction of Albanite, and never goes without the ten men at arms charged with ensuring his security. Indeed, Arden's quarries are not that safe for the Mac Mannàn family. The workers are very badly paid and work in particularly hard conditions, with merely a break at midday for lunch. Several riots occurred in the last decade, during which dozens of workers found their deaths at the hands of soldiers in the pay of the Mac Mannàn family. A fierce hatred nests in the heart of many workers, and some think about a plan to make Draydn fall in a deadly ambush.

The Mountains

The western half of Gwidre is entirely covered by the giant range of the Mòr Roimh Mountains, the highest peak of which is the Ordachaï. Few Gwidrites stay here, even if compared with Taol-Kaer and Reizh, there are many more of them who have chosen to live in trying conditions. Villages were built in middle altitude valleys, but it is not rare that you can find chapels and oratories of the Temple at the summit of the mountains. Hermits and a few priests, recommending a harsh asceticism, live in those places of faith lost in the middle of nowhere. And, unfortunately, it is also not rare that they are destroyed in Feond raids.

Some Gwidrites have discovered ancient cities dug into the rock walls, left empty, and have decided to settle there. Once restored, those stone cities could house up to three thousand individuals, providing them with the means to supply themselves with water and to fend off Feond attacks. It is said there exist half a dozen of these underground cities, but for my part, I have only seen one. In winter, passes and paths are obstructed by thick snow and buffeted by ferocious gusts of wind. Only a madman would then venture to travel in the mountains.

Precariousness induced by difficult life conditions only strengthened the solidarity and selflessness of the inhabitants, who find great comfort in the weekly ceremonies celebrated by the representatives of the Temple. The mountaineers' faith, constantly tested, is even more deeply rooted in their hearts and souls than that of the western Gwidrites. At the price of a hard and constant labor, the inhabitants were able to make their small agglomerations havens of peace and safety in the middle of a hostile environment.

Gwidre has installed Inguards along the Krezdhour River, as well as on the roads crossing the mountains and leading to Taol-Kaer and Reizh. Soldiers serve here three years in a row before letting their younger brethren take over. Every man old enough to hold a weapon–that is, of at least sixteen years–is bound to fulfill such a duty. The soldiers designated to protect the borders at high altitudes are picked randomly, and get one month of freedom before going to one of the many outposts, in which they make sure no individual enters Gwidre without being authorized to, and also take part in Feondas elimination missions. Two soldiers out of five will not come back, victims of the biting cold, of Feondas, and of episodic incursions by Taol-Kaer or Reizh's armies. They are celebrated as heroes, and their families are given medals of honor by a military officer charged with civilian relations, as well as a fine sum by the Temple. This money will be used to lead a proper funerary ceremony, even if this almost always happens in the absence of the deceased's body.



The Corvus Abbey

Among the border fortresses where the young Gwidrite soldiers serve, there exists a fortified abbey with a sinister reputation. Its troops are made up of criminals and felons sentenced to several years of military service. The Corvus abbey is located in an extremely dangerous region, and very few prisoners live through their punishment.

The abbey is led by the Corvusian monks, strict and ascetic religious people. Priests, as well as warriors, those faithful of the Temple apply themselves to lead the scoundrels they are sent on the right path.

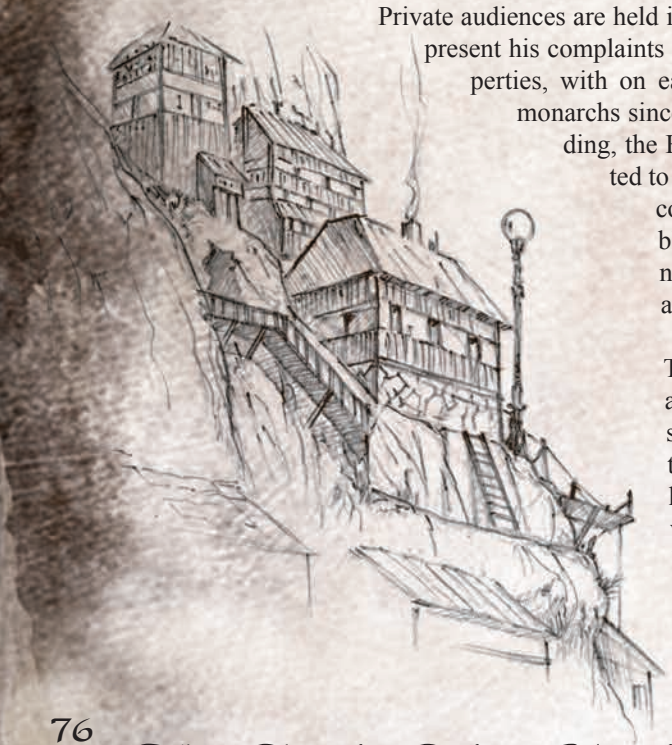
The Capital City

If the other kingdoms can pride themselves on having several major cities, such is not the case of Gwidre. All the power is condensed in a single place: its capital city, Ard-Amrach. Populated with almost fifty thousand inhabitants, Ard-Amrach is an imposing city that can be seen several walking days away. Built with Albanite, three imposing outer walls protect the inhabitants. They stand twenty-six, thirty-nine, and more than sixty-six feet high respectively. The outer walls were built this way so that should one of them be taken, the next one's defenders may easily fire projectiles on the assailants below. However, with the exception of the dreadful attack of 725, the first wall–and with greater reason the two other–was never taken. Moreover, Feondas never ventured in the proximity of the city since this attack, as if they were repelled by a mysterious charm…
The three concentric walls defend Ard-Amrach from the south, the north, and the west, whereas at the east, military and fluvial harbors are protected by heavy chains fixed to massive fortified towers integrated to the walls. Small doors were opened in the eastern walls to facilitate the carrying of goods from the docks.
A series of three great double doors open on the western walls and constitutes the only land access to Ard-Amrach. A large alley paved with Azulrock allows access to the suburbs, under the strict observation of the local militia keeping watch from the cover of the arrow slits and from the parapet walk. What are called suburbs are actually the commercial and popular districts of the capital city. They were built at the foot of the huge hill supporting the Noble March (Ard-Amrach's high districts), the Holy March (reserved to the representatives of the Temple), as well as the king's private gardens. At its top, there is the Iradion, the splendid royal palace with its high Albanite donjon rising proudly toward the sky.
Entering Ard-Amrach, a visitor will discover a noisy town, agitated by the incessant coming and going of pilgrims, merchants, porters, militiamen, and representatives of the administration and of the Temple. Three quarters of the city's inhabitants live in the suburbs. They work from sunrise to sunset, at which point they stop all activity to spend an hour in prayer, be it at their workplace, in their home, or in one of the many chapels built for such a purpose. Foreigners are invited to keep silent during the whole duration of the prayer. As a general rule, they take this opportunity to have a good meal in the quiet inns and taverns remaining especially open for them.
Offenders are warned verbally the first time and, in case of reiterated disturbance of public order during the holy hour, they are to spend the night in the nearest guardroom. For those who have still not understood the lesson, there is no lack of jails in the capital city… Only the members of the militia and of the private guards do not pray during the holy hour, for obvious reasons of security; they fulfill their spiritual duty before going to sleep. This is also the case of the innkeepers housing foreigners.

The wealthy and leading citizens, as well as the members of the Temple, can access the Noble March through stairs or strongly inclined ramps. Located nearly one hundred and sixty feet above the suburbs, Ard-Amrach's high districts present large, straight avenues, bland but tasteful buildings, small parks, and kiosks that lean against massive hexagonal pillars. To enjoy these astonishingly picturesque places for a people little inclined to decoration, one must have the necessary authorizations. The militia ruthlessly sends away all those who do not own the documents proving their legitimacy to access the Noble March.
Beyond this, three hundred and thirty feet above, the Temple occupies the Holy March with a vast, bland, and massive architectural complex, the central point of which is the Prima Cathedra, a huge church built in 747. Inside, those officiating are Hierophant Anthénor, personal advisor of the king, and the many priests under his authority. Every day, hundreds of pilgrims–escorted by the royal militia–go to the Prima Cathedra to pray, as well as in the many adjacent chapels. A colossal clinic, located on the southern part of the Holy March, welcomes the most seriously ill, as well as the invalids or the heavily disabled. Miraculous recoveries happen each day here, but the Temple must refuse new patients every day. A deep calm hangs over the whole of the Holy March, creating an almost supernatural atmosphere exalting in the hearts the necessary fervor and mysticism for acts of faith.
Looking down on the spiritual complex, the royal gardens form a luxuriant monochrome tapestry; a terrestrial vision of the ice paradise promised to men when their spirits join the spiritual world. A hundred landscape gardeners work here all year-round to make it one of the wonders of our peninsula. This place is unique in a kingdom that, incidentally, distinguishes itself by the austerity of its works. It is said you can find plants from the Continent, and from every corner of the peninsula, all of them in white, luminescent hues. From the humblest floral composition to the complex and symbolical labyrinths, everything is made to draw the mind toward reflection and amazement, and the soul toward relaxation. Belvederes suddenly revealed beyond a vegetal archway offer stunning viewpoints on the river, the city, or the plains of Abundance and their fine threads of silvery channels.



Standing majestically at the top of the hill, the royal palace is defended by a circular outer wall, ten feet high, restlessly patrolled by the most vigilant members of the royal guard as well as Temple Blades. The square Tower, or Tower of the Order, rising above the central part of the palace, contains the royal apartments, which remain of an astonishing sobriety compared with those of the kings of Taol-Kaer and Reizh. A massive construction of fortified stone, the tower is nearly a hundred feet high, and its top stands more than a thousand feet above the level of the Pezdhour. Like a slumbering mineral giant, its imposing shape is only bored with a few high and narrow windows, reminding of half-closed eyes lost in some appeasing dream.



Private audiences are held in the south wing of the palace. Also, once a month, everyone can come to present his complaints in the Hall of Hearings, a long rectangular room of amazing acoustic properties, with on each side ten alcoves, which contain the busts of the previous reigning monarchs since the settlement of the Temple. Occupying a great part of the central building, the Hall is a construction dating back to the ancient times, which was integrated to the current palace by the royal architects because of its remarkable state of conservation. It is accessed through the royal court, which has the royal stables on its left side; a long T-shaped building made of rotproof wood containing His Majesty's forty horses. These splendid equines only carry the king and his relatives, as well as the couriers he sends all over Gwidre.

The north wing is the place for reunions between the king and his advisors, as well as for the banquet hall, the kitchens, and the Library of Laws, the shelves of which nearly crumble under piles of codices and volumes about the various forms of legislation. At the west, the great library occupies a hemispheric building, linked to the palace through an elevated covered walk from which you can admire the glittering bed of the Pezdhour. In this library, you can find the official chronicles of the kingdom, account books, reunion reports, but also less formal texts such as scientific or historical treaties. Religious texts are kept by the Temple in the Hierarchary, adjacent to the Prima Cathedra.

The Shady Side of Ard-Amrach

Confidential report addressed to his eminence, Lord Rokr'an Firdh

You might believe that the criminal kind does not have the means to exercise its questionable activities in a city like Ard-Amrach. However, such a judgment would be founded on the evidences of a reassuring façade maintained by the power in place. Never would the king, his advisors, or the high dignitaries of the Temple admit that punishable acts are committed each day in the suburbs and, rarely, in the higher districts. Yet, such is the reality hiding behind the sparkling immaculate walls of Gwidre's capital city.

For the most part, Gwidrites are respectful of the laws, or more exactly, for part of them, aware of the severity of justice. However, a certain part of the population, even if it is just a minority, intends to make its business as it pleases. One part of this minority is made of opponents to the Temple, and another part of hardboiled criminals. The first ones seize every opportunity to throw a stick in the wheels of power so as to bring back the ancient traditions. They have at their disposal an important influence network, the most important figures of which are among those closest to the king. Spies from Taol-Kaer and Reizh have infiltrated them and now supply them with help, while benefiting from their information. The king is aware of the existence of these "protesters", but he seems to ignore that they get support from the highest spheres of power.

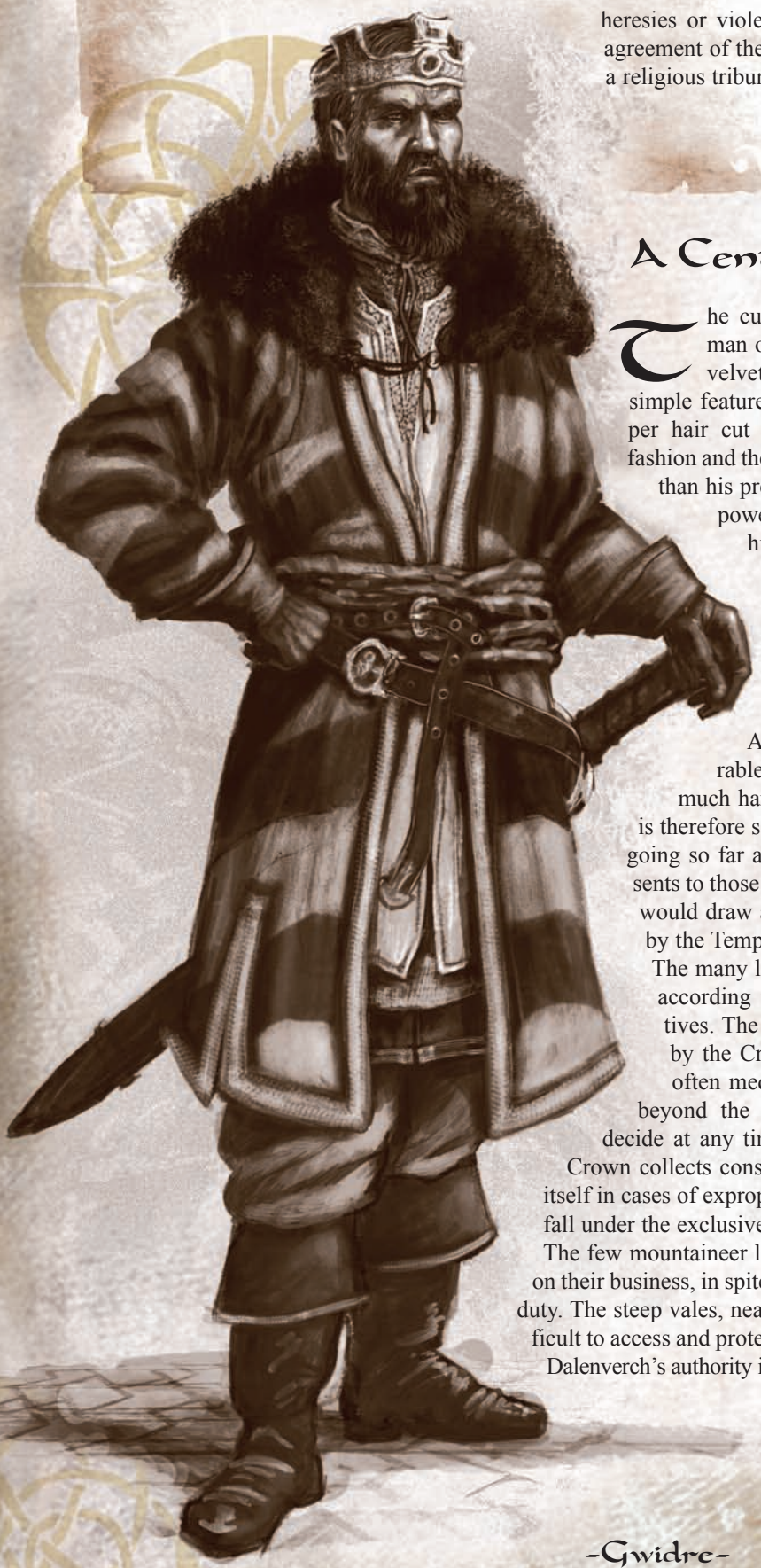
The exercise of actual criminality has been exploited by two organizations. The first one, historically constituted soon after the foundation of Ard-Amrach, was able to maintain its authority all along the centuries by seeing to the obedience of its members through the immediate application of expeditious punishment. Called the Each' Fist, this guild of wrongdoers specialized itself in the robbing of strangers, extortion, burglary, and forgery.

Recently, a new organization has formed and makes cash by trespassing on the Each' Fist's activities. Perfectly disciplined, its members always manage to disappear without trace or to make the members of the Fist fall into ambushes. Rumor has it that a woman of great beauty, with an extremely pale complexion, goes around in the suburbs at night, and that the touch of her icy fingers freezes forever the heartbeats of her unfortunate victims. People call her "Mist", and it would seem she is the one leading the criminal organization rival to the Each' Fist.

Judiciary System and Religious Tribunals

The judiciary system in Gwidre is based on Soustraine's writings ever since the religion of the Temple became the official cult in this kingdom. Each person entitled to administer justice must refer to the holy texts to pronounce a judgment, the only exception being the king who has kept a total sovereignty in that matter.

Religious tribunals are a specific magistracy for the Temple, and they only settle internal cases for the cult. Essentially, they judge the members of the church deviating from the path enacted by Soustraine, notably when breaking the Ordinances. In religious cases implicating common people, such as heresies or violence against ecclesiastics, it is possible, with the agreement of the royal authorities, that suspects may be judged by a religious tribunal.



A Centralized Power

The current king, Dalenverch IV, is a relatively young man of thirty years ruling Gwidre with an iron fist in a velvet glove. His face sometimes shows deceptively simple features–you can believe me, miss– under salt-and-pepper hair cut short (a compromise between the ancient clan fashion and the austerity of the priests' shaved heads). Even more than his predecessors, he gathers in his hands an almost total power, from which only those who manage to get into his good graces benefit.

The Hierophant Anthénor, high chancellor, supreme ruler of the Temple in the peninsula, and Dalenverch's special advisor, is, according to the rumor, the only one having some influence on the king. Currently the last representative of a long lineage of spiritual guides, Anthénor must know that the current king, as favorable as he may be to the interests of his religion, is much harder to maneuver than the previous monarchs. He is therefore said to try by all means to make his cause progress, going so far as to distribute plenty of Daols or sumptuous presents to those whose services he requires. According to some, he would draw as he pleases from the abundant treasure gathered by the Temple along the centuries…

The many lords of Abundance grumble against the king, who according to them, deprives them of their natural prerogatives. The management of resources placed at their disposal by the Crown is scrupulously controlled, and Ard-Amrach often meddles with their private accounts. If a crime goes beyond the local lordly jurisdiction–which Dalenverch can decide at any time–it is judged at the capital city. That way, the Crown collects consequential sums or goods by administering justice itself in cases of expropriation or inheritance. As for religious crime, they fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Temple.

The few mountaineer lords only partly feel the influence of Ard-Amrach on their business, in spite of how zealous royal emissaries are in doing their duty. The steep vales, near the Talkéride and Reizhite borders, are very difficult to access and protect them efficiently from the royal influence. There, Dalenverch's authority is nothing but a ghost story good for scaring children.

Diinthër's Cabal

Since agents of the king or of the Temple are present in every one of Abundance's lordships, it is very hard for the nobles of this region to organize in order to preserve their power. Many of those who attempted to oppose the king in one way or another have been tried for high treason and thrown into dark prisons where they lie for the rest of their lives. However, a group composed of ten lords has formed a cabal.

They decide, during secret reunions most often held during the night, what actions to take to regain control of their business, or even to undermine the authority of the crown whenever possible. Suspected of being sorcerers making use of occult arts such as the Oradh, these lords also have to deal with the Temple's Sigires who relentlessly track them. Diinther's Cabal, from the name of the locality where the movement formed, acts with utmost carefulness for now, making very certain not to be infiltrated.

There, miss, your lesson is over.
I hope that what I taught you today will prompt you to consider Gwidre in a new perspective. And now, if you will allow me, I will retire to my apartments. I wish you a good day, and will see you again tomorrow.

Diinthër's Tale

-Gwidre-



Chapter 1
Reizh

earest Uncle,

Allow me to disturb you for a short while with the account of my first weeks spent in Reizh. You have not spared your breath in attempting to deter me from undertaking that long journey. According to you, I was not adequately prepared and would gain nothing but pains.

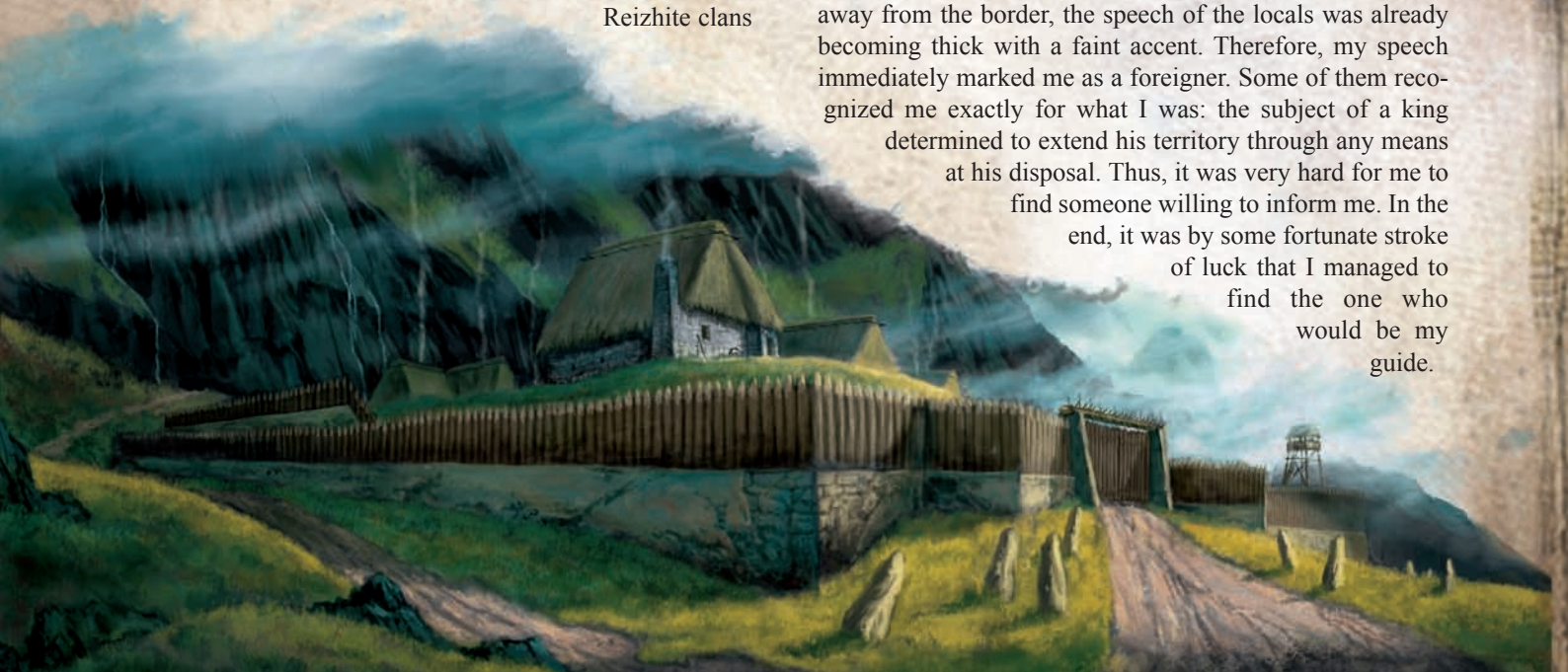
"Reizhites are idiots fighting for fancies from the Continent; they let themselves be subdued by the Daedemorthys' junk like moths by a torch's flame, and believe that power can be shared like baubles between people of different blood." These were your words, do you remember? You had even grumbled that they had forsaken the heritage of the three brothers and that they did not deserve to be Tri-Kazelians anymore. To you, they are puppets of the Continent, subjects obeying faraway masters who do not condescend to tread on the soil of our peninsula.

Echoes of the Past

I must admit to you that thusly warned against these people, I really did not expect to be welcomed by them, or to find someone sufficiently open-minded to offer me the joy of a pleasant conversation. It was not the inhabitants of the frontier zone, suspicious and sour people, who contradicted your allegations.

Indeed, soon after I had crossed the large Alliance Bridge spanning the calm waters of the Tealderoth River, I reached a small village encircled by a sturdy log palisade. Inside, there was a great statue of the warrior hero Daendetès, a reminder of the War of the Temple. It brought to mind the union ratified between the armies of the Talkéride and Reizhite clans when Gwidre attempted to invade the two kingdoms to put them under the yoke of the ideas conveyed by their new religion. Most fortunately, as you know, the war started in 857 ended six years later with the heavy defeat of the enemy. Today, there remains nothing of this fifty-year-old conflict except a veiled opposition to the expansionist aims of the Temple. The friendship formerly bound between the Talkérides and the Reizhites has come undone, a fragile relic which the ambition of Taol-Kaer's king and the careless haste of Reizh's monarch have broken for good.

As answers to my questions, I only received heavy silences, spiteful glances, and indistinct grumblings. A few miles away from the border, the speech of the locals was already becoming thick with a faint accent. Therefore, my speech immediately marked me as a foreigner. Some of them recognized me exactly for what I was: the subject of a king determined to extend his territory through any means at his disposal. Thus, it was very hard for me to find someone willing to inform me. In the end, it was by some fortunate stroke of luck that I managed to find the one who would be my guide.



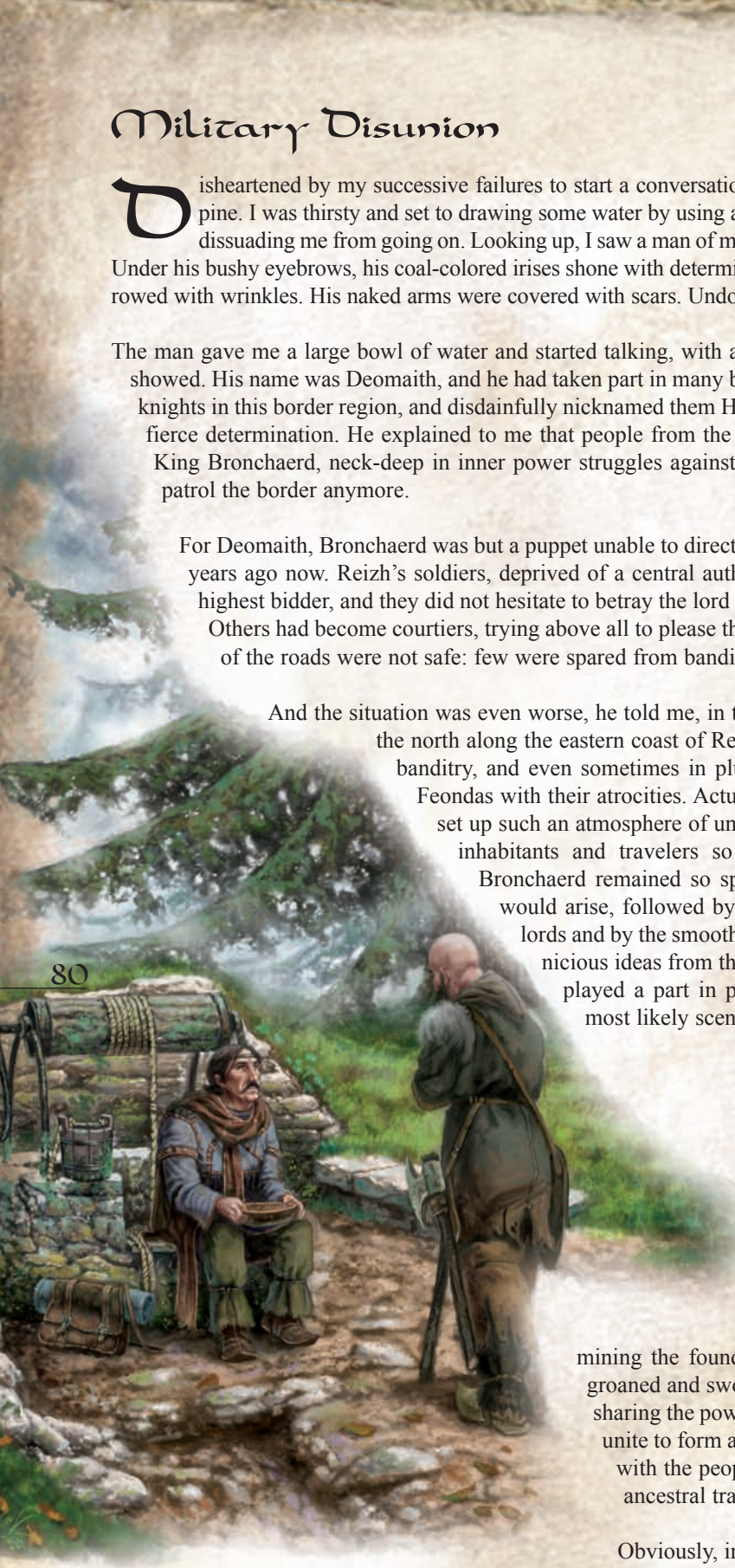
Military Disunion

Disheartened by my successive failures to start a conversation, I sat on the curb of a well, under the shadow of a great pine. I was thirsty and set to drawing some water by using a bucket tied to a rope, but I felt on my forearm a firm hand dissuading me from going on. Looking up, I saw a man of more than thirty years, his face partly hidden by a thick beard. Under his bushy eyebrows, his coal-colored irises shone with determination. His forehead and his gash-crossed cheeks were furrowed with wrinkles. His naked arms were covered with scars. Undoubtedly he was a veteran of the Reizhite army.

The man gave me a large bowl of water and started talking, with a voice in which tones of weariness and sometimes anger showed. His name was Deomaith, and he had taken part in many battles. He deplored the frequent incursions of the Hilderin knights in this border region, and disdainfully nicknamed them Hildeous, while acknowledging their martial valor and their fierce determination. He explained to me that people from the south were not able to defend themselves efficiently, for King Bronchaerd, neck-deep in inner power struggles against the great lords of the kingdom, did not send soldiers to patrol the border anymore.

For Deomaith, Bronchaerd was but a puppet unable to direct the kingdom properly, unlike his father, who had died ten years ago now. Reizh's soldiers, deprived of a central authority, had become mercenaries selling themselves to the highest bidder, and they did not hesitate to betray the lord they had sworn to serve for a good handful of frost Daols. Others had become courtiers, trying above all to please their master rather than fight for their land. Therefore, most of the roads were not safe: few were spared from bandits, accidents, and Feondas.

And the situation was even worse, he told me, in the prosperous region of the Emerald Crescent, located in the north along the eastern coast of Reizh. The idle troops of the lords of the region indulged in banditry, and even sometimes in plundering and raping, charging bandits or some horde of Feondas with their atrocities. Actually, lords wanting to destabilize Bronchaerd deliberately set up such an atmosphere of uncertainty. They let their men take their frustrations out on inhabitants and travelers so as to foster exasperation among the people. And if Bronchaerd remained so spineless in his interventions, undoubtedly, punctual riots would arise, followed by a revolution supported by the finances of the rebellious lords and by the smooth-tongued Magientists. A new regime would settle and pernicious ideas from the Continent would triumph, and with them those who had played a part in propagating them. That was, according to Deomaith, the most likely scenario if the king did not become more authoritative.



Curious Ideas

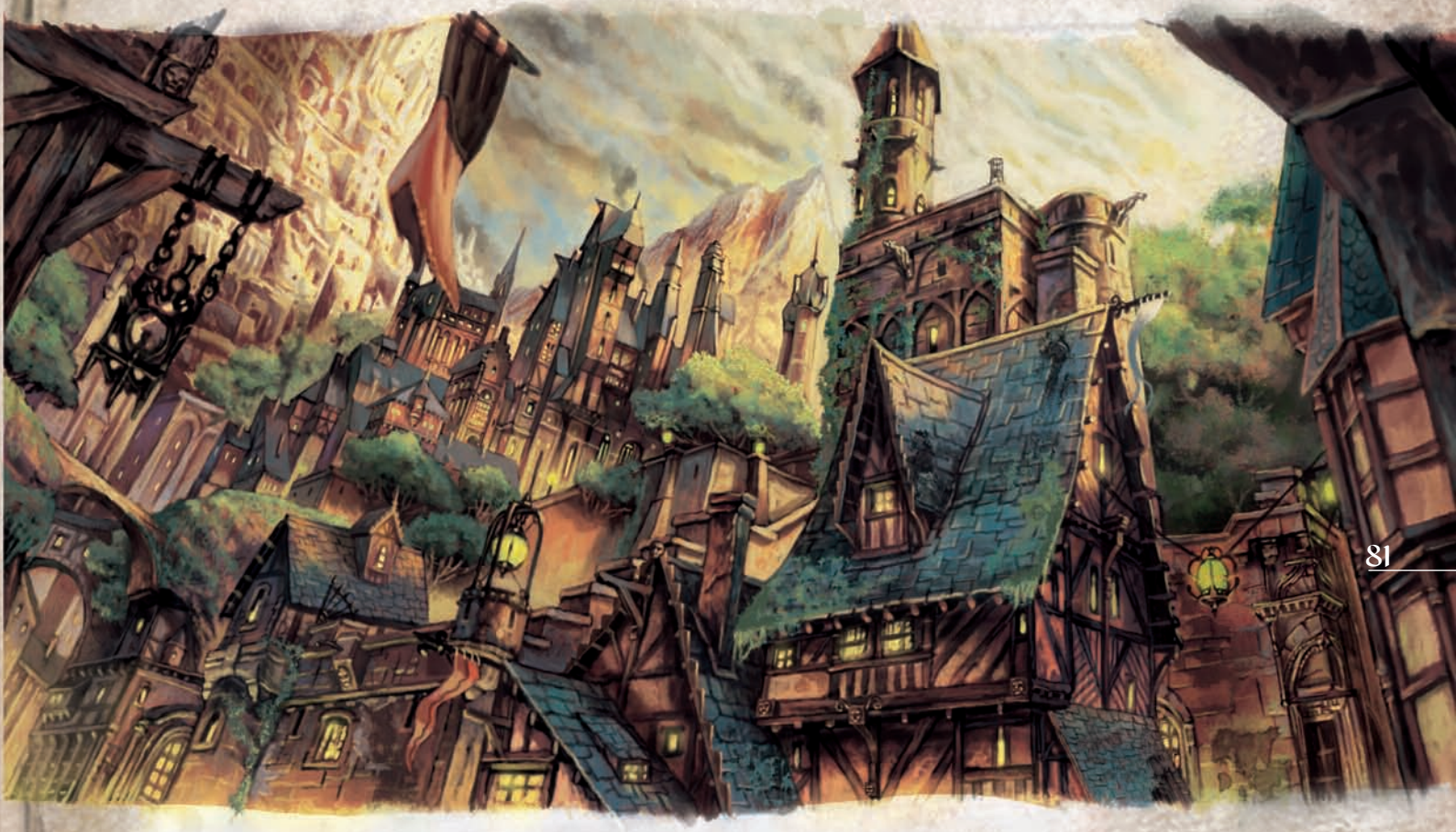
My interlocutor drew a long, painful sigh and stopped. I immediately seized the opportunity to ask him about those new ideas from the Continent, which had been slowly undermining the foundations of the kingdom of Reizh for over a century. He groaned and swore while talking about those ill minds who recommended sharing the power between commoners and noblemen, and who wished to unite to form a Parliament. To hold votes regarding laws in collaboration with the people represented for Deomaith a lack of respect toward the ancestral traditions that had always ruled life in Tri-Kazel.

Obviously, influential individuals worked in the shadows to efficiently propagate this kind of ideological nonsense. Naturally, he came to tell me about the Magientists, whom he called Daedemorthys like everyone who denigrated them. Through their science, they contributed to ensuring a greater comfort for people, and some of their inventions greatly pleased the king. This gave them much credit, which they used to manipulate high lords as well as commoners, rich or poor. To Deomaith, it was clear that Magientists were aiming for power. Maybe they wanted to be more at ease when undertaking their strange experiments?

In spite of the fear Deomaith's frightening words had arisen in me, I decided not to let myself be dominated by my emotions. I offered to hire him as my guide until Kalvernach, then Baldh-Ruoch, the capital city. He accepted, but refused my money.

Kalvernach

We spent the night in the House of Hospitality; a short building, the purpose of which is to house the few passing travelers for free, as Reizhite custom requires. It offered no comfort, and we slept on the bare, hard ground, close to a cold fireplace which went out the moment the first stars appeared in the sky. Early in the morning, we left the village through the northern gate. A small bumpy road wound irregularly through the uneven landscape, covered here and there by an ancestral forest. As it was far away from the power center and little used, it was badly maintained: its sides ran dangerously into hidden gorges and cliffs with steep slopes.
Our journey lasted seven days, which seemed like ages to me. In its course, we only came across a single group of travelers, who quickly greeted us before carrying on toward the south. Finally, after a whole series of minor troubles, the City of a Hundred Terraces came into view.



The last rays of the sun were casting their soothing light on Kalvernach when I first saw it. The town went from the foot of Femfrath's hills, dotted with trees of incredibly varied species, to the Tulach's rocky plateau. From the trees' majestic foliage to the gray-blue walls of the troglodytic town, Kalvernach was a symphony of colors. The terraces, rising progressively to the level of the inhabitations dug into the base of the Tulach's plateau, were glowing with the green and blue fires of their Nebulars, those curious light-dispensing structures conceived by the Magientists. The canalized waters of the Seleane River took the shape of shimmering curves along flowered gardens and houses with blue or green walls.

After crossing the wall through a small, vaulted doorway guarded by no less than ten soldiers, Deomaith guided me along straight ramps and stairs with large steps going up to the terraces. Because of the steepness of the slopes, the ascension was difficult, but we took our time so as to spare our legs and our breath. Deomaith led me to an imposing building with a roof adorned with flowers, which turned out to be a vast inn. It had a high ceiling, and was perfectly lit by two translucent spheres that produced a soft glow. The work of Magientists, obviously.

The great room was half full: students celebrated their graduation with beer and honey cakes while a group of workers, probably farmers, were playing dice. A hooded customer, clad in a brown-green cloak made of good cloth from Osta-Baille, sat alone at a table. As I would rather enjoy the show offered by a band of minstrels wearing gaudy clothes than pay attention to the lone one, I drew a long sigh of relief and sat down at a round table placed just in front of the performers.

There were four of them. An old Filidh, a poet gifted with divination, sitting on a three-legged stool with his blind eyes staring into space, was waiting for the time when he would sing the Gwerz. Two mature men, their eyes glowing with joy, were weaving a lively tune on the strings of a lyre and on the long ivory body of a flute. Just behind them, a young woman with tawny hair was standing, and with her delicate



mouth, she was reciting an ancient rhyme telling the story of a prince bewitched by the night and the stars. Her sparklingly green irises, her aquiline nose, and her high prominent cheekbones showed that she belonged to the Tarish people who had landed on Tri-Kazel, more than a thousand years ago, to mingle with our ancestors. I was immediately captivated by her beauty, and spent the night as if in a dream, led by her changing voice; now sweet, now sad and frail. The high-pitched trills of the flute blended with the lyre's wavy sonorities, soothing my mind and body with their appeasing charms.

I was starting to doze off when the deep, low-pitched voice of the Filidh roused me from my lethargy. Freed of the presence of musical harmonics, it rose solemnly, like a prophecy on the verge of being fulfilled. That evening, the Gwerz's subject was the deeds of Culowd Mac Namuidh, who defeated a hundred men with only his wit, and, disguising himself as a merchant, conquered the invincible citadel of Kermordhran in a single night. As the last notes of the ballad were sung, I felt the milky stare of the Filidh on my forehead. I felt as if words were ringing under my skull, but it was probably nothing but a trick from my tired mind.

I paid for our meal and took a secluded room, so as to have a decent rest. This night, I had a strange nightmare before waking up with a start, my forehead wet with a cold sweat. At the foot of my cozy bed, there was a beautiful embroidered tunic as well as a dark blue cloak. I got dressed and went to the great room. Deomaith was sitting in a corner along with the customer with the hidden face whom I had seen the day before. She was a woman in her thirties with silky blond hair, the plaits of which were gathered into a complicated bun. Her dark eyes cast their mysterious glare on me, and I suddenly started to shudder, as if I had just gone through a freezing waterfall.

Deomaith beckoned me to sit next to him, in front of his interlocutress. He introduced her to me as a friend. Her name was Ealaidha and, if I had nothing against it, she would come with us to Baldh-Ruoch, where she was expected. I gave my consent while feeling somewhat distrustful of the newcomer.

The Troglodytic City

Before leaving for the capital city, I insisted we visited the troglodytic town. Only a few primeval inhabitations were still intact, for most of them had become the entrance to one of the many tunnels that led to the vast mining network dug under the Tulach's plateau. There was plenty of rock salt and silver to be found there, ensuring the wealth of Kalvernach since centuries ago. However, many of these tunnels had been filled in recently, in reaction to a particularly deadly Feond raid. Six months earlier, they had sprung out from the caverns and had scattered into the city in the middle of the day. Dozens of inhabitants had died before the militia of Lord Kellemnir, supported by the Daedemorthys and their strange weapons, managed to drive them away. This dreadful incident had left a strong impression, and many guards were assigned day and night alike to keep watch over the tunnels that remained open.
Most of the intact troglodytic houses were the homes of Magientists who, glad to finally have all the necessary room for their experimentations, did not hesitate to settle in those windy nests. They repurchased them from the powerful guild of the Halite, which maintained its monopoly on the salt business with an iron fist. Strange sounds and lights emanated from between the closed shutters or from behind the doors of their inhabitations. I would have liked to slip inside to get a look at their work, but a neophyte such as me had no chance of being let in. Daedemorthys kept a deliberate mystery about their activities, and they invariably kept the nosy ones away. I renounced such a futile project to instead continue my visit of the place.

I soon noticed that the rocky walls in which the facades of the troglodytic houses were dug glowed with a blue light. Deomaith explained to me that this peculiarity was only visible after the moment the sun started descending toward the horizon. Soon before the night, the whole cliff seemed to be covered with shimmering rime. However, that sight was ephemeral, and vanished as soon as the first Nebulars were lit. I had missed it the day before, and unfortunately, I would not have the pleasure of contemplating it that night. I had to leave Kalvernach that day if I wanted to reach the capital city in time to finally obtain that bill of exchange Jerryl had promised he would give me months ago.

Magience and Reizh's Inhabitants

Extracted from "Peoples, Populations, and Journeys" by Aeldred Firdh

Contrary to what is commonly asserted, not all of the Reizhites are enthusiasts of the Magientists' science, nor are they all obsessed with the acquisition of some wondrous machine. Reizh is not devoid of contrasts, and communities that live as those of the other kingdoms remain the most numerous. Besides the benefits of running water and public lighting with Nebulars, there are actually relatively few Magientist miracles whose presence the Reizhites witness on a daily basis. For example, not all of them enter the weavers' workshops, even if they buy their goods. Magientist science undeniably spreads more and more, but it is still far from being omnipresent. One can find Magientist devices and cartridges of the famous Flux more easily in Reizh than elsewhere, but whatever some hysterical Demorthèn may say, not every Reizhite goes around with a Nebular in hand. Most of them still use a candle for light, as in Gwidre or Taol-Kaer. Reizhites who can afford it take interest in Magientist artifacts that seem useful to them, but apart from a few eccentrics, they do not spend their time collecting strange things, or blowing their house's roof off when lighting strange apparatuses. On the contrary, there are even people whose hostile discourses toward Magience do not differ much from those I could hear in the Lands of Dèas.



Baldh-Ruoch

We traveled for eight days on the Royal Highway, the only remotely secure road of the region, before reaching the capital city of the smallest of the three kingdoms. Large and paved, the Highway leads to the northernmost regions of the Emerald Crescent. We encountered all sorts of people; merchants, soldiers, peasants, travelers, craftsmen, nobles, and even a group of priests of the Temple, walking without a word, their face devoid of all trace of emotion. The landscape mostly consisted of more or less woody hills, through the middle of which the road snaked lazily.
We spent our nights in comfortable relays, spending a few azure Daols to ensure ourselves a refreshing sleep. As it was the end of fall, the weather was still good, but some peaks of cold were felt before twilight, as we were still progressing further north.
On the night of the seventh day, I saw Baldh-Ruoch's lights, which seemed to hang on the dark canvas of the horizon. Magientists had installed Nebulars from the first of the Great-Spirit Doors to the top of Bronchaerd's palace, capping the Daybreak Rock some three thousand feet higher. The sight was as unbelievable as it was superb, and I remained motionless for a long time, lost in an almost mystical ecstasy, wondering about the forces that had shaped Esteren.

Note from Wylard

According to the popular etymology, Baldh-Ruoch means "sung rock", but some scholars favored other interpretations, such as "high rock" or "raised mountain". I have no particular opinion on the subject, but I have noted with interest that the different opinions outlined an influence external to nature in the existence of the exceptional site on which the capital city of Reizh stands. Demorthèn probably knew more about that than anyone else…

It still took us a day and a half of walking to reach the royal city. We crossed the tumultuous waters of the Donir River through the gigantic bridge of Brian'ch, the massive piers of which held a deck more than three hundred yards long. This work, Deomaith explained to me, was the product of the collaboration of Reizhite architects and Magientists, and had only been built a century ago. Before then, one had to go a long way around to the west to cross the river on a ferry.

Although I had been prepared for it, the vision of Baldh-Ruoch offered my mind such a source of amazement that I could not take my eyes away from it for a while. Two gigantic rocky blocks, each more than five hundred yards high, towered one next to the other. Like two titanic and hieratic sentinels abandoned there at the dawn of time, they stood in front of the mountains. Between them, the powerful waters of the Oëss River sprung, violently expelled from between the flanks of the Mount Ar'Jael. They cascaded noisily against the granitic outcrops in vertiginous falls, finishing in a spraying cloud into a man-made lake, before going round the Sunset Rock at the north.



About a hundred yards apart, the two rocks were linked with innumerable rock bridges. Of these solid constructions, continuously sprinkled by the falls' splashing, I could only see hazy shapes, engulfed in a perpetual mist. Their very slippery decks were protected by high parapets designed to prevent accidents. Yet, according to Deomaith, it did happen that some unfortunate soul would fall to his doom, as some organizations at odds with justice used the bridges to settle their accounts. Of course, the royal guards often patrol those parts, but they cannot see everything…
As tarnished as this symbol of royal authority could be, the golden sun combined with silver stars was everywhere: on the oriflammes and the large banners displayed by the troops on guard in front of Baldh-Ruoch's entrance, on their brand-new tabards, embroidered on the flags flapping at the top of Bronchaerd's palace's highest towers…
On each side of the large paved road leading to the capital city's threshold, the statues of Reizh's former kings lined the way. Their intense looks and affected poses nevertheless managed to give an air of solemnity to the last mile separating the travelers from the royal city.

-Reizh-

Great-Spirit Doors

In fifteen minutes, we reached the foot of an imposing double door mechanism set in the high walls between the bottoms of the two rocks. It was the first of a series of three, and Deomaith explained to me that Reizhites called them Great-Spirit Doors, in reference to a now-forgotten ancient tale. About twenty soldiers with expressionless faces guarded the access. We had to wait for nearly half an hour–the time it took the men at arms to process the crowd of people preceding us.

Of the three of us, I was the only one to be subjected to an actual search. My boot dagger was confiscated for the duration of my stay in town. I paid the so-called "city maintenance" tax–a costly sum of two ember Daols–before proceeding between the formidable masses of the two rocks. While walking in their thick shadow, I feared that I might be smashed by a rock falling from above. Deomaith reassured me, saying there was no risk of that. With a sweeping gesture, he indicated the vast space in which we were: neither rock nor stone were to be seen on the paving of blue-painted tiles, which included aquatic motifs here and there.

After we crossed two other colossal doors under the stern watch of the guards, we climbed a set of narrow-stepped stairs dug into the Sunset Rock. We very frequently had to move to the side to allow people coming from the other direction to pass by. They wore plain, tight-fitting clothes, probably to avoid getting them caught or dirty on the many protrusions of the rock wall. I noticed women wore many nose rings, earrings, necklaces, or bracelets, trying to draw attention away from their plain outfits.

As I quickly ran out of breath, we repeatedly stopped at the benches set into the recesses cut along the stairs. The town in itself was made of several levels coiling like the whorls of a snail's shell. About fifty yards wide each, there were only straight alleys delimiting houses built one on top of the other, barely aired in some places with small squares or terraces. I seized the opportunity offered by a belvedere located at the extremity of an overhanging rock, to quench my thirst with some water and admire the undulating landscape that stretched several hundreds of feet below.

The night had fallen, and without the light of the Nebulars, we would not have been able to continue our ascension. When we were halfway up the rock, Ealaidha invited us to follow her into a long, ill-lit avenue. She took several turns in a maze of alleys before knocking on a faded door. A ray of light appeared quickly as the door opened from the inside. A middle-aged woman wearing an apron and carrying a candle beckoned us to follow her as soon as she recognized Ealaidha's face.

Deomaith and I had to wait in a small, uncomfortable room, sitting on the bare floor. The woman with an apron brought us a light meal without uttering a word. Ealaidha came back after an hour and led us to a flowered patio, in the middle of which two improvised beds had been installed. The atmosphere was surprisingly pleasant, and I slept soundly, lulled by the faraway music of a harp.

The next day, I was awakened at dawn by a bird's chirping. An artificial light imitating the rising sun spread in a soft pinkish hue on the top of the court's walls. As Ealaidha was nowhere to be seen, I came to Deomaith to tell him of my intention to go to the Currency House to meet a low-ranked Talkéride nobleman there. He agreed to lead me there, while warning me that his last stay at the capital city was ten years ago.

Many Nebulars still shed their light on the places under the shadow of the Sunset Rock. Progressing around the huge rocky peak, we got out of a street dimly lit by the science of the Magientists, and the moment after we found ourselves dazzled by the sparkling sunlight.

The brutal transition between the two sources of light caused me to feel indefinably uneasy; something was awry, but I could not put my finger on it.



-Reizh-

The Currency House

After we wandered from floor to floor, following the indications of the capital city's inhabitants as best as we could, we reached a large circular plaza. Under our feet, a huge polychromatic mosaic reflected the light of the sun and the wealth of the patrons who had donated funds for its construction. A great building with an austere facade stood on the north side of the plaza. In the courtyard, many clerks were in discussion with rich merchants and wealthy people wearing silk doublets. They were talking lively, with expressive gestures, in front of tables set on trestles where money changers with their wrinkled, focused faces were scrupulously checking the value of mountains of coins using scales, weights, and counting tokens. Sitting next to them, the first clerks ratified the transactions with their finest writing, elegantly tracing the content of bills of exchange to come.

There was no doubt we had found the Currency House. I crossed the building's large hall in general indifference and immediately headed for a free counter, behind which a bald, gaunt individual was painstakingly trying to make out the cramped handwriting of an official document. A few steps from me, a magistrate was raising objections at a representative of the noble institution, deeming that the interest he was guaranteed for his deposit was much too low. Unabashed by this altercation, I asked to see Knight Jerryl Eskayl.

Unfortunately, he had already left, leaving a message for me. I could read that an important case had required him to go to a mountain village located to the west of the Cirque of Argoneskan, not far from the border separating Reizh from Gwidre. Cursing my misfortune, I decided to keep traveling toward the north.

Salt, an Unexploited Resource

Extracted from "Peoples, Populations, and Journeys" by Aeldred Firdh

Because Tri-Kazel's underground areas have a low rock salt content, the sea, as well as the Western Swamps, constitute the main sources of salt supply. The dukedom of Salann-Tir even significantly depends on that resource. A product known from antiquity, salt was probably used in trade well before the Three Kingdoms adopted the use of Daols.

Although it has lost much of its value, it still generates an important income through taxes, which also makes it an important product in smuggling. Varigals and caravan leaders often keep a block of rock salt or a pouch of the mineral on them, proposing to share it when they have no choice but to spend the night with strangers, or offering it to villagers as a token of their consideration, to maintain good relations.

Leaving

Deomaith agreed to accompany me, as nothing seemed to keep him in the capital city except Ealaidha, who we did not manage to find again in spite of a long search.

Our trip would not be an easy one, all the more so considering summer was ending and the first autumnal frosts would soon mercilessly sweep across the mountainous paths we would be using. Therefore, we bought furs and snowshoes as well as big bags we filled with food and Rioch, a robust local alcohol made from cereals and mushrooms.

I also wanted to bring tents, but Deomaith dissuaded me. If we followed the Gray Road, the safest way to reach our destination, we could take cover in Clascadh, small hemispheric shelters made of granite, inherited from the civilization formerly occupying this hostile part of the peninsula.
The following day we reached the small village of Kell, called the Mountains' Door. From there, we followed the windy track that slowly climbed through the first foothills. It still was not too cold, but I already appreciated the warmth of my furs.



The Unruly

A Varigal told me at length about some Reizhite mountaineer clans who stubbornly refused to yield to the yoke of King Bronchaerd since they had learned of his mild temper. Used to a hard life, they felt only contempt for the obvious complacence with which the king let himself be manipulated by Magientists, whom they called by the name strangers. They refused to answer the court's invitations, and had chosen an authority for themselves, under the form of a council of two Demorthèn and a mysterious woman named The Scatach. Fierce and determined, they had slaughtered the troops sent by Bronchaerd to discipline them numerous times. Since then, they led their life away from the turbulences of power, which did not mean they neglected watching their border with Gwidre–their sworn enemy since the dreadful War of the Temple–nor did they stop fighting the Feondas, which could leap at any time from the smallest crack…
Maybe these people knew more about those creatures?

Wylard

My journey is still not over; I am leaving tomorrow morning. I will make sure to write to you again. I hope, Uncle, that I did not bother you too much with my long tale. I wish you excellent health and restful sleeps.

Until we meet again, I remain your devoted nephew,

Maethen de Briscaith

Chapter 1
The Continent

Letter from Eolas Lehaban, Scribe, for the Attention of His Highness, Lord of Farl

Sire,

As you requested, you will find here all the documents I managed to keep regarding the departure of Sir Télan, Captain of the Watch and hero of the town, for the Continent. As you know, we were friends, and he came to me for help with gathering information to better prepare for his journey. Moreover, you asked that all the documents concerning his project be donated to the town's archives.

You will find some annotations by my hand, where I deemed necessary to be more precise. It has already been a year since Télan and his family left Farl. In vain, I had attempted to convince him not to bring along his wife and his son for such madness, but they could not bear to be separated from each other. We never got any news from them; yet, our city is not far away from the mountains forming the safest border between Reizh and the Continent. I still dare to think that our friend is in good health, and that his daughter, who was promised to your son, is on the way to recovery.

Letter from Melissander to Nagguérand de Greenwood, Primus of the Magientist School of the Town of Farl

Dear Master,

You know well of the current situation of my family, and the crisis we are going through. My husband and I just took the difficult decision to gamble everything in an attempt to cure our daughter Alyna. You, as well as many others, have made use of the whole of your knowledge, unfortunately to no avail. But all of you agreed that with the science or the power from the people of the Continent, curing her would be possible… This is our last hope so that she may again be the lively young woman she was before her encounter with the wretched Feondas.

Soon, Télan is to meet descendants from Continental immigrants, and we have already found a mountaineer who agreed to lead us across the Asgeamar Mountains.

Every piece of information you can give us about those unknown regions will be precious, most particularly about your fellow Magientists, for it is of course toward them that we turn our hopes.

I am aware that I am asking a lot from you when you have already done so much for us, and that I offer you nothing in exchange. But without your help, the difficult path we have chosen to follow will be even harder.

Naturally, you will also understand that through this letter, I am also announcing my resignation. Still, it was a great pleasure for me to work in the heart of the school's kitchens, and the praise you gave me yourself has honored me beyond what I would have thought possible. I will keep in my mind our long conversations; each of them a precious memory that I will always hold dear.

I now end this letter. I hope that when I return, I will have the immense joy to see once more all those I am leaving behind today with so much sadness in my heart, to force destiny to give me back my child.

Your devoted, *Melissander*

Missive originating from Iolairnead, a Mountain Village from the Northeast of Reizh, Directed to Télan, Watch Captain of the Town of Farl

Captain,
Your message has found a favorable response in our village; you and your escort will be my guests for eight days, so that you may prepare yourself for the next step of your journey.
Dirich the Gray is our best guide; he has accepted your generous offer and will lead you, your wife, and your two children from the Eagle's Peak to the pass of Gaos-Bodhar, at the far edge of the kingdom. Then, from this panoramic point, he will show you the best road to follow to reach the first plains of the Continent and, as custom demands, he will propose that you return with him. This first part of your journey will take nearly four weeks, and you will still need at least another six to reach the base of the mountains, and the great flooded plain of the Simahir.

Saerani, Chief of the Village of Iolairnead.

P.S.: Dear Captain, Dirich the Gray is currently by my side and insists that I write the following sentence. I quote it word for word, asking you in advance to excuse the rudeness of this rough mountaineer:
"You tell him that as soon as we leave the village, he and his family will have to submit to my law, because I know the mountain and I will be their only chance to make it. They will do all I tell them to ensure their safety, or I will let them croak without even turning back…"



The Confederation

Although you certainly know most of the information we hold regarding that nation, my good Prince, here is what the Primus of our Magientist school told Télan's spouse about it.

Answer from Nagguérand de Greenwood to Melissander

Dear Friend,

It was not without regret that I read your letter. The perspective of being deprived of your fine meals really had a wasting effect on me, and the announcement of your expedition came as a shock. Indeed, I knew you two would try anything to cure Alyna from that strange illness, but I would have thought your young son, Bréac, would be left to the care of the town until your return. To tell the truth, I even secretly hoped that you would stay as well. The journey you intend to undertake will be a laborious and difficult one, particularly with a nine-year-old boy and a sick young girl…
I know your determination, and I know others have already attempted to talk you out of leaving. I also know that the bonds uniting your family are unbreakable and that it is impossible for you to even consider being separated from your relatives. I can only wish for the best and bring you my unfortunately modest help. After you cross the Asgeamar and the Simahir's great muddy lake, you will reach the border of the Confederation. I have never treaded on those lands, and no one here knows how far the Simahir stretches. My teachers told me Magience has a very different aspect from the one we know in Tri-Kazel: our modest school of Farl seems really small in front of Baldh-Ruoch's, but it is only a speck compared to the smallest of the Continent's Magientist factories.
Within the Confederation, existence is organized around the city-factories, named Nòds, and everyone who does not live within them must work to provide them with raw materials, for the progression of knowledge must never suffer from any insufficiency.
Nòds are immense fortresses, much larger than our towns; within their bowels of stone and metal live and die all those whose existence is turned toward the search for knowledge. Most strange things are told about what happens inside, but I do not believe the horrors recounted by people who certainly have never set foot there… Some slanderers also tell that only dry riverbeds and arid lands can be found around those huge fortified buildings.
However, I know of the wonders you may see there: transparent buildings, inside of which light permanently shines, where the temperature is always as mild as during a summer's day, and between which walls all kinds of edible plants grow profusely; flying barges crossing the country from city-factory to city-factory to deliver raw materials and monstrous devices capable of creating or swallowing nearly any landscape.



However, science's most beautiful miracles are not huge machines. The people toward whom I am sending you have become masters in the art of using Mekones, those little metallic-looking snakes running under the Magientists' skin, notably to palliate human weaknesses. And I cherish the hope that the ailments affecting the beautiful Alyna will soon be forgotten thanks to even more advanced techniques. Therefore, upon your return, she will only have in mind the concretization of her marriage to our young prince, as it was planned before that tragic incident.
Know, dear friend, that all my thoughts will be with you in the ordeals awaiting you.

Nagguérand de Greenwood

The Great Theocracy

Furthermore, Sir Télan had obtained an interview with a Vector of the Temple who was in town at the time. With great benevolence, you were among the first to accept to receive these representatives of our former enemy, the kingdom of Gwidre. Today, free circulation between the kingdoms has been reestablished, but for some, grudges die hard. Anyway, Télan dictated to me a detailed account of that encounter, after which we led a more extensive inquiry, the exhaustive results of which I have at your disposal.

Interview between Télan and Caûmes de Belnast, Vector of the Temple

I entered the room, and closed the door behind me. The religious man was standing, and seemed to be enjoying the sight dominating the town through one of the tower's narrow windows. I had caught a glimpse of my painful, tired face a few moments ago in a mirror; the consequence of a night spent beside Alyna without managing to get any sleep… I intended to frankly get to what brought me to his presence, straight after the usual compliments.

"Father, I thank you for granting me a little of your time, I know you wished to depart for Gwidre last week, and yet, you are still among us…"

The priest answered that introduction with a dismissive handwave:

"Captain, do not thank me. There was nothing I could do to improve your child's state, to my great displeasure; so if I can support you in any way, I will gladly help you. I already know you intend to leave and that you are gathering all the necessary information. Unfortunately, I only know of the Continent what my peers taught me about it. The Great Theocracy remains something unknown for me; my prayers will be with you, but be sure that after the hardships of your journey, you will reach a verdant, wonderful country."

I nodded in agreement, hoping that our journey would not lead us that far away. It seemed that some news traveled very fast indeed. I waited a moment for the clergyman to resume talking:

"It is said that when it is midday at the easternmost border, the sun still has not risen in Chaïna, the capital city. It is a vast land, much more so than our whole peninsula."

He then looked outside, as if he could see beyond the horizon. "There are many monastery-cities, built around gigantic cathedrals of which belfries touch the sky. Everyone lives according to the Creator's laws; a day is divided into six great prayer times marked by the bronze bells' ringing that can be heard from the top of the highest mountain to the depths of the wildest land."

I pondered over this for a while before asking a question that seemed both obvious and stupid to me.

"There is something I cannot understand. How do those who work manage with so many prayers to do each day?"

He smiled with genuine kindness.

"The great prayers are exclusive to the clergy, the laymen's prayers being shorter so as not to disturb them too much during their work. Life is hard for them; peasants, craftsmen, and laborers all play an important part. They have to fill their production quotas, so that the domains of the Theocracy may flourish, and the warehouses always be full. Architects, administrators, soldiers, and managers are all formed in specialized theocratic schools and also participate in the country's prosperity. We have to provide against all the dangers threatening us. At the north are strange barbarian tribes who never accepted to yield to the Truth. War is continuous, but that border has not moved significantly for a long time, as the most important detachments are in the south, to fight the Magientist demons and their unnatural science…"



He paused and stared at me for a while; an ironic smile took form on his face.

"My words may seem harsh to you, but they do not reflect my thought. That is what we know of Continental practices: Magientists and theocrats are hereditary enemies since their origin. Today, we of Tri-Kazel are fortunately much less categorical; even though it has not always been this way, we live in peace again now, and for a long time, I hope."

Such an evocation made me think of the War of the Temple, which put the peninsula to fire and sword years before, marking History forever. The armies of the One God, very disciplined, had invaded Reizh and besieged the cities. The reinforcements and the supplies regularly coming from the backlines could have allowed them to hold their sieges indefinitely. Without the intervention of the armies of Taol-Kaer, Reizh would have fallen in a few months. I let him go on without pointing that out.

"Everybody governing the Theocracy collaborates closely with one another, pursuing one same objective: to always stand ready and to have as much vital goods as possible at disposal. It is admitted that even in the case of an invasion or a major disaster, neither the population nor the army would lack food or raw materials for at least two years. Such an imperative originated from a double perspective. First, there is the war effort. Secondly, there is also the fact that a full stomach, a healthy body, and the promise of a better afterworld are the pillars of everyone's peacefulness and happiness. That is also why, during religious celebrations, food is served in abundance."

"I understand very well. Theocrats take care of their subjects' bellies as they take care of their souls. They see to it that nothing may trouble them on their way to wisdom."

"That is exactly how it is," he answered with utmost seriousness.

Tale about the Continent

Your Highness, here is one of the testimonies I registered at the time. We had, with your blessing, organized a vast campaign so as to gather as many as possible of them, and I keep many others at your disposal. However, this one seemed the most instructive to me.

Moreover, some things must be added about those who introduced themselves to us as emigrants from the Continent. If one excludes the three great immigration waves on which the historians' theses concur (more than two centuries before the Oath, then around year 220, and finally around year 660, each one of these periods marking the culminating point of a long heatwave), one notices there is almost no official record of Continentals arriving in the whole kingdom of Reizh. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to check the veracity of the declarations and the actual identity of the people who answered our call. For that matter, systematic investigations among the relatives of our potential interlocutors allowed us to bring to light many made-up tales. The liars were punished as they deserved.

The Climatic Cycles

It would seem that Esteren is subject to a climatic cycle of slightly over four centuries. Periods of great cold or heat, alternatively, correspond to the apogee of each half-period; about every 220 years. Thus, the coldest year took place during the fourth century, around the year 430. Two centuries before, near the year 220, or after, at the dawn of the year 660, heat waves thawed the perpetual snow, triggering droughts in plains and floods in mountains, forcing many people to emigrate. Currently, Esteren progressively sees the end of a period of great cold, but winters remain harsh and summers short.

The Simahir: Bogs and Crops

This testimony was registered in a village near our city. The man was tall, had a thin face, and time had left many marks on his wrinkled skin. He refused flatly to be paid the promised reward for all those who would give information about the Continent, and nobody in the vicinity seemed to question his sincerity. Moreover, he talked with a strong accent, characteristic of no region in the peninsula.



Tale Written Down by Eolas Lehaban

"I left the Simahir about twenty years ago. By then, I still was at the peak of my strength, but the journey toward the peninsula broke me, and I only managed to build a windmill here thanks to the help of those who welcomed me into their village. My name is Orelhic, and in the Simahir, I was at the same time a miller and the head of my community. The Simahir is an amazing region for visitors: as changing as a child's mood, it appears to the eyes of the travelers going to the Continent when they reach the spurs of the Karnova Mountains, after they braved the dangers of this place. The great boggy plain stretches toward the horizon, and is crossed by many waterways, three rivers, and their tributaries, flowing into the nearby ocean. Every shade of green can be seen, between dams, ponds, stagnant waters, and the cultivated marshes swept by unen-

ding winds that make the landscape's colors undulate. Indeed, in the language of the plain, there exist no less than fourteen words to refer to the color green, each one of them with its gradations and its variations. The weather is rumored to be the dampest of the whole Continent; the ground is always sodden and the rains almost never stop. The sky is perpetually filled with clouds that the winds pack together on the mountains, the tops of which remain invisible most of the time. In that region, people live gathered in small communities.

Formerly, we lived on the very water-filled plain, in houses built on stilts, but the Magientists' wondrous machines created artificial hills for us, on which the whole community was able to settle while keeping an eye on its crops. There are plenty of fish in the rivers and in the countless ponds and lakes; they are the base of our diet, along with the rice we produce, and also a providential manna for the inhabitants of the Continent living in less fertile regions. We also cultivate hemp and reeds, which are the main raw materials for our craft. The Simahir has at all times been approached by the warring powers seeking to win influence. The Magientist Confederation offered us artificial hills and irrigation networks. On its part, the Great Theocracy brought us its support when everything was bad and gave us precious advice in organization and management, which allowed us to improve our living standards greatly. Still today, each community of the plain is independent and delivers its food surplus to whomever it pleases, according to the favors done and to the relations developed with its neighbors…"

Puzzling, isn't it, Sire? That particular tale brings an end to my letter. May it evoke pleasant memories of Télan and his kin. I strongly hope we will soon have news–good news even–of our dear captain and his family. If your curiosity toward the Continent has been aroused by these few documents, know that, of course, I remain at your service.



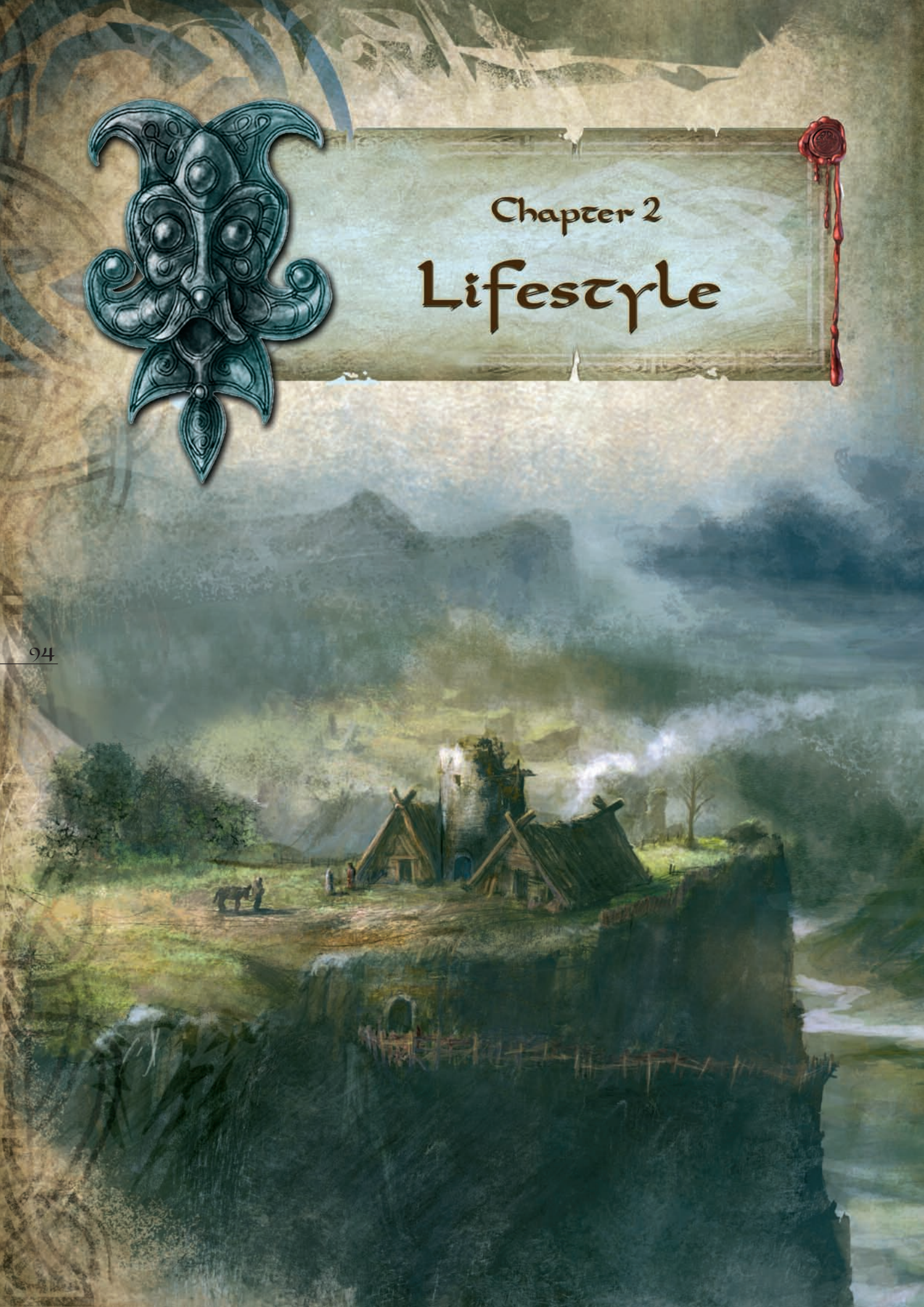
Many years later…

The old man remained silent, and silence fell heavily on the whole audience. They had come to the tavern for three evenings to listen to the teller's story, and it had just come to an end. The audience was dumbstruck, divided between the will to not believe anything of that extravagant fable, and the insidious doubt that had sprouted from the words the man had pronounced. There was in his voice that undeniable sincerity that had never faltered during the tale…

The man finished his beer, put the mug back on the counter, and carefully folded the age-yellowed pages he had held in front of him, before putting them in a leather binder he fastened to his belt, in front of his sword's scabbard.

There was a whisper, and the whisper became a murmur, which increased until it became a hubbub, and the thunder of voices soon rumbled everywhere. The man raised his arms, his palms held open in front of his audience, asking for silence. And silence was made: he was about to speak again.

"You can believe my story or not, it does not really matter anymore today. It is the story of my life as I have told you. I left the north of Reizh with my parents and my ill sister when I was barely nine years old. I spent my life on the Continent, I went through it, crossed it, combed it, looking for civilization. There, I buried one by one all those I loved, and only came back to Tri-Kazel two years ago. Everything is as I told you: there is nothing civilized on the Continent, except a few nomadic, primitive tribes. Whatever the cradle in which our ancestors have grown may be, it is not on the other side of the Asgeamar Mountains, I have become sure of that…"



Chapter 2
Lifestyle

Doern was a powerless witness to the destruction of the farm. Faceless creatures with grotesque proportions darted through the mist. Shouts rang and immediately died with a sickening gurgling noise. Doern tried to summon enough energy to move, but to no avail. He stood there, motionless, as if overwhelmed by some evil charm. Suddenly, a beast leaped out of the fog and drew closer… it uttered strange sounds, which became coherent words. With a feeling of dread, he recognized the voice of his master Wylard. Doern woke up with a start.

"So, my good Doern, I see you fell asleep."

Wylard stood above Doern, with a smile that gave his face a kind aspect, in spite of the deep rings under his eyes that revealed extreme tiredness. His servant was holding the precious parchments against himself. The glowing embers of the fire in the fireplace were slowly dying.
"You've made good progress. You are reaching a part I have a particular fondness for. That is where I have gathered all kinds of documents about our society, our art, and our craftsmen. You will notice how, in spite of adversity, our people are still able to do great, beautiful things."



Chapter 2

Habits and Customs

As I am writing these few pages, I can already feel the breath of death drawing closer. Soon, all that will remain of me will be a cairn in the field of my ancestors, the mute symbol of a life returned to earth. In these moments of urgency, it dawned on me that there are very few writings about the daily life and the customs of our people, the reasons being, of course, our tradition of orally transmitting our culture, but also the rarity of parchment. Shall my transcription be of use? Why would people read about what they experience on a daily basis? Of course, many writings of various origins are carefully gathered within the libraries of Osta-Baille, but these texts are difficult to access, and very often rather vague. Unfortunately, our oral tales tend to get lost or distorted with each new generation, and their contents vary greatly from one region of the peninsula to another. In these troubled times, during which the adepts of Magience and the faithful of the Temple continuously grow, it seems vital to me to write what I know about our culture on these few sheets.

Tilliarch'

I was born in Tilliarch', in the same house I still live in today. Tillarch' is a village of moderate importance, located in the southern part of Taol-Kaer.

It was built on a plateau hanging over a steep-sided, relatively inaccessible valley. The only road leading away goes along the side of the mountain, until it disappears beyond the Artz's pass, a few miles to the north. The village amounts to about a hundred houses, surrounded by thin walls made of compacted earth and a wooden palisade. Around the town lie fields of various crops, offering the village a clear sight of the forest.

Of course, everybody knows each other here. Tilliarch' is a community, and every important task is undertaken through communal effort: this can mean repairing the walls, helping in the construction of a house, participating in public security, etc.

Commonly Used Titles

Demorthèn:

This invariable word does not indicate a rank, but instead the responsibility of a duty and of ancestral knowledge. The Demorthèn is a sage, and the link between the spirits of nature and man. He is also the memory of the village, the one who knows and guides; the keeper of knowledge and tradition.

Dàmàthair:

Literally "second mother". These people are entirely devoted to educating children and assisting childbirths. They sit on the council of the community.

Birth

The old Demorthèn was present, as well as Kynan, the Dàmàthair at the time. While she was busy bringing some relief to my mother, awaiting the right moment when she could give birth to me, the Demorthèn was talking with my father. Obviously, I do not know what exact words they exchanged, but for having been through a similar situation dozens of time, I can picture the scene, since such a custom has remained the same. The duty of the Demorthèn is to attend every birth. In a way, his presence consecrates the appearance of a new life. The father then tells him the child's first name. Thus, the Demorthèn is the witness and binds the mystery of life by accepting this name.



In some even more traditional countries, the Demorthèn chooses a second name for the child. It is a secret name that only he knows and which he must never tell anyone. It is said that whoever manages to know of this second name captures a shard of the being it designates, and that she has a hold over him.

The Dàmàthairs

While the infant and his exhausted mother take their first rest together, the Demorthèn and the Dàmàthair go out to share the good news. Designated a few months before by the parents, the Dàmàthair is actually the first person to touch the child and she will be the one to take care of his education. Mine's name was Erein. She had chosen her condition of common mother right at the end of her childhood. As she liked children and did not enjoy going out with the others to gather fruits or take care of the fields, she preferred to dedicate herself to affection and teaching. Yet, to go by her jovial disposition was a mistake, for she was a strong-minded woman, very capable in the use of weapons. Indeed, Dàmàthairs also have the duty to defend children and vulnerable people in the case of an attack; that is why they are given a complete martial training. Erein gave birth to two children and raised six; as for me, I was the second to be entrusted to her. My first, hazy memories go back to the time when I was regularly playing with children of my age, and I believe things have not changed much to this day.

Education

Most of the time, the Dàmàthair has the duty to educate the children. Actually, the whole community participates in such an education, as well as the natural parents, when they get the opportunity. In my oldest memory, I am standing by my father, in his field. During my childhood, I spent a lot of time with my parents, since they worked at the village, but other children were not as lucky: many adults leave to hunt for several days, or deliver goods to the neighboring communities for trade.

The Circles

Each day, the children of the village gather according to their age circles. There are three, and inside this little village, all kinds of activities are organized: games of skill and strength , small tasks to perform for the village... many actions to prepare them for real life little by little. Thus, they first learn to communicate among a group, to develop their physical abilities, to learn of the basic know-how of many tools, and, later, starting from the third circle, to use weapons.







Each circle corresponds with five years of the child's life. Particular contests are organized for each passage, during which, under the watch of several Dàmàthairs, the children pit their strength, skill, and wits against each other in the fields surrounding the village. Thus, inside an arena only delimited with a few posts, they are to compete in several games ranging from wrestling to obstacle courses. The Demorthèn sometimes comes to see how they are growing, or gathers them to tell them about the beauty of the world and warn them about its dangers.

At sixteen years old, the children become adults. This important step takes place during the Earrach Feis, the festival of spring's equinox. After a period of training of variable duration among the militia, they are free to work toward the path they have chosen during their passage to adulthood. It is also at this point that they can consider getting married and founding their own homes. In many farming families, children stay in their native houses to help their parents and take over eventually. Some choose to become craftsmen's apprentices, and some others, more rarely, leave their villages and go to the city to study there or make a go of it. Indeed, such a journey is long and hard, and the dangers are many. Each year, many disappearances are reported on the roads.

Military Service and Training

Although they have been trained in using weapons during their education and are perfectly sound in body, young people are still novices. At the end of the third circle, they are entrusted to a veteran who must complete their martial education and, most importantly, make them face real situations.

Fear, cold, anxiety, and fatigue; this is what I remember the most of this dark period. Of course, we had to participate in keeping watch, by day and night alike, but we also took part in the surveillance of the surroundings. When I was a child, I had hardly ever left the protection of the walls, and never the first ring of cultivated fields circling the village. Therefore, I knew nothing about the forest, until I was forced to venture inside. Truth be told, one is better off not knowing about it… It is a dark place where one has the constant feeling of being watched, where the roads are few and bumpyparticularly where they wind along hillsides. Such trips were imposed on us to prepare us for a possible evacuation, and allowed us to know our surroundings better, but at the bottom of my heart, they terrified me deeply. However, I would not complain, for some were sent to faraway fortresses, to defend dangerous areas.

A Life Choice

During my youth, I did not stand out from the other children. As I was rather frail, I found it difficult to keep up with the others during their games. In spite of that, Kergelan, the Demorthèn at the time, noticed that I had a sharp mind. Interested in everything, I was never out of questions each time he came to tell us a story, while the other children listened obediently. Quite rapidly, Kergelan grew fond of me. Truth be told, he was already getting along well with my Dàmàthair, and would regularly pay us a visit in the evening. Erein would then cook up a copious meal.

In Tilliarch', as in most of the communities that remain attached to traditions, it is the custom that each home invites the Demorthèn for dinner at least once or twice a year. This is done out of friendship, or at least to strengthen the bonds of the village, of which the Demorthèn is considered as a nexus.

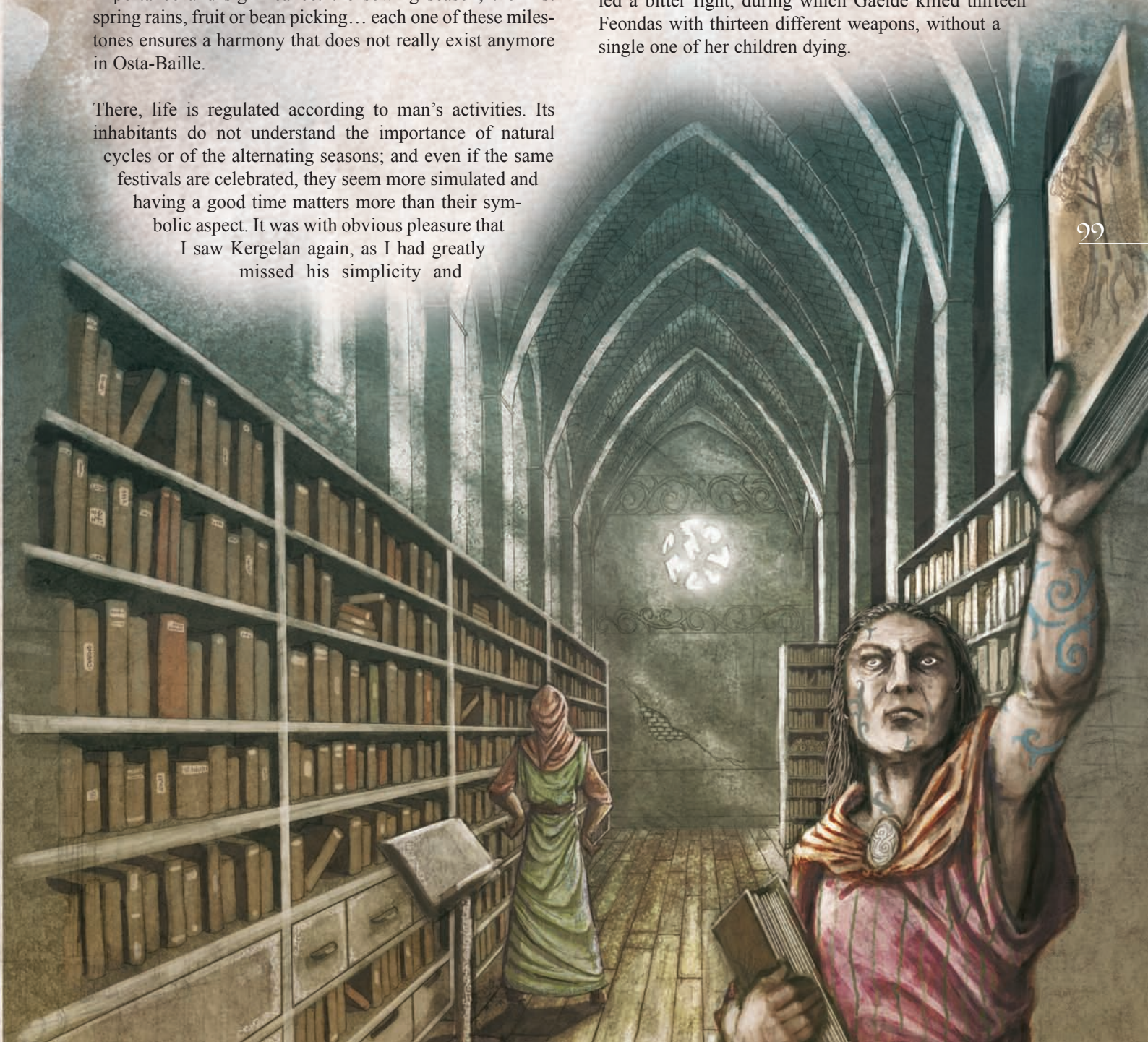
It was the occasion to spend many evenings speaking freely with Kergelan. As I had a hard time going through the mandatory period as a member of the militia, I chose to dedicate myself to studying the world and its people, with Kergelan's blessing. Some considered such a decision with disapproval, as many arms were necessary to have the village's collective life and defense run smoothly. However, since I had not really been accepted because of my blatant incapacity regarding my fighting spirit and my skills, people commonly agreed to my imminent departure. Thus, I traveled for a few weeks, with the university districts of Osta-Baille as my goal.

The experience of the great city was not quite to my liking, and I gladly came back to Tilliarch' and its life in harmony with the surrounding nature. Here, each period has its own importance and significance: the sowing season, the first spring rains, fruit or bean picking… each one of these milestones ensures a harmony that does not really exist anymore in Osta-Baille.

There, life is regulated according to man's activities. Its inhabitants do not understand the importance of natural cycles or of the alternating seasons; and even if the same festivals are celebrated, they seem more simulated and having a good time matters more than their symbolic aspect. It was with obvious pleasure that I saw Kergelan again, as I had greatly missed his simplicity and wisdom when I was in town. There, one may meet many intelligent and educated people, but their aspirations and goals differ noticeably from ours.

I stayed with Kergelan so that he might continue my initiation to other ceremonies or customs, and pass on to me the tales and legends that he usually did not tell anyone. It was at that time that I met Yledre. She was the daughter of the tavern keeper, and spent most of her time helping her father with the fastidious task of running one of the most important places in the life of the villagers.

One of Kergelan's tales mentioned a probably historical character: Gaelde, a Dàmàthair who had raised thirteen children and had taught each one of them the use of a different weapon. When her village, Eachad, was attacked by Feondas, she hid her six younger children and came to fight accompanied with the seven older ones. They led a bitter fight, during which Gaelde killed thirteen Feondas with thirteen different weapons, without a single one of her children dying.



The Tavern

This is the village's place for rest and entertainment. People like to come here after a working day to have a chat, drink some liquor, or simply spend some time away from their daily worries. Although it is still a cheerful, animated establishment in summer, it becomes the true center of the village in winter. Winter, with its long, cold nights; winter where unconsciously, fear sneaks into everyone's heart. Then, all the inhabitants come to share their remaining small part of hope and courage. Traditionally, it is a place with a low ceiling where light remains dim so as not to hurt the eyes. Here, everything is done to buck up our tired senses. The smell of Boernac meat cooked in the central stone hearth mixes with the unmistakable scent of the torches' fern oil. The luminous glow of the flames dances on the lime walls. The continuous chatter of the place's regulars exchanging news and gossips, complaining sadly, or bragging, fills space with a multitudinous life.

Located in the south of Reizh, the Bent Tree is an inn built within the trunk of one of Tri-Kazel's few giant sequoias. Following a landslide, the tree slumped until its top came to rest on a great rock. This establishment, dug into the colossal trunk, can be accessed with a rope ladder. The main room, which is slanted, was made more level by dividing it into several successive platforms. The innkeeper does not sell more than one glass of alcohol, as a few tipsy clients have paid for their one-night pleasure with a heavy fall…

I remember that in the middle of this invigorating spectacle, Yledre was at work, distributing mugs of fresh ale or plates of cooked meats. She stopped to talk for a few minutes with everyone, gracefully fluttering around the tables of dark wood. Often, when it was time to close, I took the habit of talking to her, vaguely helping her in a few small tasks. I shall skip over many small details that would be irrelevant in this tale, but in the end, we became closer until we promised to get married.

When a young couple moves into their new home, they first perform a ceremony to bless their home. It consists in naming every element composing the house (walls, roof, door, ground…) and calling the blessing of the spirits upon them, so that the habitation endures natural disasters.

Indeed, some rumors tell of houses miraculously spared by the forces of nature.

Love and Relationships

In Tillarch', we have in the end little time to spend in long courting. Relations between the villagers are rather simple. At an early age, children are put together according to their age classes, independently of their sex. Children, girls and boys alike, have the same consideration for each other. They are all integrated in the same activities, which includes weapon training. It is actually only from the third education circle that differences arise and that natural attractions start to develop. Sexual education–given at this time by the Dàmàthairs–is simple, but it makes the young ones understand the importance of procreation in a context where infant mortality is quite present and labor is precious. The natural parents rarely meddle with their children's behavior and leave them free to choose their companions or future partners, except in some families who do not accept the fact of entrusting their descendants to a Dàmàthair.
The situation is rather different in cities, where in spite of the importance of the population, families are more self-involved. Therefore, children mingle less with each other, staying among their families most of the time. The protective outlook of the parents and their decisions are consequently more important. It is even quite common to see the choice of the parents override the children's regarding their acquaintances and, above all, their unions. In contrast with this apparent rigidity regarding customs, one can find in these same cities very different places, dubbed houses of pleasure or Toil-tagh.

Marriage

The union of two people is the occasion for the whole village to participate in a community festival. A specific and exclusive day of the year has always been devoted to it. Moreover, the same rule applies to other events, which are also opportunities to gather the community as a whole. Everyone is free to participate or not, without the risk of offending anyone. This way, every marriage promise made during the year is fulfilled on the day of the summer solstice. During the year of my marriage, there were eight couples at the threshold a new life. Kergelan presided over the ceremony that took place on the circle of meetings, at the center of the village. Yledre's head was adorned with a crown of flowers and I was covered in palpable happiness. We stood barefoot on the banks of the river, where earth and water mix. At Tilliarch', the Demorthèn called upon the blessing of the primordial spirits of nature. As far as I know, such practices are losing ground. According to a letter one of my friends from Osta-Baille sent me: "The union of a man and a woman approved by mud is a ludicrous, archaic idea. One cannot possibly believe that spirits inhabit every pebble and every drop of water of creation…" Although we did not really agree on many ideas, I still corresponded regularly with this man for whom I had some esteem.

Home

My father had died the previous year in a landslide, while he was extracting rocks from the quarry. Thus, Yledre and I moved into my mother's house. Without this, we would have had to take part in the village's growth by building our own home.

When a new house was to be built, the place was chosen so as to participate in the defense of Tilliarch' in the case of an emergency. Most often, the houses were arranged in small groups around small squares, toward the center of which the entrance and the main windows faced. On the back, windows were forbidden, except for tiny, narrow openings that could be used to see without being seen, or shoot from without too much danger. Therefore, in the case of an attack, each square was used as a defense courtyard.

Death

A few years later, Kergelan died, apparently from heart failure. Obviously, I was greatly affected, and I spent long hours crying silently for this admirable person who had been a second father for me. Noticing the general affliction, I took it upon myself to do what he would have done when alive, which was to advise, comfort, and carry on.

Kergelan's body was ceremoniously laid on a flat rock for a day so that everyone could pay him homage one last time. As for many important and respected people, his face had traditionally been covered by a mask of plaited rope. We then carried him toward the high plateau hanging over Tilliarch', to the field of the ancestors. He was inhumed with his staff, the symbol of his wisdom, with his feet turned toward the village and the horizon. Once the heavy rocks were laid on his last home, I went alone to the back of the field, toward the opposite side, and planted a small oak at the entrance of the sacred wood. It was not sacred because of the unlikely presence of some spirits, but simply by the memories of all our brothers, parents, and forefathers who had disappeared.

Each of them had a slowly growing tree planted in his memory, even though their remains were long gone. Ash trees and elms stood near some birch trees. Here, a noble yew had its top darting toward the skies; there, an august oak reminded of an elder's wisdom. Soon before his death, as he felt his end drawing near, Kergelan had initiated me in some Demorthèn secrets. After spending a long time alone in the forest, where I could meditate on my new status, I came back to the village and took Kergelan's place for good in the hearts and minds of the people.

Aothbàs

During the inhumation ceremony, an oblong hole at least five feet deep is dug. The bottom is covered with a layer of sand or ground rock so as to isolate flesh from earth. The decomposing body must not directly mix with the fertile soil, but be filtered by this mineral substratum. It is said that this prevents the essential energy that each being carries within her to be directly absorbed in the depths of the world. Heavy slabs or granite are also laid on the tomb to protect the deceased's corpse. These slabs, during strongly moonlit nights, seem to vibrate with a diffuse light.

This phenomenon, occurring mostly during winter, is called Aothbàs; the light of the dead.

I think this sums up the traditions of my land. I am getting old now, and my days are numbered. I hope that my descendants will be able to share with their sons what makes the heart of our culture.



On Dreams

In Tri-Kazel, dreams have always had an important influence in folklore: a dream is often considered as a sort of prediction. When a dream is clear enough to be rational, it is then said that it can truly occur, particularly when it repeats the following night. Potions prepared by the Demorthèn can make people fall into a deep, dreamless sleep, should there be a risk that their dreams prove dangerous.

There is a curious condition called sleep disease. The affected person merely seems to be sleeping soundly at first sight, but it is actually completely impossible to wake him up. Most often, this illness lasts between two and three days. When the patient finally wakes up, he cannot remember anything about his dreams. Some time after, a slight moroseness on his part can be noticed, as well as a tendency to withdraw within himself. According to some people, priests of the Temple have sacred dreams in which they are granted the vision of what they must accomplish to fulfill the will of the One God.

Researchers on the Continent are said to have applied themselves to the study of dreams. They are called occultists and they are apparently trying to interpret dreams so as to reach a better understanding of the human mind. Some of them are even rumored to be able to put a person under a charm and force her to do their will.

Traditions and Festivals

Dearest Friend,

As I know how fond you are of stories and curiosities, I have decided to tell you about some fragments of my recent journey in the south of Taol-Kaer. It is true that I have few opportunities to go out of our beautiful Gwidrite city of Ard-Amrach and that it takes little to amaze me. But do read what follows.

Exhausted, and I confess a bit lost, I unexpectedly arrived on the day before the holy one of Earrach in a typical Talkéride village. I then took a room in the place's only inn, and promptly went to bed. The day after, reinvigorated by this good night's sleep and a hearty meal of cabbage and cooked goat meat, I went for a stroll to take a look at how traditions were celebrated in such a remote place. How surprised I was to witness the absence of the ritual decoration that usually adorns the streets of our city! Still, the inhabitants had dressed in their best clothes, and were crowding at the center of the village where the Demorthèn, dressed in a long ample robe, stood under a majestic oak. Behind them, I noticed a row of young people, of the same age as far as I could tell, who solemnly listened to the fervent speech of the sage. After some asking around, I learnt that it was some sort of rite for the passage from childhood to adulthood. Apparently, they call this festival the Renewal, and this is for them a plentiful period of five or six days, which corresponds to our Tiraine.

Earrach Feis

This is the celebration of the end of the supremacy of darkness over light. The spring equinox marks the rebirth of every thing; the renewal of the circle of life and of nature. Following it, nights become shorter and the threatening feeling that pervades the short winter days subsides. Therefore, this day is symbolically a festival filled with much rejoicing. It is also at this time that the ceremony of passage from the state of child to the one of adult is organized. Earrach Feis is closely observed in villages, less so in cities. In Gwidre, when the Temple became the official religion, some names of traditional festivals were changed, to reduce the influence of Demorthèn in popular customs. Thus, Earrach Feis became Tiraine, a solemn festival marking the beginning of the year.



Agaceann

Apart from this joyful celebration, the second most important ceremony of the local folklore is called Agaceann. It takes place at the equinox of fall, and is, as I understood, the equivalent of Earrach Feis. It is not actually a festival, for Agaceann marks the beginning of the descending phase of the seasonal cycle, during which nature progressively falls asleep. Agaceann is the occasion of a sort of collective contemplation through which the memory of the dead is honored, and following which warnings about danger lurking around are repeated. This celebration has, as I heard, a strong importance for fighters by profession. Indeed, in this occasion, trials of strength and bravery are held, at the end of which ranks are distributed or confirmed. This ceremony takes place on a yearly basis, with the idea that the chief must be stronger, braver, and cleverer than his men. As a stranger, I was well received, partly thanks to the fact that I remained evasive about where I was from. Unfortunately, one thing is for sure: being a native of Gwidre does not bring a good opinion from people. I tried to explain some of our traditions to a few of them who seemed more open, but I was quickly met with a skepticism that was not far from turning into hostility. Thus, I quickly changed the subject and asked them about their calendar, their various festivals and traditions, to see if these were the same as ours.

The Calendar

The years of the Tri-Kazelian calendar are numbered starting from the creation of the Three Kingdoms, as you know. Why set your life clock on such a trivial act? This is beyond me. As for the rest, their calendar is the same as ours: it is organized on twelve perfectly equal months, of thirty days each, preceded by the five intercalary days during which Earrach Feis, the festival of renewal linking the years, takes place. Many small local festivals occur between summer and fall; I might believe that, overall, ale and liquor are consumed more often than water! Many events, particularly those related to offerings to nature, are opportunities for libations. On such occasions, if villages are neighbors, they have common festivities and set benches of food and drinks, not far from the center of one of them. Most of the winter festivals take place in the tavern, or sometimes in a large common house if the village is big enough to own one. I will be leaving tomorrow, and am currently drinking to you.

Your loyal friend,

Asnardh.

Traditional Tri-Kazelian Calendar

Earr (March) Earrach Feis	**Giblean** (April)	**Céitean** (May)	**Og-mhios** (June) Tsioghair *(Demorthèn gathering)*	**Luchar** (July)	**Lunasdal** (August)
Sulthainn (September) Agaceann	**Damhar** (October)	**Samhainn** (November)	**Dudlachd** (December)	**Faoiltreach** (January)	**Gearran** (February)

Chapter 2
Handicrafts

My son,
If you are reading these lines, then you have now reached your sixteenth year. It also means I am dead. When exactly does not matter; I have gone to meet my ancestors and left you alone with your poor mother, without having the opportunity to teach you a proper profession myself. Fortunately, if everything happened according to my wishes, the guild has taken care of your needs and given you, my son, an acceptable education. On the next year, you will have to choose your apprenticeship and join one of their master artisans. The guild has protected you both, your mother and you, and you must now dedicate yourself to it in return; this is your duty and your honor. You are aware that I was one of its great masters myself, so let me tell you about what is involved in this word, so unique and yet so vast: crafts.



Of the Basics

As you know, in short, a craft actually indicates a manual production technique, on a modest scale. Thus, a craftsman practices a traditional technique on his own, sometimes with the help of his own family or an apprentice whom he takes under his care and trains to make him his assistant. This is what the guild has planned for you. Among craftsmen, there is a certain hierarchy: an apprentice becomes a journeyman after a few years. If he manages to create a masterpiece approved by his master and the guild, he is eligible for the title of artisan and independency. The title "Neach-torgail", which means "master artisan", is given only to the best. For each crafting trade, there are only a few Neach-torgail in each region. The quality of their works is the pride of every artisan and of his whole crafting trade. However, you shall discover that in Tri-Kazel, quality is equated with sturdiness and reliability rather than with aestheticism in itself. Beauty is only added value, which, as enjoyable as it can be, is in the end, secondary. The only exception concerns those whose craft is very close to pure art, such as jewelers, for whom splendor remains predominant. Finally, at the top of the hierarchy sits the Mercanthas, the guild master.

Of the Various Fields

In the end, craft encompasses a rather impressive range of trades, amounting to more than two hundred varieties. Here are its main fields:

Woodworking

This is a fundamental craft in our society. Lumberjacks, carpenters, joiners, coopers, shoemakers, and instrument makers… they all shape this living matter with respect and love. Although many craftsmen alternately perform several of these professions and know how to adapt, each one has his preference and specialty. Wood is used to make many buildings, but also objects, from furniture (chests, tables, chairs…) to everyday tools (buckets, barrels, dishes…). Large-scale works are also very varied and apply to fortifications as well as to boats, wagons, and carriages. Individual habitations, ramparts, and palisades; casings, crossbeams, and stilts, are all made of wood.
These craftsmen are highly respected for their part in the life and survival of villages, and form the most powerful Tri-Kazelian guilds. "The Woodworkers of Gorm" is undoubtedly the most powerful and influential guild of Taol-Kaer, but reportedly, its fortune was built on shady and opprobrious practices. As you shall quickly find out, guilds are a fertile ground for rumors and gossip!
Wood is also used to make deadly ranged weapons, essential for striking at an opponent from our palisades: hence, crossbows, and especially bows, are chiefly crafted by woodworkers. The trade of woodcarving is similar to working on small pieces of wood, with the exception that that the raw materials come from bones or deer horns as well. They are capable of designing all kinds of common objects such as knife handles, combs, or dice, but they also make tools for other professions such as rings, pins, or needles necessary for textile works.

The Guilds of Tri-Kazel: a Rising Power

Report transmitted to Aenor Iben, patriarch of Seòl's council, from investigator Guedüren Fiannaës.

Dear Patriarch,
It has been long since I have left your guidance to work for Seòl's watch. The report you required of me could put me in great trouble among my hierarchy, therefore I am asking you to keep it for yourself. I undertook this investigation alone, outside of the boundaries of my duty, and only because I am indebted to you.
What I discovered frightened me: I thought that the watch of our lord ruled over the town, but the guilds are a counter-power to be reckoned with in Seòl. Little by little, our lord is getting stripped of his heritage and his power.
The merchant sometimes becomes more powerful than the noble. Be he a craftsman or a trader, he has gradually become a financier. The most influential live in town, where the guilds are the most powerful and where they take advantage of the city's privileges: councilors, taxes, charters, and even court and soldiers, on which their grip tightens more and more thanks to the corrupting power of money.
Beyond birth, position in the social hierarchy in great cities–and in Seòl more than in any other one–is defined more and more by one's place in the commercial network. Prosperous merchants ensure a greater strength for themselves by joining a guild, which constitutes a true hope of social ascension. The more powerful a guild is, the more those who are part of it will be so as well…
A true sanctuary where merchants and artisans can share lodgings, food, and discreetly exchange precious information, the guild is used as a front for illicit agreements on prices, which sometimes go as far as organizing deliberate shortages to get all the richer.

Guilds constitute the first setting for coordination between merchants. They benefit fully from the exchanges allowed by fairs and markets to form a financial authority that sometimes surpasses that of the most powerful lords. These are cooperative, hierarchal organizations gathering people of a similar trade. They abide by statutes or charters, enacting the rules of the organizations while displaying their ambitions. The standing members decide on the entrance conditions for new applicants, and elect their representatives to strongly defend their interests before the authorities or opposed guilds. These representatives are entrusted a great power, and are only answerable to the Mercanthas, the guild masters. However, internal struggles are violent, and sometimes give rise to alliance turnarounds or the suspicious disappearances of some influential members.

The first aim of a freshly founded guild is to seek a privilege from its lord or king; and this privilege–which means the exclusivity to practice a profession within the city–establishes its status. Once it is acquired, all it has to do is avoid competition and blithely get rich while consolidating its position. Indeed, the guild is then free to organize the control of prices and quantities. It is probably on this point that our lord was overgenerous, weakening his own power little by little in exchange for financial contributions, which may have enriched the city, but progressively deprived him of a strong, unified authority. This can have tragic consequences: recently, powerful guilds of Seòl have been seen leading actual punitive expeditions against small competing craftsmen of the neighboring villages, destroying supplies and materials with the pretext of their famous privileges and getting away with it.
Guilds make exchanges easier for their members, thanks to a clever system of privileges and mutual support, sometimes on a principle quite comparable with the Magientist lodges found in Reizh; at the same time, they make life for their potential rivals harder, and slow down every trade that does not fall under their jurisdiction, unless they receive a tax–actually, more of a bribe–to validate the transaction.
The watch can hardly do anything against such practices in Seòl, as judicial action is very complex and some guilds buy justice off, or keep their own attorneys. As far as we, mere soldiers, are concerned, we are sometimes put at their disposal, when the guilds do not have their own militia! Among them, their justice is swift: should a member break the rules of the guild, he shall suffer the wrath of all others, being excluded and sometimes mysteriously disappearing some time later. The biggest guilds share the risks between their affiliates, so as to compensate for any possible financial difficulties.

However, there is worse than the corruption of justice: should the lord not yield to their fancies or fail to ensure their protection, the whole guild will voluntarily blockade his trade. In the end, I think that short of a takeover by force to get back in control of his town, he is unfortunately bound to become the hostage of the economic web that the Mercanthas–who are suspected of coordinating their actions during secret meetings–have spun around him.

With my respect,

Guedüren Fiannaës

Metalworking

This is probably as fundamental as woodworking for our protection. Our people boast excellent smiths, capable of quickly creating weapons and armors of sufficient sturdiness to counter the Feond threat… or any other one, for that matter. There are diverse techniques, and they vary a lot between a bronzesmith, an armorsmith, or a minter, from molding to hammering, and including casting and carving. But you shall learn about that in due time if you follow such a path.

Let us focus on the essential things: metal craftsmen are held in high esteem by warlords, provided they can shape efficient helms, shields, and weapons. However, the work of a smith is not restricted to this, for he is at the origin of the fabrication of useful utensils for everyday life, and above all, for other craftsmen: tools. Be it for shears, pincers, or tongs, chisels, saws or what have you, he plays a predominant part. The minter, under the authority of the king, mints coins and therefore presides over their circulation. Finally, metal craftsmen are also involved, in good part, in the crafting of jewelry. They are then jewelers, a profession at the intersection of several crafts, which deserves particular mention.



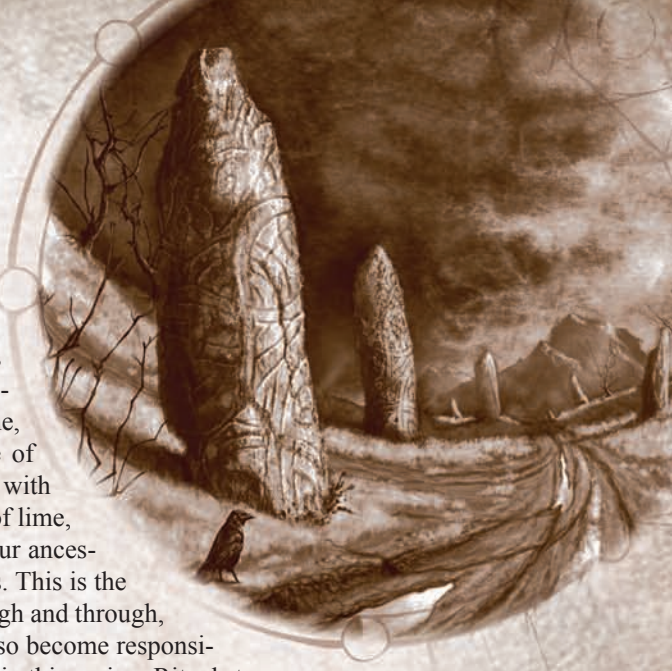
Jewelry

It is related to woodworking and metalworking as much as to masonry and glassworking. Although it is not always very elaborate, jewelry is very common, even in the most remote villages. Its use is not restricted to just women. You can find brooches and torques inherited from our traditions, but also necklaces and ornate rings, sometimes inset with gems.

Most of the beads decorating necklaces are made of wood, horn or metal; more rarely of colored glass or amber. They are often fitted on a simple thread made of plant fiber. Armbands and rings are generally made of metal or horn. Precious stones are most often set on earrings and rings. Rich commoners and nobles from the kingdom of Reizh are very fond of jewels, so jewelry is a constantly progressing art in this region.



Masonry



It is a tradition that has existed for as long as Tri-Kazel. Even if some of our buildings may seem crude compared to what is said about those on the Continent, their solidity cannot be questioned: such works are constructed to last through the ages and stand against every natural danger of our merciless peninsula. Few of our edifices are still entirely made of vegetal materials. Wood remains prevalent, but it is rare that the walls are not at least reinforced with stone. The foundations are very deep to protect them against freezing and thawing. Only the roofs are devoid of stone, as thatch is still the dominant choice. However, following the example of great cities, some of the richest inhabitants have begun to roof their homes with tiles. The masons of our three kingdoms are famed for their mortar made of lime, sand, and clay. They also craft stone in the traditional way, cutting it as our ancestors did, and still diligently decorate the roads of the peninsula with steles. This is the case for the great road linking Osta-Baille to Tuaille, which is paved through and through, and maintained by the famous guild of the Pavers. Recently, they have also become responsible for the escort of convoys; ask for their assistance if you come to travel in this region. Ritual stones are a particular case: they are sacred, and are exclusively crafted by Demorthèn. Many of them still stand, and new ones are still raised toward the sky, even if their proportions have decreased. The Demorthèn practice their ancestral carving art on these stones, inscribing runic figures known only to them.

Glassworking

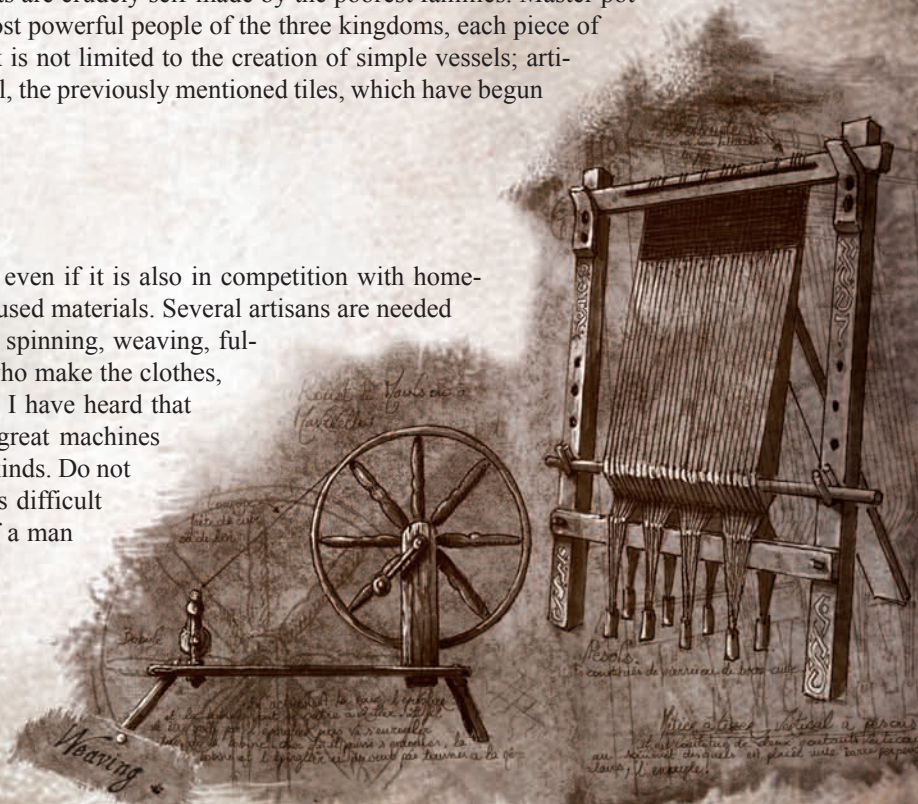
Here is a craft that is still rare in our peninsula, as we lack the raw materials. Even though we know how to shape it correctly, it remains precious for us, which explains why it is also used in jewelry. It is mainly used in the form of a paste, and truth be told, we are still not experts in glassblowing techniques. There are few windows outside of cities, and most of the village houses do not have them. In the end, glass is almost exclusively crafted on command, or imported from the kingdom of Reizh where techniques brought by Magience make it possible to create it more easily. There, glass jewels and mirrors are very prized by women. The latter are often simple metal disks fitted on a handle with one face carefully polished and then covered with a piece of glass.

Earth Craft

Its most elaborate specimens are found in pottery and the less common craft of enamel. Such rarity actually comes from the relative inexperience of Tri-Kazelians in working with the sand of the Great Beaches of Taol-Kaer, for which there had been little use before. Enamel is most often red or orange-colored, as the glass paste used in its creation is combined with amber or copper dust, since such materials are highly available in Tri-Kazel. Pottery is related to crafting vases, plates, and amphorae of all kinds, which are used to carry oil, liquors, or salt. However, the craftsmen's workshops only produce a fraction of these products, as commonly used recipients are crudely self-made by the poorest families. Master potters also craft fine earthenware destined for the most powerful people of the three kingdoms, each piece of which is worth a small fortune. Finally, earthwork is not limited to the creation of simple vessels; artisans also make earthenware figurines, and above all, the previously mentioned tiles, which have begun to cover the roofs of the richest houses.

Textile Craft

Here is another plentiful domain for a craftsman, even if it is also in competition with home-crafted items. Wool, linen, and hemp are the most used materials. Several artisans are needed to master every step of the cloth crafting process: spinning, weaving, fulling, carding, and dyeing. Then come the tailors who make the clothes, from cutting the patterns to sewing the final item. I have heard that the Daedemorthys of Reizh are trying to design great machines capable of creating large amounts of fabrics of all kinds. Do not believe such fooleries, my son; the art of textile is difficult and requires great dexterity that only the hands of a man can display.



Leatherworking

Everything begins with the tanning of the skins, which are prepared in pits using oak bark powder called tannin. Leather is largely used to make domestic objects–saddles for horses and Caernides, harnesses for draught animals, handles for weapons and some tools–but also to bring final touches to clothes or make shoes more comfortable than clogs.
In a wholly different domain, some artisans become true skin artists, and also sometimes execute war paints, for the eminent members of their villages, and exquisitely elaborate tattoos.



Basketry

A basketweaver is also in competition with a purely domestic practice, but he often has much superior skill, making much more important and incomparably well-made pieces. Basketry is generally used to reinforce pottery or obviously to weave baskets, but it is also included in the construction of small boats and some carts, or even hut awnings. Its advantages are multiple: waterproofness, sturdiness, and lightness. Any robust plant can be used, although wicker remains the material of choice. In lakeside regions, however, reeds and rush are favored by villagers who make great use of it. The artisans of these regions can even make plaited armor out of them, which is relatively resistant, but extremely light, giving their warriors considerable freedom of movement. This is often considered as second-class armor, but it is nevertheless quite famous, and many Tri-Kazelians appreciate it.

My review is now almost over, but keep in mind that all of these very vast domains include many different professions and mingle with each other. Complex products require the combination of various crafts, which can prove difficult. In remote, traditional countries, everything is done in harmony, but in cities, the primacy of guilds can be felt, and it becomes very difficult to go from one to another or to carry out works without being part of the crafting trade involved.

On Adornments

Now, let me tell you about some fundamental aesthetic principles applied by most of our artisans. First, the historical trinity of Tri-Kazel is deeply anchored in our customs and can even be discerned in the motifs chosen by all artisans, from woodworkers to tattooists. There is very little depiction in their works, and when there is, it often takes the form of animal symbols, generally in relation with the Caernide. In the end, what remains prevalent are motifs simply associated through juxtaposition, which result in a continuous tangle of shapes, and often come in groups of three, as on our coins. Schematization is important and depiction or not, everything is represented in a simple way; symmetry and geometry play a great part along with the very frequent recurrence of the trinity. Comets with three tails or mythic Caernides with three horns can be seen, but most often, vegetal shapes intertwine and spread, infinitely tying and untying. In this regard, many of these motifs are registered in the famous book of Kell-Taer. However, although our artisans draw inspiration from it, they also invent new ones on a daily basis, and their original works can become the personal or familial mark of their talents. Demorthèn also use this type of intertwined symbols in the writing of the runes that allow them to make contact with the spirits of nature. These abstract symbols are more than an ornamental art; they form a true language named the Sigil Rann. Signatures are very rare on peninsular works, and only the greatest masters afford the luxury of applying theirs.

Traditions and Modernity

My son, you will get to live in a world of perpetual change. Today, manufactured items, which are sometimes mass-produced and come from great cities, are distinguished from unique ones, crafted by artisans. The former are necessary, sometimes better shaped, and often less expensive, but no owner of the latter will grant them the same value as those unique items coming from handmade craft. However, it cannot be denied that our great Talkéride cities are starting to adopt these methods of fabrication that are apparently from the Continent. Accept it and do not complain, for artisans still play a major part in Tri-Kazel, and you must not be worried by the development of Magientist workshops in Reizhite towns. A good craftsman is, above all, one who respects every form of creation and knows that behind a mere, rough object, there may be mysterious–to say the least–forces hiding.

Objects of Power

To finish with, I will tell you about what our traditions call "Objects of Power". You have probably heard of such works, which are so invested by their creators and owners that they develop a mystical power over their environment. Such a power is probably the result of self-confidence and of an exceptional attachment to what may sometimes be only a simple tool. Some consider this as mere superstition, but it is long-lived, and artisans respect these Objects of Power, as if they were actually invested with the world's essential energy. The masterwork that gives an artisan his title sometimes holds these strange abilities. I have also heard that other Objects of Power are created by violent feelings or sinister tragedies, which weaken the border between rough matter and living things and merge them for a while, giving extraordinary properties to actually common-looking objects.

I would better give you an example by telling you the story of Kareal the sculptor. At the end of his life, he decided to make one final statue that would be the masterpiece of his existence; the paragon by which the whole of his art would be judged. He took no model, and only sculpted the hard marble according to the memory of the curves of his wife who had disappeared years ago. He gave it so much time, energy, and suffering that his very body dried up as the statue took shape. Days became weeks and weeks became months before Kareal would finally be satisfied with his statue. During this time, he never left his shop: those who brought him food told that he only talked about his statue, then that he only talked with it. Madness seemed to have seized him, but the sculpture was perfect; more beautiful and livelier in appearance than the most gracious maidens of the village. Some could only look away from it with effort, rousing in the process the jealousy of Kareal, who soon forbade anyone from entering his workshop. It was only several days later that he was found, lying in his blood. Apparently, the statue had toppled as he was embracing it, and crushed the ground under its weight. Those who displaced it to pry the body away whisper that they thought they had seen this virgin nudity move, as to bind its loving creator in a hold of flesh and stone. In spite of the defiance of some, the statue was quickly sold to a lord scorned by his lady and who was said to be inconsolable. At its contact, the man grew strong, vigorous, and ambitious again: he never laid his eyes on any other woman, as if the past love of Kareal for his wife had satiated him. This is exactly the link I mean, which you may feel for an object.

The Legend of Faëris Mac Connen



Dearest Wylard,
Here is the information you required about Faëris Mac Connen. This red-bearded giant had crafted his own club from a stump that, according to him, the spirits had indicated to him. With such a weapon in hand, he seemed invincible, and the notches he made on it after each victory were accumulating. No one dared to fight him, and he protected his village from the attacks of Feondas and other creatures of the shadows. One day, however, his Object of Power was stolen from him right before he left to escort a caravan. It was attacked by a single Feond. Faëris, deprived of his favored club, tried to protect his companions by using a regular weapon. I do not know whether he had totally lost confidence in his talents or whether he could not fight without his own club; it remains that he met a swift death at the claws of a creature he would have otherwise certainly vanquished. His companions were thus given the occasion to flee, and they quickly attributed the defeat of Faëris to the mysterious disappearance of the club that had made him seem invincible for so long.

I leave you now, my son. Choose your path, prove worthy of your name and your heritage, take care of your mother and make me proud beyond death. May my thoughts and my skills be with you on the road that I am sure you will be able to follow…

Chapter 2
Food

Dear Friend,
I hope that you and your family are faring well. Here in the south of Reizh, the weather is bad. My research is proceeding, but unfortunately, it is not leading to anything productive yet. To bring you some distraction, enclosed is a fabliau from the famous bard Alwen Mac Uvelan. It deals with culinary art, which should interest a great cook like yourself. As far as I know, this text had fallen into oblivion until I chanced upon an old parchment at a secondhand dealer in Kalvernach. I hope I can pay you a visit very soon.

Your friend,
Alan

"I would rather eat my horse's oats than the dish you just served me, cook!" With such words, one of the first Continental commanders to set foot in Tri-Kazel reacted to the dish served by the one who was considered to be, at the time, one of the best chefs of the peninsula. Obviously, the meeting of the two men was off on a bad start…

"Know, good sir of the Continent, that here in Tri-Kazel, my dishes are considered as poems, and that considering what our land offers, there is no better fare than what you have! And may I ask you, sir, of what are you so displeased with this dish, so that to the kitchen I may send it back?"
Although he was much offended by such a falsely polite answer, the commander retorted all the same:

"It seems you are far better at spicing your words than your meals! This dish is so bland that I shudder from head to heels. The ingredients that compose it are of such poverty that it is making me dizzy. There is no seasoning that would make it tasty. Sauerkraut, sausages, and potatoes are given no aroma, even by this beer that reminds me of saliva! Now, will these reproaches be what it took to finally make you serve me a dish that you would properly cook?"

The chef, who was said to be quite the rhymer, felt doubly insulted, and went back to his kitchen with a sinister project. He cooked a dish said to be worthy of a king, and put it in the oven before he came back to his torturer. Here is what he told him:

"Let us leave pleasantries aside, sir of the Continent. Of the customs of our people you seem most ignorant. Now listen: you shall know how we cook every thing on the peninsula, from fowl and game to mussels and fecula."
"Then do so, tavern keeper, tell me why your masterpieces are no better than rat feces!"
The chef did not flinch and began his exposition.



Conditions Imposing Restrictions

"Then learn, sir, that our land, surrounded by sea, does not give to its people a full liberty. Our soil is often hard, and the weather quite haphazard: wind, rain, snow, and blizzard… There are few favorable seasons for a cook: we cannot prepare meals strictly by the book, and all have to do with what we find–do try to keep that in mind. Thus, cabbage, potatoes, and pork are mainly what we put under the fork. To this you can add goats and Boernacs, which are often seasoned with onion. Rarely, we have some mutton, although sheep, because of their wool, are granted some protection.

Condiments

The only amenities come from the fat of Boernac, from lard and from a few creams kept for festivals or as an aphrodisiac. Does this seem to you very boring? It is, but sometimes, before fall, exploring, you can find the odd sugary and colorful berry to make dishes much more merry. However, you are off-season, and the only available fruits are, in winter, juicy apples served for pleasure, as jams, pies, or whole and pure. An alcohol, not devoid of zest, is also made from the ripest. Finally, there is salt aplenty in our mountainous country, and seeing how you piped up, I made sure that the meal I prepared was much more spiced up…

Sea and Coastal Commodities

Those are the main commodities that here are sown. But what? I see you frown: "This man–you think–is neglecting seafood, a mistake both foolish and rude!" Nay sir, this is to what I was getting, although this is almost as upsetting: the sea may feed us on demand, but not so much more than our land… Inconstant and spiteful, our ocean is often upset, having no pity for those with sail and net, who risk a few miles to bring back some salmon and herring, and who, rightly, are cheered for their daring… Fish is smoked, salted, dried up for conservation, even if our coasts do bring some consolation: mussels, seafood, and algae, though they are no delicacy, could perhaps make up a meal that you would deem worthy.

Here are, summed up in a few words, the whole of our culinary possibilities, and you see there is not much on lands as well as on seas. But still, to help you keep better track of everything any cook can lack, I will keep going with what is missing.

Lacks and Restrictions in Alimentation

I told you what we have in store; here is what we can only wish for, and which makes our cuisine so undeserving–so little to your liking. Boernacs and goats give us milk, certainly, but not very much, actually. Thus, creams and cheese are rare, and stored with great care. In our countries, there are few bees, and thus, of honey, few varieties. Worse: sugar, pepper, spices, garlic, herbs, oils, and "tomatoes" as you call those things, are absent, unheard of, as are, in general, most seasonings. In Tri-Kazel, to make meals better, we have only salt, mustard, and butter, and little of the latter. No cucumbers; a few fruits but–see how scarce is our fare!–no watermelons, citruses, cherries, or any pear! We have no wine, as we have no vines, but our beers and ciders are fine, not to mention schnapps and other strong drinks, which are of finer quality than you would think.

Now you understand why our cuisine is so lacking, and why your absence of leniency was so shocking. However, in accordance with your wish, I will still serve you a first-rate dish. Just wait here; from the depths of my kitchen, I shall fetch you something that will make us even.

Some Anecdotes as a Dessert

The chef left and came back immediately, facing the commander who still behaved haughtily:

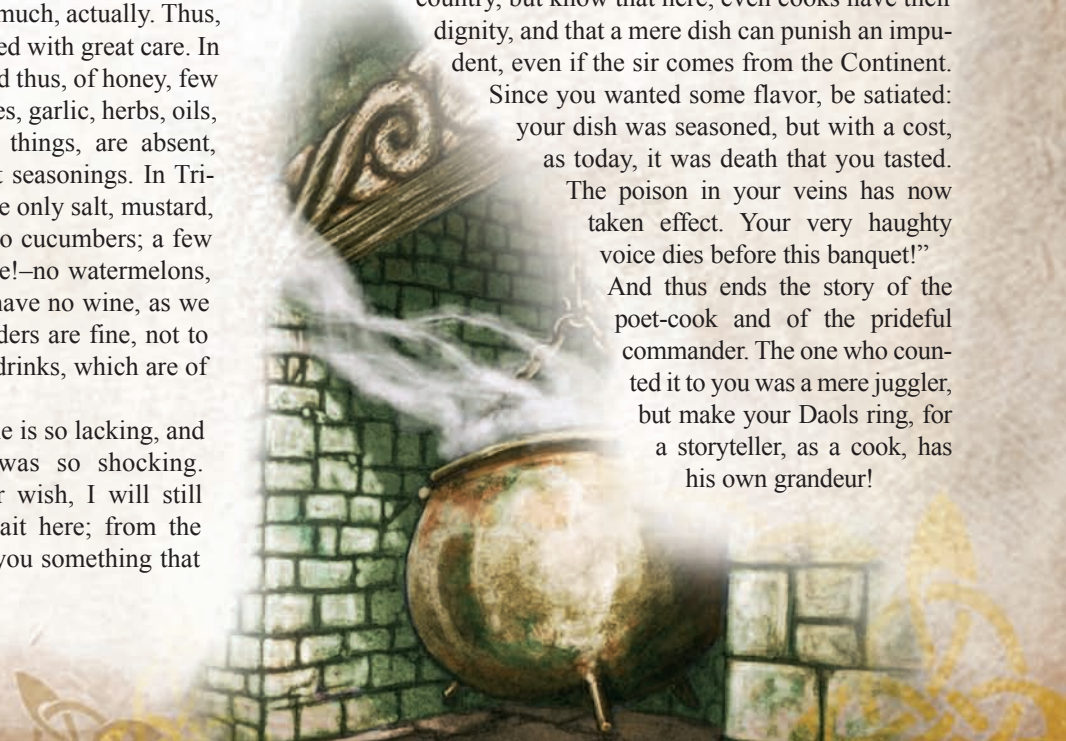
"Not a moment too soon, dear master of the plate, my stomach is a hole naught can satiate, and my palate is dying to taste something that I think, would require your very best drink!"

The cook remained silent; he just served the dishes, patient, and watched his guest bolt them without the slightest jest. Once the meal was given the proper attention, he spoke again for the conclusion of his exposition:

"We are almost at the end of your feast; maybe now you can comprehend, at least, the origin of the many legends going about our beloved lands. The vilest rumors spring from poverty's darkest demands. Hence, some people actually think that we could dare, out of desperation, to make a Caernide our fare! I see this only makes you scoff, but this animal is sacred, and no Tri-Kazelian would be so tainted as to commit an act so impure, which may anger or antagonize nature. Wildest stories go about cursed people who feast on the flesh of some fallen Feond beast; about madmen seeking, in their insanities, to absorb the strength of their enemies, but whose sickly, debilitated bodies become mottled with spots and all sorts of markings before decaying in rots.

Grim tales indeed, but I see you cough and splutter… It is time for you to be part of the legend as the commander and his last order… I had told you that in Tri-Kazel, each one of my dishes is a poem; know that what you ate was your requiem. Such is not the case in your faraway country, but know that here, even cooks have their dignity, and that a mere dish can punish an impudent, even if the sir comes from the Continent. Since you wanted some flavor, be satiated: your dish was seasoned, but with a cost, as today, it was death that you tasted. The poison in your veins has now taken effect. Your very haughty voice dies before this banquet!"

And thus ends the story of the poet-cook and of the prideful commander. The one who counted it to you was a mere juggler, but make your Daols ring, for a storyteller, as a cook, has his own grandeur!





Famines

Was this tale pleasant to you, my lord? I know that my intervention may seem impudent to you, but I hope you shall heed my plea: do not neglect the importance of food for the people of Tri-Kazel and the political stability of your kingdom. An old maxim of our regions does claim that empty stomachs cannot get on with full bellies!

A starving people is a dangerous people, prone to revolt and to the worst excesses simply to survive and satisfy the hunger gnawing at its body. A harsher winter than usual, some disease of the crops, rodents or insects devouring a poorly stored food stock, a battle happening at the wrong place, is enough to bring back the dangerous specter of famine to your lands.

This is a problem we have always experienced in our mountainous, sometimes too isolated regions. And we only come up with shortsighted solutions, only remedying it when it arises, whereas we should do everything possible to prevent it. As it stands, landlocked villages sometimes disappear without even giving us the time to intervene. Yet, we know well of the ravages of famine, as we have sometimes used them as a weapon to wrest surrender from a dissident city, without even having to fight. And, although we never had to resort to it, you know that famine can also become a defense against an invading army, by destroying or burning everything as we retreat, so as to deprive the enemy of any means of supplying itself on the field. We know well how to trigger it, and yet, nothing is harder than halting it when we have to face it.

It is mainly the linking period, which makes the transition between the stocks of the former harvest and the new one's, which is the most dangerous for our people, who try to cultivate a land already hard in itself. Famine quickly makes bodies weak and sickly, ready to succumb to epidemics spreading all the faster in such conditions, leading to true massacres during which entire populations disappear amidst awful suffering. With war on top of it all, the whole thing can sink into generalized chaos, and in the eyes of our people, the worst plagues seem like simple clouds in their existence, in comparison with the maelstroms of famine.

Hunger or ingestion of rotten food bring high fevers, throat lesions, and uncontrollable diarrheas. Pestilent itches have also been reported, as well as abdominal stains and stupor, which are bound to lead to death. People die of hunger, of course, but mainly of epidemics which sprout from such an extremely favorable ground and quickly decimate the weakest; notably, the children. One needs not pick their poison between plague and cholera, as one must often face both at the same time during such periods, and literally, unfortunately. And this is without even mentioning the ravages brought on by the various riots, which are obviously understandable in such conditions, but then spring with absolutely inhuman violence. Some people have even been witnessed resorting to cannibal acts.

Remember the White Famine, which wreaked havoc in our peninsula a few centuries ago, but still haunts our people. Because of a drastic temperature fall around the year 360, winter lingered until summer. Entire regions were isolated from the rest of the peninsula, which fell into an even more critical state of self-sufficiency than usual. Such a situation turned out to be catastrophic when many cultivable plateaus became unusable because of frost and snow. The famine at that time was unprecedented, annihilating entire villages (the very names of which have since been forgotten), driving the maddest and most desperate to barbaric, inhuman behavior. Then, Feondas could sweep to their hearts' content all those that famine had not naturally taken.

Such a catastrophe might happen again, my lord, and in spite of your guards approaching to silence me and punish my insolence, I dare to ask for your lenience and demand the urgent creation of a delegation capable of working efficiently toward means of preventing famines and driving away this specter that overshadows us as winter grows colder.

Chapter 2
Architecture

Letter addressed to Drulaan Gralec by Kelvorch Lochaed, student at Osta-Baille's Academy of Sciences, Techniques, and Industrial Works

Dear Professor,

I must confess that finding the resolve to put the following short essay on parchment was not easy. You explained to me at length how necessary it was for me to lead my own reflection on the reasons that make architecture an essential science to keep civilization in good working order. You required me to make a review of all the buildings and constructions, from the simple shack made to shelter the tools of an artisan to the vertiginous feats that are Magientist edifices. At the beginning of my works, some things appeared to me as futile and as a waste of time. However, I finally vouched to study as many of the works man has erected in Tri-Kazel as possible, so as to perfect my knowledge of the science I am about to put into practice.



Of Construction Materials

Wood, bricks, and stones are the most commonly used materials for the construction of habitations and buildings. Pine is especially priced, as it grows fast and can be found in great amounts, although spruce and oak are also much used. Cedar and hazel are exclusively used for making furniture. When the weather allows it, bricks are sun-dried, but more often they are baked. As for stones, sandstone and granite are excellent choices, particularly as there is plenty of the latter near the omnipresent mountainous ranges of Tri-Kazel.

Bronze and iron are mostly used to make locks and keys, as well as farming and crafting tools. They are also used to reinforce the structure of bridges, build grates, and are shaped into chains to mark out certain roads or to block the entrance of docks.

Of Rural Architecture

I shall start with a mention of the smallest rural settlements, which are essentially fortified farms. The better-off ones have a triple protection system: a waist-high slope precedes a deep ditch dominated by a palisade of sharp posts. Only one entrance is kept, in the form of a plank bridge crossing the ditch and leading to a sturdy double door. This passageway is just large enough for a cart pulled by two Boernacs to pass.

The house itself is built at the center of the fortifications, near the potable water well and a small orchard or vegetable plot intended to ensure some food for the inhabitants. The stables and barns are located on either side as emergency second lines of defense. Finally, a small wooden tower, high enough to provide line of sight in every direction, is set on an artificial elevation, not far away from the palisade. Watchmen continuously take turns, day and night.

Villages are the most commonplace form of rural settlement and include from twenty to a hundred habitations for the largest ones. They are developed around strategic places: along a watercourse (stream, river, creek), atop a steep hillock, near a Demorthèn oratory erected on a hill with fertile sides, or on a lakeshore. No urbanization plan managed their growth, which happened with nature-like freedom. However, a number of common characteristics can be determined, which can lead to comparisons between all of these rural communities.

Most villages have one or more plazas of an essentially circular shape (probably an unconscious reminder of the many ritual stone circles erected all over the peninsula), which offer a sizeable space where the inhabitants can gather to discuss. There is often a great tree to provide some shade, and a well from which one can draw water that remains fresh, even in the heart of summer.

Houses are most often built with a sturdy door, narrow windows, and surrounded by a low wall. The yard, delimited by the wall, is often laid out like a vegetable garden or, more rarely, as flowerbeds. Sculptures portraying the spirits of nature, or in exceptional cases a glorious ancestor, can adorn the place, but villagers usually simply do with floral decorations.

Roofs are sloped to cope with heavy snowfalls, and covered with thatch or with bark and earth mixed with straw. The slanted roofs of richer houses are covered with shingles, slates, and, in a few cases, with terracotta tiles. Next to the chimney, there is sometimes a worn weather vane, a statue, or a decorated gable standing on their crests.

Because of the increasing rate of Feond raids these last years, the people of many villages have built fortifications of varying complexity in order to protect themselves. Palisades made of posts, logs, or planks, and reinforced with ditches and slopes, are the basic elements of this type of construction, which is an imperfect imitation of military works. It is sometimes completed with one or several watchtowers, and in the best cases, with a bare covered way located on the most exposed side of the palisade.

Alarm devices such as a crude signal system, gongs, or bells give the means for a quick warning to all the inhabitants in the case of an imminent threat. Some villages located in dangerous places have even dug underground refuges which are sometimes linked to existing caves or mining galleries.

Of Architecture Considered as a Higher Science

Up to this point of my study, architecture has only been considered as a science bringing answers to the necessities of man. This is indeed the primary reason for its existence, but we shall see that it still exists today in a much different way.

Now, the many techniques on which it is based do not only serve common utility, but also the creativity and expressivity of the architect.

We all know that the inhabitants of Tri-Kazel had a very rough lifestyle during the first centuries of our history. Their primary preoccupation at the time of the Aergewin was to survive against the colossal creatures roaming the peninsular territory. They also had to find refuges to escape the rising waters and protect themselves against the violent weather battering Tri-Kazel in these ancient times.

When these threats subsided, men were able to focus their thoughts on many subjects: the construction of buildings was one of those which benefited the most from their intellectual devotion. This was when architecture was truly born, a domain that quickly earned the status of higher science, unanimously recognized today.

Of Bridges

The bridge is the quintessential work for Tri-Kazel. Whether one is in Taol-Kaer, Reizh, or Gwidre, its stern piers and its monumental arches are most needed things for the development of civilization. The largest cities, such as Osta-Baille, would be nothing without these large stone roadways linking them to the rest of the world.

Advances regarding construction made it possible to finalize the creation of a complete communication network, which had so far remained unfinished out of ignorance of the adequate techniques. In such a hilly territory, it was an imperative need to be able to cross chasms and vertiginous cliffs, which became possible with bridges.

Without the secrets of pillars and arches, the first attempts to go over great heights failed in deadly collapses. Many bridges were built with wood and bricks, but their reliability left a lot to be desired. Today, the bridges linking major commercial roads and power centers are made of good mountain stone and some of them are even built with a mixture of volcanic earth and lime, to which pieces of broken tiles are added. Thanks to these robust constructions, twenty men on horses can without worry ride over precipices swathed in mist, and a freight caravan can have the boldness to travel a thousand feet above a gorge lost in shadows. Journeys which previously took weeks are now accomplished in a few days, and that is how men get closer to one another; at least when the Feondas leave them the possibility…

The Mist Bridge

Our escape had taken us much farther than we had expected. The creature was still on our track; we could feel its presence all around us, similar to the cloying scent of poor quality incense. However, it remained invisible, waiting for the moment when we would be exhausted to leap on its preys and devour them. The mists were weaving their impenetrable web all around our miserable convoy, led by a man who had lost all reason. As the advisor of Lord Maorich, I had taken over and was doing my best to direct us in this sinuous maze of mountainous paths. However, it was increasingly difficult for me to ease the tensions between the soldiers, the artisans, and Maorich's wife. The Varigal who was accompanying us knew nothing about this arid, hostile region, lost on the southwestern headland of the peninsula, and he could spot no sign left by his fellow travelers. We were starting to lack water and food; any hope of making it out was as dwindling as the light, caught in the fog.

On the evening of the nineteenth day, we could feel the monstrous creature lurking closer. Its heavy breathing was ringing in my ears and its stench was nauseating. We were walking as fast as we could, amidst the thick coiling mist which was blocking any visibility. Two men fell to their deaths in the gorge as we were edging along the path. The echoes of their cries refused to die and danced for a long time in my head like the promise of my disappearance to come. It was all over; I knew it. The last of my strength was ebbing away. The creature was about to pounce on me and tear me apart like some piece of meat.

Then, suddenly, I saw the mists part and reveal a huge chasm of unfathomable depth. A colossal bridge spanned it, at least up to the borders of a strange, swirling patch of fog masking my sight. Never in my life had I witnessed such a work: it shimmered faintly, its smooth, uniform surface similar to a sumptuous marble paving. Its strong arches were leaping above the precipice, like hunting beasts, resting on colossal piers of which I could only see the top. The construction was giving off such an impression of solemnity that I started crying like a child. It seemed to be that faces had been sculpted along the elegant line of the arches, but I could not check it. A scream rose in the air behind me. Without even turning back, I ran to the bridge. The shiny roadway was so slippery that I nearly fell head over heels. Pulling myself up just in time to keep my balance, I decided to keep going without slowing my pace down.
Not without a short-lived hesitation, I dived in the undulating veil of mist. Before I even had the time to feel fear, I was running out of the swirling shroud. For a few seconds, it was as if I had been in the middle of luxurious drapes of crushed velvet, cold or burning, while voices were calling me by name, whispering incomprehensible words to me. But, as my feet were skidding on the smooth surface of the bridge, darting at full speed as far as possible from the monster hunting me, I was certain that I had been the victim of a hallucination.
When I reached the other side of the huge construction, I stopped for a while to catch my breath. Stupor hit me when I noticed that both of my hands were bearing azure and carmine marks, similar to streaks left by a contact with a butterfly wing. Those marks were of the same color as the hangings I had pushed aside to struggle away from the mist…
No one else seemed to have followed me. It looked like I had lost both the creature and the expedition.

Report from Kelt'hian de Lorch about the disappearance of Lord Maorich

Of the Urban Landscape

Some of my peers consider cities as hearts irrigated by the continuous coming and going of people running through their streets. I entirely agree with them, for these populous centers are melting pots of life, constantly teeming with thoughts and actions.

I think I can say that the architects of Tri-Kazel have foremostly been pragmatic men who, although they certainly had a certain aesthetic sensibility, have focused on efficiency and longevity rather than on some embellishments of secondary importance. However, our science still displays sturdiness and greatness from which our compatriots draw their strength and for which they feel awe and respect. The proud palaces with their large towers and their high, looming walls, the stout-shaped stone houses; they are part of an almost natural union between considerations of a technical, practical, political, but also artistic nature.

I just mentioned generalities of importance, but I feel like I should also add to this a few splendors which lived through the ancient time, or stemmed from the curious mind of an architect thirsting for new experiences. They still stand with their angular shapes, their sharp ridges, their beveled walls, or their thin spires strangely rising toward the sky. When I see the Castle of Aodreth, this unconquerable eyrie, my thoughts and my heart turn to wonder, but I remain skeptical regarding the functionality of such a monster, which, with its innumerable asperities, seems entirely dedicated to the crooked twists and turns of a mad or dreamy mind yearning for absolutes.

The Castle of Aodreth

Could one conceive a more extraordinary vision than the sight of this gigantic citadel perched atop the Oerdh Pass? As hanging from the sky, the phenomenal construction with its spidery towers looked like a mythical bird hesitating to take flight. Adorned with balconies bending oddly, and galleries with thin columns inviting in the northwestern wind and the cold Septentrine, its high spires of white stone fiercely pierced the clouds, like feathers as sharp as Tugarch' blades. A mystical shiver, as one coming with a revelation, ran over my spine. Who could have built such an edifice? And why in such an inaccessible place? Was it to keep a treasure there? To imprison a legendary beast of the Aergewin? Or to hide away from a world that only gave you worries, to forget oneself in such a strangely altered place, the real reflection of a dream or a nightmare? At that time, there was no way I could tell. But I planned to find out sooner or later.

The Chronicles of Arenthel – Book III

Our towns are designed to be "living" entities. Although they are divided into districts, they can be compared to a human body, with its heart, its brain, its trunk, and its limbs.

Future actions are planned in centers of political and intellectual power, the two often being intertwined: the decisions taken by the powerful are guided by the intuitions of our brightest scholars and savants, who have followed the teachings of prestigious masters in academies or guilds. Thus, the high walls of our lords' castles stand near the austere façades of the centers of knowledge. Markets naturally settle on the large circular plazas, favoring a ring-like formation around the outer edge, which leaves the center of the area free. Thus, anyone can peruse around as they wish, and leisurely talk without the annoyance of the crowd hubbub.

Fountains and wells set at every corner of the city make it easier to store water in the case of a siege, or to carry it during a fire. It goes without saying that our towns are built on sites answering to two fundamental needs: the presence of water and of natural defenses. Many subterranean rivers flow inside our mountains, invisible. Engineers and Magientists have designed subtle mechanisms to channel water and make it flow where city dwellers need it. Many water or wind mills work with elemental energies, and one can often hear their dripping wheels spin and see their blades cleave through the air when going through the roads leading to great Reizhite cities.

Although I have never had the opportunity to verify it, I have heard that Daedemorthys have built strange architectural complexes working on the same principles as mills, but powered through the combustion of organic or mineral matter. I do not know whether this is just a fanciful tale or not, but it is true that most of their constructions are striking, so far from the canons governing our science that one can ponder about the reflections that have led them toward such unconventional directions…

A town is divided into districts, which are crisscrossed by a web of alleys, streets, and lanes, separated by squares and esplanades where artists, public writers, and speakers come to perform, or where the children of rich merchants come to amble. The workshops of the craftsmen adjoin the narrow houses of the commoners and the tall properties of the nobles without too much disturbance. Readily or reluctantly, our citizens have learned to abide by the laws promulgated by the lord, which does not prevent a good number of districts from becoming sordid and rough areas.

Osta-Baille: a Reference for Safer Cities

I have heard that many Ansailéir have tried to remediate the crowdedness of old districts, as it harbors violence, diseases, and accidents of every kind. How many dramatic fires could have been avoided if houses were not so close as to touch one another? In Osta-Baille, things are fortunately greatly different. Crime still lurks in dead ends or in water mains, but its influence shrinks more with each day. Ansailéir Eober carries on with the efforts of his predecessors; the most decrepit houses are demolished to give some air to previously crammed areas. Light finally shines on the blind façades of shaking shacks.

Safe behind the walls of their city, the inhabitants lead a reasonably peaceful life. Ostian militia goes through watchful patrols, without disturbing conversations, but promptly acting at the slightest incident.
The main risk remains that of an epidemic, but there again, architects do their best to reduce the danger. Except for the squares and the large main roads, paved streets are slightly slanted, so that garbage may easily slide through the central channels onto pipes, and be evacuated several hundred feet above the ground or in cesspools dug under the city. The inclination is low enough so as to avoid disturbing the progress of wheeled vehicles and exhausting elderly people; at least in the main axes.
However, there are cities with strongly inclined streets, all terraces and balconies, such as Kalvernach. And moving around is harder there, although ramps and stairs have been laid out here and there. Engineers and Magientists have developed some of their most curious inventions there, such as an elevator with pulleys, making it possible to cross important vertical obstacles in mere moments.

Cities and Nature

What would our cities be without trees and vegetation? Sad, unsettling places… such is my opinion, at least. The laying out of public parks and private gardens probably answers the unconscious yearning to go back to the proximity of a soothing natural environment and the presence of a certain spirituality. The Demorthèn, who are the main figures of traditional cults, look down on cities, and very few of them settle in such places.

In most gardens, natural harmony is left to take over the illusory perfection the hand of man reaches for. Stones, leaves, and needles litter the ground in an apparent mess; a flowered bower harbors the representation of a forest spirit; a monolith engraved with vegetal arabesques, strange creatures or unknown signs, stands in the middle of the way, or at the center of a turfed circle. The presence of Demorthèn rites can be discerned implicitly. Gardens are entirely impregnated with the sacred essence of these mysteries, drawing their vitality from the ever-going round of seasons, and from telluric energies spinning their patterns just beyond mundane perception.

However, I am intrigued by this strange topiary art, which takes as a postulate the opposite axiom of architecture: trim trees and shrubs taking inspiration from monuments, and not design edifices drawing from the richness and diversity of nature. I had the opportunity to admire drawings representing Ard-Amrach, the capital city of Gwidre. They displayed vast gardens, the layout of which was similar to a city's, with large alleys circling flowerbeds and clumps of bushes. These were lined with trimmed boxwood looking like outer walls, and with long, narrow stone pools in which fresh water sprinkled with duckweed was flowing. Trees and shrubs had been trimmed straight as dice, arranged in perfect rows depicting habitations; flowers were forming impeccable lines of colors set out in bands... Unlikely herbaceous battalions ready to defend their territory to the bitter end!



Temple, Magientists, and Architecture

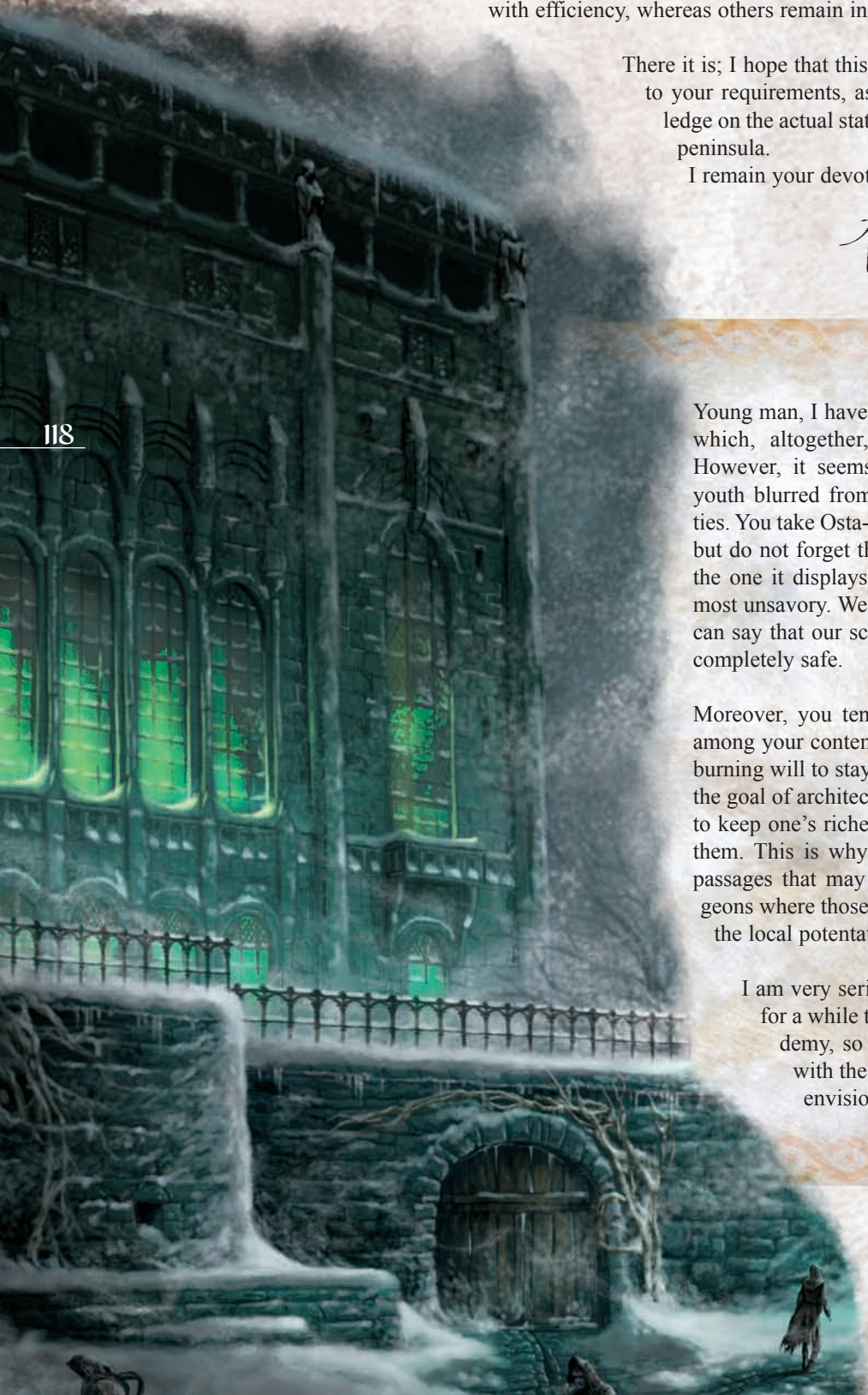
Without pretending to be exhaustive–for my short study could not claim to be so–I must mention a subject related to spirituality as well by talking about the Temple. The new religion expands a little more each day in Gwidre, and even beyond its borders. The strong ideas it conveys are expressed in tall, hieratic buildings, with imposing pillars and the severe faces of the greatest of their past hierophants sculpted on their façades. Within them, one feels oppressed by colossal vaults, and by the lack of a light that only seeps in reduced amounts through small openings made near the cornices. Although I could not verify this myself, I have heard that the Temple had appropriated the symbolic model of the labyrinth, which it adapted to the requirements of its dogma; this way, a novice can be initiated, in the middle of mazes of narrow walls, to the esoteric message of this new religion.

As for the architectural fancies of Magientists, sometimes stunningly beautiful, often clearly unsightly, they are, as I have already mentioned, so completely alien to the foundations of our science that it would be fruitless for me to try to discourse on the subject. All I can do is admit that some of their achievements combine elegance with efficiency, whereas others remain incomprehensible chimeras.

There it is; I hope that this quick essay was an adequate answer to your requirements, as well as a proof of my good knowledge on the actual state of architecture and urbanism on our peninsula.

I remain your devoted disciple,

Kelvorch Lochaed



Young man, I have read with interest your work which, altogether, does not lack pertinence. However, it seems to me that the idealism of youth blurred from your mind some harsh realities. You take Osta-Baille as a model for a safe city, but do not forget that this town has two faces, and the one it displays in the darkness of the slums is most unsavory. We are still far from a time when we can say that our science has managed to make cities completely safe.

Moreover, you tend to forget that the dominant trait among your contemporaries is not altruism, but truly a burning will to stay alive, whatever the price. Although the goal of architecture is to protect, it is too often used to keep one's riches out of the reach of those coveting them. This is why castles have a multitude of secret passages that may lead to treasures, but also to dungeons where those who have disturbed the authority of the local potentate are left to rot.

I am very seriously considering having you leave for a while the den of knowledge that is our academy, so that you may finally be confronted with the daily life of our contemporaries and envision your science under new aspects.

Chapter 2

Societies

In the lordly council room, old Demorthèn Galenor was deep in thought. In front of him, several painted pieces of pottery were displayed on the table. They had been brought the day before by a group of commoners who had stumbled upon them near a corpse, in a field close to the village of Louarn. The unfortunate man had probably discovered the antiques as he was digging a pit in his field. His murderers had left all the pieces on the spot, as well as the few Daols the victim owned. The case remained mysterious, but all the elements suggested that it was some awful settling of scores.
His hands clasped together, the Demorthèn stared at the pieces of earthenware depicting the fight of his ancestors against the Feondas of the Aergewin. Humanity had been born in darkness, and had experienced many atrocities since it had arisen. A few centuries ago, the Three Brothers had laid down the bases of a flourishing future where humanity could have kept developing while living in harmony with the spirits of nature. But the settlers from the Continent came. Their science and their God had decisively buried the dream of three kingdoms united around the traditional Demorthèn culture. For a long time, the horrors of the Aergewin had given way to futile, deadly struggles.



"Galenor, you seem pensive." The reedy voice of young Maela Mac Loarans rose in the council room.

She took a seat next to the Demorthèn. In the back, her father's throne remained vacant. Maela's face was pretty, and still juvenile. She had just turned sixteen and was already to succeed her father who had died a year before. The Demorthèn gave a faint smile, but nothing could make the solemnity inscribed within each of his wrinkles fade. The young girl went on:
"The scholars told me at length about the history of our peninsula. According to them, my instruction could not be complete without a treatise on the society of Tri-Kazel."
"Yes, Maela Mac Loarans. This is the wish of your late father, and I will personally take care of this last part. My regency is nearing its end, and you will have to assume your responsibilities. How could you rule over this region without knowing the social organization of our peninsula?"

Louarn was a small Talkéride domain of the dukedom of Salann Tir, lost behind the Mòr Roimh. In this wild region where Osta-Baille, the capital city, was a faraway legend, the Mac Loarans family was known to be loyal to the king of Taol-Kaer. The Demorthèn went on:

"As you know, because of the unchecked influence of the Daedemorthys and the priests of the Temple, our society has experienced drastic evolutions. It would make more sense to talk about three distinct societies, seeing how the kingdoms of Gwidre and Reizh differ each day a little more from our good kingdom of Taol-Kaer.

Tri-Kazelian Society

Before we get to the specifics regarding the Temple and the Magientists, let me make you a general presentation of the peninsular society. The traditional organization of society in clans and the feudal system coexist as they can in our peninsula. This mixed society is constituted from several social castes which are the same in the three kingdoms. Each caste can be differentiated by its privileges, its rights, and its duties.

Clan Society

The Osag clans never truly accepted the authority of the Three Brothers. Their communities are ruled according to clan customs as they existed in the ancient times. Some of them even still use the ancient tongue. There, customary right–transmitted orally–is the rule, and Demorthèn are respectfully listened to. There remain but few of these clans, but villages and rural communities have partly kept their traditions."

"My father told me about this. He also told me that these customs and laws vary from one clan and valley to another. Don't you think, Galenor, that everyone should abide by the texts promulgated and registered in the books of laws of Osta-Baille? We do, here, in Louarn. Why wouldn't they?"
"Maela, know that I strive each day to make people respect the authority of the king of Taol-Kaer. The Osags, beyond their rebellious disposition, are the bearers of our most ancestral traditions. Our king, in his wisdom and clairvoyance, has always shown indulgence toward them, which favors the maintenance of these traditions. The risk of the whole of Tri-Kazel giving in to the futile beliefs from the Continent is still high. It is a complicated matter and a balance must be kept between these various requirements."



Feudal Society

"Feudalism was introduced by the Three Brothers at the same time they swore the Oath, nearly a thousand years ago. Their goal was to unite the peninsula around a strong central power, so as to favor the growth of Tri-Kazelian peoples in the respect of traditional Demorthèn cults. The advent of the feudal system consolidated the three burgeoning kingdoms. In this uncertain time, the Three Brothers sought the assistance of strong men and clan chiefs who swore an oath of allegiance to them. The kings delegated to these first nobles a part of their power so that they enforced royal authority. Each suzerain could require financial and military support from his vassals, promising to protect them with his army in exchange. It took more than one century and many wars with the recalcitrant clans to establish this system."

Galenor paused. Maela was focused. He resumed:

"True nobility originates from these warriors who swore fidelity to the kings of Tri-Kazel. You descend from these illustrious lords, Maela. Since the time of the Oath, the Mac Loarans have been serving the crown, and your ancestor, Cadwalader Loarans, fought by the side of Taol-Kaer himself. This old nobility has nothing in common with the one of the Reizhite cities, which became a court nobility. This phenomenon expanded since Bronchaerd, king of Reizh, allowed the purchase of titles.

But let us get back to our subject… This aristocracy is but a small minority; the rest of the population is made of commoners. When the feudal system is well implanted, commoners are free to cultivate the land, to use mills, ovens, and infrastructures left at their disposal. In exchange, they give a part of their production to the local lord and must perform some corvees, such as maintaining the palisades and walls, ploughing the lord's lands, and carrying out watch duty. Some of them, indebted or taken prisoner during a war, can become the property of a lord. They form a third caste without rights or liberty: serfs.

However, the feudal system is far from being applied everywhere. Most of the time, customary right is the rule in rural communities. It stresses the participation of everyone in the life of the community, and nobody must be paid taxes for land rights. I understand why our king wishes to impose the feudal law of Osta-Baille in every region to strengthen the kingdom. Yet, applied without good judgment, it tends to insidiously pervert mentalities. Populations come to fight for the ownership of a patch of land, as it is the case on the borders of the three kingdoms. The land does not belong to anyone; it gives us the means to live, but no one should claim to own it."

Talkéride Society

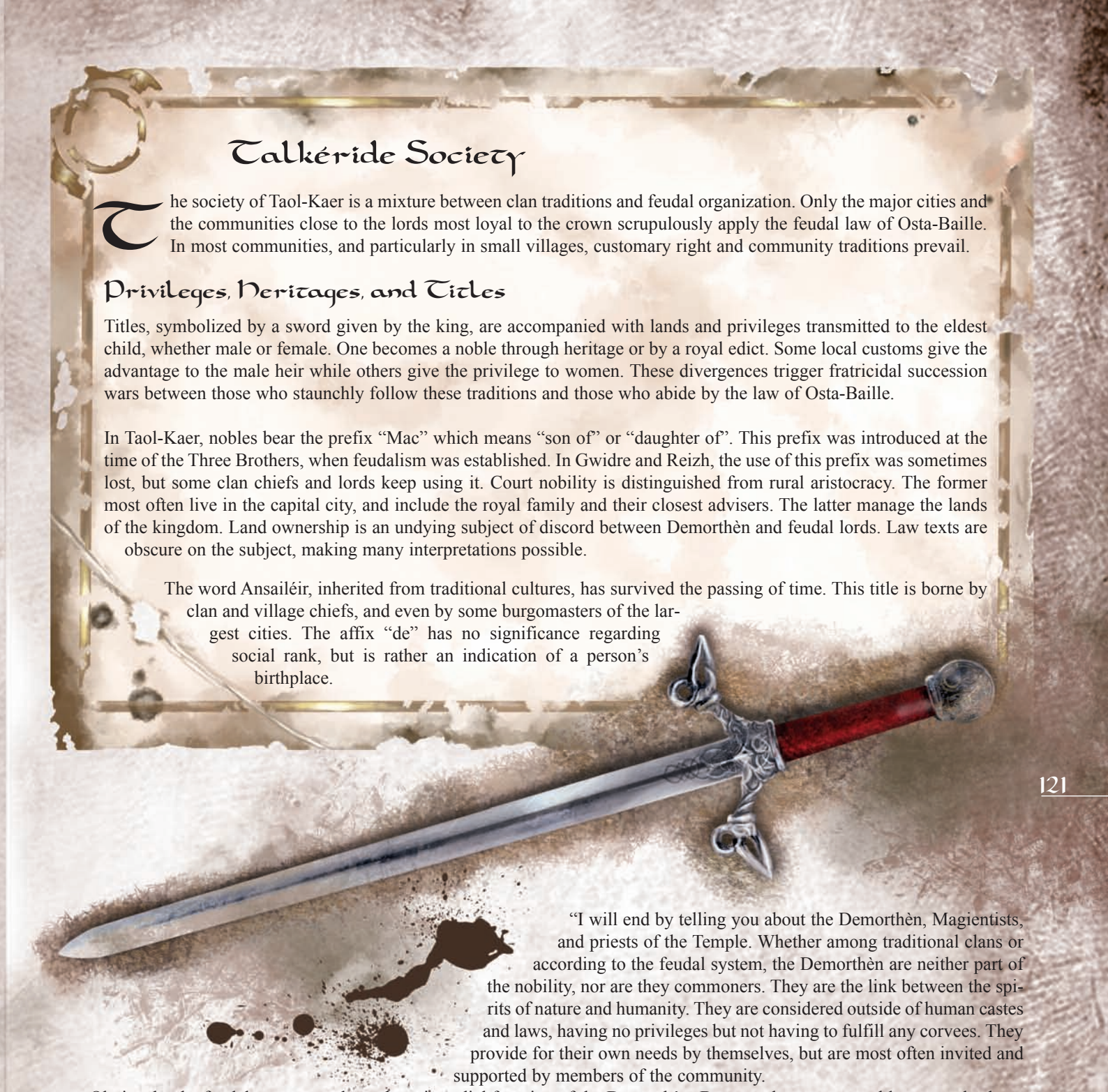
The society of Taol-Kaer is a mixture between clan traditions and feudal organization. Only the major cities and the communities close to the lords most loyal to the crown scrupulously apply the feudal law of Osta-Baille. In most communities, and particularly in small villages, customary right and community traditions prevail.

Privileges, Heritages, and Titles

Titles, symbolized by a sword given by the king, are accompanied with lands and privileges transmitted to the eldest child, whether male or female. One becomes a noble through heritage or by a royal edict. Some local customs give the advantage to the male heir while others give the privilege to women. These divergences trigger fratricidal succession wars between those who staunchly follow these traditions and those who abide by the law of Osta-Baille.

In Taol-Kaer, nobles bear the prefix "Mac" which means "son of" or "daughter of". This prefix was introduced at the time of the Three Brothers, when feudalism was established. In Gwidre and Reizh, the use of this prefix was sometimes lost, but some clan chiefs and lords keep using it. Court nobility is distinguished from rural aristocracy. The former most often live in the capital city, and include the royal family and their closest advisers. The latter manage the lands of the kingdom. Land ownership is an undying subject of discord between Demorthèn and feudal lords. Law texts are obscure on the subject, making many interpretations possible.

The word Ansailéir, inherited from traditional cultures, has survived the passing of time. This title is borne by clan and village chiefs, and even by some burgomasters of the largest cities. The affix "de" has no significance regarding social rank, but is rather an indication of a person's birthplace.



"I will end by telling you about the Demorthèn, Magientists, and priests of the Temple. Whether among traditional clans or according to the feudal system, the Demorthèn are neither part of the nobility, nor are they commoners. They are the link between the spirits of nature and humanity. They are considered outside of human castes and laws, having no privileges but not having to fulfill any corvees. They provide for their own needs by themselves, but are most often invited and supported by members of the community.
Obviously, the feudal system weakens the primordial function of the Demorthèn. Because they are not nobles, some lords no longer pay heed to their advice whereas in traditional communities, clan chiefs often trust them to settle a dispute or make the right decision. I hope that you will be able to make the right choices, Maela Mac Loarans."
Maela remained silent. The expression on Galenor's face almost frightened her. It reminded her of the arguments he had with her father on the subject. The Demorthèn went on:

"First, the Magientists were well accepted in the major cities of Taol-Kaer, particularly at the time of the reconstruction of Osta-Baille by Athaontú. Today, the urban population has mixed feelings toward the Magientists, appreciating and dreading their strange science. In the rural communities of Taol-Kaer, Magientists have always been feared and rejected. At the heart of wild regions, such as the Lands of Dèas, they can even be attacked on sight.

Priests from Gwidre have a very bad reputation in Taol-Kaer, particularly since the War of the Temple. There are a few temples in the capital and the largest cities, but followers of this religion are most often roughly treated and victims of violence. Only a few missionaries sometimes manage to settle durably among an isolated community in exchange for some services. According to some rumors, heretics pursued by this religion seek asylum in the wildest regions of the kingdom, where no inquisitor of the Temple dares to go.
We are done for today. If you will, we will meet again in a few days, for the Tsioghair takes place tomorrow, and I must attend it."

The Lines of Tùrsal

A few miles away from the village of Louarn stand lines of menhirs that are said to date back to the Aergewin. As he did each year, Galenor went there to take part in the gathering of the Demorthèn from the great West. Much to his surprise, he was vehemently contradicted by some of his peers. After a heated debate, Crisdenbel, the oldest and wisest of the Demorthèn, who presided over the Tsioghair, concluded:

"Galenor! We understand your intentions regarding the future of Louarn. However, by becoming the regent of this vale and by taking charge of the education of young Maela Mac Loarans, you go against our ethics and assume a responsibility that should be fulfilled by a bard! The primordial duty of a Demorthèn is elsewhere; you must remain a spiritual guide linking men and nature. Then, your words will be listened to and respected among the council of Louarn. We have been aware of your inclination for politics for a long time, but take care, as by wanting to take too much control over the affairs of men, you may end up turning away from the spirits!"

Gwidrite Society

A few days later, Maela came at dawn into the council room. Galenor was waiting for her. He seemed worried, which made the wrinkles of his face seem even deeper.

"This Crisdenbel fool has it all wrong!" he thought. "If I do not take care of the education of this girl myself, then Louarn will gradually forsake our traditions!"

The old Demorthèn emerged from his thoughts, and spoke:

"Today, we will study the Gwidrite and Reizhite societies in more detail, since you will certainly have to parley with some of their emissaries. In addition to commoners and nobles, the Gwidrite society is characterized by a third caste: the clergy. It includes all the priests of the six orders of the Temple. Along the time, members of the clergy have acquired privileges: they are exempt from work, military duty, and paying taxes to the local lord. Globally, the Gwidrite society is the most feudal of the three peninsular societies. A few remote regions keep applying an ancestral and customary right, but they become rarer and rarer, as Vectors of the Temple travel everywhere in the kingdom and force the populations to convert."

"What has become of the Demorthèn in Gwidre?"

"They have lost their status and are considered commoners. A lot of them have been assassinated by mercenaries in the pay of the Temple. You certainly remember that the armies of King Dalenverch serve the cause of priests and keep knocking down the sacred stones, vestiges of our culture."

The voice of old Galenor shook with rage, then his wrinkled face became still again:

"You see, dear Maela, the clergy took such an importance in Gwidre that their army, partly composed of fanatical soldiers named Blade Knights, is starting to rival the forces of the most powerful lords. Will the Hierophant need to sit on the throne of Gwidre for Dalenverch to become aware of the monumental error of his ancestor, when he made the Temple the official religion?"

Maela knew little about Gwidre, but of it, she mainly kept the painful memory of the death of her grandfather, who had disappeared during the War of the Temple. Like many Talkérides, she had lost a relative in that bloody war.

Reizhite Society

"Let us go on with the Reizhite society, which is very different from Gwidre's, but went through many fundamental changes because of the Magientist influence. Theses about progress, inherited from continental culture, lead the people of Reizh to lose touch with spirituality. There is a clergy in Reizh, but its privileges are much more limited than in Gwidre. The animosity between the leaders of the order of the Temple and Magientist academicians is such that the religion of the One God was only very partially implanted in Reizh. The recent War of the Temple only accentuated such a situation.

Consequently, the Demorthèn mostly keep their role of spiritual guides in rural regions, in spite of our conflict with the Magientists, whose ideology is totally incompatible with our way of seeing the world. The other particularity of the Reizhite society is the emergence of a caste of enriched commoners who hold important civil positions. Know that some towns, the Free Cities, are led by these people and that the king has acknowledged their authority. Recently, these rich commoners have obtained the possibility to buy titles. There are among them artisans and traders, but also a few Magientists. They gather at the court of King Bronchaerd and are very negatively viewed by the old rural aristocracy, affiliated to the first followers of the Three Brothers.

Magientists, whether they are nobles or commoners, hold a very particular function in the Reizhite society. They can be teachers in universities or work in workshops and laboratories. As time went by, they gathered into lodges. These groups are constituted of Magientists from the same social origin or following the same research goals. There is no need to get into the details of their organization, but think of getting informed about the lodge your interlocutor belongs to if you are dealing with a Magientist; this will give you precious information. The Lodge of Lanmart as well as the Royal Lodge, financed by Bronchaerd, are by far the most powerful."

Men and Women

Traditionally, the Demorthèn philosophy values each human being equally. Men and women have always fulfilled duties of a different nature, but of comparable importance in Tri-Kazelian societies. Some men became the greatest warlords, whereas the most legendary Demorthèn were women. In clan society, power is shared between the clan chief and the Demorthèn, and the balance between men and women is a natural thing. Rape, violence against, and the abduction of women are particularly punished, as they threaten their sacred ability to give birth. This equity between men and women has remained in the three kingdoms, even in spite of the great evolutions undergone by Reizh and Gwidre.

Family

"Sit down, Maela. This third day of study will be dedicated to family."

The Dàmàthair

"Allow me to tell you about an important figure in our communities; the Dàmàthair. The overwhelming majority of Dàmàthairs are women, and as you know, their duty is to educate children, which allows other women to work and participate in the defense of the village if necessary. The Dàmàthairs are trained in fighting, and their houses are very often fortified. In the case of an attack, they have the responsibility to defend the lives of children and are entrusted with pregnant women, the elderly, and the sick. The Dàmàthairs are the incarnation of the heart of the community; guardians in the strongest sense.

However, their function does not end there: along with the Demorthèn, the Dàmàthairs are the spiritual guides of a village. Where we Demorthèn create a link between men and the spirits of nature, the Dàmàthairs are omnipresent in daily life. They supervise childbirth, and know the secrets of plants that can be used for contraception. For a long time, influential women have been using such medication to be able to fully dedicate themselves to their social duties. In villages, the Dàmàthairs decide by themselves whether a woman can receive it. Women who are too young or have not developed yet, those who must perform their military duty as well as mothers who have already borne four children are the most common cases. The Dàmàthairs also sit on the council of a community, which handle matters of justice and makes the important decisions.

In the regions where the influence of traditions is wavering, the Dàmàthairs' function has changed. They have lost their purpose because institutions of a large scale now exist, and they have become mere nurses. They no longer educate children, this duty being now assumed by priests or Reizhite preceptors. In contrast, in some rural regions where the Demorthèn are less present, the function of the Dàmàthairs has grown in importance and they have taken over them. Most fortunately, Taol-Kaer is a kingdom where the Dàmàthairs and the Demorthèn are still respected and have kept their traditional functions."

Sick Children and the Elderly

"Children truly bear in them the future of our communities, and embody hope for better days. Unfortunately, some children are born crippled or sick. In some regions, Demorthèn and Dàmàthairs discuss it and may then decide to expose them. The children are then left to wild nature, which then decides whether they must survive or not."

"This is a truly horrible practice! People from Reizh say that one must respect the life of every human!" Maela's eyes were wide open. When she was a child, she had been raised by one of Louarn's Dàmàthairs. She vaguely remembered a day when the old woman had entered the forest with a child wrapped in cloth, and had come back alone. This gave the small girl nightmares for several years.

"You must refer to some Reizhite academicians who, incidentally, dream about replacing their king with a parliament. Regarding the Magientists, no other human is as disrespectful of life! Listen Maela, this is how the laws of nature work. Our people have to face great dangers, and famine is always looming. A community cannot afford to squander its supplies. Everyone must be able to make oneself useful. This is why the Demorthèn and the Dàmàthairs of these regions also have the duty to end an elder's life at the stage where he has no other prospect than an existence filled with physical suffering."

Exogamy: Clan Tradition

Urban societies describe traditional clans as self-centered, inbred savages. Nothing could be more caricatural, as exogamic law shows. This imposes that each marriage must be made between two people coming from different clans. Through a complex system of alternation and social hierarchy, the woman or man joins the clan of the spouse and becomes part of the family. Separations are possible, but imply paying a compensation, since the departure of a member of the clan weakens the community.
Exogamic law still applies in many rural villages close to traditional cults.

Justice

The permanent dangers threatening the peninsula make it vital that the established civil order should not be disturbed. Most often, Tri-Kazelian justice is cold and direct. It does not aim to scare, but acts to protect the community. Capital punishment by hanging is most often given for crimes and treasons. Those who cannot pay fines are sentenced to hard labor or to become serfs to pay back their debts. Such prisoners are in charge of the maintenance of bridges and roads in the wildest regions. Others are sent to protect Inguards and the most exposed outlying posts. There are very few prisons and jails, as both are so costly to maintain that they would deprive the kingdoms of free, expendable labor. When the culpability of a person is uncertain, banishment is the traditional sentence in wild regions. The convict is then left to natural forces, almost naked.

Actually, sentences vary according to the regions and range from fines to the most severe corporal punishments. In some places, and particularly in towns, justice has become crueler. It happens that the convict is exposed to trial by the mob (stoning, beating to death, etc). So as to leave a strong impression, some lords hire executioners who surpass themselves in inventiveness when determining a way to put an end to the life of the victims (hanging, quartering, decapitation, etc).

Taol-Kaer is where justice is the most disparate, and where customary right has the greatest importance. In Reizh, the right is overall relatively uniformized, and Baldh-Ruoch's book of law is largely spread and followed. In Gwidre, the religious law of the Temple has practically substituted for the ancient rules.

Popular Justice and Customary Right

In traditional clans, as for example in the Lands of Dèas in the south of Taol-Kaer, laws can change greatly from one community to another. This is also the case for small remote villages, isolated from the royal power, where customary right depends on local customs. Popular justice is sometimes dealt by the village's traditional council, constituted by the chief of the community, the Demorthèn, a Dàmàthair, and a bard. In the regions where traditions remain strong but where feudalism still has been introduced, the lordly court is formed by the village council, with the lord presiding.

Royal Court and Lordly Court

The feudal system gives the king the power to administer justice. Each capital city of the three kingdoms has a royal court that deals with the most important cases. It can be presided over by the king himself, but most often, one of his advisers assumes cases that do not directly concern the kingdom or the royal family.
The king delegates this power to his vassals, who must enforce law in his name in the whole kingdom. Therefore, lords have the right to arbiter justice. There exist various lordly courts, according to the degree of vassalage. Justice is most often settled according to the will of the lord or the person he has delegated for such a task. Such courts are used to settle cases that could not be solved by the community, or offenses to the lord himself or to his institutions.

Religious Justice

Gwidre has gone through a drastic evolution of its judiciary system since the advent of the Temple in the year 775. The clergy is the sole holder of the right to enforce the law according to canonical law. This right is based on the Writings of Soustraine and is inspired by the six Ordinances. Only the capital city has kept a royal court presided over by King Dalenverch.

"This morning, the council of Louarn discussed this grim case. Now, follow me, Maela Mac Loarans, for in this fourth day of your teaching, you will have to fulfill your prerogatives. According to our tradition, it is your duty to announce the decision of the council to Louarn's inhabitants."
Maela had butterflies in her stomach. She had listened to the council for hours as it discussed the fate of Aodren, and, like her father in his time, she had presided over this session. The culpability of the young man could not be averred, and this was why the council had ruled for exile. Taken aback and impressed, she could only shyly nod when the sages had asked her for her approval.
The young girl and the Demorthèn went out and crossed the village. It was raining, and the streets of Louarn had become muddy and hard to move through. A clamor rang in the distance.
"Your face is pale, Maela. I understand your apprehension, but do not worry; the council is here to support you in this ordeal. You are a descendant of a comrade in arms of King Taol-Kaer himself, and this is why you have the power to administer justice in the name of our lord, Erald Mac Anweald."
They reached the square where a hundred-year-old oak tree towered. A platform had been built, on which stood a young man gazing around in terror. The Ansailéir and three Dàmàthairs could also be seen. In front of the platform, many agitated villagers were screaming. Maela, white as a sheet, felt faint and turned toward Galenor. The face of the old Demorthèn remained impassive, his stern look ordering her to get onto the platform. Cheers welcomed the young woman who was about to announce her first judgment. Galenor made a gesture for silence, and spoke when it was made:

"The council scrupulously studied this case and reached a verdict! Like her late father, Maela Mac Loarans will announce the decision."

The villagers yelled even louder, most of them demanding the condemnation of the presumed murderer. Aodren, who was barely twenty, was watching Maela with a pleading look. The members of the council were staring at her. The young woman could feel her legs giving way and her heart beating in her temples. But she had to speak.

A Mosaic of Opposing Influences

Extract from "Peoples, Populations, and Journeys" by Aeldred Firdh

Retrospectively, it appears that the nine centuries that went by since the Foundations have only been a succession of antagonisms more or less recognized as such. The rise of the feudal system and the first sovereigns' will of assimilation clashed, as we know, with local traditions and clan allegiances. Although the current nobility comes for a good part from the ancient lineages, its situation is far from monolithic. There are still many valleys in which, in spite of his title, the local noble is simply a clan chief in the eyes of his people. The notion of identity is then affirmed as it was in past times, and a foreigner, particularly one who wishes to settle permanently, is little appreciated. In contrast, urban nobility is obviously more cosmopolitan, and has a much different perspective, but stopping at such generalities can be misleading. Indeed, there are innumerable rural lords who boast about the battling deeds of their ancestors at the king's service. And on the contrary, some nobles of large agglomerations are nothing more than rich commoners who have bought a title and prerogatives, but who could not care less about patriotism, or even abiding by the traditions.

Through the centuries, some social groups have also evolved regarding the way the rest of the community considers them. According to the sources at our disposal, Demorthèn, but also bards, Varigals, and Dàmàthairs, previously enjoyed a particular status in many cases. This status had nothing formal, as opposed to the privileges of the nobility, but populations afforded them unmistakable respect. This went with a certain number of favors, which sometimes clearly bordered on favoritism. The feudal society, even in Taol-Kaer, which remains among the three kingdoms the one most attached to the ancient customs, progressively put an end to such a situation. Although the Demorthèn are still considered as people of exception in many places, the purpose of Varigals and bards often came to be confused with that of peddlers, minstrels, messengers, and vagrants of all kinds. In particular, city dwellers no longer have for those people, as well as for Dàmàthairs, the respect their predecessors could enjoy; mainly because they do not depend on them as much as rural people.
Contacts with the Continent have also favored the rise of new social groups. The appearance of an official clergy in Gwidre, a land where the religious now enjoy prerogatives inscribed in the law, is the most obvious example, and the one most often mentioned by neophytes in social transformation. The use of a currency had already permitted the emergence of a class of well-off commoners, but technological advances, directly inspired by the Magientists or not, increased its power. Legally speaking, a trader, a craftsman, or even a Magientist of common extraction, are entitled to no special consideration, even in Reizh and in spite of what some partisan individuals support. However, the control of financial riches, or of technological knowledge, leads these types of people to become, by force of circumstance, notables, whose opinion, or even favors, are sought. Some commoners may have managed to acquire titles of nobility, but most of them did so in the prospect of earning prestige, or privileges. In the end, the influence of a scholar or a trader over a community, although unofficial, should not be underestimated.

Although in Gwidre, the Temple's clergy totally replaced the Demorthèn–sometimes by force–the Magientists have overall proved to be more circumspect, and officially have no political power acknowledged by the law. However, the opening of schools for religious or scientific teaching has favored the emergence of a learned minority, most often of middle-class origin, whereas in the countryside, many lords are barely able to write. Knowledge, whatever its aspect, also holds the seeds of many ambitions going beyond the traditional cradle in which individuals evolve.

Overall, we can witness the crumbling of certain social groups at the benefit of new ones, which, more or less consciously, strive to fill the space left by the former ones. They must take into consideration official power, which also attempts to reinforce or preserve its influence. Economic antagonisms and social ambitions have been added in a more discreet way to national, clan and–more recently–religious rivalries, while money and knowledge are flowing at an increasing pace, although still awkwardly, throughout the kingdoms.

Although the Osag tribes of the Lands of Dèas seem to live as their ancestors from before the Foundations did, we must admit that we actually have no certitude on this subject. It is quite unlikely that centuries went by without exterior influences, or a desire for new things, discreetly remodeling parts of the Osag culture. Yet, all we can do is conjecture. However, Tarishes seem to have been spared by all changes and keep traveling as they have always done, as quiet and enigmatic as in the past.



Chapter 2
Currency and Trading

My journey had led me to the outskirts of the village of Kaer Daegis. There, I met a strange character named Aeldred, as unsightly as he was deformed, who claimed to be a professional rat hunter. He was busy giving ladlefuls of a foul-smelling stew to a few people sitting around his shack. He was a very chatty man, and as we were talking about trade and the recent assault on a merchants' caravan, he started to fill a bowl for me while presenting me with a bloodstained parchment, which he invited me to read aloud. I unrolled the document and saw it was filled with a regular, conscientious lettering.

Report from Ailill Mac Naris concerning research on the commercial and monetary system of Tri-Kazel

Although I am of modest origin, I have become an influential man in many villages and small cities, and was even noticed in the great Osta-Baille. My field experience has given me a reliable knowledge of the common commercial habits in Tri-Kazel. Thus, with a wealth of knowledge, a vast documentation and the advice of some scholars from Osta-Baille, I was able to write down these few notes for the use of whoever would like to do business in trading.

Monetary System

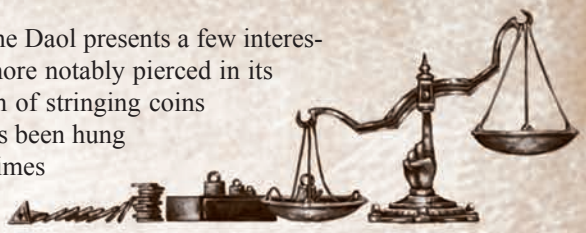
Let us start with a numismatic panorama of the peninsula. It indeed seems necessary to me to first mention the various means of exchange we use, notably the monetary system that generally prevails in civilized countries.

However, do not be mistaken: in most of Tri-Kazelian transactions, money is not involved. Barter trade is much more favored by the people, all the more so when one moves away from large cities. In the countryside, the exchange of Daols is actually not part of the common practice, and they remain rare. Most of the time, this currency is accepted in exchange for any good or service, but, in some places under particular conditions such as a threatening famine, nobody should be surprised to have their Daols refused. Thus, it will happen that, outside cities, one has to barter a service or an item for what they need. Always keep in mind that bartering is still the most widespread commercial activity in the peninsula and that demand will always set the exchange rate, whatever the product. Nothing is set, and therefore, it can vary considerably from one place or moment to another. Now that such obvious facts were stated, we can focus our interest on the currency used in the three kingdoms: in their image, it represents the symbol of a united yet composite people. This is the specificity of Tri-Kazel: three kingdoms with a fraternal origin, multiple tribes that however identify themselves with the same land, and the same currency beyond slight aesthetic differences. Thus, the Daol is the sovereign currency of Tri-Kazel. Theoretically recognized and accepted by all, it is a tangible token of the common origin of the three kingdoms and it facilitates trading. Daols come in three types of decreasing value, with a one-for-ten exchange rate, named according to their appearance. Hence, the Frost Daol (grey-white) is worth ten Azure Daols (grey-blue), while each Azure Daol is equivalent to ten Ember Daols, which have a slightly golden tint, reminiscent of copper. Thus, you need one hundred Ember Daols to obtain a single Frost Daol.

The Composition of Daols

Obviously, these allegorical names come from popular use, but they have become so common that they have been officialized. Initially, Daols were named by pragmatically mentioning the material they were made of. First, there is the Trekann Daol, the most expensive, its value going beyond even that of gold. Trekann is a complex alloy of a secret composition, the main ore of which is said to be extracted from the depths of the earth. It is absolutely stainless, but is quite difficult to work. Then there is the Aelethal Daol, an alloy of three parts of silver with one part of gold, which takes a blue tint when worked. Finally, the Orekal Daol, a natural mix of copper and gold, was given the gaudy name of "mountain gold".

You will also note that we use no pure gold or silver for the minting of money. This can be explained in several ways: our natural tendency to consider alloys–composite materials–as the reflection of our peninsular multiplicity, but also the will to keep gold, silver, and other more common materials for art and crafting. The confection of Tri-Kazelian money is therefore completely atypical compared to the rest of our society, since the use of the alloys it requires is exclusive to it.

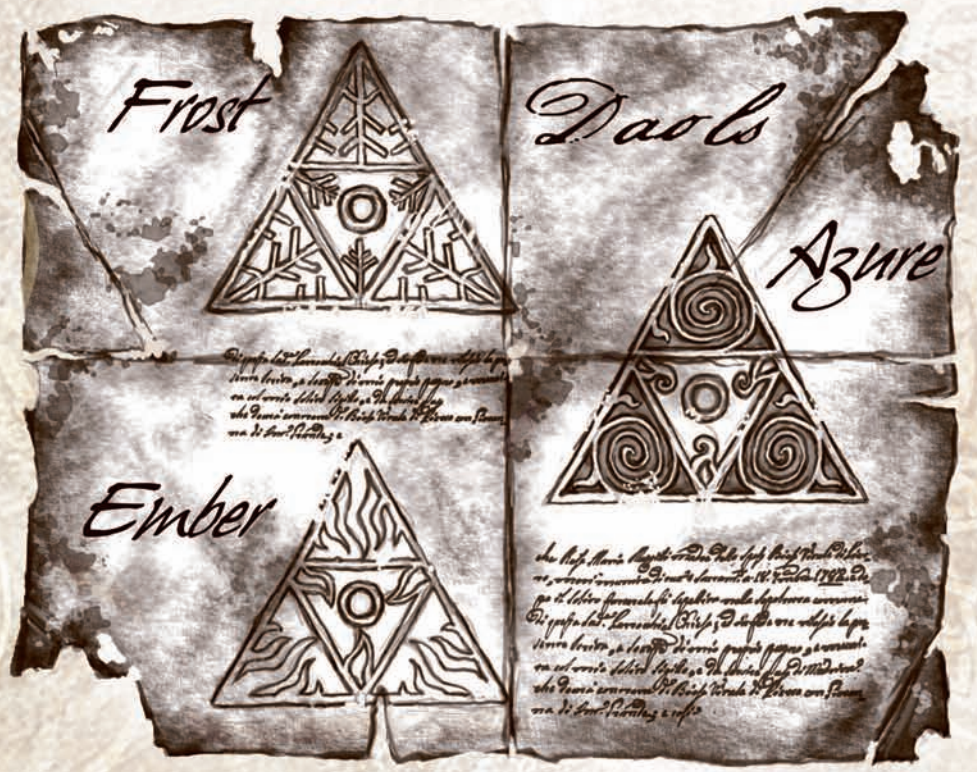


On an aesthetic level, and ignoring the aforementioned differences in colors, the Daol presents a few interesting singularities: triangular, like the trinity of kingdoms it symbolizes, it is more notably pierced in its center. The presence of this hole can be explained by the Tri-Kazelian custom of stringing coins on a piece of rope rather than making use of leather purses. The rope which has been hung with coins this way is used as a necklace, as a belt, or also rolled up several times and tied on the side, at hip height. Such a curious system tends to be a deterrent for thieves: cutting off a purse to appropriate it is easy, but breaking such a rope guarantees a clattering of coins, ruining any chance of the theft remaining unnoticed. However, to avoid any dangerous ostentation, it is customary to dissimulate this line of coins under one's tunic or shirt, or even, if it is attached on the side, under a large wool waistband.

The Daol is the result of the moneymaker's work, generally a simple smith. He is the holder of a license to mint coins, regulated by the Currency House of each kingdom, and can only officiate in these true financial strongholds. The principle is simple: "wedges"–two triangular moulds of metal engraved with motifs–are used, which are placed on each side of the to-be coin, which is only designated under the name of "flan" at this stage. This flan, a small disk of the alloy used to forge the Daol, is placed under heat between the unmoving wedge, fixed in a wooden block, and the mobile wedge, held with tongs and being dealt a hammer strike. The strike gives the flan its definite Daol shape, and also imprints the motifs of the wedges into the metal. The triangular shape and the hole of the coin are then made while the metal remains malleable.

Previously, many different motifs could be found, mainly warrior or animal-like, but the common denominations of Daols have driven the kings to set a norm: the tails side of each coin is therefore now identically minted in the three kingdoms. Thus, the Frost Daol shows three stylized snowflakes, one on each angle. The Azure one counts three coils rising in whirls, like small forming tornadoes. Finally, the Ember Daol is adorned with three stylized flames.

As for the motifs displayed on the other side of the coin, they are left to the discretion of each kingdom, or even of the moneymakers themselves. Although various motifs can be found on Daols, for a long time the symbolical representation of a tangle of Caernides' antlers linking the three angles of the coin remained the most common one. As time went by, other less traditional symbols have appeared on the heads of Daols, notably in Gwidre where representations related to the Temple are gaining ground.



False Money

Forgery exists, and uses the same crafting process. These counterfeit coins are popularly called "rascals", and the authorities are hard-pressed to bring a halt to such an issue. Some official smiths of the Currency Houses try their hand at such a business, but they are punished by death if they are found out… as are their unofficial accomplices, in that regard. The only difference is that they will be the first ones to be suspected as they have the adequate official equipment at their disposal. The most common method is to shave true money in order to forge one's own coins with the supply misappropriated in this way. Another possibility is to corrupt the necessary alloys for the minting of Daols by adding less noble materials. Then, all there remains to do is to put the false money into circulation…



Other Means of Exchange

All these numismatic remarks must not obfuscate the primary function of money: facilitating and ensuring commercial exchanges. Daols are used in most daily transactions, but large-scale ones sometimes require the use of too high a sum. This is where payments through precious stones or bills of exchange come in. There are many precious stones in the mountains and mines of Tri-Kazel, but their extraction remains difficult and perilous. Therefore, their value is very high, and they are favored over the expense of too great an amount of Daols: the ease in transporting them and the greater secrecy they allow make them very convenient.

However, it is often necessary to involve an expert who will be the only one able to judge the actual value of a stone before the exchange takes place, and this has the triple inconvenience of adding a third party, taking time, and costing considerable money. Only diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires are actually used as a means of exchange over Daols. Other gems are more often kept for ornamentation or craftsmanship. Each stone is also given specific medicinal qualities, but such pagan beliefs tend to fade before their simple commercial value.

To avoid the transportation of exorbitant sums, it is also possible to make use of bills of exchange. This system was put into practice on the initiative of the Bramble knights. These knights-errant, nomads in armor, tirelessly travel all over Tri-Kazel and claim to be “the soul” of the peninsula from the moment they join the order. Such a commitment is irrevocable. They make sure that traditions are respected, and give assistance to whoever needs it during their journey. They never remain in the same place for more than three weeks, and can be summoned by their order to carry out a particular mission and lend help to the lords of Tri-Kazel in difficulty.

They do not ask for anything, but the custom requires a tribute to be paid to them according to one’s means for the help brought. These donations are then centralized by the order in a building of Osta-Baille called the Rosace and guarded by the oldest Bramble knights, to pay the expenses inherent to the functioning of the order. It also gradually became a moneylending organization: they entrust money to institutions, which promise to pay it back with an added “obole”, worth one third of the sum. Apart from the Rosace of Osta-Baille, one can find relays in some great towns of the peninsula, often sheltered behind the walls of the local lord’s castle. They are officially related to the Brambles, and allow them to store and retrieve Daols. This way, the financial activity of the order ensures that any knight can entrust their goods to the Rosace before leaving, receiving a storage bond and a letter on which the deposited sum is written, as guarantees. This handwritten, sealed letter is called “letter of exchange”. This way, the knights can travel without fear of robbery. When they reach a relay, they get back the entirety of the money required for their maintenance and for their mission.

This system was quickly imitated by the three Currency Houses of the capital cities, and the letter of exchange became no longer exclusive to the Bramble knights. Among Houses, it became a "bill" of exchange, and indicates any document through which someone–the drawer–gives a debtor the order to pay the bearer a given sum at a precise date in one of the three Currency Houses. These three institutions secure transactions and earn interests from them, but these remain lower than the "obole" given to the knights. These have kept their influence and are sometimes hired by the Currency Houses to secure important funds transportations.

Caravans

The members of the order of the Bramble are not the only ones to travel over Tri-Kazel to secure commercial flows. Many caravans are organized by independent merchants or ones gathered in guilds. The various mining businesses have given rise to a prosperous trade, as have exchanges of resources and manufactured products exclusive to specific parts of the peninsula. Exchanges of an agricultural nature, or related to ovine, bovine, or caprine breeding are only done on a short scale and are still infrequent, as each region still cultivates their own food supplies. The only exceptions are alcohol and salt, transported in barrels.

At the instigation of some Magientists, the silica of the Great Beaches of Taol-Kaer is occasionally used to craft glass and stained glass, although Tri-Kazel was still ignorant of such a use a short time ago. On the peninsula, transportation remains difficult, and in spite of the existence of Caernides and the increasingly frequent use of horses, caravans still take a lot of time to go over long distances. I hope that we will be able to modernize our ancestral roads to make them quicker and safer in spite of the presence of Feondas. There is no other actual network, and the sea remains dangerous.

Varigals and Caernides still have a determining role in the transportation of merchandises, even if the aforementioned animals are not as docile as horses. The orientation of caravans is made easier by enormous steles engraved with symbols and spread by our ancestors along some roads. Although not all travelers are able to decipher them, many know their drawings and use them as landmarks. Some have even carved indications in the modern language on these stones, but the elders firmly disapprove of such practices.



Caernides

A Caernide is a creature with antlers, akin to a deer, but much more docile. Quick, nimble, and fast, it is however quite frail and cannot be used as a draught animal. Unable to carry heavy loads, a Caernide can bear for a long time neither a rider in heavy armor, nor two people mounting it simultaneously. Inferior to the horse in many points, this creature is however considered as sacred, meant to quickly lead its rider to destination, avoiding the dangers of wild places thanks to its constant vigilance.

A Caernide gallops in a leaping manner, well adapted to the various obstacles that one can meet on uneven roads. This skipping gait and its thick fur make it an animal in total harmony with the mountainous relief of the peninsula. In spite of this, the use of horses spreads each day a little more, particularly in Reizh and Gwidre.



This is where my exposition ends. There would be much more to say, but my intention was only to offer you a first glance, which I consider sufficient although somewhat succinct, of the fundamentals of trading in Tri-Kazel.

Poverty

As I was getting to the end of the document, I heard the rat hunter laugh as he told the meager audience we offered him:

"Ah, what a funny one this Ailill! Always trying to earn the favor of the powerful, when he only needs to open his eyes around here to see the sad truth. This sure sounds like him! Take a look at where it led him, always wanting to do his little business: here I'm travelin', there I'm earnin' my life and seein' some big people, and in the end, I'm found almost shredded in half by some bloody Feond! And with what in my pockets? This here report, completely distorted to please his new relations. I'd be surprised if his Demorthèn brother managed to get him back on his feet! He might as well die now; what a lesson that would be for him! Anyway, you can see he's able to munch his fill and he's far from poor. But all is not as opulent as he'd wish it to be. Right here, under your eyes, I have to cook rodents, and even worse, for the poor wretches who come to me with their stomachs empty. So, not such a disgusting one, this Aeldred, when there's only wind to fill your belly, huh? You sure like your Aeldred in these cases!

But I understand you… It's money that messes everything up: now, we use Daols more and more. Ailill was proud of it, but in the end, we weren't worse off with barter. Now, the Daol is the drive of war. Ailill said that the Daol would make us free, but we have all become its slaves. Even me, the village chief pays me wages to eliminate the vermin of Kaer Daegis. Whereas before, the locals gave me small game or some services in exchange. We always found an arrangement.

Believe me, the arrival of Daols has benefited the powerful, but the little ones suffer. It's harder and harder for them to eat correctly since they cannot afford what they could previously cultivate themselves or find at a neighbor's. I've even heard that some crazies went as far as to take it out on our dear Caernides! Worse than Feondas, I tell you. Well, sure, it may be better than rodents, I'll give you that, but I'll never have of that; it's a sacred animal, I don't want the forces of nature to get mad at me. What that bitch has given me is far enough…

Anyway, I'm rambling on, but what I mean is that in spite of the great speeches of our chiefs, poverty is increasing, and epidemics along with it. Because people, the harder it is for them to find food, clothes, and a house, the weaker they are against diseases. Worse than my rats! You can see it spreading all around and people croaking everywhere! They don't even have the time to educate their kids enough to teach them about being at least a little clean. So of course diseases are plenty. Look at me, I work in the worst filth, but I'm never sick, of course I'm careful: it's very simple, I wash at least twice a week, and I change clothes too! Yeah, I can see you're laughing, but the Magientist told me it worked great. Hygiene, he calls it.

Well, good thing we're people who stick together. To begin with, in Gwidre, the poor are given some help by the Temple, but I was told it's not free, and there are some shady compensations. At any rate, I prefer to stay away from such people. Here, there's only the chief's daughter who tries to make it so we don't all starve… It sure is nice of her, you can't deny it, but I don't think she has never really been hungry, and I'm sure she's never had to eat rat, and she annoys me, being all haughty like that. Anyway, I can't explain it…

But well, solidarity exists on the whole peninsula, somewhat. I even think it's encouraged by the Demorthèn, who make sure that the ancient customs are followed. But it's receding, I tell you: everyone runs after even a single ember Daol. And it has its limits: in villages, you're not that badly off, but in some towns, beggars are cracked down on; they're arrested, or worse, led outside the walls of the city, which exposes them to Feondas lurking around and is no better than sentencing them to death in the end. So believe me, cities are not the solution. At least here you're tolerated, and I'll never rat on that you've come to eat my rat stew!"

The rat hunter had a fit of shrill laughter, which distorted his purulent face. As I was remaining stoical, eyeing the dishes of the other guests, he added in a mocking tone:

"Ha ha! Don't you find it funny? Varigals have no sense of humor… Well, I feel you; I'm talking about poverty, whereas you may know it even more than me. You may be waiting for a revelation to make things better, but I'm not a hero or whatever! Poverty strikes everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, and it's a damned vicious circle! You're poor? You can expect to remain so! I've got no solution; I make no miracles. At least you won't be starving, my stew's for free. And c'mon, it's not that bad, huh? There, wipe your tears. Seconds?"

I was famished, so I accepted with a grimacing smile the broth in which floated pieces of meat of which provenance I would rather have remained ignorant of…



Chapter 2
The Arts

The Arts: Mirrors of Civilization

Lecture of Professor Morch Mac Maduidh at the Academy of Arts and Literature of Osta-Baille

The conference room was filled with the hum of the students' conversations. As it is known, students are a rowdy bunch, who are only able to behave in the presence of a professor. When the cheerful face of a little man appeared between the pillars of the great arch, the crowd instantaneously fell silent.



The Arts, or the Necessity of the Useless

"A famous saying goes that 'in Tri-Kazel, great are the men of war, and petty are the men of art.' There is nothing more inexact, and yet, I know this point of view is largely shared. Today, allow me to give the arts back their rightful aspect; that of a beacon of light that shines in the night and gives some hope back to humanity. The fire of creation rises in the heart of darkness, to better expel it far from our homes. It is amidst pain and suffering that men's most beautiful achievements were given birth to, to better exorcise them.

Artists work with their heart and their guts; in their way, they lead a bitter fight against death and annihilation. Civilization is the opposite of nothingness; a reality that the raging forces of entropy restlessly try to bring down. Feondas kill our friends, our fathers and our mothers, our brothers and our sisters. Everywhere, insecurity reigns and monsters threaten us. Yet, we Tri-Kazelians refuse to lose hope, to yield to fatality. We always drive back the waves of adversity; while soldiers strive to fight the bestial hordes away from our towns, artists try to brighten the lives of their fellow human beings. They build dreams; give them life. Sculptors, painters, writers, musicians, but also architects, tailors, goldsmiths, jewelers–they all light the fires of intelligence and knowledge, of beauty and liveliness, in the midst of the shadows looming over us.

It is true that the arts are not weapons that we can brandish in front of our enemies. But they are the keepers of what we are, the guardians of our memory, the loyal confidants of our most intimate thoughts. Needless yet necessary, such are the arts, which protect us from nothing, but hold the most precious things we have: our dreams and our humanity."

Of the Relations between the Arts and Craft

The professor paused, and laid ice-cold eyes on a group of students who were busy chattering. All eyes converged on the troublemakers, who suddenly noticed the situation and fell silent, their faces red with shame. Morch sighed perceptibly before he went on:

"From a historical point of view, craft came before the arts; it was born as such before being a support for the latter. Parchment held the words of our chroniclers; canvas, the pigments of our painters; metal, the complex motifs of our smiths. Tools became musical instruments; stones, statues, or friezes. Little by little, the sun of art laid hands on crude matter to shape it an ideal body. Therefore, the border between art and craft is sometimes an indistinct one. The latter is supposed to produce something useful for society, while the former leads us to consider it differently, be it by embellishing it or by offering us an offbeat perception of it.

Our war chiefs make no mistake when they bring with them a ceremonial weapon, which they are capable of brandishing at the opportune time to stiffen the resolve of their men. Our lords know that their glory and power shine from their furniture to the sculptures adorning the threshold of their houses. Our master artisans are proud to sell vases and scabbards artistically decorated, or ornate belt buckles. To reach such a result, they assiduously worked; and one day, they finally achieved their masterpiece, the object that harmoniously unites their masteries of craft and art, in front of which we cannot remain indifferent.

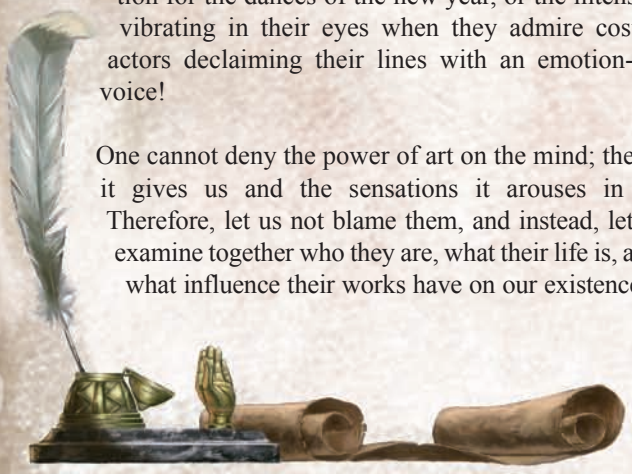
However, there exist arts that have no direct relation with craft, such as dancing, dramatic arts, or jugglery. Deprived of any perennial support, their ephemeral aspect only makes their beauty even more enchanting."

Artists and Society

"The status of artists is an ambiguous one. On one hand, society could not forsake their achievements and their performances; on the other hand, it looks upon them as individuals wasting their time with futilities while the essential is elsewhere. It is not easy to be an artist in Tri-Kazel. Bad ones are booed or even chased, mediocre ones are mocked, acceptable ones are ignored, good ones are mere objects of curiosity, and only the most talented of them are patronized by our lords or wealthy individuals, to entertain them or elevate their minds.

However, we cannot but witness the amazement of our children when tales of Thén-Mhuir are read to them, their fascination for the dances of the new year, or the intense light vibrating in their eyes when they admire costumed actors declaiming their lines with an emotion-laden voice!

One cannot deny the power of art on the mind; the joy it gives us and the sensations it arouses in us. Therefore, let us not blame them, and instead, let us examine together who they are, what their life is, and what influence their works have on our existence.



Of Lyrical Arts

The voice is undoubtedly the first of all instruments. It has been developing since the dawn of time in various fashions, such as the psalmody, the litany, the dirge, or the lament. Singers are almost always part of a choral group composed of three individuals singing alternatively. They symbolize trinities such as the deceased, his descendant, and the C'maogh, during funerary ceremonies; or also the heroic ancestor, the foe, and the proclaimer, during celebrations of our ancestors' deeds. Singers are particularly respected artists, as their art is part of the age-old traditions of our peninsula, and marks rites such as the transition to adulthood, or marriage. Often, their musician colleagues play before and after them, but their performances, as beautiful as they may be, strangely make them only slightly popular.

Filidhi are among the only artists who sometimes perform their art alone, although they are often accompanied by musicians. It is told that these blind poets possess authentic divinatory powers, and that they sing alone so that their predictions may not be hindered by other voices. At any rate, Filidhi enjoy considerable respect, and they never lack of anything, which is not the case for traveling storytellers, who have a hard time earning a living, trying to catch the attention of capricious audiences.

Of Melodic Arts

No art without craft here: artists deprived of their instruments are like disarmed soldiers; bound to fail. Lutes, rebecs, tambourines, horns, trumpets, bagpipes, small harps, or flutes are the common companions of musicians. Easily transportable, these instruments are designed to be playable in any circumstance. Tambourines accompany marching soldiers with their rhythmic sounds; the trumpet glorifies the power and the glory of kings and lords. The soulful sounds of bagpipes salute the memories of our ancestors, whereas the lute or the rebec emphasize the journeys of our legendary heroes. The harp and the lyre often accompany theatric representations, stressing the emotions of the comedians. The flute cheers on the crowds during festivals, while the horn gives the signal for hunting or alarm.



Musicians are essentially urban artists, but some of them enjoy traveling from village to village, to let country people enjoy their harmonious melodies… At their own risk. Most of them are interpreters, who take inspiration from a vast traditional repertoire of melodies to brighten up the receptions of nobles or rich commoners, popular festivals, or the least pleasant taverns.

Composers are far rarer: they still work today with the ternary rhythm, favored by the Tri-Kazelians, as a work basis, but some of them experiment with new ones, casting tradition aside for modernity.

Most of the peninsula's inhabitants appreciate music, but they consider it as a minor art. It knows how to entertain them, particularly during festivals, but its status as a profane art, which gradually distanced it from the traditions, is detrimental to those practicing it. However, jugglers and minstrels are still rather welcomed by people, thanks to their acrobatic or poetic talents that greatly set them apart from 'mere' musicians.

Of Dramatic Arts and Dancing

Comedians and dancers offer their contemporaries another form of art: a living, moving art, which draws ever-renewing shapes and gives us our varying emotions to see, mirrored in flesh.

The most ancient tales teach us that dramatic art was born under most unusual circumstances. Striving to appease the spirits, men started to imitate nature through their gestures and movements, and invented the first dances. Such rituals grew in complexity to give birth to ceremonies, the goal of which was to earn the favor of the spirits. Gradually, the celebrants played parts that differentiated them from one another, with the double aim of clarifying the hierarchical relations and humanizing the rituals. Regarding this point, other tales mention the use of ornate masks, which, through their attributes, indicated the function of their bearers; this seems to be the origin of the masks worn during our festivals…

Today, apart from performances based on Demorthèn traditions, comedians offer us a wide range of entertainments: satires delivering a witty criticism of our leaders, comedies and tragedies touching the chord of our most excitable emotions, or also the famous epics, of which the crowd, loving tales of blood and victory, is fond.

Most of the shows are held in the open, most often in the squares of towns and villages, and sometimes in gardens. Therefore, it is not rare for a performance to be troubled by rain or wind, but comedians have learned to adapt to the gloomy climate of Tri-Kazel.

Most often, they wear very bare costumes, their roles being indicated either by an accessory (hat, cane, sword, spectacles…), or by a mark painted on their face. Beautiful costumes are reserved for productions given for nobles and for festive days.

Although the official speech depicts comedians and dancers as barely more estimable than musicians, I think that, on the contrary, they enjoy great sympathy, deep in the heart of people."

A legend says that the hero Leog was the only survivor of a massacre, perpetrated by a horde of Feondas. When he was found in the ruins of the village of Two-Stars, he was dancing. In spite of all the efforts to talk to him, Leog kept dancing for another night and day before literally falling asleep. The Demorthèn who examined him noticed that his skin had taken a greenish-brown coloration, and that his hair had become brittle, like twigs…

Of Plastic and Pictorial Arts

"Sculptors are certainly the most appreciated artists on the peninsula, if only for the fundamentals of their discipline, which are deeply rooted in the Demorthèn traditions. Ritual stones, so dear to Tri-Kazelians, decorated with animal and vegetal motifs since the Aergewin, are the most illustrative example of this union between art and the sacred. Gradually, as plastic art was developed, painted branches and arabesques displayed the fascinating curves of their complex geometry on the rugged surface of the monoliths, transforming them forever into guardians of our civilization. According to rumors, an initiate can read in the meanders of these elegant drawings much more than the stylization of nature. Thus, well-trained eyes would supposedly be able to decipher the names and mood of the C'maoghs, the local spirits of nature, as well as traps laid in the surroundings by nature, or even the location of neighboring human communities…



Apart from these typical achievements, sculptors carve from stone, wood, or clay, fierce warriors, haughty damsels with eyes of fire, or animals frozen in strange postures. They adorn the houses of nobles and rich commoners with elegant, muscular caryatids, columns with cornices delicately chiseled with scenes of war or hunting. They transform porches into visual enchantments, decorating gables and corbels with smiling or grimacing faces, etching the façades of friezes with Azulrock, or inviting their frescos in the round on walls left bare… The works of sculptors exhort us to touch them, cautiously at first, then to stroke them for longer–as our eyes alone cannot grasp their carnal mystery–in order to satiate the powerful desire they have sparked in us.

Painters rarely collaborate with their sculpting colleagues, as the aesthetic taste of the peninsula wishes for statues and sculptures to remain devoid of any chromaticism; hence the word 'Virginalism' applied to plastic arts by some Continentals who have visited our cities. Pictorial artists draw frescos directly on walls, or pour their pigments on parchment, wood, or even canvases smeared with glue, covered with a dressing and stretched on a frame. Although they employ a vast range of colors, ternary hues–green, ochre, and gray–are the most used: these three tones reflect the major influence of the forests, mountains, and rainy skies on their work. The few Continentals settled in Tri-Kazel often mock them in this regard, and consider their art to be as limited as the surface of their peninsula; our painters politely retort to them that they respect the 'right arrangement' of the world, taking care not to 'scatter.' Unlike sculptors, painters are but a few, and enjoy a rather limited esteem among commoners and nobles. Only the middle-class truly seems to appreciate their talents.

Of Noble Arts

Poetry was born with Tri-Kazel. It is the daughter of the steep sides of mountains, the weary sighs of the wind, the tears of the sky, and the darkness of forests. It is the child of our sorrows and our joys, of our pains and our pleasures.

The first poems were written on the walls of caverns, then on parchment, and today, on paper. They communicated us the emotions of our ancestors; their greatest fears and frights. These first poetic topics, often awkward, sometimes inspired, were polished as time went by. Today, poems are not only about blood, suffering, and mourning, but also about beauty and elation. Poets are not brooding individuals whining about the lot of men, as the general opinion has it, but on the contrary, fervent worshippers of life and of its magnificent twists and turns.

The verses of the most famous poems are known by everyone, and it is frequent during festive days to hear 'The Three Monarchs' or 'Shining Leaves of Spring.' Many minstrels also compose poems, and they were the ones to introduce the free verse in Tri-Kazel, leaving the classical, nine-foot verse for the liberty of their inspiration."

The Chronicles of Arenthel are doubtlessly the most famous ones. Written at the time of the foundation of Tri-Kazel, they were only discovered about three centuries later by a gold prospector, in a locked chest behind the wall of a well in the burgh of Erlean. It was reported that one of the bundles of parchments, which was the original copy of the chronicles, crumbled to dust at the first attempt to unroll it. However, rumor has it that in truth it actually held such extraordinary knowledge that it was hidden in a place kept secret. Indeed, according to the legend, these chronicles contain the complete history of the foundation of Tri-Kazel, bringing answers to the many mysteries surrounding the victorious campaign of the three brothers.

The Trine

The Trine is the most widespread form of poetry in Tri-Kazel: it is composed of three stanzas, each of them including three verses. The existence of the Trine is attested well before the foundation of the Three Kingdoms, and its origin probably lies in the alternation between day and night. Dawn or twilight constitute the third period, the one when light and obscurity temporarily mingle. Thus, the first trine was an ode celebrating the birth of day in its first stanza, evoking the marriage of shadow and solar fires in the second, and ending with an imploration calling for the end of darkness in the third. Today, the traditional metrics of the Trine sings the union between the kingdoms of Taol-Kaer, Gwidre, and Reizh.

"Along with poetry, chronicles form what are called in Tri-Kazel the 'noble arts.' Most chroniclers are nobles who have received a very advanced education in the domain of rhetoric and history, but also in law and politics. Chronicles are generally extensive works precisely describing the history of all great events punctuating the life of the chronicler, or reviewing customs, traditions, laws, nobiliary genealogies, local facts, etc., making an inventory of many details that would have otherwise sunk into oblivion. They assume the role of keepers of the memory of Tri-Kazel, and are highly respected among commoners."

Of Bards

"Many of you may wonder why I have not mentioned the subject of bards yet. Very simply because, as it seems to me, they certainly are accomplished artists, but for them, art is more a means than an end.

Let me explain. The most famous bard was a woman, Arenthel, who accompanied the three brothers in their travels. She advised them, aided them in the negotiations they undertook with clan chiefs, and wrote down the tales of the foundation of Tri-Kazel. Of course, her talents as a musician and a dancer, her sharp tongue and her unmatched sense of prosody were precious assets in the determining part she played in the future of our peninsula. However, as curious as it might seem from such a talented artist, Arenthel always considered art with a pragmatic eye.

In that regard, she was the worthy successor of these young, spirited people whose words were almost sacred, and who advised clan chiefs since the Aergewin. Noticeably, her fame opened such a profession to women, who have since proven that they are predisposed, or at least as talented as men, to fulfill such a role.

Bards are also the living proof that art can be a weapon as efficient as the sharpest axe. They can access a lore forbidden to the uninitiated, which they transmit orally, as well as to knowledge they draw from the chronicles written by their peers or some scholarly nobles. Today still, they most often work for a lord, whom they entertain, move, and advise. They also assume the role of a preceptor for this lord's children, giving them a complete education, which is often much less consensual than the one taught in academies.

When it is time for diplomatic action, bards are the most appropriate individuals to speak in their lords' names. Their natural eloquence backs up their considerable knowledge, and it frequently happens that the businesses of lords transform into debates between two bards. However, bards always bear the word of the lord they represent, and, although they may take a few liberties, they only have one aim: to reach the objectives they have been given.

Previously, one became a bard through heredity, and never in any other way. Today, any individual with a gift for learning and arts in general can seek the title of bard. Applicants are introduced to a jury composed of nine bards who have been practicing for at least nine years, and they must show proof of their talents and determination to pursue their studies. This test lasts a whole day, and the weight of disillusions is often very hard to bear; there are therefore many minstrels who hide a lingering melancholy related to their failure in becoming bards.

For those who pass, their success marks the beginning of long years of intensive studies with a master. As opposed to the practices of other corporations, the young bards choose their masters during the ceremony following their acceptance in the ranks of their peers. Masters are bards who have been practicing for at least five years; if they already have three pupils, they have the right to refuse the newcomer, who must then make another choice.

Each master has his own personal methods, and it is not hard for an expert to know with whom a bard has studied, simply by listening to one of his songs or reading one of his works. No master is better than another, but it is important to choose him wisely, or there is a risk of undergoing a long, fastidious apprenticeship. Generally, the pupil chooses the master according to the compatibility of their characters. If he is mistaken, he has to wait for a year and then has the opportunity to choose another master, and so on.

A pupil continuously going from a master to another is considered as an exception, and is mocked by the other bards. The knowledge he develops is sketchy, and in the future, he will make a quite mediocre advisor for the lord who makes the mistake of taking him under his wing.

Most often at the center of power games, of which they try to be the arbiters, bards have close relations with the Demorthèn. The keepers of peninsular traditions have always represented a pillar on which one can rest on for stability. Traditionally, a bard is part of the council of a community, composed of the Ansailéir, the Demorthèn, and the Dàmàthairs.

Even if today the growing influences of the Magientists and the members of the Temple diminish their prevalence, they remain precious allies for bards all the same. The same goes for the Varigals, the guild having been founded by Arenthel herself, may I remind. They often lend a hand to bards who, for one reason or another, come to travel.

Used to double entendres and to the subtleties of etiquette, bards know how to be appreciated by their friends as much as how to be hated by their enemies. Unfortunately, it is not rare that they meet a tragic end, pushed from the top of a tower, locked up in a dungeon, or broken by a treacherous lover, for whom power had a better taste than love.
I would have much more to tell you concerning such individuals, but unfortunately, the time has already come for us to part."

Chapter 3
Factions

Doern did not know whether he should be thrilled or fearful. For the last few weeks, his master, Wylard Mac Readan, had been enjoying a new lease on life. With an energy that those close to him had not witnessed for years, he was organizing a great expedition that should, to quote him, "purge the world of the Feond scourge". Doern had nodded timidly when his master had asked him if he wished to join him on such a journey. The lord had then told him, once more, to read the whole of his notes. "I've had premonitory dreams, Doern! Nothing must elude us, for the slightest error could be our doom; I can feel it!" Wylard then stared at Doern with eyes so determined, so exalted, that his servant was feeling as impressed as fear-stricken.

After much laborious effort, Wylard had managed to gather in the same place delegations of Demorthèn, Magientists and ecclesiastics of the Temple. In the great corridor of the Mac Readans' castle, Doern could hear the echoes of a commotion. His master believed that an alliance of these factions could result in an effective solution to the Feond matter... but was it even conceivable? How could people with such fundamentally different beliefs manage to work together? The Three Brothers' dream of an eternally unified Tri-Kazel seemed so far away now…







Chapter 3
Demorthèn

At the brink of dawn, Demorthèn Keogh liked to sit on the crudely carved gradins of the circle of meetings. It was the most propitious time for meditation, when the sun barely grazed the first crown of the oak standing at the center of the circle. One morning, he was approached by a young girl he had known since she was born. Louane was already insatiably curious: her face beamed at each ancient tale or legend that was narrated by her nurse, Dàmàthair Dyánnair, or by Irwan, the bard of the village. Her sharp mind delighted Keogh, who liked to talk to her, or simply answer her many questions.

So, Louane came to him; during their discussion, she innocently asked him what the name "Demorthèn" meant exactly. Taken aback to have to explain this term to such a young child, Keogh was searching for a way to explain such a complex title, when a voice rang out behind them:

"It is the link between man and creation."

Meeting Again

Keogh turned around and made out a dark shape slowly moving toward them. When the shape climbed the first step, the light revealed an old man with a stern expression and an impassive face. During these moments of freezing surprise for Keogh, the man came and sat by his side.

"You know the significance of this tree, I assume…"

Keogh did not answer immediately. The way this man was bearing himself, his slightly uneasy gait, and above all this deep, low voice, had reawakened memories in him that made his stomach tighten: he saw himself more than ten years back, when his master interrogated him harshly without forgiving the slightest mistake.

"The oak is the link; the axis of life," he muttered softly. "It links the earth and the sky, creates life, knows death and yet escapes it. It is the center of the world and…"

"Good, Ionnthén! My teaching was thus not entirely in vain. Now, do tell me about how you have filled all these years since we last met."

His imperious tone admitted no escape. Resigned, Keogh spoke gloomily.

The Ionnthén is the apprentice of the Demorthèn. He accompanies him in everything, assists him during ceremonies, and lives with him until his final initiation.

The Role of the Demorthèn



Of Society

"Well, Master Jánn… from the day you suddenly disappeared, people felt betrayed and lost. Yet, everything was fine. Spring was coming to life, there had been no disappearances for a long time, the militia kept watch but had witnessed nothing out of the ordinary for weeks, and yet, fear had seized the village for a while. They felt like they had lost their confidant, their healer, and their guide all at the same time. Even our chief, Ansailéir Eoben, seemed at a loss. They all knew me, of course, and knew that I had been your disciple for a long time, but at first, I think they did not trust me.

You had taught me to reassure and to seek in everyone what is best for the community. But there is a fine line between observing a master and actually doing something. Fortunately, it was thanks to the skills I had developed by your side that I earned everybody's trust. One day, the young daughter of Karl, the lumberman, fell ill. Dàmàthair Dyánnair knew a few things about this sickness, but there was nothing she could do. I was able to bring down the scalding fever that afflicted the girl by preparing a potion with some herbs and plants that I could only gather at the heart of the forest. Once the villagers established that I was able to provide what they previously expected from you, things went much better.

Of Wisdom and Ritual Customs

Little by little, I assumed your role. I had to restore this broken link with knowledge and ancient lore. It was necessary to hand down such things, to remind everyone of the name of the spirits governing our world. At the beginning of each year, during the festival of Earrach Feis, I officiated during the ceremonies of passage. Yga, the eldest Dàmàthair, was able to fill my gaps regarding history and tradition. At her side, I could participate in the education of the youngsters and instill our values in them."

Tsioghair

Every year, at the same period, toward the end of the month of Og-mhios, when nights are at their shortest, gatherings of Demorthèn from a same region are organized in vast circles of stones located in four places around the peninsula. These special places, called Liagcal, are so ancient that, in living memory, they have always been there. The Demorthèn come here to exchange news and information. This is also the place where feuds are settled, and where Demorthèn who have broken the code of ethics are judged. The Tsioghair is also the time for other, parallel meetings, of smaller scale and more secretive nature…

Of Ancient Beliefs

Silence came, and Jánn pulled down his hood to gaze at the faraway clouds.

"It was ten years ago that I left for the ceremony of the Tsioghair, at the great circle of stones of the north. As you know, Ionnthén, this is one of the most important Demorthèn gatherings. There, I had a dreadful dream which led me to go to the south of the peninsula, in the wild lands of Dèas. When I reached this windy region, after I had crossed all of Tri-Kazel, I met Demorthèn of the Osag people and attained greater knowledge thanks to them. During all these years, I was able to familiarize myself with the subtleties of the ancestral art of the Liadh. This technique allows us to communicate directly with the spirits of nature; it is the quintessence of our traditional arts. This is why I could not stay by your side. I thought you were ready.

Yes, you were… almost. I did not come back by chance, or to banter or chatter idly! I must have been careless or distracted. You were a good Ionnthén, and I think you still are today! Do you remember the many ancient tales I used to tell you? The ones that dated back to the time of the Aergewin, when Demorthèn united and drove back colossal Feondas? Without them, we would have certainly suffered Saoghal-Dheir, the end of the world. Do you remember when you were younger? I took you into the heart of the forest of Croach, where no one from the village has ever set foot, where trees are so thick that the light does not reach the ground. Did you forget that I had forbidden you to go there alone, or you might never come back? There are unfathomable forces deep in these woods, forces in which you obviously could not believe; so ancient that today, they are nothing more than a myth for which almost no one has a sincere conviction."
His voice erupted harshly when he pronounced the last syllable.

Lan-an-Saol: the Demorthèn Myths

Here is the account of the legends that serve as the basis of Demorthèn beliefs. Traditionally, they are called "Lan-an-Saol":
In the beginning, there were four primordial spirits of creation: Roimh, dweller of the earth and the epitome of a creating entity; Adhar, the evanescent spirit of air; Usgardh, the feeder, who waters the world; and Aingeal, the spirit of fire, unpredictable and violent. The first three form what is called the Triad, and are constituted of the essential energy, Rindath. The three of them engendered Corahn-Rin, the Life-Tree. It is told that this world, as it can be pictured today, endlessly revolves around Corahn-Rin, the eternal axis. It is at the same time the one that feeds the world, its core, its heart, and its sky. Its roots burrow deep into the heart of the earth, and its branches brush against the starry dome. The fourth spirit, Aingeal, has never been part of the Triad. It incarnates destruction and death. It is part of the cycles and ensures their perpetuation. These cycles give life and seasons their rhythm, on the basis of perpetual renewal: winter coming after summer, and death after life.
The four primordial spirits gave birth to minor spirits which govern specific aspects of the world. Their power varies according to the cycles of seasons: the spirits of stone, Ursan and Clachan, the influence of which is predominant in winter; Saog, a spirit of fire expressing itself in summer; and Clábar, a spirit of the marshes which reigns in fall…
The spirits of nature never show themselves directly, but sometimes manifest their power by appearing before the eyes of mortals assuming the form of C'maoghs, will-o'-the-wisps constituted of some of the pure energy of Corahn-Rin.

Of the Evolution of Beliefs

They remained silent for a long while, then Keogh spoke again softly:
"As I could witness, our beliefs do not protect us against everything. When people come to me, it is more often to listen to my advice than to the teaching of traditions. I earned more respect by curing people or by resolving disputes between two neighbors than by calling upon the benevolence of Usgardh to protect our crops. Every now and then, we have a few contacts with the other kingdoms, through the account of some travelers or Varigals who walk around our countries: in Reizh, some burghs openly disregard our traditions, driven by these opportunists who only have respect for their 'Magience'. In the neighboring valley, the Demorthèn barely knows the Lan-an-Saol.
The world is evolving; knowledge must be passed down, but deep within myself, I believe we must make choices between our folklore, which is an integral part of our history that must be preserved, and the reality of life. Lots of children die very young, there are still many fatal diseases, and frequent accidents and disappearances. Sometimes there are not enough men or women to guarantee that everyone can eat enough. The life of the community takes precedence: the organization of defense, harvests… I personally help as I can when the village is short-handed. Meditations provide good spiritual comfort, but they are not enough."

"I have wandered for years in the greater part of the Three Kingdoms," Jánn replied. "What you are saying is–partly–true, and it saddens me. In Ard-Amrach, in Gwidre, the mere mention of the name 'Demorthèn' arouses suspicions and hatred. But I know on good authority that they haven't all fled or yielded to this absurd cult of the Temple. On the contrary, some of them gather, hidden in sacred sanctuaries where no one but them dares to go. In Osta-Baille, our faith is still held intact, protected by the tomb of Taol-Kaer. The king himself is advised by Algwich Dert, one of the most powerful Demorthèn. And the past remains deep-rooted in the heart of each member of the proud and dangerous Osag people I have met. Their Demorthèn are as formidable as they are uncompromising, particularly regarding their traditions. They have a much greater influence than us among the communities. I have even heard that some of them did not hesitate to punish with fire the men who dared to make use of nature without going through the appropriate rites. In any case, I am very disappointed at your words."

The Powers of the Demorthèn

"It may be, dear Ionnthén," Jánn went on with a voice tinged with contempt, "that your meditations lack vigor when you call upon the gifts of Adhar or Corahn. It may also, and more likely, be that you failed to heed and understand my teachings when I truly wanted to initiate you."

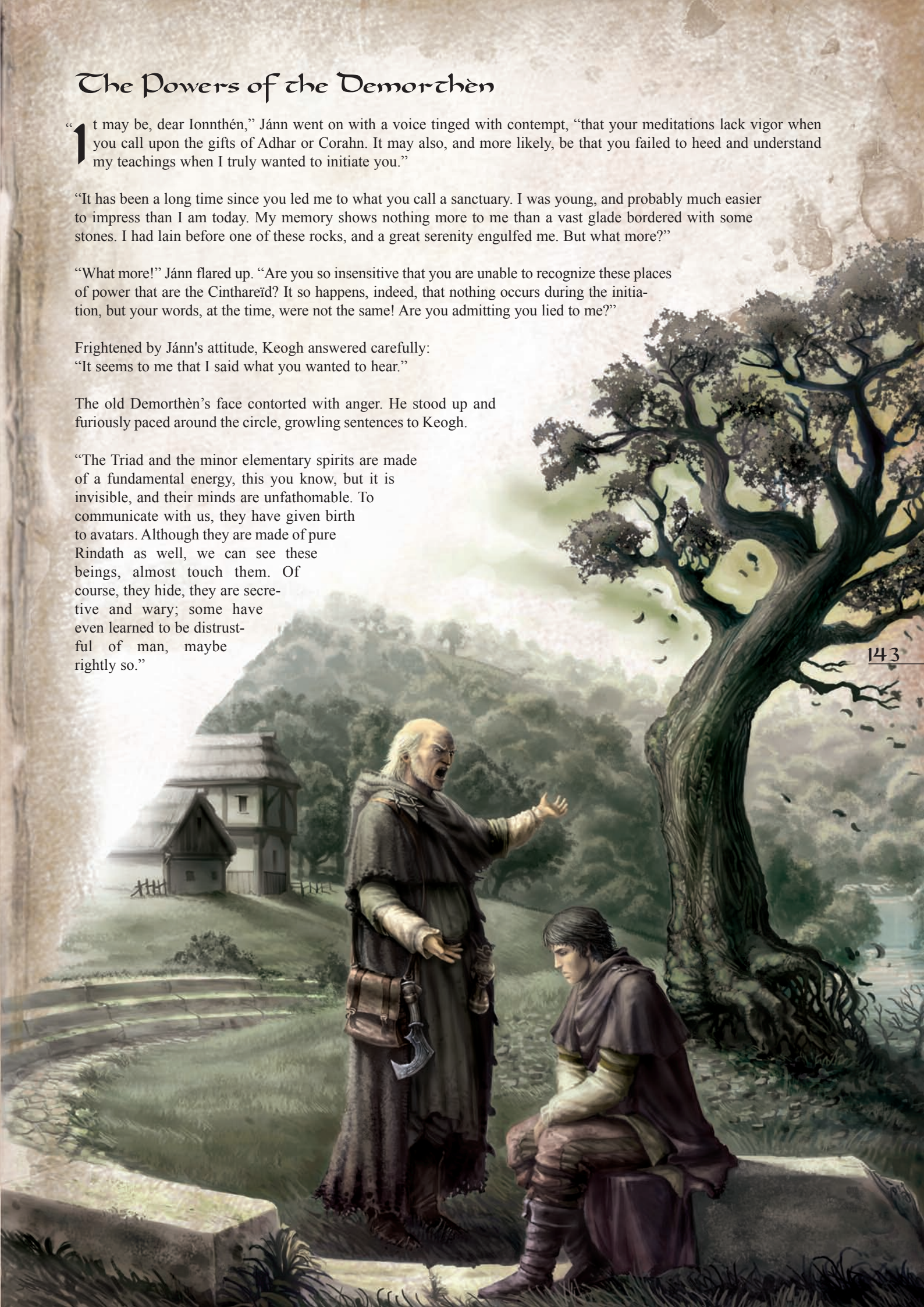
"It has been a long time since you led me to what you call a sanctuary. I was young, and probably much easier to impress than I am today. My memory shows nothing more to me than a vast glade bordered with some stones. I had lain before one of these rocks, and a great serenity engulfed me. But what more?"

"What more!" Jánn flared up. "Are you so insensitive that you are unable to recognize these places of power that are the Cinthareïd? It so happens, indeed, that nothing occurs during the initiation, but your words, at the time, were not the same! Are you admitting you lied to me?"

Frightened by Jánn's attitude, Keogh answered carefully:
"It seems to me that I said what you wanted to hear."

The old Demorthèn's face contorted with anger. He stood up and furiously paced around the circle, growling sentences to Keogh.

"The Triad and the minor elementary spirits are made of a fundamental energy, this you know, but it is invisible, and their minds are unfathomable. To communicate with us, they have given birth to avatars. Although they are made of pure Rindath as well, we can see these beings, almost touch them. Of course, they hide, they are secretive and wary; some have even learned to be distrustful of man, maybe rightly so."





C'maoghs

"We call them C'maoghs, and they are the incarnations of the spirits of nature. This is why they can take various shapes, depending on whether they represent Roimh, Adhar, or Usgardh, or even some of the minor spirits. In some cases, they seem to be made of flickering vapor or pure water, and in others, they can simply appear as a luminous gas floating in the air. You should have seen them the first time I took you to the sanctuary. They flocked around you at my request, and wished to know you, to reveal themselves to you. But apparently you remained insensitive to their presence, although I believed otherwise at the time."

A palpable tension was settling between the master and his disciple, and as the voice of the sage was rising, Keogh started to feel fear. His eyes glaring, his left hand fiddling with his thin, gray beard, Jánn was striding angrily, speaking and watching the sky as if he were alone. Seeing the situation was taking a turn for the worse, Keogh humbly asked how he could communicate with these avatars.

Ogham and Magical Language

Jánn seemed to calm down somewhat.

"The C'maoghs never, or seldom, react to words. Their lifestyle is alien from ours. As an initiate to the art of the Liadh, I can make myself understood by them. How, I do not really know. But through the link that unites us, they can feel my mind. There is also another way."

Jánn put his hand in his loose clothing, and took out a small leather bag. He opened it and slipped small polished, engraved pebbles into his open hand.

"I had previously shown them to you: these are the Ogham of power. There remain few Demorthèn today who can truthfully claim to know the ancient art of such writing. Their origin is mysterious. Some say that Roimh itself created a language making it possible to link the power of the elements to a physical object; however, these are but rumors. Look, each symbol represents a unique aspect of a natural force. Alone, they are useless; it is only when combined with an ancient knowledge that one can draw upon real power. This is the art of the Sigil Rann. I got these ones from my own master, who gave them to me before his death. Remember that they hold within themselves a fragment of the power of the C'maoghs.

The Aergewin

For Demorthèn, the Aergewin would be the consequence of the uncontrollable wrath of two natural spirits: Aingeal, the spirit of fire, and Sníomh, offspring of Adhar, the spirit of air. During the Aergewin, the wrath of the two spirits manifested itself through the birth of innumerable hordes of raging Feondas which spread throughout the world, destroying everything in their path. Feeling that the balance of Esteren was threatened, the other natural spirits came to help humanity by giving men some of their powers. This is how Demorthèn became the protectors of the Life-Tree, Corahn-Rin.

Saoghal-Dheir

This is the name given to the mythical event that will bring about the end of the world. The anger of the spirits Aingeal and Sníomh will cause the world to stop revolving around Corahn-Rin. Then, the balance will be broken and life itself will lose its meaning. Esteren will become Saoghal-Glas, an ashy land swept by an everlasting wind. According to the Demorthèn, if some spirits had not helped humans during the Aergewin, the havoc wreaked by the ancient monsters would have certainly led to such a cataclysm.

Suddenly, Jánn straightened.
“Now, enough with this idle chatting! Follow me, Keogh, so that I may demonstrate it all.”
They set at a quick pace in the direction of the neighboring woods. At some distance from the village, at the edge of the forest, Jánn stopped for a while, bewildered at the sight of a large deforested area strewn with inert stumps and log piles. His eyes wide with rage, he asked Keogh the meaning of it. The disciple spoke of the necessity of reinforcing the weak fortifications of the village, mentioning the importance of security for the villagers. Jánn clenched his teeth and pushed Keogh ahead of him. They went below the thick foliage of the forest, following a narrow path littered with pine needles and rocks. All around them, trees grew taller. They plunged into a sort of tunnel of greenery, dark and oppressive. The sun barely reached the ground, and the ferns sometimes gave way to some brackish ponds and bizarrely shaped mushrooms. Suddenly, Jánn froze, as if he had felt something peculiar. He closed his eyes and focused for a while.
“Here we are on one of the sacred paths, the access to which is defended by fierce spirits. I was able to communicate with them to be granted access to this Cinthareid. You can stop worrying, no danger can threaten us now.”

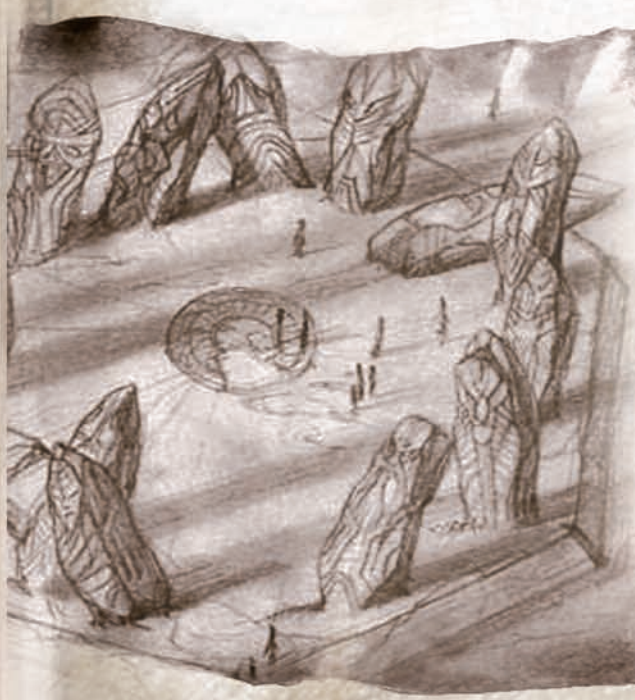
Demorthèn Sanctuaries

They reached the edge of a natural glade with an irregular, rocky ground. Ritual stones were standing in a semicircle around a flat rock, eroded by time. A huge oak towered before them. It was the exact place where they had come, ten years before. The silence was oppressive: neither the chirping of birds nor any of the other familiar noises that usually filled woods could be heard. Keogh approached one of the stones, half-covered with moss, and made out Oghamic symbols on it.
“These are stones of power,” Jánn told him. “Here is one of the places where the C'maoghs are born, where I am able to communicate with them. Sit down on this center stone; we shall uncover your true nature: Ionnthén or... something else.”

Of Menhirs

Apart from circles of stones, many isolated menhirs can be found throughout the peninsula. Reputed to be magical, they are often the origin of legends of miraculous healing, or travelers saved by taking shelter under their shadow.

With the help of Jánn, Keogh fell into a deep stasis. Many hours later, when he emerged, shivering, Jánn asked him what he had seen.
“To begin with, an intense serenity washed over me. The scent of pine, then a veil of soft colors slowly suffused in me. I was focusing on the extraordinary aura of this oak, when suddenly, fear seized me. A somber feeling of nothingness overwhelmed all of my senses then... nothing more.”
Jánn then straightened, and his figure seemed to grow. His voice boomed:
“Our discussions had made me fear it, and the atrocious vision of this tree graveyard confirmed it. You're not one of us! Traitor to your knowledge! Renegade!”
Seething with boundless hatred, his features convulsing with rage, Jánn took out of his tunic a small pebble engraved with an Ogham and uttered a few words. A violent wind started to blow, sending the leaves that littered the ground whirling around. Harrowed, Keogh stood up and fled before his master’s irrational anger. Deep cracking noises could be heard inside the ocean of trees surrounding the sanctuary as the former Ionnthén disappeared in the shadows. An agonizing cry rang within the thick forest of Croach, and after that day, Keogh was never seen again.



An Instructive Lesson

Louane's voice faded into deep silence. Amused by the horrified expression of her apprentice, she went on softly:
“It all truly happened when I was still a little girl. Not a snatch of their conversation had passed me by, and, prompted by the recklessness of youth, I had followed them into the forest. Both of them were so engrossed in their discussion that they paid no attention to me. I do not know how I was able to follow them, safe and sound, into the Cinthareid. In any case, after the cry, I must have passed out, and only woke up the day after, in the village. Jánn must have found me and brought me back, although I never heard from him again either. In the end, remember this lesson well: between believing too much or not enough, there is a happy medium that befits one who is wise. It is all a matter of balance.”

Evolution of the Demorthèn Role

Extract from an academic study on Demorthèn

Nomadism

During the Aergewin, death and devastation struck our peninsula so violently that there remain practically no vestiges of that ancient time that saw the pinnacle of the cult of the Demorthèn. As it is said, they put an end to the Feond abominations thanks to the powers granted by the C'maoghs, but not without severe losses. These Demorthèn used three ancestral arts, which are now partly forgotten: the Liadh, the art of communicating with the spirits; the Lorn Rann, the art of engraving Ogham; and finally, the Sigil Rann, the art of using them. Weakened, they gathered and strengthened the foundations of their cult: yearly meetings called Tsioghair were introduced, and Demorthèn devoted themselves to traveling through the peninsula to pass on the cult of the spirits to the scattered peoples.

Therefore, at that time, they were of a nomadic and solitary nature, never interfering in the business of men, but visiting as much as possible the communities they came across during their travels. They were highly respected by the population, thus a Demorthèn passing by was an event. Their powers were both feared and admired; often praised in the same way as things beyond the understanding of most people. They were offered food and lodging, but they often declined the latter, preferring to rest in the heart of wide open spaces. It was the occasion for the inhabitants to seek their advice, solicit plant-based remedies, or ask about the mood of the local C'maoghs. In exchange, they gave them objects of daily use that they could not obtain elsewhere, as Demorthèn never used money. After a few days, they disappeared discreetly, taking with them the noble mystery of their art.

A Partial Sedentarization

As time went by, the clans grew bigger, and new villages rose in Creag, as Tri-Kazel was called at that time. The Demorthèn progressively saw the necessity of watching such an expansion by spending more time among men to pass on the teachings from the Aergewin to them, and to preserve the cult of the primordial spirits. Some settled more lastingly on the outskirts of villages, without giving up on their autonomy, however. Refusing any superfluous luxury, they most often contented themselves with rather bare shelters in the middle of the woods, living like hermits, and feeding on berries, herbs, and mushrooms. They ate no meat, as they considered hunting as the practice of warriors. However, they joined the villagers for the celebration of a birth, a union, a death, or for some festivals such as the Earrach Feis or the Agaceann. The rest of the time, they remained under the cover of trees. Sometimes, they took an apprentice, carefully chosen, as candidates were many. He was to obediently stay at the side of his master, hoping to gather some scraps of knowledge before being finally considered as a true Ionnthén, after long years of hardships.

The Influence of the Powerful

After the foundation of the Three Kingdoms, the feudal system started to gain in importance, and new lords made their appearance. Some of them, appreciating the reputation of Demorthèn, asked them to settle in the village, or in their own homes. Most of them refused, claiming that their place was in nature, but some of them gave in, to better ensure that the traditional rites were followed, or guided by a secret ambition. Such an evolution did not happen without causing strong inner tensions. This was the start of a time of division that led to the creation of some minority groups. During Tsioghairs, frictions started to rise between the adepts of tradition who were still keeping their nomadic lifestyle, and those who supported opening up to men. Some Demorthèn, outraged by such a shift in tradition, left the Tsioghairs, refusing any implication in the emerging geopolitics. These traditionalists disappeared almost entirely from the chronicles of history, but it is said that strange gatherings are sometimes organized in the heart of the Mòr Forsair.

Of Social Implication

There was no actual evolution of the practices before this dreadful period called the White Famine. This short ice age forced the Demorthèn living in the open to join villages in order to preserve their own life from elements that had become uncontrollable, but also to guide and comfort inhabitants overwhelmed with despair. There remain few traces of this time, but it was established that it marks the progressive involvement of Demorthèn in village councils, with the same status as the Ansailéir, the Dàmàthair, and the bard. At the Tsioghairs, the old debates surfaced again. However, the general opinion was that the progressive weakening of beliefs, particularly in Reizh and Gwidre, suggested that it was time for Demorthèn to be more strongly involved in society.

Rites and Traditions

Although rites hardly changed in those few hundred years, the role of the Demorthèn evolved irregularly. The Osag Demorthèn, in the south of Taol-Kaer, constantly opposed such an evolution. Their current lifestyle is the same as before: some keep living as hermits on the outskirts of the communities, while the others have remained nomads. In that regard, they often consider themselves as the true holders of traditional culture, looking down on social deviancies. However, they did not forsake regular gatherings, as others did in the past. Although tradition remained so firmly established among the Osags, little by little, it lost ground in other territories, particularly in Gwidre, where the Temple tried to totally suppress the Demorthèn influence.

Of Popular Beliefs

The many ordeals that struck Tri-Kazel, such as the harshness of the weather, recurrent epidemics, or repeated attacks from Feondas, have sometimes deprived some remote regions of their Demorthèn. In Gwidre, during the great expurgation of 782, many Demorthèn preferred to flee far away from the urbanized areas or were secretly executed by Sigires and Blade knights, the deadly warriors of the Temple. In these territories, deprived of the main upholders of the peninsular traditions, bards and Varigals took over. Moreover, in some regions, because of the deep transformations of a social, political, or religious nature, lore became legend, and the knowledge of the Demorthèn sometimes took the form of folk tales. This way, the primordial spirits of the Lan-an-Saol (the tale of the creation of the known world) were progressively replaced with new entities inspired from the creatures populating the earth and the sky. Such deviancies do not always match but, as years went by, true cults spread and managed to last around the most charismatic figures.

Animal Symbolism

Of all the beings living in the thick forests, the most respected one is the Great Deer. Because of his cautious nature, he is very hard to track down in spite of his imposing size. His magnificent antlers, his noble bearing, and his deftness burned in the collective unconscious the image of a sovereign whose wisdom and intelligence are the main attributes. He is called Fiadha in Taol-Kaer, and Fiedh in Gwidre and at the border of Reizh. One can also notice, in more mountainous regions, the predominance of Arthadh, a dominant, voracious bear that symbolizes strength and bravery; and Gobhar, a Caernide with a human torso, whose qualities are skill and guile.

Nimheil

This word, which means “poison”, is used in Tri-Kazel to designate an amber-colored liquid substance of variable density. It is found in Tri-Kazelian folklore, in which it is attributed to a disease of Corahn-Rin, or the corrupting action of some spirits of nature. In fact, this word directly comes from the Demorthèn cults, in which it designates a substance, the distinctive effect of which, outside of being a deadly poison, is to drive the C'maoghs away.

Morcail

Demorthèn Ethics

The Demorthèn philosophy imposes implicit, yet essential rules. Its basis includes maintaining balance and natural cycles, as well as the cult of the spirits. Abiding by such precepts makes these men the holders of a power and a particular relationship with nature. Using such knowledge to serve their personal ambitions, by a thirst for power or out of envy, or also to satisfy a desire for personal vengeance, goes against ancestral principles. It is generally during Tsioghairs that the deviancies of some are reported and judged. The accused Demorthèn then appears before the council to justify himself. If he is found guilty, he has his Oghamic stones confiscated for an amount of time determined according to his fault. In extreme cases, when a Demorthèn not only infringes the ethics, but also misappropriates or uses his power wrongly, the sanction can be as hard as a banishment or even death. Such Demorthèn are then called Morcail, meaning “corrupted” in the ancient tongue. Often aware of the risks they take, they rarely appear before the council of their own volition, and must therefore be ruthlessly tracked down. Some Demorthèn, often nomads of Osag origin, have made these hunts their primary duty. The most fanatical of them make it the reason of their very existence.

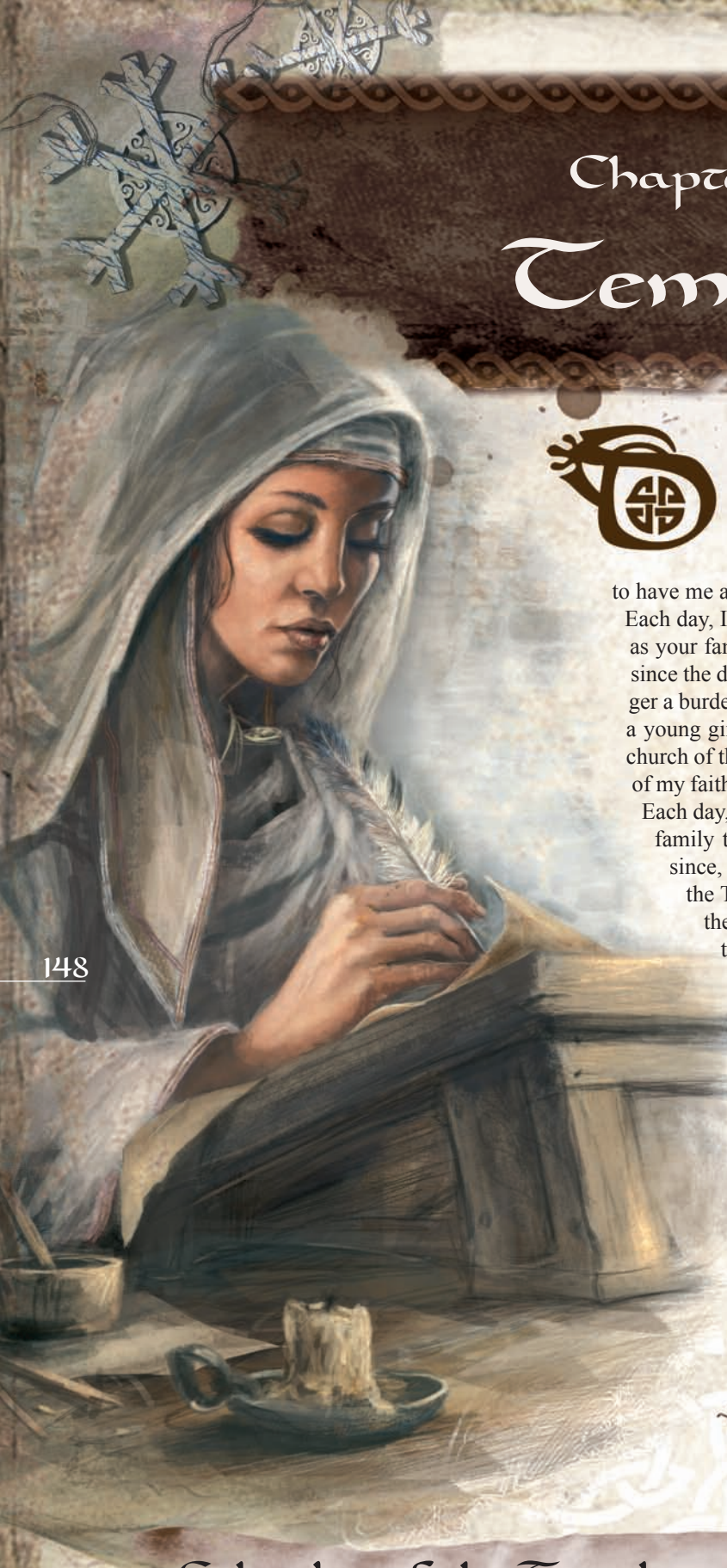
The Oradh

Said to have been initiated by the dire Argmald, the Oradh is considered an abomination in the eyes of Demorthèn. Using the altered principles of the three ancestral arts, it allows Morcail to trick and manipulate the C'maoghs, the primal source of the power granted to Demorthèn. The most audacious ones do not hesitate to use this forbidden art to attract the most dangerous spirits of nature, such as Sníomh and Aingeal.

Tales and Legends

Demorthèn teaching often uses educative allegories used to demonstrate the dangerousness of these renegades' acts. Although such tales often originate from real facts, legend and hyperbole have turned them into fables, narrated by bards or by some Varigals for popular entertainment. One of the most famous is the Lan-an-Avel, inspired from the true story of Avel, a Demorthèn traitor to her rank. It tells how, several generations ago, this simple disciple of nature veered from the primary philosophy in order to become part of the highest-ranking authorities of the kingdom of Reizh. She is said to have misused the art of the Ogham, attempting an unnatural mix with Magience, and is even said to have associated with some gatherings of Daedemorthys.

Chapter 3
Temple



Dearest Uncle,

Here are my first notes about the most holy church of the Temple, into which you managed to have me accepted. I do not know how to thank you for this. Each day, I pray to the One so that he may grant you, as well as your family, his blessing. You have done so much for me since the death of my parents; I am relieved that I am no longer a burden to your family. I know it is usually very hard for a young girl born into a modest Talkéride family to join the church of the Temple as I did, but I think that the staunchness of my faith was the determining element for my Acceptation. Each day, I give my thanks to your late father who gave our family the opportunity to discover the divine light. Ever since, some of us have been following the precepts of the Temple, and this is a good thing, since this path is the only one that deserves to be followed. Of course, the traditions of our peninsula are based on true facts, but I could never bring myself to trust those inconstant, capricious beings that are the spirits of nature.

I know of the reluctance of some members of our family; promise me that you will have them read my letter, in order to correct some of the prejudices our holy church suffers from. Deep down, I hope that one day we may all be reunited around this same faith that gives my life a new meaning.

Calendar of the Temple

For greater convenience, I shall use the traditional dates of the Tri-Kazelian calendar. However, the lands where the Temple displayed its all-powerful influence have adopted the religious calendar, based on the year of Soustraine's revelation, which means the year 503 before the Oath (or “the year -503”, as it is also written). When you have contacts with the faithful of the Temple, do take this into account. Do not forget as well that although they divide a year into the same number of months as we do, they do not use the same names.



Soustraine's Revelation

To begin with, let me remind you how the church of the Temple was born. Everybody has heard of Soustraine the Pure, but very few know his true story. The prophet was born in a village in the north of the Continent, in the year -522 according to our Tri-Kazelian calendar. He lived a peaceful childhood, and proved to be calmer and more mature than the other children of his age. He started to learn his father's profession as a weaver, a trade for which he very quickly showed great talent. When he was done with his period of apprenticeship, he set off on the road in order to find the best place to set up his shop. His youth was free from vices and all the skullduggery those of his age generally indulge in. Soustraine enjoyed walking alone and meditating, pondering far from the hustle of crowds.

In the year -503, he suddenly had a life-changing epiphany. As he was meditating, divine voices imparted upon him the expectations of the benevolent One concerning him, while showing him the past and the creation of the world, as well as the future of humanity. Soustraine kept traveling from villages to cities, from fortresses to hamlets, but now he was preaching what had been revealed to him.

The One granted Soustraine fantastic powers. The more he prayed, the greater was his ability to perform prodigies and miracles. Thus, Soustraine showed the might of the Creator in the villages he came across. He performed many miraculous healings, drove bandits away, and froze in ice the devilish Feondas. Everywhere he went, Soustraine attracted followers. His speeches had the ability to convert entire crowds, fascinated with the discovery of the One God and his gifts.

When he grew old, Soustraine finally settled. He chose to do so in the town of Chaïna, where the greatest church erected by his disciples in the name of the One God stood, and many traveled from afar to come and see him in this sanctified place. Until his last day, Soustraine helped those who needed it; then he disappeared without trace, at the dawn of his one-hundredth birthday.

The Powers of Soustraine

"At the time, nobody other than Soustraine claimed to hear the voices that guided him. It would have been easy to think he was a madman or a lunatic... but the immense powers he was granted for his prayers were proof enough. According to the tales, more than one person tried to demonstrate, to no avail, that his 'miracles' were only tricks, and that his God did not exist. We cannot but acknowledge the existence of this divinity, for his powers are as real as the ones the spirits of nature lend us."

Lem Deon

The Precepts of the Temple

For Tri-Kazelians in general, the precepts of the Temple seem much harsher and stricter than the traditions taught by the Demorthèn. Indeed, in order to be worthy of the favors of the One God, men and women must lead a temperate, ascetic life, far from the excesses that corrupt mind and body alike. Vivid colors drive the eyes away, alcohol diverts the mind from the thought of the Creator, and debauchery leads to the propagation of diseases that ravage the populations. Therefore, there exists a whole series of Ordinances given by the One God to Soustraine, which his heirs, the Hierophants of the Temple, continue to pass on to the faithful.

The aim of all these restrictions is to keep people close to the Creator and to guide them on the sole path of faith. They protect humanity from the threat of the abysses and the demons that lurk there. Once dead, a man or woman who was able to remain pure will join the Divine Kingdom and enjoy eternal serenity. The others will be cast into Limbo and suffer forever. Therefore, to ensure felicity after death, everyone is expected to follow the commandments of the One God.

The Writings and the Ordinances

Soustraine spent a lot of time transcribing his revelation on parchment. Thus, he wrote a book of about six hundred pages, the content of which is very diverse: poems, psalms, stories, parables, drawings, all of them forming a complex, sometimes cryptic, set. Every adept spends many hours learning the Writings. The six Ordinances are its crux; six commandments the Creator has dictated to Soustraine and which constitute the core of our religion:
You shall follow the path of the One God only.
You shall heed the sacred words of the Creator.
You shall impart the Truth to any person you meet.
You shall master your passions and be moderate in every thing.
You shall be humble and thank the Creator for the gifts you are granted.
You shall show your faith through prayer and self-reflection for the glory of the One God.

The Prayers

Originally, and as the sixth Ordinance dictates, the day of a faithful of the Temple is punctuated with six prayer times, each one lasting half an hour. From dawn to twilight, the faithful are reminded of these times with the chime of the church bells. Believers must then immediately interrupt their activities and kneel in prayer for the One God. The first Hierophants quickly realized that most faithful could not strictly follow such a commandment without dramatic consequences for trade and the very survival of the communities. Thus, the clergy became the self-appointed representatives of all the faithful, who could delegate part of their religious obligations to them. Priests pray for the salvation of the believers who, in exchange, take care to support them and ensure that society fares well. Moreover, the faithful can make offerings to the priests, who will then remind the Creator of their piety and intercede in behalf of the donators during their prayers. Some malicious gossipers pretend that this way, the rich ones are more likely to be granted salvation, but it is untrue, for the Creator is kind and wise. He judges everybody according to the sincerity of their actions and not on the form they take.

Of the Place of Man

The One has created the world and everything that lives on its surface. He is the source of everything, and Man must therefore be respectful and deferent toward him. Thus, the faithful are humble and quiet, aware of their insignificance and of what they owe the Creator. Therefore, we cannot approve of the prideful attitude of the Magientists who claim the superiority of Man in all things and go against our fifth Ordinance. Like everything that surrounds us–plants, oceans, land–we are a divine creation, no more and no less important than the others. All is One, for all pertains to the One. Man has simply received the gift of conscience, which allows us to perceive the will of the Creator and, therefore, to guide our existence on the path of the Truth.

Miracles

Maybe our religion would not have reached the influence that it has if the Creator did not prove his existence on a daily basis through the miracles he grants his followers. Thus, the communities that support our faith can see their sick ones recover and their churches drive back hordes of Feondas.

As for us, the adepts, we are still not close enough to the One God to dare make such demands. Only the holiest and most devout faithful of each order can receive divine favors: they are the Elect. Praying allows their spirits to rise and send a plea to the Creator, who then intervenes. Hierophants are very close to the One God, and the miracles they are capable of are beyond imagination. Like Soustraine in his days, it is said that they have the ability to resurrect the dead or purify infidels with ice storms.

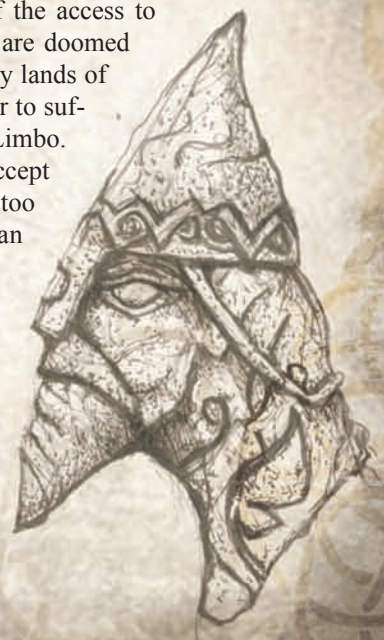
Faith and Pagan Beliefs

My uncle, I feel that I must insist on a very important issue that threatens our good kingdom. The Talkéride people must sever their connections with the spirits of nature as soon as possible, and dedicate themselves to praying and abiding by the Ordinances. Outside the Creator, none should dominate nature, and Demorthèn are guilty of pride when they set themselves as the guardians of the world.

The One would have allowed his Elect to communicate with these natural spirits if he had wished to do so. He didn't, and Demorthèn go beyond their human condition when they dominate these spirits through sorcery. They are blinded by a power that is not made for men, and must be guided toward the right path.

Moreover, the Demorthèn claim that there is no such thing as a soul, and that the dead go back to nature. This is but a lie, for this goes against what the Creator has revealed to Soustraine: the soul is eternal. Before this revelation, men and women were left in doubt concerning what was hidden beyond death.

The Demorthèn myths lead the Talkérides astray, and deprive them of the access to the Divine Kingdom. They are doomed to wander forever in the ashy lands of the Kingdom of the Dead, or to suffer forever in the depths of Limbo. However, the One can accept repentance, and it is never too late to abjure such pagan beliefs.



The Reprobates

“The adepts of the Temple boast that they can judge anyone with impartiality, but this goes otherwise for those they call the ‘reprobates’. Indeed, in their eyes, those who are afflicted with severe cases of madness or spectacular malformations are suspected of being possessed. For us Demorthèn, such a way of thinking is strange; madmen are very often the bearers of messages from the spirits of nature that we are able to decipher; as for deformities, they simply are the manifestation of the quirks of nature. However, I cannot deny that some parents, supported by some of our brothers, have for a long time abandoned their misshapen children to nature, out of fear of weakening their lineage.

As for the dogmas of the Temple, deformity or madness supposedly indicate the influence of devils from Limbo trying to corrupt humanity. These beings are said to be the origin of Feondas, and some faithful of the Temple claim that these monsters were previously reprobates; unfortunate victims of demons. I must admit that most of the faithful of the Temple willingly try to help these unfortunate ones. But in some Gwidrite regions, where the dogma is applied strictly, they are bound to live miserably, begging for the charity of passers-by. I have also heard of monasteries where these reprobates are gathered to go through ‘purifications’ of their bodies and souls, which look too much like torture to me.

The Cult of Cold

In Gwidrite lands, snow is, even more than anywhere else, considered a sign of purity. I have heard that the great deceased Hierophants lay in sanctified ice coffins, resting in the depths of great cathedrals. Generally speaking, cold is sacred in the faith of the Temple, whereas heat is considered with ambivalence. It is associated with life, but also with comfort, and therefore with negligence or excess for some. Those who want to prove their piety go as far as performing their devotions in the cold, or barely clothed. In some houses, there is a little room dedicated to praying; it is usually bare, containing an altar with the symbol of the Temple, or a figurine representing the prophet Soustraine. During winter, this room is always kept at a very cold temperature, with windows as thin as arrowslits letting in the freezing wind. The most devout insist that fire must never be lit when it is not absolutely indispensable, since it is a gift of the Creator that is too often lavished. Concerned about remaining pure, they live in a very strict way that many consider as extreme.”

Lem Deon

The Constructions of the Temple

Now, let me tell you about landscapes touched by the holy light. The Temple mainly marks its presence with the construction of churches and town-monasteries. The former are relatively commonplace and vary in size. The latter, unfortunately, cannot be found in Tri-Kazel yet, but I keep hope that one day, I will go to the Great Theocracy, on the Continent, to gaze at them.

The Churches

In every place where the Temple settles, its faithful build a church dedicated to prayer for the One God. The greatest cathedrals rise very high in the sky, housing up to several dozen priests and adepts. In Tri-Kazel, these large buildings can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and the one of Ard-Amrach, capital city of Gwidre, is the most beautiful of them. In this kingdom, almost every village has at least one small church. The situation is different in Taol-Kaer and in Reizh, as the Temple is not the official religion. The large cities of these two kingdoms most often have one church of modest size. Several villages, particularly along our border, boast small chapels among their buildings. In the countryside, it is possible to find a monastery or a convent, often used as a shelter for travelers lost in wild regions. Finally, I have heard there exist secret places of worship, disguised to the eyes of stubborn obscurantists who reject the Truth. All the churches, from the most modest ones to the great cathedrals, are built according to common principles, applying the sacred rule of the number six. The faithful enter through a large double door in the nave of the main building. It takes the shape of a long six-sided room, one of its extremities letting the faithful in and the other leading to the area exclusive to the priests. It is an inner construction of hexagonal shape, most often divided into several rooms with variations according to how important the church is and how many clergymen live in it: dining room, kitchen, latrines, dormitory, etc.

Town-monasteries

I will not dwell on this subject, my uncle, since I have never visited one. However, the rectoress of my convent told me wonders about them. According to her, the entire town is built on several stages of hexagonal shape, protected with sturdy walls, and rising higher and higher as one gets closer to the center. In these cities, the greatest and most beautiful of cathedrals in the honor of the One God are built. The most precious Relics are gathered there, and create a tangible link between the Creator and men. The faithful who live there dedicate their entire lives, even more than others, to the service of the Temple. Chaïna, the capital-city of the Great Theocracy, is obviously the largest, richest, most beautiful, and most fervent of town-monasteries.

Further to that, I will tell you about a story I have heard several times. Some of my fellow adepts have told me that when a priest of the Continent reaches the highest state of holiness, he is invited to go to a fantastic underground maze, built in the depths of earth, under each town-monastery. By walking around such a tortuous place, he gradually loses all notion of reality, until he finally manages to commune with the Creator.



The Relics

In his writings, Soustraine tells of the sacred mission he was dictated: “In order to protect themselves from darkness, men shall have to find the Light Shards. They have been left for us, so that we may be in contact with the One.” I have never seen one, but these fragments are described by the prophet as crystals of absolute purity, radiating with the light of the Creator. The theologians of the Temple often debate about the exact nature of these holy relics, but the Writings strongly hint that they are the petrified fragments of Divine Envoys who have, in a very remote time the pagans call “Aergewin”, fought against Feondas, the minions of Limbo.

Many are those who have gone so far as to pillage and sell these precious relics; particularly to Magientists who, as I have heard, use them to feed their unnatural machineries. These unbelievers stop at nothing in their unbridled quest for power. Because of them, all humanity could be consumed. This is how, in his Writings, Soustraine speaks of the great cataclysms: “When the arrogance of man reaches its pinnacle, when pride and power become their idols, a great disaster shall occur, and pestilence shall spread throughout the world. The hordes will rise from Limbo to engulf the unbelievers, and the faithful will have to lead their last battle for the triumph of the One Light.” My Uncle, we must pray for the Reizhites to relinquish their folly and join the path of wisdom that Soustraine indicates to us.

Finally, you must know that the prophet also received the mission to find and lock up the Cursed Stones, impure caricatures of the holy Shards. These abominations look like the holy Relics, but are the work of devils from Limbo who strive to enslave men by tempting them with powers mimicking those of the One. The pure know how to recognize the evil nature of these factitious stones, but an infidel or a prideful one could yield to temptation.



The Six Orders

The Temple is multifaceted, much less monolithic than our adversaries pretend. And unlike what some women may think, men and women have equal status in the eyes of the Creator; hence, they can access the highest responsibilities of the six orders that make up the Temple.

However, before one can join an order, he must be initiated. That is why I currently have the rank of adept, and for now, I am expected to spend most of my time in studies and prayers, which make up most of my training. The life of an adept also involves a large number of the same chores, which are imposed on us in order for the places of worship to operate properly, but also to test the strength of our faith. Indeed, it is never pleasant to clean the latrines or to tend to the wounds of the knights of the order of the Blades, but such tasks must be fulfilled, and the One shall measure the worth and the involvement of everyone. The complete training of an adept lasts six years, at the end of which I will be allowed to join one of the six orders. As you know, I have already made my choice, and I hope I will become part of the order of the monks which my convent belongs to.

"Each order of the Temple has its own internal hierarchy, which is more or less abstruse in the eyes of outsiders. The Hierophants stand at the very top of this hierarchy, and the adepts at the very bottom. Priests or monks promoted at the direction of a church or a monastery are called 'rectors', and form cenacles when the institution they must rule has many faithful. The most honorable of Sigires bear the title of 'keeper of faith', while the Blades are organized as a chivalric order with, at their head, the 'great commanders', These are only examples, but they give an idea of the complexity of the various orders."

Lem Deon

The Priests

The priests form an order with a large majority among the clergy of the Temple. They are the administrators of most of the rural and urban communities, which they guide toward the One God. They can be seen every day in churches, which they lead sometimes alone, sometimes as a cenacle. Priests lead the service, answer the metaphysical questions of the faithful, and try to bring on the path of the Truth all those who do not follow it yet. According to their seniority, they don't all have the same power or the same influence.



The White Rose Traitors

I cannot help but add here this side note about the White Rose order. Under this pompous name hides a rebellious group of former Blade knights who claim they bear the true message of the Creator. These heretics are tracked by the Blades and the Sigires, and must be fought by the true followers of the One God.

The Sigires

Highly feared, Sigires are appointed by the Great Cenacle of Ard-Amrach. Their task is twofold: to fight against the heretics and sorcerers using occult arts, and to ensure that the Ordinances are properly followed among the Temple. A Sigire commissioned for a particular mission can access all places of the Temple without having to give any justification to a priest or even to a Hierophant. They are said to often hide their status when investigating in order to witness problems and breaches of the dogma with their own eyes. True believers have nothing to fear from Sigires, but they are still dreaded because they are known to be ruthless in their methods.

The Blades

This chivalric order protects the Temple; its warriors quick to react against attacks we could suffer from those who do not accept the Truth. Also known as Blade knights, these well trained fighters are generally armed with a sword and protected with chainmail and a shield.

The Vectors

Vectors are missionaries traveling the world to show infidels the path of Light. Bold travelers, sometimes escorted by several Blade knights, they fearlessly tread in regions where the Temple still has not settled, and reveal to pagans the benevolence of the One God.

The Monks

Living in secluded monasteries, monks dedicate their lives to prayers and crafts. This order is composed of several distinct groups of monks or nuns, such as the Corvusian brothers of the Corvus abbey, for example. Some of these orders are famous for their calligraphies, some others for their distilleries. They house travelers and are often very close to nature. Some monks travel the world, going from churches to monasteries, accumulating and exchanging knowledge and techniques.



The Clerics

Clerics are the scholars of the Temple. As teachers or scribes, they contribute to the training of adepts, keep the archives of great parishes, manage the finances of churches, and advise priests and the Hierophants. Many clerics –the theologians– are specialized in studying the enigmas of the One, and reflections about faith. They are the most directly involved with seminaries and synods, which gather the members of the Temple.

Of the Importance of the Number 6

"Why this '6', which you find everywhere in the rites of the Temple? Their hexagon-shaped churches, the six members of the Great Cenacle, the six prayer times, the six commandments given by Soustraine after his vision, the six statuses of the members of the Temple, the six stanzas of their prayers and psalms... No one knows where it comes from exactly, but obviously, this number has an important significance in the religion of the Temple."

Lem Deon

The Hierophants

Above the leaders of the six orders are the Hierophants. In theory, the masters of each order can all aim for such a prestigious rank, but most Hierophants come from priests and clerics. They are the most faithful among the faithful; the staunchest believers. Like Soustraine during his revelation, they are said to have heard the One God. Their role is to rule over the destiny of the Temple, and to guide our people. In Tri-Kazel, Hierophant Anthénor leads our holy church and presides at the Great Cenacle gathering the masters of each order: keeper of faith Vengu, from the order of the Sigires, Saint Jaoven de Nectan, from the order of the Blades, theologian Neirin, from the order of the clerics, priest Andrev, rector of the church of Farl, holy Vectoress Selina, from the order of the Vectors, and monk Thaeg, rector of the monastery of Gouvran.

Speech from a washerwoman of the district of Trádáil to her apprentice.

"Girl, you must understand that our clients from this church are very careful about being clean. Purity, as they say, must be spiritual as well as material. But don't you worry, they're not that awful, and lots of nonsense is said about them. I've been coming to take their laundry for years, and nothing has ever happened to me! Wash each piece of clothing as if it was to be worn by Soustraine himself, and everything will be fine. Know that each religious order has its own color. Adepts who have not yet been ordained are clothed in light gray and wear colored facings on their sleeves and collar, which indicate the order they are to be a part of. When they are accepted, they are dressed in white, with equal parts of the color of their order, which, however, becomes less and less present as they rise in the hierarchy. About that, I've heard that the attire of the Hierophant of Ard-Amrach is completely immaculate.

There are two monks here, who'd rather get their hands dirty and wash their laundry themselves. They're dressed in brown, a plain, humble color if I ever saw one. Blade knights wear red, since it sometimes is their duty to kill in order to defend the Temple. But you won't see many of them in Osta-Baille. Vectors sport azure, the color of the sky under which they walk in order to spread faith everywhere in the world. All priests wear green. According to the sermons I've heard, I think it's supposed to remind people of their task as the Creator's gardeners, who watch over the faithful and nourish their souls in the house of the One. Or something like that... Clerics, who take care of all the paperwork, like purple. It's a hard color to obtain, and they use it for their illuminations, along with fine gold. Finally, if you're ever approached by a clergyman wearing black, you're dealing with a Sigire, and I hope this will never happen...

'Scuse me? Ah, yes. They forget all kinds of stuff in their pockets. You see this one, they use it as a holy symbol. They call it a Hexcelsis, because of the six branches that correspond to the six ordinances of the prophet, I think. Take care not to break it or get it dirty; they don't like that at all. Simple faithful often carry a Hexcelsis of polished wood. The religious' ones are made of iron, or copper when they start to go up in the hierarchy. Only the highest-ranking leaders carry a silver Hexcelsis. But no matter their attire, even if you only see novices in gray, always be polite toward them. Things are going well in our town, and after all these years, nobody wants that to change. And a young girl like you should stay on her guard: as pure as they may be, they're still men."

The Convent of Mount Darenne

Before this letter reaches its end, let me tell you a few words about the convent I live in. As I told you, I am part of the holy order of the monks. Convents only house nuns; mixing genders is often a source of distractions, and monastic life requires the most absolute asceticism and serenity if one hopes to reach the illumination. The six prayers, the meals, and our calligraphy works punctuate our days. We must also tend to our gardens, which provide us with vegetables aplenty. It is said that our convent was built on the very place where Saint Darenne heard the words of the Creator. For this reason, it is a place of pilgrimage which houses our faithful brothers and sisters from the whole peninsula.

The Temple and Civil Life in Tri-Kazel

As you know, Uncle, the Temple had to strive to settle in our peninsula, and it still does today. Attempting to convince the unfaithful is a constant fight. Here, in Gwidre, the Temple has become the official religion since the king converted. People pray to the Creator to avert their minds from the Magientist aberrations and the trickery of the C'maoghs. Like in the Great Theocracy, people work hard to free the clergy of their daily tasks, so that they may in exchange pray for the salvation of everyone. Unfortunately, our cousins from Reizh are too engrossed with the impious powers Magientists offer them. The Truth is more welcome here in Taol-Kaer, but the Magientists are more and more numerous, and the Demorthèn remain fiercely clutching at the power they hold over the ignorant.

I pray so that our Talkéride and Reizhite brothers may become aware of their mistakes before it is too late. The demons that the pagans call Feondas roam and proliferate in the shadow; we must stiffen our faith in order to drive them away.
Dearest Uncle, kiss all the family for me.

May the One protect your souls,

Vona

Chapter 3
Magientists

There was almost no one in the tavern where Khalmen and his old mentor Mordan were sitting. The people of Osta-Baille feared the night, and few of them dared to venture outside after twilight. Khalmen listened to his master intently. Soon, his apprenticeship would come to an end, and he would become a Varigal. The old man–whose weathered skin showed how many years he had spent traveling–knew how to narrate the adventures of his youth with uncommon ardor, as if he were reliving each past moment for the first time. Mordan moistened his lips and drank another sip of liquor before he spoke again:

"Khalmen, you know a lot of things: nature holds no more secrets for you, you won't ever get lost in our lands of Tri-Kazel, you know how to subdue wild beasts and avoid the dreadful Feondas. You can survive in hostile lands; you'll make a great Varigal. But you cannot travel alone on the roads of our peninsula without learning more about the Magientists and their mysteries. I'll tell you what I know of them..."

A Quick Account

"Magientists appeared in Tri-Kazel about two hundred years ago, coming from the Continent. I have heard about texts mentioning a more ancient presence, but I have no evidence on the subject. However, what we can be certain of is that their order has been in existence for much longer on the Continent; it even seems that they lead a great nation there... but let's get back to the facts. They crossed the mountainous range of the Asgeamar in an epic expedition that almost failed to reach its destination, and, in the end, they arrived in Reizh. Quickly, their feats brought them fame, and from the year 720, they started creating schools in this kingdom.

During the following decades, the Magientists very quickly became a force to be reckoned with in Tri-Kazel. They followed the major roads to spread their technology in the whole peninsula, with more or less success. We'll get back to how they were welcomed later on, as I'd like to get done with the historical part of the subject."



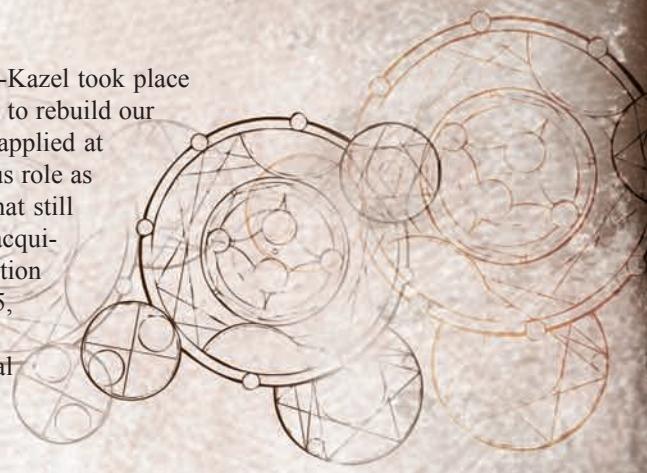
The "Daedemorthys" Name

The word "Magience" comes from the Continent, and the people of Tri-Kazel quickly called the adepts of this science "Daedemorthys". Such a designation shows a feeling of distrust for their strange practices, which clash with the local traditions related to the spirits of nature. A study of the ancient tongue of Tri-Kazel reveals that "Daedemorthys" means being disrespectful toward the spirits, a thing much frowned upon in our peninsula.

Extract from "Tongue of Ancient Tri-Kazel", by the bard Liyien Mac Seinn.

Osta-Baille

"A great, determining event for the establishment of Magientists in Tri-Kazel took place in 748 when Kailleach, king of Taol-Kaer, asked Magister Athaontù to rebuild our capital city, according to modern principles which had never been applied at such a large scale on this land. This way, Athaontù was granted a prestigious role as advisor to the king. Although Taol-Kaer is the kingdom of the peninsula that still remains the most attached to the ancient traditions, the Daedemorthys have acquired, since that day, considerable ascendency. In many places, such a situation even became a source of blame to the throne. However, since the year 895, which was marked by the closing of the capital's Magientist university, it would seem that King Mac Anweald is clearly returning to more traditional views.



The War of the Temple

As you know, it was in the year 857 that the infamous fratricidal war opposing the kingdom of Gwidre to its two neighbors broke out. The source of the conflict was precisely Magience. The Temple, established in Gwidre, could not allow such a strong influence from the Daedemorthys on the peninsula. Rumors even tell that these two factions wage an almost permanent war against each other on the Continent.
So, during this year, the leaders of Gwidre–allies of the Temple–declared war on Reizh, to which Taol-Kaer quickly brought its help. You see, Khalmen, the fury of the fights that then took place reminds us that humanity doesn't need Feondas to destroy itself. In Taol-Kaer, this conflict created a gap between the throne and Magientists, because of their involvement in its outbreak. That is how they have lost their positions at the side of the king, although they are still accepted in the kingdom. However, Reizh on its part remains a loyal advocate of the Continent's modernity, and under many aspects.

Current Situation

For about a century, the increase in Feond attacks gave Magientists the opportunity to extend their influence. They try to put their weapons and defensive technology at the service of the population. However, people are still wary, particularly where the followers of the cults dedicated to the spirits of nature remain present. Sometimes, on the other side, there are those who enthusiastically accept the technological advances that allow them to improve their living conditions. You'll certainly get to see some Reizhite mills in the region of the Emerald Crescent; they are able to grind twice as much grain in one day as traditional mills. Of course, when it comes to Magience–and although not everyone understands the principles at work–it remains a much more reliable process than dealing with mysterious, fickle natural spirits, according to its supporters. But don't be fooled; such a way of thinking is a devious means for Daedemorthys to denigrate our ancient beliefs.

The Principles of Magience

I'll now explain to you what I know about how their science works. Of course, I don't claim to be a master in this domain, but years of various travels have allowed me to learn enough. Magientists spend most of their time mulling over techniques to improve our living conditions. They attempt to circumvent some natural laws in order to obtain amazing effects going beyond what nature allows. I've already told you about their mills, but you must also have heard about these new looms, of such accuracy that human fingers could not thread such stitches. There are also these famous weapons that can propel projectiles so fast that no bow could rival them. And of course, there are their Nebulars as well; these lamps that make it possible for the high districts of some of our towns to have quality nocturnal lighting at their disposal, without the risk of setting something on fire, as it would occur with a great number of torches. One thing is for sure, their inventions are not useless... at least, not all of them.

Therefore, a Magientist is first a scholar well versed in sciences that some Peninsulars already know: alchemy, physics, etc. But what characterizes one is the use of a strange source of energy: Flux. With it, one can power machineries that could not possibly work with mundane means, and build edifices that remain beyond the abilities of our best architects.

Flux

"My observations have led me to conclude that Flux always comes in a liquid form, but can be of four different colors: blue, green, red, or deep yellow. Actually, it can be difficult for an uninitiated to identify a liquid of one of these colors as being Flux or not. Daedemorthys, on their part, seem to be able to do so with merely a glance."

Flux Cartridges

Flux is stored and sold in the form of cartridges of various sizes. The conditions for their sale and their availability greatly vary from one region to another. In Reizh, it can be sold freely, and anyone can buy cartridges. In Taol-Kaer, its sale is permitted, but the royal power requires that the buyers prove that they are the owners of a duly registered artifact, or own a license to work as a Magientist. Some dukedoms give more leeway, others are much stricter.

In Gwidre, the sale of Flux is closely controlled, and restricted to a few Magientists under oath. Some servants of the state or of the Temple can be allowed to make use of specific artifacts, and they are distributed set quantities of Flux to such an end. Generally speaking, Flux cartridges are rather available in great towns; the countryside and remote regions most often lack of it, and prices can therefore soar (see p.226). Outside of Reizh, it is possible to find Flux cartridges on the black market, but it is a particularly risky business, especially in Gwidre.

"'But how do they obtain this Flux?' you might ask me. Excellent question, Khalmen. Obviously, I can only tell you about what my travels as a seasoned Varigal gave me the opportunity to find out. Flux seems to come essentially from plants and rocks, but sometimes from animals as well. Each substance, each being, apparently doesn't hold the same quantity of it, and the extracting and refining process to obtain Flux itself is long and complex. It is this mysterious process that makes it possible to obtain–from inanimate matter or living beings surrounding us–this unique substance partly responsible for the suspicion harbored toward Magientists. Although the order agrees to explain many of the concepts that underlie their creations–or rather their artifacts, as they say–they don't let out much about Flux, and they're very careful not to explain in detail how they obtain it. As you can guess, it clashes with the traditions of Tri-Kazel and the cult of nature led by the Demorthèn. They don't appreciate that one can draw from the very natural elements an energy that men can then use according to their whims. Moreover, drawing Flux from a living being systematically kills it in the process. In Reizh, the neighbors of the Magientist plant of Baldh-Ruoch talk of nasty, or even toxic, emanations and waste poisoning the earth. But you already know that these two visions of the world are in conflict; this is not something new for you. During your life, you'll obviously have to take sides, because it would be fruitless to try to conciliate both: they're too antagonistic."



Magientists and Demorthèn

Sir,

Everything opposes these two factions, and an alliance between them cannot be imagined. On one side, we have the Demorthèn, keepers of the age-old traditions all generations in Tri-Kazel have been immersed in. They respect the spirits of nature with which they can communicate to obtain magical effects from them. On the other side, we find the Magientists, who support that human beings should rule over nature, and who bend it to their will through unhealthy ways. Our kingdom has remained very close to the ancient traditions, particularly in the mountains. Therefore, your Majesty, I cannot but advise you to keep some distance with the Daedemorthys. Indeed, it would be inopportune to have the Demorthèn turn against you, as they have a real influence on the people.

Harn Mac Brog

The Organization of the Order

"Here Khalmen, go and fill me a glass with some of this Ostian liquor; talking makes me thirsty.
So, let's now see how the Magientists are structured. Their order is organized in a strict way, according to a very precise hierarchy. The Council of Baldh-Ruoch is at the head of the order of Magience in Tri-Kazel, and dictates the broad direction of the action of the various universities and schools. To practice, each Magientist must own a diploma obtained in a university recognized by the Council, and abide by some principles. Magientists who do not follow their professional or moral duties have to stand before their peers in a particular court named 'Disciplinary Chamber'. The illegal practice of Magience is severely punished, particularly here in Taol-Kaer, and even more among our neighbors of Gwidre.

The Magisters

The Magisters are intellectuals who have proven themselves in several scientific domains and for whom Flux has no secrets. Along with their scientific expertise comes the power they are granted over the rest of the Magientists. There are only half a dozen of them on the whole peninsula, and they seldom leave the main centers of the order. Three of them form the Council of Baldh-Ruoch. You'll certainly get to hear about Magister Alana Naïghan. This woman is said to be ambitious and to stop at nothing to carry out the projects of Magience. Beware, because her charm could turn your head, and soon, you'd be swearing by Magience!" Old Mordan finished this sentence with a sonorous laugh. Khalmen had already heard of that woman; her reputation knew no boundaries, and she was said to be able to heal the nastiest wounds as well as most diseases.

Diary of Simus
Giblean, year 905

Well, tomorrow is the great day; I will be traveling to Farl to enter its Magientist school. Primus Nagguérand de Greenwood is to see me privately in order to confirm my acceptance. My father, a famous alchemist in Reizh, has bent over backwards in order to get me there, and I am truly proud. I will do all I can to follow my training to the end. However, I don't know if I will be able to sleep tonight...

The Primus

"There is a Primus at the head of each Magientist institution, except for some small, remote laboratories. There is therefore one in each school, factory, or university. They are also the leaders of some congregations. They reach this rank by climbing the hierarchical ladder, but they probably aren't told about the greatest secrets of the order. They have much more mundane responsibilities than the Magisters.

The Scientörs

This category actually includes most of those we call 'Magientists'. The Scientörs are researchers, scholars, designers, and engineers working in factories and laboratories. They are also the ones who lead research and experiments performed in the field, manipulating and extracting Flux.

The Inceptus

The Inceptus are those newly integrated into the order; novices and apprentices. Only the best can hope to pass the seven-year cycle of studies that will give them the status of Scientör. Many Inceptus stop their studies to become simple assistants. In spite of the suspicions Magientists arouse, more and more youngsters from our towns think they can find in this career a future commensurate with their hopes, persuaded that they will one day solve all the mysteries of the universe.

The Helites

The Helites are found among Magisters, Primus, and Scientörs (although there are less of them). They form a sort of transverse group composed of ideologues. Helites are more preoccupied about the future of the order and its orientations than scientific researches. However, they are said to enunciate surprising theories from time to time, even for the most seasoned Magisters. They are generally quiet and stay away from the public as well as from the other Magientists.

The Lodges

Finally, know that Magientists are gathered in Lodges; these congregations unite several Magientists around a project or a common specialty. Some of these Lodges only have scientific goals and aspirations; others are deeply implicated in politics. For example, the Lodge of the Amber Stone, which focuses on the study of fossil Flux and its applications, was noticed during the War of the Temple.

Other Types of Professions

Magientists also hire people who are not Daedemorthys. The order pays well, and more than one person left their village to work at a Magientist school. More particularly, those who are not part of the order are grouped in two categories of jobs. The first can hope to become workers, in charge of storage, maintenance, and transport. These warehouse workers are given a quick training, generally in the field, which teaches them the basics of Magience. Those who are skilled in the use of weapons can be hired as mercenaries. Between traveling hazards in Tri-Kazel, and the many enemies the Magientists have, they don't lack opportunities to earn their pay."



Diary of Simus
Céitean, year 905

How glad I am to have been received with full honors. The Primus is an extremely pleasant man. Since my arrival, I have learned so many things that I don't have much time left to spend with you, my diary. But I would have so much to say, starting with the architectural wonders of the school, a construction that would have been impossible even for the best builders in Tri-Kazel. Everything is lit during the day through a careful placement of phenomenal mirrors that make the light of the sun reach the most remote parts of the edifice; and by night, you can stroll under the light of the fascinating Nebulars. I could see some artifacts, and even manipulate some of them. What a wonder it is, to be able to observe so many details on objects through what they call Vision Glasses! I also handled remotely controlled pliers that make it possible to work with astounding accuracy. And the alchemy laboratory; so different and so better stocked than my father's. He would have been fascinated to see all this.

Days are extremely busy, between classes of all types, meals, discussions, meetings. I do not know when I will have time to get back to writing this diary... very soon, I hope.

The Various Magientist Schools

"What you probably don't know is that all the Magientists do not work the same way. Each specialty researches and uses different types of Flux. There are several paths in the order, which form as many visions of the world and working habits. I couldn't claim to know about all of them, but I'll tell you about the main ones. Also, know that these schools lead underground conflicts in order to be the most influential in the order. These power struggles even shape the general direction of their research, and the relations of the Magientists with the rest of the world.

The Botanists

This school is composed of Magientists who spend a lot of time in the field, observing and studying every plant they come upon. Apparently, they have discovered in Tri-Kazel a flora and fauna that have no equivalents on the Continent. As far as I know, the ultimate aim of such work is to draw Flux. Their methods are quite radical, as it seems they completely destroy the plant. You can find their laboratories close to forests and in remote areas. Many also work in schools and universities with the purpose of transforming vegetal sap into Flux. I've got to admit that their alchemical research is outstanding.

The Mineralists

Whereas the other Magientists have a passion for living beings, the Mineralists prefer to work with rocks and minerals. They set up laboratories near the mines they oversee, but also work in factories where their research is aimed at the best way to extract mineral Flux.



The Mekones

"Now, let me get to a rather sensitive topic, Khalmen. The Helites are often rather excessive and extremist in their practice of Magience. In order to improve their mastery over nature and their artifacts, they slip under their skin something called Mekones: it is Flux flowing like blood under the skin. I have already met such people, and I can tell you it's a very disturbing vision. Imagine thin pipes on the face and limbs, in which you'd see, showing through, a liquid whose color is sometimes amber, greenish, bluish, or even bright red; the whole seems to flow through spasmodically, as if pumped. It would seem it allows them to manipulate their artifacts with particular ease. With that, they can directly feed some of them with Flux for optimal use. But such an improvement–as they consider it to be–has a price. I've been told the circulation of Flux in one's body causes the Magientist terrible pains. To alleviate such sufferings, one therefore has to take a soothing drug daily. As I understood, it affects one's mood, making one more distant and insensitive, growing apart from other human beings."

The Vitalists

Vitalists are often despised or feared by the population of our peninsula because of the peculiar nature of their works. Among the order of the Magientists, they are, on the contrary, often respected and influential. Their experiments revolve around man and animal. Few things are known about such a subject, but I have heard they remove organs from corpses to extract Flux from them, the most dreadful rumors even telling of removals from living humans. However, their knowledge in medicine and anatomy surpasses ours, although this does not make them trustworthy physicians in the minds of many people."

Letter from Hilderin Ceogh

We will soon be leaving the valley, since it turns out Feondas were not involved in the murders, and neither was Magientist Druihn, in spite of the suspicion he was under. I must say this case leaves a strange impression on me. The culprit is a man exiled nearly twenty years ago, who has claimed a dozen victims of all ages over the last months out of a desire for vengeance. The fact he made it so that the corpses were found atrociously mutilated, in order to make people believe that Magientist Druihn was the culprit, indicates resourcefulness, and even perversity. And yet, this man was not particularly intelligent, and even seemed quite boorish to me.

Fossil Flux

Much sought after by Magientists, this rare substance takes the shape of small deposits of an amber-colored liquid of varying viscosity, often surrounded by a crystalline shell. Refined fossil Flux takes on a yellow color and an oily texture. In spite of centuries of research by the Mineralists on this substance of unmatched energetic properties, its exact nature remains unknown. However, in Tri-Kazel, the most knowledgeable Demorthèn know it for its toxic properties, which even disturb the C'maoghs, and name it Nimheil; “poison” in the ancient tongue.

Architecture

“The Magientists have constructed buildings in great numbers, and for many uses, but they are the only ones to be let into the strangest of these edifices. I'll tell you about the main ones I know, which I could sometimes enter and see from the inside. As for the others, I'm relying on information that has filtered through, or on testimonies I have compared.

Universities

Of course, you’ve walked many times by the Magientist university of Osta-Baille, in the district of Saoithín. Although it has remained closed for more than ten years, this edifice is a good representation of the Magientists' philosophy. They try to stand above the masses; to dominate them.

Such constructions take a lot of ground surface, and their walls rise above the streets of our city, towering over the buildings surrounding them. Very few of our engineers would be able to erect such edifices, particularly in so little time. There are few windows, as the inside is abundantly lit by Magientist technology. Access is difficult for outsiders, restricted by sturdy doors watched by mercenaries. The walls of these edifices are often smooth and hard to climb. Few burglars try their luck, particularly if they have heard the rumors about traps and Magientist mechanisms.

There are schools of a lower scale. That's where the Inceptus are trained, and such places can be found in every large town of Taol-Kaer, like Seòl, Tuaille, or Kel Loar. In Reizh, many important burghs have one as well. Conversely, the Magientists were unable to officially settle in Gwidre because of a very uncompromising opposition from the high leaders of the Temple, although I have heard about clandestine, illegal schools.

Such places are open to the most promising youngsters of the peninsula. Right now, I can't say for sure what it means for our future, but I'm afraid the generations to come may turn away from our ancestral values. These young people rarely leave the walls of their schools during their training. The studies generally last seven years, and at the end, pupils get a diploma that allows them to practice and to have the title of Magientist. It happened that I escorted some of them, who had been sent to conduct research in the field in remote places. I can tell you their isolation makes them individuals particularly unadapted to the realities of existence. These schools are places of teaching, to which research laboratories are attached. There, they lead strange experiments, according to rather puzzling theories."

Diary of Simus
Sulthainn, year 905

Today, I am back from my first trip outside of the university's walls. Scientör Clapsine took me to the laboratory located near the village of Melwan, on the foothills of the mountains. We went there to supply the Mineralist Magientist in charge there, Talacien, with food and Flux.

His works on new sources of Flux led him there, away from his colleagues. We did not even pass through the village, but only climbed the cliff that hangs above it, until we reached the old manor that was rehabilitated by Talacien and a few assistants. What a strange result produced by this mix of traditional architecture from the time of the clans and Magientist equipment. This field laboratory won me over; I too want to travel the world to understand the inner workings of nature, and allow men to improve their living conditions!

Nòds and Factories

"There is only one true Magientist Nòd in all of Tri-Kazel, and it is located in the Reizhite capital. This city-factory produces the most widespread Magientist artifacts and those who work there are often given lodging as well. They're not all Magientists; most of them are just workers putting together metal and wood parts according to the orders they're given. In the lower districts of the city, you'll find many people employed there. Factory work is harsh, with very long days of work, but the offered salary makes it possible to afford better living conditions. Other large cities may have dark buildings with tall chimneys, but they're puny things compared to the Nòd of Baldh-Ruoch, which employs hundreds of people.

Magientist factories generate pollution that greatly upsets their neighborhood. The lords of Reizh and Osta-Baille are often aired grievances about the noise, but also the noxious vapors, and the foul-smelling smokes these edifices give off.

Laboratories

Laboratories are generally set up in remote places. Their activity mixes university research and the construction of new machines. It would seem these buildings often stand near places plentiful in Flux. Don't ask me how they can determine that, because I don't know. Most of the time, Magientists use an existing building that they modify as they see fit before sending a small team there. I got to see a few of these laboratories. On the base structure of one of them, strange pipes had been mounted, and the roof had been replaced with a dome of polished, glowing metal. A chimney, which gave off a strange, greenish smoke, had sprung from the main building, and the doors and windows had been reinforced with curious metallic devices.

When there is no building that can house them, the Magientists build a laboratory from scratch, with materials sometimes brought directly from their factories. One day, you may see a Magientist carrying one of their 'mobile Flux extractors'; a bunch of strange tools with which they do all sorts of manipulations. However, although most laboratories are self-sufficient and set away from population centers, several are located in or near agglomerations. The Magientists then have some contacts with their neighbors, and perform various experiments and installations, with the aim of popularizing their artifacts, with very mixed results.

Artifacts and Magientist Inventions

Although you have certainly already seen commonly used artifacts, there are many others which are less widespread and which you may come across during your peregrinations. As for me, I've even seen objects which are never talked about, but which I will mention for your edification. Know as well that you must distinguish artifacts from other Magientist inventions. Artifacts all run on Flux, whereas other types of machines and apparatuses do not need it.

Nebulars

Nebulars are certainly among their most known and appreciated inventions. You'll find some in every large town of the peninsula, more precisely in rich enough districts, where you'll see these pylons bearing small, glassy, opaque spheres. At nightfall, the sphere of the Nebular starts glowing, casting a clear light around the column. This miracle is made possible through the use of Flux, stocked in the metallic support of each Nebular, the machinery of which is protected by a very complex lock. Workers regularly come to resupply the Flux tank of each Nebular and ensure their maintenance. It would seem the nature of the Flux determines the color of the produced light; blue, green, or reddish. One must see the nights of Osta-Baille or Baldh-Ruoch to appreciate the comfort and beauty Nebulars provide us.



Mills

The winds and swift rivers of our peninsula have always had an essential role in our civilization. It is commonly admitted that our mills have greatly benefited from Magientist techniques. The Daedemorthys became interested in inner machinery, pulley combinations, and drive systems. By using vapor and Flux, they were able to double the productivity of average-sized mills. However, some say that grain milled with these devices gives the bread made from it a particular, rather unpleasant taste. This has probably slowed down the popularization of this yet notable Magientist improvement.

Fervhen's Rifles

Be very careful not to annoy Magientist militias. Some could be equipped with these particularly powerful weapons. These rifles, bearing the name of the Magister who designed them, look like crossbow stocks without bows, with a metal tube mounted on them that can shoot metal pellets. Through a process that baffles me, but which obviously involves Flux, they are propelled at the target at a terrifying speed. I saw this weapon at work only once. The bullet went right through the chain mail of a brigand who attacked the group of travelers I was guiding; the man died on the spot. As I have heard, Fervhens are hard to maintain, and consume a lot of Flux.

Looms

Like mills, the looms of our artisans enormously benefited from the knowledge of the Magientists. Although massive and requiring sizeable machinery, a Magientist loom, fueled by Flux, is much faster and more accurate than our manual looms. A sort of mechanical guide makes it possible to weave at a very high speed without any risk of error. Once the weaver has chosen the thread and placed the bobbin correctly, work can start, and the artisan only has to stop the device when an empty bobbin needs to be replaced, or when the color must be changed. However, using this machine requires specific skills and techniques; many mishaps have unfortunately been reported.

Vision Glasses

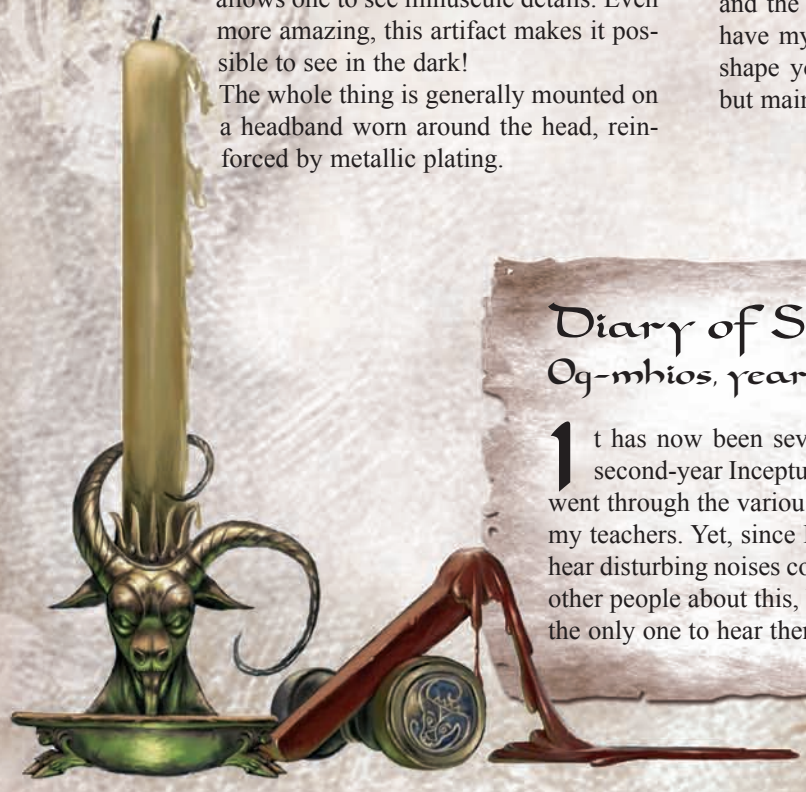
Certainly you've already seen a Magientist bending over a small plant or a tiny element. You must have noticed the strange apparatus placed in front of his eyes. Much more than a mere magnifying glass, this is a highly complex artifact. A combination of glass lenses that the Magientist can slide over a series of thin tubes, in order to superpose them, this mechanism allows one to see minuscule details. Even more amazing, this artifact makes it possible to see in the dark!

The whole thing is generally mounted on a headband worn around the head, reinforced by metallic plating.

Strange Experiments

All that remains is to tell you about some widespread fears, which are the main obstacle to the generalization of Magientist wonders. Of course, they say their science makes it possible to perform miracles without having to rely on unpredictable spirits of nature, as the Demorthèn do. Their purpose is the emancipation of man from any mystic dependence, whether Demorthèn or conveyed by the Temple. Of course, they try to improve the quality of everyone's life, and their potions, as well as their medical science, have saved the life of more than one inhabitant of Tri-Kazel. Still, people are wary about this science, the adepts of which hide behind the impassable walls of their schools. Very often, people prefer the company of Demorthèn, who have always been present on the peninsula. The Daedemorthys are scary: they're distant, cold, and sometimes very condescending toward those who do not share their knowledge. I must however add that not all Magientists behave this way; some of them are even very good company.

But above all, truly frightening rumors are the source of the distrust and fear of the peninsula's inhabitants. First, you'll often hear about the pollution produced by their famous Flux, which may cause diseases, and sometimes even lead to death. Other rumors speak about horrid experiments. A woman told me that some three months after the disappearance of her husband, his body had been found at the bottom of a cliff, with broken bones and his body pierced with many holes. Despite the certainty of other people that he had been the victim of Feondas, she asserted Daedemorthys had kidnapped him. Other people, who live near Magientist universities, claim they have heard cries–human ones, or of a more frightening nature–and strange cracking noises. As for the Demorthèn, they don't hide their anger and never stop vituperating. They blame the Magientists for wanting to bend all nature to their will. Don't our traditions tell about the spirits of nature, and the necessity of respecting them? Don't they speak of these C'maoghs with which we can communicate, and the benevolence of which we must seek? Of course, I have my own opinion on the subject, but it's up to you to shape yours; according to everything I've told you today, but mainly in the course of your meetings..."



Diary of Simus
Og-mhios, year 906

It has now been several weeks since I moved into the wing of the second-year Inceptus. Everything should be fine, since I successfully went through the various exams, and I am progressing well according to my teachers. Yet, since I moved in, it is very hard for me to sleep. I can hear disturbing noises coming from the basement of our wing. I have told other people about this, but no one has noticed anything abnormal. Am I the only one to hear them?

Chapter 3
Varigals

Confidential report from Advisor Collean Plyfth, addressed to his Grace, Duke Alanforth de Brégan, year 907.

Lord,

Know that it was difficult, to say the least, to gather the following information. Therefore, I dare hope you shall consider it satisfying.

Varigals are, as everybody knows, messengers who go from village to village to bring the latest news and sell their almanacs. In exchange for a good story or a spicy anecdote, they are given room and board at inns, or are housed by the inhabitants.

While most people fear to venture out on paths and roads, and all the more so in wild regions, these bold individuals do not hesitate to travel dozens of miles alone. Most of the time, they would rather travel by foot, in order to keep a low profile. Sometimes, they ride a Caernide or a horse to reach their destination, but only if matters of a very pressing nature require them to do so.

People with Practical Experience

Their reliable knowledge of places often allows them to travel faster by foot than mounted. Indeed, the irregular grounds of Tri-Kazel always force travelers to make many detours, but Varigals go through side roads only they know, and which spare them considerable time. Of course, only individuals with a steady foot and a good sense of direction are able to go through the difficult passages they venture into. However, I know from a reliable source that Varigals receive a complete training on that matter before they can go on their "first run".

They are taught to identify with a mere glance weather changes, tracks left by men, animals, or Feondas, the nature of some herbs and plants, to recognize a source of drinking water, and to get their bearings according to the position of the sun and stars. They are also taught the mastery of trail-blazes: these symbols, known only to the Varigals, look like nothing else, and have probably been invented by the founders of this group. They indicate the presence of Feondas or brigands, the discovery of a new side road, the location of a nearby shelter or food cache, a change in the attitude of the chief of the nearby village, and many other things.

The Varigals also do tough physical exercises that aim to improve their lung capacity and stamina, as well as their ability to move in the various terrains they will have to pass through. Many of them also learn to swim. Most Varigals travel with their Carath, a stout walking stick they have learned to use as a weapon, mainly in order to defend themselves in the case of an unpleasant encounter. They dress with clothes of dull colors, that are most often waterproof, easy to put on or take off, and the least cumbersome possible. They also usually wear sturdy leather boots with dagger sheaths. As opposed to what rumors say about them, they bear no distinctive mark displaying their affiliation to any group.

Varigals and "Varigals"

The Varigals' guild was created by Arenthel soon after year 0. Its members were then royal messengers, bearers of a mandate that indicated their complete neutrality. Respected by all, their role was to ensure the transmission of official information among the three kingdoms, which contributed to maintaining the recently obtained peace. However, gradually, as relations turned sour, the Varigals emancipated themselves from the royal authority and became a public organization. Of course, they lost their mandate, and therefore the protection it brought them; but this way, they discovered a freedom in the exercise of their duties that they previously had no idea about. They put themselves at the disposal of everyone, bringing news from the world everywhere they could, and no longer traveling only through the main roads, learning to familiarize themselves with the landscape and the weather of the peninsula, down to the smallest detail. Little by little, the organization adopted more and more drastic measures to ensure the safety of its members, which led to veiling it with the shroud of mystery that surrounds it today, and to lower the number of new recruits.

Actually, few Varigals today are part of the organization that started with the guild created by Arenthel. Most individuals who claim to be Varigals are nothing more than lone wolves, travelers, and messengers who have decided to live a nomadic life. Most of them have a good knowledge of the region they work in, but know nothing about the side roads and trail-blazes true Varigals learn about. This situation further increases the confusion regarding the organization, particularly concerning the number of its members, which is much lower than people think.

Organization and Recruitment

You may ask me how do the Varigals manage to recruit new members while keeping such a low profile? To such a question, I can now answer, my lord, that they delegate to some of their members the task of spotting every potential newcomer. Such Varigals are called Observers, and as suggested by their name, they blend in with common people in the hope of coming across a gem. Once an Observer has chosen a particular individual, he focuses on him for several months before reporting what he has seen to his superiors. The decision is then made of informing the person about the intentions the Varigals have regarding him. Of course, a refusal is possible, but Observers are rarely met with one, as they generally only approach individuals attracted by the charm of a nomadic life.

Curiously, this involves women as much as men. I would have thought the female sex to be less attracted and less fit to lead the life of a Varigal, but I must admit I was wrong. I was even quite surprised by the efficiency of a certain young lady from a proper family that I was lucky enough to meet before her disappearance. The acuteness of her senses and her quick reflexes saved my life. Without her firm hand, I would have crashed at the bottom of a cliff, and farewell good old Collean! What I mean, my lord, is that female Varigals are as numerous as their male counterparts, and just as capable.

The Varigals have no family life; at any rate, I never saw one with a spouse or children. Their wandering lifestyle predisposes them to short-lived love affairs, and I have heard they are not averse to visiting places of dubious reputation! Ah, the joys of libertinism! On the other hand, the freedom they enjoy is only the counterpart of the important risks they take on a daily basis. In spite of their remarkable physical condition and their vast knowledge, death can strike them at any time. Varigals know that very well, but they have chosen to live this way, and are much less prone to fear than ordinary individuals.

They have close relations with the Demorthèn, whom they often visit. They also meditate with commendable regularity in sanctuaries or near circles of ritual stones. The Varigals hold the ancestral traditions of Tri-Kazel particularly dear, and rarely look favorably upon the innovations from the Continent. The spirits are, for them, a reality that must be respected, just like the memory of the dead, whom they honor long after their departure. I once saw a Varigal fly into a thundering rage after I had been unfortunate enough to crack a joke about an ancient tomb sacked by brigands. Since then, I am careful to avoid the topic.

Varigals often die completely unnoticed, far from any inhabited area. But, as it seems, it poses them no particular problem, since they have come to an agreement with the Demorthèn. When it is possible, they take the responsibility of carrying the corpse to a consecrated place, where they go through the proper rituals so that the deceased's spirit may leave peacefully. Then, they cover the face with a mask of woven rope before burying the body. In exchange for such precious services, the Varigals keep the Demorthèn informed about all the important changes in Tri-Kazel.

I will end my report by emphasizing the unbreakable loyalty the Varigals have for one another. They never reveal information about their organization, whatever it may cost them. Likewise, they never betray their friends, in the very rare situations where they have relations with non-Varigals.

There you are, my lord. You must be wondering what the extreme discretion of the Varigals hides? In the end, I can confess that, as opposed to the rumors, they only seem to be prompted by honorable intentions, and in no way do they scheme to win influence or power.

Your devoted advisor,

Collean Plyfth



Chapter 3
Hilderins

Dearest Mother,

It is with great resolve, but also with great hope, that I write to you today. This letter is purposefully addressed to you, as Father would not have deigned to pay it any attention, throwing it into the fire instead. I have been missing during the past six years without giving news, but now, I can return to you with my head held high, the master of my own fate.

Since Father made me leave home for my incompetence in management, I have joined the motherhouse of the Hilderins with a battered heart, but also with an unshakeable will. As I was of noble birth and had some savings, they took me in, but it was only after a harsh year of duty that I could officially be integrated as a novice.

The Genesis of the Order

The order of the Hilderins was created in 467, at the initiative of Gairn, brother and successor of King Hild of Taol-Kaer. Trained in the use of weapons at a very young age, Hild developed an excessive passion for hunting. With his father's death, he took the throne, leaving aside his weapons to dedicate himself to the crown. He became a good manager for the kingdom until the terrible surge of Feond attacks of 466. Before then, such aggressions had only struck the hinterland, but in that year, incursions multiplied, aimed at the most strategic positions in the Three Kingdoms. It was a year of suffering and fear: the first raids were devastating, leaving many villages devoid of resources and in ruins, and sometimes even totally emptied of all life. The local fortifications and militia were powerless before the swiftness and savagery of the attacks.

This state of war was the opportunity for King Hild to take up arms again, in order to drive back and hunt down those vile beings. Filled with ardor and bravery, he led an army of loyal soldiers, traveling over Taol-Kaer, from Osta-Baille to Seól. When he fought near Ostreach, he was unhorsed and mortally wounded by one of the creatures he so loathed. His companions managed to force the monsters to retreat into the thick forests, but they could do nothing to save the king. Slowly eaten from the inside by a mysterious poison, he died moments after.

His young brother, Gairn, who was present, thus inherited the crown, and his first royal edict was to proclaim the birth of the Order, granting it generous funds with the purpose of wiping out the Feond threat. The motherhouse was constructed not far from Osta-Baille, on a rocky headland overlooking the southern road. A few years later, the new commander, who had a thirst for expansion, created two other chapter-houses: one in Ostreach, a highly symbolic place, and another one in the north of Taol-Kaer, not far from the border with Gwidre. This commander is even rumored to have had hidden ambitions that could have taken him very far if it hadn't been for his mysterious death.

Gear

For my official admission as a Breithan, I was given a dagger, a short bow, sturdy boots, a pair of dark linen braccae, and a heavy fur cloak. When I reached the rank of Osfei some time later, I could wear a leather brogne with adjusted scales. It was only once I was knighted that I was granted the right to wear a heavy chain mail suit reaching the knees and reinforced with metal plates, the traditionally conical Hilderin helmet, and my sword: a broad, straight-edged blade with a two-handed hilt ending in a round pommel, on which is engraved a simple “H” topped by a crown. Needless to say, much training was required for me to be able to move, and above all fight, with reasonable ease when I wore such equipment.

Noviciate

During the noviciate, two ranks are distinguishable: the Breithans and the Osfeis.

Breithan

Ah! How proud I was on the day of my admission ceremony. For me, it was the moment when my life truly began. By agreeing to burn the clothes I was wearing, I was accepted as a Breithan. Apart from a few classes on military theory and a first experience in the field, I mainly had to go through many community chores. This first phase lasts several years, and it is only with the approval of the knights in charge of the fort that one can be admitted into the higher rank after an official ceremony.

Osfei

Each one of us was appointed to the service, more or less personal, of a fully trained knight. The latter, by accepting the Pact, becomes an Osfer and agrees to mentor his pupil. As far as the Pact is concerned, his main duty toward the Osfei he is in charge of is to partly take care of his training, the rest being done in common within the chapterhouse. My Osfer was called Yvann, and had been a knight for three years. Of a reasonable nature, he did not overtax me with mind-numbing chores. My duties toward him were mainly to take care of his gear and to tend to his horse.

Of Cavalry

The title of knight has always been the pride of the order. Horses are prestigious, and give their riders great martial superiority.

After the Anró, each knight receives a mount. The order also has many Caernides at its disposal, which are less adapted to fighting, and therefore used for light scouting missions instead; they cannot bear the weight of a fully armor-clad knight.

Tarkas Mac Goch,
Tower Master in the dukedom of Tuaille

Anró

During my last year in the noviciate, Yvann became my guide and made sure to test me so that I might become his equal. It was the most exciting period of my apprenticeship. I was authorized to join him on all his missions, with or without his peers. When we could expect some danger, our role was to form the rearguard or the reinforcement lines, but should a fight occur, we were expected to take part in it, as any Hilderin. During a routine mission, Yvann took me alone into thick woods, and while I was busy reconnoitering, turned tail and went back to the chapterhouse, leaving me to my fate, and to some creatures. This is simply what the test of the Anró consists of: surviving and coming back unhurt to the motherhouse. It is only under this condition that one can become a knight.

Hierarchy

Those who come back from the test of the Anró become aspiring knights, but they must still prove themselves to deserve their titles. After that, they become Osfer, fully trained knights who can impart their knowledge to others. Above them are the Tòrr Ceann, literally the “Tower Masters”. A knight must have performed his duties as an Osfer for at least a decade before he can reach such a rank. They supervise and officer the other Hilderins in the chapterhouses of the order. Finally, the Tòrr Ceann are led by Commanders, who only obey the highest-ranking knight: Supreme Commander Gustin Mac Anweald, the king's own brother. I do not think I have dishonored the name of our family, as Father said; much the opposite. I hope you will be able to understand my position, and know that although my life has met so inexorably the path of arms, my respect and my love for you will always remain intact.

Erwan



Chapter 3
Rumors in Tri-Kazel

The Deathcheaters

Éliane Rosàg's house was a real place of wonders, where figurines of strange shapes and primitive design stood aside intricate Magientist instruments. Piles of old books bedecked with numerous bookmarks were gathering dust in a corner. A skull and bones, from what seemed like a hominid, sat close to a mummified hand mounted on a sculpted wood base. In a nearby front window, a deck of ivory playing cards and metallic marbles intertwined with leaf-like lines were lying. Occultists sure were oddballs!

Occultists in Tri-Kazel

In Tri-Kazel, the Demorthèn traditionally deal with the spirit world and its manifestations. The occultist profession developed with the rise of Continental ideas. It gathers a few esotericism enthusiasts, most of whom come from great cities where the people turned away from the ancient traditions. This discipline rests on the postulate that the perceivable world masks other planes of existence. The occultists' works focus on phenomena related to ghosts and so-called haunted places.
They are very interested in the study of dreams as well and have developed advanced techniques of hypnosis. Such a profession is commonly looked down on by those who do not share such beliefs, particularly by the Magientists, who consider it as nothing more than hocus-pocus.



Obviously uncomfortable, the visitor was standing still amidst such a jumble, facing a similarly cluttered massive oak desk. He was strongly built, yet his eyes were shadowy and his skin was of a pallid white.
"Please, do sit down. I apologize for the mess; you see, I am getting ready to move. Rest assured that my office is not always in such a state!"
The occultist concluded with a charming smile. She was in her early thirties at most, and dressed elegantly, in the Reizhite fashion.
After some small talk, Mog came to the reason of his visit:
"Last year, part of my barn's roof fell in and smashed my head."

Mog bent forward, showing a horrid scar running on the top of his balding head.
"I stayed in a comatose state for several weeks, but one day, I came round. Since then, my sleep has been uneasy, I have a lot of bad dreams and I constantly wake up. I went to see the Demorthèn and she gave me some herbs, but it didn't do any good. I need to fully recover to feed my family; my children are still too young to take over!"
"Can you tell me about these dreams?" The occultist was delicately fiddling with some sort of rosary.
"It's always the same thing." The man's look became hazy, seemingly in search of faraway memory fragments of those exhausting nightmares. "I walk in a desolate valley. I can't see the sun, but the light is blinding. The rocks are gray and the earth is dusty, as if covered with ashes. I sometimes sink knee-deep in them. I walk like this for a long time, until I meet him."
"Who is it you meet?"
Mog frowned.
"That's strange, I'm never able to remember what he looks like, but there's someone for sure. I always wake up at that moment, and most of the time, I'm all sweaty. Each time, I feel exhausted, as if I had actually walked through all those ashes. Since I awoke from my coma, I've been having this nightmare almost every night."
"It is important that you remember this mysterious person. Come back tomorrow, and we'll try hypnosis to improve your ability to remember."
Mog then left the house, feeling as concerned about his future as about tomorrow's hypnosis session. As for Éliane, she did not feel like moving out anymore, in spite of having previously decided to leave this rural community, where nothing significant had happened since her arrival, the year before. She could not stop thinking about Mog's story. It was possible that every night, without knowing it, this man walked through those very cursed lands the occult arts books read about. Could it be that Mog was a Deathcheater, a traveler that roams those lands during his sleep, and manages to come back to the land of the living? Thoughtful, Éliane nestled in her old armchair and took out one of her favorite books by the famous occultist Goran Franz: "The Territories".

The Ice Coffin of King Maelvon

The king of Taol-Kaer died in the year 360, as he was traveling toward the citadel of Aelwyd Saogh to meet his peers from Gwidre and Reizh. His heavily armed convoy, composed of two hundred of the best Talkéride knights, disappeared without a trace in the region of Brorann's pass. Rumor has it that the royal troop was swept by an avalanche and forever imprisoned in a coffin of ice. The crown of Taol-Kaer, worn by Maelvon, was lost during this catastrophe. Since then, the many expeditions that were sent by his successors have always proven fruitless. According to popular tales, the spirits of the king and his two hundred knights haunt the valley and the pass of Brorann, whispering ancient secrets, bringing death to unwary listeners.

Black Magic

"Yes, my daughter, the demons that some call Feondas are far from being the only affliction plaguing our good kingdom of Gwidre. You're aware of the excesses of some adepts of Magience, who stop at nothing when they are looking for a new Flux deposit; or also of these Demorthèn, who keep preaching the pagan cult of the spirits, spreading disorder among the population and leading it astray from the true faith. However, we faithful of the Temple have to face an even more insidious threat. I am, of course, referring to those men and women who do not hesitate to perform obscene rituals in order to obtain powers granted by evil forces."

Gaëlle nodded. She was used to the sermons of her old mentor. Although he often tended to exaggerate the "diabolical" intentions of Magientists and Demorthèn, he was in this case talking about people that even the Sigires feared. This fear was due to the very specific nature of the powers attributed to them: they were said to be capable of worming into the minds of other people and bending them to their will. What could be more horrible for a person devoted to the faith than to fall under the influence of such a force?

"Yes, I have heard of them. They are called sorcerers, gray mages, and also bewitchers. Is it true that they can take possession of spirits with their incantations?"

"Unfortunately, it is. They use black magic that the Demorthèn call Oradh. They claim that the corrupted, the 'Morcail' as they say, are fallen Demorthèn who use their powers to satisfy their egoistic desires. But they are direly mistaken about the true origin of such powers. They attribute them to spirits of nature under the influence of Morcail, but the truth is very different: they come from Limbo."

"Father, what can I do if I come upon such a sorcerer?"

"Pray, my daughter. And kill him before he's done with his incantation. The Blade knights are here to protect us. When you are accepted among the order of the Vectors, and start your first travels, you will have to be very careful. If you cross the path of one of these sorcerers, you must not hesitate to request the help of our holy church. Also, know that the Sigires are ready to move if suspicions about such a cult are solid enough. Attempt nothing alone, my daughter; you'd put yourself at risk of losing your soul."

The Gutripper

The old soldier had clearly drunk too much, but the people from the village were categorical: he was the only one who knew something about the "Gutrippers":

"You're sure you wanna know about it, right? Then I'll tell you, I'll tell you how all my men died. It was ten years ago, during a peaceful fall day. The kind of day you'd never expect to turn into a bloody nightmare!

For once, I wasn't wary. I'd let my guard down. We were walking in the forest, slowly, so damn tired that some of my guys were making awfully crude jokes. For two months we'd been walking through the great forest of Mòr Forsair, constantly slapped by the wind and drenched by the freezing rains, fumbling with our swords to croak these freaking Feondas and clean the place from the presence of brigands. For two months we'd been playing with death, with fear instead of food in our stomachs, and all that for some tranquility and a pittance!

My lord did not appreciate my frankness; that's why he'd sent me far from the castle, while assuring me he'd chosen me for such an important mission because of my remarkable abilities! That bastard; with some luck, he'd send me to kick the bucket in the middle of nowhere, and pass himself off as the good guy in the process. For sure, his lieutenants, stinking of fear and jealousy, had advised him well!

Thanks to these cowardly, submissive people, my master had doomed us, me and my men, to not see the end of the year. I should've died too, and today I still don't know why I'm the only one to have escaped the slaughter. We were following the slope of a small valley covered with a thick layer of leaves, twigs, and needles, trying to keep our balance as we could, when we smelled an awful stench, as if a hundred carcasses had been rotting near us.
My boys and I, we covered our noses with old pieces of cloth and kept moving. But the smell grew stronger; a mixture of rot, puke, and shit filled our nostrils in spite of the cloth. The leaves started whirling around, and a gust of stinking wind swept our faces.
We turned away and went back up the slope as we could. And suddenly, I saw one of my boys stop and clutch at his throat with both hands, yelling, his eyes rolling upwards, white foam trickling down his chin. He fell on his knees, thrashing around violently, his crazed eyes streaming with tears, his face contorted into a horrible mask of pain. Then, he vomited; well, I thought he did, but instead of the meager meal he had eaten, we saw his guts stream from his mouth. A bunch of bloody intestines dangling like a huge wriggling worm.
I turned away and ran as fast as I could, feeling sick. Cries rang behind me, but I did not look back. One after the other, my men fell and they puked out their insides with awful gurgling noises. An irrepressible feeling of nausea gripped me as I was taking deep breaths of this putrid stench. With an incredible effort of will, I managed to refrain from coughing my guts out. The wind fell, the smell disappeared as if by magic, and I fell to the ground, exhausted.

There, friend, that's how all my men died!"

Azulrock

Azulrock is a stone with a bluish hue used in construction, rarer than sandstone, but just as sturdy. It remains a relatively common rock in our lands, but it is said to be extremely rare on the Continent. The arrival of people from the Temple and Magientists led us to rediscover it, and made it much more precious. Indeed, those exiled from the Continent see a symbol of richness and prestige in Azulrock, which is normally reserved for the elite. In Tri-Kazel, they wholly take advantage of this, and use it in many of their constructions. It is said that Reizhite merchants have tried to organize an Azulrock trade between the peninsula and the Continent, regardless of the dangers of the oceans and even the valleys of the Asgeamar Mountains. Rumor even has it that some have financed the construction of aircraft, which is illegal since the decree of the year 792. Of these merchants who wanted to make a fortune by exporting Azulrock, none came back to Tri-Kazel. Are they all dead, or do they enjoy their new prosperity?

This subject is still sufficiently shrouded in mystery to motivate new bold souls to attempt such a journey.

Epilogue

He was standing alone under the dim glow of a cloud-shrouded moon. He was shivering in his ragged clothes, starving, and yet, he had never felt so sure of himself. All the men who had accompanied him were dead, both his close servants and the mercenaries hired for the occasion. None had lived through the danger, and he himself only owed his survival to some incredible luck. The manuscripts had somehow guided him on his quest for vengeance, leading him through many detours, letting him wander through side paths before bringing him amazing revelations when he thought he had only reached a dead-end. By looking for a way to eliminate the Feond plague, Wylard had started to become aware of how ignorant he was. He had thought himself to be cognizant of this world, but he could only acknowledge how wrong he had been. Behind the myths and legends of Tri-Kazel hid a sinister truth that he was merely starting to fathom. The old lord sat under an august sequoia, at the top of a rocky knoll, concealed from the sight of possible enemies by an imposing menhir. On the surface of the ancient rock, drawings half-erased by the wind and rain could faintly be seen under the moonlight, and faded as soon as the nocturnal body was covered by clouds.

Wylard identified some of the figures as being men, and others as gigantic creatures as tall as towers. There were also symbols that looked just like writings, but Wylard could not decipher them. He stood up, opened his bloodstained notebook, and on a new sheet, started to copy these mysterious inscriptions. Who knew, maybe they would guide him toward new clues?



Chapter 4
Game System

Foreword

Before they go and explore the lands of Tri-Kazel, the Players must learn about the game system and create their Characters. The purpose of the game system is to provide the Players and Game Leaders with tools that are simple, yet comprehensive enough to simulate the abilities of the different protagonists and the outcome of their actions. Each Player has to fill in a Character Sheet that will include all the information useful to the game. A blank version can be found at the end of the book, or freely downloaded on the website www.esteren.org. To help you fill in that sheet, a reproduction can be found with various annotations on the next page. Read about them to familiarize yourself with the terms associated with the game system.

Discovering Role-playing

If you have never taken part in a role-playing game before, you may find this chapter a little confusing. Do not worry, because you will learn quickly. You can also learn more about this activity on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role-playing_game.
The "Playing Your Character" aside of this book (p.178) gives novice Players some advice to start role-playing.

Abbreviations

The Leader is the person telling the story and leading the game; he will be referred to by the GL (Game Leader or simply Leader) abbreviation. The word Character(s) refers to the alter egos that Players embody during a role-playing game, but also to Tri-Kazel's other inhabitants, played by the GL. In this book, the Players' characters will be referred to by the PC (Player Character) abbreviation. Those who are managed by the Game Leader will be called NPCs (Non-Player Character). All of these abbreviations will be used invariably.

Game Universe and System

There is a strong link between the rules system that allows playing Shadows of Esteren and the game universe itself. References to the universe will appear every now and then along this chapter, in the form of inserts.

Rule Choices and Optional Rules

Some rules are optional, which means that the Leader, with the agreement of the Players, is free to apply them or not. In a more general way, no rule is absolute; each Leader may modify them so that they fit the mood he wishes to give his games of Shadows of Esteren.

Nomenclature

So as to make it easier to read the system and check it during the game, visual codes will be used:



This icon indicates an important part of the game system.

The passages in italics deal with examples and illustrations of the game system.

Using the System



The objective of this section is to inform the reader of the initial intent of the designers of Shadows of Esteren's game system, and to provide some suggestions as to how to use it.

Initial Intent

The game system of Shadows of Esteren has been developed to support the mood and to avoid hindering the action with a burdening technical aspect. Keep a simple principle in mind: if rolling a die might break the rhythm of a sequence, lower the dramatic intensity, or reduce the emotional charge of a scene, do not do it.

1 - The Ways:
There are five Ways, which describe the major features of the Character's personality (p 207).

2 - Advantages and Disadvantages:
Every Character can have qualities, flaws, be unlucky or born under a lucky star, etc. (p. 212).

3 - Health Condition:
This chart allows you to keep track of the Character's health condition as well as the injuries he may have suffered (p. 239). It also includes the Survival Points (p. 217) and the Stamina rating.

4 - Domains & Disciplines:
The knowledge and abilities of the Character are gathered here (p. 194). The ratings in the Ways as well as various penalties and bonuses (mainly those given by Advantages and Disadvantages) are added to each appropriate skill so as to be directly used during the game.

5 - Fighting Attitudes & Weapons:
This part includes the different fighting styles and the information about the Character's weaponry. The Potential rating is also indicated.

6 - Defense and Armor:
The Character's ability to defend himself is indicated here, as well as his Speed (p. 215).

7 - Equipment:
This part sums up the Character's possessions as well as the mystical energy he has at his disposal, if any (p. 217).

8 - Personality:
This page gathers all the information about the personality, history, and sanity of the Character.

Encourage Interpretation

Usually referred to as "role-play", the interpretation of the Character by his Player is an important part of Shadows of Esteren. The whole system has been designed for such a purpose, in order to give the Players tools to facilitate such an interpretation. However, the system does not exist to make up for a possible lack of the Players' direct involvement in the game. Before asking for any die roll, the Leader should encourage each Player to describe what their Characters feel, and how they intend to solve a problem.

Making Use of the System with Moderation

As long as Players play their Characters with conviction, or show some ingenuity when facing the challenges they encounter, the Leader will be able to do without many die rolls. For example, if a Player describes an effective way to batter down an iron door (by taking his time, by using a clever procedure or appropriate tools, etc.), the Leader will probably not need to have him do a Feats roll, instead considering it a success. The Leader has to estimate the viability of a Player's attempt to solve an issue at hand. If he is not sure or if too many random factors come into play, he can of course ask for a die roll. But it should not be systematic. The same goes for every roll implying psyche and sanity: if a Player portrays on his own initiative a particularly coherent behavior for the scene played, the Leader will not need to ask for a roll to see if his Character falls under the influence of wrath, terror, etc.

How to Use Skill Rolls

On this subject, it will be particularly useful to refer to the works of Matthew J. Finch. This author distinguishes between two styles: "modern" and "traditional". The first one rests more on the Character's abilities and skills (and therefore on the die rolls), the latter on the Player's ingenuity and improvisation (and therefore on his direct involvement in the game). According to the way it is used, the same system can lead to very different atmospheres.

Example: The Perception Domain allows a Character to notice abnormal things, to find her way, to be alert, etc. Let us imagine a scene in which a Character is in a room and leads an investigation concerning a crime.

First Type of Resolution

As the Character enters the room, the Player mentions she takes a careful look. The Leader tells her to make a Perception roll. The Player obtains a very good result, and the Leader tells her she notices a blotch of dry blood, a precious clue…

Second Type of Resolution

As the Character enters the room, the Player mentions she takes a careful look. The Leader asks her to be more accurate. The Player goes on to explain she looks for clues on the walls, upturns the objects on the floor, and checks under the bed. The Leader answers she finds nothing, but that it is dark and that she cannot see very well. The PC lights a torch and keeps searching. The Leader then explains how the Player's Character notices a dark patch on the floor…

A die roll may become superfluous if the Player is able to describe correctly to the Leader how she is going to find that clue. Using skill rolls should not short-circuit the enigmas and obstacles the Leader sets on the Characters' path; the Players should manage to solve them by themselves. It will make them feel more in touch with their Characters, and preserve the mood by putting the system in the background.

A Light System

Even if the game system of Shadows of Esteren covers the fundamental points useful for a role-playing game to go smoothly, it is not meant to be exhaustive. The lightness of the system should lead the Players and the Leader to rely on their ability to imagine and improvise. It will not always be easy, and there will certainly be hesitations, but such spontaneity during the game is at the heart of the role-playing experience as it greatly improves the mood and encourages the Players to involve themselves.

A Toolbox

Beginner Players and Leaders may feel inclined to make use of the game system proposed in this book quite frequently to solve certain situations. There is nothing wrong with that, and it is actually perfectly normal. However, as the Leader becomes more experienced and the Players learn to smoothly role-play their Characters, they will be able to solve many game situations without having to use the system. The Players' ability to imagine solutions for the problems they encounter without systematically relying on their Characters' skills, and the Leader's ability to impartially improvise the consequences of the Players' initiatives will be good bases for thrilling adventures, favoring mood over technique.

Creating a Character

According to what he has planned, the Leader will leave more or less autonomy to the Players in the creation of their PCs. This section presents a few pieces of advice for the Players, particularly novice ones, to make that step easier. If the Leader does not propose a Character he has entirely created, each Player will be allowed to create one inspired from the professions existing in the rules (see the proposed "Professions" pages 203-206), or from the six archetypes proposed on pages 182-193. He can also try to come up with his own character concept.

The only actual distinction in terms of rules between the proposed archetypes–apart from the skills related to their vocation–is that some of them have access to specific powers from their creation. Outside this particular case, to which we will come back, each Player should be free to conceive what he pleases, as long as the Character is relevant in the game's context.



Stereotypes and Singularities

Once a basic idea is set, it may be useful to note that psychologically, each member of a same faction (bards, Varigals, Demorthèn, Magientists…) is very different from her peers, even if they all share a certain ideology or have the same role in the society of Tri-Kazel. They are individuals before all, and this is as true of the PCs as of the other Characters they will meet. Although a stereotype may correspond to reality until a certain point, it remains a stereotype nonetheless. Therefore, it is by no means required to play a skeptical Magientist, a charming bard, a pontificating Demorthèn apprentice, or a fanatical Blade knight, even if at first sight, that is how they seem the most likely to be.

General Features

It is often difficult to immediately draw a detailed portrait of a PC before it has been played. First, each Player should take the time to assimilate correctly what belonging to such or such culture, kingdom, or faction may represent. He should also ensure that his Character's personality and abilities are compatible with the adventures awaiting him, according to what the Leader may tell him on that subject. A bard or a diplomat will not be out of place compared to a brutish, thickheaded warrior in a series of scenarios revolving around delicate negotiations or a long investigation requiring tact. On the contrary, a Varigal, a mercenary, or a Demorthèn will be more appropriate than a secluded scribe or a sedentary Magientist in a series of adventures across the mountains and all the dangers they involve.
To sum it up, creating a Character requires not only focusing on the creation itself, but also taking into account the pleasure and interest one may have in playing that alter ego in the long term. Some Leaders rely above all on improvisation, and only follow a vague common thread, which they adapt according to the actions of the Players. Others already know perfectly well what most of the ordeals they plan to introduce will consist of. If this is the case, then it is all the more important for the Players to make sure during the creation of the PC that he will fit into such a context. In case of doubt, it is better to have a Character who seems mildly convincing at the start, but who will be easy and pleasant to play, rather than a properly detailed and inspiring alter ego that will remain idle most of the time because he does not mesh well with the context and the rest of the Players. The best way to avoid such problems is for the Players and the Leader to discuss it.

Past and Personality

If the Players are used to it, or feel like it, they should not hesitate to accurately describe the past, the attitudes, and the preconceptions of their PCs. The Leader must encourage them to do so, for these developments will be a real help in playing the Characters and giving them depth. However, if the Players are new to role-playing games, or did not have the occasion to correctly assimilate the context of Shadows of Esteren before starting to play, do not worry. It is not a problem if they do not know exactly what the convictions, personality and expectations of their PCs are when they play them for the first time. There is nothing wrong in starting with a fairly simple archetype the Player understands well, in order to get familiar with it. Then, gradually, everyone will give more depth to their Characters. Progressively, the Players and the Leader will come to build a past, prejudices, and hopes for each Character. For example, they can give them a mannerism, a routine, or repulsions and fascinations concerning simple, daily things. In this way, the Character will slowly take shape and become more authentic. During the first game sessions, it is not obligatory to tell the life of one's Character in detail, or to reveal her deep motivations. Each Player may take the time to develop them little by little, and the result is bound to suit her.

The Motivations

During the game, a PC will quickly leave a normal life behind her to start traveling around the world with the other Players' Characters. It is useful to know why she goes on such an adventure. For example, circumstances may have bound her to do so, as in the case of a Character wanting to get revenge against brigands or Feondas that have destroyed her native village. She can also have a thirst for ancient knowledge, or want to become rich and famous as a sellsword. Some types of Characters are naturally more likely than others to lead an adventurous or roving life: Varigals, bards, mercenaries, criminals… but why did they choose such a career instead of another one? Likewise, if a Character is part of an organization, such as the Temple or the order of the Hilderin knights, she is certainly sent by her superiors and is on active service. Each Player may confer with the Leader about what her hierarchy expects from her, and decide to which extent the PC embraces this, or puts up with it because she does not really have a choice. All of these questions need not necessarily be answered in detail from the first game session, but each Player must talk with the Leader to build at least one general leading thread for her Character. According to his style, each Leader may or may not propose the Player a precise explanation of the circumstances that set her on the road, or will lead her to live with the Characters played by the other Players. However, even if such explanations are given, this should not prevent the Player from going deeper into the hopes and expectations of his PC. It will be all the more enjoyable to play her Character if she can modulate her reactions, her opinions, and her initiatives according to her motivations.

Building your Character According to the Ways

The creation system will help each Player in defining the main features of his Character's personality, step by step, mainly by using the system of the Ways. To have a strong Combativeness may signify being aggressive, pugnacious, or impulsive; or even completely devoid of patience. To have a strong Reason implies being a thoughtful person, who can be distant, dreamy, or, on the contrary, cold and cynical. The Ways are not only aptitudes to solve certain types of actions, but also a manner of acting and reacting. Therefore, in an underlying way, they influence the PC's choices and his development. Strong Ways, or weak ones, represent mental attitudes and habits as much as reactions that the Character will find very hard to give up on. By highlighting a Way, either by giving it a high or low rating, one not only influences the PC's abilities, but also his reactions and his attitudes (for example, a Character with a low Reason may be very spontaneous). At the same time, the Ways are not only restrictions or numerical values, but also beacons; tools to keep some coherence in the way a Player will play his Character. In its description, each Way proposes several indications on how to play a high or low rating. Each Player has to choose the ones he will feel the most comfortable with. After all, the value of a rating is only important regarding some dice rolls. What matters is the meaning it is given.

Special Powers and Knowledge

If a Player creates a Character who is not trained from her creation in Magience, in the secrets of the Demorthèn, or initiated into the miracles of the Temple, this does not mean she will never be able to access them.

Of course, this will involve acquiring the appropriate skills during the game, but above all, the Character must also prove she can be entrusted with this knowledge. Magientists, Demorthèn, or adepts of the Temple are rather selective in the way they welcome among them those who have not been raised or educated according to their principles and philosophies. Everyone who looks favorably upon one of these ideologies is not necessarily trained in using the powers they regulate. To access them is to be part of a sort of elite, however that group may be constituted.

In terms of rules, nothing prevents someone from learning one, or even several skills linked to special powers. However, the Leader will decide in the end if the way a Player plays a character is compatible with such possibilities. Mainly, he will decide if particular conditions (long-term spiritual withdrawal, initiatory trials, important financial donations, prolonged studies…) are required in order to obtain such knowledge. The rules for Experience on pages 228-230 detail how it is possible to learn some special knowledge. Therefore, with the Leader's agreement, it is possible that a Character may be initiated into one of these particular schools. However, on the ideological aspect, they differ enough for it to be very unlikely that a single PC manages to acquire several of them. It is true even if the Player claims that her PC "saw the light" and supposedly forsook Magience to become a Demorthèn, for example. Keep in mind it should be a rather exceptional case. However, if a Player manages to play a Character reflecting those conviction changes, and above all, managing to reconcile what sets them apart, the Leader–who must remain the only judge in this matter–may authorize such a reconversion.

Playing a Character

This aside is more particularly dedicated to novice Players, who have never played role-playing games until now. Although it may seem difficult to you, a very simple thing can help you tremendously in quickly feeling comfortable with your Character: talk about him as if you were talking about yourself.

Therefore, when the Leader asks you "what do you do?", the obvious answer will be "I do…" and not "my Character does…". In the same way, when you are talking with other Characters or extras played by the Game Leader, think about talking to the other protagonists as if you were the Character, and not by using terms such as "I tell him that…". Say it yourself, with your words. Do not be afraid, we are in a role-playing game, not in a speaking contest. Yes, some Players have a sense of the dramatic or a vocabulary that gives them an advantage when they express themselves in this way. Do not feel compelled to do as they do. In that regard, they most certainly did not always feel so at ease…

The other Players are not your enemies or your rivals. There is no first or last place in a role-playing game. On the contrary, most of them will be glad to help you play your PC better. Shadows of Esteren depicts a universe without a nitpicky or excessive formalism. It requires no particular historical or linguistic knowledge. If you have never played a role-playing game, it is normal you should feel somewhat apprehensive, even more so if you do not, or barely, know the other people around the table. You may feel as frightened as if you should play a part in a theater scene. However, you have two advantages actors do not have: first, you write your part yourself, and do not have to render imposed dialogues and attitudes. Second, and most importantly, the other Players are your audience, in the same way that you are theirs. Do not hesitate to ask for a quick out-of-game break to think about the way your Character should or could act at a precise moment. Quite quickly, you will become more confident and such a need will fade. At the start, do not get too preoccupied about the interpretation of your Character. Nobody expects an optimal result from you right away. The essential thing is that as the sessions go on, this PC becomes familiar and increasingly easy to handle for you. Until the moment when you will be able to "put on your costume" without any difficulty for the time of the game, then put it back until the next session.

Shadows of Esteren gives a great importance to threats lurking in the shadows, as well as to rivalries between factions and kingdoms. These preoccupations keep all their pertinence in the beliefs and antagonisms of the Characters. Yet, at the same time, they must not stoke rivalries between the Players. Being uncompromising accomplishes nothing in the end. This does not mean that the Characters have to be paragons of tolerance or open-mindedness. The difficulty lies in making them people who can embrace certain beliefs, or reject them fiercely, without necessarily becoming a dead weight for the rest of the participants.

The most illustrative example would be a group including an adept of Magience, a follower of the One God, and an individual attached to Demorthèn traditions. Such a group is made of members who seemingly have every reason to feel some mutual animosity against each other. But is that a fatality? One can easily think that having convictions obviously implies being a fanatic, or a rather boring proselyte. Indeed, the PCs will have many occasions to meet extras of that sort. Therefore, what would be the interest of playing other bigots bathing in their own certitudes? In cinema, literature, or role-playing, this is often the well-used divergences (through irony, friendly rivalries, and many other things) that give the Characters–together and individually–what makes them interesting. One may have convictions and be curious, open-minded… or have doubts. A Character with deep-rooted convictions does not need to systematically be aggressive, scornful, pontificating, or provocative. However, it is possible to play a PC with one of these traits; the Player will therefore have to think about moderating his vehemence, so as not to spoil the gaming experience for her fellow Players.

If a Player takes some ascendance over the other members of the group, because he has more charisma, or because he often has good ideas, he should not forget to let the others breathe as well. They are not here to follow him like extras, even if the Character becomes the leader of his little team. They are here to have a good time, with him. These charismatic Players should encourage the others to get involved, to take sides, to give their opinion, to speak up for themselves. This will make the games much more interesting for everyone, and this type of Character will also achieve greater depth.

Threats and Stakes

The rules system, as well as the game's secrets–which will be detailed in a future book–exist to induce a certain atmosphere, which leaves aside the "epic" aspect present in other universes. It is not possible to become an invincible superman in Shadows of Esteren. Yet, it does not mean that the Characters will have to keep solving only minor issues. On the contrary; there are scales of far-reaching consequences on which they can weigh. However, if this is the case, the Players will owe it much more to their choices and to the interpretation of their Characters than to the characteristics of their PCs or the results of some die rolls.

At the same time, this game does not make the Characters heroes who are constantly blessed with a lucky star. They are not any stronger, luckier, more blessed, or chosen than the multitude of other individuals populating the world around them. If they run straight into a trap or an uneven fight, the result will be predictable, because it is written nowhere that they must absolutely survive. As a consequence, and in the same way, when the Characters accomplish something significant, this will not be because the Leader absolutely wanted them to succeed against all odds, but rather because they have made the right decisions, and limited the risks as much as possible for them.

Fear…

Shadows of Esteren is not devoid of anxiety, danger, or even horror. However, compared to other game universes, the Players will not systematically be confronted during each session with inhuman, cruel monsters. Feondas, as dangerous and frightening as they may be, are not the only axis around which the game revolves. Indeed, political rivalries, ideological divergences, and the erosion of traditional values in favor of sciences and beliefs that carry deep changes, all constitute dramatic motives and contextual elements that the Leader is free to make use of. Human madness, also, has some importance as it can directly concern the PCs, while playing a role in the decisions of some protagonists they will come to meet.

Esteren has nothing idyllic. The problems linked to mere survival, the more or less known horrible threats, and all the misdeeds man can commit, weigh on the daily life and often alter radically the behavior of individuals. Safety, peace, and happiness are not impossible, but simply precarious. And the Characters, through their choices and interventions, will feel this precariousness much more often than the common man.

… and Hope

In the end, Esteren may be a dark universe, but its mood is not irrevocably desperate. On the contrary; hope is one of the game's most important underlying themes. During some games, the physical survival and the sanity of the Characters will be at stake. At other moments, it will be ideological choices, or rather materialistic negotiations that will mobilize their abilities. In conclusion, Shadows of Esteren is a universe designed to have a certain pressure rest on the PCs shoulders, in order to bring tension, anxiety, fear, and expectation, not to depict a setting in which a series of setbacks and ordeals will be inflicted upon the Characters, and of which goal is to annihilate them without hope of more than a respite for them. Therefore, the survival, and above all the success of the Characters, depend on the decisions of the Players, as well as on the way they will manage to persevere.

The Group of Characters in Esteren

This section displays some of the game's central subject matters and gives several leads to round up a group of Characters for Shadows of Esteren.

Starting Point and Perspectives

The newly created PCs will not be epic heroes, but relatively ordinary people. There will be no particular fate expecting them, or any prophecy foretelling their coming. A PC will probably accomplish great things, and may leave a mark on the world. However, her accomplishments will really be hers, because the world expects nothing from her in particular. In that regard, PCs are truly heroes, in the dramatic sense of the word; which means people who make a difference because they act, or who meet a grim fate because they made a mistake. Although so far, their existence was similar to that of the majority of the people populating the world around them, this will not last. In the beginning, the stakes will be rather limited, or even of a personal nature. For example, if the Players create a group native to a mountain village, the first sessions will be linked to local matters and will involve the surrounding influential people, or the PCs' relatives.

Progressively, stakes implicating a vaster scale will make their appearance as the PCs attention will be drawn to some mysteries. By attempting to understand some things, or to weigh on specific events, they will discover disturbing truths and take great risks. Mainly, the horrors lurking in dark forests and other unexpected places will no longer be a vague threat or an exceptional catastrophe for them. They will face them in a more direct and frequent way than the rest of the population who considers life to be already hard enough as it is.
The peninsula of Tri-Kazel goes through problems of various types, some of which conceal some quite shocking or sinister surprises. If they really want to change some things or have an effect on the future, the PCs will have to accept the physical and mental risks this implies. Nothing will ever be granted to them because they are "the heroes of the story". It will be their decisions, and their sacrifices, that will make the difference.

Who are they?

As they may have very varied origins, the main point when aiming to place them together is to know where they begin, and what they are doing here.

A Rural Group

Most of the rural communities live a relatively isolated existence, receiving few travelers if such settlements are not located on a major road. A group of PCs of rural origin therefore has every chance to know each other from childhood. In such a way, you can find, for example:
- the apprentice of the local Demorthèn,
- the son of the main craftsman, who came back from the town after he completed his Magientist studies,
- the daughter of a leading inhabitant, whose family practices the religion of the Temple,
- the offspring of the local lord, who received advanced martial training
- a young Varigal who regularly passes through the village, etc.

In spite of some antagonisms, mainly linked to parental choices and old stories, our PCs will obviously have been with the same Dàmathàir and feel some camaraderie toward each other; some of them may even have become rivals for the affection of a pretty girl. Some of them may have recently returned after being away for several years, maybe because they ended up lacking money for their expensive university studies, or because they learned of a family tragedy. It will be necessary to put down a short description of the community and its eminent members, starting with their families. Then, they may decide together what ties they share, or even invent one or two anecdotes from their childhood. These different tools have been used for the proposed archetypes pages 182-193.

An Urban Group

The essential advantage of a city is that it is a cosmopolitan crossroads, all the more so if it is near a border or known as a major place of cultural and commercial exchanges. That way, each PC can have her own little business here, the use of which will in fact be to make her come over if she does not live there. Therefore, an urban group can include townsmen as well as countrymen. If they do not share a common activity (such as being tutored by the same master), then it is very likely that a NPC gathered them; for example, a patron, looking for employees with various talents, or having reasons to sell their abilities in a precise situation. A Varigal and a Magientist may be useful to a scholar wanting to undertake an archeological expedition, for example. And he may have a young priest as a confessor if he is an adept of the religion of the One God. This kind of configuration makes it possible to put together individuals of different origins, who owe a favor to a NPC giving them an initial objective.

A Group of Travelers

Meeting on the road remains the most obvious way to make the acquaintance of strangers, but it guarantees nothing outside of a few rather limited exchanges, unless they have to face a common problem together, such as finding a path when the only bridge around has crumbled, or confronting brigands with their weapons. Instead of moving alone, most travelers join a caravan, which leads them to be with people they might not have wanted to associate with. Such a group may include a good number of extras, who will help in binding them together.

What must they do?

After the first session or the first adventure, the PCs must have reasons to stay together. Even if it is not always visible, there must be an actual lead, which will help the Players find a reason for their PCs to accept, or even wish for, collaboration. If the first idea of the Leader was to bring them to ancient ruins, they may have found mysterious writings there. Their employer will need their help looking for someone able to decipher them. And one of the PCs may find these writings… familiar?
Likewise, if the Players have fought bandits, maybe they have discovered these were the associates of a more devious scoundrel, who stole some of their possessions while they were fighting his accomplices... unless these criminals seem to serve the neighboring lord, who threatens the PCs native valley? These are very simple, but also very convenient motives for an adventure.

Keeping the Group Together

The society of Tri-Kazel has plenty of antagonistic factions: Magientists, priests of the Temple, and Demorthèn have such different visions of the world that one could wonder how a group made of these different individuals could possibly coexist.

Play with the Contradictions

The Leader can use the choices of the Players to bind the PCs together. For example, the young adept of the Temple is moved by the cute Magientist apprentice and does not clearly know anymore if he is attracted to her or wishes to save her sinful soul. Nothing better than a passing bigot–particularly a misogynistic one–for the young adept to wonder whether his conscience accepts the idea of locking down the poor girl in a convent, or dragging her to the stake… and the young lady, probably full of commiseration for "such a naive fool", will she remain indifferent to the fact that he tried to defend her, in spite of his absurd beliefs? This example is almost a caricature, but allows to set the basis of an amusing relationship, mixing a certain unacknowledged attraction with more or less convincing attempts to persuade the other of adopting one's vision of the world. The Players and the GL should remember that the convictions of a Character do not necessarily define his temper. There are compassionate Magientists, humorous Demorthèn, and tolerant followers of Soustraine. These are even much more interesting to play–including in front of those sharing their beliefs–than fanatical priests, mad scientists, and uneducated hermits.

A Common Threat

It is possible to bind the group through a common threat, related to the PCs' pasts and opening the way toward a long-term plot. For example, the pretty Magientist and a surly Demorthèn are accused of a crime they did not commit. The true culprit might be a former suitor of the Magientist yearning for revenge, or a fanatical Demorthèn who thinks that his colleague is too lenient and deserves a good lesson. Either one might even belong to a rather radical group…

A Flexible Interpretation

Above all, nothing forces a Player to set his PC in a certain way of thinking or acting from the start. His Ways (which determine the main trends of his personality) give orientations, which he can play in several ways, without needing to change them in numerical terms. It is not necessarily useful to define a firm mentality from the start. Caricatures and archetypes are useful for the Player to draw inspiration from them, not to restrict him in playing what his character is before anything else. Likewise, the Ways may have constraining aspects, but they are only guidelines and do not force the Player toward a single type of interpretation; far from it.

From Antagonism to Complementarity

In the end, hatreds, rivalries, and prejudices are obstacles which exist precisely to be overcome. In this way as well, the decisions of the Players can make all the difference, at many different levels. For the game in itself, as well as for the pleasure of the participants, team spirit is something vital. Esteren is a universe that has been created to such an end.



The Archetypes

The following chapter introduces six ready-to-play archetypical characters. They are a few of the many concrete examples of PCs who can be created by Players. These characters were designed in a detailed way, with their personal story, their equipment, and their psychology. They are linked to Dearg's Vale, a region at the north of Taol-Kaer that includes Melwan and Loch Varn's Vales.

The technical characteristics of each archetype include a few particularities in order to make gaming phases smoother:

Skills: The indicated rating for each skill is the addition between the level in the Domain and in the Way. In the case of a Resolution roll, such a rating can be directly added to the result of 1D10 and compared to the Difficulty Threshold set by the Leader. Possible bonuses indicated in brackets are not included in this total, and must be added if the PC can benefit from his Advantage for this Resolution roll.
Combat: The indicated ratings are for a standard Fighting Attitude. To determine the ratings of the other Attitudes, use the Potential rating.
These archetypes can be downloaded on the website www.esteren.org

Sid "the Wolf", Varigal

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 5. Reason: 1. Conviction: 3.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 9. Craft: 4. Erudition: 3. Feats: 7. Natural Environment: 9. Perception: 3. Relation: 7. Shooting and Throwing: 5. Stealth: 7. Travel: 10.
- **Advantages**: Survival Instinct.
- **Disadvantages**: Trauma, Addiction: Tobacco.
- **Setback**: Tragic Love.
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 3.
- **Combat**: Attack: 9 (Carath Damage: 2. Short sword Damage: 2). Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Bow Damage: 2). Defense: 11 (Protection: 3). Speed: 9. Potential: 2.
- **Stamina**: 9.
- **Survival Points**: 4.

Sìd was born in Louarn, in the west of Taol-Kaer, a humid region near the Western Swamps. He was destined to the life of a peasant, like the other members of his family, when an event turned his life upside down. The young woman he was to marry, Anaelle, as well as her whole family, were found dead; brutally murdered. Signs of a struggle were clearly visible at the scene of the crime, and a dagger with a sculpted handle–reminiscent of the head of a bird–was discovered near the corpses. Sìd, yearning for vengeance, took the weapon and swore he would find its owner.

Very quickly, his quest became an obsession, and led him to leave his native village. After he met adepts of the Temple, he converted to their religion, adhering to the faith in the eternity of the soul, which gave him the certainty he would be with Anaelle again one day. His first travels were hard ones, and he almost died many times. Wandering in Taol-Kaer, he questioned sages, searched the dregs of cities, and visited many libraries, obsessed by the enigma that this mysterious bird head represented. Several times he had to resort to violence, either to survive or to achieve a goal.

One day, he was approached by a man who invited him to enter the Varigals' guild, which Sìd accepted. It was the opportunity to continue with his investigations while earning a living, gathering and propagating important news or carrying packages across the peninsula. After several seasons on the road, his hunger for vengeance was not as gnawing, but it remained vivid, ready to resurface as soon as a new clue appeared.

A few weeks ago, Sìd was found near Dearg, more dead than alive. This time, it had been a close call, and he needed to spend a long time in convalescence to get back on his feet. As winter was near, Sìd decided to stay at the village for some time before hitting the road again. He has no memory of his misadventure, even though he feels like it might have something to do with his quest…

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

Personality

Character Traits: Pugnacious, Stubborn.

Latent Disorder: Obsession.

Sìd's greatest quality is also his biggest flaw: he is a combative, determined man who can seem stubborn when his mind is set. However, Sìd is intuitive and sensitive, attentive to the people surrounding him, but only showing his own feelings very rarely. Since the violent death of Anaelle, he has hardened: his quest for vengeance guides his moral principles, and he stops at nothing to reach his goals. However, he has kept some sense of justice, and is reluctant to harm innocents. Along the years, he became a taciturn man who appreciates being alone. Each day, Sìd says a prayer for Anaelle, afraid that her soul would disappear otherwise. He will do everything to accomplish such a ritual, lest he feels anguished, absorbed in metaphysical questions about death and the permanence of the soul.

In Dearg, Sìd quickly found his place, feeling indebted to the community that had saved his life; particularly to Eoghan and his comrades in arms who found him unconscious, not far from the village.

Equipment

Sìd owns many things, most importantly: a rope and a grappling hook, tent canvas, climbing pitons, a blanket, a tinderbox, several torches, a notebook and some ink, chalk, a first-aid kit, maps of Tri-Kazel, small measuring tools, and a leather roll containing lock picks as well as a crowbar. He has 18 azure Daols, a short sword, a Carath (a Varigal's iron-shod staff), a short bow, some arrows, a quiver, and several knives. He also holds the aforementioned dagger with its pommel sculpted like a bird's head, which was found near the body of his betrothed. He wears studded leather armor as well as a shield.



Eoghan, Warrior

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 3. Reason: 1. Conviction: 4.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 10 (Discipline: Axe: 11) (+1 bonus). Craft: 3. Demorthèn Mysteries: 4. Erudition: 2. Feats: 10 (+1 bonus). Natural Environment: 6. Perception: 2. Relation: 6. Shooting and Throwing: 7 (+1 bonus). Travel: 4.
- **Advantages**: Strong.
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 2.
- **Combat**: Attack: 11 (Axe: 12). (Axe Damage: 3. Short sword Damage: 2). Shooting and Throwing: 8 (Bow Damage: 2). Defense: 9 (Protection: 3). Speed: 8. Potential: 2.
- **Stamina**: 10.
- **Survival Points**: 3.

Eoghan is the eldest son of Maorn, the Ansailéir of Dearg. His family descends from the clan who settled in this valley a long time ago. In contrast to the other children who were entrusted to the Dàmàthairs, his father took care of his education himself. He was very harsh, leading his son to develop his warrior instincts by stoking his anger and rage.

Apart from this exhausting martial training, Eoghan made friends with Mael Mac Govrian, one of the last descendants of the noble family ruling the region. The two boys were also rivals, as they were in love with the same girl, Céliane, daughter of Fearìl's Demorthèn. This rivalry drove them to surpass themselves physically, giving Eoghan an ever-renewed energy. It was all about who would be the nimblest and the strongest. But little by little, Céliane showed a preference for Mael, who aimed to become a great warrior while being of a particularly sensitive nature, which he notably expressed through music. As much as she appreciated Eoghan, she feared the violence he carried within himself, coming from the ruthless education Maorn had given him. Eoghan took that development poorly, burning with jealousy and rage. However, the competition between the two boys came to a brutal end when Mael died in a fire near Fearìl.

One might have thought Eoghan would be glad of such a disappearance–for a while, a rumor went round that he was involved in the event–but, although he never talked about his feelings, it affected him deeply and it remains a painful memory for him. Following this tragedy, Céliane and Eoghan grew closer, and eventually promised to wed. Eoghan went on with his father's training before he was sent to a frontier post to fulfill his obligation to his lord. When he came back, he saw that the vale was now under control of the Hilderin knights, sent by the crown of Taol-Kaer to compensate for the absence of noblemen since the disappearance of the Mac Govrians. In Dearg, the name of Eoghan is sometimes mentioned, but he does not pay it much attention: next spring, he is to marry Céliane, and such a prospect fills his thoughts entirely. A few weeks ago, during a routine patrol, Eoghan and his comrades at arms found a badly wounded man on the roadside. It was Sìd the Varigal, whom they brought back to the village to have the Demorthèn tend to his wounds.

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

Personality

Character Traits: Upright, Impulsive.

Latent Disorder: Frenzy.

Eoghan was brought up according to the peninsular traditions; he respectfully listens to the Demorthèn's advice and is wary of the spirits of nature. The education his father gave him left him with an impulsive temper, which sometimes rears up unexpectedly. His emotions are violent and seething, starting with his love for Céliane. They give Eoghan the qualities to become a great warrior, but could also prove to be a fatal flaw. He is aware of that, and has learned to contain himself and obey, releasing his wrath in the heart of action.

This upbringing has also taught him about courage and loyalty. After having seen many horrors during his time as a frontier guard, Eoghan stopped hating his father, as he understood that the aim of his training was to prepare him to survive in a brutal world in which a single moment of weakness could turn deadly.

Equipment

Eoghan is equipped with thick studded leather armor, a battleaxe his father gave him, a short sword, and a large round shield bearing the symbol of the Mac Govrian clan. When he goes on an expedition, he takes with him a leather bag containing a few torches, a rope, a tent, and a blanket. He also takes a short bow, arrows, and several knives. He owns 15 azure Daols as well as a long cloak made from wolf skin he inherited from his grandfather.



Adeliane, Demorthèn

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 1. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 5. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 4. Craft: 5. Demorthèn mysteries: 10 (+1 bonus). Erudition: 6. Natural Environment: 9. Perception: 4. Relation: 7 (+1 bonus). Travel: 9 (+1 bonus).
- **Advantages**: Intuitive.
- **Disadvantages**: Trauma, Aftermath (Stamina -1, Health condition -1).
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 1.
- **Combat**: Attack: 4 (Staff Damage: 2). Defense: 12 (Protection: 0). Speed: 6. Potential: 2.
- **Stamina**: 9.
- **Rindath**: 10.
- **Survival Points**: 3.

Adeliane originates from Melwan's Vale, near Dearg. She is the granddaughter of the local Demorthèn, Wailen, and the older sister of Yldiane the Varigal. Raised by her grandmother, the little girl always felt drawn to the wild nature, fascinated with Demorthèn myths and yearning to be able to feel that communion with the C'maoghs, the natural spirits. Encouraged by Wailen, this fascination led to an unexpected event. One day, when she was only seven, and in spite of the strict forbiddance for children to go outside the village, Adeliane took three of them to the banks of the nearby river to watch the "dancing lights". No one knows what happened then, but one of the children disappeared in the fog, never to return. When she came back to the village, Adeliane was violently blamed, and only the intervention of her grandmother Wailen prevented a new tragedy.
Rejected, feared, sometimes threatened, little Adeliane was not welcomed anymore in Melwan, and she was the center of the tension between the Demorthèn Wailen and the Mac Lyr, the local lordly family. Under such pressure, Wailen was forced to entrust Adeliane to her friend Loeg, Dearg's Demorthèn. He accepted to take her under his protection and make her his second Ionnthén, along with Finn.
Although they were very different, the two pupils became close, as Adeliane found in Finn a kind company, whereas the inhabitants of Dearg were reluctant to make her part of their community. One day, Finn decided to leave everything to go to Reizh and Adeliane ended up alone, suffering a lot from solitude. When she was thirteen, she was struck down by a terrible disease; her master Loeg took her near the river where she had seen will-o'-the-wisps several years earlier, and she was cured. Although this episode left her with aftereffects and poor health, it has also deepened her link with the natural forces. In her adoptive village, Adeliane ended up finding a role for herself, even though it remains marked by mixed feelings of fear and respect. Her two only true friends are the musicians Mirna and Aïnlis.

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

Personality

Character Traits: Sensitive, Absent-minded.
Latent Disorder: Hallucination.
Adeliane has a great sensitivity. She has become a calm, reserved young woman; some might find her shy, but she definitely isn't. She is just a daydreamer, which sometimes makes her seem distant. She is often lost in her thoughts, letting her emotions show. She appreciates meditating and wandering in the middle of nature, as she got used to a previously unpleasant loneliness. She keeps a blurry, painful memory of that infamous escapade on the banks of Melwan's river, feeling guilty for the disappearance of the child. She sometimes thinks of coming back to her native community, but in the end she feels very comfortable with Dearg, her two friends Mirna and Aïnlis, and her mentor, Loeg.

Equipment

Adeliane has few material possessions. Her bag contains various herbs, first-aid tools, some food rations, a knife, as well as 10 azure Daols. She carries around a great staff, which she can use to defend herself. She owns the following Oghamic stones: Calm Water, Tracking, Light, Calyre, and Healing.



Joris, Theologian of the Temple

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 1. Reason: 4. Conviction: 5.
- **Skills**: Close combat: 6. Craft: 3. Erudition: 9 (+1 bonus). Natural Environment: 3. Occultism: 5. Perception: 7. Prayer: 10. Relation: 4. Science: 6. Travel: 5.
- **Advantages**: Well-read.
- **Disadvantages**: Poor Health (opposite of Iron Stamina).
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 10. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 4.
- **Combat**: Attack: 6 (Long sword Damage: 3). Defense: 10 (Protection: 1). Speed: 4. Potential: 2.
- **Stamina**: 10 (-2 penalty on rolls against diseases and poisons).
- **Exaltation**: 15.
- **Survival Points**: 3.

In Dearg, everyone knows the story of Joris. This boy was adopted by Firmin the monk, who lives in a monastery a few miles away from the village.

One night, Firmin was startled awake by the ringing of the bell located at the entrance of the monastery. On the doorstep, he found a fatally wounded man in armor. It was Teorg, Joris's father, a Gwidrite knight of the order of the Blades, who was holding in his arms his son, who was then barely one year old. Miraculously, the father and his child had managed to survive a Feond attack and reach Firmin's monastery. With his last breath, Teorg gave his child to the monk who promised to raise him as his own son.

Years went by, and Firmin educated Joris according to the precepts of the Temple. Being alone most often in the great vaulted rooms of the monastery, the child found company among books.

Fascinated by the engravings and the few stained glass windows depicting the life and death of the prophet, he always had questions on the subject. Rather shy when his father took him to the village, Joris gradually became more self-assured as he grew up. As he was always ready to give a helping hand, the villagers quickly appreciated him. He took a liking to Zaig, the old secondhand goods dealer, as well as to Ronan, her grandson, both of whom have converted to the Temple. Joris also often benefited from the findings of the old woman in books and parchments gathered along the seasons in her shop. At the monastery, he is also regularly visited by young Masha, a musician who intends to become a bard.

For a few months, Joris has been preparing a journey to Gwidre so as to officially join the order of the clerics, and hopes to be accepted among the theologians thereafter.

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

Personality

Character Traits: Thoughtful, Ascetic.
Latent Disorder: Mysticism.

Joris is a studious young man, who may seem shy and reserved.

A pious man, he has been raised according to the teachings of Soustraine and is careful never to wander away from them. The ambiguous feelings he has for young Masha cause him anguish as regards to the Ordinances, since they require of him to be restrained and moderate.

He was very quickly interested in books and enigmas brought by theology. Along the years, this interest only grew stronger, until it became a true passion. Joris can remain buried in books for hours, cut off from the world, reading some passages again and again to grasp their essence. Outside this mystical temper, Joris can be a brave, helpful boy, qualities that have earned him respect from the inhabitants of Dearg. Even if he is reluctant to use violence, his intellectual training did not make him neglect a martial one.

Equipment

Joris wears light leather armor under his adept suit. He is equipped with a long sword that belonged to his father. His bag notably contains a book of prayers gathering the Writings of the prophet Soustraine, a first-aid kit, some food rations, and a bottle of water. He owns 15 azure Daols.



Finn, Magientist

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 1. Reason: 5. Conviction: 2.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 4. Craft: 5. Demorthèn Mysteries: 3. Erudition: 10. Magience: 10 (Discipline: Artifact Use: 11, +1 bonus). Natural Environment: 3. Occultism: 7 (+1 bonus). Perception: 7. Relation: 4. Science: 8 (+1 bonus). Travel: 4.
- **Advantages**: Smart.
- **Disadvantages**: Trauma x2, Insect Phobia.
- **Setback**: Adversary.
- **Sanity**: Mental resistance: 7. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 3.
- **Combat**: Attack: 4 (Dagger Damage: 1). Defense: 11 (Protection: 0). Speed: 4. Potential: 2.
- **Stamina**: 10.
- **Survival Points**: 3.

Finn is an orphan from Dearg. He was adopted by the Demorthèn Loeg, who took him as his pupil. From the age of nine, he shared this status of Ionnthén with young Adeliane from the nearby vale of Melwan. A hard working student, he also had the unfortunate tendency of always doing things his way, eager to skip past many of the steps that would make him a Demorthèn. His life was shattered the day his little sister, Ionna, contracted a disease against which the traditional medicine of Loeg turned out to be powerless. Ionna died, and it was a terrible trauma for Finn who lost all confidence in the techniques and powers the Demorthèn were supposed to hold. He forsook his training and, after he met a passing Varigal who told him of the wonders Magience was able to do, left his country to go study Magience in Reizh. Indeed, Finn had convinced himself that a Magientist would have been able to save his little sister.

After long and difficult years of study in the heart of a great Reizhite city, he managed to obtain a diploma as a Vitalist Magientist, with the goal of working as a doctor. Finn discovered the spirit of competitiveness that animated the order of the Magientists, and learned to be wary. After a few bitter betrayals, he swore never to trust anyone again. And that was not the only difficulty he met: first, he had to learn a new way of thinking, relying on rationality and logic. Moreover, the various experiments he participated in left him with a few traumas and a severe phobia of insects. Finally, his rebellious temper earned him a serious enemy among the professors, and he had to leave the city before things became ugly.

After traveling for a few months, he decided to return to his native country with the desire to have the people of Dearg benefit from his findings.

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

Personality

Character Traits: Ingenious, Rebellious.
Latent Disorder: Paranoia.

Finn is a clever boy, curious about the world surrounding him. A free and very creative mind, his mentors always had much difficulty focusing his energy.

His feelings for Loeg, his adoptive father, are ambivalent: Finn respects him, but he cannot help thinking of him as an old coot who promotes obscurantism. To see Adeliane again did not leave him indifferent, even if he showed nothing of it.

Although Finn may appear cold and haughty at first sight, he did learn Magience for a fundamentally humanistic reason, and his medical vocation is genuine. He sees Magience as the way to improve the daily life of men, and can be generous and zealous in the practice of his trade.

Equipment

Finn owns a suitcase containing several small pincers, vials, healing tools, and chemical substances such as acids and alcohols. His leather satchel contains traveling commodities, food and water supplies, two books about Magience, as well as 20 azure Daols. Finn owns Vision Glasses (an artifact, see p.268), five standard cartridges of organic Flux, and two doses of Tonic. He has several daggers as weapons.



Masha, Bard

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 5. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2. Conviction: 1.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5. Craft: 7. Erudition: 3. Natural Environment: 7. Perception: 4. Performance: 10 (+1 bonus). Relation: 9 (+1 bonus). Shooting and Throwing: 4. Stealth: 6. Travel: 6.
- **Advantages**: Beautiful.
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 6. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 5.
- **Combat**: Attack: 5 (Short sword Damage: 2. Dagger Damage: 1). Defense: 11 (Protection: 1). Speed: 7. Potential: 3.
- **Stamina**: 10.
- **Survival Points**: 3.

Masha and her twin sister Mirna are of Tarish blood on their father's side, and their mother is from Dearg. The two young women never knew their father, for he only remained at the village for a few months, when his clan, entrapped by a hard winter, had to take refuge there. The Tarish man had a passionate affair with an inhabitant of Dearg, but left the following spring, leaving her pregnant with twins.

Soon, the people of Dearg began to suspect the origin of the girls, and the Demorthèn Loeg had to intervene to protect the children and their mother, who risked being the victims of popular condemnation. Even if the mother had been a widow for a long time, she was harshly blamed for having fooled around with a Tarish man instead of wedding a man of the region.

When they were about five, Masha and Mirna each received from their mother a musical instrument that had allegedly belonged to their father. The two sisters developed a passion for music and showed a commendable talent for the art, although each in a different style. Masha learned to play the lute in a rather calm, wistful way. Although her twin sister managed to slowly be accepted by actively participating in the life of the village, it proved harder for Masha. A pensive, sometimes troubled girl, her only source of appeasement was music and she only took part in the communal tasks reluctantly. Now seventeen years old, she has become a pretty young woman of mixed blood, wooed by vale boys she has only little interest in. The only one earning her attention is Joris, the young adept of the Temple, living in the monastery not far from Dearg. Masha appreciates the young man for his discretion, and finds his presence soothing. Deep down, Masha's dream is to leave to explore the world, and she has set her mind to being part of the prestigious circle of Tri-Kazel's bards one day.

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

Personality

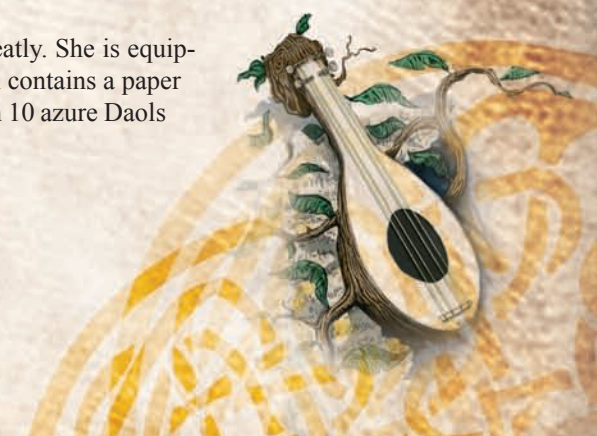
Character Traits: Poetic, Doubting.
Latent Disorder: Melancholy.

Masha is a daydreaming young woman, very different from her lively, eccentric sister. Having a true artistic sensibility, Masha spends a lot of time playing her lute, sometimes singing along with her crystalline, melancholic voice. Outside of her contemplative side, she is a capable, inventive young woman.

Although she appreciates the company of Joris, whom she finds different from the vale's other boys, she does not feel attracted to his religion, no more than she is to the cult of the spirits of nature. Actually, Masha finds it difficult to believe in anything, and does not manage to give a meaning to her life. She wonders a lot about her Tarish origins, and would like to know more about them, hoping that her travels will put her on her father's tracks. Her twin sister does not understand why she is so set on learning more about a culture that has nothing in common with their life in Dearg, and has exhorted her to change her mind more than once, but always in vain.

Equipment

Masha possesses a Tarish lute with a peculiar sound, which she treasures greatly. She is equipped with light leather armor, a short sword, and two daggers. Of note, her satchel contains a paper notebook and some ink, a small mirror, a few music sheets, and a small purse with 10 azure Daols inside.





Skills

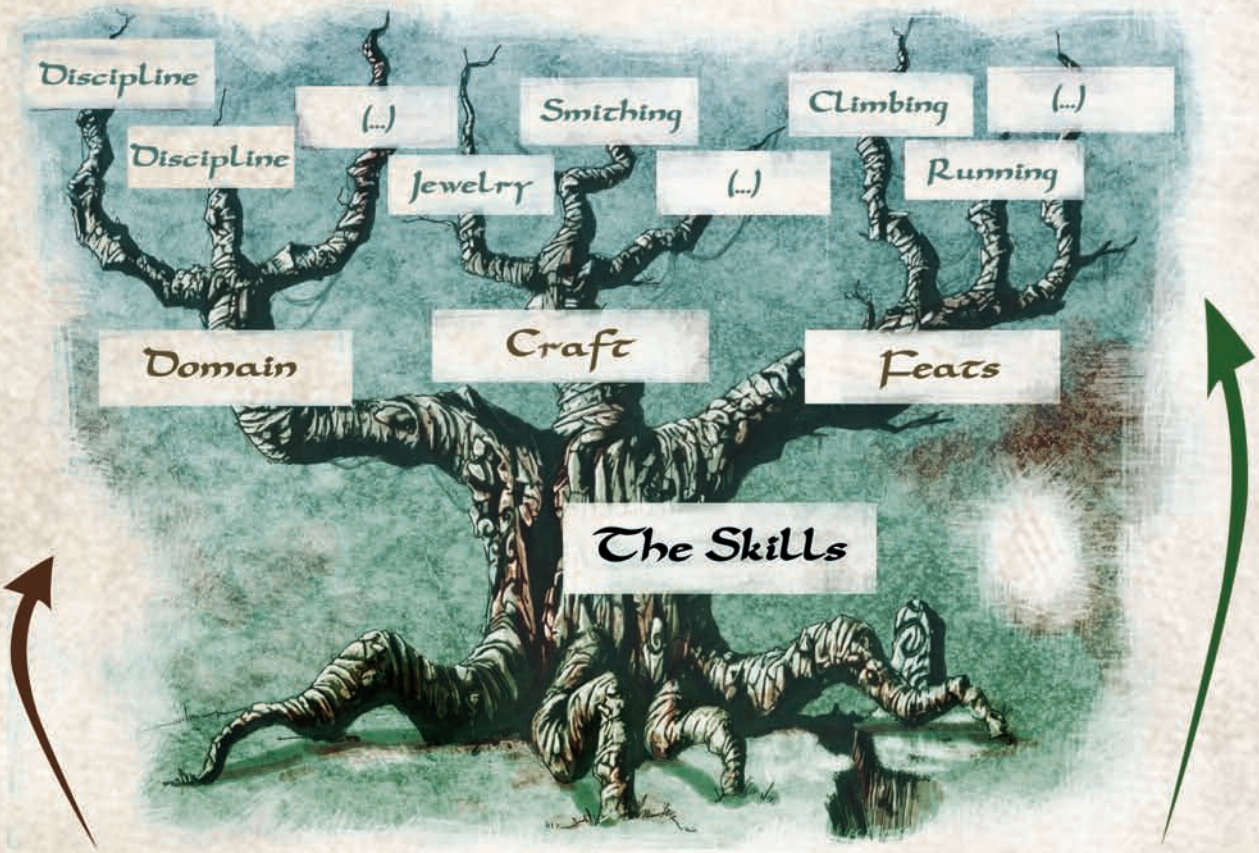
Skills represent everything the Character is able to do; what he has learned as a professional or by following his passions.
Since the creation of a Character involves this Skill system, it is necessary to explain their exact function. Therefore, the distinction must be made between what comes from the Character's training and experience (Skills) and his potential related to his personality (the Ways), which will be explained later, in the "Character Creation" chapter.

Generalities

The Skill system of Shadows of Esteren has a tree-like structure: the general trunk is divided into sixteen generalized Domains, gathering a large range of knowledge and abilities. These Domains then branch out into several Disciplines; specializations in a narrower field of a Domain. Therefore, the word "Skill" indicates a Domain divided into several Disciplines.

One's level in a Domain can reach a maximum of 5 (corresponding to the five boxes under each Domain of the Character Sheet). When this level is reached, the Character can keep improving, but he will have to acquire one or several specific Disciplines, pertaining to the adequate Domain and representing a specialization in it. A Discipline is rated from 6 to 15. There is no limit to the number of Disciplines a Character may learn, but he cannot go over 15 in a given Discipline.

Finally, each Domain is linked by default to a Way. For example, Craft is linked to Creativity while Close Combat is linked to Combativeness. The Ways are characteristics and traits that are detailed in the "Character Creation" chapter.



The 16 Domains
These form the trunk of a Character's Skills "tree". The maximum level in a Domain is 5. To go further, specializing is required.

The Disciplines
These are the extensions of a Domain and represent a specialization in a particular technique or knowledge linked to that Domain. They are rated from 6 to 15.

Disciplines on the Character Sheet



Each specialization in a Domain gives access to a Discipline that will have to be written down on the Character Sheet at the corresponding location. Each Discipline from the same Domain evolves independently from the others.

Jarl has a level of 5 in the Craft Domain. He has good general knowledge in this Domain, but would like to advance further. Thus, he must specialize, and chooses the Smithing Discipline in which he will have a level of 6. Next to the name of his Discipline, the Player indicates his level in it. During the game, he will just have to add his Way rating and apply any possible bonuses and penalties to know the rating he will use for a Resolution roll. Jarl has the ability to work as a smith, and knows the basic techniques well enough to forge weapons, tools, and armors.
In the Craft Domain, he still has a rating of 5, which he will use for every relevant action outside of smithing. If he wants to train in another Discipline, Jarl will have to take another specialty.

What a Skill Rating Means

A level of 0 in a Domain means that the Character knows nothing about this field of knowledge. With a level between 1 and 5, he has some notions, and is able to make use of them; to combine them in order to deal with a situation relating to this Domain. A level in a Domain applies for every action pertaining to this field of knowledge. For example, a Character with 4 in Science, who is therefore fairly skilled in that Domain, can make use of this level for every type of question relating to Science, be it about medicine or mechanics. Likewise, a Character with a level of 3 in Close Combat will benefit from his training and techniques with every weapon, including swords, axes, polearms, his bare hands, etc. If the Character has 5 in Close Combat and 7 in the Swords Discipline, he will make use of his level of 5 in every fighting situation, except when he uses a sword (in which case he will make use of his level of 7).

Here are the corresponding points between the levels of the Skills and what they mean (these tiers have no impact on the game, they are just here as an indication):
- 0: no knowledge in this Domain
- 1 to 2: novice; the Character has a smattering of the subject
- 3 to 5: a respectable knowledge, but not a very accurate one

Later on, the Character may have the opportunity to access a Discipline, which corresponds to a specialty in this Domain. Here is what Discipline levels mean:
- 6 to 9: Professional
- 10 to 12: Expert
- 13 to 14: Master
- 15: Legend

From level 10 in a Discipline, the Character becomes an Expert. If he has managed to make himself known regarding his Discipline, he may be offered work, or responsibilities, as the GL sees fit. Regarding other adepts of the same Discipline, the Character is generally famed for his trade, which can earn him various favors… or arouse some jealousy. Of course, this does not apply if the Character has cautiously hidden his expertise or if he has been living as a recluse for years. If he keeps improving, the Character will become a Master, then, finally, will be considered a Legend when he reaches level 15.

List of the Domains and Disciplines

In the following list, the sixteen Skill Domains are followed with the name of the Way they are related to by default. The purpose of the proposed Disciplines is to sum up all of the activities useful for the game, and they have therefore been intended to be exhaustive, but GLs and Players are free to add others, especially in Craft and Performance.
Some Disciplines do not require particular details; however, for others, explanations will be included to help the GL and the Players understand them. Finally, some Domains give access to particular abilities, the descriptions of which will follow.

Accessibility to Some Disciplines

Some Disciplines are only accessible if one has had the opportunity to discover their existence; such is the case for those from Domains requiring studies (Demorthèn Mysteries, Erudition, Magience, Occultism, Performance, Prayer, and Science). It means that the GL can ask for a justification regarding the Character's background before allowing him to have such a Discipline at creation. He may inform the Players about the possibility of acquiring it later. For that matter, the GL will check that the PC remains entirely consistent during his creation. For example, a villager from a remote valley has seemingly no reason to have access to the Magience Domain and even less so for the Disciplines that come under it. Later, the direct experiences of the PCs or people they will meet will give them access–again, as the GL sees fit–to possibilities that had been forbidden to them at the start.

Disciplines Common to Several Domains

Some Disciplines are accessible through several Domains. For example, the Natural Environment, Travel, and Perception Domains all allow a specialization in Orientation. There also are very close Disciplines bearing different names according to the Domain they originate from, but which allow the same type of actions. For example, Knowledge of Mental Troubles in Science and Mental Phenomena in Occultism both represent the Character's ability to diagnose psychical disorders, but the approach used by a scientist or an occultist will be different. Therefore, there is no distinction in terms of rules if one Discipline or the other is used; they just have a different flair.

Close combat
(Combativeness)

This Domain includes all melee fighting techniques.
- Being proficient in a Discipline applies to every weapon it includes. For example, the Bludgeoning Weapons Discipline allows fighting with a staff, a hammer, a flail, etc.
- From a level of 10 in a Discipline (Expert), the Character must choose a single weapon he excels at. It is possible to be an expert in several weapons of a same Discipline by spending the necessary experience points.
- Having a rating of 5 in Close Combat allows access to Fighting Arts (p.238).
- To access the Artifact Fighting Discipline, it is necessary to have at least 1 level in Magience. This Discipline allows training in an artifact that can be used in combat (See "Artifacts and Associated Disciplines", p.265)

Disciplines: Artifact Fighting (Magience), Axes, Blind Fighting, Bludgeoning Weapons, Polearms, Short Blades, Swords, Unarmed Fighting (includes grappling and using gauntlets).

Craft
(Creativity)

The Craft Domain consists of the application of traditional techniques and know-how of manual work. It also includes the various plastic arts.
- The Magientist Tool Discipline allows using an artifact, a device, or a tool powered by Flux. The Magientist Machinery Discipline is related to the largest types of artifacts. In both cases, to be able to access these Disciplines linked to Magience, the user must also have a minimum level of 1 in the Magience Domain (See "Artifacts and Associated Disciplines", p.265).

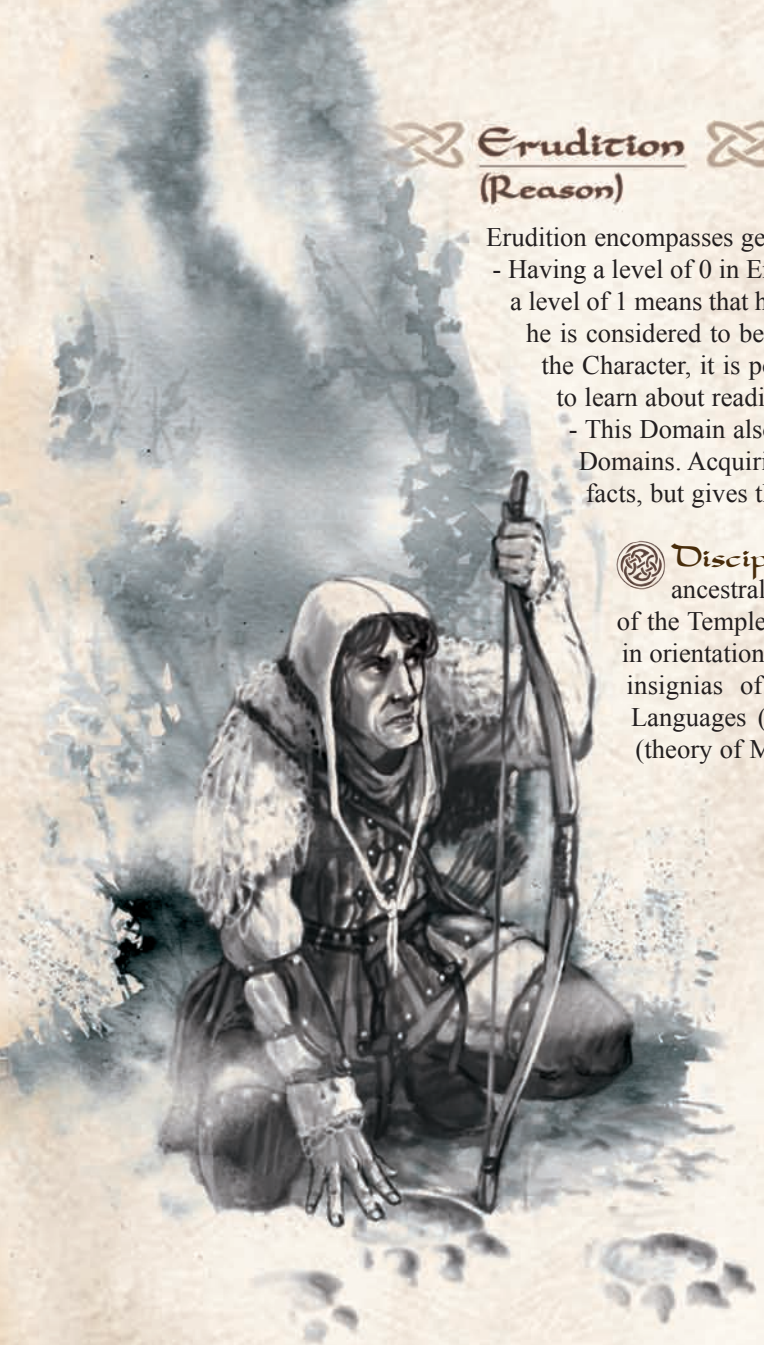
Disciplines: Clothing (sewing, weaving, etc.), Cooking, Distillation, Jewelry, Leatherworking, Locksmithing (includes picking locks), Magientist Machinery (Magience), Magientist Tool (Magience), Mining (exploiting ore deposits), Painting, Pottery, Sculpting, Smithing, Woodworking.

Demorthèn mysteries
(Empathy)

Outside the Demorthèn, only the Ionnthén (their apprentices) or long-standing allies can have access to this Domain. It notably gives access to the techniques and knowledge making it possible to use the Sigil Rann, one of the ancestral Demorthèn Arts (p.245).

Disciplines: Ancient Tongue, Concentration (makes it possible to perform or maintain an ancestral Art in spite of exterior disturbances), Demorthèn Knowledge (knowledge of ancestral ceremonies, Demorthèn gatherings, founding myths, and places of power), Herbalism, Meditation (recovering Rindath (see p.251)), Sigil Rann, Spirituality (this Discipline can help someone suffering from psychical disorders (p.279)), Traditional Medicine.





Erudition
(Reason)

Erudition encompasses general knowledge.

- Having a level of 0 in Erudition means that a Character is completely illiterate. Generally, a level of 1 means that he can only barely make out a few words until a level of 5 at which he is considered to be able to read and write fluently. Depending on the upbringing of the Character, it is possible that he may be very knowledgeable, but has never gotten to learn about reading and writing.
- This Domain also includes every type of knowledge that is not dealt with in other Domains. Acquiring the Magientist Principles Discipline does not allow using artifacts, but gives theoretical information about this science.

Disciplines: Astronomy, Demorthèn Traditions (knowledge of the ancestral Demorthèn rites and beliefs), 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 (knowledge of emblems and insignias of military, familial, or political nature), Herbalism, History, Languages (including the ancient peninsular tongue), Magientist Principles (theory of Magience, Magientist conceptions and ideas), Politics.

Feats
(Combativeness)

This Domain makes it possible to go beyond one's physical limits; to perform exceptional physical actions. A Character with a rating of 2 in Feats is considered to be able to swim after a fashion.

Disciplines: Acrobatics (includes jumping and keeping balance), Climbing, Endurance, Evasion, Running, Swimming.

Magience
(Reason)

This Domain sums up the knowledge and know-how linked to this Continental science. Normally, one must have studied in a Magientist university to access the Disciplines of this Domain. Some Disciplines are linked to obtaining a diploma that allows the Character to exercise a profession. In any case, obtaining a level in the Magience Domain must be justified (mentor, studies, important scholarly resources, etc.) For example, workers in Magientist laboratories and some craftsmen exploring new horizons can acquire levels in this Domain. More information is given on this Domain and its Disciplines on pages 265-266.

Disciplines: Artifact Repair (p.266), Artifact Use (this Discipline applies to every artifact: weapon, tool, etc.; see p.265), Flux Extraction (p.262), Flux Knowledge (knowing where to find Flux, the different types of Flux and their properties), Flux Refining (p.264), Medicine

Natural Environment
(Empathy)

This Domain measures the Character's aptitude to survive in the wilderness, as well as his knowledge of the rural environment. A Character competent in this Domain will notably have notions of agriculture, animal knowledge, camping, etc.

Disciplines: Agriculture, Animal Training, Fauna and Flora, First Aid, Herbalism, Orientation, Survival (includes hunting techniques, such as using natural traps), Tracking.



Occultism
(Reason)

Occultism is a Continental discipline little known in Tri-Kazel; very marginal in Reizh, and practically nonexistent elsewhere.
- This Domain gathers a whole body of sometimes eccentric beliefs and theories about magic and phantasmagorical creatures. It also deals with the study of sanity, as well as the treatment of such disorders via hypnosis. The GL should only authorize a PC to take levels in this Domain if it is justified in his story: study of the discipline in a university, mentor specialized in this domain, etc.
- If the PC has no level in Occultism, he may not use it during the game. To access the Disciplines linked to Magience in Occultism, it is also necessary to have one level in the Magience Domain.

Disciplines: Artifact Fighting (Magience), Esotericism (knowledge of esoteric writings and spiritualism techniques), Hypnosis, Interpreting Dreams, Magientist Tool (Magience), Mental Phenomena.

Perception
(Reason)

This Domain gathers skills linked to observing, noticing details, and staying alert.

Disciplines: Acute Senses (its main use is to reduce penalties when blinded), Alertness, Evaluation (estimate the value of an item, but also check the state of a building, etc.), Lip Reading, Observation (to notice abnormal things, lead an efficient search), Orientation.

Performance
(Creativity)

The practice and knowledge of stage arts. This Domain also contains everything related to different types of games and to entertainment. Performance is the Domain of predilection for bards.

Disciplines: Acting (includes disguising), Dancing, Games, Juggling, Musical Instrument (specify which), Singing, Ventriloquism, etc.

Prayer
(Conviction)

This skill gathers the knowledge and rites of the religion of the Temple.
- Only the religious members of one of the six orders can access the Disciplines and only they are initiated to the Miracles of the One God as well (p.256).

Disciplines: Concentration (makes it possible to perform a Miracle even when subjected to disturbances), Contemplation (recovering Exaltation; see p.258), Knowledge of the Temple, Miracles, Spirituality (this Discipline can help someone suffering from psychic troubles (p.279)).

Relation
(Empathy)

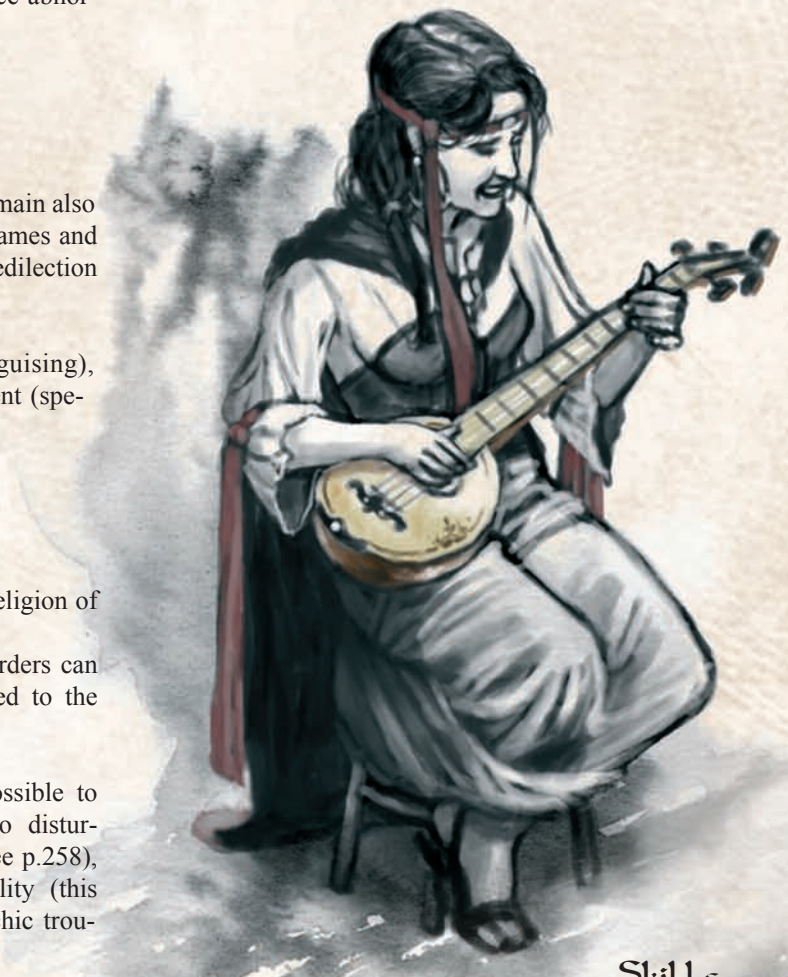
This Domain includes rhetorical techniques and knowledge. It also deals with manners related to life in society and education.

Disciplines: Charm, Command, Diplomacy, Etiquette (specify social environment), Intimidation, Faction Knowledge (specify faction), Persuasion, Sweet Talk.

Science
(Reason)

This Domain gathers elaborate knowledge and processes, most of them traditional ones.
- Knowledge of Magience is a particular Domain and is not part of this one. Thus, a Character having a good rating in Science but 0 in Magience will know nothing about Magientist principles and will not be able to learn the following Disciplines: Artifact Fighting, Artifact Repair, Magientist Machinery, and Magientist Tool. See the section "Artifacts and Associated Disciplines", p.265.

Disciplines: Architecture, Artifact Fighting (Magience), Artifact Repair (Magience), Botany, Engineering (study and supervision of large-scale constructions, bridges, but also siege engines), Geology, Knowledge of Mental Troubles, Magientist Machinery (Magience), Magientist Tool (Magience), Mechanics (repairing and creating articulated things, mechanical traps), Medicine, Mind Treatment (this Discipline can help someone suffering from psychical troubles (p.279)), Zoology.



Shooting and Throwing
(Combativeness)

A skill for ranged combat, but also for throwing a grappling hook, for example.
- It is required to have a level of 1 in Magience to learn Artifact Fighting.

Disciplines: Artifact Fighting (Magience), Bows, Crossbows, Throwing Weapons.

Stealth
(Empathy)

The Domain of furtiveness and obfuscation, to avoid being spotted and stay hidden. Most of the Disciplines derived from this Domain are only usable by Characters wearing no armor, or wearing light armor (made of light or woven leather).

Disciplines: Furtiveness (moving silently and shadowing), Hiding (concealing a shelter, an object on oneself or in something, laying low), Mimicry (includes disguising and copying gestures), Pickpocket.

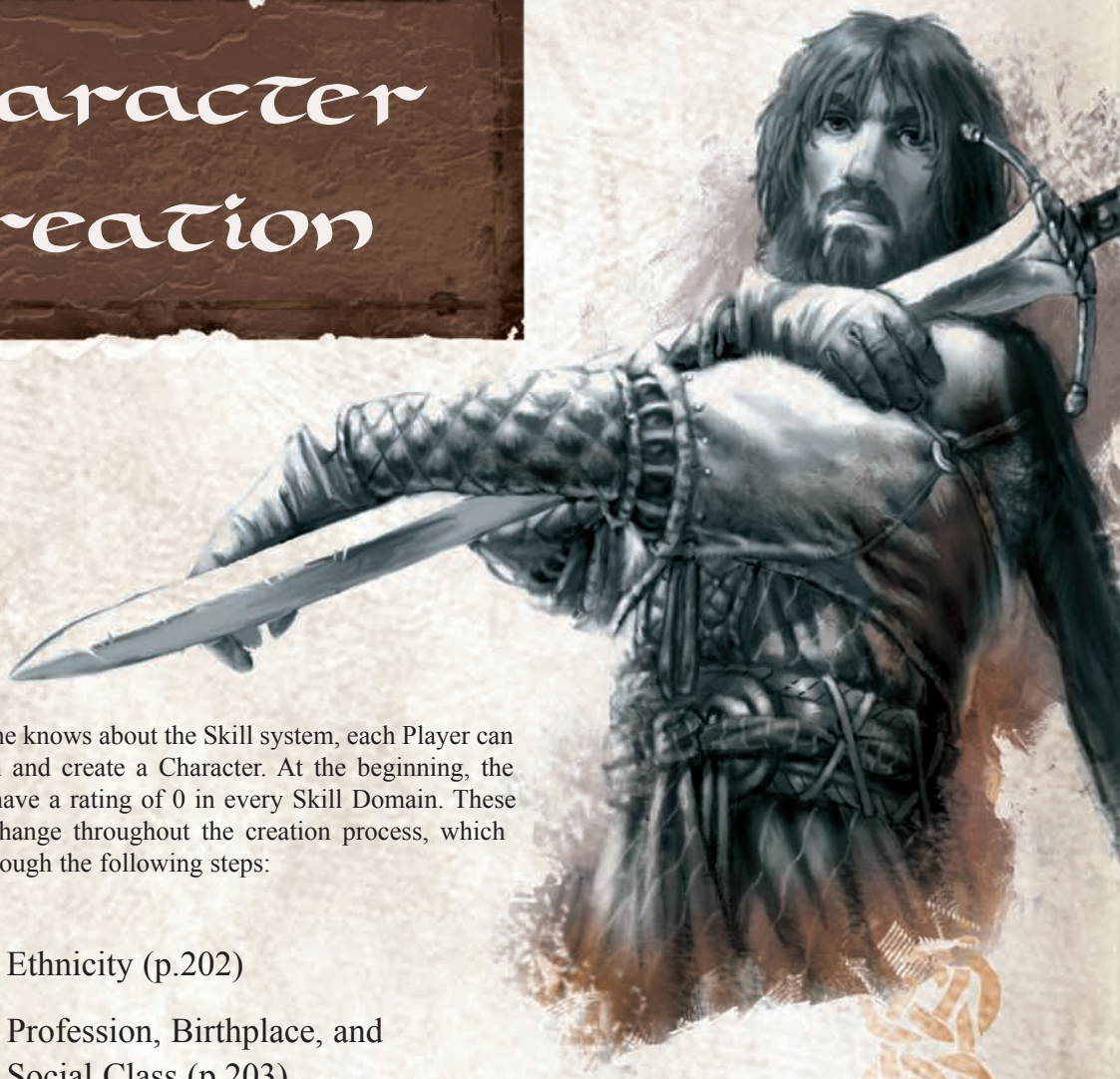
Travel
(Empathy)

A Domain gathering the various types of knowledge and techniques useful for traveling and living in the open. Some Disciplines are exclusive to the Varigals or to those who have had the privilege to learn about their trade.

Disciplines: Carriages, Cartography, Navigation, Orientation, Riding, Side Roads (a Discipline exclusive to the Varigals, used to find shortcuts), Signs (a Discipline exclusive to the Varigals, used to notice and understand signs left in nature by their peers: a mark announcing a danger, the presence of Feondas, a nearby waterhole, etc.)



Character Creation



Once he knows about the Skill system, each Player can go on and create a Character. At the beginning, the PCs have a rating of 0 in every Skill Domain. These ratings will change throughout the creation process, which progresses through the following steps:

1. Ethnicity (p.202)
2. Profession, Birthplace, and Social Class (p.203)
3. The Ways (p.207)
4. Age, Setbacks, and History (p.208)
5. Character Traits, Sanity, and Personality (p.210)
6. Experience Points, Advantages, and Disadvantages (p.212)
7. Potential, Defense, Speed, and Stamina (p.215)
8. Fighting Attitudes and Attack Rating (p.216)
9. Survival Points, Rindath, and Exaltation (p.217)
10. Description and Equipment (p.218)

These ten steps are detailed in this chapter. It is possible for a Player to go through the creation of his PC by himself, but it may be more interesting to discuss it with the Leader and the other Players, so as to have good skill coverage in the group or justify the collaboration of the Characters.

Optional Rule:
Alternative Creation Order

The Leader can change the creation order by having the Players distribute their ratings in Ways, pick their Traits, and determine the backgrounds of their Characters (steps 3, 4, 5, and 6) before they choose their ethnicities, professions, and birthplaces (step 1 and 2). That way, the Players will first get to determine a general concept for their Characters, by beginning with designing their personalities and then choosing their professions.

Optional Rule:
Preliminary Step: Common Motivations

The aim of this optional rule is to have the game go more smoothly and optimize the pleasure of playing together by consolidating the team spirit binding the PCs.
The Players will create a group of PCs who will get to live many adventures together. It is perfectly possible to imagine a group including a Magientist, a Demorthèn, and a priest of the Temple, but the Players and/or the Leader will have to imagine together the reason for such an unlikely alliance.
This optional rule introduces a preliminary step to the Character Creation that will require the Players to define a common goal or binding origin for their PCs in order to facilitate the cohesion of the group. It can be: live a life of adventure and leave a stagnating rural community, be part of the same family or be childhood friends, be the pupils of the same mentor or the subjects of the same lord, giving them a long-term quest to achieve, a common enemy who has done wrong to the native community or the family of the PCs, etc. The Players can take the "Group of Characters in Esteren" text as a support to define this common goal.
With a little imagination, there should be no impossible combination of PCs. Each Player should be free to play the Character he wishes, even if the Leader can set some restrictions for the sake of the game, such as the starting place of the adventure.



Step 1
Ethnicity

First, the people the PC originates from must be chosen. Each PC speaks Tri-Kazelian (the common language of the peninsula) and a second language typical of his native people (which may just be a regional dialect).

What does my Character Look Like?

At creation, the PC has average physical and mental abilities that earn him no particular bonus or penalty. He is considered to be average in build, charisma, intelligence, etc. At step 6, it will be possible to make decisions about those characteristics by choosing among the Advantages and Disadvantages proposed later in the creation: the PC can then become Strong, Agile, or even Short-sighted. Finally, the physical description of the PC will be dealt with in step 9.

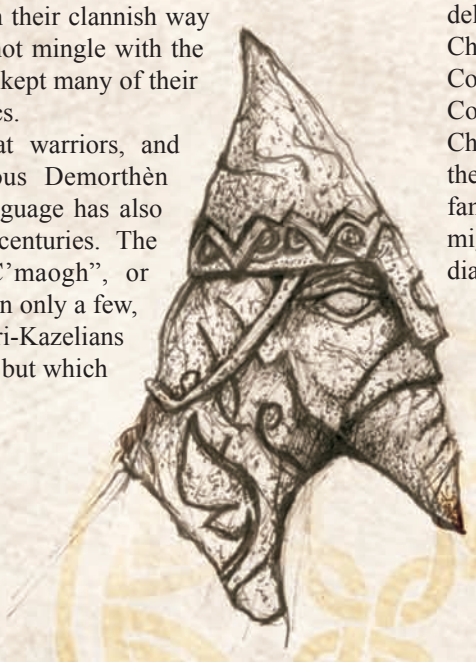
People of Tri-Kazel

Tri-Kazelians constitute a very large majority of the peninsula's population. Most of them still have a robust physique inherited from the Osags, but they may also have features from other peoples. Tri-Kazelians descend from centuries of mixing between all the cultures that have set foot on the peninsula one day or another. With such an origin, the PC knows a local dialect; what country and region he originates from must therefore be defined (see the map p.22).

Osag People

Used to relying only on each other, the Osags are a hardened people, with a generally strong build. They are the direct descendants of the peninsula's traditional clans. The peninsular civilization has evolved a lot since the foundation of the Three Kingdoms, but some clans remained faithful to the ancestral traditions and did not take part in these changes. Retired within their clannish way of life, the Osags did not mingle with the other peoples and have kept many of their ancestors' characteristics.

The Osags make great warriors, and count the most famous Demorthèn among them. Their language has also survived the passing centuries. The words "Feondas", "C'maogh", or "Dàmàthair", to mention only a few, all come from what Tri-Kazelians call the ancient tongue, but which is still used by Osags.



Tarish People

Of unknown origin, the Tarish people form a nomadic minority that has been traveling around the lands of the peninsula for decades. They are also called "people from the west", for they came over by crossing the Furious Ocean, according to legend. Tarishes can be differentiated from Tri-Kazelians by their high cheekbones, their rather aquiline nose, and their often pale eyes. Many of them become entertainers, mystics, or craftsmen.

The Tarish culture, although diluted today, still rests on an important base: they are a nomadic people used to long journeys and their language did not disappear, although no stranger has ever learned it.

People of the Continent

Men and women from the Continent are often slimmer and slenderer than natives from Tri-Kazel. Most often, they have delicate faces, but with sometimes very sharp features. A Character choosing this people will not be a native from the Continent, but rather the direct descendant of at least one Continental parent. If the Continental origins of the Character reach further away, he is considered to belong to the people of Tri-Kazel. According to the past of the PC's family, and how it fitted in the Tri-Kazelian society, he might have learned their language of Continental origin or a dialect of the peninsula, as the PC wishes.

All through this chapter, we will be following Mark as he creates his Character. He decides to name him Johan and he will be a Tri-Kazelian, originating from Taol-Kaer.

Step 2
Profession, Birthplace, and Social Class

After the Character's native people has been chosen, he must be attributed a profession. It can be his main activity or the domain in which he has been essentially trained during his youth (of his own free will or forcibly, as the Player wishes). Whatever his profession may be, the PC starts with the social status of an apprentice, or a novice.
The Leader has to decide, with the Players' agreement, whether the PCs have already obtained their statuses or are still apprentices: a squire dreaming of becoming a knight, a young Ionnthén destined to become a Demorthèn, an Inceptus finishing his Magience studies, or a young adept of the One God on the way to his Acceptance.
PCs may start with the status of Demorthèn, knight, or Scientör for Magientists. In such cases, they will be novices. Therefore, a Demorthèn PC will just be granted his status and his first powers; a knight will not be the leader of a fortress, but rather a fighter defending it, etc.

Choosing a profession directly gives a level of 5 in a skill Domain (Primary Domain) and of 3 in another (Secondary Domain). The Player will tick the corresponding number of boxes for each corresponding Domain on the Character Sheet. Throughout the creation process, the level in some Domains can increase beyond 5, making it possible to learn Disciplines, but these will have to be allotted to the Primary and Secondary Domains defined by the chosen Profession.

Optional Rule:
New Professions and Crossed Professions

Players will find a list of professions below, but it is in no way exhaustive. The Leader and a Player may of course agree on the creation of a new profession. In this case, the Primary and Secondary Domains for this occupation will have to be defined.
It is also possible for a PC to have a "double formation". This must be justified by his past. If the Leader accepts it, the PC may choose his Primary Domain among one of the professions, and his Secondary Domain in another. Whatever his choice, the levels at creation in these two Domains will be 5 and 3.

Firin is a Scholar; his Primary Domain is Erudition, in which he will therefore have a level of 5. His Player would like the Secondary Domain to be Close Combat (the Fighter's Primary Domain). Such an uncommon specialty for a destined intellectual would be explained by two years of military campaign at Gwidre's border. The Leader accepts, and Firin obtains a level of 3 in this Secondary Domain.

Bard:
The status of bard is highly honorific, and the most powerful monarchs surround themselves with these artists who truly act as powers behind the throne. Artist, acrobat, musician, jester; the bard can play different parts. She can also be known under other names, such as the blind Filidhi poets or the strange Céilli of the Tri-Sweszörs archipelago.
Primary Domain: Performance
Secondary Domain: Relation or Travel

Craftsman:
Whatever his domain may be, the craftsman is a qualified manual worker. Smith, cook, architect, cobbler, woodcutter, sculptor, jeweler; a craftsman can cover many specialties. In cities where Magience has settled, artifact repairmen can be found, as well as specialized workers employed in factories.
Primary Domain: Craft
Secondary Domain: Relation or Science

Demorthèn:
The representative of nature, she can make contact with the spirits and ask them to perform particular tasks. She is the keeper of the ancient peninsular traditions and is often regarded with respect. Apprentice Demorthèn are called Ionnthén.
Primary Domain: Demorthèn Mysteries
Secondary Domain: Erudition or Natural Environment


Knight

Explorer:
An adventurer and a thrill-seeker, an explorer is fascinated with traveling, often to flee the poverty or the monotony of his birthplace.
Primary Domain: Feats
Secondary Domain: Natural Environment or Travel

Fighter:
She can be a soldier or a mercenary, a champion of justice, a tavern brawler or a thug lurking in dark alleys, etc. Archers can take Shooting and Throwing as a Primary Domain.
Primary Domain: Close Combat
Secondary Domain: Shooting and Throwing or Feats

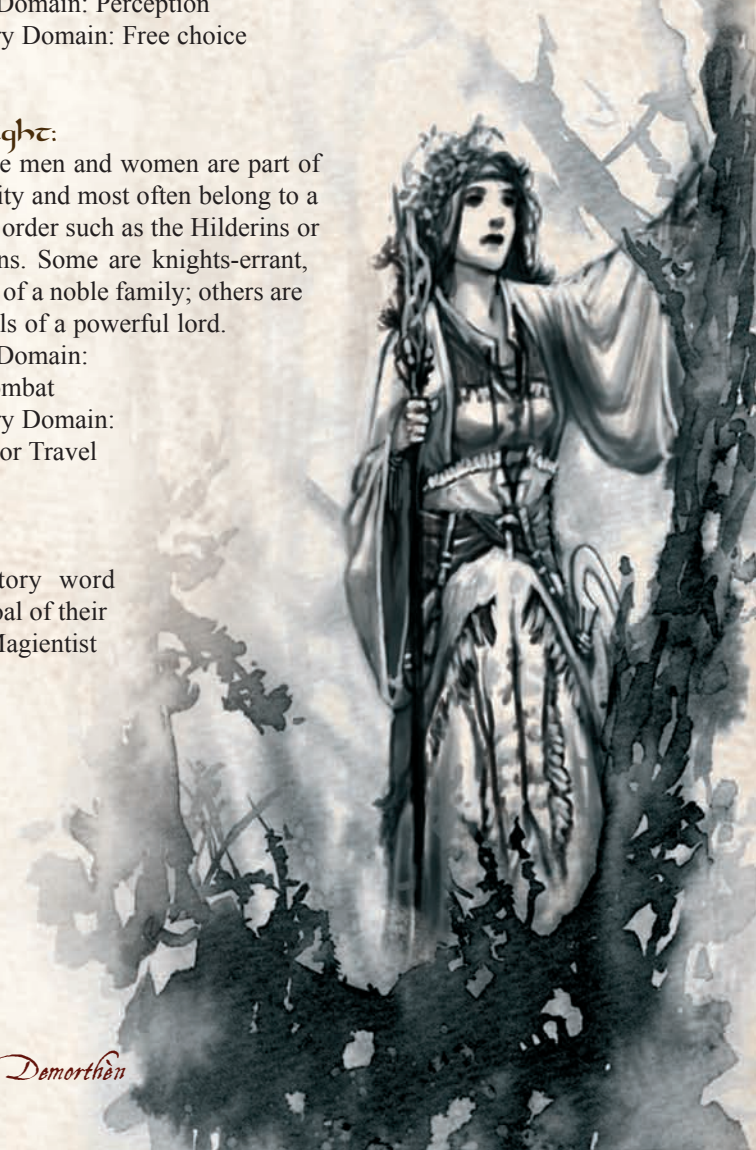
Hunter:
He feeds the community with what he brings back from his long expeditions, which sometimes last several days. The expansion of cities saw the appearance of new kinds of hunters, such as ratcatchers. Others, such as Neven's Children, dedicate their existence to hunting Feondas.
Primary Domain: Natural Environment
Secondary Domain: Close Combat or Shooting and Throwing

Investigator:
Generally living in great cities, investigators offer their services to lead an inquiry. Each investigator has her own style: some are skilled in occultism, others in science, Magience, or even medicine. For that reason, the Secondary Domain can be chosen freely.
Primary Domain: Perception
Secondary Domain: Free choice

Knight:
These men and women are part of the nobility and most often belong to a chivalric order such as the Hilderins or the Thorns. Some are knights-errant, last heirs of a noble family; others are the vassals of a powerful lord.
Primary Domain:
Close Combat
Secondary Domain:
Relation or Travel

Magientist:
In Tri-Kazel, they are often named with the derogatory word "Daedemorthys". In spite of such a bad reputation, the general goal of their science is to improve mankind's living conditions. A qualified Magientist is a Scientör, while a pupil in training is an Inceptus.
Primary Domain: Magience
Secondary Domain: Science or Erudition

Merchant:
A hawker or the manager of a properly stocked shop, a merchant is able to trade many goods.
Primary Domain: Relation
Secondary Domain: Erudition or Craft

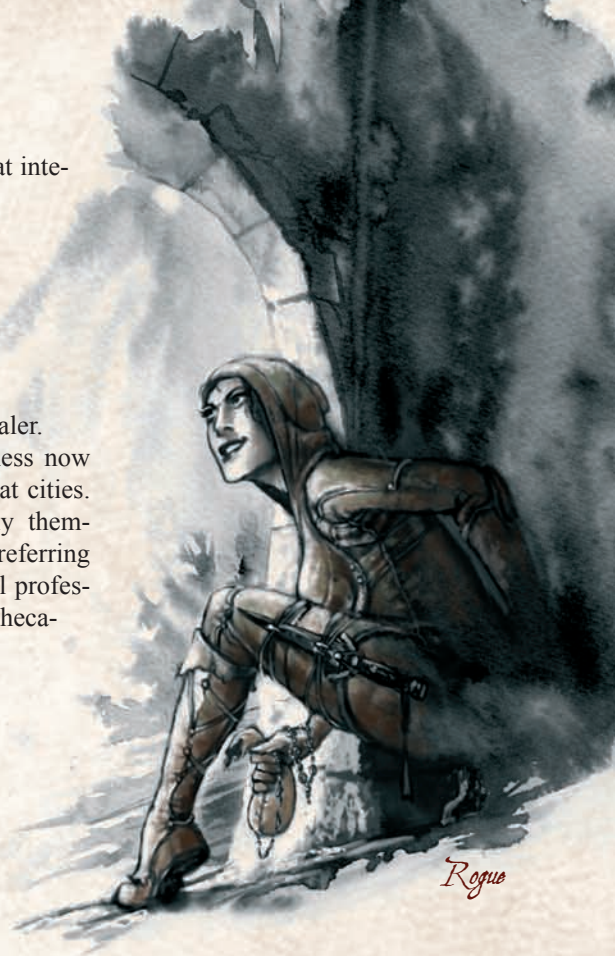

Demorthèn

Occultist:
Fascinated with esotericism, occultists are often academicians with a great interest in that domain looked down upon by the other divisions of science.
Primary Domain: Occultism
Secondary Domain: Erudition or Science

Peasant:
Whether he cultivates the land or raises animals, he takes part in the life of his community by feeding it.
Primary Domain: Natural Environment
Secondary Domain: Craft or Feats


Occultist

Physician:
There are places where the local Demorthèn is not the best healer. New techniques of proven effectiveness now come from the universities of the great cities. Some physicians, the alienists, apply themselves to curing psychical troubles, referring themselves to the work of Continental professor Ernst Zigger. Others, such as apothecaries, are specialized in herbalism.
Primary Domain: Science
Secondary Domain: Erudition or Relation


Rogue

Religious of the Temple:
A mere adept (one of the faithful in training), or a member of one of the six orders of the Temple, these people preach in favor of the Creator's advent.
Primary Domain: Prayer
The Secondary Domain depends on the order to which the religious belongs: Craft (monks), Erudition (priests, monks, and clerics), Relation (priests and Vectors), Close Combat (Sigires and Blades) or Travel (Vectors).

Rogue:
A thief, a robber, a pickpocket; there are enough illegal means of earning a living to attract people, even with the inherent risks…
Primary Domain: Stealth
Secondary Domain: Feats or Performance

Scholar:
Fascinated by knowledge and research, scholars are often employed as scribes, professors, or librarians. Generally, a scholar has a favored domain of knowledge: theology, Magience, science, etc.
Primary Domain: Erudition
Secondary Domain: Science or Occultism

Spy:
Anyone, may he be a high-ranking advisor or a mere beggar, can live a double life, gathering information on behalf of an employer. The Secondary Domain can be picked freely to coincide with the spy's fake identity.
Primary Domain: Perception Secondary Domain: Free choice

Varigal:
A traveler, a messenger, a bringer of news but also of packages, the Varigal is a link between the scattered communities of Tri-Kazel. Spending most of her life on the road, she is generally welcome whenever she reaches a village. Being close to nature, Varigals are often the allies of Demorthèn.
Primary Domain: Travel Secondary Domain: Feats or Natural Environment

Mark decides that Johan, his Character, will be a young Varigal. He writes down the level of 5 in Travel which corresponds to his Primary Domain. Then, he decides Johan will be close to nature: his Secondary Domain will be Natural Environment with a level of 3. Throughout the creation, Johan will be allowed to take Disciplines in the Travel and Natural Environment Domains.

Other Occupations

A Character is not competent in his profession only: he generally has other activities, skills, etc. Apart from his Primary and Secondary Domains, each PC can take two other Skill Domains at level 2, and another two at level 1.

Johan has learned to fight, and has been trained in throwing weapons. Mark writes down a level of 2 in Close Combat and 2 in Shooting and Throwing. At the contact of nature and during his travels, he has also learned to read his environment and has gotten physically tougher: he adds 1 level in Perception and 1 in Feats as well.

Birthplace

It is important to determine for each PC whether he has grown up in a rather rural place or in a city. Regardless of his birthplace, a military service of one year is mandatory in Tri-Kazel. Each inhabitant, man or woman, has the duty to contribute to the defense of the community, and is given basic training in fighting.

Every PC has a +1 bonus level in the Close Combat Domain.
However, it may be that a PC was exempted from such a service, or that he avoided it for one reason or another. If such a reason is justified–because of his history or social origin–the Player can put the bonus level normally attributed to Close Combat to another Domain. A fighter PC will probably already have 5 in Close Combat due to his profession; in this case, this bonus level will give him his first Discipline.

- A PC who spent his childhood in a rural environment adds 1 level in Natural Environment.
- A PC who spent his childhood in an urban environment adds 1 level in Relation.

Therefore, Mark adds 1 point in Close Combat, which gives Johan a level of 3. Being from a rural environment, he adds 1 in Natural Environment, for a level of 4.

Social Class

It is time to determine the social class the PC was born to, and amidst which she lived her first years. She can be a commoner, a noble, or belong to the clergy.

Keep some logic in this: there are very few members of high nobility in the farthest remote valleys of Taol-Kaer, and there are not a lot of farmers in the middle of Osta-Baille. In game terms, choosing the origin will give points in some skills.

- Commoners:

Most of the population is made up of commoners. For peasants and rural people (as well as Demorthèn, although they do not belong to any social class), the PC obtains +1 level in two Domains among Feats, Natural Environment, Perception, and Travel. For craftsmen and workers, the PC obtains +1 in two Domains among Craft, Erudition, Relation, and Science. If he is from the middle class, the PC obtains +1 in two Domains among Craft, Erudition, Performance, and Relation.

- Clergy:

Members of the Temple are part of the clergy. A PC belonging to this class obtains +1 in two Domains among Erudition, Prayer, Relation, and Travel.

- Nobility:

Nobles can be townsmen or countrymen. They obtain +1 in two Domains among Close Combat, Erudition, Relation and Science.

Johan's parents are peasants. Therefore, he is a commoner. He chooses to add 1 point in Travel. As this Domain is already at its maximum (5), Johan acquires his first Discipline in this Domain. For his PC, Mark chooses Side Roads, the Varigals' special skill. He then invests 1 level in Feats, which brings his level to 2.



Disciplines and Adding Points in Domains:

During the creation of your Character, ratings in some Domains will surpass 5, making it possible to obtain Disciplines.

At creation, the number of Disciplines is limited to 2, and their level is limited to 6. Moreover, the Disciplines must be allocated to the Primary or Secondary Domains defined by the chosen profession.
If a PC manages to go beyond 5 in a Domain that is neither Primary nor Secondary, he can add the points in excess to another Domain chosen by the Player, which cannot go beyond 5. The same goes if a PC obtains a new level that should have made him go beyond the maximum level at creation in a Discipline.

Step 3
The Ways

The five Ways are mental characteristics that determine the major traits of the Character's personality; his way of seeing the world and taking action. The Ways will be of use to him in his daily life. For example, he will make use of his Combativeness in every moment in which a strong pugnacity will be needed to overcome an ordeal. Here is the description of each of the five Ways:

- **Way of Combativeness**:
This Way reflects pugnacity, the drive that leads to action, and the passion of living.
- **Way of Creativity**:
The ability to imagine, to give an original meaning to one's life; inventiveness, resourcefulness.
- **Way of Empathy**:
The bond linking a human being to his environment. For example, Demorthèn use their Empathy to communicate with nature. At the relational level, Empathy means the ability to feel the emotions of another person.
- **Way of Reason**:
Rationalization, intellect, but also research and reflection. It shows the learning ability of a Character, his curiosity, etc.
- **Way of Conviction**:
Generally, a human hangs on to an ideal or principles guiding his life. Some turn toward religion, others abide by precepts of chivalry, while others follow a personal code.

Each Character will have a rating in each of these Ways, which will be between 1 and 5 and will be qualified as a major rating (4 and 5), a minor rating (1 and 2), or neutral (3).
To have a high rating in a Way is not better in itself than having a low rating. Each type of rating implies different qualities and flaws. Where a high rating in a Way will bring some facilities in the appropriate Domains and Disciplines, it will become a disadvantage when the Character will have to deal with his Faults (see p.234). Thus, a Character with a high rating in Combativeness may be more energetic in a fight, but he will also tend to be impulsive. To have a minor rating in this Way leads to a character who is calm, but who may sometimes lack spine.

What the Ways are not:

Do not forget that at this stage of the PC's creation, his build, intelligence, and appearance are all average. The Ways do not correspond to physical characteristics, nor is their aim to quantify brains or beauty (with Reason or Empathy, for example). A PC with a high Combativeness will not necessarily be a muscular person; he will be someone full of energy, who may be nervous or have a very strong character. A PC with a strong Reason will not necessarily be educated or quick-witted; he will be a thoughtful person, with a tendency for intellectualization. However, a high rating in Reason does imply facilities in every domain requiring abilities in memory or logic. If a Player wants his PC to be particularly strong or witty, for example, he will have to take a corresponding Advantage. Choosing Advantages and Disadvantages will be dealt with in step 6 of the creation process.

Ways and Vocations:

Each human leads her life according to a particular spiritual path. One will choose Combativeness to face existence; another will use Creativity, while someone else will choose Reason, etc. Generally speaking, each main ideological or philosophical trend favors one Way over the others, in a more or less obvious fashion.
In this way, through their search for harmony between the needs of man and those of nature, Demorthèn give preference to the Way of Empathy. As for Magientists, they favor intellectualization and reflection, which should guide man toward carefully thought out, pertinent choices. They illustrate the Way of Reason.
For adepts of the Temple, a strong faith allows man to ward off evil: the Way of Conviction is dominant compared to the others.
Bards think that any hope for a better world rests in the faculty of men to imagine and invent new things, which corresponds to the Way of Creativity.
Finally, for many inhabitants of Tri-Kazel, only the Way of Combativeness can offer sufficient energy to survive.
These different examples should not be restrictive: a Magientist can have a knack for inventions (Way of Creativity) or have deep faith in the idea that Magience is the solution to save humanity (Way of Conviction). Thus, each Player should take the time to wonder how her PC stands regarding these main principles of the world surrounding her: it will help her choose ratings in Ways coherent with the personality of her PC.

Synergies between the Ways:

The effect of combining some Ways will be to amplify or regulate some personality traits. We have seen that a PC with a major rating (4 or 5) in Combativeness will generally be a very energetic person, but one who can be rash and nervous. Having a major rating in Reason can regulate this impulsive side by giving him the ability to think before acting. On the opposite, a major rating in Creativity can amplify Combativeness by adding a dimension of originality that can be expressed in not only impulsive, but also risky, or even dangerous acts. Each Player is encouraged to define the interactions between his PC's Ways.

The Character's Ratings in Ways:

Now, the PC's ratings in the five Ways must be determined. The Player distributes ratings of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 as he wishes among the five Ways, which gives a different rating to each of them.

Johan has the following ratings in Ways: 5 in Empathy, 4 in Combativeness, 3 in Reason, 2 in Creativity and 1 in Conviction. A rather combative and energetic young man, Johan has above all a real sensibility for the world surrounding him. However, he is known to be rather unimaginative, and finds it difficult to give a meaning to his life.

Optional Rule: another Repartition for the Ratings in Ways:

With this optional rule, Players can distribute a total of 15 points as they wish between their five Ways. However, the Leader is advised to apply the following restriction: the Character must have at least one Way with a rating of 5 or 1. For example: 5, 3, 3, 2, 2 or 4, 4, 3, 3, 1. This restriction is preferable to avoid featureless, flawless Characters. One of the main interests of the Ways system is to have the PC play a living character with qualities and flaws. Overly average ratings in Ways may go against such an idea.

Ways, Domains, and Disciplines:

On the Character Sheet, next to each Domain, the rating of the Way associated by default will be indicated. During the game, when a Domain will be used, the ratings calculated in advance will make the resolution phases smoother.

Step 4
Age, Setbacks, and History

The Age

At creation, a PC will be at least 16 years old. This means that he has been trained in his profession and that he has fulfilled his military service (outside of exceptional cases, such as a street urchin who became a rogue, and who has always lived on the fringe of society, for example). He cannot be over 35 years old, since a more advanced age would be rather implausible regarding the experience he is given at creation. Of course, the Leader can adapt this to her needs, if she decides to put children, older people, or even seniors in her game.

Age and Experience:

It may seem strange that from her creation, a 16-year-old Character may begin with two Disciplines and that after a few months of adventures, she may–because of the Experience system–become more skilled than a soldier in his forties who has been defending his village for more than twenty years. This is part of the concept of Shadows of Esteren: Players will take on the roles of normal people who will come to live extraordinary adventures. Where our valiant soldier will have seen Feondas only once during his career and will never have left his valley, the PCs will probably travel all over Tri-Kazel, discover secrets of the world of Esteren, and meet creatures and beings of exception. Therefore, it is legitimate that a barely 18-year-old Character may be someone with exceptional abilities and knowledge for her age. This also justifies why a Player wanting to play an old man will only have a few more skills than a Player choosing a juvenile Character. It is assumed that an aged PC lived a relatively peaceful or ordinary life in the universe of Esteren, and that it is going to change once the Player starts playing him.

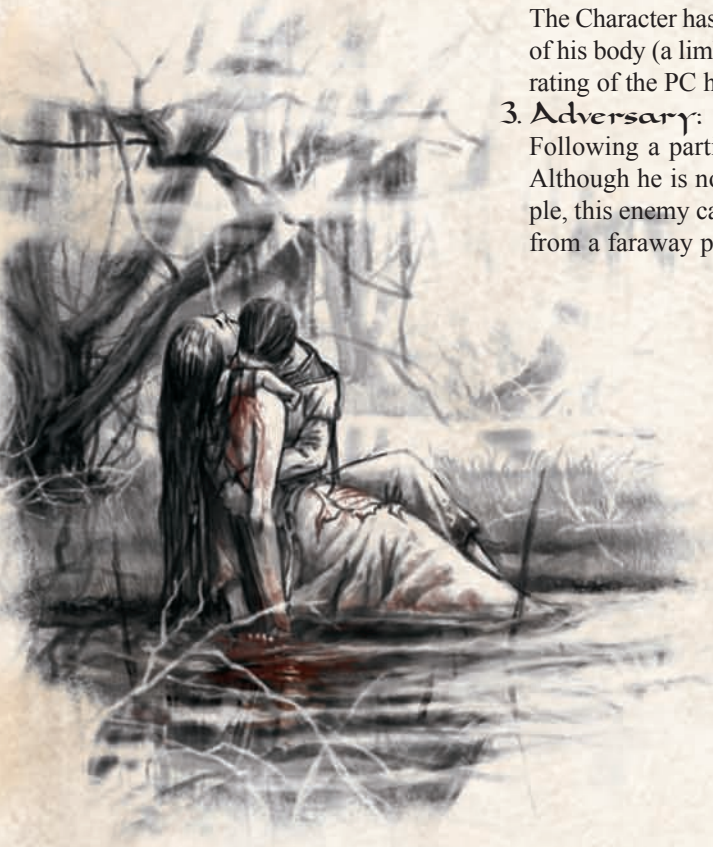
The Player chooses the age of his Character. The older the Character is, the more he will have learned and the more he will be marked by the hardships of peninsular life, which will be represented by one or several Setbacks that will have affected him:

Age of the PC	*Skill bonus*	*Setbacks*
16 to 20 years	-	-
21 to 25 years	*+ 1 in one Domain*	*1*
26 to 30 years	*+1 in two different Domains*	*2*
31 to 35 years	*+1 in three different Domains*	*3*

For example, a 30 year-old PC will have +1 in two different Domains and two Setbacks.
If your PC has Setbacks, roll 1d10 for each one, referring to the table below.

Setbacks

1. Bad Luck:
The life of the Character was particularly harsh… roll twice in the table, and ignore any subsequent roll of 1.



2. Wound:
The Character has a debilitating injury. At the Player's choice, it can be a gash across a part of his body (a limb, his torso, or his head), a lesion that gives him a limp, etc. The Stamina rating of the PC has a one point penalty. Define the events that have caused this wound.

3. Adversary:
Following a particular event that must be defined, the Character has made an enemy. Although he is not a mortal enemy, he holds a grudge against the Character. For example, this enemy can be part of a faction (Magientist, Demorthèn, etc.) or be a jealous lord from a faraway province.

4. Rumor:
A mysterious rumor (maybe a truthful one) hangs around the Character: crime, sacrilege, treason… Must be determined by the Player with the Leader's agreement.

5. Tragic Love:
The Character lived a love story that ended very badly. This painful memory (that the Character may hide from himself) causes him a permanent Trauma point that must be added to his Sanity chart.

6. Illness:
The Character was very ill, but he survived. The Player chooses the illness. The Stamina rating of the PC is reduced by one point.

7. Violence:
The Character endured harsh moments that cause him one permanent Trauma point that must be added on the Sanity chart. Define the nature of these events. It can be a horrific encounter with Feondas, participation in a military campaign, a childhood spent in familial abuse, etc.

8. Alone:
Everyone the Character cared about (parents and/or friends) died in violent or strange circumstances.

9. Poor:
After he was robbed, had his assets seized, or was victim of an accident, the Character was reduced to poverty. No other event or Advantage may change this financial situation. The PC only owns a weapon or a tool of poor quality, as well as a few personal belongings.

10. Lucky:
The Character came very close to a disaster! Define what sort of event it was with a new roll on this table and the way the Character avoided its consequences. Ignore any subsequent roll of 10.

Johan is 21. He chooses to assign his 1 level bonus to the Shooting and Throwing Domain, which brings it to 3. When determining his Setback, Mark got a 6 on his die roll, which corresponds to an illness. He decides that Johan fell seriously ill when he was younger. As for his Stamina rating, at the top of the Character Sheet, he adds a -1, which will be taken into consideration later, when his final Stamina rating will be determined.

History

It is time to sum up the past of the PC by focusing on her childhood, the main facts of her life, and her ambitions. The Player can use the space assigned to that effect on her Character Sheet. This is not about going into details (although a Player can do so if she feels like it), but defining the historical basis of the PC. The Player can give it more substance afterwards, during the game. Such a basis should help playing the Character.
Here are some aspects the Player may think about: childhood and family history, important social and romantic relationships, events that shaped her character, her first experiences in her profession, strange or mysterious facts, ambitions, goals and motivations, etc.

A rather frail child after a pestilent fever he almost perished from, Johan was raised by the Dàmàthair of the village of Klob. At the dawn of his sixteenth year, after he met an old Varigal who told him about his life, he took his leave to escape from a career as a soldier. As time went by, Johan found his calling and became a Varigal, spreading news from valley to valley.

Step 5

Character Traits, Sanity, and Personality

Character Traits

Each Player must choose two Character Traits for his PC. One of these traits will be a quality, the other a flaw, and they will be picked from the list below. They are determined according to the ratings in Ways chosen previously: 5 or 4 in a Way gives access to the major rating qualities and flaws for that Way; 1 or 2 gives access to those of a minor rating.

Any combination is possible: the flaw and the quality may be picked in the same Way or in different Ways, come from two major or minor ratings, or even a major and a minor one. Even if the Player has distributed his ratings in Ways so as to have more than two major or minor ratings (for example: 5, 5, 2, 2, 1), he only chooses two Character Traits; one quality and one flaw.

This list is in no way exhaustive, and its only goal is to help the Player become more in touch with his PC and enjoy playing him. To that effect, he is advised to choose qualities and flaws that inspire him the most. With the agreement of the Leader, and if it is appropriate considering the adventures the PC lives through, the Traits may evolve and change.

	Qualities	*Flaws*
Combativeness	***Major Rating: combative, optimistic, dynamic, brave, pugnacious, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: calm, phlegmatic, cool-headed, peaceful, etc.***	***Major Rating: impulsive, presumptuous, prideful, stubborn, arrogant, boastful, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: pessimistic, spineless, sad, weak willed, fearful, self-conscious, cowardly, etc.***
Creativity	***Major Rating: inventive, original, resourceful, funny, poetic, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: serious, respectful of traditions or rules, disciplined, etc.***	***Major Rating: nonconformist, rebellious, undisciplined, eccentric, liar, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: awkward, narrow-minded, ascetic, rigid, etc.***
Empathy	***Major Rating: receptive (able to perceive and understand other people's feelings), sensitive, intuitive, extrovert, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: master of one's emotions, unmovable, etc.***	***Major Rating: emotive, pushover, gabby, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: austere, insensitive, uncommunicative, taciturn, cold, individualist, etc.***
Reason	***Major Rating: thoughtful, ingenious, cautious, logical-minded, focused, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: spontaneous (thinking does not impede acting), daring, etc.***	***Major Rating: abstraction, shut-in (lives with books, etc.), overcautious, irresolute, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: absent-minded, careless, unthinking, etc.***
Conviction	***Major Rating: upright (bound to moral values), persevering, loyal, incorruptible, generous, etc.*** ***Minor Rating: free (open-minded regarding social, religious or moral codes), independent, etc.***	***Major Rating: rigid, intolerant, fanatical, overzealous (regarding his dogma and his hierarchy), etc.*** ***Minor Rating: whimsical, inconstant, unreliable, immoral, doubting (difficulty to give his life a meaning), treacherous, etc.***

Mark has chosen the two following Character Traits for Johan: his quality is being intuitive (thanks to his major rating in Empathy) and his flaw is being impulsive (because of his major rating in Combativeness).

Sanity in Shadows of Esteren

Before proceeding with this step of creation, the Leader and the Players are strongly advised to read the chapter dealing with how to manage and make use of Sanity (p.269). Only informed and experienced Players should use these rules. Should you decide not to use them, skip directly to step 9 of Character creation.

The Aspects sum up the different facets of the PC's personality. They are the synthesis of the ratings in Ways distributed by the Players and will allow the Leader to manage the evolution of the PC's sanity through the game sessions. There are three Aspects: Consciousness, Instinct, and Trauma. Here are their definitions as well as the formulas to calculate their levels.

- **Consciousness**: This Aspect shows how important rationality is to the PC, how rooted he is to reality, how logical, thoughtful, and resilient his mind is.

Consciousness:
Way of Reason + Way of Conviction

- **Instinct**: Instinct is about the driving urges of a living being. This Aspect notably includes survival and self-preservation instincts, as well as everything related to sexuality.

Instinct:
Way of Combativeness + Way of Creativity

- **Trauma**: Trauma depicts all the psychical wounds that weigh on one's consciousness and disorganize one's instincts. This Aspect is dynamic, as it is in constant evolution and interacts with the two other Aspects. It is a Sanity chart that is gradually filled: if a PC suffers a psychic injury, he receives one or several Temporary or Permanent Trauma points according to the gravity of the events.

Trauma: Rating of 0 at the start, but can be adjusted according to Disadvantages, Setbacks, or the structure of the PC's personality, described below.

As he has 1 in Conviction and 3 in Reason, Johan has a Consciousness rating of 4, and an Instinct rating of 6, with his 4 in Combativeness and 2 in Creativity. Mark writes down these ratings on his Character Sheet.

Orientation of Personality

The Aspects constitute a representation of the general structure of the PC's personality and give the means to determine its Orientation: rational or instinctive. A higher rating in Consciousness indicates a rational Orientation; a higher rating in Instinct indicates an instinctive Orientation. In the case of an equal rating between the Aspects, the Player chooses the Orientation. This general Orientation will be useful to manage the evolution of the PC's Sanity. A balanced Sanity is induced by similar ratings in Consciousness and Instinct. Calculate the difference between the two ratings: the result translates into an equal amount of Permanent Trauma points. If, at creation, a PC accumulates more than 5 Trauma points, he suffers a personality trouble according to his latent mental disorder.

With a rating of 6 in Instinct against only a 4 in Consciousness, Johan has an instinctive Orientation. He has a gap of 2 points between these two Aspects: he carries over this result to his Sanity chart by filling two Trauma boxes.

Mental Resistance

During his adventures in Shadows of Esteren, the PC may get to see or understand unfathomable things. Each time this happens, there is a chance that the state of his Sanity will decline.

Mental Resistance is equal to the rating in the Way of Conviction + 5

This rating can be adjusted by choosing some Advantages or Disadvantages. For more details about the utilization and evolution of Mental Resistance in the game, see page 270.

Since he has a rating of 1 in Conviction, Johan has a rating of 6 in Mental Resistance. When dealing with unfathomable things, he will have no solid beliefs or convictions to help him psychically bear the unbearable. Where a priest will see a divine ordeal, when a knight will cling to his ideals, Johan will have to draw from his own resources not to sink into madness.

Sanity Chart and Mental Disorder

The Sanity chart is subdivided into four states, each one with five boxes: Balance, Symptom, Syndrome, and Madness. The effects of each state will be different according to the PC's latent pathology.

At creation, the Leader and the Player may agree upon the mental disorder the PC will develop if his Sanity is deeply damaged.

It is possible to put off determining this mental disorder, or to choose by default the Phobia disorder, which can indifferently be chosen by any PC. The list of these disorders is detailed in the Sanity chapter, page 273. To go through this step, it is necessary that the Leader or the Player has read this chapter.

Johan has a total of two Trauma points, which leaves him in the "Balance" category. He is in good psychical condition. After discussing it with the Leader, Mark has chosen the Hallucination disorder. This disorder is related to Johan's major rating in Empathy, and corresponds to his tendency to become very contemplative, very attentive to the world surrounding him, even seeing or hearing things that do not exist... His disorder manifests itself through mystical concepts marked by Demorthèn traditions.

Personality

A Player should now take the time to write a few lines summing up the personality of his Character. For that, he can use the space left to that effect on the back of the Character Sheet. The Player could try to show a goal or a major motivation for his PC; this will help in role-playing him and can be used by the Leader for the conception of his scenarios. He is also encouraged to give a meaning to the ratings in Ways he has chosen, by drawing inspiration from the Character Traits, for example.

Instinctive and combative, Johan is a spontaneous young man. He has a tendency to act according to his feelings and intuitions, which may sometimes make him seem impulsive. His childhood holds many unknown spots, such as the event that gave him a phobia of crowds. As he has some difficulties in making plans for the future, he usually lives from day to day. Fascinated by travels and discoveries, contemplative and a close listener to the world surrounding him, Johan hopes to discover the secrets of the Three Kingdoms as well as to bring light to the mysteries of existence in a journey he considers initiatory.

Step 6
Experience Points, Advantages, and Disadvantages

Each Character has 100 Experience points at his disposal, which allow him to improve some skills and/or buy Advantages. They represent what he has lived through until now, independently from the aspects mentioned beforehand (such as the profession or the social origin) or his innate characteristics.
The PC can increase this amount of points by taking Disadvantages, but this is not mandatory. The amount of points that can be accumulated through this means is limited to 80.
Unused points after Character Creation are written down on the Character Sheet, where the Experience points are indicated; they can be used later.

Improve a Domain or a Discipline

Experience points can be used to improve a Domain or a Discipline:
· **Domain**: 10 Experience points for every additional level.
· **Discipline**: 25 Experience points for every additional level.
Reminder: At creation, a PC can only have two Disciplines with a level of 6.

Advantages

A PC can choose Advantages, which cost the amount of points indicated in parentheses or in their definition. At this point in the creation of the PC, he still has average physical characteristics and mental aptitudes. He is not particularly strong or smart, etc. Some Advantages and Disadvantages will make it possible to adjust these characteristics.



- Ally (20, 40, or 50 points):

The PC has an ally who is willing to help her when things are tough. For twenty points, it is an isolated ally with little power (the provost of a village, a merchant, etc). For 40 points, the ally is also a mentor, and allows the PC to add 1 level in one of her skill Domains (within the limit of 6 levels for a Discipline). For 50 points, he is not only a mentor, but also an influential ally who can count for much in political matters or help the PC efficiently (a Demorthèn with important powers, a noble with high political responsibilities, or a high-ranking member of the Temple). Depending on what the PC asks of him, the ally may require services or money in exchange, but will generally be ready to help.

- Financial Ease (from 10 to 50 points):

The PC hails from a rich family or has somehow made a fortune. He can add the corresponding amount of money to his starting sum: 20 azure Daols (10XP), 50 azure Daols (20XP), 10 frost Daols (30XP), 50 frost Daols (40XP), 100 frost Daols (50XP).

-Physical or Mental Advantage (variable cost):

The PC can be Strong, Smart, etc. With the Leader's agreement, one of the Advantages can be taken a second time to improve its effects: this way, the PC can be a Colossus or be Brilliant. Such an addition costs half the number of necessary Experience points to earn the basic Advantage. For example, the Strong Advantage costs 40 points; becoming a Colossus will cost 20 more points, which means a total of 60 points for this enhanced Advantage. However, these enhanced Advantages are rarer, and a PC can only choose one at creation.

Advantages or Disadvantages can also give bonuses or penalties when a PC uses one or several Domains. Remember these are not skill levels; they will be written down in the appropriate places (noted "bonus" and "penalty") in the "Domains" part of the Character Sheet. Bonus and penalty from different Advantages can stack.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of the various possible Advantages and their effects. Leaders and Players can draw inspiration from them to create new ones.

- Beautiful (30 points): The Character's attractive features give her a +1 bonus when she uses the Performance and Relation Domains. By doubling this Advantage, she becomes Magnificent and the bonus goes up to +2.

- Charismatic (30 points): Regardless of his appearance, the PC has a certain natural charm or a particular gift for expressing himself. He has a +1 bonus when using the Performance and Relation Domains. By doubling this Advantage, he becomes Magnetic and his bonuses double.

- Good Health (40 points): Being of a robust nature, the PC is able to endure blows better. She has one more box in the "Bad" category of her Health Condition chart. She has a +1 bonus in Stamina rolls against diseases and poisons. By doubling this Advantage, she has Iron Stamina. She gets one more box in the "Critical" category of her Health Condition chart and the bonus on her Stamina rolls doubles.

- Good Sight (30 points): The PC has a keen sense of sight, earning a +1 bonus when using the Perception and Throwing and Shooting Domains. If he takes this Advantage a second time, he is a Hawkeye and doubles these bonuses.

- Intuitive (40 points): The PC has a gift that makes her feel her environment acutely. She has a +1 bonus when she uses the Demorthèn Mysteries, Relation, and Travel Domains. By doubling this Advantage, she has a Sixth Sense and doubles her bonuses.

- Keen Hearing (20 points): The PC has a +1 bonus to Perception rolls related to hearing. If the PC takes this Advantage twice, he has a +2 bonus. Smell and taste can also be made keen (each Advantage costs 10) and give a +1 bonus to Perception rolls involving the concerned sense.

- Nimble (40 points): In Tri-Kazel, a light-footed person is said to have "the foot of a Caernide". It is the case of the PC who earns a +1 bonus in her Defense rating as well as in the Stealth Domain. The Feats Domain also benefits from this bonus in appropriate cases (tumbling, climbing, and evading). If the PC takes this Advantage a second time, she becomes Agile and the bonuses above are doubled.

- Quick (20 points): Being quicker than average and having good reflexes, the PC adds one point to his Speed rating. By doubling this Advantage, he becomes Fast and obtains a second bonus point.



- Smart (40 points): Having notable aptitudes in logic and reflection, the PC has a +1 bonus when she uses the Magience, Occultism, and Science Domains. If the PC takes this Advantage a second time, she is Brilliant and her bonuses are doubled.

- Strong (40 points): The PC earns a +1 bonus in the Close Combat, Feats, and Shooting and Throwing Domains (except for crossbows or some Magientist artifacts using mechanical force) and in situations where strength is a determining factor. If the PC takes this Advantage a second time, he becomes a Colossus. The bonus then rises to +2 for the mentioned Domains.

- Strong Mind (30 points): The PC is a hard case. She gets a +1 bonus in her Mental Resistance rating. If the PC takes this Advantage a second time, her personality is a true Mental Rock and her bonus doubles.

- Sturdy (30 points): The PC is particularly tough. He earns a +1 bonus in his Stamina rating. He can hold his breath, run, or perform any other endurance feat longer; he also gets a +1 bonus for Feats rolls during extended actions (running, swimming, and endurance). If the PC takes this Advantage a second time, he becomes Relentless and the bonuses above double.

- Fighting Arts (20 points): Every Character has what are called "basic" Fighting aptitudes. A PC having a minimum rating of 5 in Close Combat can learn particular techniques: Archery, Cavalry, Parry, Sneak Attack, and Two-weapon Fighting. Learning a Fighting Art is possible later in the game as well (see the "Experience and Advancement" Chapter).

- Lucky (30 points): The PC has luck on her side. She adds a +1 bonus to her Luck rolls. If she enhances this Advantage, she was Born Under a Lucky Star and has a +2 bonus to her Luck rolls.

- Survival Instinct (30 points): It allows the PC to obtain 1 more Survival point on his initial rating. This Advantage can be reinforced to make the PC a Survivor and double this bonus.

- Well-read (20 points): The PC has attended university courses with assiduity, has spent long hours studying alone, or has benefited from the teachings of a preceptor. Whatever her rating in Erudition may be, the PC is able to fluently read and write. Moreover, the Character obtains a +1 bonus when she uses one of these Domains, at the Player's choice: Erudition, Magience, Occultism, or Science.

Disadvantages

The number in brackets shows the amount of Experience points earned by taking the Disadvantage, within the limit of 80 points.

- Addiction (20 points): The PC is addicted to a substance, such as tobacco, alcohol, or another type of drug. If she does not regularly have her dose, she will suffer from it (p.243). Additionally, the PC loses 1 Stamina point.

- Physical or Mental Disadvantage (variable cost):
These Disadvantages penalize the PC by inflicting penalties to his physical or mental abilities. For example, he can be Weak or even a Weakling instead of being Strong or being a Colossus; Nearsighted instead of having Good Sight, etc. The bonuses indicated in the Advantages are inverted and become penalties. This way, being Nearsighted inflicts a 1 point penalty when the PC uses the Perception and Shooting and Throwing Domains. The gains are the same as the costs of the corresponding Advantages minus 10 points. Therefore, being Weak brings 30 points and Nearsighted 20 points, etc. It is possible to reinforce a Disadvantage; for example, being a Weakling brings 50 points.

- Aftermath (30 points):
Aftermath brings a 1 point penalty in two of the following characteristics or Domains: Health Condition, Stamina, Feats, Relation, Defense, and Speed. For example, the PC suffered a serious accident or an aggression, which has left marks. He can have a Limp, which makes him lose one point in Speed and one point in Defense. He can be Sickly, his skin wan and his body weakened by a plague or a poison, which brings the loss of 1 Stamina point and and removes one box in the "Okay" category of his Health Condition chart.

- Enemy (30 points):
Be it a noble, a powerful Magientist, or a Demorthèn respected by his peers, someone has something against the PC, and will do everything to hinder her. The Player can propose an enemy that fits into the history of her PC, but the Leader must validate–or not–this choice. If the PC already suffers the "Adversary" Setback, this enemy will be added to the first, with distinct motivations.

- Fragile (20 points):
The PC does not have the necessary guts to fight to the bitter end and still get back up in spite of pain or hardships. He starts with one less Survival point.

- Phobia (40 points):
Following a traumatizing event that inflicted him a Permanent Trauma point (which must be noted on the Sanity chart), the PC has developed an undying phobia: an irrational fear of water, heights, being locked up, dealing with certain beasts or creatures, etc. The PC is considered to suffer from the Phobia disorder as it is described on page 278. The effect of the Phobia depends on the state of the PC's Sanity. Phobia will be added in addition to the disorder that the PC is likely to develop.

- Poor (10 points):
Whatever her social origin, the PC is bankrupt. Whether she is from the lower class or the nobility, she has very few resources: she will only have a quarter of the sum given to starting PCs, see step 10.

- Shy (10 points):
The PC lacks easiness and self-assurance in his relations with others. This inflicts on him a 1 point penalty when he uses the Relation and Performance Domains in public.

- Trauma (10 points):
Something, or someone, which must be determined, has traumatized the PC. This Disadvantage can be taken up to three times and results in a Permanent Trauma point each time.

- Unlucky (10 points):
The PC subtracts 1 point each time she makes a Luck Roll. She can reinforce this Disadvantage; the PC then has the Evil Eye and the penalty is doubled.

Mark has 100 Experience points for his PC. First, he chooses a Phobia of crowds as a Disadvantage. Since he was a child, Johan has always been afraid of crowds for reasons he keeps deep within him. Therefore, he has 140 Experience points which he uses this way: first, he chooses the Nimble Advantage for 40 points, then takes the Survival Instinct Advantage for 30 points. With his 70 remaining points, he improves the following skills: +1 in Feats, +1 in Close Combat, +2 in Stealth, +1 in Perception, and +1 in Natural Environment. Mark writes down all of this on his Character Sheet. He has ten remaining experience points, which he can use later (see p.229).

Step 7
Potential, Defense, Speed, and Stamina

Fighting Potential

Potential is a rating that will be used during the fighting phases. It represents the investment ability of a Character in a given Fighting Attitude (p.216). The Creativity rating of a PC gives the value of his Potential.

- At 1, the Character has 1 Potential point
- From 2 to 4, the Character has 2 Potential points
- At 5, the Character has 3 Potential points

Johan has a rating of 2 in Creativity, and therefore has a Potential of 2. Mark writes this down on the upper left corner of the second page of his Character Sheet.

Speed

In a harsh world such as Esteren, it is often important to be the faster one. The Speed rating will be used during fights and in every situation where the quickness of the Character matters. It relies on his reaction speed and his ability to guess what is going to happen. Experience, as well as an Advantage or a Disadvantage, can modify this rating.

To know the initial Speed rating of a Character, make the following addition: Way of Combativeness + Way of Empathy.

Johan has a rating of 4 in Combativeness and 5 in Empathy. Being very intuitive and combative, Johan has a rating of 9 in Speed.

Defense

During a fight, everybody has the ability to defend themselves against melee and ranged attacks alike. The Defense rating is related to several qualities: the fighter's ability to analyze the situation, some degree of carefulness, and also his knack for anticipating the actions of his opponent.
This rating is used as a Difficulty Threshold to determine if an attack succeeds. The Defense rating can be adjusted by a specific Advantage or Disadvantage. Experience also plays a part, and the Defense rating can be improved as the Character becomes more seasoned (see "Experience and Advancement").

To know the initial Defense rating of a Character, make the following addition: Way of Reason + Way of Empathy + 5

Johan has a rating of 3 in Reason and 5 in Empathy. Thus, he has a Defense rating of 13, to which a 1 point bonus is added because of his Nimble Advantage. Johan then has a Defense of 14.

Stamina

Every PC has a basic rating of 10 in Stamina. This rating represents the general health of the Character, her ability to resist diseases, to recover from her injuries, etc. An Advantage or a Disadvantage previously chosen by the Player can adjust this rating. Events during adventures experienced by the PC can also change a Character's Stamina.

Johan survived a malignant disease when he was younger, but it inflicted the permanent loss of 1 Stamina point. Thus, he has a Stamina rating of 9. Mark writes it down in the appropriate space, under the Health Condition chart.



Health Condition Chart

On the Character Sheet, a chart gives the Health Condition of the Character. It registers the possible traumas the Character has suffered and their consequences. The more boxes are filled in this chart (following injuries, diseases, poisonings, etc.) the worse the Character's Health Condition gets. The chart ranges from "Good" to "Agony". Of course, having a Health chart indicating the Agony condition while having a low Stamina rating does not bode well for the Character's chances to survive his injuries. For more details about the Health Condition chart, see page 239.

Step 8
Fighting Attitudes and Attack Rating

Each Character has five different basic Fighting Attitudes: Standard, Offensive, Defensive, Quick Attack, and Movement. These various Attitudes sum up the stances a Character can take during a fight. Remember that a fight is divided into Combat Rounds, each one lasting a few seconds.

Each Fighting Attitude significantly modifies the Attack, Defense, and Speed ratings. So as to make the phases of a fight go smoother, the effects of each Attitude should be previously calculated and noted on the Character Sheet (in the top part of the second page). To do so, the Player needs her Potential rating, as well as her Attack, Defense, and Speed ratings. Also, note that for each Attitude, the full Potential rating must be applied: it is not possible for a Player to modulate such changes, no matter what her Potential is.

Attack Rating

The Attack rating of a Character is calculated with the following addition:

Way of Combativeness + Domain or Discipline used for the fight + possible bonuses (Advantage, etc.) = Attack rating.

There are many Domains or Disciplines that can be used in a fight according to the weapon used. Close Combat and all of its Disciplines in the case of melee fighting; Shooting and Throwing and all of its Disciplines for ranged fighting; the Magience, Science, and Occultism Domains (and the Artifact Use or Artifact Fighting Disciplines) to fight with a Magientist weapon. To calculate in advance the Fighting Attitudes, the Player uses the skill he will use the most often during the game: Shooting and Throwing for an archer, using a type of artifact for a Magientist, etc.

Johan has the following basic ratings: 8 for his Attack rating (Combativeness of 4 + Close Combat of 4), 14 in Defense, and 9 in Speed. He has a Potential of 2.



Here is how the ratings of the different Attitudes must be calculated:

- Standard Attitude:
Not being particularly aggressive or defensive, the PC fights in a rather balanced way. The Potential is not used: the Attack, Defense, and Speed ratings are indicated as they are.

- Offensive Attitude:
By counting on an overwhelming attack, the PC will tend to take more risks. The Potential is added to Attack and subtracted from Defense.

In an offensive Attitude, Johan's Attack rating goes up to 10 and his Defense rating goes down to 12.



- Defensive Attitude:

The PC focuses on defense, trying to avoid or to parry blows. The Potential is added to Defense and deducted from Attack.

In a defensive Attitude, Johan's Attack rating goes down to 6 while his Defense rating goes up to 16.

- Quick Attack:

The PC counts above all on acting first, even at the cost of risks. The Potential is added to Speed and deducted from Defense. Note that using this Attitude will not necessarily mean that the PC has the initiative; her opponent may still have a better Speed than her.

In a quick Attitude, Johan's Speed goes up to 11 while his Defense goes down to 12.

- Movement:

During a fight, it is possible to move a few steps, but sometimes, a Character will want to use his entire action for moving. By using this Attitude during a Round, a Character can move about ten yards, or even double that if he can run. It is also possible to use the Feats Domain to make special moves.
The Potential is added to the Defense rating, but no Attack can be made. If the Character himself was caught in a melee fight, he can use this Fighting Attitude to withdraw. Leaving a fight is never simple and can have harmful consequences (see page 238 to know how to proceed).

In a Movement Attitude, Johan's Defense rating goes up to 16 and his movement capacity is improved.

Step 9
Survival Points, Rindath, and Exaltation

Survival Points

Each PC has Survival points, the amount of which must be written down in the Character Sheet. The Player must keep track of these Survival Points as they are used. These points stand for adrenaline, the last resort energy in critical moments when the PC feels in danger.

The initial number of Survival points is 3, but it can be adjusted with Advantages or Disadvantages.
In a critical moment, a Player can decide to use one or several Survival points. The PC can then go beyond her limits, ignore pain, or accomplish a desperate act by calling upon her courage or her innermost willpower. Such actions are not necessarily physical: Survival points can be used for every type of action, given there is a feeling of urgency.

For each Survival point used, the PC suffers a temporary Trauma point, simulating the psychical exhaustion after a scene during which she was very hurt or scared. These points are added on her Sanity chart and can lead to a temporary degradation of her psychical health.

Used Survival points do not refresh. Therefore, each Player should think well about the most opportune moment to use them. However, it is possible to acquire new ones by spending Experience points.



By spending a Survival point, a PC can obtain one of the following effects:

- Roll a Die Again:
By using a Survival point, the Player can make a failed Resolution Roll again, but the result of the second roll will have to be accepted, even if it is worse than the first. It is not possible to use a Survival point again for the same action.

- Ignore Pain:
During a Round, a Survival point makes it possible to avoid penalties from a bad health condition. If the PC is in a state of Agony but still alive, he can use two Survival points to empty this box (which brings him in a Critical condition) and remain standing. During the first Round, he also has the "ignore pain" bonus, which negates all wound-related penalties. Take note that Survival points are of no use if the PC is deceased and will not allow him to escape death.

Rindath

Rindath is the vital energy every thing is filled with, according to the Demorthèn. It is mainly used for manifesting their ancestral Arts.
This level is calculated according to the following formula, and then written down on the back of the sheet, in the "Rindath" frame:

Way of Empathy + Way of Combativeness + Way of Creativity

Exaltation

It represents the power generated by faith from which the elect of the Temple draw to perform Miracles. The Exaltation level of a Character is calculated in the following way, and then written down on the back of the sheet, in the "Exaltation" frame.

Way of Conviction x 3

Step 10
Description and Equipment

Description

The Player may now take some time to describe his PC in the space left to that effect on the Character Sheet. He can quickly go through his physical appearance and what characterizes him, such as his face and the way he behaves, his size, his build, etc.

Johan has a tall, lean figure. His hair is short and most of the time messy. His bony face, with skin weathered by the wind and the sun, contrasts with his soft, clear eyes. His mended clothes, on top of which he wears an old leather cuirass, are a testimony to his long travels, as are the big leather bag, the bottles, and the pouches hanging from his belt. He carries a short sword, a short bow, and a quiver.

Equipment

The last step of creation is to determine the material belongings of the PC by using one of these two methods:
- At creation, each PC has a sum corresponding to 30 days of pay at his disposal. Daily wages for each profession are indicated on the following page. With such an amount of money, each Player can buy whatever he wishes (be it weapons, armors, miscellaneous equipment, or services) by referring to the following pages.
- If Players and Leaders do not want to spend too much time to determine the basic equipment for each Character, he is considered to have the minimum equipment necessary to his profession. Moreover, he will possess 2d10 azure Daols of savings (or ember Daols if the "Poor" Disadvantage has been taken).
A PC from the nobility or the middle class will not necessarily be richer: he can belong to a bankrupt family, or be of noble origin but without any inheritance, or have wealthy but miserly parents, etc. It is possible to start with a richer PC by having previously taken the "Financial Ease" Advantage.

Prices and Equipment



Various details are given in this chapter about the cost of equipment, its availability, average wages, etc.

Equivalency between Daols

100 ember Daols (Ed) = *10 azure Daols (Ad)* = *1 frost Daol (Fd)*

Availability of Equipment

Frequent (FR):
Can be bought or traded almost everywhere, barring exceptional circumstances.

Common (CO):
Available in every community, except for the smallest and the most isolated ones.

Rare (RA):
Can only be found in great cities or in some sites producing it, commercializing it, or buying it for a local use.

Exceptional (EX):
No distribution network, with demand either very low or, conversely, far above the available supply. Hard to find, even in great cities.

Articles with no Availability attribute are considered to be Frequent by default, or Common in the worst case.

Average Daily Wages

Unskilled Manual Professions:
6Ed ▲
Examples: porter, rat catcher, laborer, waitress, stable boy, agricultural worker, gardener.

Skilled Manual Professions:
8Ed ▲
Examples: Journeyman crafter (builders, carpenters, weavers, dyers…), cook, carriage driver, seaman.

Scholarly and Artistic Professions:
10Ed ▲ (1Ad) ▲
Examples: musician, painter, preceptor, scribe, archivist, doctor, alchemist.

Hazardous Professions:
10Ed ▲ (1Ad) ▲
Examples: Varigal, mercenary, bodyguard, messenger.

These sample wages concern professionals of a reasonable level. Renowned individuals, who are very experienced or are experts in their field, can ask for much higher sums. Moreover, those wages do not take into account the possible advantages negotiated or granted by the employer: housing, food, danger money, medical care, inclusion or replacement of the tools for the profession, etc. They are set considering that the money the employee earns is enough to buy food, lodging, clothing, and to maintain his tools. Many employees are lent a loft or sleep in a dormitory, and some even eat at their workplace. Indeed, many employers would rather pay with goods and services than with money, which is often more cost-effective in the end. As a consequence, those advantages are not necessarily high-quality ones, and as a result, some employees still spend a good part of their money to improve their ordinary fare.
Apprentices generally earn only half of the indicated salary, or even less. Some are not even paid, and are only given food and lodging, with some pocket money for a local festival or for a special occasion. Guilds often put in place a form of indenture: they take in the apprentice, who in turn, incurs a debt toward the guild. This way, he commits himself to give part of his profits once he works on his own, or to work during a given number of years for a reduced salary to balance his debt.

Short-term Services

These concern people who are paid for a short-term work (from a few minutes to one or two hours) instead of a whole day. When business is good, those proposing them can expect fairly significant earnings compared to people with a dependable income. Conversely, they are totally dependent on their clientele and their earnings can vary dramatically and unexpectedly. In this case again, these are indicative numbers, particularly for notable and exceptional services.

Common Services: (washer, barber, porter, messenger, coach driver…): 1Ed

Notable Services: (public writer, minstrel, juggler, prostitute…): 2Ed

Exceptional Services: (doctor, bodyguard…): 3Ed

Inns and Taverns	Price
Frugal meal (broth, meager soup, dry bread)	3Ed
Nourishing meal (hearty soup, bread, cheese or omelet, dried fish)	5Ed
Wholesome meal (soup, bread, chicken or roast, pâté or pie)	7Ed
Ale	2Ed
Cider	2Ed
Beer	2Ed
Brandy	1Ed
Liquor	3Ed
Pastry	3Ed
Dormitory or common room	2Ed
Bedroom	5Ed
Luxury bedroom (with a servant)	1Ad
Hot bath	3Ed
Stable and fodder	2Ed

Foodstuffs

Foodstuffs	Price	Avail.
Ham or dried meat	8Ed	FR
Fresh fish	7Ed	CO
Smoked fish	6Ed	CO
Pie or pâté	5Ed	FR
Two pints of ale	6Ed	FR
Two pints of beer or cider	7Ed	FR
Wheel of cheese	7Ed	FR
Two pints of milk (goat, Boernac)	5Ed	FR
Two pints of oil	4Ed	CO
Jar of honey	1Ad	EX
Butter, per two pounds	7Ed	FR
Bread or biscuits	2Ed	FR
Fresh fruits or vegetables	6Ed	CO
Oats	3Ed	FR
Flour, per two pounds	3Ed	FR
Tobacco, a jar	1Ad	FR

Products without a unit of measurement or indication are enough to feed someone or his mount for one day. Nutritional deficiencies are frequent, because of financial reasons, supply difficulties, and ignorance of nutritional principles.

Medicine

Medicine	Price	Avail.
Healing balm	4Ed	CO
Herbs for headaches	2Ed	CO
Purgative	3Ed	CO
Analgesic herbs	2Ed	CO
Fortifying infusion	1Ed	FR
Febrifuge (fever-reducing) tea	1Ed	FR
Clean bandages	1Ed	FR
Surgeon kit	3Ad	CO

Infusions, balms, and herbal concoctions are enough for one day of treatment. A treatment can be very brief (for a sudden headache, or digestive trouble), or require several days-or even weeks-of daily care (wounds, infectious diseases).

Many minor health issues will probably be incapacitating, or even deadly, if they are not treated with these typical preparations, which are commonly used. However, many diseases and toxic substances require the use of specific remedies or antidotes, which are often the only known way to cure the patient. Whatever their form, they are from twice to five times as expensive as the common mixtures and extracts, sometimes more. In some cases, these common preparations can bring relief to the patient without curing him, but they often have no effect without the actual remedy. See the chapter on Health for more details.

Clothing Articles and Cosmetics	Price	Avail.
Hemp tunic	3Ed	FR
Linen tunic	4Ed	FR
Wool tunic	6Ed	FR
Linen cloak	4Ed	FR
Wool cloak	6Ed	FR
Fur coat	1Ad	CO
Clogs	1Ed	FR
Rope sandals	1Ed	FR
Leather sandals	3Ed	FR
Galoshes (leather shoes with a wooden sole)	5Ed	FR
Traveling boots	8Ed	FR
Riding boots	8Ed	CO
High boots, waders	1Ad	CO
Linen belt	3Ed	FR
Leather belt	4Ed	FR
Linen pants	3Ed	FR
Wool pants	5Ed	FR
Kilt	4Ed	CO
Chasuble	9Ed	CO
Linen shirt	3Ed	FR
Corset	6Ed	CO
Wool scarf	3Ed	FR
Hemp dress	4Ed	FR
Linen dress	6Ed	FR
Underskirt	3Ed	FR
Apron	2Ed	FR
Leather apron	7Ed	FR
Cap or bonnet	1Ed	FR
Hide hat	2Ed	FR
Furred hat	3Ed	FR
Leather gloves	4Ed	FR
Hide gloves	3Ed	FR
Wool jacket	5Ed	FR
Fur jacket	8Ed	FR
Leather jacket	6Ed	FR
Makeup, cream	3Ed	CO
Hair dye	2Ed	RA
Wig	1Ad	RA
Perfume	6Ed	CO
Washcloth	1Ed	FR
Bar of soap	1Ed	CO
Mirror (brushed copper)	6Ad	CO
Mirror (polished silver)	1Fd	RA
Tall mirror (polished silver and glass)	4Fd	EX
Hairbrush	1Ed	FR

Containers and Dishes	Price	Avail.
Willow basket	3Ed	FR
Backpack	1Ad	FR
Handbag	6Ed	FR
Water skin (4 pints)	3Ed	FR
Hide pouch	1Ed	FR
Large cloth bag	1Ed	FR
Quiver	8Ed	FR
Bottle (ceramic)	2Ed	FR
Bottle (glass)	8Ed	RA
Bowl (wood or ceramic)	1Ed	FR
Glass (wood or ceramic)	1Ed	FR
Tin cup	2Ed	CO
Glass	1Ad	RA
Tureen or dish	5Ed	FR
Plate (wood or ceramic)	1Ed	FR
Plate (porcelain)	3Ed	CO
Cooking pot	1Ad	FR
Frying pan or saucepan	7Ed	FR
Metal flask (1 pint)	3Ed	FR
Small chest	1Ad	FR
Trunk	2Ad	FR
Small cask	3Ad	FR
Barrel	6Ad	CO
Bucket	2Ed	FR
Wooden dishes	1Ed	FR
Kitchen knife	4Ed	FR
Big ladle	2Ed	FR

Furniture	Price
Kitchen table	4Ad
Willow chair	1Ad
Large armchair	3Ad
Shelf	6Ed
Rack	5Ed
Cupboard or chest of drawers	1Ad
Feather mattress	6Ed
Straw or bran mattress	3Ed
Feather pillow	4Ed
Straw pillow	1Ed
Linen sheets	5Ed
Wool blanket	1Ad
Coal stove	1Ad
Wood oven	2Ad

Rent, by month	Price
Bedroom, shack	7Ad
Cottage, small apartment	1Fd
Large apartment	2Fd
Private house (with two floors)	4Fd
Comfortable house (with a courtyard or a garden)	8Fd
Farm (with a lean-to, a courtyard, and a stable)	8Fd

Lodgings

An apartment or a cottage generally consists only of a modest bedroom, and a common room, which is also used as a kitchen. Families who cannot afford more live without any real privacy. The facilities of the humblest bedrooms and apartments must often be shared with next-door neighbors–when there are any facilities to speak of.

Large apartments and private houses have an actual kitchen, a living room, one to three rooms used as bedrooms, and a study or a library. Private hotels and luxurious apartments have more rooms, which are often quite large, but on average, they are from five to six times as expensive as indicated, or even much more. It also includes lodgings for domestic employees, so that they are not a disturbance to the employers.

Renting "a farm" means renting the building itself, not the land surrounding it. Its owner generally sets its rent according to its potential productivity. In practice, most of the time, it is paid for with the produce of the farmer's work. Habitations have no running water, apart from the upper districts of some great cities–mainly in Reizh–and a few rich owners. Heat is generally provided by a fireplace or a hearth, and rooms that do not have one are often freezing. Lighting comes from candles, and as most people do not–or barely–read, they are as little used as possible

The price for buying a house or any other place to live is generally equivalent to between 100 and 120 months of rent.

Traveling and Survival Tools	Price	Avail.
Bear trap	2Ad	FR
Tent (for one or two people)	1Ad	FR
Tent (for six people)	5Ad	FR
Tent (pavilion)	1Fd	CO
Sleeping bag	4Ed	FR
Fishhooks and reed rod	1Ed	FR
Grappling hook	7Ed	FR
Three feet of rope	1Ed	FR
Tinderbox	4Ed	FR
Saddle and stirrups (for a Caernide)	3Ad	FR
Saddle and stirrups (for a horse)	5Ad	CO

Various Tools	Price	Avail.
Spade, pickaxe	9Ed	FR
Hammer, sledgehammer	1Ad	FR
Sickle	9Ed	FR
Saw	9Ed	FR
Scythe	1Ad	FR
Crowbar	4Ed	FR
Lumberjack axe	8Ed	FR
Sewing kit	2Ed	FR
Precision toolkit (for watchmaking, locksmithing, etc.)	2Ad	RA
Pitchfork	8Ed	FR
Smithing tongs	3Ed	FR
Anvil	6Ad	FR
Trowel	2Ed	FR
Wheelbarrow	5Ed	FR
Plough	1Ad	FR
Bellows	7Ed	FR

Lighting	Price	Avail.
Candle (lasts 2 hours)	1Ed	FR
Resin torch (lasts 2 hours)	3Ed	FR
Oil lamp (lasts 4 hours/2 pints)	4Ed	CO
Oil lantern (lasts 2 hours/2 pints)	1Ad	CO
Two pints of oil	4Ed	CO

Writing, Painting, Drawing	Price	Avail.
Quill	1Ed	FR
Paintbrush	4Ed	FR
Charcoal	2Ed	FR
Chalk	1Ed	FR
Black ink (a vial)	4Ed	FR
Colored ink (a vial)	8Ed	CO
Ink for illuminations (a vial)	1Ad	CO
Parchment (a sheet)	1Ed	CO
Paper (a sheet)	2Ed	CO
Blank notebook (with about 50 pages)	1Fd	RA
Blank book (with a simple cover, and about 300 pages)	5Fd	RA
Ruler and compasses	8Ed	CO
Small chalkboard	2Ed	CO
Chalkboard	6Ed	CO
Magnifying glass	3Ad	RA

Musical Instruments	Price	Avail.
Bagpipes	1Ad	FR
Horn or trumpet	8Ed	FR
Flute	5Ed	FR
Harp or lyre	2Ad	FR
Tambourine	6Ed	FR
Rebec (an instrument similar to a violin)	3Ad	CO
Lute (a Tarish instrument)	1Fd	RA

Means of Transportation	Price	Renting
Cart	1Ad	2Ed
Small boat	2Ad	2Ed
Fishing boat	1Fd	4Ed
Carriage	8Ad	3Ed
Stagecoach	1Fd	3Ed
Sedan chair	3Ad	1Ed

Traveling Prices	Price
Crossing a river in a ferryboat	1Ed
Traveling in a boat (per day)	2Ad
Bridge or road toll	2Ed
Ticket for a stagecoach (per day)	1Ad



The Means of Transportation

"Renting" is the price for a one-day rental. The drivers, porters, skippers, or sailors are not included and must be paid as well (see "Wages" at the beginning of the chapter). Boats stay as close to the coast as possible. Almost no one would attempt to actually cross the sea, and there are no average prices for such services (and few captains that would be interested in such an adventure anyway).

Tickets for a boat or a stagecoach include accommodations for dining and sleeping. More expensive services can be negotiated by travelers asking for some comfort, if it can be managed… The prices are all-inclusive, and the travelers are still at the mercy of the wind, the state of the roads, or of the sea.

Few stagecoaches are built to reach the communities in the mountains. At the heart of the peninsula, a traveler will save a good amount of money, but will have to be both hardy and patient if he does not have his own mount. Some traders organize caravans pulled by pack animals, and can accept passengers at sometimes abusive prices. Going by foot is faster, but more tiring.

Stagecoaches and boats have set itineraries, and a means of transportation will probably have to be bought (along with the services of its crew) to venture away from the existing commercial roads. Giving the hired people a respectable amount of danger money is recommended to avoid bad surprises… in that regard, no sane owner will accept to rent a means of transportation to people going to a place with a bad reputation or with the intention of meeting certain dangers.

Raw Materials Miscellaneous Materials	Price	Avail.
Charcoal	4Ed	FR
Firewood	3Ed	FR
Timber (common)	4Ed	FR
Timber (exceptional)	8Ed	CO
Log (per piece)	1Ad	FR
Linen	3Ed	FR
Wool	2Ed	FR
Common dye (red, blue, green, black, yellow…)	2Ed	CO
Rare dye (purple, gold, silver)	1Ad	RA
Mortar	1Ed	FR
Carved rubblestone, per 35 cubic feet (made of sandstone or granite)	6Ed	FR
Brick, per 35 cubic feet	5Ed	FR
Tile, per 10 square feet	2Ed	CO
Chalk, per 10 square feet	5Ed	CO
Straw, per bale	1Ed	CO
Glass (for a small window)	1Ad	RA
Glass (for a large window)	4Ad	EX
Bronze ingot (one pound)	2Ad	CO
Iron ingot (one pound)	3Ad	CO
Steel ingot (one pound)	5Ad	CO
Copper or tin ingot (one pound)	2Ad	CO
Silver ingot (one pound)	1Fd	RA
Gold ingot (one pound)	2Fd	RA
Retort or glass bottle	1Ad	RA
Acetic or hydrochloric acid	8Ed	CO
Cinnabar (mercuric sulfide)	2Ad	CO
Sulfur	3Ad	RA
Saltpeter	2Ad	CO

Amounts that are not specified are to be understood as two pounds, two pints, or 10 square feet.

Livestock	Price
Sheep	1Fd
Caernide	2Fd
Boernac	2Fd
Pig	1Fd
Ox	2Fd
Chicken	2Ad
Mule	1Fd
Horse	3Fd
Shepherd or hunting dog	7Ad
Guard dog	9Ad
Trained falcon	1Fd

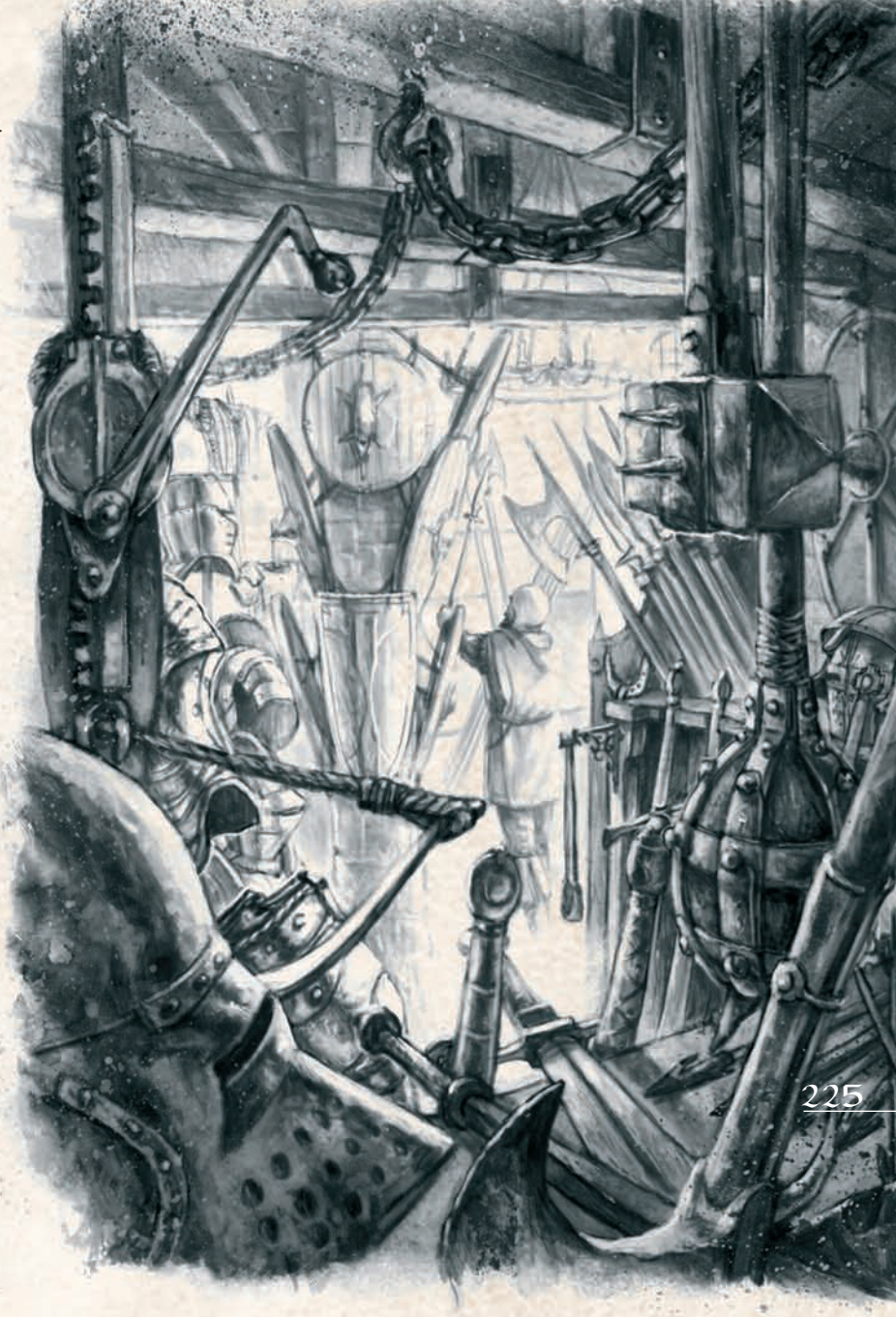
Ranged Weapons	Damage	Range	Price	Avail.
Dagger	1	3 yd	4Ed	FR
Sling	1	8 yd	2Ed	FR
Javelin	2	4 yd	8Ed	CO
Bow	2	20 yd	3Ad	FR
Crossbow	2	24 yd	5Ad	CO
Francisca	2	2 yd	2Ad	FR
Short spear	2	3 yd	2Ad	FR
Lead pellet (ten of them)	/	/	5Ed	FR
Arrow (a dozen)	/	/	7Ed	FR
Bolt (a dozen)	/	/	9Ed	CO

Range: It is the basic range of a weapon. Middle range reaches up to twice the basic range, but incurs a -2 penalty on the Attack roll. Long range reaches up to four times the basic range, and incurs a -5 penalty.

Armors and Shields	Protection	Price	Avail.
Round shield (made of metal and hardened wood)	1	2Ad	FR
Osag shield (of rectangular shape, made of wood with metal reinforcements)	1	2Ad	CO
Hilderin shield (of triangular shape, made of metal)	1	3Ad	RA
Leather tunic	1	2Ad	FR
Studded leather tunic	2	3Ad	CO
Chain mail	3	7Ad	CO
Reed cuirass	2	1Ad	RA
Continental lamellar cuirass (of leather and metal)	3	1Fd	RA
Plate armor	4	3Fd	EX
Leather coif*	/	4Ed	FR
Chain coif*	/	8Ed	CO
Osag helmet (only covers the skull)*	/	1Ad	FR
Open helmet (protects the skull, the cheeks and the neck)*	/	2Ad	CO
Helm*	/	4Ad	RA

**Every suit of armor is supplied with the corresponding helmet. Not wearing a helmet brings a -1 penalty to the Protection rating of the armor (the Protection rating cannot go below 1).*

Melee Weapons	Damage	Price	Avail.
Dagger, knife*	1	4Ed	FR
Club	1	2Ed	FR
Crafting hammer	2	1Ad	FR
Mace	2	2Ad	CO
Iron-shod walking staff (Carath)	2	8Ed	FR
Francisca* (a light axe, traditional in Tri-Kazel)	2	2Ad	FR
Short spear*	2	2Ad	FR
Battleaxe	3	5Ad	CO
Long sword (straight-bladed sword of Osag origin)	3	7Ad	CO
Gladius (short sword of Continental origin)	2	5Ad	CO
Polearm (halberd, etc. Two-handed weapon)	3	8Ad	RA
Long spear (Two-handed weapon)	3	4Ad	CO
Javelin*	2	8Ed	CO
Maul (large two-handed hammer)	4	1Fd	RA
Claymore (two-handed sword)	4	1Fd	RA



**Weapons with an asterisk can be thrown and are also presented on the chart on the previous page.*

Magientist Artifacts	Price	Avail.
Crushing Pliers	1Fd	CO
Lighter	2Ad	CO
Portative Nebular	3Ad	CO
Magientist Pulley	4Ad	CO
Driller-hammerer	8Ad	CO
Mechanical Saw	8Ad	CO
Vision Glasses	1Fd	RA
Tonic	5Ad	RA
Mobile Flux Extractor	1Fd	RA
Energetic Gauntlet	1Fd	EX



Flux Cartridges (1 charge)	Reizh	Avail.	Taol	Avail.	Gwidre	Avail.
Cartridge–mineral	7Ed	CO	1Ad	CO	12Ed	RA
Cartridge–vegetal	9Ed	CO	11Ed	CO	15Ed	RA
Cartridge–organic	1Ad	CO	15Ed	RA	18Ed	RA
Cartridge–fossil	3Ad	RA	5Ad	EX	6Ad	EX

The price of Flux on black markets (in Taol-Kaer and above all in Gwidre) can range from three to five times the average price. Medium cartridges (3 charges) cost three times the price of a simple cartridge.
Flux jars (30 charges) are generally sold with a discount and cost the equivalent of 25 to 28 charges/simple cartridges. Their availability is always one level below the cartridges' (a jar of fossil Flux is therefore of Exceptional availability in Reizh, and is almost impossible to find anywhere else).

Equipment of Superior Quality

Many articles can be of excellent quality. Clothes, weapons, furniture, and crafted items fit into these categories. Likewise, some brands of cider or beer have an established reputation. Their price is entirely left to the Game Leader. An article of "Frequent" Availability but of exceptional quality can be worth up to ten times its average price, or even more…

Weapons, Armors, and Tools of Exceptional Quality

These weapons and armors are always of Exceptional rarity and their value can reach up to ten times that of an ordinary weapon, or even much more. Their Damage or Protection rating is improved by 1 point. Some truly legendary weapons and armors, often worn by heroes and sometimes given a name, have their Damage or Protection rating go 1 point higher, or even 2 points. Obviously, no one would think about giving them away, whatever the price offered…

Other items, such as tools, Magientist artifacts, or musical instruments, for example, can also give bonuses from +1 to +3 according to their quality.

Breaking Equipment

A critical failure when using a piece of equipment destroys it.
It is possible to repair such an item, but the cost will be at least the original price. Incautious use of Magientist material can lead to direr consequences (see the "Magience" chapter).

If a PC wearing armor or a shield takes a critical hit, he must roll 1d10. A natural 1 means that the Protection breaks.

A shield always breaks before a piece of armor.

Optional Rule: Maintaining Equipment

By applying this optional rule, the Leader will add an aspect of management for equipment by simulating wear and tear and the necessity of maintenance.
The monthly maintenance of each piece of equipment used intensively (meaning daily) costs one tenth of the item's price (which includes spare pieces, paying a craftsman, etc.) or half of it if the Character has an appropriate Discipline for repairing and succeeds in a Complicated roll (14).

Each month of intensive use without maintaining a piece of equipment will bring a -1 penalty when using it. When it reaches -3, the item becomes fragile and breaks on a natural 1 when used.

In the case of a badly maintained protection, its chances of being destroyed by a critical hit are greater by 1 point for every month without maintenance (until it reaches 4 chances out of 10 after three months of neglect).



Experience and Advancement

Shadows of Esteren is a game in which the Characters will get to make rapid progress in their skills and techniques. The PCs will earn experience throughout their adventures, which will be represented by Experience points (XPs) that the GL will award to the Players. These XPs will allow them to improve their skills as well as other secondary characteristics.

Earning Experience Points

Three factors allow the Leader to determine the amount of XPs to give at the end of each adventure. In general, for each adventure, the PCs will receive between 3 and 15 Experience points. Each of the factors being ranged from 1 to 5, the simplest thing to do is to start from an average number of 3 XPs for each factor and then modulate it according to the difficulty encountered, the result obtained, and the Characters' development and portrayal.

Factors	*Experience Points*
Confrontation	**1 to 5**
Progression of the plot	**1 to 5**
Interpretation of the PC	**1 to 5**

The Players just finished an adventure. The Leader estimates that it presented confrontations of a standard difficulty and that each Player correctly relied on his skills to solve them: each PC gets 3 XPs. The group understood particularly well the ins and outs of the story, and found the optimal solution: the Leader decides that all the Players deserve 5 XPs. Thus, each Player gets 8 points. Now, the Leader distributes points for interpretation. A Player who correctly took part in the adventure while not respecting the principles of his Character's personality earns 2 more XPs for this factor, while the two other Players who convincingly portrayed the Ways and Character Traits of their PCs earn 4 more XPs each.

Confrontation

There are plenty of times in Shadows of Esteren where Players will have to be brave or subtle to reach their objectives. They may also have to deal with technical challenges or the resolution of a mystery. This factor should reward these various qualities according to everyone's specialties. The Leader can judge if a skill Domain was appropriately used to solve a confrontation (be it Close Combat, Feats, Natural Environment, Relation, Science, etc.). Every skill can, at some time or another, be useful to solve a confrontation. In a schematic way, these four types of confrontation can be differentiated as follows:

- Fight:

The Characters defeated an opponent, with brawn or brains. They can also have gone through a physical ordeal with bravery and showed pugnacity and fortitude in adversity.

- Negotiation:

Through force of persuasion, the Characters took a decisive step toward the completion of the adventure. It can be hard negotiations with a surly lord that were crowned with success, the presentation of a project before an assembly that accepted it, avoiding a war, or even convincing an opponent to forgo his mad ambitions.

- Mysteries:

Sometimes, a confrontation will take the form of solving a mystery, properly carrying out an investigation, or using intellectual skills to solve a problem. Characters who discover well-kept secrets should also be rewarded with XPs.

- Techniques:

Technical challenges require the PCs to be clever and resourceful to solve a problem: repairing an object essential for the rest of the adventure, leading the group without any mishap through correct orientation in the middle of the wilderness, etc.



It is quite possible that a Character did not take part in any fights, but did solve some kind of mystery during the adventure. If his companions earn 3 XPs in Confrontation for their fights, he should also earn points for having overcome this intellectual challenge. In this way, each PC should have access to the Experience points of this factor, whatever his profession. The harder the confrontations are, the more XPs the GL should grant for this factor.

Progression of the Plot

At the end of each adventure, the GL evaluates the way the Players have progressed in the resolution of the plot. Have they discovered the right clues? Have they correctly accomplished what their PCs needed to (protecting a person or a convoy, recovering an object, etc.)?

Interpretation of the PC

Shadows of Esteren is a game of atmosphere and the GL should reward Players making efforts to convincingly play their PCs, as they contribute to strengthening the mood. However, the GL should be careful not to punish Players who are shy and self-conscious by nature.
Experience for interpretation corresponds to how well the Ways and Character Traits of the Character were portrayed.



Optional Rule: Going Beyond the Charts

In the case of particularly striking, clever, or brave acts, or to mark a crucial moment, the GL can distribute more than 5 XPs for one or every experience factor. Through the game, after several adventures, the Leader can adjust the amount of points given, by scaling it up or down, if the advancement seems too slow or, on the contrary, too fast to him. Initially, Shadows of Esteren is a game that has been designed to allow a large margin of advancement for the PCs, while postulating that such an evolution should take time and be deserved. But of course, the Leader is free to adjust this experience system so that it fits his gaming style. For a more "heroic" kind of game, the Leader can go up to a gain of 30 XPs for each adventure.

Optional Rule: Alternative Calculation of XPs for Fights and Confrontations



In the case of an adventure depicting many important confrontations (be they physical fights, mysteries, negotiations, technical challenges, etc.), the Leader can use another calculation basis by distributing XPs for each confrontation. Obviously, by using this optional rule, the GL will come to go beyond the 5 XPs proposed by default for confrontations. However, it is recommended to set a maximum limit of 20 XPs for each adventure, so as not to unbalance the advancement of the PCs.

Following a memorable adventure including two confrontations weapon in hand against dreadful Feondas, the resolution of a crucial mystery, and the success of a highly risky technical challenge, the Leader decides to make exceptional use of this optional rule. Instead of obtaining between 1 and 5 XPs for this factor, the Leader cumulates the different confrontations: 3 XPs for each fight, 3 for the mystery, and 4 for the technical challenge. As each Player actively took part in all the confrontations, he gives 13 XPs to each PC, to which he adds those for interpretation and the progression of the plot.

Spending Experience Points

At the end or before the beginning of a game session, each Player can spend XPs to improve her PC. If the Leader allows it, this evolution can take place during play. The main use is improving skill ratings: up to 5 for Domains; up to a maximum of 15 for Disciplines. A rating in a skill can only be improved once per game session. However, it is possible to improve several different skills. If the Character learns with a mentor, fewer points have to be spent (the number is indicated in brackets). Here is a chart summing up the necessary amount of XPs to reach the desired rating:

Rating to reach	*XP Cost*
1 – 5 (Domain)	10
6 – 10 (Discipline)	25 (20)
11 – 15 (Discipline)	40 (30)

Johan has basic knowledge in Stealth, with a rating of 2 in this Domain. Mark wants to reach a rating of 3, which will cost him 10 XPs. Since he has remaining points, Mark also decides to improve his Side Roads Discipline from 6 to 7, which will cost him 25 XPs.

Learning Method

Generally, a PC learns by himself, from experience, but it can be interesting to justify why he could develop a skill. Thus, Players are advised to spend their XPs in a skill that has been required during the adventure, or for which the PC has shown interest. A PC can also progress in a skill he never uses, in which case he will have to get the help of a mentor, or spend time experimenting alone. Getting the help of a mentor makes learning easier for Disciplines and lowers the XP cost from 25 to 20 points.

The training will last one week to go up a point; double that if the PC is alone.

From level 11 on, training with a mentor (with a rating at least one level higher) can lower the amount of Experience points normally required from 40 to 30 points. This can be a source of adventures for the Leader, as it makes for a good opportunity to introduce improvement quests for the Characters. However, it is possible to reach excellence by oneself, but it takes longer and is more demanding. The training will last a month (half of that with a mentor) and improving a Discipline by one point will cost 40 points.

Optional Rule: Staying Fit

Being an Expert or a Master (with a rating of 10 and more) in a skill is not within everyone's reach and requires regular practice. This optional rule makes this aspect of the game more realistic. The Leader is free to adopt it or not, according to the atmosphere he wishes to give to his game. Each time the Player spends Experience points to improve a skill other than one pertaining to his fields of expertise, he must pay an extra tribute in XPs for each one of his skills beyond 9:

Discipline Rating	*XP Tribute*
10-13	5
14	10
15	15

Rahir is an Expert in fighting with swords. He has a rating of 12 in this Discipline. Following a dangerous journey that almost cost him his life, Rahir decides to improve his Travel Domain. In order to obtain a rating of 5 in Travel, he spends 10 XPs, to which a tribute of 5 more XPs is added because of his rating of 12 in Swords. If Rahir had another Discipline higher than or equal to 10, he would have to pay another tribute.

Such tributes are cumulative in the case of several expertises, and stand for the energy necessary to maintain a level of excellence while learning another Discipline.

Learning Fighting Arts

Instead of specializing into a category of weapons, a PC can learn a fighting technique (see the Fighting Arts' descriptions, p.238). Learning a Fighting Art costs 20 XPs and requires one month of intensive training. Normally, such an Art is taught by a mentor who has mastered it; however, it is possible to learn it by oneself by spending twice as many XPs and twice as much time on it.

Recovering Survival Points

Acquiring experience makes it possible to improve the odds of surviving in the hostile environment of Esteren. By spending 5 XPs, a Character can recover a spent Survival point. Note that it is in no way possible to go beyond the maximum number of Survival points indicated on the Character Sheet.

Johan has used two Survival points during the last adventure. He only has one point remaining out of the original three. With the 35 XPs he has gathered over the time, he decides to repurchase 2 Survival points for 10 XPs. Whatever his amount of available Experience points, Johan can never have more than 3 Survival points.

Improving Defense and Speed Ratings

Throughout the adventures, a PC can improve her Defense and her Speed. Each time she improves one of these characteristics by 1 point, she ticks a box in the corresponding line on her Character Sheet. A PC cannot improve her Speed by more than 5 points, and her Defense by more than 10. From the fifth bonus point, every extra point costs 30 XPs.

Bonus	XP Cost
1	10
2	15
3	20
4	25
5+	30

At creation, Johan had a rating of 14 in Defense. After the last adventure, Mark spent 10 XPs to improve this rating by one point. If he wishes to improve Johan's Defense a second time, Mark will have to spend 15 XPs this time.

Sigil Rann and Rindath

Sigil Rann can be improved like a normal Discipline (see the previous page). Moreover, each time a Demorthèn takes a level in Sigil Rann, he earns a bonus to his maximum Rindath rating.

Sigil Rann Level	Rindath
6 to 9	5
10 to 13	10
14	20
15	30

Such bonuses are cumulative: therefore, reaching level 9 gives 5 more Rindath points (for a total of 20 extra points at this stage), then 10 at level 10, and 10 again at level 11, etc. It is possible to earn a total of 110 extra permanent Rindath points.



These points do not mean that the vital energy of the Demorthèn increases, but that she hones her ability to commune with the spirits of nature to obtain their help.

Learning a New Ogham

Using an Ogham implies knowing how to get in tune with it. This training is simulated by the expenditure of 5 XPs. Once it is done, the Ogham is permanently known.

Increasing Exaltation

The level of Exaltation shows the fervor adepts have for the Creator. Each time an adept of the Temple improves the Miracles Discipline, he earns a defined amount of Exaltation points, which increase his maximum level as well:
As with the Demorthèn's Rindath, increases in Exaltation are cumulative.

Miracles Level	Exaltation
6 to 9	5
10 to 13	10
14	20
15	30

Awakening to a New Miracle

When a PC is created, she can have access to a first Miracle. Through her journeys, she can awaken to other Miracles. Such an awakening costs 5 XPs, but will only occur in a specific instance: indeed, awakening to a new Miracle always happens at the occasion of a mystical scene. Until level 10, a PC can awaken to a new Miracle only once for each level of the Miracles Discipline he earns. Beyond this, there is no limit. The Player tells the Leader what Miracle he would like to awaken to, and must wait for an appropriate scene to do so.

Jonathan's Character, Erog, is a priest of the Temple with a level of 11 in the Miracles Discipline. Since he has reached this level, Erog has not awakened to a new Miracle. As his PC has a reserve of 32 XPs, Jonathan tells the Leader he would like to awaken to the Miracle of Purification. Some time later, Erog and his companions have to deal with a Feond infestation threatening a small Gwidrite community. After the group has ventured into the lair of the beasts and as the fight rages, Erog calls upon the One God to purify this place of corruption. The Leader has Erog make his Resolution Roll to know whether the Miracle succeeds or not. If Erog manages to perform this Miracle, he is considered to have awakened to this new power. This costs him 5 XPs. As Erog has a level of 11 in the Miracles Discipline, he can awaken to another power if it fits the situation.

Resolution System

When a particular action is attempted, or when the knowledge of the PC is tested, the GL 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) that fits the action, as well as to the associated Way. To succeed, the Player must reach a number higher in value 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 higher in value or equal to the Difficulty Threshold

The GL should require Resolution rolls only when it is truly necessary, such as in the case of an action significant for the rest of the adventure, for example. Remember that such a Resolution roll should never replace a Player's description of his action (see the paragraph "Using the System" on pages 175-176).

Examples of Resolution Rolls

To determine the result of actions requiring physical strength or agility (when the PC wants to bash a door, jump from one roof to another, etc.), the Feats Domain, associated to the Way of Combativeness, is used by default. When the PC tries to be convincing, to barter, or generally speaking, to be persuasive, the GL will ask for a Relation roll, associated with the Way of Empathy, etc. By default, each Domain has a Way associated to it. Thus, its rating will be used for each Resolution roll related to this skill field.

Level of 0 in a Domain: If the PC has a level of 0 in a Domain, he can still attempt the action, simply by using the Way rating associated to the Domain, and the die roll.

Other Types of Resolution Rolls: The Resolution System will take many forms, as it can be used in various circumstances related to the PC. For example, instead of adding the rating of a Domain to the rating of a Way, the Player can use other attributes, such as Stamina (to measure physical resistance), Sanity, or even Way ratings directly. Some of these particular cases are described in the associated chapters of the system, but they all work in the same way: the result of the D10 added to the rating in question must exceed the Difficulty Threshold set by the Leader.

Default Domains: In the Shadows of Esteren books, when a Resolution roll is required, the required Domain is generally indicated by default. If a PC possesses a suitable Discipline in the Domain in question, she can use it, of course. For example, during a scene in which a PC falls into water, a Feats roll is required to escape the current; a PC with the Swimming Discipline can obviously use it.

When the Discipline is directly mentioned, it means that it is necessary for this type of action (for example, earning bonuses to resist a disease with the use of the Medicine Discipline). However, except in particular cases, it is possible to attempt the action by using the rating of the associated Domain, when lacking a Discipline.

Optional Rule: Picking another Way

This optional rule makes it possible to use a different Way than the one usually associated with a Domain to attempt an action. Such use of an alternative Way must be justified during the action at hand. For example, a combative PC (with a major rating in Combativeness) will probably attempt to solve some situations with this Way. The Travel Domain generally relies on his Empathy; his ability to stay alert, and to be aware of the environment or his mount. He may possibly use his Combativeness instead of his Empathy in a case where his survival is at stake and where his pugnacity could logically contribute.

Using another Way should not become a habit, and each case is subject to the approval of the GL. The Player must explain how his PC will use this alternative Way for the action at hand.

If an action is failed when an alternative Way is used, the result will have more harmful consequences than an ordinary failure with the default Way. Let's imagine a rather creative PC trying to convince soldiers to let her in. Instead of using the Way of Empathy normally related to the Relation Domain, the GL authorizes the Player to use her Creativity. Indeed, the Player explains to the rest of the group that her PC improvises a fanciful story to fool the soldiers. Should she succeed, everything goes fine: the soldiers buy it and they obey. Should she fail, they may not appreciate such a trick and decide to put her in jail for a few days in order to teach her a lesson.

The Difficulty Threshold

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

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

The theoretical difficulty of an action can be largely influenced by the circumstances. Climbing a wall on a sunny day with the help of comrades cannot be compared with climbing the same wall in the middle of the night, alone, and under a driving rain.
Here are some typical circumstances influencing the odds of succeeding an action: particular environmental conditions (pitch dark, dazzling sun, fog, rain, snow, tempest, etc.), taking one's time or being in a hurry, being assisted by a skilled Character, not having the appropriate tools, etc.
In such cases, the GL can decide to take the Threshold one level higher or lower. If there are several factors involved, the Threshold might even change by two levels.

Automatic Success and Failure

A PC may be skilled enough in a Domain and have a strong enough Way for the addition of both numbers to go over the Difficulty Threshold defined by the GL without having to roll 1D10. Success is then considered to be a given and it is not necessary to roll a die.

Sylviane has a rating of 10 in the Riding Discipline and of 5 in the Way of Empathy. While being chased, Sylviane must jump over a chasm that would have normally required a Complicated Travel roll (14). However, Sylviane already has a rating of 15 by adding up her Discipline and her Way. It is an automatic success and the GL describes how the PC crosses the gap.

It may also be that an action is clearly out of reach for the PC, either because the Threshold to reach is too high for him, or because the action planned is unrealistic or goes beyond human abilities. Although it is possible to outdo oneself, no one can cross the limits of the human body or mind without some exterior help, be it mystical or technical. The GL warns a Player if the action he has in mind is impossible. Trying anyway will automatically lead to failure.

Success and Failure Margins

Sometimes, it can be useful to know the degree of the success (or failure) of an action. This is measured by the margin of success or failure, which is the value obtained by subtracting the Difficulty Threshold from the result of the Resolution roll. The greater this value is, the more important the success or the failure is. This margin has no direct impact in terms of rules, but it will help the Leader and the Players picture the way an action succeeds or fails, and spice up the descriptions of the scenes. To succeed in an action with a margin of 10 or more is considered remarkable, while failing with a margin of 10 or more is catastrophic. By contrast, failing with a margin of only a few points will lead to an action that was a near success, and vice versa.

Sylviane is trying to convince villagers to forsake the use of a Magientist artifact. The Leader considers it a Difficult action, for the action takes place in Reizhite territory, and the machinery in question allows sizeable production gains. Sylviane will have to succeed in a Difficult (17) Relation roll. As she has 3 points in the Relation Domain and a rating of 5 in Empathy, Sylviane will have to roll at least a 9 to reach the Threshold. Not an easy one! Unfortunately, the die gives a result of 2 (which makes a total of 10 on this action). The failure is resounding, with a margin of 7 points: the GL depicts the annoyance of the villagers, who violently send the Demorthèn packing.

Out of Reach Actions

It is possible that a Character cannot theoretically succeed in some actions because of too low a skill and/or Way rating. In such a case, obtaining a natural 10 on his die roll (the "0" side of the die) will assure a close success in any attempted action with a Difficulty Threshold of 17 or less.
If the Character has a rating of 0 in a Domain, he can attempt an action (except in Domains requiring studies, see p.195), but his success will always be considered to have a margin of 0, which means a close call.

Sylviane is being chased by beasts. It is pitch dark and a driving rain might make her fall at any moment. As a last resort, she tries to climb up a tree so as to escape the hungry horde. The Leader considers that this is a Standard (11) action, but that night and rain make the action Difficult (17). Unfortunately, Sylviane is only a novice climber; her Feats rating is 1, and her Combativeness is 3. She should obtain 13 on her die roll to succeed, which is impossible! Her only chance is to roll a natural 10 to succeed in her action...

Critical Success

If the Character succeeds in an action by obtaining a natural 10, he must roll 1D10 again. If he gets another 10, he achieves a critical success. Every other result on this second roll will have no particular effect. Such a success can be treated in two different ways. First, it can bring a 5-point bonus to the roll or another concrete effect (see below). Note that these bonuses do not apply to actions that succeeded through this means when they were otherwise out of reach (see the previous paragraph). Here are some examples:

Fighting:
A critical hit increases the damage by 5 points.

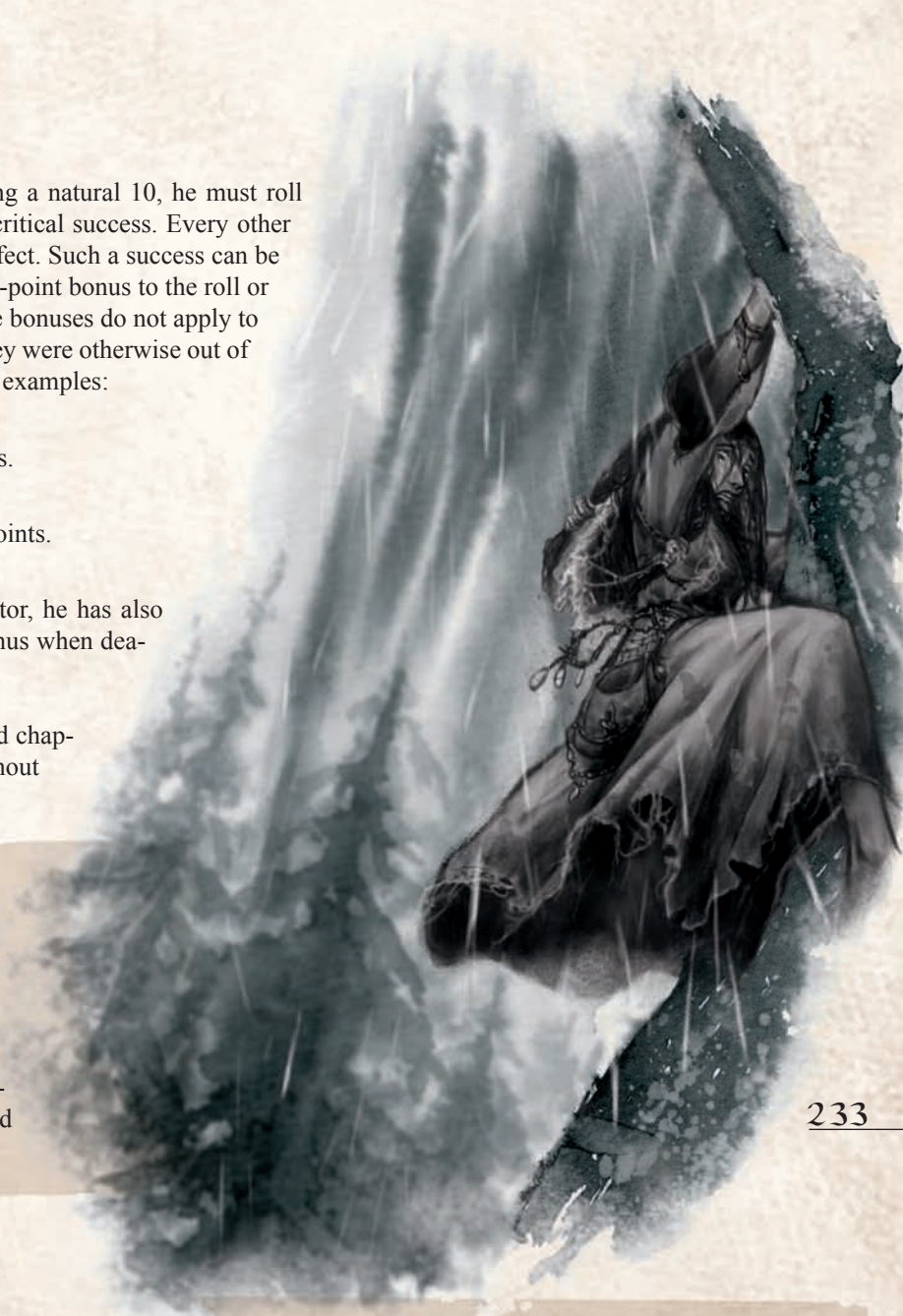
Healing:
The patient is instantly healed of 5 damage points.

Persuasion:
Not only has the PC convinced his interlocutor, he has also probably charmed him. He has a +5 temporary bonus when dealing with this interlocutor.

Some situations or actions, described on the related chapters, trigger a particular effect on a natural 10, without having to roll a die again.

Optional Rule:

The other way to treat a critical success is to leave its effect entirely to the discretion of the Leader, so that she can adapt it to the current scene. The purpose is to reinforce the dramatic impact of such a success, so as to accentuate the mood and make the moment unforgettable. Another option, left to experienced Players, is to let the Player who has rolled the critical success describe the ensuing effect.



Critical Failure

Failing an action by rolling a natural 1 on the die roll (the "1" side of the die) means that the Player must roll 1D10 again. On a new result of 1, he suffers a critical failure. Every other result on this second roll will have no particular effect. Not only will the action attempted by the Character be a complete and utter failure, it will also have negative effects. Using the example of a Character trying to convince a crowd, a critical failure will not only leave everyone unconvinced, but will also trigger a violent riot among the assembly. Usually, a critical failure brings a 5-point penalty or a concrete negative effect, which can be improvised by the Leader to fit the scene. Here are some examples:

Feats:
The PC gets hurt for 5 damage points.

Crafting:
The failure breaks the tools used and possibly inflicts 5 damage points if hazardous materials are used.

Healing:
The state of the wounded person gets 5 damage points worse.

Fighting:
The fighter breaks her weapon.

Optional Rule: Beyond Limits

With this optional rule, a natural 10 can allow a Character to outdo himself by succeeding in an action with a normally inaccessible Difficulty Threshold for him. This situation can only be applied if the Threshold is directly above the one that is normally the limit.

Sylviane attempts to translate a very complex ancient text. The GL considers this translation to be of Exceptional (25) Difficulty. However, Sylviane has a level of 9 in the Ancient Tongue Discipline and 5 in the Way of Empathy, which allows her to reach a maximum result of 24 (with a result of 10 on her die roll). Short of a critical success, this translation is normally out of reach. But if the GL uses this optional rule, a natural 10 on her die roll can allow her to reach the Exceptional (25) level, which is directly above the maximum level she can reach.

Choosing to adopt this optional rule will give your game a more heroic feeling, in which characters will be more likely to go beyond their limits at crucial moments.

Contested Actions

When two Characters do actions that oppose each other, each one rolls a regular Resolution roll. The one with the highest rating wins the contest. In this case as well, a success margin can be used to evaluate the degree of the success obtained; here, it will be the difference between the two results. A draw means a tie between the two opponents. Persuasion is a particular case: a Character being persuaded (with the Relation Domain) can, if he wants, use his Mental Resistance rating or his Way of Empathy instead of his rating in the Relation Domain.

Testing

The Players have most probably noticed that high ratings in Ways bring benefits in using the Domains and Disciplines. This way, a Character with 5 in Creativity can use her inspiration and her resourcefulness each time she makes something (Craft Domain); likewise, her knack for improvisation can help her during fights (as Creativity is used to calculate the Potential rating). But these high ratings in Ways can become serious hindrances in some situations–called Tests–in which it will be better to have the lowest rating possible… Thus, a high Combativeness is much more likely to lead to violence, the same way that a high Creativity can easily lead to rebellious acts. Each Way hides a Fault that can manifest at critical times.

The Five Faults

Passion (Combativeness): this Fault manifests itself through fits of violence or anger, an excessive love or hatred, an irrational enthusiasm, an out-of-proportion pride, taking dangerous risks, etc. When someone or something irritates the PC, when it is related to something he strongly loves or hates, when he undergoes humiliation or comes to take risks, he will be tempted to react in an impulsive way if his Fault gets the better of him.

Subversion (Creativity): Subversion comes under the form of constant non-conformism or all-out eccentricity; the inability to abide by a rule or to adapt to a system. When Subversion overcomes a Character, she will not listen to what she is told, will disobey and have it her way, without caring about the consequences.

Influence (Empathy): this Fault can manifest itself when a PC risks being influenced, moved, or generally speaking, filled with the intensity of the events around him. When Influence takes over, the PC is overwhelmed by what he is going through and may take strange decisions or behave in a disconcerting way.

Doubt (Reason): when facing an important dilemma, a Character can be beset by a doubt that will hinder her or stop her in her tracks. This can apply to social or intellectual situations, but also to physical prowess: being overcautious, the Character, stricken by doubt, will hesitate, not knowing what to do.

Guilt (Conviction): when the PC has to betray someone, lie, or accomplish acts that go against his moral codes, his guilt and moral principles can catch up with him, leaving him in an awful state of hesitation. If he decides to accomplish the act at hand nevertheless, the Character will be consumed with remorse and a feeling of guilt. The principles in question can be of any nature: religious, social, personal, etc. and differ according to each Character.

The Interpretation of Faults

Like the Ways, the Faults can be given many different interpretations. The Player is left to characterize how a Fault can manifest with his Character according to the context. Thus, for Combativeness, a pugnacious warrior and a passionate bard could both have 5 in Combativeness and doubtlessly express their Passion in a very different way. Context can also make the manifestations of a Fault vary strongly: an act of betrayal from a person with a strict code of personal conduct and the transgression of a religious taboo do not have much to do with each other, yet they both involve Guilt.

Moreover, Faults combine with each other. Thus, a PC with high ratings in Passion and in Guilt will probably be led to commit acts on the spur of the moment, but will regret them very strongly thereafter… The Fault with the highest rating will generally overshadow the other.

Test Roll

A Test roll is a very particular Resolution roll that makes direct use of the Ways. To succeed in a Test, the Player rolls 1D10 and the result must bypass a Difficulty Threshold, which will be represented here by the rating of the implicated Way. According to the intensity of the event or the context, the Leader can add from 1 to 3 points to the Threshold.

1D10 must be above the Difficulty Threshold (Way rating + modifier)

If she succeeds, the Character temporarily surpasses her Fault, but new solicitations can lead to a new Test. If she fails, she falls under the influence of the Fault for 1D10 minutes. A natural 1 is always considered a failure. The Player is then encouraged to play or describe the Fault besetting her Character the best she can. If the Player does not manage to do so, the Leader can tell on her behalf the way her Character behaves.

When Tests should be Used

These specific Resolution rolls have been designed to stress a particularly important moment of the story, when the PC ends up in a critical situation. They should remain rare and the Leader can do without asking for such a roll if the Players correctly portray their Characters by themselves.

Here are some examples of Test rolls:

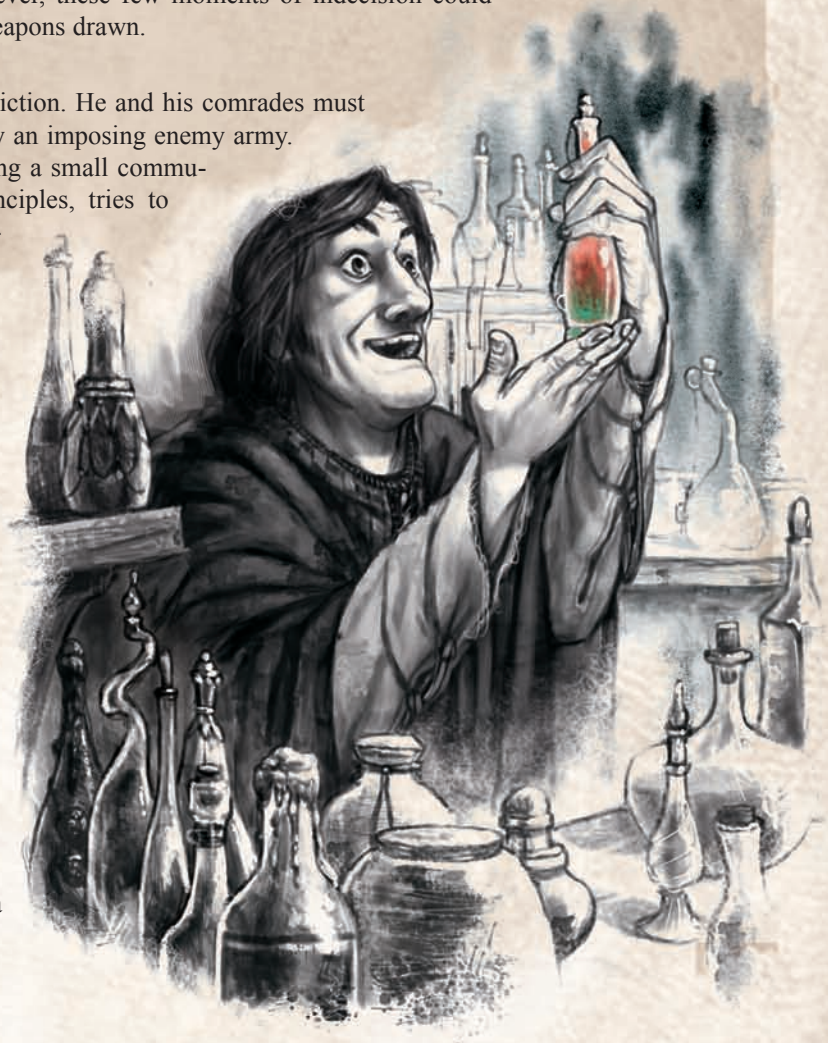
Passion: Jos is a scholar with a rating of 4 in Combativeness. He is involved in a debate of the highest importance in which taunts spring from all sides and tension is palpable. Malik, the person playing Jos, shows his Character's anger as his companions try to calm him down before things turn out for the worst… In this case, the Leader does not need to ask for a Test roll for Jos as his Player gives a correct interpretation of the combative temper of his Character. Should Malik have remained completely stoical, the Leader could have asked for a Test roll to determine if his Character was overcome by his boiling temper.

Subversion: Fiona is a seasoned fighter with a rating of 4 in Creativity. Exhausted, she finally reaches the gates of a castle to deliver a vital warning and is asked to surrender all of her weapons before entering. The clock is ticking! Knowing how important the stakes are, Caroline, who plays Fiona, entrusts her equipment to the soldiers without complaining. The Leader asks her for a Test roll, for it is possible that Fiona could do things her way and try to keep a dagger on her, without thinking about the possible consequences…

Influence: Rhys is a young Demorthèn with 5 in Empathy. When exploring an ancient network of underground tunnels with his companions, he stumbles upon remains probably dating back to the Aergewin. The runes and the pictures engraved on the rock fascinate the Demorthèn. Maybe this place was of paramount importance in the ancient times? Suddenly, inhuman growls can be heard from the darkness. Fleeing is necessary, and Rhys's comrades at arms insist that they must leave this place. The Leader can ask for a Test of Empathy: the very peculiar atmosphere of this place could very well overcome the Demorthèn to the point that he would remain on the spot, hypnotized by what he feels, and taking senseless risks in the process.

Doubt: Seren is a Magientist with a rating of 4 in Reason. Chased by what appears to be mercenaries hired by a Magientist Lodge, she ends up cornered on a balcony. She is at a dead-end! The only solution would be to run and attempt a jump to reach the roof of the house in front of her… a quite uncommon situation for a well-learned young woman used to the studious atmosphere of the libraries of the Reizhite capital city. Moreover, there is a high risk of falling to her death! The Leader asks the person playing Seren for a Test roll linked to Reason: it is possible that the young woman would find herself paralyzed by doubt, hesitating to attempt this dangerous jump. However, these few moments of indecision could prove to be fatal as the mercenaries rush at her with their weapons drawn.

Guilt: Enor is a priest of the Temple with 5 in Conviction. He and his comrades must absolutely leave a region that is about to be attacked by an imposing enemy army. However, by departing immediately, they are surely dooming a small community that has not been warned… Enor, beset by his principles, tries to convince his friends to turn back, go to the village, and organize an evacuation of the population that remained there. The Leader does not need to intervene, since Enor's Player, Alan, is giving a correct interpretation of the strength of the moral principles of his Character.



Luck Roll

Sometimes, chance may determine a good part of an event's outcome. For example, the PC is chased and ends up in a dead-end: will he find a ladder or a manhole to make his escape? Another wants to create an antidote and needs a particular ingredient: can it be found in the only shop of this isolated village? Of course, the GL may arbitrarily decide this, but he can also resort to having the Player make a Luck roll. The GL determines a Difficulty Threshold between 2 (very likely) and 9 (very unlikely). The Player then rolls 1D10 and must reach or go beyond the Threshold to be lucky, and his roll can be modified by an Advantage or a Disadvantage. A roll of 1 always means a stroke of bad luck and a 10 some great fortune.

Combat System

A fight is divided into Rounds, at the beginning of which each Character chooses a Fighting Attitude. Fighting in Shadows of Esteren is quick and violent; it is often better to avoid a confrontation or be sure to defeat an opponent quickly.

The Round

During a Round, each participant attacks, defends, moves, etc. A Round lasts about six seconds, and a fight should generally only last a few Rounds. A Round is composed of several phases, the order of which must always be respected:

1. Determination of the order of action
2. Announcing Attitudes
3. Resolution of action
4. Calculating damage

1- Order of Action

To determine the order of action, there are two ways to proceed:

1. Compare the Speed ratings. This is the simplest and quickest method.
2. Each participant rolls 1D10, to which he adds his Speed rating. This method makes the fight somewhat slower, but it favors suspense.

The one with the highest rating gets the initiative and becomes first in the order of action. Characters with the same rating act simultaneously. If several combatants are engaged in the same melee, the order of each one is established this way. At this moment, only the Quick Attack Attitude can be announced, which has the effect of improving the Character's total Speed rating. Each Player intending to use this Attitude must announce it immediately; otherwise, the GL may proceed to the following combat phase.

Elen is fighting a brigand. She has a Speed of 7 and gets a 6 on her D10, which amounts to a total rating of 13. The brigand has a rating of 8 and gets a 7, which makes a total of 15. Thus, the brigand is the fastest; he is first in the order of action.

2- Fighting Attitudes

Each protagonist announces the Fighting Attitude he has chosen; the slowest one–which means the last one in the order of action–speaks first, and the fastest one is the last to decide. This represents the fact that the fastest Character evaluates the intentions of his opponents and manages to precede them.

The choice of the Attitude must be announced quickly; if a Player hesitates, the PC is considered to be indecisive and his Attitude will be Standard by default.

The Attitudes are described in the Character Creation chapter, p.216.

Since Elen is the slowest (the last in the order of action), the GL asks the Player which Fighting Attitude she chooses. She picks the Standard Attitude. The GL decides to use an Offensive Attitude for the brigand.

3- Resolution of Action

Each fighter then makes his Resolution roll according to the 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 surpasses the opponent's Defense rating, he is hit.
The Attack and Defense ratings are adjusted according to the chosen Attitude; they are indicated on the Character Sheet for the favored weapon so as not to lose time calculating them in the middle of a fight.

The brigand has the initiative. The GL rolls a 5 on his die, which added to his Attack rating in an Offensive Attitude, gives a total of 15. Elen, having a Defense rating of 11, is hit.

4- Calculating the Damage Points

A successful Attack roll means that at least one blow has been dealt during the Round. If such 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 rating, which will give the success margin of the attack. Finally, the Protection rating of the opponent is removed from this margin of success (these subtracted points represent the damage absorbed by the defender's armor) in order to know the inflicted damage points.

Attack roll - opponent's Defense (+ weapon damage) = Margin of Success
Margin of Success - Protection rating = damage points

For each damage point, the Player ticks a box in the Health Condition chart of her Character Sheet. The received wounds are cumulative and the Player ticks boxes each time she suffers damage. A gash can become a fatal wound if the PC is already in a dire state. Damage is inflicted from the success of the attack, which can immediately impose penalties on the wounded opponent. Suffering an amount of damage points in excess of one's maximum total of Health points in one blow always results in instant death. Take a look at page 239 to know more about managing Health. Thus, initiative can be of capital importance; it is indeed possible that the fighter with the initiative deals an incapacitating blow to his opponent, who will then be unable to strike back.

The brigand got an initial Attack rating of 15, to which the Leader adds the damage inflicted by his weapon (2 points). Elen's Defense level (11) is subtracted from this total rating (17), which gives a margin of 6 damage points. Fortunately, Elen wears thick leather armor that soaks up 2 damage points. Still, the brigand deals 4 damage points, resulting in a nasty gash. Camilla, who plays Elen, ticks 4 boxes on her Health Condition chart. Her condition is still Good, so the wound causes her no penalty. As Elen is still standing, her attack proceeds: Camilla rolls an 8 on her die. Added to her Attack rating in a Standard Attitude, her Attack roll reaches 16. The GL takes a look at his notes and sees that the brigand has a Defense of 10, because of his Offensive Attitude. Elen hits her opponent! She can add the damage inflicted by her weapon (2). The Leader subtracts the Defense of the bandit (10), as well as his Protection rating (2), from the total rating (18). Elen still inflicts a serious wound of 6 damage points. As the dice are rolled and the ratings are compared, the GL and the Players can describe the scene so as to make it more vivid: "Elen, the brigand charged at you and cut your left side. Without your armor, this could have been a serious wound!" Following her good outcome with the die, Camilla goes on with the description: "I strike back and ferociously slash his arm! Luckily for him, his armor has partially deflected my blow!"

End of the Round

Once everything is resolved, the Round ends and a new one may then begin. As it has already been mentioned, wounds incur penalties that apply to all rolls (attacking, moving, etc.) but also to Defense. These penalties apply to every following Round and persist as long as the Character has not been healed. The chapter dealing with Health gives details about these penalties (see p.239).

Elen is in Good Health Condition as she only has 4 boxes ticked on her chart. Therefore, she suffers no penalties for the new Round. If she takes more damage and moves to the following line of her chart, she will suffer a 1-point penalty on her Defense and on all her actions.

Particular Combat Conditions

Of course, combat is not limited to two opponents fighting face to face without any other particular condition. Here are some typical situations and how to deal with them.

Ranged Combat

Ranged combat is dealt with like a regular Attack roll, with the obvious difference that the Shooting and Throwing Domain determines the Attack rating. A penalty will be applied according to distance: -2 at middle range, and -5 at long range. The weapons' ranges are indicated on page 224. If the target is moving at a running pace, the shooter suffers a -2 penalty, or -5 if its speed equals that of a galloping horse. The various fighting Attitudes can be used: in a Defensive Attitude, the Character will try to take cover or focus on attacks that may possibly target him; in an Offensive Attitude, the Character focuses on his target, neglecting his defense; in a Quick Attitude, the PC's arrow is fired as soon as his bow is drawn.

Group Combat

Most group combats can be managed as a series of simultaneous one-on-one combats. For example, if a group of four PCs are in a fight with five opponents, each one will fight against an opponent, except for a PC who will fight against two.

The Round is resolved normally and the isolated PC has to announce which opponent she attacks. At close quarters, a Character can be attacked by a maximum of four opponents (one for each direction). Someone attacking his opponent from behind earns a +2 bonus on his Attack roll in such a situation.

Ambush

For an ambush to work, the attacker must wear no metallic armor or cumbersome equipment, and must sneak by without being noticed (which implies one or more successful Stealth rolls on her part). Once she is in range, the ambusher can attack and earns a free Round during which her opponent cannot strike back. The victim cannot benefit from the protection of his shield or from an Attitude giving him a bonus to Defense. The attacker chooses her Fighting Attitude as usual. In most cases, this grants a +2 bonus for an attack from behind, but if mastered, the Fighting Art of the Sneak Attack (p.238) can obviously be used.



Leaving a Combat

To leave a combat, the Character will first have to choose the Movement Attitude. The Character rolls a Feats (or Tumbling) roll in opposition to his opponent's Close Combat roll. A success indicates that the Character has managed to disengage from the fight. A failure indicates that his opponent(s) has/have outmaneuvered him. During this Round, the opponents can attack if they have not already done so. A fighter who manages to disengage is not out of trouble. His opponent(s) can try to chase him, which will be resolved with opposed Feats rolls. If he is caught, a new fight begins with him and his opponent(s). It is also possible to simply turn around and flee. The Fighting Attitude of the runner is considered to be Standard. During the round when a Character flees, he cannot attack his opponent, and does not benefit from his shield or bonuses to Defense related to being very deft or any other Advantage. His opponent can attack him with a +2 bonus on his Attack roll, whatever the order of action. A chase can then ensue, and will be resolved as previously described.

Mounted Combat

A Character with the Riding Discipline can fight when riding a mount trained for combat and earns a +2 bonus to her Attack rolls.

However, should she be wounded, she will have to succeed in a Difficult (17) Riding roll or be unhorsed and suffer 2 additional damage points. When facing opponents on foot, the rider can leave the combat at any moment, without having to go through the procedure described in "Leaving a Combat": this still takes a Round, but success is automatic.

Shields

As long as a Character can put it between her and an attack, a shield grants its Protection rating as armor would. No roll is needed.

Fighting Arts

Not only can a Character specialize in a category of weapons if he has a rating of 5 in the Close Combat Domain (or another Discipline in particular cases); he can also learn specific fighting techniques. These Arts are neither Disciplines (in the sense that they are learned once and do not improve) nor Attitudes (however, a particular Art can require making use of a specific Attitude; see below). It is possible to learn these techniques when creating a Character, or later during the game (see the "Experience and Advancement" chapter).

Sneak Attack

This art consists of taking one's enemy by surprise or striking him from behind to make the most of it. The attacker using this technique must meet all requirements for an ambush (see above). Moreover, she can only use a short weapon (knife, dagger, short sword). If the attack of the free Round is a hit, the attacker will add 5 additional points to the damage dealt, which represents the precision and effectiveness of her blow.

Two-weapon Fighting

To make use of this Art, the fighter must have both hands free (which means that he cannot use a shield), and the secondary weapon must be easily wielded (a short or small-sized weapon, such as a dagger, a short sword, a hatchet, etc.). Making use of this technique grants the Character a +2 bonus that will accentuate the chosen Attitude; this means it will be added to the Attack rating with an Offensive Attitude, or to the Defense rating in the case of a Defensive Attitude. If a Standard Attitude is chosen, the Character chooses where the bonus is attributed. The highest damage of the two weapons is used to determine the Attack Rating. The damage of the two weapons never stacks up.

Parry

This Art can only be used with a Standard, Defensive, or Quick Attitude. It is necessary to have the initiative over the targeted opponent to make use of this technique. For this round, the Attack roll of the Character trying to parry the blow is used not to hit the opponent, but in opposition to the latter's Attack roll when it is made. If the defender gets the upper hand in the opposition, he parries the attack. Otherwise, it is resolved normally (i.e. the Attack roll is compared to the Defense rating of the target).

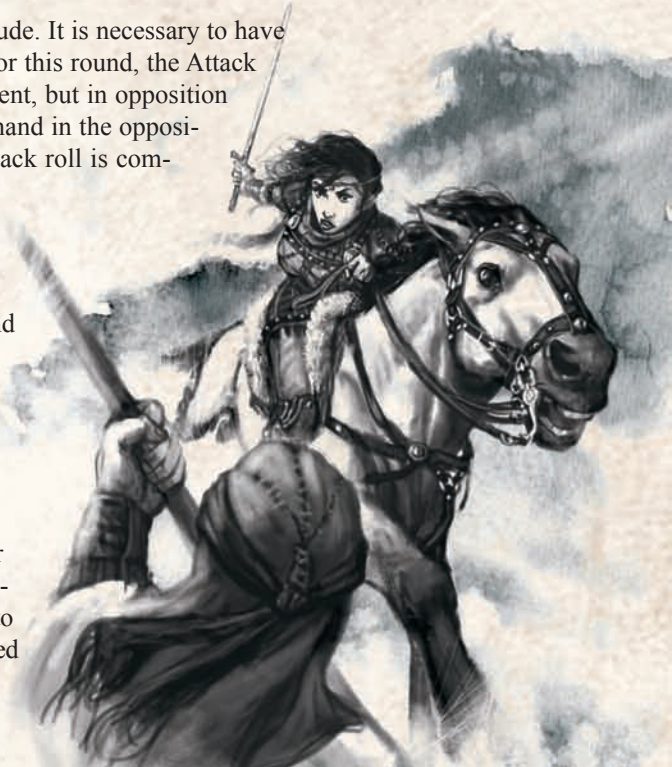
Archery

This Art is only accessible to Characters with a minimum level of 5 in Shooting and Throwing. The PC takes time to aim at her target, which makes her act last during this Round. She improves her Shooting and Throwing skill by 2 points for this Round, while canceling any penalty due to her target moving.

Archery can be used with other ranged weapons as well.

Cavalry

A Character with the Riding Discipline can learn this Art. Only an attack inflicting 5 damage points or more has a chance of unhorsing the rider; in this case he will have to succeed in a Difficult (17) Riding roll or fall and take 2 additional damage points. It also gives the rider the possibility to charge for his first attack in a fight, which gives him a +3 bonus to damage for this Round (+4 if a lance is used). A charge must be performed with the Offensive Attitude, on a galloping steed.



Health

The PCs' physical health will often be endangered in the world of Esteren. Wounds suffered during fights are far from being the only potential dangers. Diseases, poisons, falls... This chapter describes the different ways of being harmed, dying, and also of recovering.

Health Chart and Stamina Rating

The Character Sheet comprises a "Health Condition" chart specifically included to keep track of the PC's physical condition. This chart is composed of 19 boxes and ranges between five conditions, from "Good" to "Agony".
As for the Stamina rating, it indicates the general physical constitution of a PC. This rating is used for Resolution rolls dealing with health (Stamina + 1D10), particularly to test resistance against diseases, poisons, etc. The Stamina rating is also used when a PC has to hold his breath or has to endure extreme temperatures.

The Different Health Conditions

Wounds and other afflictions stack: for each damage point suffered, the Player ticks a box in his PC's Health Condition chart. The "Calculating the Damage Points" paragraph on page 236 gauges the severity of the wounds suffered during a fight. When a line is full, the one below follows. When he reaches the Okay condition, the Character immediately incurs a -1 penalty on every action he undertakes, -2 when his condition is Bad, and -3 when it is Critical. Such penalties do not stack, so a Character whose Health Condition is Critical suffers a -3 penalty on every action. These penalties apply to all rolls, including any eventual Stamina rolls the Character may have to make.

For NPCs and creatures managed by the Leader, a simpler system is used. For example, for a brigand, the Health level will be indicated as follows: 19(G)/14(O)/9(B)/5(C). Thus, if this 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, unable to perform any action. If there is nobody to attend her within 1D10 minutes, the Character dies. A Difficult (17) First Aid or Medicine roll is necessary to stop this process. If the roll is successful, the Character regains consciousness 1D10 hours later. She is then in Critical Condition (the Player unticks the "Agony" box), cannot walk without assistance, and needs rest. Spending a day in Critical Condition without any medical care requires a Complicated (14) Stamina roll. Failing the roll means that the Character dies of her injuries.

Suffering in a single blow an amount of damage points superior to one's maximum Health points always results in instant death.

Garrel has been treacherously attacked by two brigands. As he has already suffered 15 damage points, his condition is Critical. During the next Round, he suffers several wounds that inflict 9 damage points. The Player ticks the Agony box of the Health Condition chart; Garrel collapses to the ground, his body pierced. If there is no one to succeed in a Difficult First Aid or Medicine roll within 1D10 minutes, it will be the end of Garrel...

Death of a Character

Esteren is a harsh universe in which death may be a permanent threat for the unwary. Despite such a premise, the GL should take care not to cause the death of a PC too brutally, without giving the Player a chance to avoid it. Shadows of Esteren is a game of atmosphere in which the discovery of the world's secrets, the evolution of the PCs, and the changes in their personalities are the main tools used to create an unforgettable mood for your sessions. Therefore, the death of a PC should only occur as a last resort. However, PCs who are overconfident or take absurd risks can very quickly pay for it with their lives. More than ever, Players should look before they leap in this threatening world.

Falling

Falling deals 1D10 damage points for every 10 feet. Up to 20 feet, the PC can attempt a Complicated (14) Feats roll to halve the damage or a Difficult (17) Tumbling roll to land unscathed.

Holding Breath

A Character can hold her breath during a number of Rounds equal to twice her Stamina rating (a Round lasts six seconds). Beyond this duration, she has to succeed in a Complicated (14) Stamina roll every two rounds without taking a breath. A failure means she loses consciousness; a natural 1 on this roll causes death from suffocation or drowning. If an unconscious Character is not immediately put in a situation where she can breathe, she must succeed in a Stamina roll on each following Round, with an increasing Difficulty Threshold (14, then 17, then 20, etc.) or she will die.

Blindness

Being blinded inflicts a -4 penalty on all actions requiring sight, which include Attack and Defense ratings. The Blind Fighting or Acute Senses Disciplines can halve this penalty.

Healing and Resting

A roll in Medicine or First Aid with a Complicated (14) Difficulty Threshold, applied soon after a wound or a fall, allows the healing of one damage point. This does not apply to diseases, asphyxiation, etc.



A Character who is resting can recover up to three damage points for every twenty four hours: one point for a night's sleep, a second point if he is cared for correctly (which he can do himself, if he is in condition to do so and has an appropriate Discipline, or through the intervention of someone else with the required Discipline), and a third point if the Character stays in bed or has little activity during a whole day.

Each day, the Character must succeed in a Standard (11) Stamina roll for the recovery to be effective. Penalties for the Okay, Bad, and Critical Conditions apply to the daily Stamina roll. If a wounded PC does not receive appropriate care while he is resting, a failure indicates that his condition worsens by 1 point. He ticks an additional box in his Health Condition chart. If the Character engages in strenuous activity, moves too much, or fights as he is wounded, he will not recover any points.

Diseases

In Tri-Kazel, diseases make up the most common cause of mortality. Unfortunately, the mystical powers of the Demorthèn, the Miracles of the priests of the Temple, and the scientific knowledge of the Magientists are far from proving to be effective against all of them.

Virulence

The Virulence level of a disease measures its power; the more virulent it is, the harder it will be to resist it, or to recover from it. This level also indicates the amount of Disease points the ill Character suffers; it is also used to determine the level of the magical powers required to cure it (see the chapter about Demorthèn powers and the Miracles of the Temple).

Virulence of a disease

Virulence level	Difficulty Threshold	Disease points
Weak	Standard (11)	5 (1 point/day)
Mild	Complicated (14)	10 (2 points/day)
Malignant	Difficult (17)	15 (3 points/ day or death)
Deadly	Very Difficult (20)	20 (4 points/ day or death)

About Diseases in Esteren

The aim of the system to manage Diseases is not to simulate any historical or medical reality. Indeed, the diseases that exist in the universe of Esteren are loosely inspired from reality, and the rules presented here have one purpose: to help Players and Leaders simulate the effects of diseases during the game in a simple manner.

Falling Ill

During her travels, a Character may face a situation in which she is at risk of falling ill. When this happens, the Leader has to estimate the Virulence level of the disease according to the context in which the Character is. Here are some typical examples:

Weather Conditions

The climate on the peninsula of Tri-Kazel can often be harsh. If the Character happens to be traveling while it is freezing, with warm but insufficient equipment, she has quite the chance of catching a nasty cold. The Leader may consider it as a Mild disease: the Character will be feverish, have coughing fits, etc. However, if the Character is also wet, because of the rain for example, she may catch a more serious disease, or even a fatal one (which implies a Deadly Virulence).

Infections

A wounded Character that receives no care can contract a disease. The wound will become purulent and may even endanger the Character. The worse the wounds are, the greater the chance is that they will become infected without proper care. The environment can also make a situation much worse: stumbling through a swamp after having been wounded may bring a disease of much more serious Virulence than if the Character stays warm, in a relatively clean and dry place.

Contaminations

Being in the middle of an environment where other people are ill puts one at risk of being contaminated. In this case, it depends on the Virulence of the disease hitting the population. For example, it is ill advised to visit Tuaille when it bears the onslaught of insects from the marshes spreading what the locals call the "Yellow Fever"…

Contracting a Disease

When a Character is at risk of catching a disease, he must make a Stamina roll with a Difficulty Threshold corresponding to the Virulence of the illness threatening him. If he succeeds, he avoids the disease. If he fails, he falls ill. If he rolls a critical failure, the illness becomes Deadly and will kill him within a few days (according to the duration) if no specific care is given.

Incubation Time

Some diseases, after being contracted, take some time to develop; their progression can be:

- Slow (1D10 months)
- Fast (3D10 days)
- Short (1D10 hours)

Duration

In most cases, a disease lasts five days, during which the Character suffers a certain amount of daily Disease points (1 point if the disease is weak, 2 if it is mild, 3 if it is malignant and 4 if it is deadly). In the case of diseases of Malignant or Deadly Virulence that can kill, death occurs at the end of these five days. Some diseases can evolve in a faster or slower way than the average; the Leader divides the amount of Disease points by the number of days the illness lasts (see the previous chart). For example, a Malignant disease lasting only 3 days will inflict 5 daily Disease points.

Disease Points

The effects of a disease are simulated by Disease points, which worsen the Character's Health Condition. The Player fills the necessary number of boxes in her Health Condition chart as the sickness wears on. Damage points and Disease points stack, which can turn dangerous for the PC. Diseases of Malignant and Deadly Virulence may inflict no Disease points, resulting in instant death instead. Only a very skilled physician (see below) or a mystical power (Demorthèn or from the Temple) can then save the patient.

Garrel is a victim of a Weak fever. During a period of five days, he suffers 1 daily Disease point, which means his Player will fill (and not tick, in order to set them apart from wounds), as days pass, 5 boxes in his Health Condition chart. If he is wounded while he is ill, or if he was already wounded, his Disease points will add to his Damage points and make his Condition worse. When he is cured, he recovers every filled box. Thus, a seriously ill Character will be much less likely to survive heavy wounds from a fight or a fall than a Character in full health.

Diagnosis

Diagnosing an illness requires a Standard (11) Medicine roll. A natural 1 on this roll means a wrong diagnosis, whereas a regular failure simply means the Character cannot identify the disease. A success gives the Virulence of the illness and ideas for adequate care (see on the following page).

Resting and Recovering

Resting can often allow a Character to recover from a disease, even a dangerous one. She needs to rest as long as it is in effect, and she will suffer the appropriate Disease points for its Virulence. However, she will recover all of those points the day after the end of her disease. If a Character does not rest, the disease may live on after its normal five day duration; in that case, on the sixth day, the patient has to make a Stamina roll related to the Virulence. A failure means that the illness persists and deals the same number of daily Disease points again (another Stamina roll must be made the following day); a critical failure leads to death. A success means a remission and a recovery from all the Disease points. When a Character is ill and wounded, she cannot recover damage points due to injuries by resting. Only medical care can allow it, but at the rate of one daily Health point instead of the normal two.

Treatment and Cures

If a physician or any other skilled Character takes care of a patient daily, not only will she avoid the risks described in the previous paragraph, but she will also be likely to better endure the disease. The patient must remain in a calm environment, preferably in a bed. The healer has to be aware of the illness plaguing his patient, and roll a Complicated (14) Medicine roll each day; a success reduces the amount of daily Disease points she suffers by 1. Therefore, for a typical illness of Weak Virulence lasting five days, the Character will not take any Disease points; for a Deadly Virulence, she will take only 3 for each day. A regular failure has no effect, but critical failures and successes apply normally. The same effects can be obtained by taking herbal remedies without need for Medicine rolls. If a PC does not get enough rest, the disease can go on beyond its normal duration, as previously described. Regarding diseases causing death rather than disease points, the physician can only make a single Difficult (17) Medicine roll to save the patient.

Magientist Remedies

These take the form of Flux cartridges on which syringes are mounted. They are often very expensive and each one corresponds to a particular disease. Magientists are far from having discovered remedies for every disease, but their research continues. For the remedy to be effective, the physician must first diagnose the disease (see on the previous page) and inject the correct doses according to the patient's build, age, etc. This prescription requires a Complicated (14) Magience or Science roll.

If a patient is given such a treatment while suffering from a disease, she has to roll a Complicated (14) Stamina roll. If she succeeds, she suffers one less daily Disease point; this bonus can be cumulated with other care. In the case of a disease of Malignant or Deadly Virulence bringing certain death, the patient suffers the appropriate Disease points instead and has a chance to survive.

Sample Diseases

Following are some examples of illnesses that can affect the Characters, with indications about their Virulence and their symptoms. They can be used to spice up descriptions and stress the mood during sessions. Each Leader may of course complement this list with diseases, whether of his own or inspired by illnesses that struck the world during the Middle Ages.

Yellow Fever

This disease, typical of the marshy region of Tuaille, mostly spreads during summer. It is carried by insects swarming in the swamps. It causes fever and a yellowish complexion. Its virulence is Mild and the disease lasts five days. Incubation time is Fast.

Catarrh

Magientists gave this name to a form of flu bringing fever, coughing fits, and breathing difficulties. It is of Mild Virulence and lasts five days. Incubation is Short.

Canker

An infamous disease among warriors, it appears when an injury has been badly treated. The wound starts to suppurate, will not heal, and may even spread, bringing death. Virulence can go from Weak to Deadly depending on contamination conditions. Incubation time is Fast.

Stomach Flu

This disease of Mild Virulence and Short incubation time causes nausea, fever, and vomiting for about 5 days. There are Malignant variants that can even kill the patient.

Chimerical Fever

This illness, of Mild Virulence and Fast incubation time, plagues the patient with nightmarish visions as well as high fever. Along with the regular Disease points, the patient also suffers the same amount of Trauma points, which will disappear when the fever subsides.

Poisons

There are two types of poisonings: direct and progressive.

Direct Poisoning

Immediate poisons and venoms work the same way as diseases. The Leader estimates the Virulence level, which determines the Difficulty Threshold to avoid the effects of the product as well as the amount of Poison points the Character will suffer. As with diseases, a poison may only take effect after a certain period of time, which can range from a few hours to several weeks. However, the effects of a poison are generally felt within a single day (as opposed to five days for diseases). Thus, a Deadly poison inflicts a Character 20 Poison points in one day, whereas a poison of Weak Virulence only deals 5 points. Moreover, some antidotes (of Magientist nature or of another) can wholly cancel the effects of a poison. These poisons can be of various origins and have very different Virulences: animal or vegetal venom, a chemical, spoiled food, etc.

Progressive Poisoning

There is another type of poisoning, the long-term one, sapping a Character's health. It can be caused by exposure to pollution or to a toxicant, such as dye vapors, for example. Each year of exposure calls for a Complicated (14) Stamina roll; a failure brings the permanent loss of one Stamina point and the possible contraction of an associated disease.

Drugs

Some products can cause a very strong dependency in their consumers. There are all kinds of these, and they have very different effects. The word "drugs" will be used here for simplification. Their impact is linked to several factors: the speed of addiction, the effects on health, and the induced degree of dependency.

Becoming Addicted

Not all drugs have the same virulence: some of them trigger a phenomenon of addiction very quickly whereas others take more time. Each time a Character consumes a drug long enough to risk becoming dependent, he makes a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll. A successful roll means that the Character does not become addicted, but each subsequent dose taken will trigger a new roll with a cumulative one-point penalty. Only after abstaining for 1D10 months will the Character make such rolls without penalties from previous consumptions. There are three degrees of addiction:

- Slow: the effects are only felt after a month of regular consumption, at the rate of 2 or 3 doses a week.
- Moderate: the effects can be felt after two weeks of regular consumption, at the rate of 2 or 3 doses a week.
- Fast: each dose can lead to dependency.

Effects on Health

In the case of regular consumption, some products can very quickly be harmful, while others have a slower effect.

When the product is Strongly harmful, each week of consumption calls for a Complicated (14) Stamina roll that brings the loss of one Stamina point if it fails. Lost points recover at the rate of one for each month without consuming drugs. A Character dies when she reaches zero in Stamina.

In the case of a Moderately harmful one, the same system applies, but Stamina rolls are made once per month. When it is Mildly harmful, a roll is made every year, and only a result of 1 on the Stamina roll triggers the loss of one Stamina point, but permanently.

Of course, particularly excessive consumption can make a product even more harmful. Likewise, however harmful a drug is, a critical failure (or a result of 1) on a roll causes the permanent loss of one Stamina point. In the case of a critical failure with a Strongly harmful drug, the Character dies 1D10 minutes after taking the dose.

Mixing drugs can have disastrous effects: if a Moderately or Strongly harmful drug is involved, a Complicated (14) Stamina roll must be made. A success means that the effects of the various drugs add up without any harmful consequence; a failure means that the consumer falls ill (she suffers nausea and headaches that inflict a -4 penalty to all rolls); a natural 1 on the roll brings death within the following hour.

Weaning and Withdrawal Symptoms

If a Character stops consuming a product he is addicted to, he will suffer unpleasant effects. Weaning off a drug takes a full week: each day, the abstinent Character makes an Easy (8) Mental Resistance roll with a 1-point penalty for each day that has passed; a failure brings a different effect according to the drug's degree of Dependency:

- Mild Dependency: if the Character does not have his product at disposal, he will try to acquire some. He is in a bad mood, irritable, and has trouble sleeping. He suffers a -2 penalty on all of his actions during the weaning period.
- Strong Dependency: the Character develops different symptoms depending on the drug (headaches, insomnia, shaking, nausea, etc.) He becomes aggressive and is ready to spend high sums of money or commit crimes to get his hands on his favorite drug. He will focus on obtaining his dose, to the exclusion of any other project. Every action except the ones related to acquiring the drug suffers a -4 penalty.

Detoxification

After 1D10 months of abstinence, the Character will no longer be intoxicated and dependent. If she consumes during this period of time, she must immediately succeed in a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll or become dependent again, whatever the drug's degree of dependency. Each new dose requires a roll with cumulative penalties, as the "Becoming Addicted" paragraph indicates.

Drugs in Tri-Kazel

Alcohol

Addiction: **Slow** | Harmfulness: **Mild**
Dependency: **Strong**

Alcohol is probably the most widespread drug in all Tri-Kazel, and abusing it is highly detrimental, bringing violence, diseases, etc. Abruptly stopping a regular consumption may result in shaking, anxiety, and a state of sadness. Being under its influence dulls pain, makes the drinker more daring and bold, but lowers his sense of balance and accuracy, as well as his ability to focus. Therefore, penalties and bonuses compensate and there is no particular adjustment.

Ashen

Addiction: **Fast** | Harmfulness: **Moderate**
Dependency: **Strong**

Thus named because of its resemblance to ash, this drug has the ability to greatly accelerate thinking abilities and grants +1 to Reason for an hour after each dose. Abstinence brings a feeling of nervousness and headaches.

M Flux

Addiction: **Fast** | Harmfulness: **Mild**
Dependency: **Strong**

Short for "Mekone Flux", this substance is not a drug strictly speaking, but a product used by some Magientists whose bodies are irrigated by Mekones.

Tobacco

Addiction: **Moderate** | Harmfulness: **Mild**
Dependency: **Strong**

Tobacco is widely used in some regions of the peninsula. Long-term use can result in serious complications, particularly for the consumer's respiratory system.

Opallion

Addiction: **Moderate** | Harmfulness: **Strong**
Dependency: **Strong**

Opallion comes in the form of a glittery black powder, and its name is simply a reference to black opals. It is a powerful and very expensive hallucinogenic drug, which is found in great cities. It is rumored to be synthesized within Reizhite laboratories by unscrupulous Magientists. Opallion greatly increases creativity; it grants a +1 bonus to the Way of Creativity for 1D10 hours after consumption. Withdrawal is characterized by a livid complexion, nausea, and sharp physical pains.

Gwilmine

Addiction: **Fast** | Harmfulness: **Moderate**
Dependency: **Strong**

This drug is infamously obtained from the essence of the Gwylmith flower, which gave it its name. It is highly exciting and energizing. It comes in the form of thick oil that can be smoked or ingested. Each dose grants a +1 bonus to all rolls requiring physical efforts–such as Feats and Attack rolls–for an hour. Gwylmine abuse leads to heart troubles, while sudden withdrawal will make an addicted person sad and dispirited.

Tonic

Addiction: **Moderate** | Harmfulness: **Moderate**
Dependency: **Strong**

Tonics are substances made from Flux by Magientists (p.268). It is advised not to use more than one per week, and for a good reason: abuse can result in a strong addiction to the product. Withdrawal brings headaches and insomnia. Tonics are injected intravenously.

Aging

Existence is harsh in the world of Esteren, and people often have a short lifespan. When she reaches forty, a PC rolls a Standard (11) Stamina roll each year. Failure means that she permanently loses one Stamina point. In this particular case, a result of 1 on the D10 of this Resolution roll is always considered to be a failure. Every year, a new roll is made, until Stamina reaches zero, which indicates the death of the Character.

When she reaches fifty, a Character suffers a -2 penalty on all physical actions. Another 2-point penalty is added for each 10 years: -4 at sixty, -6 at seventy, -8 at eighty, etc.

Demorthèn Art

During his training, a Demorthèn is initiated to an ancestral art called "Sigil Rann", based on the use of stones on which mystical symbols are engraved: the Ogham.

Ancestral Art and Discipline: How Magic Works

Demorthèn magic relies on the ancestral art of the Sigil Rann. Knowledge of the Ogham (Sigil Rann) is a Discipline from the Demorthèn Mysteries Domain. Globally, magic works according to the same rules as the other skills described from page 194 to 199; it is based on succeeding Resolution rolls and beating Difficulty Thresholds. However, the effects and the progression of these Disciplines are based on specific rules, which are described throughout this chapter.

Lorn Rann and Liadh

Demorthèn myths and legends tell about two other ancestral arts that only very few Demorthèn still master: first, the Lorn Rann, which gives the power to write the Ogham and to create the vessels capable of focusing the essential energy; second, the art of the Liadh, which is about directly calling upon the spirits of nature, the C'maoghs. This chapter only deals with the art of the Sigil Rann.

To use the power of Ogham, the Demorthèn draws power from the Rindath of the spirits of nature around him. Just like every other being and object, the Demorthèn himself holds an amount of Rindath that will also be partly used during such a process. The Oghamic art is exhausting and requires the Demorthèn to have a great empathy with nature. To attempt using it, the Demorthèn must possess the Discipline of the Sigil Rann (a level of 6 is enough).



Major Ogham and Minor Ogham

The art of the Sigil Rann deals with natural elements and is divided into seven distinct major Ogham: Earth, Water, Air, Fire, Vegetal, Animal, and Life. Each major Ogham has uncountable minor Ogham associated to it, which stem from it and are used during incantations. Each minor Ogham is linked to a particular power that can be unleashed according to six distinct degrees of intensity, ranging from an insignificant effect to setting the natural elements raging. According to tradition, these intensity degrees are called Power Circles.

The Oghamic Stones

Oghamic stones come in the form of small polished pebbles; three of them easily fit in a hand. These are the vessels within which the Rindath energy summoned by the Demorthèn accumulates. Being very resilient, they can be used as often as desired to focus this energy. Should a Demorthèn attempt to use her own mortal coil to gather all the necessary energy for some invocations, her body would likely break apart, or be violently altered. Each pebble is engraved with a minor Ogham corresponding to a specific power; one of the innumerable derivatives of one of the seven major Ogham. For each power she wishes to use, the Demorthèn will need an Oghamic stone engraved with the corresponding symbol. When she unleashes its power, she must hold the Oghamic stone in her hand.

The Demorthèn needs to find these stones; some stones are very rare, others are much more common. The list of powers presented in this manual is not exhaustive as there are uncountable derivatives of the seven major Ogham.

Creating a Magic-user PC

A PC may be given the ability to use magic from his creation; he only needs to have access to the Discipline of the Sigil Rann and possess his first Oghamic stones. In such a case, the PC has a number of Oghamic stones equal to his Empathy rating, which are chosen by the Leader in the list starting on p.253. Without these stones, it is impossible to summon powers with the Sigil Rann. A GL can also choose not to give access to such powers from the creation of a PC, so as to save the attainment of the Sigil Rann Discipline for later, during a scenario, or by stressing the search for a mentor. The Character will then be an Ionnthén, a Demorthèn in training. Such a choice does not make it impossible for him to awaken to the Oghamic powers later. The GL is advised to talk about such a limitation with her Players, as well as about the atmosphere she wishes to give her sessions. The rarer magic is, the more enigmatic and exceptional it will feel; the easier magic is to reach, the more fantastic the atmosphere of the game will be.

The Seven Major Ogham of the Aergewin

According to legend, Demorthèn from the time of the Aergewin possessed exceptional Oghamic stones on which one of the seven major Ogham was engraved. With only one of these stones, it was possible for them to summon every power related to the element it represented. Thus, the major Ogham of Water made it possible to call forth mist as well as create whirlpools or even sprout gills. All the Demorthèn of Tri-Kazel use minor Oghamic stones, and nobody could ever prove whether stones bearing the major Ogham existed for sure.

Rindath and Oghamic Powers

Powers related to the Sigil Rann draw from Rindath, the vital energy. This part gives details about how to spend and earn energy points.

A reminder: a Character's resources of natural energy at creation amount to the following addition:
Way of Empathy + Way of Combativeness
+ Way of Creativity

Power Circles and Factors

When a Demorthèn decides to summon a power (assuming he possesses the associated Oghamic stone), he is free to determine its intensity by choosing the Power Circle. The Leader or Player who wants to know the effects of a power at a given Circle must refer to the following chart:

SIGIL RANN – SUMMONING CHART

Circle	*Difficulty Threshold*	*FACTORS*					*Rindath Cost*	*SummoningTime (= penalty to Speed)*
		Targets	*Scale*	*Persistency*	*Bonus/Penalty*	*Damage*		
1	Standard (11)	1	Touch	1 Round.	+1 / -1	1D10	3	1
2	Complicated (14)	2	5 yd	3 Round.	+1 / -1	1D10	5	2
3	Difficult (17)	3	50 yd	1 minute	+2 / -2	2D10	10	3
4	Very Difficult (20)	4	100 yd	1 hour	+2 / -2	3D10	15	4
5	Exceptional (25)	5	1000 yd	1 day	+3 / -3	4D10	20	5
6	Heroic (30)	special	special	special	+5 / -5	special	special	special

Natalie's Character, the Demorthèn Armel, wants to summon a power of the second Circle. The Player takes a look at the chart and notices this power calls for a Complicated (14) Sigil Rann roll. It may affect a maximum of two targets at a maximum range of five yards, last three Rounds, give a +1 bonus or inflict a -1 penalty, and/or deal 1D10 damage points. It will cost five Rindath points to the Demorthèn and has a summoning time of 2.

To make sessions run more smoothly, each participant playing a Demorthèn is strongly advised to have a reproduction of the summoning chart, which he may refer to during the game. A downloadable one can be found at the game's website (www.esteren.org).

Here is a definition for each entry of the summoning chart:

Circle:

In Demorthèn traditions, six Power Circles exist, which correspond to various stages of rising intensity for each power. The sixth Circle remains something extraordinary, even for Demorthèn with a perfect mastery of the Sigil Rann.

At the first Circle, the Gust Ogham makes it possible to conjure simple blasts of wind, but will unleash a real tempest at the sixth Circle. Likewise, a Shield Ogham offers light protection, which becomes thick, resilient armor at the last Circle. Each Oghamic stone can manifest powers of six different intensities.

Difficulty Threshold:

To summon a power from the first to the fifth Circle, a Demorthèn must have a minimum level of 6 in Sigil Rann and the corresponding Oghamic stone. However, to summon powers of the sixth Circle, one must have a level of 15 in Sigil Rann. Invocations of the most powerful kind are detailed on p.249, and can only be performed by Demorthèn with a perfect knowledge of this ancestral art.

Moreover, an invocation is not necessarily successful. Each time a Demorthèn calls upon the Ogham, she must succeed in a Resolution roll based on her Sigil Rann rating added to the Way of Empathy to beat a Difficulty Threshold proportional to the intensity of the power.

Possessing the Thunder Ogham, Armel wishes to summon this power at the third Circle. She has a level of 7 in Sigil Rann, which is enough since a power summoned at the third circle requires a level of 6. Now Natalie, who plays Armel, has to succeed in a Difficult (17) Sigil Rann roll for the invocation to take place. As Armel has 5 in Empathy, she is quite likely to succeed: Natalie has to roll 5 or more on her D10.

Factors:

A power is quantified through 4 main factors. These factors allow the Players and the Leader to have a clear idea of the concrete effects of a power at a given Circle. When he summons a power, a Demorthèn can freely choose its intensity, within the limit of his Sigil Rann level. The greater the intensity, the higher the cost in Rindath energy. It is also possible to mix factors from several Circles; the highest one always determines the level of a power's Circle. For example, whether a power requires only one or all of the factors of the third Circle changes nothing: it will be considered a power of the third Circle.

Armel possesses the Gust Ogham and wishes to use it on a single target more than 40 yards away from her, for the duration of a single Round. A power affecting one target and lasting only one Round is of the first Circle. However, the target is at a range of about 50 yards, which is a factor of the third Circle. The Gust summoned by Armel will therefore be considered to be of the third Circle: the Sigil Rann roll will be Difficult (17), and its Rindath cost will be 10 points.

Here is a more accurate description of the factors, of how they interact, and of the cases in which they should be taken into consideration or not. In any case, it is up to the Leader to validate the effects of each factor for a power.

Targets:

This factor defines the number of targets hit by the power; "target" referring to a Character or any other living being. In the case of some powers, it can also be an object or a thing. For each Circle, one target may be added.

Note that the targets included must be within the Circle's maximum range, as defined by its Scale. This means Scale can be a restrictive factor for the number of targets.

Armel wants to use a Shield power to help three of the village's militiamen, but each of them has a lot to deal with: they are within a circle 100 yards in radius, and cannot get closer. To target three people, Armel would normally use a power of the third Circle, but in this case, the power will have to be of the fourth Circle for the Scale to be sufficient (100 yd).

In such a case where the Scale is not sufficient to include all of the targets, the Demorthèn has to choose between taking a higher Circle level to reach a sufficient Scale, and lowering the number of targets to those included in the Scale corresponding to the chosen Circle. If the targets are out of the Demorthèn's line of sight, he must be able to mentally picture the place and the target. Some powers, such as Earthquake, can affect a very large number of targets without this factor having an influence on the Power Circle.

Scale:

This factor includes the range, the area of effect, and the volume. The range of a power determines the maximum distance between the Demorthèn and the spot where the power is summoned. The area of effect is always calculated as the diameter of a circle and spreads from the spot where a power is summoned. Thus, a power of the third Circle can affect a spot distant from 50 yd at most, and within a radius of 50 yd. Some powers require interpreting the Scale factor so that they remain coherent: for example, a Thunder power, whatever its Power Circle, will remain something brief, with a very restricted area of effect. However, Scale can be used to determine where lightning struck; if several targets are hit, it will then be considered that several lightning bolts are striking the area of effect defined by the Scale. Note that the same power cannot strike the same target several times just because it is of a high enough Circle to affect several targets. The Leader should exercise common sense to validate or not the interpretations of the Scale factor. Finally, this factor also determines the volume a power can affect. The first Circle can affect up to 2 pounds or 2 pints of material; the second one 10 lb/pints; the third one 100 lb/pints; the fourth one 200 lb/pints, and finally, the fifth circle can affect up to 2000 lb/pints.

Persistency:
Some powers have an immediate and permanent effect, such as healing or curing powers. This is also the case for many offensive powers that only last an instant, such as Thunder. For such powers, the Persistency factor is not taken into account. Bonuses and penalties present another particular case, which is described below. For every other power, this factor determines its duration. Note that a minute is equivalent to ten Rounds.

Bonus/Penalty:
This column may apply to a Domain or a Discipline, to the Attack, Defense, or Speed rating, to Health, etc. For example, a Shield or Bark Skin power can have effects on the Protection of the target. If the Oghamic stone makes it possible (i.e. if its effects are reversible), penalties can also be inflicted to the Demorthèn's targets. Persistency works differently for bonuses and penalties: a bonus/penalty can only last up to three Rounds before the instilled energy wears off.

Rindath Cost:
Summoning a power takes its toll in vital energy. This column indicates the amount of Rindath points the Player must spend for each use. When his Rindath rating reaches 0, a Demorthèn feels exhausted and cannot summon powers anymore. A Demorthèn cannot summon a power if he does not have the sufficient amount of Rindath points at his disposal, unless the optional rule "Drawing from Vital Energy" is used (see on p.250).

Summoning Time:
The powers of the Sigil Rann are feared, for their execution is very fast. A Demorthèn only needs to concentrate for a moment, with an Oghamic stone in hand, to unleash its power. However, the mightier a power is, the deeper the concentration needs to be. This factor indicates the penalty applied to the Demorthèn's Speed rating to determine her order of action and the precise moment when the power is activated. A Demorthèn must not be disturbed before her invocation ends or her power may fail (see further).

A brigand charges Armel. The Demorthèn wishes to bring him down with a Thunder power. Armel's Speed rating is usually of 9; the scoundrel has a rating of 6. As she uses a power of the second Circle, Armel must subtract 2 points from her Speed rating, which falls to 7. She remains the faster one, but barely!



Damage:
This relates to all powers aiming to inflict wounds or kill. It may be a Stone Arrow, a Heat Ogham, a Choking, Poisoned Air, or simply Poison power. Damage dealt varies according to the Circle and gives the amount of damage points dealt. Whatever the maximum duration allowed by the Circle, an offensive power only deals damage points once and generally only lasts a few instants. Thus, a snowstorm used to cause wounds can last several Rounds, but it will only inflict an amount of damage corresponding to its Circle. Of course, situations of other types may occur, but the Leader and the Players should keep this rule in mind. This factor is also used to determine the effects of a healing power.



Evaluating the Intensity of a Factor:

Ogham can produce very different effects and it is impossible to list them all. For example, in the case of the use of a power creating light, Scale allows knowing how far it spreads, but the Leader still has to estimate how bright it will be. A power of the first Circle can create a candle's glow, while one of the sixth can conjure one rivaling the brightness of the sun.

To get a clearer idea, the Leader can use the scale of the Difficulty Thresholds. The more powerful the phenomenon, the higher the required Circle will be. For example, a Demorthèn using a Calm Water Ogham tries to make a rainstorm subside. The wind blows hard, and the rain falls continuously; the Leader considered this to be a Very Difficult action; thus, the power will be of the fourth Circle. If it had only been a light rain, the Leader could have considered it was only a power of the first Circle.

Using the Summoning Charts:

The Leader and each Player using Demorthèn powers are advised to have the summoning charts at disposal during a session so that taking a look at them does not slow down the pace of the game.

The Sixth Power Circle

This Circle is considered mythical among Demorthèn, and only the wisest and most experienced among their numbers know how to concentrate enough energy to unleash powers of this intensity. Here is the chart detailing the effects of powers at the sixth Circle:

SIXTH CIRCLE							
Degree	*FACTORS*					*Rindath Cost*	*Summoning Time (= penalty to Speed)*
	Targets	*Scale*	*Persistency*	*Bonus*	*Damage*		
1	10	6 mi	1 week	+5	5D10	30	1 Round
2	50	30 mi	1 month	+5	6D10	40	2 Rounds
3	100	60 mi	1 season	+5	7D10	50	3 Rounds
4	200	120 mi	1 years	+5	8D10	60	5 Rounds
5	300	180 mi	2 years	+5	9D10	70	1 minute
6+	+100	+60 mi	+1 year	+5	+1D10	+10	+1 minute

The intensity of a power of the sixth Circle has virtually no bounds, except for the amount of Rindath a Demorthèn can concentrate and use for his invocation. The chart above works the same way as the Sigil Rann's summoning chart. Here, there is a "Degree" column instead of the "Circle" one, and it is used to determine the intensity of the power; each corresponding line indicates the relevant information.
For example, a power of the sixth Circle and of the third degree can reach a maximum of 100 targets, have a scale of 60 miles, last for an entire season, grant a +5 bonus, or inflict 7D10 damage. It will cost 50 Rindath points and will require a summoning time of three Rounds. As for the other Circles, the highest factor will determine the final intensity of the power, as well as its Rindath cost and its summoning time (the Difficulty Threshold for every power of the sixth Circle remains 30).
For a summoning time of one Round, the Demorthèn concentrates and the power comes in effect at the start of the following Round, before all the other actions, which then follow according to the order of initiative.

An old Demorthèn wishes to summon a heavy rain to put out a huge forest fire, with the use of a Rain Oghamic stone. He only has one target, and bonuses and damage do not apply, which makes it a power of weak intensity at first glance. However, the Demorthèn wants the power to last at least an entire day and to cover an area of a diameter of about sixty miles. Taking a look at the summoning charts, the Leader notices that the Scale factor is the most important one (the sixty miles area), which implies a power of the sixth circle and of the third degree. The Demorthèn has to succeed in a heroic (30) Sigil Rann roll; this power will cost him 50 Rindath points and will require 3 Rounds of incantation. Therefore, it will take effect at the start of the fourth Round.



Summoning a Power

As it has previously been said, successfully summoning a power is not a given. Each time a Demorthèn calls upon the Ogham, she must succeed in a Resolution roll based on her Sigil Rann rating added to the Way of Empathy, which must beat the Difficulty Threshold related to her power's Circle level.

- If the Resolution roll is a success, the power is summoned and the Demorthèn subtracts the cost of the power used from her amount of Rindath. Drawing energy from herself brings the Demorthèn a feeling of tiredness, which becomes greater as her Rindath reserve diminishes. It is possible that a high rating in Sigil Rann makes the use of powers of a certain Circle an automatic success. In such cases, no Resolution roll is necessary, but the Demorthèn still spends as much time summoning and still expends her Rindath.

- If a natural 10 is obtained on this roll, the invocation is more powerful than intended. The Demorthèn makes one factor of her choice one Circle higher, but the Rindath cost remains the same.

- If the Resolution roll fails, the power is not unleashed, but this failure does not affect the Demorthèn's Rindath reserve. She must start her invocation again from the beginning.

- If a natural 1 is obtained on this roll, the invocation does not occur, but the Demorthèn still consumes the corresponding Rindath. The wasted energy is spread among nature.

Being Disturbed During an Invocation

If the Demorthèn is brutally disturbed during his invocation (particularly if he suffers a blow or is pushed), the power will not unleash. In this case, the Demorthèn loses no Rindath points, but he has to start the invocation again from the beginning.
If he has the Concentration Discipline, he can attempt to overcome the disturbance and summon his power in spite of it. To do so, he has to succeed in a Resolution roll with this Discipline, with a Difficulty Threshold proportional to the disturbance. If he is pushed or suffers from 1 to 4 damage points, he must succeed in a Difficult (17) roll. From 5 to 8 damage points, the roll is Very Difficult (20), and becomes Exceptional (25) for an injury of 9 points or more.



Optional Rule: Drawing from Vital Energy

By using this optional rule, the GL allows a Demorthèn to call upon an Oghamic power even when her energy rating is insufficient or has reached 0. Using her reserves of vital energy will completely exhaust the Demorthèn, and may even lead to her death. When a Demorthèn wishes to use a power that would make her Rindath rating fall into the negative, she must make a Stamina roll (Stamina rating + 1D10).
The Difficulty Threshold for this roll is linked to the negative rating the Demorthèn reaches:

From -1 to -3: Standard (11)
From -4 to -6: Complicated (14)
From -7 to -10: Difficult (17)

If the Stamina roll is a success, the Demorthèn manages to summon the intended power and remains conscious. She cannot summon any more powers until her strength has recovered (by coming back to a positive rating through normal means of recovery, see further). She is exhausted and will have a penalty equal to her current Rindath rating on every type of action so long as her Rindath rating remains negative. A natural 10 on the Stamina roll has no particular effect in this case.
If the Stamina roll is a failure, the Demorthèn unleashes the power (which takes effect as usual), but falls unconscious for a number of hours equivalent to the negative rating the use of her power led her to. Upon waking up, she is exhausted and suffers a penalty equal to her current Rindath rating on every type of action, until her Rindath energy has recovered through normal means. If the Demorthèn obtains a natural 1 on her Stamina roll, she also suffers an amount of damage points equivalent to the negative Rindath rating she reached. Critical failure leads to death.

Armel only has 4 Rindath points remaining, but wishes to use her Antidote Ogham to save one of her companions who is in agony. Given the condition of the patient, this power is of the third Circle; it costs 10 Rindath points, which leads our benevolent Demorthèn to a rating of -6. Thus, she must succeed in a Complicated (14) Stamina roll in order to bear this brutal loss of energy. As she has a Stamina rating of 10 and gets a die roll of 3, the Demorthèn manages to summon her power but falls into a comatose sleep that will last 6 hours. When she recovers, she will have a -6 penalty on all of her actions until her Rindath rating goes back to 0 or more.

Resisting a Power:

A living being can attempt to resist the effects of a power, be they physical or mental. The stronger the intensity of a power is, the harder it will be to avoid its effects. A natural 10 is always considered a success, even if the Difficulty Threshold was out of the target's reach; likewise, a natural 1 always means that the roll is a failure, even if success could have been automatic. According to each case, various characteristics can be involved (see the following paragraphs).

RESISTING A POWER	
Power Circle	*Difficulty Threshold*
First	*Standard (11)*
Second	*Complicated (14)*
Third	*Difficult (17)*
Fourth	*Very Difficult (20)*
Fifth	*Exceptional (25)*
Sixth	*Heroic (30)*

Physical Resistance:

When physical resistance is involved (such as when taking a Stone Arrow, or extracting oneself from an area turned into a bog), the target may make a Stamina roll to halve the effects. Any suffered damage is halved, rounded up. A power inflicting immobility will have no effect if the target succeeds in a Stamina roll. An immobilized target may make another Stamina roll each Round to try to shake off. This also goes for sleep-inducing Ogham. Being paralyzed in front of an opponent can be fatal: the target suffers blows without being able to strike back, has a 5-point penalty to Defense, and loses all bonuses related to agility or to the use of a shield. A power used to slow someone down inflicts penalties that are halved (also rounded up) if the roll is a success.

Mental Resistance:

Some powers attack the mind of the target, or try to deceive his senses. This applies for Dissimulation, for example. In such cases, the target may make a Mental Resistance roll to avoid the effects entirely. Penalties inflicted to a target through a power also allow for a Mental Resistance roll: a success halves the penalties, still with the number rounded up.

Recovering and Earning Rindath Energy

There are several ways to recover or increase one's Rindath energy. Recovering energy must be distinguished from improving the maximum Rindath rating. The first one consists of recovering Rindath energy to return to the maximum amount. The second one is about permanently increasing this maximum Rindath rating and is dealt with in the "Experience and Advancement" chapter.

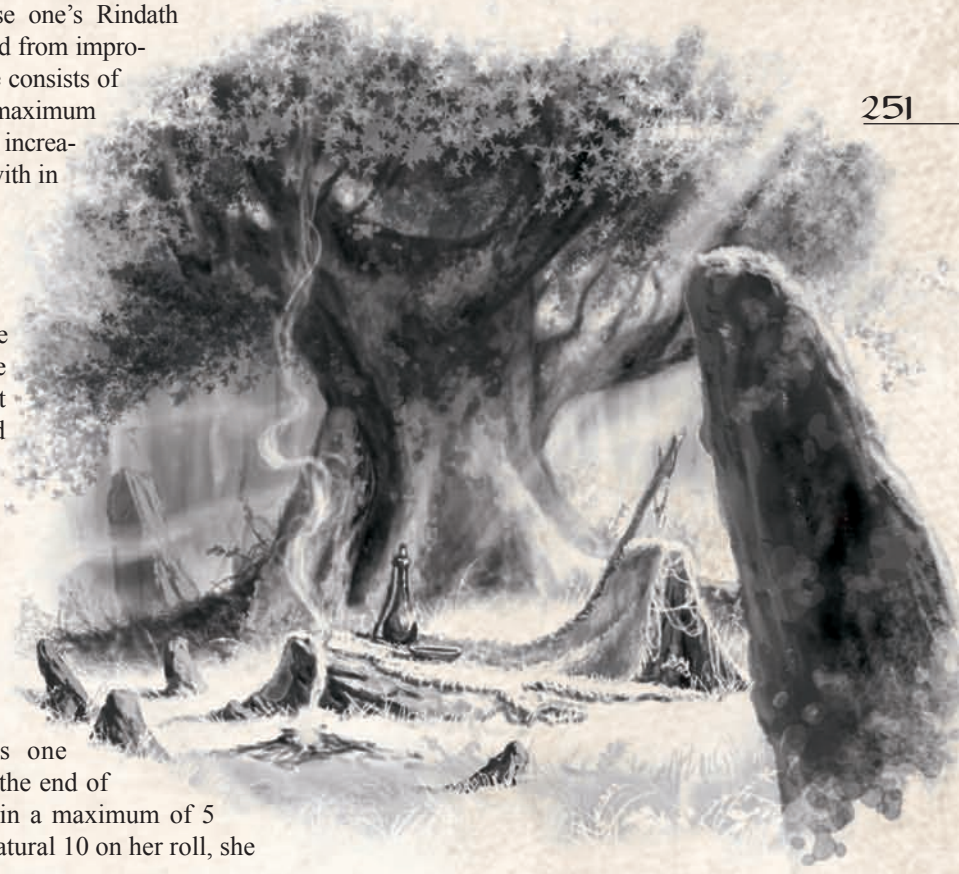
Recovering Rindath:

Meditating:

After at least one hour of meditation, the Demorthèn makes a Meditation roll (or uses the Demorthèn Mysteries Domain if she does not have this Discipline). The Difficulty Threshold varies according to the place:

- In a sacred Demorthèn place: Standard roll (11)
- In a forest or a natural place: Complicated roll (14)
- In a village or a cottage: Difficult roll (17)
- In a city or a Magientist factory: Very Difficult roll (20)

Each hour of meditation potentially gives one Rindath point. The Resolution roll is made at the end of the meditation period. A Demorthèn can obtain a maximum of 5 daily points through this means. If she gets a natural 10 on her roll, she doubles the amount of points recovered.



After three hours spent in a forest, near a stream, Armel makes a Complicated Meditation roll to regain 3 Rindath points. She has a level of 6 in this Discipline, and of 5 in Empathy; the Player must roll 3 or more on her die. Natalie rolls her die and obtains a 10! Therefore, she earns 6 Rindath points instead of 3.

Resting:

A full night of sleep allows a Character to regain two Rindath points.

Demorthèn Ethics

In Demorthèn traditions, the Three Arts must always be used in order to enforce natural order and the balance of the environment. A Demorthèn using such powers to serve personal ambitions, by a thirst for power or out of envy, or also to satisfy a desire for personal vengeance, goes against ancestral principles. It is possible that the other Demorthèn, during a Tsioghair, will consider him unworthy of his rank and confiscate his Ogham, temporarily or permanently, according to the fault he committed and how he behaved thereafter.

Oradh and Morcail

The Three Arts require a Demorthèn to be patient and even-minded. He must be humble and respectful toward nature and its spirits, the C'maoghs, who grant him a great part of the necessary energy for invocations. However, there are tales of fallen Demorthèn who use their powers to serve their ambitions. Some think they manage to trick, intimidate, or even bribe the C'maoghs, in order to obtain more Rindath and use their Ogham for wicked purposes. Those corrupted users of the ancestral arts are called "Morcail" and are hunted by the other Demorthèn. Some of these Morcail reportedly gather in cabals to practice and promote their dark art, the Oradh.

Oghamic Stones and Powers

This part explains the effects of several powers by giving some examples of Oghamic stones.

Nature of the Powers

On each Oghamic stone there is engraved a minor Ogham, which derives from one of the seven major Ogham. If there are an infinite number of powers, it is because nature can express itself under limitless shapes. However, powers must be drawn from natural facts. In this way, a Thunder power will bring forth lightning and rumbling in the sky, which will end in bolts striking the Demorthèn's target. It is not possible for the Demorthèn to make lightning burst out of her hands. Also, this power cannot be summoned indoors or in an underground area, and it may have no effect if the weather is sunny and there is not a single cloud on the horizon. The same goes for a power like Rain, among others.

Effect of a Power

As it has previously been described, it is up to the Player to define the effects of an Oghamic stone, within the limit of its range of action. Some examples of Oghamic stones presented further define ranges of action. Demorthèn Players are advised to describe the power of their Ogham and what they wish to obtain as accurately as possible. For example, when summoning Spring, the Player can explain he is summoning the spirit of the stream running under the path to make a small fountain of pure water gush from the ground. The more accurate the description, the closer the Demorthèn will be to achieving the desired effect. The vaguer the description is, the more surprising the effect may be, and the GL should feel free to interpret the power as she wishes.

Creating Something "Ex Nihilo"

Nothing is created ex nihilo. Nature makes up a whole, and even if he does not see it himself, the Demorthèn knows he creates nothing but borrows what he uses from nature, with the help of the C'maoghs. When the Demorthèn summons Spring, for example, the liquid is drawn from another place, generally a nearby one. For this reason, Demorthèn are very careful not to alter the balance of a place by abusing their power.

Combining Powers

It is possible to combine several effects. For example, a first power may create dew on a Character, and a second one may freeze this dew, confining the target within an ice prison, putting it at risk of choking or dying because of the cold.

Oghamic Stones

Here are some examples of Oghamic stones. This list is in no way exhaustive: there is potentially no limit to the number of Oghamic stones. Each Leader is free to decide whether an Ogham exists or not; she can also decide not to use some Ogham so as to limit the influence of magic in her sessions and preserve an atmosphere where fantastic things are less obvious. The description of each stone gives a non-exhaustive glimpse of its range of action. Some Ogham are reversible; in such a case, it is indicated in their descriptions. Thus, a Humidity Ogham may become a Drying Ogham, etc.

Oghamic Stones of Water

Call Aquatic Creatures
A Demorthèn can call aquatic animals to come to his aid. Note that he will never control them absolutely: the animals respond to his call, and may give him their help depending on his behavior and what he asks of them, but there is no phenomenon of domination. Specifically, animals will not give their life for the Demorthèn, unless he has developed very strong and reciprocal bonds with them. To know the number of creatures called, use the Targets factor. The exact nature of the creatures called depends on the animals present in the power's area of action (Scale).

Calm Water
Makes rain stop, prevents a river from bursting its banks, or lowers the intensity of waves.

Humidity
Humidifies an area, creates dew, etc. Drying, its opposite effect, inflicts damage and can be fatal for living beings.

Ice
Transforms water into ice and vice versa. It can cool objects or even freeze them, but it cannot generate heat. This Ogham can kill, immobilize, or slow down living beings.

Mist
Makes a fog patch appear, or can transform water into mist, and vice versa.

Rain
Summons rain.

Pure Water
Cleanses a liquid from poison or pollutants. The reversible version makes water poisoned and it may inflict damage to, or even kill, those who drink it.

Spring
Makes water appear. Generally, it will gush from the ground. Used at the sixth Power Circle, this Ogham can become very dangerous as it can create columns of water.

Wave
Stirs water, makes a stream go faster and may even, at the sixth Circle, create actual ground swells, inflicting damage.

Oghamic Stones of Air

Breath
Improves a living being's ability to hold its breath. The reversible version of this power, Choking, inflicts damage and can be fatal.

Call Birds
Works the same way as the Call Aquatic Creatures Ogham described above.

Gust
Makes it possible to control wind, to make it rise or, on the contrary, fall. According to the factor and the Circle, damage can be dealt because of objects hurling about: bricks, boards, rocks, etc.

Pure Air
Cleanses polluted or poisonous air. The reversible version makes air poisonous and it may inflict damage, or even kill those who breathe it.

Rustling
Conveys whispers or an oral message through the wind. Whispers can become the hisses of a powerful wind, deafening those who hear it. This Ogham also allows the Demorthèn, if the wind goes in the right direction, to hear what happens far from her position.

Thunder
Summons lightning and makes it fall on one or several targets.

Oghamic Stones of Earth

Earthquake
Triggers tremors or even true earthquakes, according to the Circle used. Normally, the Damage factor of the associated Circle is used. Conversely, this Ogham can make tremors stop; entirely overpowering an earthquake is always considered a power of the sixth Circle.

Fuse With Earth
Allows the Demorthèn to enter earth (she must hold her breath, but she can breathe normally starting from the third Circle). At the fourth Circle, it is possible to fuse with stone, so as to move through walls, for example.

Petrifaction
Turns an object or a being into stone (the amount of damage must be sufficient for this, see the following aside). It is possible to give back its initial aspect to an entirely petrified being or object, but such a process will kill any being. Otherwise, this Ogham is not reversible.

Pure Earth
Cleanses a patch of earth from every poison or pollutant.

Sculpt Earth
Makes it possible to shape earth. At the fourth circle, it is possible to shape stone.

Stone Arrow
Rocks around the Demorthèn sharpen and shoot at the target.

Tracking
Allows the Demorthèn to read tracks left on the ground like an open book. In its opposite version, Trackless Path, this Ogham hides one's tracks.

Transmutation, Paralysis, and Slowing



Some offensive Ogham can be used in several ways. The Ice Ogham, for example, can be used to turn the target into ice, freeze it, or slow it down. The Demorthèn must choose among one of these three uses but cannot add up those effects. The target has a chance of reducing or escaping the effects as explained on page 251.

Transmutation

Some minor Ogham, such as Ice or Petrifaction, have the ability to turn a living being into ice, stone, etc. Used reversely, the Humidity Ogham can also bring similar effects by totally drying up a being containing water. This kind of power deals damage normally according to its Power Circle. For the intended effect to actually occur, the Demorthèn must deal a sufficient amount of damage to kill the target. In this case, the target perishes and the transmutation is permanent. If the amount of injuries is insufficient, the target will still be wounded (it will be freezing, will feel awful pain because of cramps in its body, etc.) but will suffer no other effects from the power. The Persistency factor is irrelevant in this case.

Paralysis

A Vegetal Growth Ogham can be used to entangle an opponent and bind it. An Ice or Petrifaction Ogham can be used for the same goal; the target will be trapped in ice or stone until it can no longer move, but it can still try to struggle free, as explained on page 251.

Slowing

Slowing down is expressed through penalties in Speed, Defense, Feats, and Close Combat rolls, and globally all physical actions. The penalties are defined by the Power Circle.

Oghamic Stones of Fire

Flame

Creates flames, from a mere candle's to actual bonfires. It can also set objects, weapons, or even beings, on fire. It is useless under the rain or on a water-soaked target.

Heat

Makes the temperature of an object or a being rise, which can set it on fire, or even melt it. At the sixth Circle, the Heat Ogham can melt the most resilient metals such as iron (2700°F) or minerals such as zircon (3200°F).

Light

Creates a non-burning source of light.

Fire Resistance

Makes a target (an object or a being) resistant to heat. At the first Circles, the target will not flinch under scorching heat, while at the last Circles, it will withstand the most powerful fires.

Sleeping Volcano

Lowers the intensity of a volcanic eruption. It will generally require a high Circle to be efficient. Stopping an eruption entirely is always of the sixth Circle. Its opposite, Awaking Volcano, can stir an active volcano and, at the sixth Circle, put a dormant one into activity.

Vegetal Oghamic Stones

Animated Tree

Animates branches, vines, roots, and all the other appendages of a plant to make them perform tasks: grabbing an object, hitting (the damage dealt depends on the Circle), immobilizing an opponent, etc. The higher the Circle used is, the more active the tree or plant will look.

Bark Skin

Makes the target's skin look and feel like solid bark. This Ogham generally grants bonuses to Protection. The Ogham can be used to heal the damaged bark of a tree in a permanent way (which gives no protection against ulterior damage on the same tree).

Curative Berries

Gives fruits or vegetables curative properties, the Bonus factor giving the amount of damage points healed. However, they can also become Poisonous Berries (see the "Poison" Ogham for the effects of the berries).

Camouflage

Makes it possible to blend in with any type of surroundings.

Poison

Gives the Demorthèn a poisoning ability. He must bite or scratch the target to inject the poison. Poisons inflict damage points according to the Circle. This Ogham can also make a plant venomous or poison a beverage. The opposite, Vegetal Antidote, can neutralize natural poisons. The Difficulty Threshold to cure the poisoned one–and thus, the required Circle–depends on the toxin's Virulence. The required intensity is equivalent to the level of Virulence +1 (for example, the fifth Circle for a deadly Virulence; see the "Health" chapter).

Vegetal Growth

Makes plants bloom, while trees and thickets grow at an uncanny speed. This Ogham can, for example, create inextricable vegetal walls.

Animal Oghamic Stones

Bear
Makes the target stronger: the bonuses apply to the Feats, Close Combat, and Shooting and Throwing Domains.

Call Animals
Works the same way as the Call Aquatic Creatures Ogham described on p.253.

Calm Animals
Placates animals. The required Circle depends on how upset the beasts are. The Demorthèn and her companions will have to be calm themselves; any agitation cancels the effects of the Ogham.

Calyre
Makes the target more agile; his Defense rating as well as his Stealth Domain can be increased. In appropriate cases, it applies to the Feats Domain as well (for tumbling, climbing, and evading).

Eagle
Improves the target's eyesight and alertness. The opposite, Blind Eye, inflicts penalties and can make one nearly blind.

Endurance
This Ogham makes the target more enduring: the bonuses apply to Stamina, Feats roll, etc. This Ogham does not change one's Health Condition.

Shield
The skin of the target becomes very resistant, in a way inspired from a precise animal, each Ogham being related to a particular animal: thick leather, scales, etc.

Oghamic Stones of Life

Cold Resistance
Makes a target (an object or being) resist the harshest cold, in accordance with the Circle at which it is used.

Cure
Neutralizes a disease. The Difficulty Threshold to cure a patient–and thus, the required Circle–depends on the Virulence of the illness. The required intensity is equivalent to the level of Virulence +1 (see the "Health" chapter).

Healing
Makes bleedings stop and closes wounds. A Healing power cannot heal severed limbs, incapacitating wounds (gouged eyes, an injury that caused a limp, severe burns, etc.) or death-causing wounds. Every wound healed through the Healing Ogham will leave the scars or common marks of the healed wound.

Regeneration
Regenerates burnt or destroyed tissues and heals wounds without leaving marks or scars. Only this rare and powerful Ogham makes such a feat possible. The Circle depends on how severely the body has been affected. A severed limb or a completely destroyed sensory organ will require at least an invocation of the fifth Circle.

Vital Energy
Improves a single vital aspect of the Target. There are many vital Ogham allowing the improvement of an aspect such as Defense, Attack, Speed, feats (the Feats Domain), etc. Each Ogham can take effect in an opposite way.

Withering
Works like a reversed Regeneration Ogham. According to history, this deadly Ogham was created by a Morcail.

Wound
Inflicts damage to a target.

Improving in Demorthèn Arts

Refer to page 230 for the rules to improve a Discipline and learn new Ogham. The maximum Rindath rating can be increased as well by improving in the Sigil Rann Discipline.



Miracles of the Temple

Some emissaries of the Temple are capable of accomplishing true miracles. No one could tell whether such a gift is innate or comes from rigorous practice of the ordinances and daily prayers. The purpose of this chapter is to describe how clerical magic works and to define its main powers.

How Clerical Magic Works

In terms of rules, the magic of the Temple's Elect works on the same principle as the Demorthèn's, which was previously described. This chapter is going to describe what differs in terms of game mechanics for users of clerical magic. For any other point, refer to the rules about Demorthèn magic. Here are the basic principles:

Faith and Miracles

Clerical magic rests on two elements: first, an unwavering piety, and second, the Miracles Discipline (a branch of the Prayer Domain). Obtaining the Miracles Discipline does not ensure that powers will be obtained; only genuine faith can make it possible. Even if the Elect are few, the Leader can authorize access to such powers for adepts of the Temple played by PCs. In such a case, the young Elect starts with the access to one Miracle chosen by the Player. Awakening to this first Miracle should be an important moment of the Character's history, and be detailed in his background. He can then access other Miracles by following the advancement procedure (See the "Experience" chapter). As with Demorthèn, the Leader can also decide that access to such powers will only come after some time, if for example, she wishes to give her sessions an atmosphere where magic is a rare thing.

Exaltation

Where Demorthèn call upon Rindath energy which flows through the world, priests of the Temple use their faith, which is measured by an Exaltation rating.

The Six Stanzas

Like runic arts, Miracles can be of variable power. They are divided into six Power Stanzas, and cost a certain amount of Exaltation points based on the chosen intensity. A Miracle of the first or second stanza is considered to be a minor one; beyond this, and up to the sixth Stanza, it is a major Miracle.

The Powers of the Elect

The Powers of the Elect traditionally match the twelve miracles performed by the prophet Soustraine during his earthly existence: Canticle, Castigation, Circle of Protection, Divine Cold, Divine Wrath, Holy Vigor, Litany, Might of Faith, Miraculous Healing, Purification, Resurrection, and Vision of Limbo. All of the six orders of the Temple can access the twelve Miracles, but not to the same extent. They can only reach the third Stanza and above (which means a major Miracle) in the six Miracles specific to their order. For the other six, they can only perform minor Miracles, from the first and second Stanzas.

Priests, Monks, and Clerics:

Major Miracles:

Canticle, Circle of Protection, Divine Cold, Miraculous Healing, Purification, Resurrection.

Minor Miracles:

Castigation, Divine Wrath, Holy Vigor, Litany, Might of Faith, Vision of Limbo.

Blades:

Major Miracles

Circle of Protection, Divine Cold, Divine Wrath, Might of Faith, Miraculous Healing, Vision of Limbo.

Minor Miracles:

Canticle, Castigation, Holy Vigor, Litany, Purification, Resurrection.

Vectors:

Major Miracles:

Canticle, Divine Cold, Holy Vigor, Litany, Miraculous Healing, Purification.

Minor Miracles:

Castigation, Circle of Protection, Divine Wrath, Might of Faith, Resurrection, Vision of Limbo.

Sigires:

Major Miracles:

Castigation, Circle of Protection, Divine Cold, Might of Faith, Purification, Vision of Limbo.

Minor Miracles:

Canticle, Divine Wrath, Holy Vigor, Litany, Miraculous Healing, Resurrection.

Intensity of Miracles

To accomplish Miracles, the Elect calls upon the exaltation resulting from her faith. This part describes how to spend and earn Exaltation points. At creation, a Character's Exaltation amounts to the following:

Way of Conviction x 3

Intensity of Miracles

Accomplishing a Miracle requires the use of a certain amount of Exaltation points. The cost directly depends on how powerful the Elect wishes the Miracle to be. Gauging the power of a Miracle is done as with Oghamic powers, as it is described on page 246, in the paragraph "Power Circles and Factors". Leaders and Players will refer to a similar chart to know about a Miracle's cost in Exaltation points according to its Stanza.

Power Stanzas

The greater the intensity of a Miracle is, the higher its Stanza will be. There are six Power Stanzas. Only the wisest and devoutest Elect can access the sixth Stanza. The access to the Stanzas, the cost in Exaltation points, and the Difficulty Thresholds are the same as for the six Demorthèn Power Circles. The sixth Stanza works like the sixth Circle of the Demorthèn. Here is a reproduction of the summoning chart; the definition of each element can be found in the chapter dealing with Demorthèn magic.

MIRACLE – SUMMONING CHART

Stanza	*Difficulty Threshold*	*Factors*					*Exaltation Cost*	*Summoning Time (= penalty to Speed)*
		Target	*Scale*	*Persistency*	*Bonus*	*Damage*		
1	*Standard (11)*	*1*	*Touch*	*1 Round*	*+1*	*1D10*	*3*	*1*
2	*Complicated (14)*	*2*	*5 yd*	*3 Rounds*	*+1*	*1D10*	*5*	*2*
3	*Difficult (17)*	*3*	*50 yd*	*1 minute*	*+2*	*2D10*	*10*	*3*
4	*Very Difficult (20)*	*4*	*100 yd*	*1 hour*	*+2*	*3D10*	*15*	*4*
5	*Exceptional (25)*	*5*	*1000 yd*	*1 day*	*+3*	*4D10*	*20*	*5*
6	*Heroic (30)*	*special*	*special*	*special*	*+5*	*special*	*special*	*special*

Jorn wishes to summon a Holy Cold Miracle to sweep aside his four opponents with a freezing gust; this invocation requires the use of the fourth Stanza (since there are four targets). As it is described on page 254, the power can transmute, paralyze, or slow down targets, at Jorn's choice. He decides to transmute his opponents into ice; thus, the power will deal 3D10 damage to each target and will only last a few moments (as it is explained on page 248, in the "Damage" paragraph). The maximum range will be 100 yards, the cost in Exaltation points 15, the summoning time 4, and the Miracles roll to succeed at will be Very Difficult (20). As with Demorthèn PCs, it will be useful for those playing an adept of the Temple to have a reproduction of the summoning chart to use during the game.

Performing a Miracle

Successfully performing a Miracle is not a given. However, having a minimum rating of 6 in the Miracles Discipline is enough to attempt to realize one. For that, the priest must have awakened to one or several Miracles (See the "Experience" chapter). Each time an Elect calls upon divine powers, she must succeed in a Resolution roll based on the Miracles Discipline; the Difficulty Threshold depends on how powerful the Miracle summoned is. Performing a Miracle is done according to the exact same rules described in the paragraph "Summoning a Power" on page 250. The consequences of a successful or failed Resolution roll described in this paragraph also apply to Miracles. Here are the others aspects to take into account:

Being Disturbed During an Invocation

An Elect can be disturbed while he is invoking a Miracle. The paragraph "Being Disturbed During an Invocation" on page 250 explains how to resolve such situations.

Resisting a Miracle

The paragraph "Resisting a Power" on page 251 describes the possibilities a target has to resist the effects of a Miracle.



Recovering and Increasing One's Exaltation

If the Exaltation of an Elect reaches 0, he can no longer perform Miracles until he has recovered Exaltation points. Note that if the current rating is insufficient to realize a Miracle of a given intensity, the Elect will not be able to complete it. An Elect cannot possibly have a negative Exaltation rating. There are several possibilities for an Elect to recover the points he has spent when realizing Miracles, or to increase his maximum Exaltation rating.

Praying

Elect follow the same mechanics as Demorthèn with Rindath to recover or earn Exaltation points (See the "Experience" chapter and the "Recovering and Earning Rindath Energy" section on p.251). The only differences are that they use the Contemplation Discipline instead of the Meditation one, and that the Difficulty Thresholds depend on how holy the place is instead of how close to nature it is. Moreover, praying in a place holding a Relic triples the hourly point recovery, with a maximum of 15 daily points. Finally, a night's sleep brings no Exaltation point; only prayer restores faith.

Fervor

Promoting faith in the One God and carrying out acts in favor of the Temple increases the Exaltation of the Elect. Here are some examples of such actions: following the precepts of the order the Elect belongs to in an exemplary way, converting populations, having a new place of prayer built, recovering lost holy relics, protecting the interests of the Temple, etc. The action will be a minor, significant, or major one according to its magnitude and the fervor of the Elect in accomplishing it. Converting a small group of people is a minor action, converting a village is a significant action, converting a city is a major action. Managing to accomplish actions considered as significant and major should remain exceptional events.

- **Minor Action**: 5 Exaltation points recovered.
- **Significant Action**: 10 Exaltation points recovered and maximum rating increased by one point.
- **Major Action**: 30 Exaltation points recovered and maximum rating increased by three points.

Increasing the Exaltation level is also possible via the experience and advancement system (See the "Experience" chapter).

Showing Faith

The Elect must faultlessly abide by the principles of the Temple, mainly through a strict application of the six Ordinances.

Breaking the principles of one's faith, performing Miracles to serve personal ambitions, or any other sacrilegious act can lead the priest to face a Gwidrite religious court. Those acts can also make her lose Exaltation points, temporarily or permanently. The Elect may lose her ability to realize Miracles until she repents. The ensuing punishment depends on how important the errors made were. It can take the form of a pilgrimage, acts of contrition, or corporal punishment (with a cilice, a knout, etc.) Some acts (such as murder) may not only be considered serious offences, but also lead to being dismissed from the order, and can be punished by death.
These are the sentences generally applied according to the offence committed:

Minor Offence:
Loss of 5 Exaltation points. They can be recovered normally.
Examples: skipping a prayer on purpose (if the Character is ill or in a dangerous situation–traveling or on a mission, for example–he will not be punished), making a minor breach of the Ordinances, etc.

Significant Offence:
Loss of 10 Exaltation points (which can be recovered) and maximum Exaltation rating lowered by one point, inability to perform Miracles for a month or until the fulfillment of a punishment dealt by a superior.
Examples: getting drunk, yielding to the pleasures of the flesh in a provocative way, making a significant breach to the Ordinances, being insolent or disrespectful toward an immediate superior, etc.



Major Offence:
Loss of 30 Exaltation points (which can be recovered) and maximum Exaltation rating lowered by three points, impossibility to perform Miracles until punishment.
Examples: making a severe and deliberate breach to the Ordinances, using Miracles for one's personal success without regard for the Creator, committing senseless murder or assaulting a member of the Temple, etc.

The Twelve Miracles

Each Miracle has a precise field of application described below. Unless it is explicitly mentioned, powers are not reversible.

Canticle

Through his chanting, the Elect can instill fervor for a celebration or during a fight. At the time of holy prayers, canticles ring in cathedrals dedicated to the One God. Used in a fight, the Canticle protects the Elect and all those he wishes to by improving their Defense rating.

Castigation

Castigation can cause great pains that may lead to death. The bodies of the victims will feel painful, as if knouts were flaying their naked skin and cilices were clutching their limbs. The damage, the number of targets, and other factors are determined as usual according to the Stanza.

Circle of Protection

The enemies of the Elect suffer a penalty to every action they take against the priest and her allies (thus, attacking and using skills) within the circle of Protection. At the fifth Stanza, the Circle cannot be crossed by the enemies of the Elect. If an opponent is within the area of effect when the invocation is performed, it has to leave it. The priest can use this power to drive an opponent away through her faith by wielding her holy symbol. If the opponent ends up cornered and the priest keeps getting closer, her power dissipates. If it gets stuck, the opponent can also try to cross part of the Circle to escape, but never to attack.

Divine Cold

This Miracle can transform water into ice, cool down an object and even freeze it, unleash snowstorms, freeze the opponents of the priest, etc. This last use is seen as a purification of the enemy, so that it may meet the purity of the creator God in its death.
Refer to page 254, paragraph "Transmutation, Paralysis, and Slowing" to get more details about using this Miracle.
For other types of use, the Stanza depends on the intensity of the Miracle the priest wishes to perform.

Divine Wrath

The Elect calls upon the blessing of the Creator to fill him and his allies with righteous fury, which translates into bonuses in Close Combat.

Holy Vigor

This Miracle can make someone ignore exhaustion, have a restful sleep (4 hours are then enough to be fully rested), ignore pain, and have a bonus to Stamina rolls and skill rolls related to endurance. Ignoring pain reduces penalties due to a deteriorated Health Condition by an amount of points equivalent to the bonus granted by the Miracle. From the fifth Stanza, this Miracle makes it possible to ignore death for a few moments. If the beneficiary suffers a mortal wound, he can still stand for 1D10 minutes or until he has accomplished his last action (finishing a fight, carrying a relic to a safe place); the beneficiary then dies from his mortal wounds. It is not possible to naturally heal deadly wounds while this Miracle lasts; only Miraculous Healing or any other sort of magical power can save the beneficiary.

Litany

This Miracle has an enthralling effect on those who listen to the Elect. At the first Stanza, the priest catches the attention; at the third Stanza, he can calm down his opponents (he must genuinely want to soothe the situation, as this Miracle cannot be used for a tactical goal; any sign of aggressiveness from the priest or his allies disrupts the power); the fourth and fifth Stanza allow him to captivate his listeners, who will then be well-disposed toward him (in the case of faithful of the Temple, they will be galvanized and will follow the orders of the priest).
At the last Stanza, Litany can induce faith in the One God if a Mental Resistance roll is failed by the target(s). The faith remains vivid as long as the target remains near a representative of the Temple or a church, and becomes genuine after a year. Otherwise, it will dissipate after a few months if the newly converted person goes away from a source of faith (a new Mental Resistance roll is made for each month without any contact).

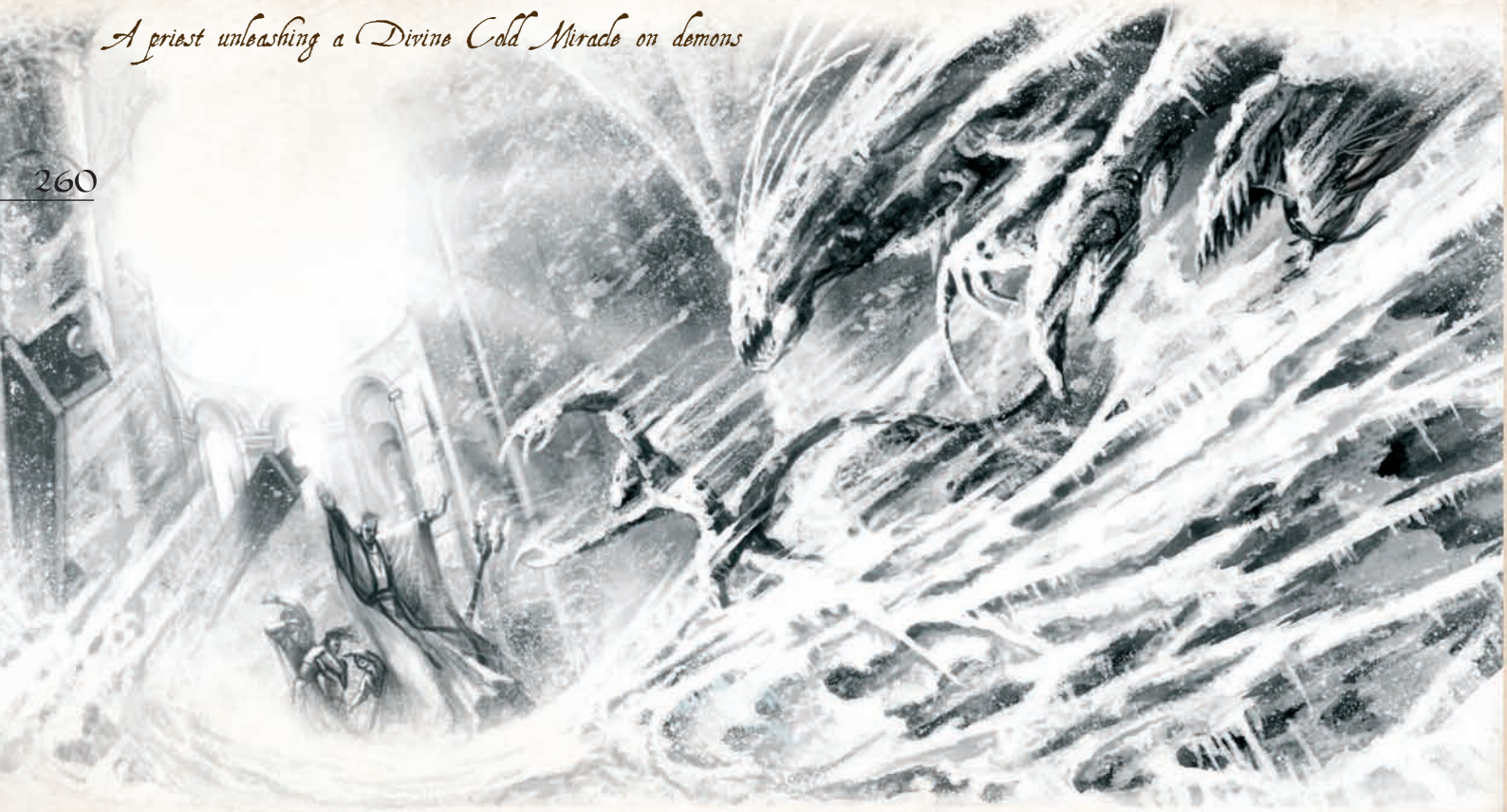
Might of Faith

This Miracle allows the priest and her allies to ignore fear and terror. Believers who benefit from this Miracle can be granted a bonus to Sanity rolls depending on the Stanza for the whole duration of the Miracle. From the third Stanza, this Miracle also allows all beneficiaries to ignore pain by reducing penalties due to a deteriorated Health Condition by an amount of points determined by the Stanza.

Miraculous Healing

This Miracle heals wounds, stops bleeding, mends broken bones, etc. The amount of damage points healed is related to the Damage factor. No scar or mark will be left. From the fifth Stanza, this Miracle can regenerate mutilated limbs. It can also cure all kinds of diseases, and neutralize the effects of natural or artificial poisons. The necessary intensity will not be the same for a mild disease or poison than for a particularly deadly affliction: the Difficulty Threshold imposed by the Virulence determines the minimum Stanza required (See the the “Cure” Ogham on p.255). In no case can this Miracle bring the dead back to life.

A priest unleashing a Divine Cold Miracle on demons



Purification

Thanks to this Miracle, the Elect can purify objects, places, or people. A successful Purification is permanent, but does nothing against any potential future profanation. This power can make brackish water clear, spoiled food edible, a rotting tree healthy, etc. This power is also used to exorcize possessed people or places haunted by evil spirits.
It can also sanctify defiled areas from which Feondas rise. By accomplishing such a Miracle, the Elect banishes corrupted spirits from a place and prevents any new Feond from appearing. In any case, the level of the Stanza is determined by the intensity of the present corruption and is entirely left to the Leader’s judgment.



Resurrection

This Miracle can bring the dead back to life. The Persistency factor indicates the maximum amount of time following the death that the priest has to perform this Miracle. For example, at the third Stanza, the Elect has one minute (10 Rounds) following the death of the targeted person to accomplish this Miracle. This factor can never go beyond 20 days. The miraculously saved person has to succeed in a Complicated (14) Stamina roll to come back among the living. A success means that he comes back to life in the Critical Health Condition, but such an operation makes him permanently lose one Stamina point. A failure on the Stamina roll means that his soul became a wandering one in the realm of the dead; he is now definitely dead and no other Resurrection Miracle can be attempted. A natural 10 on this roll means that the beneficiary loses no Stamina point and comes back to life in a Good Health Condition (thus, with no box ticked in the Health Condition chart). In any case, coming back from the dead inflicts one permanent Trauma point. If the Stamina rating of the target falls to 0, death is irrevocable. It is impossible to use this Miracle to resurrect someone who has died of old age. If the body of the beneficiary is in a very bad state, it will first have to be restored through a Miraculous Healing Miracle in order to repair any destroyed vital organs.

Vision of Limbo

This powerful Miracle implants a vision of the hell awaiting the target(s) of the priest when they die. They will be blamed for every sin they have committed; a dreadful feeling of guilt will seize them, as well as the unfathomable terror of suffering forever in the depths of Limbo. The greater the Stanza is, the more difficult it will be to avoid the effects of the Vision of Limbo. A failure on the Mental Resistance roll inflicts an amount of Trauma points equivalent to the bonus this Miracle would have granted according to the chosen Stanza. Moreover, the target(s), their minds filled with fear, suffer a penalty to all Attack rolls against the priest for the whole duration of the Miracle. If the Mental Resistance roll gives a natural 1, Trauma points are permanent and the target(s) flee.

Improving in Faith

As she earns experience and makes progresses toward the One God, the Elect can acquire new Exaltation points and improve her rating in the Miracles Discipline. It can be developed like any other Discipline (See the “Experience” chapter). To improve in this Discipline, the Elect must go to a holy place and pray, study sacred writings, or talk at length about theology with a superior of her order.

The Leader can decide that increasing the Discipline and the Exaltation level will have to be done along with a mystical quest: recovering a sacred object, freeing a land dominated by infidels, etc.

Magience

For most people, Magience remains a mysterious discipline. Yet, it is a science that works according to precise principles. It is based on the use of Flux to power various machineries and create effects often far beyond human abilities.



Extracting Crude Flux

Only Magientists know how to extract crude Flux and refine it. In theory, anyone can access Magientist Disciplines; in actual practice, one has to study in a university or under the guidance of specialists in the domains at hand, and the Magientists control the diffusion of their knowledge. If a Character accesses the "Flux Extraction" Discipline, it means he has learned the theories and specific techniques used to extract Flux from matter. Crude Flux extracted in this fashion generally comes in the form of a thick, greasy liquid.

Raw Material

To realize an operation of extraction, the Magientist must have raw material at her disposal. Each animal, vegetal, or mineral matter holds a specific amount of Flux. The following chart indicates a few examples of the properties of Flux according to its source, as well as the necessary amount of raw material to obtain one standard dose of Flux ready to be refined.

Type of Matter	Quality	Rarity	Type of Flux	Amount for one dose
Stones, rocks, pebbles, sand	Mediocre	Common	Mineral	400 lb
Trees, plants, and vegetal matter	Average	Common	Vegetal	200 lb (1 tree weighs between 2000 and 4000 lb)
Very old tree or vegetal essence rich in Flux	Good	Rare	Vegetal	20 lb
Flesh, bones, skin, fur	Mediocre	Common	Organic	100 lb
Blood or live organic matter	Average	Common	Organic	2 pints
Fossil Flux	Excellent	Very rare	Special	Special



Extraction

Before performing an extraction, it is necessary to take 5 factors into account: the time spent on the extraction, the number of doses of crude Flux the Magientist wishes to extract during this period, the quality of the material and of the technical equipment used, the quality of the raw material, and finally, the type of the raw material which defines the type of refined Flux. Once the Magientist has determined the various factors, he has to succeed in a Very Difficult (20) Flux Extraction roll that takes into account the adjustments of the chart above. Penalties and bonuses are cumulative, so a beginner Magientist had better take his time and use the right tools. Indeed, each factor can make the extraction process easier or harder!

Crude fossil Flux does not need to be extracted; it is gathered as it is in nature. It is a liquid, the density of which can greatly vary (See "Glossary").

Adjustments on the roll	*Time spent*	*Doses of crude Flux*	*Technical equipment*	*Raw material quality*
-9	-	4D10	Bad	N.A.
-6	Half a day (6 hours)	3D10	Mediocre	Mediocre
0	One day (12 hours)	2D10	Average	Average
+3	3 days	1D10	Good	Good
+6	1 week	1	Excellent	Excellent

One dose of crude Flux weighs one pound. For crude fossil Flux, which is directly gathered from nature in liquid form, one dose corresponds to a pint.

Magientist Alaric intends to extract 1D10 doses of mineral crude Flux from rocks he has gathered. He wishes to give it 1 entire week in a small laboratory in the countryside, which is fairly well equipped for such an operation:
- Mediocre raw material: -6 penalty
- One week spent: +6 bonus
- 1D10 doses of crude flux: +3 bonus
- Average technical equipment: no bonus
In the end, Alaric gets a +3 bonus on his Extraction roll, which has to reach a total of 20. If he succeeds, he will obtain 1D10 doses of crude Flux, provided he has the corresponding amount of raw material (400 lb of rocks for each intended dose of crude Flux).

Doses of Crude Flux and Amount of Material Invested

The amount of material invested is defined at the beginning of the operation. The aforementioned Magientist who aims for 1D10 doses can announce he is using between 400 and 4000 lb of rocks. Considering he uses 4000 lb of rocks, if he gets a result of 3, it means he has used 4000 lb of rocks (about 35 cubic feet) to obtain 3 doses of mineral crude Flux.

Therefore, any surplus of raw material invested is lost in an operation of extraction, but it is, however, impossible to obtain more doses than the invested mass allows for. For example, had he only used 2000 lb of rocks and rolled an 8 on his D10, he would only have gotten 5 doses of crude Flux (since a minimum of 3200 lb is needed to obtain 8 doses).

Extraction Equipment and Workers

The extraction of crude Flux must always be undertaken with the appropriate tools and technical equipment. The Flux Extraction Discipline, exclusive to Magientists, includes skills to maneuver and use such equipment. Workers are often trained by Magientists in using these machines and extracting crude Flux. They must have a minimum of 1 in Magience, as well as a Discipline in the Craft or Science Domain (machineries of extraction are then considered as a particular type of artifact), and have access to equipment of at least Average quality.

Failing Operations of Extraction

Failing the operation results in spoiling the raw material. A natural 1 on the roll may trigger an accident. Roll 1D10 adjusted according to the quality of the equipment used (bad (+3), mediocre (+1), good (-1), and excellent (-3)), and refer to the following chart:

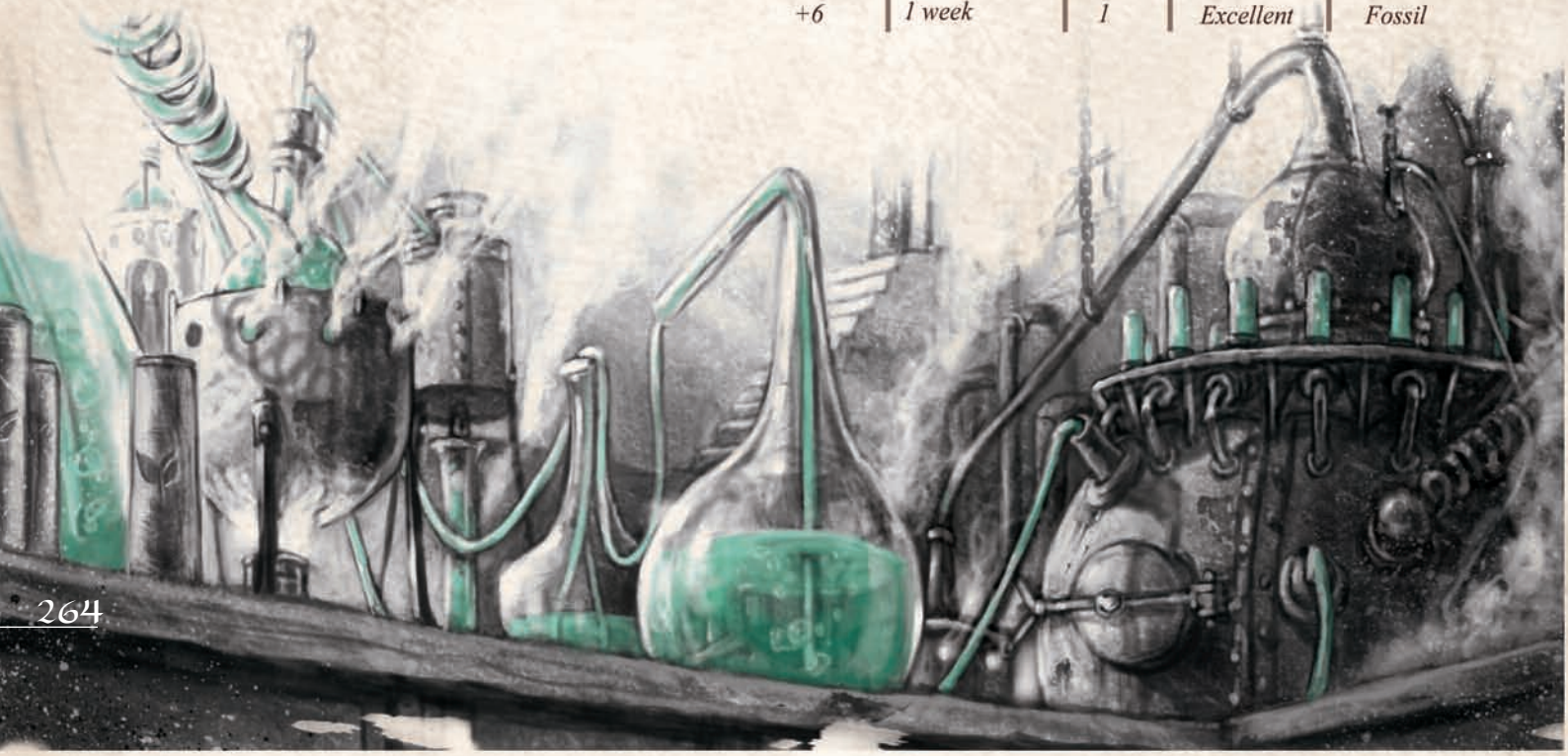
1 or lower	*Overheating, sparks, smoke... but no accident this time.*
2 -5	*The equipment breaks down.*
6	*Malfunction! The equipment is damaged, and the person working suffers 1D10 damage.*
7	*A toxic fog spreads within 3D10 yards and brings death to any living being who does not leave the area for fresh air.*
8	*Acid burst! Anyone within 1D10 yards suffers 1D10 damage.*
9-10	*A fire breaks out and devastates everything within 2D10 yards.*
11-13	*Explosion! Anyone within 2D10 yards suffers 2D10 damage and any equipment within the area is destroyed. A fire may also break out.*

A result between 2 and 10 in the chart above implies that the equipment breaks down. A technician with the appropriate repairing Discipline must work for a number of hours equal to the result to be able to start it up again.

Refining Crude Flux

Crude Flux cannot be used as-is. Once extracted, it must be refined, distilled, and go through many procedures to become a substance usable in the form of fuel. Only Magientists trained in the Flux Refining Discipline can attempt to perform this complex operation. To correctly go through the refining process, one must succeed in a Very Difficult (20) Flux Refining roll based on this Discipline, taking into account the adjustments of the following chart:

Adjustments	Time spent	Doses of Flux	Technical equipment	Crude Flux type
-9	N.A.	30	Bad	N.A.
-6	Half a day (6 hours)	15	Mediocre	Organic
0	One day (12 hours)	10	Average	Vegetal
+3	3 days	5	Good	Mineral
+6	1 week	1	Excellent	Fossil



As it was the case for extraction, adjustments are cumulative. Failing irremediably spoils all of the crude Flux invested. In the case of a natural 1, refer to the chart in the previous paragraph "Failing Operations of Extraction".

After one week of work, Alaric's process of extracting crude Flux is a success. His result on the D10 has given 5: he is therefore in the possession of 5 doses of mineral crude Flux. He now wants to refine all of the crude Flux he has obtained. Being careful, he chooses to spend three entire days on this:
- 3 days spent: +3 bonus
- Five doses of Flux to refine: +3 bonus
- Average technical equipment: no bonus
- Mineral crude Flux: +3 bonus
In the end, Alaric gets a +9 bonus and has to succeed in a Flux Refining roll with a Difficulty Threshold of 20. If he succeeds, his five doses of crude Flux will be refined into as many doses of Flux ready to be used.

Refuse from Extracting and Refining

The extraction process produces an important mass of refuse. For example, to get one pound of mineral crude Flux, no less than 400 lb of rocks are needed. This refuse generally takes the form of a colorless, lumpy paste, the origin of which (mineral, vegetal…) is vaguely recognizable through smell. During the refining process, any matter that is not successfully treated transforms into a sort of black powdery substance with a metallic smell. Such a residue is toxic if ingested or mixed with water. It can also be detrimental to the fertility of soil.

Refined Flux

It comes in a liquid form with a vivid hue that varies according to its origin (bluish for mineral, purplish for organic, greenish for vegetal, and warm yellow for fossil). One dose of refined Flux is generally equivalent to 3 ounces.

Artifacts

The word "Artifact" refers to a mechanism or a device powered by Flux. The last part of this chapter explains who can use an artifact and how. A definition of each Discipline concerning artifacts, as well as several examples of these machines, will also be presented.

Artifacts and Associated Disciplines

Some artifacts are very complex, while others have been designed to be used by the masses. Here are the main principles allowing the GL and the Players to know what a PC can do in the presence of an artifact.

- Complete Neophyte

Having a level of 0 in Magience means that the Character knows nothing about this science. She only knows very vaguely what Flux is, has probably never seen an artifact, and would be hard-pressed to switch it on and even more so to make it work. In many places that are isolated or hostile to Magientists, nobody could use even the simplest artifact without assistance.

- Popular Artifacts

Using everyday artifacts, such as switching a Nebular on or off, for example, requires no particular knowledge; they are even specially designed to be optimally ergonomic and usable by commoners. Even someone with a level of 0 in Magience can turn it on and use it, provided she at least knows what an artifact is.

- Novice

A Character who is not a Magientist but has a level of at least 1 in Magience has already heard about artifacts and knows about their very basic principles: such devices work on Flux, they must be switched on before use, require cartridges, etc. Such a Character can access particular Disciplines, which are specially intended for non-Magientists, and related to the following Domains: Close Combat (Artifact Fighting), Craft (Magientist Machinery and Magientist Tool), Occultism (Artifact Fighting and Magientist Tool), Science (Artifact Fighting, Artifact Repair, Magientist Machinery, and Magientist Tool), and Shooting and Throwing (Artifact Fighting). If she has none of these particular Disciplines, she will use her level in the related Domain.

With the exception of Artifact Repair, each of these Disciplines only gives access to proficiency in a single artifact. The Discipline will have to be learned again (with a different specialization) to know about another artifact. Such a restriction reflects how complex artifacts are for those who are not familiar with Magientist science. Using an artifact without a Discipline is possible, but it greatly increases the risks of an accident (see the "Switching On" and "Using an Artifact" paragraphs).

Elvoz is a Reizhite lumberman. He has a level of 5 in Craft, several Disciplines in this Domain, as well as a level of 1 in Magience. He would like to learn how to properly use the Mechanical Saw activated by Flux. For that, he can learn the Magientist Tool Discipline and choose this artifact. He will then have a level of 6 when he uses this tool. However, if he tries to use a Driller-hammerer without an adequate Discipline, he can only use his level in Craft, which is 5, and he will risk a serious accident.

- The Artifact Fighting Discipline

This Discipline allows non-Magientists to learn to use an artifact designed for fighting.

- The Magientist Tool Discipline

This Discipline encompasses all the portable artifacts such as the Mechanical Saw or the Vision Glasses.

- The Magientist Machinery Discipline

This Discipline concerns the use of larger artifacts, such as elevators, power looms, and other things such as engines. These are generally large, hardly movable artifacts.

- The Artifact Repair Discipline

Magientists remain the most skilled people to correctly repair an artifact. However, thanks to the Artifact Repair Discipline from the Science Domain, some technicians can learn to use and repair such machines; this is the case of many well-established repairmen in great cities. Contrarily to the other Disciplines, this one makes it possible to repair any artifact.

- Magientists and the Artifact Use Discipline

This Discipline, which is exclusive to people fully trained in Magience and is only accessible through the Domain of the same name, gives them a huge advantage. Thanks to it, they can use any artifact they have to deal with, be it a tool, a weapon, etc. However, from a level of 10 (Expert), the Magientist has to choose one single artifact in which he becomes an Expert. Afterwards, he may become an expert in several artifacts if he spends the necessary experience points.

Magientist Kravan has a level of 8 in the "Artifact Use" Discipline. Whether he has to work with a weapon (such as an Energetic Gauntlet), a Tonic, a tool (such as Crushing Pliers) or even a machine (such as a Power Loom), he may use this level of 8 to make use of these artifacts.

Switching On, Using, and Repairing an Artifact

Correctly making use of an artifact requires two things: switching it on and using it. It is also possible to repair it if it is damaged.

Switching On

Most artifacts must be switched on before they can be used.

A Complicated (14) Switching On roll is necessary when a Character deals with an artifact for the very first time. This roll uses the Magience Domain (or the Artifact Use Discipline) or the Domain related to the artifact for those who are not Magientists (for example: Craft, Occultism, or Science if it is a Magientist tool). The Handling rating (see the "Handling" paragraph on p.267) adjusts these Switching On rolls. Everything depends on who is trying to switch the artifact on:

- Complete Neophyte

If a Character has no points in Magience, it will be impossible for him to make the artifact work by himself.
If a Character has an instruction manual that he has carefully studied, or if a professional tells him how to do it, a Complicated (14) Switching On roll allows him to do it.

- Novice

Confronted with a new artifact, a Character with at least 1 in Magience can attempt to make it work in one Round by using his level in the appropriate Domain and succeeding in a Complicated (14) Switching On roll. Note that a failure triggers an immediate Resistance roll (See the "Resistance Roll" paragraph below). A manual or some outside help makes the Switching On roll drop to 8.

Rob, a warrior, would like to use a pair of Vision Glasses he has just found. He has a level of 1 in Magience, but no particular Discipline. He can still attempt to switch this artifact on by relying on his Craft Domain, in which he has a level of 3.

- Magientist

Someone with a rating of 5 in the Magience Domain must succeed in a Complicated (14) Switching On roll with the Artifact Use Discipline, or the Magience Domain if he does not have it. This action takes one Round. If this first roll is a failure, it can be attempted on the following Rounds until it succeeds. A successfully switched on artifact will no longer require such a roll from the Magientist, as it is considered that he knows how to use it. With a manual or an explanation, success is automatic.

- Popular Artifacts

These require no Switching On rolls.

Using an Artifact

After an artifact has been switched on, it is possible to use it with the appropriate Discipline. In the case of a failure with a natural 1, the artifact may be damaged. It is also possible for a novice to use an artifact without the appropriate Discipline; the adequate Domain will then be used, but the risks of an accident are significantly higher. (See the paragraph "Resistance Roll" on p.267).

Elvoz has switched on a Driller-hammerer. As he has no Discipline for this particular artifact, he will keep using his level in the Craft Domain. Beware, for a failure on the roll might trigger a serious accident…

Artifacts that require no Use roll once they have been activated have "Auto" indicated as their Ergonomy."

Repairing an Artifact

When an artifact is damaged or breaks down, it is possible to return it to working order by using the Artifact Repair Discipline. This takes an hour and requires a Complicated (14) Repair roll, with the amount of resistance points the artifact has already lost added to the Difficulty Threshold. The worse its condition is, the harder it will be to repair it. A successful Repair roll makes it function again. If, and only if, there is adequate material at disposal, it also gives it back its lost Resistance points, at the cost of an entire day of work for each point to repair. To know of the repair cost of a Resistance point, the basic price of an object must be divided by the maximum amount of Resistance points.

A pair of Vision Glasses generally costs 1 frost Daol and has 2 Resistance points. Thus, repairing one point costs half the basic price: half a frost Daol, which means 5 azure Daols.

Flux Cartridges

Flux is often stored within cartridges with a very thin metallic cover. A standard cartridge holds a single charge of Flux (about 3 ounces of refined Flux). There are medium cartridges, that fit in the hand and hold 3 charges (about 10 ounces). Finally, there are also Flux gallons: reinforced carboys holding 30 charges each and weighing several pounds. Unless otherwise stated, a cartridge of one type of Flux (mineral, vegetal…) is universal and able to power any artifact using this type of Flux.



Fossil Flux

As rare as it is precious, fossil Flux has three essential qualities:
- It does not need to be extracted and can be directly refined.
- It is richer in energy than the other Fluxes.
- With some rare exceptions, it can power any artifact, no matter the type of Flux it usually requires.

In terms of energetic efficiency, one charge of fossil Flux is the equivalent of three charges of the other types of Flux. Therefore, an artifact will work thrice as long with fossil Flux, or will spend thrice as less charges (rounded down) when it is activated.

Technical Characteristics of the Artifacts

Each artifact is defined according to the following technical characteristics:

- Type of Flux

Each artifact functions on a specific type of Flux. Using another type of Flux can break it, or even make it explode.

- Consumption

The amount of Flux used when the artifact is running.

- Tank

An artifact can be powered by directly plugging it to a cartridge or a carboy of Flux. Some of them also have an inner tank. One Round is required to change a cartridge, plug a carboy, or pour the equivalent of two charges of Flux into a tank. Artifacts with a tank are generally larger, and are more likely to explode if they are damaged.

- Resistance

Artifacts may break down or be damaged if they are misused. A Resistance roll is required in the following cases:
- A Magientist or any Character using an artifact with the appropriate Discipline getting a failure with a natural 1 when trying to use the artifact.
- A Character with no adequate Discipline getting a failure when using an artifact.
- The artifact is exposed to one of its Vulnerabilities (see below).
- An artifact is powered with the wrong type of Flux.

- Resistance Roll

It is calculated by adding the result of a 1D10 roll to the Resistance rating of the artifact. To get a success, the user of the artifact has to succeed in a Standard (11) roll. Should she succeed, the artifact works properly, but its Resistance drops by 1 point. If it is a failure, it not only loses the Resistance point, but also breaks down and must be repaired in order to work again. It is possible to use the Artifact Repair Discipline to make it work again in a hurry: a Difficult (17) roll is required and this operation takes one Round. A success means that the artifact starts working again; a failure results in additional damage, dropping Resistance by another point. An artifact powered with the wrong Flux automatically breaks down; there is no Resistance roll to make. On a result of 1 on the Resistance roll, or if the Resistance level reaches 0, the Flux-feeding mechanism short-circuits and becomes unstable: the artifact explodes and deals 1D10 damage points to everything within 3 yards; or 2D10 if it contains more than six charges of Flux.

- Vulnerability

An artifact can be vulnerable to one or several conditions such as humidity, heat, cold, impacts, lightning, etc. Each time it is exposed to a Vulnerability without the proper protection (which the GL is the judge of), a Resistance roll must be made for the artifact. A Vulnerability to shocks implies an immediate Resistance roll if the user is hit for 5 damage points or more.

- Handling

How easy or hard is it to handle a given artifact? Is it light and handy, or on the contrary, heavy and cumbersome? Bonuses or penalties to Handling apply as adjustments when attempting to use the artifact. Thus, a weapon powered by Flux can give bonuses or penalties to each Attack roll. A Handling bonus can reach a maximum of 3 points; penalties can go up to 6 points.

List of Artifacts

Here are the characteristics of commonplace artifacts, as well as those of more exotic ones. Some offensive artifacts are considered as weapons and their wielder must hit his target by using the appropriate Discipline, as described in the previous paragraphs. Damage is calculated as usual, by adding the damage of the weapon to the margin obtained.
Popular Artifacts, which require no particular knowledge to be switched on and used, are indicated with this symbol: 

Crushing Pliers

Type of Flux: Mineral
Consumption: 1 charge/2 hours
Tank: 10 charges
Resistance: 7
Vulnerability: Humidity, Heat
Handling: +3 (0 in combat)
Damage: 3

This cumbersome device, weighing about 40 pounds, is generally used by miners. It is a harness that straps on to the back and the arms of the user. Its pliers can be used in a fight.

Driller-hammerer

Type of Flux: Organic
Consumption: 1 charge/2 hours
Tank: 10 charges
Resistance: 7
Vulnerability: Humidity, Lightning
Handling: -1

Its ear-shattering noise may be highly unpleasant, but its thick steel drill hammers rock and makes it possible to directly dig granite.

Energetic Gauntlet

Type of Flux: Vegetal
Consumption: 1 charge/discharge
Tank: 1 charge
Resistance: 3
Vulnerability: Impacts, Fire, Lightning
Handling: 0
Damage: 2

This extravagant invention consists of a gauntlet linked to a medium Flux cartridge on the user's forearm or a carboy on his back. It deals 2 damage points for each energetic discharge; armors and shields offer no protection.

Lighter

Type of Flux: Vegetal
Consumption: 1 charge/2 hours
Tank: 1 charge
Resistance: 2
Vulnerability: Humidity, Lightning
Handling: Auto

This somewhat heavy box produces a green flame, much more efficiently and quickly than a tinderbox. The useful life of a moderately used charge (three or four daily uses of 5 seconds each) is about 3 months. Used continuously, one charge is consumed in 2 hours.

Magientist Pulley

Type of Flux: Mineral
Consumption: 1 charge/2 hours
Tank: 1 charge
Resistance: 4
Vulnerability: Impacts, Humidity, Fire, Lightning
Handling: +1

This clever mechanism is increasingly used by miners and builders. It can pull up to 200 lb without any effort.

Mechanical Saw

Type of Flux: Vegetal
Consumption: 1 charge/2 hours
Tank: 10 charges
Resistance: 4
Vulnerability: Impacts, Humidity, Fire
Handling: 0
Damage: 4

It is highly prized by lumberjacks, although it is cumbersome and its blades require a lot of maintenance.

Mobile Flux Extractor

Type of Flux: N/A
Consumption: N/A
Tank: N/A
Resistance: 3
Vulnerability: Impacts, Fire, Lightning
Handling: 0

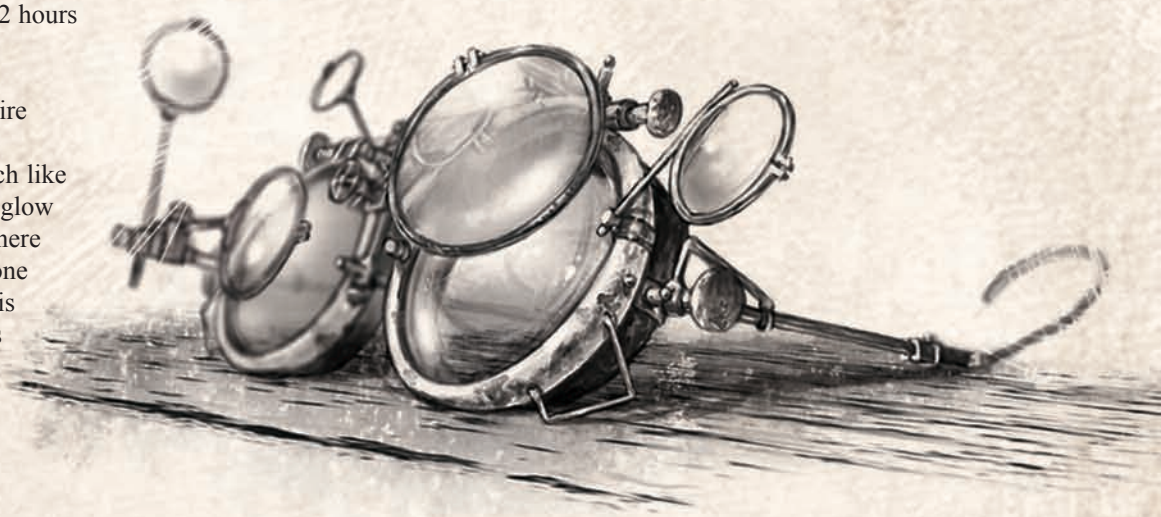
It is not always possible to use one of the huge machineries of extraction or refinement, particularly in the middle of nature. Thus, the Mobile Flux Extractor is greatly appreciated by the Magientists of Tri-Kazel.

Activated with a crank, it draws its energy from the very extraction process; truly a Magientist miracle. This complex device is generally disassembled and kept within a chest. It weighs about 40 lb. Only Magientists with the Flux Extraction or Flux Refining Discipline (according to what it is used for) can use it. The Mobile Extractor is considered Average quality equipment and can extract or refine one daily dose of crude Flux.

Portative Nebular

Type of Flux: Variable
Consumption: 1 charge/12 hours
Tank: 1 charge
Resistance: 2
Vulnerability: Impacts, Fire
Handling: Auto

This artifact looks very much like a lantern. It gives a nice glow within a 3-yard radius. There are several models, but the one powered by mineral Flux is the most popular one: its cartridges are the least costly and its blue glow does not feel too eerie.



Tonic

Type of Flux: Organic
Consumption: 1 charge
Tank: 1 charge
Resistance: 7
Handling: +3

A Tonic is contained within a special syringe. No Switching On roll is necessary.

With an injection, the beneficiary heals 1D10 previously suffered damage points.

The roll to use it has a Standard (11) Difficulty Threshold in a quiet environment, but can be higher under distractions or difficult conditions. If it is a failure, the injection process fails, the cartridge is spoiled, no wound is healed, and the patient suffers one damage point. Used regularly or too often, Tonics can create an addiction (See the "Health" chapter).

This artifact uses special organic Flux cartridges, with secret additives. There are other types of medicines with various effects–which come within the same type of single-use syringes–notably remedies to help fight certain diseases, or special Tonics used in the treatment of madness.

Vision Glasses

Type of Flux: Organic
Consumption: Special
Tank: 1 charge
Resistance: 2
Vulnerability: Impacts, Fire
Handling: +2

Several lenses, strangely assembled around a frontal frame, allow the viewing of microscopic details and seeing in the middle of the night.

Night vision has a range of about fifteen yards, and displays the scenery in grayish tones.

Microscopic sight consumes one charge per hour, while night vision consumes one charge every ten minutes.

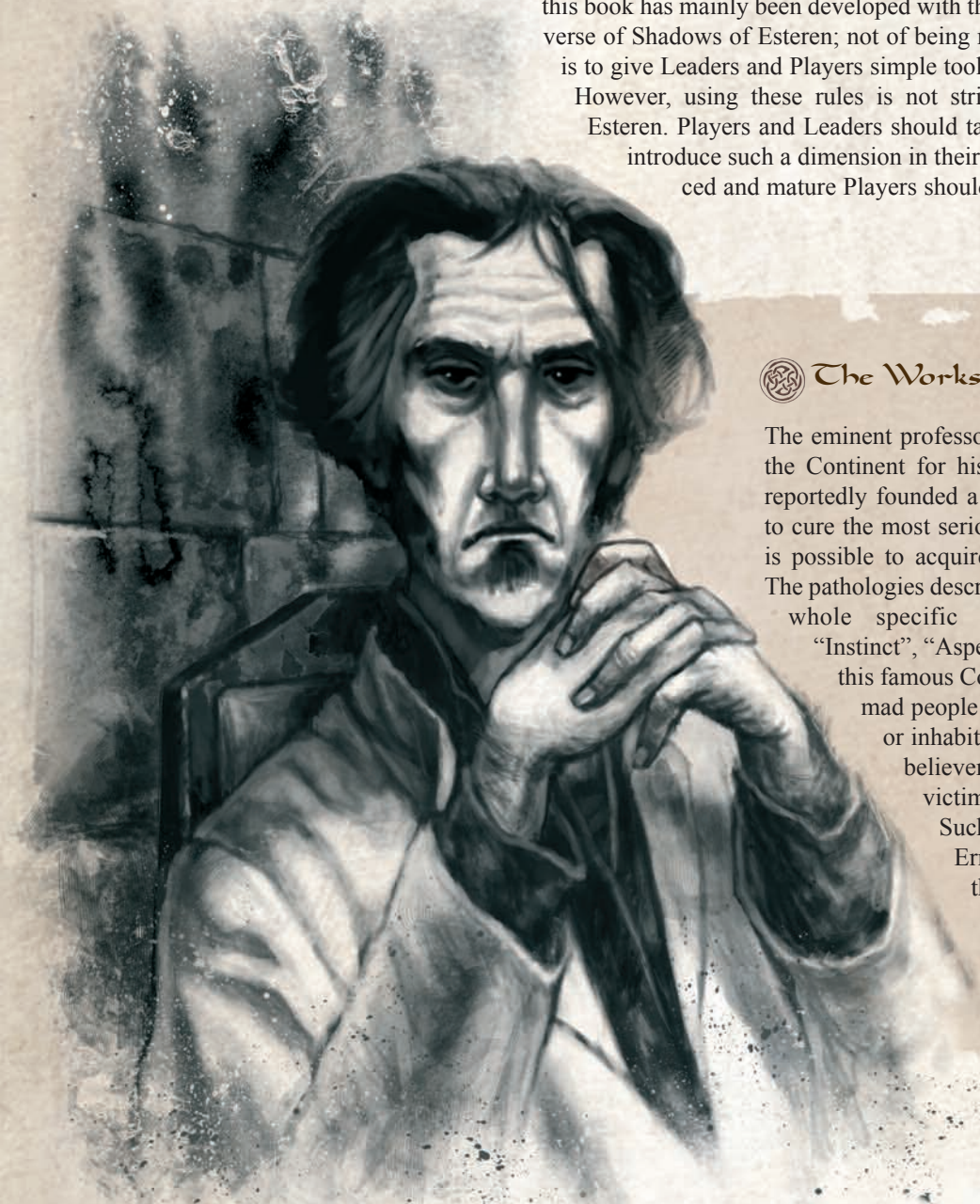
Switching from one mode to another requires a successful Standard (11) Artifact Use roll.

Sanity

In Shadows of Esteren, the PCs will come to experience exceptional events which can leave a mark on their personalities. This part of the system is used to simulate the evolution of their Sanity.

Preamble

Although it is strongly inspired by psychopathology, the Sanity system presented in this book has mainly been developed with the express purpose of fitting the universe of Shadows of Esteren; not of being realistic or exhaustive. Its only goal is to give Leaders and Players simple tools to optimize the game atmosphere. However, using these rules is not strictly required to play Shadows of Esteren. Players and Leaders should talk about it to know if they want to introduce such a dimension in their sessions. In general, only experienced and mature Players should use these rules.



The Works of Ernst Zigger

The eminent professor Ernst Zigger is well-known on the Continent for his works about madness. He has reportedly founded a mental hospital where he works to cure the most serious mental disorders. In Reizh, it is possible to acquire his book, "Mental Disorders". The pathologies described in this chapter, as well as the whole specific vocabulary ("Consciousness", "Instinct", "Aspects", etc.) refer to the research of this famous Continental character. In Tri-Kazel, mad people are most often considered stupid or inhabited by the spirits of nature. To the believers of the Temple, mad people are victims possessed by the forces of evil. Such is not the case of Professor Ernst Zigger, who thinks madness is the manifestation of a personality disorder, most often caused by important past traumas.

Evolution of Sanity

The personality of a Character is defined by his ratings in the Ways. Aspects (Consciousness, Instinct, and Trauma), Orientation (rational or instinctive), and Character Traits result from them. All of these elements are determined at the creation of each Character. Each PC also has two segmented charts that are a permanent reminder of his psychical condition. One of these charts keeps track of Trauma points, and the other of Hardening points. The Leader also has a sheet with a chart for each PC, which she will update as the game goes on.

Sanity Charts

Obviously, the Leader has the responsibility of keeping track of the evolution of the PCs' Sanity. It will prove to be a very good tool to preserve the mood: the Players will only have a vague idea of their alter egos' psychical condition. Thus, when a PC will start to hallucinate, the Player will not actually know whether these visions are real or not. The Leader will find below a reproduction of the sheet for such a purpose. During sessions, she will keep this sheet hidden and update it without telling the Players about its evolution. At certain points in the game, the Players will have the opportunity to know the exact condition of their Characters' Sanity, and to update their own charts (see the "Healing and Curing Mental Disorders" section, at the end of this chapter).

However, the Leader may decide to make it easier on herself by letting the Players directly keep track of the evolution of their PCs' Sanity on their Character Sheets, especially during the first sessions. The Leader may still include this method in her game-mastering style later on, when she feels completely comfortable with Shadows of Esteren.



Trauma Points and Hardening Points

These charts are updated as the PC suffers Trauma points or Hardening points. In the case of Trauma points, there is a difference between Temporary Trauma points (marked with a ticked box) and Permanent Trauma points (marked with a filled box), which are more harmful.

Mental Resistance Rolls

When a PC has to face unbearably strong scenes on an emotional level, the Leader may ask the Player to make a Mental Resistance roll (see p.211 for the calculation of this rating). The Difficulty Threshold is secretly set by the Leader, in accordance with the intensity of the situation. Therefore, its level will not be indicated to the Player; the Leader simply asks him to make a roll and tell her 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 has possibly suffered.

MENTAL RESISTANCE ROLL	
Difficulty Threshold	***Trauma Points***
11	*1*
14	*2*
17	*3 (1)*
20	*5 (2)*
25	*10 (3)*

Success

If the roll is a success, the resilience of the PC's mind is tested, but he hangs on and generally suffers no Trauma points. Some shocks may result in Trauma even if the Mental Resistance roll is a success; these points are indicated in brackets in this chart.

Mental Hardening

Someone's mind may also harden when repeatedly submitted to horror. When a Player gets a 10 on the D10 of her Mental Resistance roll, her PC is considered to have endured the shock remarkably well. She shows no sign of emotion and even comes out of it hardened. The Player ticks a box in the Hardening chart each time she gets such a result. For each state she reaches in this chart (Symptom, Syndrome, and finally, Madness), the PC gets a +3 bonus on all of her future Mental Resistance rolls. For example, a PC with 6 Hardening points is in a state of Symptom and gets a +3 bonus to all such rolls. This represents the ability to withstand increasingly strong psychical shocks. However, Hardening may reach such a degree that it also becomes a psychic trouble. The mind shuts away more and more from the outside world to protect itself against it; hence the fact that the Hardening chart is divided into four states reaching up to Madness. Professor Ernst Zigger has defined this specific pathology, which he has named the "Empty Fortress".

Failure

In the case of a failure, the PC suffers a given amount of Temporary Trauma points. The immediate effect of the failure is left to the judgment of both the Player and the Leader in accordance with the situation and the PC's mentality. The Character will at least feel poorly, filled with a feeling of fear or distress.

Scarring

A PC develops psychic Scarring each time the Player gets a 1 on the D10 on a Mental Resistance roll. If the Character suffers from a deteriorated sanity condition (that is to say "Syndrome" or "Madness"), such Scarring can happen at the same time as a Crisis. It is possible to be scarred several times after having rolled several natural 1. Each Scarring is determined by rolling 1D10 and referring to the following table:

Scarring

A result of 1 on the D10 of a Mental Resistance roll has several effects. First, one of the Trauma points is Permanent (the others are Temporary): the Leader fills one box on the Character's hidden chart. Second, the PC is scarred (see below).

SCARRING	
1. Nightmare	*6. Nausea*
2. Phobia	*7. Fleeing*
3. Hiding	*8. Stupor*
4. Crying	*9. Fainting*
5. Anguish	*10. Obsession*

Nightmare

From the night following the traumatic scene, the PC will have horrible nightmares. His nights will be interspersed with horrific scenes during which he will relive the traumatic events. Exhaustion caused by these recurring nightmares inflicts a -1 penalty on all his actions. After a week, the PC makes a new Mental Resistance roll (with the same Difficulty Threshold as the scene that has brought about the nightmares). If he succeeds, the nightmares stop; if he fails, they go on for another week, after which a new roll is made. Each week of nightmares makes the penalty -1 point worse, up to a maximum of -5. The nightmares may last indefinitely, as long as the weekly Mental Resistance roll continues to be a failure. The penalty does not affect the weekly Mental Resistance roll.

Phobia

Very quickly after the traumatic scene, the PC will notice she has developed a phobia: be it the place and/or the type of creature implicated, the PC will do everything to stay away from the source of her distress. If she has to face it again, she will have to make a new Mental Resistance roll with the same Difficulty Threshold as the one that has triggered her trouble. After a month, the PC makes a new Mental Resistance roll (again with the same Difficulty Threshold as the traumatic event's). If she succeeds, the phobia subsides; if she fails, it will persist for another month, after which a new roll can be attempted.

Hiding

Terrified, the PC will do everything he can to hide. He will not move from his hiding place for at least 1D10 minutes.

Crying

Surprised and horrified, the PC screams. He experiences disorientation for 1D10 minutes, shaking, sobbing, or simply remaining stunned by the scene. He is unable to perform any action, but will defend himself if he is attacked.

Nausea

The scene makes the PC sick, and she will feel nauseous for 1D10 hours. Throughout this time, she suffers a -1 penalty on all her actions.

Fleeing

The PC immediately drops what he is holding and runs in the opposite direction of what frightens him. He will run for 1D10 minutes and nothing will stop him except physical restraint or an impassable obstacle. A Character who is this frightened may take senseless risks such as leaping across a gaping chasm or climbing a very difficult obstacle.

Stupor

The PC remains paralyzed by the scene she just witnessed. She will not move and will not try to defend herself for 1D10 minutes. Only a violent blow, a slap, or cold water can make her come back to her senses.

Fainting

The PC collapses, unconscious, and will not come to before 1D10 minutes, unless he is shaken or splashed with water.

Anguish

Little by little, the PC will feel anguished, without really being able to identify the origin of such anguish. She suffers a -1 penalty on all her actions, which reflects her general condition. After a week, the PC makes a new Mental Resistance roll. If she succeeds, the anguish subsides; if she fails, it goes on for another week (with a cumulative -1 penalty, and a maximum of -5), after which a new roll is made. This process is repeated weekly. The penalty does not apply for this weekly roll.

Obsession

As opposed to a phobia, the PC will develop a morbid fascination for what triggered the trauma. She will try to know more, will think only about it, etc. After a week, the PC makes a new Mental Resistance roll.
If she succeeds, the obsession slowly subsides; if she fails, it will persist for one more week, at the end of which a new roll is made, and so on.

When Should You Ask for a Mental Resistance Roll?

It will not always be obvious for the GL to decide when the psyche of a PC is tested to the point of requiring a Mental Resistance roll. It all depends on the context, and on the Character's personality as well.
Overall, frightening situations that suddenly spring and catch the PC unprepared can lead to such a roll. It is particularly the case when he has to face a horrific situation alone or if it concerns someone he is close to. Esteren is a universe that holds dreadful secrets: suddenly coming to realize some of them can be the source of a Mental Resistance roll, and so can witnessing supernatural events. The GL can also take her decision according to each PC's personality. A seasoned warrior will be much less shocked by bloody scenes than a scholar freshly out of his university, for whom a slaughter may be traumatizing. A believer will be deeply affected by something that questions her faith. In general, individuals with a rational Orientation will be affected by unexplainable, supernatural things. Instinctive individuals can be unsettled by too vivid emotions that will severely test the organization of their personalities.

Avoiding Mental Resistance Rolls

Shadows of Esteren is a game relying on atmosphere, in which the Players are encouraged to do their best to portray the reactions of their PCs realistically. Sanity rules are here to help the Players get more involved in the performance of their PCs, and make the game more thrilling; not to punish them.

If a Player spontaneously reacts with fear or horror when confronted with an unbearable scene or situation, the GL can do without having her make a Mental Resistance roll.

At the discretion of the GL, who must be careful not to be too indulgent, the Player can avoid possible Trauma points and Scarring this way. Indeed, it is considered that her portrayal gives a correct in-game rendering of the effects of a horrific scene on her Character (the Player can display terror, say that her alter ego is hiding, or describe her behavior according to the possible reactions previously described). On a technical level, the GL can consider that any possible Mental Resistance roll is a success, which can still result in Trauma points (see the "Mental Resistance Roll" chart above). Conversely, a Player who remains completely stoic when his PC is having a hard time will probably be asked to make a Mental Resistance roll in order to see how his alter ego is reacting in the game. Each case must be given careful consideration, as this must not disadvantage Players who are less demonstrative or who have a more reserved way of playing. Thus, the GL must show good judgment. It is also possible that an excellent performance still leads to a Mental Resistance roll, so as to reflect the impact on the PC.

Balance, Symptom, Syndrome, and Madness

The chart of each PC is graduated with five-point segments. This graduation corresponds to the works of Ernst Zigger, who differentiates four specific states of a person's psyche.



The first graduation corresponds to a state of Balance. The PC is in good psychical condition. The second corresponds to a state of Symptom, the third to a Syndrome, and the fourth one to Madness. Note that the state of Madness does not mean a continual, systematical state of insanity. The madman is not permanently rambling on, moping around, or staring with a hallucinated glare. These most spectacular behaviors correspond to Crises, which remain temporary.

Crises

Each of the twelve pathologies defined by Zigger manifests through particular states and outbursts. When an already shaken PC is confronted with unbearable scenes, it may trigger a Crisis. The state of the chart is always taken into account before any additional Trauma points are included.

- If the chart of the PC corresponds to a state of Balance or Symptom, a failure on the Mental Resistance roll does not trigger a Crisis.
- Starting from a state of Syndrome (11 points and up), each failure on a Mental Resistance roll will lead to a Crisis related to the PC's pathology. If a natural 1 is rolled, the Crisis also includes Scarring (see above). If the Crisis and the Scarring contradict, the Scarring is ignored and the Crisis takes precedence.

Unless otherwise specified, a Crisis lasts 1D10 days before it subsides.

Madness, Crisis, and Portrayal of the Character by the Player

This cannot be stressed enough: the aim of these rules is to give tools to the GL and the Players to optimize the mood of their sessions. They should remain play aids, and never become tedious or absolute constraints. For the greater part, it all depends on the Players' goodwill to carefully play their PCs, and on the moderation of the GL as for their use in game. A good indicator is how much fun every participant has during the game: if the Players or the Leader no longer have fun, it is necessary to change something.

A Player should be able to play his PC for as long as possible: remember that even in a state of Madness, a PC can still fare relatively well and should remain playable. Of course, the others may consider him to be strange, with a personality marked by his troubles (a sorrowful disposition for a melancholic, increased distrust for a paranoiac, etc.) However, it truly is in a state of Crisis that the severity of his condition will come to light, all the more so since a PC in a state of Madness will be far more likely to suffer from one.

Playing such Crises can be tricky. The best option is then for the GL to talk with the Player in private so that they can mutually agree on how the PC will behave during a Crisis. If the Player feels like doing it, he can describe or act according to the Crisis his alter ego is going through, taking the instructions of the GL into account. Otherwise, the GL describes what is happening, and the PC's actions during his Crisis. Remember that madness remains one of the great dangers threatening a PC. Therefore, it is normal that it is debilitating for a PC whose psyche is heavily damaged.

Mental Disorders

The Sanity system introduces twelve mental disorders, which are the exacerbation of classical character traits. Ten of them are directly associated with the Ways.

- At creation, the Player, with the Leader's agreement, can choose the disorder that is likely to affect her Character.
- The disorder must be chosen for a Way with a major (4 or 5) or minor (1 or 2) rating. Only Phobia may indifferently be chosen by all the Players.
- The Empty Fortress is not a disorder that can be chosen; it can affect any PC, regardless of her initial disorder, and is the result of an excess in the Hardening chart.
- The Orientation of the PC's personality and his Character Traits can help choosing an appropriate disorder. Each disorder involves particular Symptoms, Syndromes, states of Madness, and Crises.

Here is a chart recapitulating the troubles for each Way.

Way	Disorder (Major Way)	Disorder (Minor Way)
Combativeness	Frenzy, Elation	Melancholy
Creativity	Hallucination, Mental Confusion	Mimicry, Obsession
Empathy	Hysteria, Mysticism, Hallucination	Paranoia
Reason	Obsession, Paranoia	Mental Confusion
Conviction	Melancholy, Mysticism	Elation

Mark has created his PC: Johan, a Varigal. He has a rating of 5 in Empathy, 4 in Combativeness, 3 in Reason, 2 in Creativity, and 1 in Conviction. Mark can choose for him a disorder related to a major Way (Empathy or Combativeness) or to a minor Way (Creativity or Conviction). Considering that Johan has his mind filled with Demorthèn beliefs, and that he has a meditative, inspired mind, he chooses the Hallucination disorder. This could give a whole supernatural aspect to his Varigal profession...

Alteration of Ways and Special Abilities

When a PC develops a Syndrome or sinks into Madness, her personality and abilities are altered by her mental troubles:

Strengthening

One of the PC's Ways, specific to the mental disorder, increases by one point when she develops a Syndrome, then by another point when she falls into Madness. Obtaining a rating of 6 in a Way through artificial or mystical means leads to the same result: a Syndrome arises. The same thing goes for a Character who reaches a rating of 7 by any other means. In no case can the rating of a Way go beyond 7.

Weakening

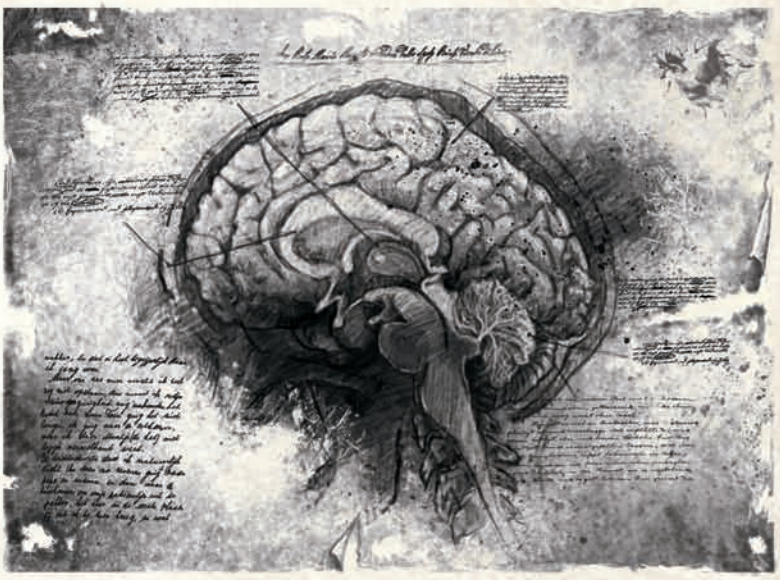
One of the PC's Ways successively decreases by one point for a Syndrome, then by another one for Madness. A Way can go down to 0 but cannot go below. In such a case, another Way, at the discretion of the GL, is lowered.

Special Abilities

A PC suffering from a severe psychical disorder develops particular abilities. Madmen are often exceptional people with unparalleled capacities. Such abilities stack and are described for each disorder.

These Strengthenings, Weakenings, and Abilities are temporary and are likely to change if the psychical state of the Character evolves.

In cases of Melancholy described by Professor Zigger, the Strengthening applies to the Way of Conviction, while there is a Weakening in Combativeness.
Thus, the patient will become more and more self-critical, tortured by ideals that he does not manage to follow and developing a very bad image of himself.
On the contrary, his willpower and energy will keep lowering. He will develop a Special Ability manifested through the total absence of the fear of dying.



The 5 Rational Disorders

These disorders are the result of a strong domination of Reason or Conviction, or also of a great lack in one of the instinctual Ways.

Melancholy

This disorder is typically associated with a minor rating in Combativeness. Sullen and listless, the person is burdened by pessimism, sadness, and a feeling of fatality that can put her in danger. This disorder can also be chosen by a PC with a major rating in Conviction: she is consumed by the ideals that she does not manage to carry out, falling into a ferocious self-deprecation and the guilty feeling of not being up to the task.

Symptom of Morosity

The person feels tired, and lacks motivation.

Depressive Syndrome

The person is dull, lacks energy, and may even have a hard time getting up. She speaks little or, on the contrary, complains continuously. A Crisis involves insomnia and seemingly senseless crying fits. Special Ability: the person is less frightened by death; she gets a +2 bonus to her Mental Resistance rolls when she is directly in danger.

Melancholy

The person becomes desperate and develops a very poor self-image. She can become prostrate and devoid of reactions. A melancholic Crisis generally leads to a suicide attempt. Special Ability: the person is fearless, particularly regarding death. She automatically succeeds in every Mental Resistance roll related to a danger threatening her. In contrast, her survival instincts are completely smothered, and she may even let herself die in some situations.
The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Conviction, whereas the Weakening's is the Way of Combativeness. A melancholic person becomes increasingly harsher toward herself; her Conviction turning against her, and finding fault in everything she does. Moreover, she is marked by a loss of energy and motivation.

Paranoia

This disorder is typically associated with a minor rating in Empathy, as a paranoiac has a severe lack of it. He makes incorrect assumptions about everything he sees or hears, and will tend to blame others for his own suspicions. Moreover, anything that will be said or done will be interpreted as persecution, which can lead to violent reactions from the paranoiac. A major rating in Reason can also foster paranoia.

Symptom of Distrust

The person is distrustful, suspecting treachery or feeling in danger. He can become suspicious toward his friends or allies. He also becomes very touchy and vindictive.

Syndrome of Abusive Interpretation

The person feels potentially threatened by everything happening around him. He becomes very cautious and increasingly suspicious. A Crisis takes the form of a delirious interpretation of a sign or a sound: the soldiers passing by are here for him, the laughter at the nearby table are taunts that are directly targeting him, etc. The person will react to such a sign: hiding, challenging those who are making fun of him, etc. Special Ability: the person becomes very hard to catch off guard; he gets a +2 bonus to every skill roll related to alertness.

Organized Delusion

The person structures a delusion around a person or an entity. He feels wanted, persecuted, threatened. He turns a deaf ear to critics, locking himself into logical deductions that, however, have faulty or invented elements. A Crisis can lead to absurd acts of protection–the person completely barricades himself in his home, carries massive weaponry–or to acts of violence. For example, he will try to murder his neighbor, suspecting him to be a henchman in the pay of his imaginary enemy. The idea that his friends or his relatives have been replaced by magically created doubles, or that they are impostors or twins, are other examples of organized delusions. Special Ability: the paranoiac cannot be taken by surprise. Save for being totally silent and perfectly hidden, it is impossible to strike him from behind.

The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Combativeness: as the disorder worsens, the person feels more and more persecuted, spied on, or threatened, and tends to react violently. The object of the Weakening is the Way of Empathy; the person becomes more and more hermetic to critics.

Mimicry

This disorder is typically associated with a minor rating in Creativity. The person will tend to take influential or charismatic people as examples, until she copies them entirely and becomes unable to take an initiative or imagine something new.

Reference Symptom

Generally lacking spontaneity in her acts and thoughts, the person will have a group of people that serves as a reference and from whom she will tend to constantly seek advice: the army, priests, scholars, etc. When her ability to take a decision is solicited, she feels lost in doubt, and has great difficulty making a choice by herself.

Mimetic Syndrome

Very dependent on the opinion of others, and particularly of the reference group, the person picks one particular individual who becomes her role model. Systematically, the chosen example will have a strong physical or psychical resemblance with the person. The person will try to copy what the individual does, idealizing her acts and words and feeling a great fascination toward her. This role model can be alive or dead, or even a fictional character. In a situation of Crisis, the person feels frenetically inquisitive about her, trying to know more about her no matter the means used: getting heavily into debt to obtain information, spying on her to know about her private life, etc. A Crisis can also trigger an impossibility to make a decision without relying on the role model. The person becomes dumbfounded, unable to react and think by herself. Special Ability: the person gets a +2 bonus on every skill roll related to imitating or fooling: vocal imitation, disguise, ventriloquism, etc.

Mimicry

The person goes as far as thinking herself related to her idol, and believes she is her hidden daughter, her forgotten twin sibling, or any other "plausible" link. Her delirious beliefs can even make her think that she actually is her model and that the latter is only a double who has stolen her life. Indeed, when she experiences a Crisis, the person is convinced she is the victim of a scheme according to which her role model is a double who has usurped her. The person forsakes her own background and name, asserting that she is the person she previously worshipped, with many details to prove it. During these Crisis moments, she will do everything to "return to her rightful life", which may imply the murder of the one she thinks to be her double. Special Ability: the person gets another +2 bonus on every skill roll related to imitation.

The object of the Strengthening is Empathy, as the person becomes more and more sensitive to her role model. The object of the Weakening is Creativity, which deprives the person of any spontaneity or ability for initiative.

Obsession

This disorder is typically associated with a major rating in Reason or a minor one in Creativity. The person thinks too much and his reflections can quickly become stagnant and obsessive. He loses more and more creativity as his field of thought focalizes on his obsession.

Obsessive Idea Symptom

The person will tend to focus on a fixed theme or idea, which can hinder him in his other activities. He can get worried if he does not have the opportunity to perform the appropriate actions (religious ritual, checking, etc.) The obsession can have a phobic connotation, when, for example, the person is always afraid of catching a disease, or meeting such-and-such creature everywhere he goes. He will tend to be excessively careful and meticulous, which will make him waste time.

Obsessional Syndrome

Not only does the person constantly think about his subject of focus, he also tends to feel anxious. He develops new rituals, which he has to perform lest he feels seized by anxiety (for example: checking his equipment when he leaves a place, saying a prayer after a given action, counting his Daols, etc.) When he undergoes a Crisis, he feels violently oppressed and performs the same ritual several times, which is related to his subject of focus.

Special Ability: by dint of using his brains and constantly thinking about the same subject, the person gets a +2 bonus on every roll related to his obsession.

Ritualizations

Each action or thought of the person is contaminated by his obsession. A diffuse, crushing culpability seizes him if he does not give his entire attention to his favorite subject. Easily anxious, he can experience severe bouts of depression. When he undergoes a Crisis, he becomes fully engrossed with his obsession and uses every possible means to satisfy it, even resorting to violence if necessary. Special Ability: the person gets another +2 bonus on every roll related to his obsession. The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Reason: the person tends to get more and more lost in his obsessions. The object of the Weakening is Creativity, which, as it erodes, deprives him of the necessary drive to steer away from his whirling thoughts.

Mysticism

This disorder is typically associated with a major rating in Conviction (among the faithful of the Temple, for example), but it can also be to a major rating in Empathy. The person's beliefs, which can be of any nature, may take a growing importance in her life, up to the point when she sinks into mystical delusions.

Symptom of Mysticism

One possible manifestation is that the person's convictions harden until she becomes obsessed with the proper observance of the rites specific to her beliefs. The other possible manifestation is that she always seems to be attentive to the "signs" of her environment, remaining in a deep meditative state. She can appear as a mystic, or even as a misfit in other people's eyes. Such consideration greatly depends on the social context and on the beliefs of the PC: a priestess of the Temple who spends her time praying alone will not be seen as "weird" in a city where this religion prevails. This may go very differently for someone with more esoteric beliefs…

Syndrome of Fanaticism

The person's conversation and thoughts become mainly related to her beliefs. More and more, she reacts harshly to anyone questioning her convictions, and behaves unpredictably toward those who do not share them. A Crisis triggers

a mystical bout during which the person seems sometimes cut off from the rest of the world and absorbed in her own thoughts, sometimes elated to the point of being embarrassing for her neighbors. She can also have aggressive and uncontrolled gestures. Special Ability: the person gets a +5 bonus to her maximum Exaltation or Rindath rating.

Mystical Delusion

The person thinks she is in direct contact with superior entities or is convinced she is invested with a special mission that she must accomplish, no matter the cost. Her convictions become practically unquestionable. A Crisis manifests with intense bouts of elation; she can drop what she is doing, persuaded of witnessing a "sign". She may take senseless risks, become violent, or even start a dangerous journey with an unlikely mystical goal. Special Ability: the person obtains 10 more points to her Exaltation or Rindath rating. The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Conviction or the one of Empathy. The beliefs of the person become more and more invasive until she becomes deaf to any questioning. The object of the Weakening is Reason, which reflects a loss in rationality and in her grip on reality.

The 5 Instinctual Disorders

According to Zigger, these disorders are the consequence of a prevalence of one of the two instinctual Ways, or of a severe lack in one of the rational Ways.

Frenzy

This disorder is typically associated with a major rating in Combativeness. Aggressive and rash, a frenzied person tends to perform violent and impulsive acts without any remorse or guilt.

Aggressive Symptom

The person becomes overly irritable and aggressive. He tends to try to control and dominate other people.

Impulsive Syndrome

Of unstable temper, the person's combativeness is most often expressed through violence and aggressiveness. When he undergoes a Crisis, he may be violent, overtly go against the established order, or suddenly take a thoughtless risk. If he is in a commanding position, he will be perceived as tyrannical and capricious. Special Ability: the maximum amount of Survival points increases by one point.

Fury

The person permanently feels tense and reacts violently to practically any situation. Confrontations with the law, authority, and restriction may trigger a Crisis during which the frenzied person flies into a destructive fury that can easily lead to the murder of whoever stands in his way. At the same time, the thought process is greatly weakened, and the ability to feel emotions erodes. Some bloodthirsty kings probably have this personality disorder. Special Ability: the maximum amount of Survival points increases by an extra point.

The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Combativeness, which stresses the person's aggressive and impulsive behavior. The object of the Weakening is the Way of Reason, as violent or dangerous acts overshadow reflection.

Hallucination

This disorder is typically associated with a major rating in Creativity. It can also be associated with a major rating in Empathy (notably among the worshipers of a cult or a religion). Overwhelmed by her rich imagination invading her exterior reality, the person believes she can perceive things that have yet no concrete existence. Hallucinations can be related to any of the five senses, but are most often linked to hearing. Sight can be affected, and display characters, strange shapes, or hideous creatures. More rarely, touch, smell, and taste can be involved. The person can live these hallucinations as mystical or persecutory experiences. In the latter case, they will be linked to traumatizing scenes or memories coming back to haunt the person.

Symptom of Illusion

The person feels like her senses are playing tricks on her. A shadow at the corner of a street or in a copse, a whisper in the dark alleys of a city…

Syndrome of False Perceptions

Assailed by perceptions she experiences as oddities, the person starts to construct a theory revolving around a precise theme. This is not about direct hallucinations, but rather defined symptoms of illusion, reinforced by a vague feeling of mysticism or anxiety. During a Crisis, the person is beset by direct hallucinations involving one of the five senses. She is absolutely convinced of the reality of what she sees or feels. Special Ability: if the experience is mystical, the person gets a +5 bonus to her Rindath or Exaltation rating. If it is persecutory, the person is aware of any "exterior sign". She will rarely be caught unprepared; she has a +3 bonus on every skill roll related to alertness.

Hallucinations

The person is tormented by her hallucinations, which clearly take a mystical (see "Mystical Delusion") or paranoid (see "Organized Delusion") dimension. She relates to the world around her in a deeply distorted way, as almost all her interactions are contaminated by hallucinatory elements that she believes to be real. During a Crisis, the person shuts away from the outside world, caught in visions and sensations that completely invade her mind. She can put herself in great danger without even being aware of it. Special Ability: if the experience is mystical, the person gets 10 more points to her Rindath or Exaltation rating. If it is persecutory, she is constantly on guard and can never be caught flat-footed.

The object of the Strengthening is Creativity, amplifying the person's imagination. The object of the Weakening is Reason, which reflects the progressive loss of her ability to analyze and the difficulty she has in maintaining coherent thoughts amidst her hallucinations.

Hysteria

This disorder is typically associated with a major rating in Empathy. Rather uninhibited among other people, a hysterical person is very expressive and very sensitive to the attention he is given. There is a strong part of seduction in his daily relations. A rather whimsical and moody person, quickly switching from laughing to crying, a hysteric stands out with his immaturity and tendency to dramatize.

Symptom of Agitation

The person is very sensitive, and can switch from one emotion to another at a moment's notice. He becomes fickle, and there is an accentuation of his tendency to dramatize and make a fuss over the slightest annoyance in his daily life, which makes him very hard to bear.

Hysterical Syndrome

The person lives in an almost permanent state of emotional agitation: he is sensitive to everything happening around him and always overreacts. During a Crisis, this agitation becomes a violent nervous breakdown, which can also lead to a depressive phase. In the rarest and most intense cases, the Crisis is accompanied by an epileptic seizure as violent as it is sudden. Special Ability: the person has an enhanced ability to seduce other people. When he succeeds in a Relation roll, the result is always better than it should have been: gruff soldiers will become friendly, a friendly guest will be charmed, etc.

Erotomania

In the final stage, the hysterical trouble can have a paranoid aspect leading to the hysteric being madly in love with someone (most often, a very influential or charismatic person) and convinced of being secretly loved back. This delirious one-sided love can lead to insane acts such as continual harassment, excessive seduction, and progressive intrusion in the private life and the circle of friends of the loved one. When the hysterical person becomes aware that his attempts are fruitless, he may experience intense periods of sadness, which can climax into suicide. Less often, this sadness can turn into hatred toward the loved one and can make the person seek her death and the destruction of her relatives. Special Ability: the person has the ability to literally bewitch other people with a successful Relation roll. Being charmed, the targets will tend to do everything to be friendly, helpful, etc. However, a failure in a Relation roll has devastating effects: the person's interlocutors find him unbearable, and will tend to feel aggressive toward him. Note that the mood of a previously charmed person can be reversed, and vice versa.

The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Empathy, whereas the object of the Weakening is the Way of Conviction, which reflects the progressive loss of inhibitions leading to an increasingly extravagant behavior.

Mental Confusion

This disorder is typically associated with a minor rating in Reason. It can also be linked to a high rating in Creativity. This trouble brings severe perturbations to mental faculties and disturbs the thought process as the person sinks into a strange and phantasmagorical inner universe.

Symptom of Absent-mindedness

The person suffers from attention disorder. She tends to have difficulties focusing, often forgetting what she was told earlier, and can have sleep problems. She becomes temperamental, alternating quickly between a meditative and a very talkative attitude.

Confusional Syndrome

The person shows increasingly worrying signs of inattention, and memory and sleep problems (which make her state of inattention worse during the day, due to sleepiness). Moreover, she suffers from spatiotemporal disorientation, combined with a disorganization of her reasoning, possibly leading to incomprehensible speech. If she is an artist or someone of a creative nature, she will appear to be eccentric, with an unbridled imagination. In a state of Crisis, the person seems unable to follow what is happening around her, confused, and caught in a dreamlike world. She can remain prostrated, or on the contrary, elated, strange, and fascinated with a phantasmagorical inner world. Special Ability: the person only needs to sleep six hours a night and gets a +2 bonus to every artistic skill.

Crepuscular State

Most often lost in a severe Confusional Syndrome, the person ends up sinking into a state in which her mental issues lead to flawed interpretations of reality. She also tends to be more active during the night. The manifestation of a Crisis is a "dream delirium": visual images of a sometimes frightening nature arise in the conscience of the person who appears sleepy and unable to think realistically. The Crisis may trigger sleepwalking acts ending with total amnesia of such an episode. Special Ability: the person only sleeps three hours a night and gets an extra +2 bonus to every artistic skill, as she draws inspiration from her visions.

The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Creativity: confusion induces its share of incoherent and chaotic imagery, and as the condition worsens, the person's imaginative production becomes more intense, getting in the way of focusing, sleeping, etc. On the other hand, this accentuation offers the person a growing artistic inspiration. The object of the Weakening is Reason, which reflects the increasingly severe alteration of the ability to focus, think, and keep track of time and space.

Elation

This disorder is typically associated with a minor rating in Conviction, or with a major rating in Combativeness. The person, uninhibited, feels in top form, thinks himself able to do anything, and shares his ideas of grandeur unabashedly. He can become impulsive and touchy, and will easily waste his time on multiple projects.

Symptom of Mood Disorder

The person has a friendly, uninhibited behavior: he is excited, talks fast, and displays an enthusiasm that may seem excessive. The slightest thing can annoy, irritate, or even infuriate him.

Syndrome of Elation

Losing the notion of social decorum, the elated person becomes very extroverted, neglecting his speech and manners in inappropriate circumstances. Indeed, talking to a high-ranked dignitary in a familiar way will surely make

everyone uncomfortable… Showing hyperactivity, the person also has all sorts of projects and ideas. He often changes his mind, becoming impatient and irritable. During a Crisis, he may put his own life in danger by taking on one of his projects in an impulsive and irrational way. A Crisis can also manifest itself in a violent bout of anger if someone else, no matter whether friend or stranger, hinders him. Special Ability: the person gets a +2 bonus to all his Feats rolls.

Megalomaniac Delusion

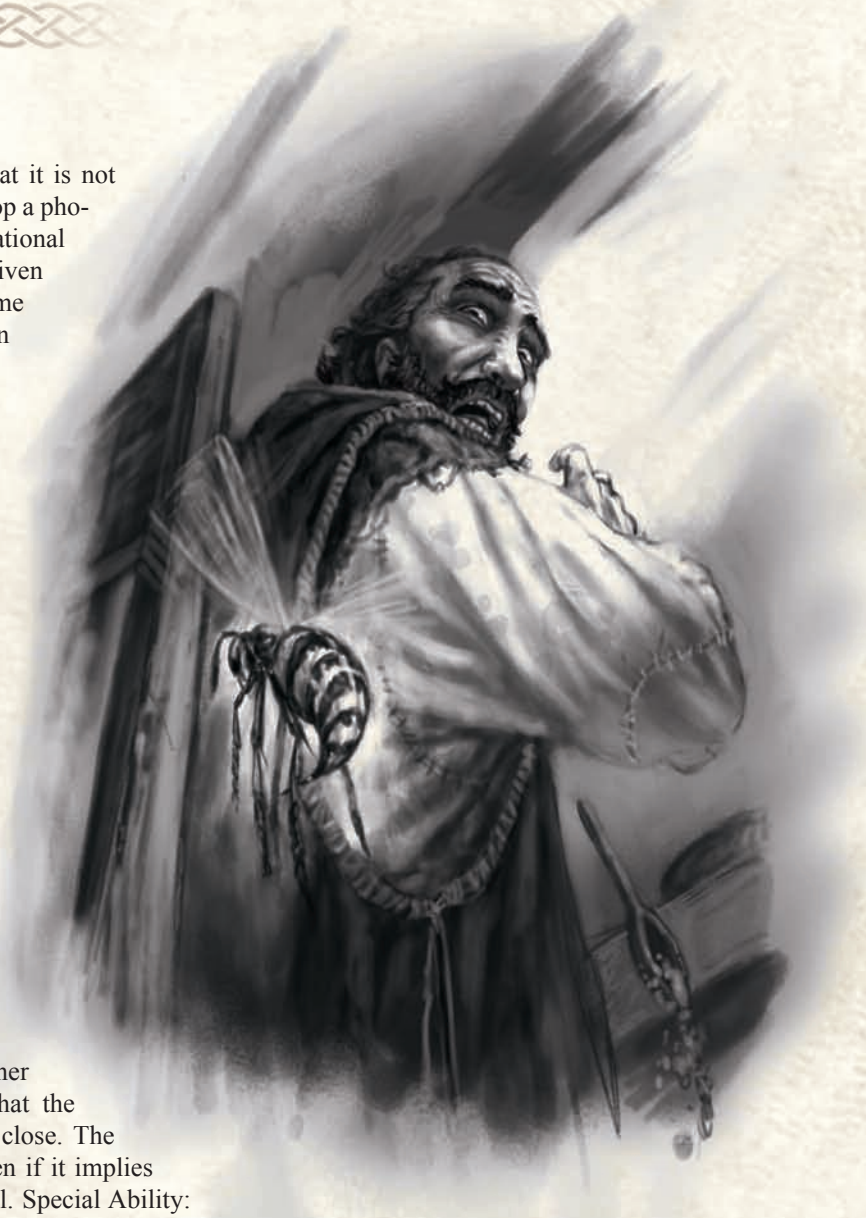
The person truly believes himself to be capable of anything. He plans great projects that will seem unrealistic or delirious to his companions: he wants to be included in the king's council to warn him about the threat hanging over his kingdom, or to bring about an economic recovery that he deems much needed; he demands to meet a high-ranked emissary of the Temple, thinking that he has discovered the location of a holy relic, etc. When dealing with a stranger, he switches from an exuberant familiarity to an unjustified anger, which will give him great problems in his daily life. He also tends to buy things compulsively, spending all of his Daols and even possibly getting himself hugely in debt. A Crisis leads to an attempt to fulfill one of his delirious projects, or to a fit of wrath that can become violent and deadly. With a natural 1 on a Mental Resistance roll, the mood of the elated completely reverts. Within a few hours, he sinks into a deep melancholy that is very likely to lead to a suicide attempt if another Crisis arises. On a natural 10 on a Mental Resistance roll, the mood of the elated reverts again, making him exuberant and uninhibited once more. Special Ability: the person gets another +2 bonus to all his Feats rolls.

The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Combativeness: the person becomes more and more enterprising and uninhibited as the disorder worsens. The object of the Weakening is Conviction, particularly the aspect of this Way related to moral values and the ability to fit into society while being capable of self-control.

Other Disorders

Phobia

This disorder is a particular case in the sense that it is not associated with a specific Way. Anyone can develop a phobic personality, which is the consequence of irrational fears or real traumas. At first a vivid fear of a given object, creature, or situation, a phobia can become severe up to the point where it prevents the person from living a normal life.



Symptom of Fear

The person resents being in the presence of her object of phobia or in a specific situation that can trigger anguish (such as with claustrophobia, for example). She will do everything to escape from such a situation or to move away from her nemesis. If she has to make physical contact or remain close to the creature, or situation that she dreads for too long, she has to make a new Mental Resistance roll to avoid immediate damage to her psyche. Apart from these moments of confrontation, the person feels no particular inconvenience in her daily life.

Phobic Syndrome

The phobic constantly considers the possibility that she may stumble upon her object of phobia or the situation that disturbs her. She is anxious and difficult to calm down. Always on her guard as soon as she deems a situation to be dangerous, the phobic obstinately refuses to face her nemesis. If she is forced to, this immediately triggers a Crisis. A Crisis may also arise in any other situation and lead to the delirious conviction that the nemesis of the phobic is here, somewhere very close. The person will do everything to avoid the place, even if it implies danger for her or using violence to reach her goal. Special Ability: the person acquires an extensive knowledge of her object of phobia, getting a +2 bonus to all skill rolls involving knowledge related to it or actions to move away from it.

Phobic Delusion

The person is beset by her fears. She is permanently anguished and frightened, afraid of being trapped in a situation in which her phobia would crush her. During a Crisis, the person suffers from real hallucinations, during which she struggles with her nemesis: for example, when facing unreal images displaying her companions taking hideous appearances, the person will do everything to escape and survive, and will not hesitate to resort to violence. Special Ability: the person becomes an expert in regards to her nemesis, getting an additional +2 bonus to all skill rolls involving knowledge about it or actions to move away from it. The object of the Strengthening is the Way of Reason and reflects the fact that the object of phobia invades the person's life more and more, up to the point of completely monopolizing her thoughts. The object of the Weakening is the Way of Combativeness as the person feels crushed by anxiety and the threat the object of phobia represents, without any hope of resisting.

Empty Fortress

This particular disorder is associated with the Hardening chart. The person's mind, after it has faced too much horror and trauma, withdraws into itself and rigidifies, which can cut it from the outside world entirely. However, behind such a fortress, there is often a devastated mind that is no longer more than an empty shell.

Symptom of Dulling

The person goes through phases of demotivation during which he feels deeply tired, intellectually as well as physically. At other times, on an emotional level, he appears rather unresponsive regarding what happens around him, even when it would have triggered an emotional response in the case of a balanced person. Special Ability: the person gets a +3 bonus to all Sanity rolls.

Apathetic Syndrome

Described as cold and distant, the person becomes less and less sensitive to emotions. During a Crisis, he becomes prostrated, unresponsive to external stimuli, and almost unable to move (however, he can defend himself if he is attacked). Another possible development is that he completely denies the traumas he has suffered or what he has seen, pretending that they have never existed. Special Ability: the person is much less sensitive to social influence, getting a +3 bonus to resist any attempt at charming, persuading, etc. The person also gets an additional +3 bonus on all Sanity rolls.

Empty Fortress

At this stage, the person displays no emotion. Becoming increasingly apathetic, he shows no motivation or enthusiasm, which does not necessarily mean he will be perceived as sad. His creativity is greatly dulled, and he develops a passive nature, tending to follow other people. A Crisis manifests itself through a period of total prostration during which his mind and body are unresponsive to any external stimulus, even if he is attacked. The person keeps no memory of these episodes of total isolation. Special Ability: shut in, the patient's mind cannot be possessed or altered through manipulation, charms, spells, etc. The person also gets a third +3 bonus to all Sanity rolls.

The object of the Strengthening is Reason and reflects the lack of spontaneity in the person's speech and reflection as the emotional dulling progresses. The Character has an increasing tendency to coldly rationalize what he lives. The object of the Weakening is Creativity.

Healing and Curing Mental Disorders

Although many events or situations can damage the psyche of the PCs, there are also several means to recover from such wounds.

Diagnosing

The "Knowledge of Mental Troubles" and "Mental Phenomena" Disciplines, which can be accessed through the Science and Occultism Domains respectively, make it possible to analyze a Character's mental condition by referring to the works of Ernst Zigger. In no case can a Character use this Discipline on herself. A diagnosis can have different aims, and involves three steps. Each step requires a roll in the appropriate Discipline. A result of 10 on the D10 gives the physician a complete diagnosis (a General one, a Condition one, and a Complementary one) within a single session.

- General Diagnosis

A half hour discussion makes it possible to determine the mental disorder the patient suffers from. The Resolution roll is Complicated (14). If it is a success, the physician determines the disorder affecting the Character.

- Condition Diagnosis

This diagnosis attempt can only be undertaken with a previously successful General Diagnosis or information from another person. With a successful Difficult (17) Resolution roll, the physician can determine whether the examined Character is in a state of Balance, Symptom, Syndrome, or Madness.

- Complementary Diagnosis

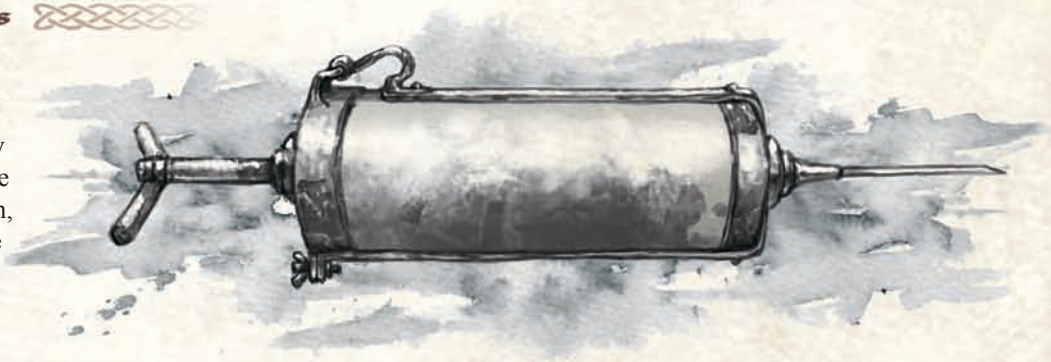
If the physician has successfully gone through the first two diagnoses or has enough information about her patient, she can attempt a Complementary Diagnosis. It is achieved with a Very Difficult (20) Resolution roll and makes the diagnosis about the condition of the Character more accurate. Through this means, a Player can learn of the precise level of his PC's Sanity chart. The Leader can then tell him the exact number of ticked or filled Trauma boxes, and the Player can update his Character Sheet.

The GL should have these rolls made secretly, so that a Player attempting them does not know whether he has succeeded or not. A simple failure on a Resolution roll means that the physician is not sure about the diagnosis she must make. A failure obtained with a natural 1 leads to a diagnostic error. The more visible the symptoms of a patient are, the easier it is to succeed, which is reflected with a bonus to rolls for General and State Diagnoses: Symptom (+2), Syndrome (+4), Madness (+6).

Natural Recovery

In a calm situation, Temporary Trauma points subside after a week. Resting at an inn, coming back to one's homeland, or feeling protected by friends in a secure place are examples of situations allowing for a good recovery. This type of recovery has no effect on Permanent Trauma points.

Potions and Medicines



Demorthèn, alchemists, and Magientists have created potions and medicines capable of partly abating psychical suffering. There are products to calm someone down, and others to stimulate him. A dose of such a product generally has the following effects:

Easing a Crisis

Administering a sedative generally ends a Crisis.
The recipient makes a Mental Resistance roll with a Difficulty Threshold corresponding to the strength of the dose. The stronger it is, the easier it is to succeed the roll. A failure on this roll means that the dose has no effect. Beware: a natural 10 on this roll means overdosing, which leads to amplified effects. Sedatives will literally knock the Character out, while a stimulant will make him jittery. Determining the correct dosage requires a Complicated (14) "Medicine" or "Traditional Medicine" roll. Magientists have designed a particular version of their Tonic to use in such situations; these medicines may induce an addiction.

Subduing the Effects of a Disorder

Administered on a daily basis and at correct doses, potions or medicines can restrict the effects of a disorder. The success or failure of the treatment is checked monthly. As with Crises, the Threshold the roll must reach is defined according to the strength of the dose. If it succeeds, the treatment neutralizes 1D10 Permanent Trauma points and all Temporary ones. This can make Mind Treatment easier, as the state reached is taken into account regarding the Difficulty Threshold of the monthly skill and Mental Resistance rolls. The roll to determine the effects of the treatment is made only once, at the start of the treatment, and to be able to make a new roll, the treatment must be changed, which means that different products must be used. Should the medication cease being administered, Temporary and Permanent Trauma points that have not been dealt with through more permanent measures come back within 1D10 weeks.

The "Knowledge of Mental Troubles" and "Mental Phenomena" Disciplines give very good knowledge in psychopathology, but not the ability to cure such afflictions. Only the "Mind Treatment", "Spirituality", and "Hypnosis" ones can. Conversely, these three Disciplines cannot be used to establish a diagnosis

Mind Treatment

Some methods have proved to be effective to alleviate heavy psychical suffering. They mainly include two Disciplines: "Mind Treatment" in Science, and "Hypnosis" in Occultism. Although the latter is denigrated by the proponents of science, it can be used in the same way as "Mind Treatment". In Tri-Kazel, such occultists are few and often suspected of sorcery. There are some in Reizh, but practically none elsewhere.
Churchmen and Demorthèn can also be of great help for traumatized Characters who share their beliefs, thanks to the power of faith (related to the "Spirituality" Discipline). It is the most commonly used therapeutic method in Tri-Kazel.
To be efficient, the therapeutic supervision must last a number of months equivalent to the amount of Permanent Trauma points the patient suffers from. The PC must visit her therapist at least twice a week in a calm, secure place. Each month, the physician or spiritual guide must succeed in a Mind Treatment, Hypnosis, or Spirituality roll. The roll is Complicated (14) if the patient is in a state of Balance or Symptom, Difficult (17) if a Syndrome must be treated, and Very Difficult (20) for a Madness. At the same time, the patient must succeed in a Mental Resistance roll, the Difficulty of which varies according to her state: Standard (11) if she is in a state of Balance or Symptom, Complicated (14) for Syndromes, and Difficult (17) when she is in a state of Madness. A success removes one Permanent Trauma point, a natural 10 on this success removes two points, and a critical success three points. It is possible to remove Hardening points in the same way.
If this roll is a failure, one more month must pass before any new attempt can be made. If the patient gets a natural 1 on her monthly roll or faces traumatic situations leading to a failure in a Mental Resistance roll during the treatment, she relapses and 1D10 of her Permanent Trauma points come back (this cannot go beyond her maximum at the beginning of the treatment).

Shadows of Esteren

Character Sheet

Name: _____ Player: _____

Sex: _____ Age: _____ Ethnicity: _____ Profession: _____

Description: _____

Ways

Combativeness:

Creativity:

Empathy:

Reason:

Conviction:

Advantages

Disadvantages

Health Condition

Good		OOOOO
Okay	-1	OOOOO
Bad	-2	OOOO
Critical	-3	OOOO
Agony		O



Stamina:

Survival:

Domains & Disciplines

Close Combat
OOOOO + (COMB:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Feats
OOOOO + (COMB:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Perception
OOOOO + (REA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Science
OOOOO + (REA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Craft
OOOOO + (CREA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Magience
OOOOO + (REA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Performance
OOOOO + (CREA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Shooting & Throw.
OOOOO + (COMB:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Demorthen Mys.
OOOOO + (EMP:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Natural Environ.
OOOOO + (EMP:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Prayer
OOOOO + (CONV:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Stealth
OOOOO + (EMP:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Erudition
OOOOO + (REA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Occultism
OOOOO + (REA:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Relation
OOOOO + (EMP:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Travel
OOOOO + (EMP:)
Bonus: Penalty:
Disc:
Disc:
Disc:

Weapons

dmg:

dmg:

dmg:

dmg:

dmg:

Potential:

Fighting Attitudes

- Standard — Atk: Def: Spd:
- Offensive — Atk: Def: Spd:
- Defensive — Atk: Def: Spd:
- Quick — Atk: Def: Spd:
- Movement — Atk: Def: Spd:

Defense:

OOOOO OOOOO

Speed:

OOOOO

Armor:



Prot.:

Equipment

Treasure

Ember

Azure

Frost

Valuables

Artifacts

Resources

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO

Rindath



Rating:

Ogham:



Exaltation

Rating:

Major Miracles:

Minor Miracles:

Flux

Mineral Flux
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO

Vegetal Flux
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO

Organic Flux
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO

Fossil Flux
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO



History

Birthplace:
Setbacks:
Social Class:

Sanity

Mental Resistance:

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA:	OOOOO	OOOOO	OOOOO	OOOOO
Hardening:	OOOOO	OOOOO	OOOOO	OOOOO



Disorder:
Str./Weak.:
Scarring:
Special Ability:

Personality

Consciousness:
Instinct:
Orientation:

Character Traits:

Faults

Passion:

Subversion:

Influence:

Doubt:

Guilt:

Experience Points:

Highlights:

Sanity
Leader's Sheet

Shadows of Esteren

PC: _____

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA :	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○
Hardening:	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○

Disorder: Scarring:

PC: _____

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA :	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○
Hardening:	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○

Disorder: Scarring:

PC: _____

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA :	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○
Hardening:	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○

Disorder: Scarring:

PC: _____

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA :	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○
Hardening:	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○

Disorder: Scarring:

PC: _____

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA :	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○
Hardening:	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○

Disorder: Scarring:

-Glossary-

Adept: a person undergoing six years of instruction, with the aim of being accepted into one of the six orders of the Temple.

Adhar: the primordial spirit of air in the Lan-an-Saol, the Demorthèn's central myth. A member of the Triad that created the Life-Tree. (25, 58, 142)

Aelethal: an alloy three parts silver and one part gold, with a blue tint. It is exclusively used for the making of azure Daols. (126)

Aergewin: the mythical age during which men battled countless Feondas, including particularly gigantic ones. To Demorthèn, the Aergewin resulted from the wrath of the primordial spirit Aingeal, as well as from Sníomh's–the offspring of Adhar–and could have led to Saoghal-Dheir, the end of the world. (20, 26, 35, 37, 142)

Agaceann: the celebration of the fall equinox in Demorthèn traditions. People meditate to honor the dead, and soldiers often engage in various competitions of skill and bravery. (103)

Aingeal: the primordial spirit of fire in Demorthèn myths. Unlike its brothers of the other elements, it incarnates forces of death and destruction, and did not participate in the creation of the Life-Tree. (35, 142)

Albanite: a thick, hard rock of a remarkably white color, only found in Arden's quarries in Gwidre. The Temple sees them as a sign of divine favor, and makes great use of the mineral in the construction of its churches. (73, 75)

Anrò: a rite of passage allowing an Osfei to become a Hilderin knight and to be granted his mount. During a patrol or a routine mission, he is left alone by his mentor in a dangerous area and must come back alive. (169)

Ansailéir: "guardian" in Tri-Kazel's ancient tongue. The title borne by Osag clan chiefs. As time went by, it also came to be bestowed on village chiefs and those who are nominated by a king to be the head of a city. (19, 62, 67)

Aothbàs: the "light of the dead". A faint vibrating luminescence that can sometimes be observed above cairns, tumuli, and tombs on nights of full moon. (102)

Arenthel: a famous bard, founder of the Varigals. She is said to have accompanied and aided the Three Brothers. (26, 27, 136, 137)

Artifact: a Magientist apparatus or machine, which runs on Flux energy. (158, 165)

Ast: an aerial spirit of the Demorthèn myths, which name has been given to a dry eastern wind, responsible for numerous fires in Gwidre. (17, 73)

Azulrock: a bluish mineral found in Tri-Kazel's marble deposits. Azulrock is very much sought-after, especially because it is known to be very rare on the Continent. (172)

Blade knights: a chivalry order of the Temple. Their duty is to defend the adepts of the One through force of arms. (122, 147, 153, 155, 171)

Breithan: a novice in the order of the Hilderin knights, a Breithan is subjected to basic training and must do the chores before being confirmed at the Osfei rank. (169)

Boernac: a big pack animal related to the cow; sturdy and particularly slow. (20, 43, 71, 100, 111)

Botanist: one of the three Magientist schools of thought, specialized in Flux of vegetal origin. (160)

Bramble knights: the peninsula's most ancient chivalry order. Its members are knights-errant dedicated to protecting those in need and to upholding traditions. They also lend money, and have instituted the use of bills of exchange. (128)

Caernide: an animal commonly used as a mount, with magnificent antlers reminiscent of a deer's. (20, 111, 130, 131)

Calyre: an animal similar to a goat or an ibex, native to Tri-Kazel. A Calyre has one frontal horn. (20)

Carath: an iron-shod walking stick used by Varigals. (166)

Cinthareid: natural sanctuaries; Demorthèn places of power where C'maoghs are born and gather. (143, 145)

Circles: a way of grouping children by age section under the tutelage of the Dàmàthair. There are three circles of five years each, the passage to adult life being traditionally set at sixteen. (97)

Clascadh: small, hemispheric granite shelters, formerly built in the north of the peninsula by ancient mountain tribes. (87)

C'maogh: manifestation of the spirits of nature in Demorthèn myths, appearing as gleams or will-o-the-wisps. It is with the help of the C'maoghs that Demorthèn are able to perform their magical powers. (144)

Confederation: a Continental nation in which Magientists have a lot of influence. (89)

Continent: a territory at the east of the Asgeamar Mountains. Its exact dimensions are unknown. (24, 27, 88)

Corahn-Rin: The Life-Tree's name in the peninsula's ancient tongue. (142)

Creaq: the ancient name of Tri-Kazel's peninsula, before the Foundations. (26, 146)

Cursed stones: crystalline remains of ancient demons that must be gathered and sealed away, according to Temple dogma. (152)

Daemorthys: a Tri-Kazelian word used for Magientists, with emphasis on their disrespect for the forces of nature. (21, 80, 156)

Dàmàthair: "second mother" in the ancient tongue. A person, most often a woman, in charge of instructing and protecting a group of children, thus liberating their parents so that they contribute to the survival of the community. (14, 97, 123)

Daol: the common monetary unit of Tri-Kazel's kingdoms. There are three types of Daols, which look like triangular coins minted with specific alloys. A frost Daol (made of Trekann) is worth ten azure Daols (made of Aelethal). Each of those azure Daols are worth ten ember Daols (made of Orekal). (126, 127)

Deathcheater: according to the theories of the occultists, a person who travels in cursed, unknown territories in his dreams. (170)

Demorthèn: "guide" in the ancient tongue. A keeper of sacred traditions in Tri-Kazel, and the intercessor between men and the forces of nature. (26, 32, 35, 42, 52, 53, 57, 71, 72, 96, 97, 98, 107, 117, 140, 158)

Earrach Feis: the festival of the spring equinox in Demorthèn traditions. Children who have reached sixteen years are welcomed in adulthood. It lasts five to six days and marks the new year. See also "Tiraine". (98, 103)

Elect: a religious of the Temple who has received the gift of performing miracles from the One. (150)

Exaltation: the energy of faith, used by the Temple's Elect. (257)

Feond: a creature hostile to mankind–plural is Feondas–the name of which means "foe" in the ancient tongue. Of various shapes, Feondas can be animals, plants, or even an improbable crossing of several natural kingdoms. Some are even said to be capable of possessing corpses or living people. (20, 26, 27, 32, 34, 42, 57, 69, 74, 75, 83, 115, 151)

Filidh: a blind poet who sings alone, or accompanied by musicians. He is often credited with prescient talents. Plural is Filidhi. (81, 82, 133)

Flux: the energy source of Magientist artifacts. Flux is mainly extracted from dead or living matter, and then refined into a useable state. There exist four types: mineral (blue), vegetal (green), organic (red), and fossil (warm yellow). It is commercialized in the form of cartridges and carboys: 1 charge for standard cartridges (3 ounces), 3 charges for medium cartridges (10 ounces), and 30 charges for a gallon. (35, 43, 49, 52, 157)

Fossil Flux: an amber-colored toxic substance, of variable density in its natural form: most of the time liquid, but also thick and sticky. It is often contained in a crystalline shell. When refined, it becomes a bright yellow liquid with an oily consistency. Rare, but extremely rich in energy, this Flux is highly valued by Magientists. Demorthèn gave the name Nimheil to this substance. (159, 162)

Foundations: the period during which the Three Brothers united the tribes of Creag's peninsula and founded the three kingdoms. The year zero of the Tri-Kazelian calendar marks the Oath and formalizes that event. (27)

Gray Mages: practitioners of the unholy arts, see Sorcerer. (171)

Great Theocracy: a Continental nation founded around the faith of the Temple. (90, 152)

Gwerz: a solo a capella lament sung by Filidh. Relates legendary or historical events in two modes; one tragic, the other heroic. (81, 82, 133)

Gwylmith: a flower, the golden petals of which make a magnificent yellow powder, used by painters and dyers. (20)

Helite: a member of a Magientist network of intellectuals in charge of reflecting upon the great orientations of the Magientist Order. Most of them are Magisters or Primus. (159)

Hexcelsis: the six-point symbol of the religion of the Temple, symbolizing a snowflake, as well as the six Ordinances revealed to Soustraine. (155)

Hierophant: a high dignitary of the Temple's clergy. An assembly of Hierophants, the Great Cenacle, leads the clergy in the Great Theocracy, whereas a single Hierophant is responsible for the church of Tri-Kazel. (154)

Hilderin knights: a knightly order dedicated to fighting Feondas. The brother of King Hild created it in 467, soon after the king's death at the claws of those monsters. (30, 52, 54, 80, 168)

Inceptus: a Magientist pupil, following a seven-year period of study. (159)

Ionnthén: a Demorthèn's apprentice. (42, 140)

Inguards: isolated strategic bastions and advanced posts, well known for their prevalent iron discipline. Their garrison is formed out of conscripts on duty for their lord, soldiers under disciplinary punishment, petty criminals, and mercenaries attracted by the high pay. (19, 36, 74, 124)

Lan-an-Saol: the founding myth of the Demorthèn traditions, enumerating the truths of the Primordial Spirits, the Life-Tree, and Saoghal-Dheir. (142)

Lár an Baille: commemorative songs, celebrating the deeds of Osta-Baille's inhabitants, who drove the besieging armies of Gwidre back from their city in 858. (62)

Liadh: the most mysterious of Demorthèn arts, the Liadh gives its wielder the power to call directly upon the C'maoghs, without making use of Ogham. (141, 144, 245)

Liagcal: ancient circles and lines of ritual stones where the Demorthèn gather for the Tsioghair. Formerly, there were four of them, approximately located at the four cardinal points, but the one on the north of the peninsula was razed by the faithful of the Temple. (24, 25, 122, 141)

Life-Tree: a mythic tree of the Demorthèn beliefs, named Corahn-Rin in the ancient tongue. Created by the spirits of the Triad, it covers Esteren's world and represents the whole of nature's phenomena. In its branches and foliage flows the Rindath, existence's primordial sap. (24, 142)

Lodge: a group of Magientists gathered around a project or a common specialty. (122, 159)

Lorn Rann: one of the near legendary Demorthèn arts, which allows the carving and shaping of the Ogham used in the Sigil Rann. (245)

Magience: a science from the Continent whose basic principle is the use of the Flux's energy to fuel apparatuses known as Artifacts. (29, 30, 35, 43, 156)

Magientist: a person trained in the secrets of Magience. Magientists are organized in distinct schools (Botanists, Mineralists, and Vitalists) and ranks: Inceptus, Scientör, Primus, and Magister. (30, 31, 33, 36, 43, 52, 57, 84, 156)

Magister: a Magientist of high status, supervising several Primus and numerous Scientörs. (159)

Mauve Death: one of the most dreaded diseases. Its most remarkable epidemic goes back to the year 492, when it killed half the inhabitants of Osta-Baille in two months. (30, 32)

Mekones: a network of artificial veins supplied with Flux, implanted in the body of some Magientists to improve their abilities. (52, 90, 161)

Merchanthas: a master artisan at the head of a guild, which he leads. (104, 105)

Mineralist: one of the three Magientist schools of thought, specialized in Flux of mineral origin.(160)

Morcail: a renegade Demorthèn ("corrupted" in the ancient tongue) who uses the Oradh for evil ends. (147, 171, 252)

Neach-torgail: "master artisan", the honorary title granted by guilds to their most famous creators. (104)

Nebular: an artifact; a lantern or street lamp running on Flux. (45, 81, 84, 85, 157, 164)

Nimheil: an amber-colored toxic substance disturbing the C'maogh, and the name of which means "poison" in the ancient tongue. See "Fossil flux". (147, 162)

Nòd: a Magientist complex of great size. Tri-Kazel's only Nòd is in Baldh-Ruoch. On the Continent, Nòds are actual industrial cities. (89, 163)

Occultist: an adept of obscure theories originating from the Continent, mixing mysticism, superstitions, and psychological or paranormal hypotheses. (102, 170, 198)

Ogham: inscriptions carved on rocks or pebbles through a secret Demorthèn process, the Lorn Rann. Ogham allow Demorthèn to perform magic by calling upon the spirits of nature. There are seven fundamental Ogham from which the rest are derived. (25, 144)

One: the only true god in the Temple's religion. He gave birth to the world of Esteren according to the prophet Soustraine. He is also called the Creator, or the One God. (26, 27, 45, 70, 148, 149)

Oradh: a Demorthèn word for corrupted forms of magic that are practiced by Sorcerers and Morcail. (147, 171, 252)

Ordinances: the six fundamental commandments the One transmitted to the prophet Soustraine. They are: recognize the One as the only divinity, spread his message, follow his commandments, remain humble before the One, control your passions, and finally, express your piety through prayer. (150)

Orekal: a gold and copper alloy only used to make ember Daols. (126)

Osaq: a member of one of Tri-Kazel's first tribes, striving to preserve ancestral traditions. (18, 19, 27, 28, 40, 41, 53, 58, 62, 120, 141, 142, 202)

Osfei: a squire of the Hilderin order, apprenticed to a knight for his training. He will be made knight if he survives the Anró. (169)

Osfer: a seasoned Hilderin knight, qualified to take care of an Osfei. (169)

Primordial Spirits: the elementary beings from which Esteren originated according to the Demorthèn: Adhar, Roimh, and Usgardh (which form the Triad), as well as the spirit Aingeal. (142)

Primus: a person responsible for a Magientist site or school. (88, 159)

Relics: in the Temple's dogma, this word designates the Light Shards, crystalline remains of envoys from the Creator, who fought against demons in the ancient times. The Temple strives toward discovering those relics and exhibiting them in holy places. (152)

Rindath: the primordial energy, according to Demorthèn; the substance of Primordial Spirits and the sap of the Life-Tree that irrigates and feeds all things. Also the energy used in Demorthèn magic. (42, 142, 245, 246)

Roimh: the primordial spirit of earth in Demorthèn myths. A member of the Triad. (24, 25, 142)

Saoghal-Dheir: the end of Esteren's world mentioned in the Lan-an-Saol, when the wrath of the spirits Aingeal and Sníomh will cause the fall of the Life-Tree. (142, 144)

Saoghal-Glas: the world after the end of Esteren during Saoghal-Dheir. A vast plain of cold ashes, buffeted by harsh winds. (144)

Scientör: the title granted to Inceptus who have successfully finished their training and obtained their Magientist diploma. (159)

Sigil Rann: the primary Demorthèn art, allowing one to obtain the C'maoghs' help by means of Ogham specific to the effects one wishes to call upon. (144)

Sigire: a member of one of the six orders of the Temple's clergy. The Sigires have the task of watching the faithful and fighting heresy and blasphemy. (24, 78, 147, 153, 155, 171)

Simahir: the Continent's region situated on the other side of the Asgeamar Mountains. It is described as a great marshy plain, fertile and rainy, populated with various tribes. Numerous migrants from the Simahir have probably mixed with the Osags as time went by. (25, 30, 89, 92)

Six Orders: the branches of the Temple's clergy: the Vectors (missionaries), the priests (in charge of churches), the Blade knights (soldiers of the Temple), the clerics (scholars and administrators), the monks, and finally the Sigires (who hunt down heretics). (152, 153, 154)

Sorcerer: a practitioner of magical arts taught by demons, according to the Temple's dogma (171).

Soustraine: the ancient prophet born on the Continent. He spread the faith of the One, giving birth to the religion of the Temple. (27, 149)

Soustrainians: a rarely used derogatory word used by Tri-Kazelians to call those who believe in the message of the prophet Soustraine and in the One. (24)

Tarish: a nomadic people of mysterious origin, called "the people from the west" as they are believed to have reached the peninsula through the Furious Ocean. (18, 21, 41, 42, 53, 82, 125, 202)

Temple: a monotheist religion originating from the Continent, founded by the prophet Soustraine. The Temple is organized in Six Orders and its center is the Great Theocracy, on the Continent. (148)

Three Brothers: the three young warriors who unified the peninsula and founded the kingdoms of Tri-Kazel to which they gave their names: Gwidre, Reizh, and Taol-Kaer. (19, 27, 60, 120, 137, 138)

Tiraine: the new year festival in the tradition of the Temple's church. It corresponds to the spring equinox and to the Demorthèn's Earrach Feis festival. (103)

Toil-taigh: lliterally "house of pleasure". Urban establishments that allow individuals to find–in exchange for a few Daols–pleasant company and distractions. (101)

Tòrr Ceann: "Tower Master", a high-ranked officer from the Hilderins' order, commanding lower-ranked knights. (169)

Toscaire: an urban guide from the city of Osta-baille, hired to take charge of visitors. (65)

Trekann: a rustproof alloy of secret composition, grey-white colored. It is only used to make frost Daols. (126)

Triad: Adhar, Roimh, and Usgardh, the three primordial spirits that have, according to Demorthèn beliefs, given birth to the Life-Tree and to Esteren's world. (42, 142, 143)

Tri-Kazel: the "three kingdoms" in the ancient tongue. The official name of the peninsula since the time of the three brothers. Before the Foundations, Osags called it "Creag". (26)

Tsioghair: the Demorthèn's assemblies, held each year at the end of the month of Og-mhios in sacred places called Liagcal. (24, 25, 35, 122, 141)

Tugarch': a legendary metal, said to be the only means of defeating the most powerful Feondas. (17, 66, 116)

Usgardh: the primordial spirit of water in Demorthèn myths. A member of the Triad and co-creator of the Life-Tree. (25, 142, 144)

Varigal: a messenger and/or a guide, wandering across the peninsula's roads and maintaining ties between the most isolated communities. (166)

Vector: a missionary; a member of one of the six orders of the Temple's clergy, in charge of spreading faith in the One. (56, 90, 122, 154, 155, 171)

Vitalist: one of the three Magientist schools of thought, specialized in Flux of organic origin. The best Magientist doctors and surgeons have followed this teaching. (161)

White Famine: a period of suffering during the Ice Era (360-450); its name refers to the cold weather that caused the decimation of numerous snowbound communities. (29, 82)

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www.esteren.org/shadows_of_esteren

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



Picture a peninsula with steep hills, thick forests that barely let the sunlight through, misty valleys, and fortresses clinging to the mountainside... and beyond the oceans, the vast and mysterious Continent. In such awe-inspiring landscapes, the Shadows of Esteren role-playing game will introduce you to a gritty, realistic world, where supernatural elements are never trivial or meaningless, and where men have to face fierce threats lurking in the dark.

Intended for Game Leaders as well as for Players, this book is the first of the Shadows of Esteren series. Within, you will find:

- A Gaming Universe
Discover the world of Esteren through the eyes of its inhabitants, especially those of Tri-Kazel's peninsula. Divided into three kingdoms, its political, geographical, and historical aspects are described. The lifestyle, the antagonisms among the factions, and the problems its inhabitants have to cope with on a daily basis are extensively portrayed.

- A Complete System
Giving priority to the atmosphere and interactions among the Players, the game system of Shadows of Esteren will notably allow you to create your Characters, manage the evolution of their sanity, use Magience, uncover the secrets of the Oghamic arts, call upon the power of the Creator, etc.

- Player Aids
This book includes six archetypes illustrating a few of the possible roles you can play, technical texts about assembling a group of Characters, a complete glossary and index, the character sheet, etc. These player aids will allow you to set up your first game sessions while fully introducing you to the Shadows of Esteren series.

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RPG

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