

SHADOWS OF ESTEREN

The background of the cover is a detailed landscape painting. It features a massive, dark, and craggy mountain peak that rises steeply from a dense forest. The forest is composed of various types of trees, some with vibrant green foliage and others in darker shades. A bright, golden-yellow light emanates from a path that winds through the forest, leading towards the base of the mountain. A small, white, humanoid figure is visible on this path, looking up at the mountain. The sky is filled with swirling, ethereal clouds in shades of green and white. The overall mood is mysterious and epic.

2 ~ TRAVELS



Shadows of Esteren


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2. TRAVELS

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

"A long worm, white, but with thread-like, closely-packed joint rings in deepest black, suddenly seemed to emerge from the lapping surf and come wriggling over the gently sloping beach, menacing, terrifying. Was it real, or was it just a figment of his fear?"

Stig Dagerman



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Shadows of Esteren is a role-playing game imagined and conceived by the ForgeSongs collective.

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ForgeSongs 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



ear explorer of the shadows,

You have discovered Tri-Kazel, its harsh climate, its mysterious legends, and its multiple dangers through Book 1 – Universe and Book 0 – Prologue. The first includes all you need to get familiar with the world and create Characters, while the second contains three scenarios set in Dearg and its surroundings, which can be used as introductory adventures for the official campaign, Book 3 – Dearg. You are holding in your hands Book 2 – Travels, which was designed for Leaders, describing places and figures your Players may explore and meet during their journeys. In it, you will also find one large scenario and five small-scale ones, as well as many game aids focusing on Varigals, occultists, and Morcail.

The History of Travels

A first version of Travels was published in France in November 2010. It was an 80-page softcover book that included the first Shadows of Esteren gaming screen. This book is now sold out, and translating it into English was the opportunity for us to work on a new, improved version with more than 100 pages of brand new content, for a total of 196 pages.

What We Added

With a few years to reflect on the first version, and after many talks with the Shadows of Esteren community, we have striven to provide a variety of content usable by any group and for any type of campaign.

We enhanced the cartography with detailed descriptions of 10 locations, including a few entirely new ones, spanning the whole peninsula and adapted to various gaming styles: exploration, intrigue, politics, Demorthèn mysteries... To help you give more depth to your stories, we designed specific game aids dedicated to traveling and sailing, thus putting the spotlight on Varigals and seafarers.

This book includes a bestiary, the purpose of which is not so much to be exhaustive as to create a strong connection between an entity and the folklore surrounding it. The aim was to give a powerful dramatic identity to each creature, in order to go beyond the sole idea of destroying a disturbing, alien foe. Lady Fir Patience, the Sirens of the Tealderoth, and the Great Madarcht are dangerous opponents whose designs are unfathomable, incomprehensible. Their aspects are inspired by the Romantics' notion of the sublime, filling the Characters with feelings of awe mixed with repulsion, which is the essence of our way of presenting horror in the universe of Esteren.

The Lords of Shadows

If we were able to go so far in the Shadows of Esteren adventure, it is thanks to the support of the community that constantly drives us to do better and to create and offer high-quality books, both conceptually and visually. Two Kickstarter campaigns and one Ulule campaign allowed generous sponsors to distinguish themselves through their willingness to support the series, and even, in the case of the Lords of Shadows, to be part of it through their creations. Thus, Book 2 – Travels presents several noteworthy figures of Tri-Kazel—charismatic allies, but also ruthless opponents. Some are from the book's first edition, but for this new edition, six figures designed by the Lords of Shadows have joined their ranks, providing material for thrilling adventures!

A Life Choice

The initial version of Travels included five canvases—short-format scenarios that can be played as such, developed to be taken to a wider level, or inserted into a larger-scale campaign. In addition, for this new edition, we created a large scenario that depicts the journey of a mother looking for a child she long believed dead. This story is an opportunity to discover the dangers and wonders of the paths of Tri-Kazel, but also to feel the ideological contrasts that tear the peninsula apart. It should also lead your PCs to wonder about their choices, find out about what truly matters to them, and maybe even transform a simple, perilous trip into a quest of self-discovery!

And Now, for the Conclusion...

We would like to express our warmest thanks to all of those who discovered Shadows of Esteren, yesterday, today, or tomorrow, and who contributed, each in their own way, to keeping this universe alive and growing. Without your invaluable support, the series would not exist!

Wishing you a pleasant journey on the paths of Tri-Kazel,

Iris

Chapter I

Cartography



his first chapter is divided into several parts:

The notes of Aeldred Firdh

This famous bard has traveled a good deal, and the first part of this chapter is composed of his notes on a hundred places. For Leaders, there is much raw material for original scenarios, or simply for describing a journey more vividly. These paragraphs do not provide the absolute truth about the various regions of the peninsula; rather, they are a collection of testimonies and legends that Leaders can make true or not according to their gaming style.

Noteworthy places of Tri-Kazel

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The second part of this chapter shows more thorough depictions of 10 noteworthy places of the peninsula: the Lines of Tùrsal, the Ashen Yard, the religious city of Expiation, the island of Calvary, the towns of Fionnfiar and Farl, the county of Frendian, the rivers of Reizh, the Slope of the Fallen, and the Carmine Chasm.


Each place was designed as a game aid providing Leaders with scenario seeds, personalities, and secrets for their Players to investigate. In contrast with the notes of Aeldred Firdh, this section is more objective, revealing certain truths behind legends, or providing answers to a few mysteries of Book 1 – Universe. Thus, it will be possible to understand what happened to the Duke of Seòl's daughter, Aoda Mac Iseanor, or to discover what is hidden deep in the Carmine Chasm. As with the scenarios, this part of the chapter makes use of the modular scenes system: optional boxes are provided, describing a reality that Leaders are free to include in their games, to adapt, or to simply not use.

Traveling

The third part of the chapter spans eight pages of additional rules on traveling, as well as a game aid on Varigals. Finally, advice is provided for Leaders on how to depict a journey, round out descriptions, and optimize the atmosphere.

Sailing

The last part of this chapter is told by Milena Arweal and focuses on sailing the raging waters that form the seas and oceans surrounding the peninsula. It is a narrative text that complements the testimonies in Book 1 – Universe. A game aid on boats and sailing costs is also provided.



Young sir,

We do not know each other, but I have been told that you have already read some of my writings, which I have simply named "Peoples, Populations, and Journeys". I hope that you have enjoyed them. Know that if I chose to publish such writings as they progressed in spite of the imperfections this implied, rather than wait until my curiosity was satisfied, it was for two essential reasons. The first is that I doubt that my curiosity will ever be quenched. The second, which is barely less important, lies in the fact that traveling implies risking one's life. Although I am not mad or rash enough to venture into dangerously disreputable places, I have already escaped a grim fate several times, most often when there was nothing to make me believe that I was so exposed to danger. Two Varigals have already died guiding me, and my current traveling companion seems rather young, in spite of her commendable experience.

Last year, on the occasion of a short stay in Osta-Baille, I made the acquaintance of your uncle, and we spoke at length. He told me of your interest for faraway things, history and geography, as well as of the unfortunate condition that prevents you from leaving your room. I truly sympathize with your misfortune. It is a grim irony of fate to force a boy thirsting for discoveries to remain secluded at home while so many healthy young people only yearn to lock themselves up in some castle or university, to hide their narrow-mindedness behind worthless erudition.

During my exchanges with your uncle, he showed me the geographical information he had gathered for you. With his permission, I made a copy of them, and told him that I would make sure to repay him for his generosity. Young sir, since this encounter, I have resumed the work of your uncle, to examine them in the light of my own knowledge and of the stories told to me by people I deem trustworthy. I have also had at my disposal various written sources, including several military documents, and even a letter from the Duke of Seòl's young heiress, who unfortunately disappeared during a journey through the kingdom. Discretion dictates that I must not tell you how such documents reached me, or even why some people have accepted to talk to me. Suffice it to say that bards are still respected here and there.

The sheaf of papers included with this letter constitutes my next opus, the seventh to be accurate, of "Peoples, Populations, and Journeys". It would have been much more difficult for me to produce it without the help of your uncle, and without your curiosity which motivated him in his own investigations. Therefore, it seemed only natural to me to have its very first copy sent to you.

You will see in these pages quite a few things that will be familiar to you. Sometimes, I have just repeated what you have already read, and only changed what was undeniably erroneous or exaggerated. In other parts, you will notice significant differences with what you thought you to be true. As with the rest of my works, I have done my best to clearly state what constitutes proven facts, and what is more of a rumor or tale. I have only discarded the wildest or most unbelievable stories. I had the opportunity to visit many of these places, and I know that nothing in the world could drive me to go near some other locations mentioned here. Truth in its entirety therefore still remains out of reach.

Still, I hope that such works will help those who follow them to shape their own ideas and go further than we have done. I also hold hope that these pages will quench your thirst for new horizons, and that, in some way or another, you will find their reading profitable.

If my travels lead me to the land of your family, rest assured that I will not forget to come and greet your uncle, and above all, that I will meet you with great pleasure.

Will all my respect,

Aeldred Firdh
Bard, Cartographer, and Chronicler.

Noteworthy Places of Tri-Kazel



Gwidre

⊗ Aimliù:

The local reefs and shoals cause frequent shipwrecks around this village, contributing to the isolation its inhabitants value so much. Rumors say that the icy wind and water “whisper” things to the locals, and that they shy away from sunlight. I have also heard of a raid led by the Sigires shortly before the War of the Temple, and of the slaughter of most of the community. I know that such a purge did take place, but for what reason I did not manage to learn. As for the rumors, they persisted, and after having been to Aimliù once, I must admit that its dwellers have a chilling way of staring at strangers and muttering behind their backs.

⊗ Ard-Amrach:

If there is one place in the peninsula where the might of faith can be beheld, it is Ard-Amrach. It was in the capital city of Gwidre that the Temple had the Prima Cathedra built, to be the seat of the power of the Hierophant and the leaders of the Six Orders. Add to this vision the beauty of the Noble March, the austere simplicity of the royal keep, the Iradion with its Albanite walls, and one can only feel a tightening in the throat. Although I have mixed feelings regarding the faith I have been raised in and I am horrified by some extremist behaviors, I must say that gazing at the Prima Cathedra has always had a soothing effect on my poor soul. However, Ard-Amrach has also its share of paupers, well-organized criminals, and officials who know how to best abuse their prerogatives. Nowhere is faith more dazzling, but also nowhere can this troubling truth be so easily ascertained: we are truly wicked and misshapen in our ambitions and desires, compared to the immeasurable and perfect might of the One.

⊗ Broken Stones:

I have seen the dilapidated vestiges of this former Liagcal, where the Demorthèn of the North used to gather before the Temple decided to purify the place with sword and fire. Strange marks on some of the pulled-down menhirs are evidence of the terrible battles, and of the fierce magic used during the fights. A church was built nearby, but it is falling apart as well, since the three priests charged with maintaining it have disappeared one after the other. The C'maoghs may have learned to loathe humans, unless the specters of the Demorthèn killed here rise against the servants of the Temple. Whatever the reason, I feel a pang in my heart when I think about this place, which has witnessed sacred rites for hundreds of years, and which now welcomes no one, whatever their faith may be.

⊗ Calvary:

I have been told that four monasteries have been built on this island. I know nothing about what may take place there, and like many people, I have heard of a prison or citadel built by the crown of Gwidre. However, there is nothing to validate such a rumor about this place, or the stories mentioning important prisoners kept there.

⊗ Corvus Abbey:

The Corvurian brothers are part of the order of the monks, and form a congregation of warrior-monks founded by the first Hierophant of Tri-Kazel. From this abbey, the brothers walk the roads and try to set an example for wavering believers through their martial prowess and their frequent penances. They are also skilled in receiving the confessions of weak souls and lead them back on the path of righteousness with severe admonitions. The abbey itself watches over the borders of Gwidre. It houses convicted criminals who are enrolled in squads led by the monks. The most deserving of them, whose desire for repentance and faithfulness have been put to the test for years, sometimes earn the right to be forgiven by joining the Corvurian order.

⊗ Deh'ad:

A mountain village among many others, but I was sojourning there five years ago when Feondas invaded the community. Among the many who died, there was another outsider, Varigal Haldan, who was my friend and had been accompanying me for a long time. It was he who insisted that we stopped at Deh'ad, and it was a sad irony that a man of the road should die this way, precisely when he thought he could find shelter against external threats inside the fortified walls. He was buried along with the other inhabitants of the village, in the course of a moving ceremony led by the priest of Deh'ad. Haldan was not a faithful of the Creator, but I think that unlike his clergy, the One does not pay attention to such details.

Expiation:

I was only eleven in 887, when the Sigires gathered the population of Lightrock, where I was born. My family had left for the coast months before to settle there, since my father was already a seasoned bard. I have heard dreadful things about what happened to the relatives of some of my childhood friends, several of whom were taken to some unknown place to be “suitably educated”. I have nothing solid to provide about the heresy that attracted the Sigires, its leaders, or its objectives, but I do know that I will never go back to Expiation, since it is how my native town has been renamed. Travelers and pilgrims have told me that the entire town has become some sort of place of contrition, where the faithful go to take part in countless rites of purification and expiation. There is nothing for me to see there, except things that would break my heart.

Fionnfiuar:

Formerly a small fishermen village, Fionnfiuar, or “holy cold” in the ancient tongue, was renamed in homage to Saint Jamian, who landed here when he arrived in Tri-Kazel. The place has taken imposing proportions, becoming a major place of pilgrimage for all the believers of the One. The rector (or rectress) of Fionnfiuar is also in charge of the missionary's tomb, a responsibility granting unquestionable prestige. As such, that position traditionally brings leadership over all the priests of the peninsula. However, recently, the Hierophant has chosen to appoint a young ecclesiastic based in Reizh by the name of Andrev as head of the priests, which has been taken as an offense by Fionnfiuar's rector and inhabitants.

Gouvran:

A small-sized city on the very north of Gwidre, and its main harbor on the northern coast, Gouvran is also the home of the Order of the Reliquary. It is the most powerful congregation of monks, holding great sway over the other ones. Thus, the rector of Gouvran is the leader of all the peninsula's monks, and sits at the Hierophant's side. It is possible, with the appropriate authorizations, to observe holy items which have belonged to the servants of the One in Tri-Kazel: the sail of Jamian's ship, the sword of Saint Aerdan, the quill of Saint Noenys, the bones of Saint Albérich's right hand, and a few others. However, the monastery of Gouvran is primarily a place of contemplation for the order of the reliquary, and they have little appreciation for visitors. Therefore, several times each year, the brothers of the reliquary exhibit one of the relics on the occasion of a procession around the town, which attracts crowds from the whole kingdom and even beyond.

Monastery of the Windy Peak:

This rather austere place, some distance away from the road, is the headquarters of the Velathyan brotherhood. It is a very ancient monastic order dedicated to the memory of Saint Velathys, one of the most respected figures of the Temple's history. As the saint before them, the Velathyan brothers strive to learn everything a man needs to be autonomous, then use their talents to provide help to those in need. They travel through the peninsula to tend to the sick, help masons and carpenters, lend the strength of their arms during harvest season, and so on. The Velathyans are poor and so is their order, although the monastery of the Windy Peak sometimes receives generous financial help from a wealthy faithful. However, they welcome with a smile all those who wish to sleep safely inside their monastery, as well as many sick people, on the condition that the guest takes part in the many tasks of the community when his condition allows him to. Therefore, it happens rather often that a cured sick person or a passing-by traveler stays for a while among the Velathyans to help them. And in the end, some of them even put on the order's humble habit, and return to the road with new resolutions.

Forest of Whispers:

You often get unpleasant shivers when you are under the foliage of these ever-rustling woods, as it is clear that some sounds cannot come from the wind, and you feel like someone is whispering incomprehensible secrets to you. I am very disposed to believe the stories saying that some travelers go mad, but I have never met one of these unfortunate souls, nor someone who could credibly claim to know the meaning of these strange sounds.

Gorm Caladh:

A cove protected from the wind makes this town a landing place for many of the fishermen of the south of Gwidre, as well as a port for small commercial traffic along the coasts. Trade is also done via the road crossing the border, in spite of the grudges from the War of the Temple. A local custom here is that people sentenced to death are taken to an old remote house on a small hill. They are made to go inside at sunset, and a ring of guards makes sure that they do not come out. No one has ever been seen again. In old tales, I found mention of a young widow of great beauty who lived in this house and is said to have suffered an awfully painful death, without the culprit ever being identified. For a long while, I have watched that old building which seems mysteriously spared from the ravages of time. At nightfall, its closed door, crisscrossed by shadows, seems to invite you in. Thrice did the Temple send Sigires to purify the place. They stayed there until dawn, and reported nothing unusual... nor did they find a single body.

Nectan:

This town, famed for its dyers and woodworkers, has been slowly recovering from the Mauve Death, which decimated its population almost twenty years ago. However, the rector of its church died recently, suddenly and inexplicably catching fire right before mass. The authorities blame the “burned sorcerer”, a renegade actively hunted by the Sigires for years. Some claim that he is a Gwidrite Demorthèn, others that he is a minion of the demons, and some even maintain that there are actually several sorcerers who attack the clergy of the Temple and burn its representatives alive.

Norgord's Plateau:

The white marble of Norgord's quarries is highly valued by the Temple; almost as much as the precious Albanite. The clergy of the Creator has therefore financed the construction of a road leading to the Plateau. However, the Gwidrite crown has very recently managed to acquire control of part of the quarries, to the great displeasure of the clergy. Now, marble from Norgord can be found in Taol-Kaer as well, although in small amounts, which makes fortunate people appreciate it all the more.

Ordachai Peak:

Everyone considers it to be the highest mountain of the peninsula, and it only takes one look at its massive shape, even from far away, to agree. The River Pezhdour certainly flows from there, and the Demorthèn say that the one who reaches its summit can converse with the powerful Roimh, master of earth and stone. The clergy of the Temple advises against such undertakings, arguing that it is meaningless to risk one's life in the hope of conversing with a spirit that does not even exist.

Rhingal:

This small city is a major step in the transportation of goods from the region of Abundance toward the eastern provinces of Gwidre. Its importance explains why I got to see the great commander of the Blade knights, Jaoven de Nectan, there. He was leading his men in a vast operation aimed at eliminating a terrible Cèir. It is a monstrous, legendary species of Feondas; a solitary killer that wanders at night with a white mask upon its face and stalks isolated passersby to slaughter them in horrible ways. The monster had already claimed four victims. I preferred to sleep in an inn where several caravan guards were staying, and I did not linger. Afterward, I heard that the Cèir had been killed, or at least had stopped attacking.

River Pezhdour:

Vital for the kingdom, canals have been built at great cost and effort to exploit its flow. Formerly, its banks were decorated with many sculpted steles honoring the spirit of waters, Usgardh.



The priests of the One have performed rites on them in order to make them votive shrines glorifying the generosity of the supreme being.

Saint Albérich's Cathedral:

In 805, Albérich, a young Blade knight, saved at this very spot the queen's brother and his escort from a Feond attack, which cost him his life. Albérich stood facing more than forty monsters while the survivors of the prince's convoy fled; the titanic and heroic fight he led is still sung of today. By the time reinforcements arrived, the Feondas had disappeared. On the bloodsoaked earth covered with hideous corpses, stricken by the blade and powers of the brave man, only his right hand was found, still clutching his broken sword. Saint Albérich's Cathedral has become a place of pilgrimage for all those who dedicate their life to serving the One with arms. It houses an honor guard of Blade knights, formed of aging veterans who have distinguished themselves during their career. Most say that they came to pray there in the past when they had just been accepted in the Order, and that it stands to reason that this is where they go to end their days.

Slope of the Fallen:

Near a pathway that supposedly leads to this strange place, Varigal Haldan and I met one of his fellow travelers, the famous Deirdre Lourière. She was returning from the Slope, where she had guided two Reizhite occultists. It is difficult to tell the difference between charlatanism and erudition in the discourse of the occultists, and I would have liked to talk with these two men. However, Miss Lourière had been the only one to come back, and she still seemed very shaken. She told us that up there, one could see things that had been lost for a long time, or live dreams that had become impossible. I know not what illusion Deirdre Lourière had to fight on the Slope of the Fallen, but only with difficulty had she managed to regain her senses. She confessed she had tried hitting her employers, but that they had not come back from their trance. Beset by new visions, she had quickly fled, and she was so full of remorse that it took her a while to agree to leave with us. I had spent three days trying to persuade Haldan to lead me up there, and he only cast me a sidelong glance when we turned back.

Torn Woods:

The oceanic winds and storms regularly damage this very bleak-looking forest, according to those who say they have been to the island of Calvary. I actually wonder how there can remain so much vegetation in a region so exposed to the elements. However, an ancient tale mentions the hero Ruel, whose existence is still debatable. He is said to have chased a powerful Morcail up to this place. The Demorthèn then inflicted a powerful curse on her: the Morcail had turned her children into monsters by substituting their blood for sap, and since she showed more love for trees than for her progeny, she is said to have been sentenced to expiate her crime by preserving this forest forever.





Reizh

Baldh-Ruoch:

The capital city of Reizh is another unique sight of the peninsula, since it is an exceptional testimony to the harmonious result that can be produced by natural forces united with human intelligence. Built on twin mountainous masses between which the River Oëss flows, Baldh-Ruoch boasts many bridges suspended between the two parts of the city. Faced by such majesty, combined with the multicolored lighting provided by the countless Magientist Nebulars, one can only feel humility in front of the forces of nature and human tenacity that gave the peninsula its most modern city. Furthermore, an important part of the city is dedicated to the activities of Magientists and forms a sort of huge complex, some parts of which are only accessible to people authorized by the order's Council. The metropolis contains not only the main university of the peninsula, but also a multitude of laboratories and workshops. Thus, the city is also the industrial heart of Reizh, and a considerable part of the resources flowing into the capital is invested in the Magientist shops, laboratories, and machineries.

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Candlewood:

This wood is what the Demorthèn call a Cinthareid, a sacred place where the spirits of nature powerfully manifest themselves. Candlewood was thus named because of the many will o' the wisps that can be seen at night throughout the year. I have seen some with my own eyes, and they are certainly C'maoghs, as the Demorthèn say. However, they have grown scarce, whereas the presence of Feondas in this region has dramatically increased. These abominations must offend the C'maoghs, or perhaps their corruption defiles the wood and is detrimental to these spirits.

Carmine Chasm:

I did not personally go to the Carmine Chasm, but my late guide Braen crossed it himself. He confirmed that the whole vegetation is blood-red; a most disturbing sight. Braen also reluctantly mentioned the persistent feeling he had of being watched, even though he told me that he had not spotted a single animal there. Some say that the strange color of these plants is related to a terrible crime, a slaughter perpetrated there. The conjectures on this subject generally make mention of migrants from the Continent, since there is no sign that the surroundings have been occupied. However, it is also possible that it was the eerie hue of the vegetation that gave rise to this tale. At any rate, nothing is known about the real origins of the Carmine Chasm. I have been told that the Magientist Council has financed several expeditions in order to bring back vegetation samples for their laboratories.

Cirque of Argoneskan:

A natural formation discovered by someone named Pelfreinth

Argoneskan, who told to any who would listen that strange things happened there. Few adventurous souls have gone to see for themselves. Those who have done so, and made it back, claim they saw nothing except high rocky walls forming an almost perfect circle.

Citadel of Kermordhran:

A strategic place for centuries, it is said that it was conquered in the past by the Reizhite hero, Culowd Mac Namuidh, under exceptional circumstances. I made a brief stay there six years ago, when I was taking part in negotiations aimed at reconciling two neighboring lords. Therefore, I can testify that the rumors claiming that one can hear the clamor of the battles of yore on moonless nights are entirely founded. I was terrified by some of these sounds, particularly when I distinctly heard the clangor of a fierce fight around me. I was told that the room where it took place had formerly been a fencing room, and that Culowd brutally slaughtered seven opponents there.

Crail:

In the nearby valleys, Crail is famed, and rightly so, for the quality of its woodcraft. A small guild was even founded there, to keep the techniques employed secret. Wooden furniture, trinkets, and dishes make up most of the local production, but Crail also makes spear shafts, arrows, and bows aplenty. It was there that I met my current guide, young Varigal Ceirane, while she was buying a new Carath. Her peer, the unfortunate Braen, who had been my guide for months, had died soon before, some hours of walk away from Crail, victim to the venom of a rock asp.

Crows' Peak:

At the court of Baldh-Ruoch, it is said that the Crows' Peak is the site of an old castle abandoned centuries ago, which, I have heard, guarded now-depleted silver mines. A family of continentals, the Nevermore, has settled here during the last century. People say they are the descendants of heretics who had fled the Great Theocracy, or Magientists whose works had been forbidden by their order. Whatever the truth is, they have adopted the castle's old coat of arms, a perched crow, and they seem determined to stay away from other men. They pay their taxes to the crown and expect to be left



alone. Personally, I have had the opportunity to witness that the Nevermore are well mannered, if rather reserved, and that the gallery of their ancestors' portraits is impressive. They all bear the same family traits, the same pale complexion, and the same ebony hair. They all have the same thoughtful eyes. Stranger still, in each one of the portraits, a crow perches on the right shoulder and seems to stare enigmatically at its "host".

Eagle's Peak:

The legendary eagles of Reizh's highest peak are mentioned in the chronicles of Arenthel, who even describes one of these majestic birds, claiming that it could have carried away an adult goat effortlessly. Unfortunately, these fabulous birds seem determined to stay up there, and getting closer to them would require climbing very steep cliffs.

Ear Caladh:

This town at the mouth of the Donir is called "East port" in the ancient tongue since it is the easternmost major port of the peninsula. Although it is not possible to sail up the river, a road was built alongside it in order to carry merchandise up to Baldh-Ruoch. Thus, as time went by, Ear Caladh became the economic center of the Emerald Crescent and the port gradually turned out to be too small to answer the growing needs.

Thirty years ago, after tremendous efforts, engineers backed by Magientist science created a great artificial bay on the other side of the river, around which an agglomeration, Nua Caladh, the "new port", was quickly built. Ear Caladh, on the east bank, is going through a process of gentrification as the rent is increasing and the workers, sailors, and dockers settle on the other bank, in Nua Caladh. However, trading companies and captains in favor with the leading citizens of Ear Caladh keep landing here, since the taxes are lower than in Nua Caladh. Indeed, the construction of the artificial bay required considerable means and the local authorities are in a hurry to replenish their vaults by making the port profitable.

15

Fairean Ear:

Two years ago, Guinevere Oan, one of the most influential Reizhite Demorthèn, asked several bards to come and exceptionally participate in the Tsioghair taking place at the "east viewpoint", the most magnificent of the peninsula's four Liagcals. I will say nothing regarding our discussions, but I can speak of the place itself. Fairean Ear is organized around a rock with crystalline hues due to its apparent mica and quartz veins. The rock is used as a natural altar, and around it, stones have been raised and an alley of flat rocks has been laid so that the Demorthèn may perform their rites. The might of the Triad, and especially that of the great Usgardh, is regularly celebrated there, as the rising sun lights the sea and the rock with crystalline veins. The most traditional Demorthèn of the East have refused to come to Fairean Ear for several years now, because they accuse Oan and those who respect her to be traitors who have entered into an alliance with Magientists. Regarding this last affirmation, it is certainly entirely unfounded.

Fairean Ear

Fall Tree:

Many are those who think it is only a tale, but I have seen this tree with my own eyes. It looks like a lone elm whose foliage, whatever the season, is of a beautiful deep green at dawn, which then slowly turns yellow until dusk. When the sun sets, its leaves are of reds and golds. As this tree is considered as a Cinthareid by the Demorthèn, it is not surprising that each year the fall equinox is the occasion of a long celebration in tribute to these spirits. I have heard that the Tree is also the home of a powerful and respected spirit, but the Reizhite Demorthèn I know refuse to confirm it.

Farl:

One of the few important towns in northern Reizh, as well as one of the few places where the court peacefully welcomes representatives of both the Demorthèn and the Temple, as well as Magientists. I went to Farl four times, and I have always been impressed by its inhabitants' open-mindedness. I have even been told that recently, it had been permitted for a church of the Temple to be built within the walls of the city.

Gline:

The folks of this small border village are tense because of the proximity of a powerful garrison of Hilderin knights whose patrols "lose their way" more and more often on the other side of the border. There is even talk of depredation and stealing, but the crown of Reizh seems reluctant to bring the issue to its Talkéride allies. This tension recently increased when a young Magientist from Gline was found with her throat slit, bloodless. The Hilderins are accused of this crime, although some have furtively mentioned blood-drinking creatures, and other stories of an even more alarming nature.

Iolairnead:

The main, if not the only important stop for those who try to make it to the Continent by passing through the mountains. I made a short stay at this village, and I could see that its inhabitants have little interest in the rest of the world, and consider the city of Farl as a metropolis unrivaled in the whole peninsula.

River Donir:

Crossing the swift and ice-cold Donir is almost as dangerous as attempting to sail down it to Ear Caladh. Thus, the bridges traversing it arouse much greed. I had the opportunity to witness the conclusion of an agreement concerning one of them, ending a feud more than two hundred years old between a trading guild and the family of the local lord. The remarkable talent of my young peer, the famous Lyrielle, known as Lyrielle of the Finery, contributed a lot to this. Unfortunately, one of the envoys of the guild was found eviscerated on the following day. A local tale goes that a century ago, the bridge was the place of a bloody fight, and several of the people present deduced that the spirits of the fallen warriors may have been offended by the agreement made. I doubt that spirits could eviscerate a man, but I have seen much stranger things, and it seemed clear that in spite of the treaty, the two delegations were looking for a pretext to score points. Therefore, Lyrielle insisted that this compromise should not be discussed, and since it had been sealed in the presence of two bards, she was reluctantly obeyed.

Kalvernach:

"The City of a Hundred Terraces" spreads from the foot of Femfrath's hills to the Tulach's rocky plateau. Famous for its sloping streets and its ancient galleries bountiful in rock salt and silver, it also boasts a Magientist university. I had recently completed my apprenticeship when I went to Kalvernach for the first time, ten years ago, soon after one of the most influential Magientists of the university, Yvon Joern, had been expelled for having conducted atrocious experiments on paupers. Much more recently, the Magientists have been able to polish their image by helping the locals drive back an attack of Feondas that had infiltrated the city via the mining galleries.

Kell:

"The Mountains' Door" is a very hospitable place, the four inns of which are all of praiseworthy quality. Each one has a few rooms, which are quite expensive but provide full Magientist comfort, with Flux lighting and hot water at will. People there are used to the presence of the many travelers, and welcome bards and Varigals with a smile. I was even asked to act as an intermediary for a wedding uniting two influential families who had been rivals for a long time. Unfortunately, the union could not be celebrated, for the young betrothed died in rather... odd circumstances. But I promised the Kellians not to give details on the subject, since some aspects of these events are rather disturbing. As for me, I got out of it with a nasty chest wound, which led me to spend several weeks of convalescence at my hosts', who proved as attentive as they were embarrassed by such a case. Apparently, the hospitality at Kell has not suffered from such a tragedy, even if it would be inconsiderate for a stranger to mention it.

Pass of Gaos-Bodhar:

I will never live long enough to be done with the peninsula, and therefore, I will never follow the long, hard road that leads to this pass, beyond which Reizh has no more authority. As others, I have heard that weeks of travel make it possible to then reach the famous Simahir, the closest populated continental territory.



River Oëss:

The main tributary of the Donir is much more peaceful than the river it pours into. It is therefore intensively used to carry raft wood to Baldh-Ruoch. However, its flow increases perceptibly because of the relief near the capital city, and the logs are therefore retrieved upstream.

Taelwald's Forest:

The main resource of Reizh for wood and game, it has recently been the center of discussions at the court, since the Magientists wish to build several installations there. The hot-blooded Alana Naighan, Magientist of the Council famed for her beauty and imperious nature, is the main promoter of this project. When I was a child, my father told me of the legend of Taelwald, a champion of the king who freed the forest from a ghastly Feond and enabled men to exploit it. As the tale goes, the Feond was called Mórcrann and had the shape of a monstrous tree, which attracted its victims with grim singing. Taelwald perished during the fight, for he had to make use of the Spear of Celestial Fire, an ancient Object of Power that consumes the one who calls upon its might. A strange thing is that the Osags of the Lands of Dèas have a similar tale about a group of Demorthèn who are said to have killed Mórcrann somewhere around Cardach. Maybe one of the legends inspired the other... or maybe there are several Mórcrann...

Taol-Kaer

Ahman Glas:

As gloomy as can be, and haunted by a great many Feondas, the Gray Bogs are however incredibly bountiful in plants of all kinds and edible fish. The survival of Tuaille and the neighboring communities depends on such abundance, even if no one would ever consider the place to be pleasant. The paths going through the bogs must be maintained regularly, and even the commonly used road that leads to Osta-Baille, albeit protected by the guild of the Pavers, is not devoid of danger.



☪ Aisir Ceomhor:

The Mistway is certainly the oldest known pathway to cross the mountains. This road is as spectacular as it is dangerous, since one must travel on a cliffside path with the frequent threat of thick clouds of mist. Fortunately, the ancients marked the course of the way with engraved milestones, each one tied to the next by a thick chain of corroded bronze. The bronze links have kept the prints of the countless hands that clung to them along the centuries, and most of the milestones bear inscriptions begging the powerful spirit Adhar to dissipate the mist, which, according to tradition, is the work of evil aerial spirits who have always refused men the right to cross the region.

☪ Alliance Bridge:

The first Alliance Bridge was built on the Tealderoth, by the order of the Three Brothers, but what few people know is that, in the past, there was a matching bridge on the western coast. Indeed, an identical bridge was built over the Kreizhdour, but it was swept away by a storm from the sea. The origins of these bridges were quickly forgotten, and through the centuries, they were rebuilt in different styles. The Alliance Bridge is the sturdiest, as its last reconstruction dates back to the War of the Temple, when the kingdoms of Reizh and Taol-Kaer started financing projects in order to symbolize their alliance during the conflict. Today, it bears several sculpted statues depicting warriors of the two kingdoms.



☪ Ard-Monach:

Its inhabitants claim that there is no city at a higher altitude in the whole peninsula. The town was built around the citadel that led people to settle in the region. Ard-Monach suffered a great deal during the War of the Temple, and although rebuilding efforts have been undertaken on its walls, there has been mention of several cases of embezzlement. Làn Mac Torrach, the Duke of Dùlan, is a fearsome warrior and a loyal cousin of the king. He does his best to rule his domain with a firm hand, and stands ready to drive back a new Gwidrite invasion. However, few people appreciate such ruthlessness, as well as the expeditious and brutal justice of a man fundamentally disconnected from his people. I can also say that the prisons of Ard-Monach are dens of pestilence and death, and the four weeks I spent there because my words did not please His Grace remain one of the most dreadful ordeals of my existence.

☪ Brégan:

The Duke of Brégan owes his title to the fact that for several generations, his lands have been the settling place of some of the best glassblowers of the peninsula, who have preferred to part from the city of Koskan. Without this remarkable craftsmanship, the vaults of the small burg of Brégan would be quite empty. As things stand, the agglomeration has become an important location in the negotiations for glass and other luxuries. The price and quality of the two local inns have been affected as one may expect.

Caiginn:

Not only has Caiginn been frequently attacked throughout the centuries by Feondas, but during the War of the Temple, the village was besieged and conquered six times by and from the Gwidrite and Talkéride armies. Most of today's inhabitants have no ties with those who lived there during the war. Indeed, the few survivors of the conflict were slaughtered by Feondas soon after the armistice. However, these new dwellers have taken the habit of inviting those who are related to the departed to come and participate in ceremonies for the Agaceann festival.

Cairns' Island:

I hate boats and I will not expand on the circumstances that led me to this island. Suffice to say I counted sixty-eight cairns here, although I did not get to explore all of it. These stacks bear no inscription, and most of them have been destroyed in the past, probably by looters eager to know which treasures may have been buried beneath the stones. From what I know, they have not found anything, but I cannot be certain of it. However, I am sure that the mere idea of lifting one of these stones filled me with vague dread; hence I did not take the issue any further. The fishermen thriving from the waters full of fish that surround the isle do not like to set foot on it, and they say that on occasion someone disappears, never to be seen again. However, no one has been able to tell me the name of a recently missing person.

Calhtair's Wood:

Once, Braen and I got lost in Calhtair's Wood, and I thank the C'maoghs, the Triad, and the One for having allowed us to make it out of there. One is easily disorientated in these groves that seem to repeat themselves endlessly, and a frequent dizziness besets the senses of a stray traveler. We have even caught glimpses of frightening shadows, which sometimes seemed to draw close enough to touch us. However, the most frightening thing is that we realized afterward that the two days and two nights we spent wandering amidst these dark groves had actually lasted more than a month. I cannot explain such a phenomenon, but I know that we did not carry food for a whole month with us, which seems to imply that in this place, time does not flow as it should. Moreover, I was not able to ascertain whether Calhtair's Wood was actually the location of a Liagcal forgotten by men. When I mentioned these events to royal advisor Algwich Dert later on, the Demorthèn kindly called me an idiot. According to him, such a legend is unfounded, and no Demorthèn would be stupid enough to go there. After centuries of fruitless efforts and the disappearance of several well-considered Demorthèn in the depths of this wood, they have given up on shedding light on this mystery, as well as on looking for the fabled lost Liagcal. This does not tell me where this legend may come from, nor what is actually happening in Calhtair's Wood.

Cape of Farewells:

The reputation of this place is well-established: few are those who attempt to cross it to venture into the Furious Ocean. By far, people prefer to travel inland to reach the western coasts of the peninsula. And seen from afar, the sea seems so wild that I can easily understand why.

Cardach:

This Osag village has been the main trading post of the tribes with the rest of the world for a long time. Many Osags from the nearby lands would rather walk the way to Cardach to trade with strangers than encourage them to go further into their country to reach Deanaidh. Since the "Osag city" is rather empty most of the year, Cardach manages to keep its status, even though the attraction of Deanaidh is bad for its business when the great annual festival takes place.

Castle of Aodreth:

This is a strange building, with a surprising architecture of gossamer towers made of white stone, balconies, and thin colonnades. Located at the top of an abrupt peak, remote from known paths, it is said to be impossible to reach, but I confess I sometimes dream about its peerless walls and towers. The next time I travel through the region, I intend to collect more information on the subject. Fanciful stories go about the origins of this castle, and some have it that its builders were not human.

Castle of the Reeds:

The Castle of the Reeds has mysterious origins, since no known lord had this place built, or has apparently inhabited it. No one knows when it was built, or why it was abandoned. Only one tower and a few walls remain. I have slept in these ruins once, and I have found remains of a camp. However, my night was troubled with nightmares and long periods of sleepless disquiet. The people of the dukedom say it is haunted, and if something dwells in this place, I am most glad I did not meet it.

Citadel of Deas:

Built during the first centuries of consolidation of Taol-Kaer, this large-sized fortress kept watch over the few existing paths leading to the uncooperative communities of the west and the Osags who refused the changes brought by the Three Brothers. It was progressively neglected these last centuries, but this is no longer the case, and works have been undertaken to return it to its former glory. Indeed, the Osags do not appreciate that the capital city has opened up to the followers of the Temple and to the adepts of Magientist theories. The tribal lands have always been the most autonomous region of the kingdom of Taol-Kaer, and the crown seems to consider that some tribes might take direct action against the emissaries of the king or those who seem too supportive of the "thralls of the Continental abominations".

☪ Còmhlan:

The greatest of the peninsula's circles of ritual stones, Còmhlan has always been under the control of the Osag Demorthèn. Sometimes, after various trials, they accept a foreign Demorthèn on the Tsioghair, but as far as I know, no bard or Varigal that is not part of the tribes has ever been authorized to get close to this Liagcal. Unfortunately, I have no reliable description of the place, which has at times been described to me as a perfect circle of menhirs of matchless size or, on the contrary, as a series of several concentric circles of ritual stones.

☪ Deanaidh:

Usually, Deanaidh is only inhabited by about a thousand people, but once a year, the main Osag clans organize a fair there, and the population increases tenfold for two weeks. During this fair, various alliances are made, unions are celebrated, and the clan chiefs who attend it take this opportunity to talk about important matters privately. The locals have gotten rich enough to hire mercenaries who help them protect the town the rest of the year. The only real city of the Lands of Dèas is therefore a unique place in the Osag territory, since it permanently houses a high proportion of foreigners skilled in fighting.

The relations between the mercenaries and the tribes are rather neutral, but marriages are celebrated every now and then between foreigners and Osags. Indeed, people banished from tribes for one reason or another come more and more often to Deanaidh to live off foreigners, or to become guides, or even mercenaries.

☪ Dearg:

This miners' village is prosperous and has more than half a thousand inhabitants. They are generally quite welcoming, and although its fare is nothing extraordinary, I must mention the Red Dog Inn for its lively nights and its local beer, which I must say is quite interesting.

☪ Faol Ròd:

Thrice I have crossed the "Wolf's Breach" in the course of my travels; a narrow pass amidst almost vertical slopes. Never have I come across the legendary monster; a giant wolf covered with barbs, nor have I found any proof of its existence, apart from the tale explaining that every twenty years, a hero must sacrifice him or herself to appease the monster and die fighting it. I was given the names of several of these heroes and their legends were narrated to me, but of the cursed wolf itself, no trace.

☪ Fearil:

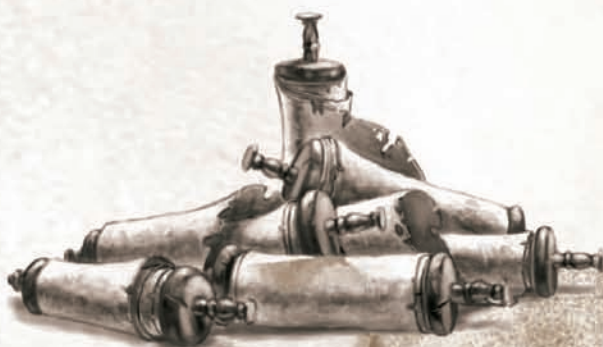
A pleasant village to stop at on one's way from Gwidre to Taol-Kaer. The Fortress of Smiorail has hardly been used since the War of the Temple, but a reduced garrison of Hilderins still lives here. The community essentially lives off woodcutting, and my contacts with the inhabitants were most often rather cordial.

☪ Fools' Spring:

I was advised not to drink from it, since those who do turn mad, or fall into a coma until death comes. However, I took some water from this spring and had it sent to an alchemist friend in Kalvernach. He replied that it was perfectly healthy, and held no particular property... which does not explain why no bird or other animal from Cairns' Island ever drinks from it.

☪ Frendian:

For a long time, Frendian has been considered a remarkably peaceful place. I have been there four times since I was a bard, and I also was surprised by how few fortifications and defenses there were. Apart from the brigands, whom the seasoned warriors of the Countess of Frendian have always driven back successfully, there is apparently no threat weighing on this quiet village. This makes the rumors I have recently heard all the more shocking. Several atrocious crimes were committed in the surroundings, including the death of the local Demorthèn who was, it is said, dismembered. An emissary of the king is even rumored to have disappeared under strange circumstances at about the same time. I dare not mention the even crazier stories I have heard, but as soon as I have the possibility, I intend to go there and learn more.



Great Beaches:

The Gaineamh provide most of the sand used by the glassworkers of the peninsula, particularly those from the south and east. These beaches are crossed thanks to the amazing sailwagons invented in Seòl, and this is a wonderfully unforgettable experience. However, the crews carefully search the sand around them when they stop to camp. Eye-eating crabs and sand snakes are the most representative of the hostile creatures that burrow under the dunes or in the reef's shallow water.

Hòb's Cape:

Out of curiosity, I went to the extreme outcrop of the peninsula, where the Tarish are said to have arrived from the sea a long time ago. Truth be told, and in spite of the many legends one can hear here and there, there is nothing to see there except for the raging waters of the Cape of Farewells. Faraway, one can also make out the gloomy rocks called the Wreckers when weather allows, which is rare. The ground is barren, swept by the sea wind, and there are only a handful of bays amidst reefs and cliffs. I saw no vestige indicating settlement of any kind. Should the ancient Tarish have really landed there, they did not stay for long, which is understandable. When one looks around from Hòb's Cape, one easily gets the feeling of being stranded at the edge of the world.

Howling Chasms:

It is undeniable that the strange noises that regularly emerge from these deep abysses are not of natural origin. When the wind blows strongly enough, they can be heard from miles around, and they are often reminiscent of truly disquieting and fearsome howls. It would take heavy climbing gear and some experience of mountain traveling to dare climb down the mysterious depths of the Howling Chasms. If someone has done so in the past, no one ever learned of it.

Iolach:

The southernmost fishing port of the peninsula according to the registers of Osta-Baille, Iolach is a village so remote that few people know of its existence. It is a place where a few misfits and runaway criminals have settled, and where I have run into some trouble which cost me a doublet, a good dagger, and a few nasty scars. Those who think Iolach to still be too civilized for their tastes can settle in the nearby grottoes, populated with rather aggressive undesirables... or they can go to Hòb's Cape, if solitude and wind seem better to them. It seems that the Bramble knights have tried to protect Iolach in the past, since the ruins of one of their forts can be found there. It is now inhabited by a few destitute people, and its contents have certainly been long since spread between the houses of the burg.

Koskan:

A small city, particularly ill-famed and corrupted, which mainly subsists thanks to the sailwagons coming from the east, and various commercial activities. The lord of Koskan is known for his depravity, and for the fact that he feels no interest for what is happening outside his palace, as long as it does not disturb those he favors. In Koskan, one can find everything without too much difficulty if one pays the right price. One can also find a lot of trouble—for free. Leagues and cartels of petty criminals thrive here, from groups of gangsters attacking passersby to burglars, smugglers, assassins, and sellswords. However, most of them make sure to stay clear of the “Brotherhood”. It is a powerful guild of slavers that is practically part of the high society, but works like some kind of fraternity, with many strange initiation rites and codenames given to their members. I cannot reveal more on the subject, since anyone asking questions about the Brotherhood is quickly invited to go away or keep quiet. From time to time, a leading citizen or gangster disappears without a trace. People talk of clandestine mines, or sometimes of black magic. One thing that is certain is that the Brotherhood is amazingly apt at taking advantage of rumor and fear in order to be left alone.

Kaer Daegis:

A quite important burg whose woodwork is famed in the region, particularly in Kel Loar. The huge Magientist machinery set not far from the outer wall easily catches the eye. Its builder is doing his best to convince the inhabitants of the benefits that his science can bring.

Kel Loar:

In spite of the Feond attack twenty years ago, the capital city of Kel Loar's dukedom remains a city famed for its many books, where many cultured individuals have settled. Among them are several very dear friends, but also some of my most virulent detractors. Indeed, the evenings of Kel Loar's society are frequently animated by vigorous debates between prominent scholars and those who support opposed positions. The reputation of some strong minds of the peninsula grew or was crushed following some of the most memorable disputes that took place in Kel Loar. To be frank, and although some people (you know the ones) might disagree, most of the “intellectuals” of Kel Loar are nothing more than parasites much more skilled in the art of words than in logic, science, history, or even metaphysics. The books of the ducal library, and many private collections, are for the great majority of undeniable interest, but it is obvious that those who quote them without rhyme or reason have, for the most part, never read them.

Leacach:

Sheep and Caernides favor the surroundings of this village, and the results on the quality of their wool are visible. The clothiers proved skillful enough for their reputation to be known in the whole peninsula, and they eventually formed a guild, which actually holds more power in Leacach than the local lord. Close to two thirds of the village's adults work in weaving and carding workshops, owned by five particularly wealthy families. Their rivalry is fierce, although they make common cause against strangers. Of notice, they have so far refused every offer made by Magientists to install Flux-powered looms.

Lines of Tùrsal:

The Demorthèn of the west still gather in this remarkable place for the Tsioghair. Around the circle of ritual stones, the famous lines form long alignments of menhirs engraved with Ogham praising the might of the Triad. I doubt that the legend claiming to explain their origin is founded, but it is interesting enough to be mentioned: the hundreds of aligned stones are said to actually be an army petrified during the Aergewin. But whose army? And petrified by what? It is hard to tell, considering there are at least four different versions of this tale, the origins of which are unclear to say the least.

Llewellen:

The capital city of the dukedom of Salann Tir is a rather cheerless and even gloomy place; a small fishing port protected by an old castle on the cliffside, populated with sober and uncommunicative people. It only takes a few minutes of walking to reach the Western Swamps, which makes the landscape even more depressing. In spite of its remoteness and poverty, Llewellen and its lord remain among the most faithful supporters of the king. Moreover, old Duke Athelstan Mac Tremen and his young bride Aīnlis are simple yet well-mannered hosts. However, the duke has granted to the Temple the authorization to build an abbey in Llewellen, and his wife was implicated in an incident with Hilderin knights several years ago. Thus the crown judged it useful to send the old duke a governor; an emissary whose job is to advise him in various domains. Tensions between the king's envoy and the people of Llewellen are underlying but do exist.

Loch Varn:

The surroundings of this village are affected by a strange phenomenon called “Brown Earth”, which gives a strange aspect and an unpleasant smell to vegetables, although they remain edible. A cult devoted to Gluta, the spirit of the swamps, thrives in Loch Varn under the direction of Demorthèn Deorn. He turns out to be very hostile against anything that seems to contradict the local beliefs or his influence.

Louarn:

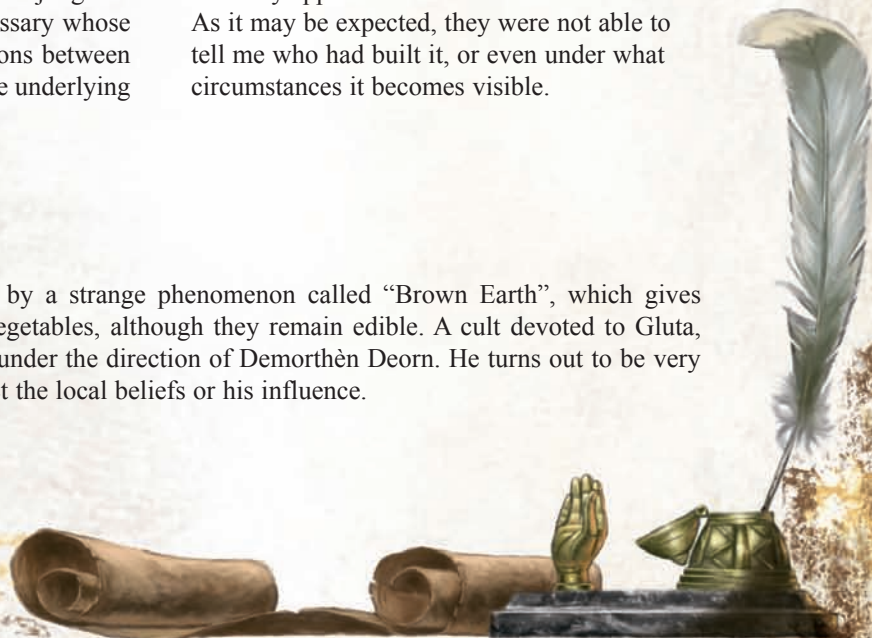
Although it is of small size, this village controls iron deposits of excellent quality. Not enough of it is produced for exportation, but it still gives the village an ascendancy that is not far from equaling the power of Llewellen, the capital city of the dukedom. Young Maela Mac Loarans, a descendant of a comrade at arms of the Three Brothers, presides over the council leading Louarn. She has to reckon with the influence of Demorthèn Galenor, a charismatic although rather uncompromising man in his opinions. However, in recent days, Louarn has been housing four Bramble knights in a fortified house. Most of the time, they manage to moderate the excesses of the Demorthèn.

Melwan:

The last of the Mac Lyrs, an old and prestigious line of warriors of high fame, rules over this small village that essentially lives off of the mining of the nearby metal deposits. However, Melwan saw its prominence diminish somewhat as the neighboring vale's communities, Dearth and Fearil, rose to fame. My one and only stay in the region made me guess at a certain tension between Wailen, the local Demorthèn, and the representatives of the lordly family. This is also the village in which a young Varigal I traveled with in Reizh, Yldiane, was born.

Mist Bridge:

Intrigued by the stories about the disappearance of Lord Maorich de Lorch, I spent a long time searching for this fantastic bridge. I did not find it, and I am actually surprised that this construction described as “titanic” could exist, since there is no road other than the one we took in this part of the Lands of Dêas where Maorich disappeared. I could almost believe that it is merely an invention crafted by the lone survivor of the lost convoy. However, several Osags confirmed that they had also heard about this bridge, although they had not seen it with their own eyes. According to them, it is an enchanted vestige that only appears under certain circumstances. As it may be expected, they were not able to tell me who had built it, or even under what circumstances it becomes visible.



Mùdan:

For travelers, the only noteworthy aspect of this mountain village is that the local Demorthèn is particularly influential and does not hide the distrust—I could even say contempt—he feels toward strangers. I have personally been rather poorly welcomed, in spite of my bard status.

Mòrail Peak:

Considered as the highest summit of Taol-Kaer, the Mòrail was thus named because its matchless thin shape can be seen from afar. It sometimes happens that clouds gather close to the top and huddle, forming a huge belt orbiting around the peak before slowly drifting apart.

Osta-Baille:

The original city is only visible on a few paintings dating from before the reconstruction initiated by Magientist Athaontú. Although the capital of Taol-Kaer is a most splendid city, the surrounding landscape is what truly emphasizes its beauty, particularly the magnificent Lake of Bân. Like Baldh-Ruoch, Osta-Baille was built on twin mountains, but apart from that, they have little in common. Osta-Baille holds many more examples of our traditional architecture than the Reizhite capital city, and the names of the important squares or streets are often reminders of the kingdom's history. Also, the Magientists had to close their only university twelve years ago, following a tragic accident. The building is still a place of rather ambiguous reputation, but the Magientists have suffered no other setback than having to close it. They are still listened to, and as many people use the great elevators invented by Athaontú as before.

Ostreach:

It is a short distance away from this village that King Hild was grievously wounded during his campaigns against the Feondas. Since then, one of the main chapterhouses of the Hilderin knights has been built in Ostreach. Their fortress houses more than a hundred seasoned knights, as well as many Breithans and Osfeis. Many are those who wish to enter the order and would rather risk the journey to Ostreach than simply travel to the motherhouse.

Pass of Brorann:

There is no other way to go from Taol-Kaer to the fortress of Aelwyd Saogh. It is said to be haunted by the specter of King Maelvon and his knights since their disappearance in 360. The true crown of Taol-Kaer is said to be buried somewhere there. Needless to say, countless treasure hunters and reckless knights have undertaken the quest for this exceptional object. So far, while no one has ever been able to find anything, many are those who have died because of the perils of the mountain... or something else.

Pass of Lochre:

Often snowbound, it is maintained at a high cost because of its strategic importance. Indeed, it makes for the quickest way to go from the great southern cities of Taol-Kaer to the dukedom of Tulg, the western coast, and the littoral of Gwidre. Ceirane and I almost fell prey to a Feond there, a few weeks after she began to work for me as a guide. She demonstrated her talents on this occasion, even though I broke my arm and we lost our Caernide. The Feond attacked us soon after nightfall and we waited for dawn, perched on a rocky promontory, looking out for the monster through darkness and rain. We never saw it clearly, but it was larger than a horse and left very impressive prints. Most fortunately for us, he appreciated neither climbing, nor daylight.

Pass of Oerdh:

The main highlight of the spectacular sight from this passageway is the strange Castle of Aodreth, which seems to dominate the surroundings; a vision both wonderful and awe-inspiring. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a way leading from this pass to the strange construction.

River Klaedhin:

Navigable from Tuaille to Osta-Baille, its flow is rather weak compared to the other rivers of Tri-Kazel, and those who can afford it generally prefer to sail down the Klaedhin rather than follow the road to the coast.

Ruel's Crossroads:

The ritual stone that stands at this place is supposed to mark the tomb of the Demorthèn Ruel, who is said to have died fighting a great Feond “taller than treetops”, according to the tale. However, Ruel the Subtle is mentioned in many stories of old, which have often been turned into parables intended to edify the people and enlighten them. Thus, it is not certain that the hero died here, or even that he truly existed.

Sad Hills:

The tales mentioning communities wiped out by cold and Feondas during the Ice Era are not wrong. I have studied ancient maps of the region, and it was formerly populated with several important villages. Mention is now made of prospectors who still come from Koskan to gather iron and copper from the soil of the Buidh Cuideamm, but I am afraid they are actually graverobbers and other types of scoundrels. At any rate, I got into trouble with such individuals, from whom I barely escaped. My only consolation is that fearsome Feondas are rumored to have made some of the ruins their dens, which must make such a criminal endeavor dangerous.

Seòl:

If, in the ancient tongue, Seòl simply means “sail”, it is certainly because its founders were bolder than most of those who lived near the shores of the Sea of Shrouds. Many traces of the importance of that city can be found in the first exchanges that took place with the other eastern ports of Tri-Kazel. It stood to reason that the sovereigns of Taol-Kaer made it the capital city of a dukedom. However, Seòl is also known for its famous sailwagons, which make it possible to cross the Great Beaches at a swift pace. Indeed, the prestige of sailwagon crews has even become on a par with that of sailors, and the two fraternities indulge in endless competitions, most of which are of a friendly nature. Still, sometimes, there are more vicious rivalries which end with a bloodbath. Generally speaking, the natives of the dukedom, particularly those from the town of Seòl, are freethinking and enterprising people, eager to outdo themselves.

Smàrag:

Since he became Duke of Gorm, young Preden Blonag has slowly tightened his fist on all the lands he is the sovereign of. The capital city of his dukedom is a rather grim place, where people strive to work with diligence and inconspicuousness. The locals seem both discontent and frightened by their lord, and even though the city has been on the way to prosperity for the last three years, it remains dirty and riddled with inequalities. I had been in Smàrag when Preden's father was still alive, and I remember a fat young man, capricious and lustful. It seems that he did not improve, if credit is to be given to the frankly disgusting stories I have been confidently told. However, I cannot really fathom how such a perverse man can exercise such authority. He seems irresolute, dissolute, and egotistical, which probably means that there are people in his entourage who manipulate him by satisfying his desires. I had no wish to meet the young duke, and did not stay in his lands for long.

Sunken Forest:

It is hard to collect wood here, since the ground is spongy due to the proximity of the Ahman Glas, the Gray Bogs. Added to the sight of strangely-shaped trees, half-hidden by frequent mists, the very real presence of a great number of Feondas makes the place as frightening as it is dangerous.

Terkhên:

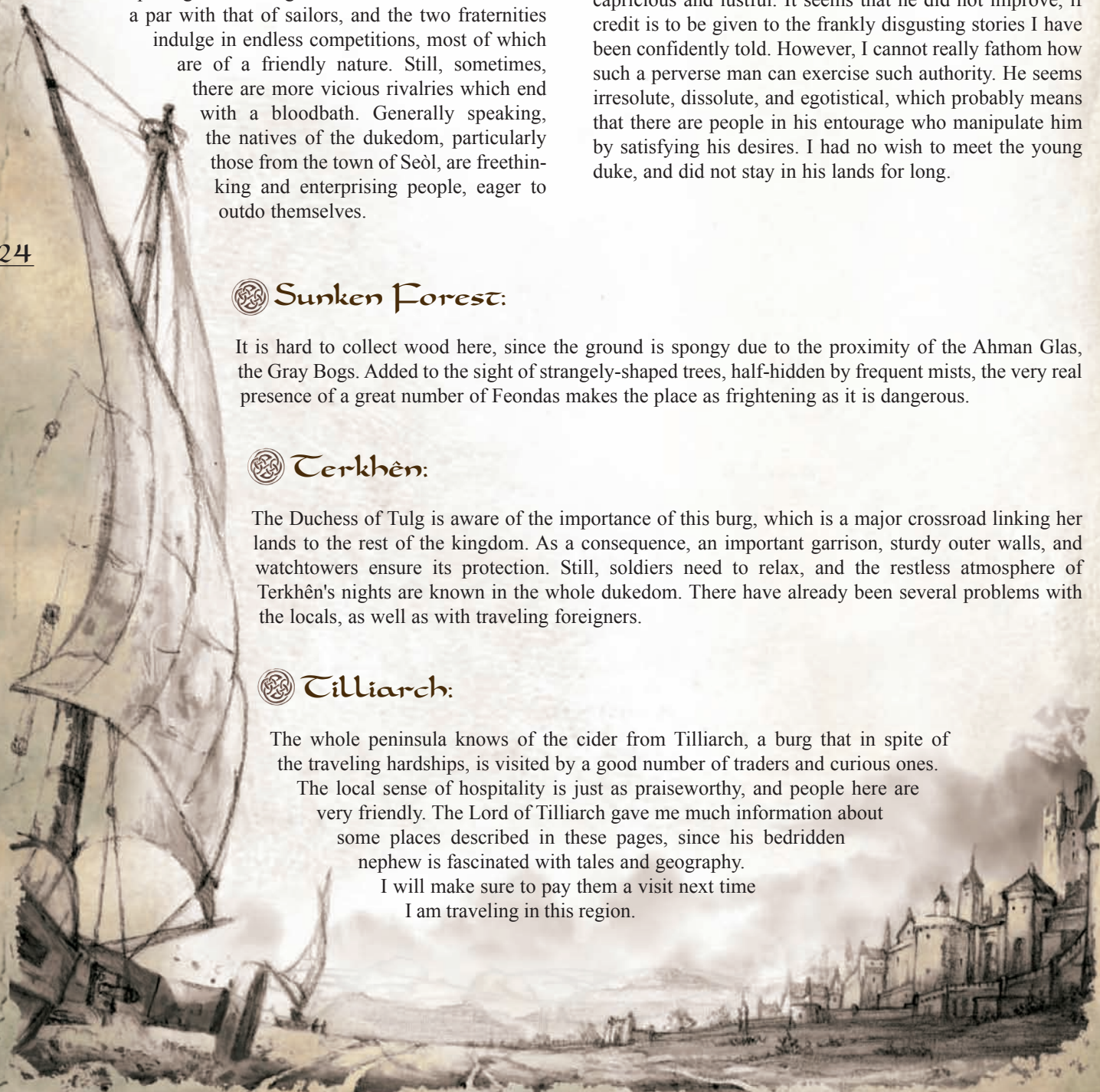
The Duchess of Tulg is aware of the importance of this burg, which is a major crossroad linking her lands to the rest of the kingdom. As a consequence, an important garrison, sturdy outer walls, and watchtowers ensure its protection. Still, soldiers need to relax, and the restless atmosphere of Terkhên's nights are known in the whole dukedom. There have already been several problems with the locals, as well as with traveling foreigners.

Tilliarch:

The whole peninsula knows of the cider from Tilliarch, a burg that in spite of the traveling hardships, is visited by a good number of traders and curious ones.

The local sense of hospitality is just as praiseworthy, and people here are very friendly. The Lord of Tilliarch gave me much information about some places described in these pages, since his bedridden nephew is fascinated with tales and geography.

I will make sure to pay them a visit next time
I am traveling in this region.



Tuaille:

I suppose that at the time Tuaille was built, the Gray Bogs were probably less gloomy, and were certainly not as plagued by Feondas. The city on stilts therefore benefited from the incredibly diverse vegetation of the marshes, as well as from the waters full of fish on the estuary of the Klaedhin. In spite of the hardships of history, it prospered as a capital city until the crown moved to Osta-Baille, one hundred and fifty years ago. Only fools do not know that the people and the nobility of Tuaille have never forgiven this offense to the king's line, and the relations between the dukedom and the crown have remained rather cold since then. I have heard all sorts of rumors in the taverns of Tuaille, and if half of them are to be trusted, it means that the entire town is teeming with conspiracies... against the crown, but also against other leading citizens, whom their rivals would be all too happy to denounce to the Hilderin knights. An old friend in Osta-Baille let me know that if the War of the Temple had not dealt such hard blows to the state finances and the populations of the kingdom, the father of King Erald would probably have given the order to militarily occupy the dukedom.

The current sovereign is more reasonable, or more wary of the power of the kingdom of Gwidre.

Tulg-Naomh:

The famous "Stairway City", which is the heart of the dukedom of Tulg, is a port town full of contrast, with the richness of the districts located on the higher steps on one side, and the poverty of the district of the fishermen who live below on the other side. There are said to be even drearier places, where impoverished people live in caves dug in the heart of the stairs. The dukedom has plenty of mineral resources and trees, which ensure comfortable income from trade, through water as well as through land. Tulg-Naomh and its dukedom were among the Talkéride territories that suffered the most from the War of the Temple.

However, Tulg-Naomh's powerful have always been pragmatic people, and business has started anew with Gwidre. The prosperity of the city, and the fact that it had to fight the Gwidrites without much support from Osta-Baille, stirred some thirst for independence. Princess Cortessa Mac Lichorl, Duchess of Tulg and younger sister of the queen, is known to be loyal to the crown, but it seems she has few supporters within her own castle.

Wreckers

Western Swamps:

The salt of these humid lands is the only real resource that the dukedom of Salann Tir manages to export in significant amounts. Apart from the old mines of Kalvernach, the Western Swamps constitute the main salt deposit of the peninsula, and their production is essentially sold in the Lands of Dêas, the dukedom of Tulg, and the south of Gwidre. After my stay in Llewellen, Duke Athelstan insisted on having me escorted through his domains, and I learned thereafter that he and his lady had feared for my life. Indeed, one of the main brigands of the region, Sir Jerryl of the Swamps, seems

to nurture excessive hatred against every one of those who compose songs or poems.



Wreckers:

I know of the Wreckers only what fishermen say about them, and even they are not eager to learn more. These are desolate rocky islets, against which an unlucky ship trying to navigate through the Cape of Farewells sometimes smashes. There is nothing here apart from wind and rain. However, Ceirane claims that one of her uncles who lives in Iolach has heard sailors talk about strange lights coming from the Wreckers.

Yellow Hills:

Should there be gold in these hills, since some claim this is where their name comes from, I doubt that anyone will ever find it; even the few streams are often choked by all the sand that the southern wind carries there in great clouds. I did not linger in the Buidh Meall, but I can assure that no one lives there except for a few half-deranged prospectors.



Other Places

Aelwyd Saogh:

Aelwyd Saogh has remained abandoned since the fateful winter of 360, during which King Maelvon of Taol-Kaer and his escort perished as they were heading for the great citadel founded by the Three Brothers. The roads that allowed the sovereigns of the three kingdoms to reunite there have been left to the ravages of the elements. Now no one ventures there, apart from a few fools who believe that the citadel may still hold ancient treasures, or desperate travelers who think they can cross the mountain through these forgotten passes. Aelwyd Saogh must be no more than a ruin, completely inhabitable and populated with the ghosts of idiots who made it this far to die there, alone in the cold.

Asgeamar Mountains:

A handful of Reizhite communities survive painfully in the mountains that separate the peninsula from the Continent. The few travelers that come from here say that the mountains stretch as far as the eye can see, and that they are vaster than Tri-Kazel. They can be seen from afar, and their summits seem almost gigantic when compared to our mountains'.

Ashen Archipelago:

It was described to me as a group of isolated islets and peaks, three of which are said to be volcanoes. The ash they belch out is sometimes collected by the lords of Gwidre to fertilize the land, but only those who already own considerable riches can finance such expeditions. Obviously, no one inhabits these desolated rocks.

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Cliffs of No Return:

They are said to be imposing and impassable. Sailing through the ill-famed Sea of Shrouds to go and check that myself holds no appeal to me, so someone else will have to show bravery on this precise point. Still, many stop at nothing to venture into the mythic Continent.

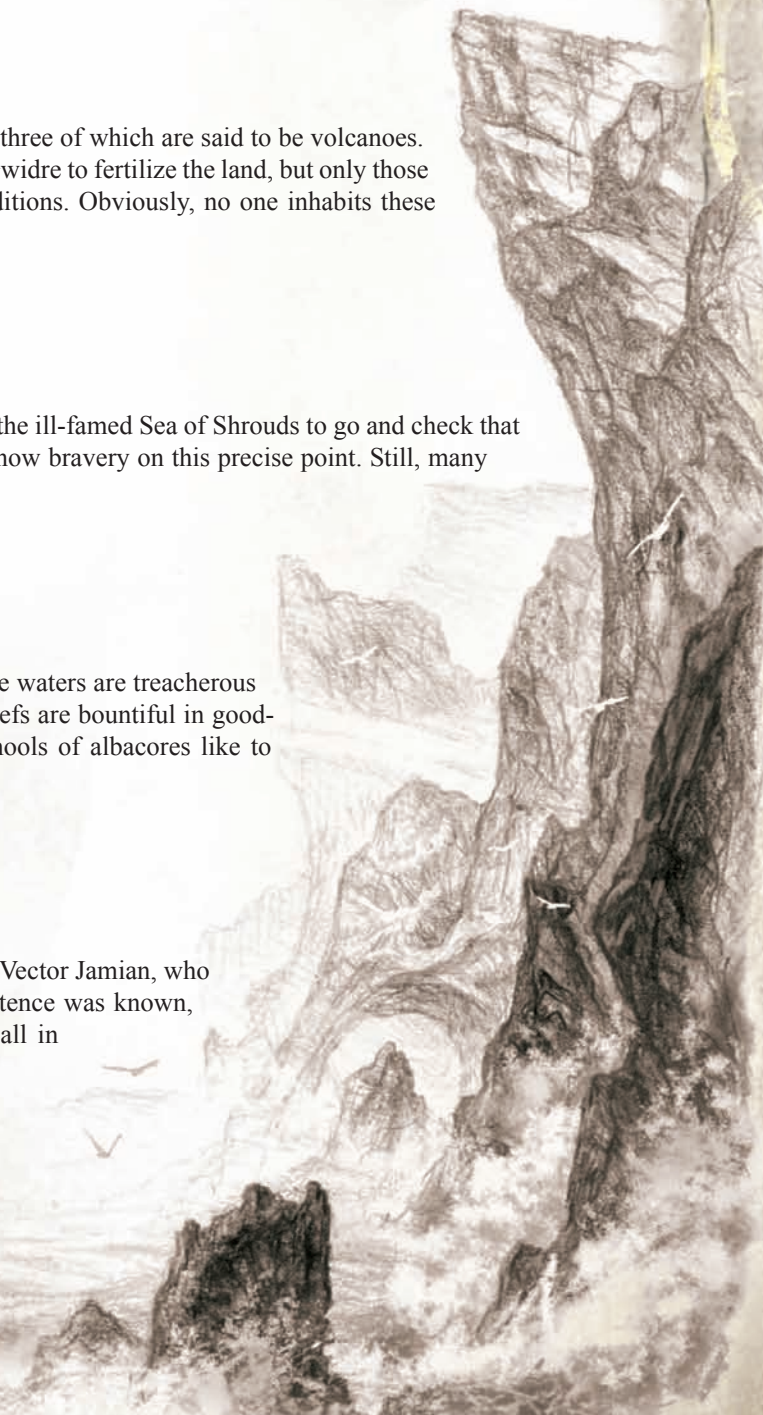
Cliffs of Sorrows:

They are thus named by the sailors of Reizh and Gwidre, since waters are treacherous there and disasters are many. However, some of the nearby reefs are bountiful in good-sized seashells and oysters. Also, particularly impressive schools of albacores like to swim there.

Dullfrost:

This desolated isle is indeed mentioned in the travel diaries of Vector Jamian, who seems to have been the first to land there. Ever since its existence was known, some sailors say they have seen ships from the Continent call in there, just to stock up on fresh water. Another less fanciful rumor mentions the construction of a Reizhite outpost during the War of the Temple, which is still used today by bandits. The site is known to be most grim, and an isolated fortress could certainly have done nothing if forces from the Great Theocracy had tried to attack the coasts of Reizh.

Cliffs of Sorrows



Furious Ocean:

With the exception of a few expeditions toward the nearby isles such as Calvary or the Ashen Archipelago, the seafarers of the Furious Ocean stubbornly sail as close to the coasts as possible. The miraculous arrival of the ship of Jamian the missionary did not bring them to change their habits, even among those whose faith in the One is great. They are persuaded that countless monsters, as well as the ghosts of all those who have offended the spirits by setting sail without making the appropriate offerings, live just beyond the horizon; that the raging waters and winds are the manifestation of their wrath, and that those who taunt them by sailing too far into the sea are torn apart before being forced to join them. Although it is commonly believed that the Tarish have crossed the sea, hailing from a hypothetical faraway western land, the wandering people of Tri-Kazel curiously refuse to talk about such a voyage. Maybe because according to ancient tales, on their arrival in Tri-Kazel, some Tarish were slaughtered by superstitious people, who thought they were dealing with dead people back from the open sea. Many are those—and I share their opinion—who think that the Tarish actually know much about the Furious Ocean, and that they would rather be careful and not share this knowledge in order to avoid new demonstrations of such stupid behavior.

Mòr Forsair:

The main forest of the peninsula covers almost half of the arable ground of the east and south. No one has ever been able to map its depths with accuracy. I can affirm that some of the countless stories mentioning spirits or fabulous animals living in the heart of Mòr Forsair are truthful. Unfortunately, I can also corroborate that it is inhabited by many Feondas. The human settlements of the great forest are often precarious, and even the inhabitants of those that have been built generations ago maintain wary awareness.

Mòr Roimh:

The great chain forming the main part of Tri-Kazel's relief is pierced with roads and passes, most of which can hardly be used during winter. Traveling is often difficult once one leaves the most used roads, and even those are not devoid of dangers. As one goes deeper into the heart of the mountains, the chasms, cliffs, and sheer drops become increasingly frequent, making the journey even more complicated.

River Kreizhdour:

It is used as a natural border between Gwidre and Taol-Kaer. Although it is navigable, few boats sail it because of the infrequent border skirmishes since the War of the Temple. However, proof has recently been made that most of these attacks were not carried out by the border communities, but by a well-organized band of brigands willing to take advantage of the local antagonisms.

River Tealderoth:

This large stream marks the border between Reizh and Taol-Kaer. The Alliance Bridge is the most convenient way to cross it to reach Kel Loar. It is said that sometimes, someone disappears near the mouth of the river or on its banks, and people generally blame sirens, legendary monsters with a bewitching voice. However, neither the Reizhite troops, nor the Hilderin knights, nor the inhabitants of the nearby village have ever killed one of these creatures in living memory.

Sea of Shrouds:

Even though it is less dangerous than the Furious Ocean, this sea is feared by seafarers and its name bears witness to the many lives it has engulfed. However, from Tuaille, Koskan, Smàrag, Seòl, Kel Loar, or Ear Caladh, fishermen and trading boats keep braving its waters. The Sea of Shrouds is also the home of monsters of a most often legendary nature, from the tentacled Krakens to the cloud-like jellyfishes, and to the albatrosses that are supposed to carry away the souls of the deceased according to the beliefs of the people of Seòl and Koskan. Only the dolphins are considered as friends on the waters of the Sea of Shrouds, and sailors rejoice when these strange animals playfully follow their ships.

Sighing Forest:

Often called “Mourning Forest” by the locals, it has witnessed a great many bloody skirmishes during the War of the Temple. Also, the villages on both sides of the border fight bitterly over its hunting resources, perpetuating ancestral hatred.

Tri-Sweszörs:

“The Three Sisters Archipelago”, the origin of which name is long-lost, is located some distance into the Sea of Shrouds, and numbers three isles and a few islets. I have little love for the sea, so I have never set foot there. People say that the Three Sisters have always been populated with unwelcoming communities of a primitive nature. Others have it that a flourishing culture thrives there. There are also some who claim that the most radical Reizhite Demorthèn have taken exile there and perform grim rites. Finally and obviously, many are those who believe that they are simply deserted, or that the humans who lived there have been slaughtered by Feondas that now dance on the ruins of their cities. Still, I hold hope of managing to find reliable information about them one day.



The Lines of Tùrsal



he high moors of Tùrsal dominate the salty Western Swamps and the eerie Sunken Forest. This vast heath is almost entirely devoid of human presence, and is mostly covered with wild grass, the color of which varies according to the season. The hues change, and during summer, patches of mauve briars and yellow junipers can be seen from afar, while the dark green of the lone yews offers a contrast with the many stones covered with lichen of varied colors: it ranges from blue to yellow, including such subtle shades as ocher or rust. The sacred nature of this place inspires reverent fear in the local population and to Varigals, which makes the Lines of Tùrsal a seldom-frequented place outside of the yearly Tsioghair.

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The Tsioghair

Making the journey to the Tsioghair alone is a test commonly given to Ionnthén that are about to be dubbed Demorthén by their elders. It is a way of recalling the ancient tradition of wandering for the keeper of the spirits. On such an occasion, the Ionnthén are often watched from afar by their masters, unless the mentors ask another Demorthén to do it secretly. The purpose is to observe how the candidates will behave when they think themselves alone and left to themselves. Will they be able to identify and respect sacred places? Will they behave in accordance with the Demorthén ethics? Will they show wisdom and restraint? During the ancient times, it seems that such a period of observation could result in the murder of unworthy Ionnthén, either through an auspicious accident, or as a cleansing sacrifice.

When the Ionnthén finally reach Tùrsal, they find transient villages of tents, complete with colored flags, gatherings, discussions and debates, as well as a whole set of logistics to provide food and sleeping accommodations to all these people. Since Demorthén may be too busy to take care of such mundane tasks, many come with a retainer, or hire one in Louarn or Deanaidh. Each year, journeymen come to assist with the practical organization of the gathering. Merchants also come, taking this opportunity to hold a fair, some respectful distance away from the sacred stones. Apart from the presence of these people interested in the pecuniary repercussions of the Tsioghair, a good number of pilgrims come here to seek advice and remedies. Crippled or ill people come this far, led by the hope that somewhere in the gathering, a Demorthén will hold an Ogham able to cure them... With such insistent requests, it is necessary to have a force to make sure that the sacred part of Tùrsal—the famous Lines—remains exclusively dedicated to spiritual business. These enforcers have much to do, since thieves—including Osag exiles from Deanaidh—are also attracted to such a bustle by the prospect of easy gains. The Demorthén of the Tsioghair of Tùrsal purposefully claim that they wish to set themselves apart from those of Fairean Ear, in Reizh, by not meddling in politics. The lords of Taol-Kaer, particularly the dukes, who know how important the opinion of the spiritual guides is, have taken the habit of sending spies each year, in order to be kept informed of the trends and changes.

New Demorthén will always be closely watched. Do they seem decided to dedicate themselves exclusively to the spirits? Do they intend to get involved with a political faction? Will they research some mysteries? Do they have affinities or enmities with a particular lord?

One's first Tsioghair as a Demorthèn is concluded with a confrontation in front of a jury of peers. The aspiring Demorthèn are questioned on their knowledge of the spirits, the legends, the creation of the world, the ethics... Not-so-coincidentally, the subjects raised are generally connected to the hardships met by the soon-to-be Demorthèn during their journey. Finally, the Demorthèn who watched the traveling Ionnthèn are asked for their opinions, and they solemnly confirm the worthiness of their new peers...



The Other Liagcals

There were originally four of these sacred sites: a Northern one, an Eastern one, a Southern one, and finally a Western one. In the past, one of these Liagcals has been destroyed, and some people have it that only the restoration of these four points of balance could possibly end, or at least considerably weaken, the threat constituted by Feondas. Moreover, according to some legends, there exists a fifth Liagcal, which is now lost: Calhtair's Wood.

Broken Stones

Destroyed during a war, the Northern Liagcal has become a cursed place, whose surroundings have been marked with Stermerks—the trademark signs of the Varigals—signaling a Haunting. When the weather is foggy, the adepts of the Temple, particularly if they are isolated, are at risk of falling prey to a strange call; a muffled beckoning threatening to take them away on a journey without return. An occultist arrested by Sigires in this region protested that he knew what was happening; talking of a strange psychical phenomenon that he dubbed Bogeyman, which made him the subject of ridicule. He persuaded them to let him spend only one night outside with one of them; the problem would then be solved. At dawn, the Sigire had disappeared, as had the occultist, but the latter actually seems to have managed to flee to Reizh.

Fairean Ear

A majestic place, the Eastern Viewpoint offers a striking vision in the morning, when sunlight glistens on the site's altar of natural rock. However, in spite of the poetic aspect of the place, it is hard to forget that it is now mainly a place of political scheming between Reizhite Demorthèn. Some of them remain faithful to the crown out of principle, and try to find a middle ground with the Magientists, while the others are convinced that the kingdom is going astray, and that they must thus ally with the King's opponents. Finally, some of them use the prestige of their status as a means to find clever arrangements with the Osag rebels, the rulers of the Emerald Crescent, and the royal tradition at the same time.

The fiercest upholders of the traditions, despising political considerations, have shunned the Tsioghair of Fairean Ear to organize a new one on the island of Tir na Loch. There, in a more traditionalist atmosphere—some would say authentic—they strive to construct a new Eastern Liagcal. The Three Sisters Archipelago is about to become a place of pilgrimage for all those who oppose modern decadence, whether from the Magientists or from the adepts of the Temple. Their religious rigor and the radical nature of their approach to social and political questions win over some populations that feel oppressed by a corrupted feudal power, or by the imposition of a cultural identity they feel no connection with.

Còmhlan

Located in the Lands of Dèas and rarely visited by strangers, the Southern Liagcal, Còmhlan, is a vast gathering of stone circles where only Demorthèn go. There are also smaller sites close-by, mostly mounds used as necropolises for the local elite. For the Osags, Còmhlan has always been the one and only Liagcal in the south of the peninsula, but according to some, particularly bards, such is not the case. This site would have actually been erected after the loss of the first and true Southern Liagcal; the one located in Calhtair's Wood. Mentioning such a subject in front of an Osag Demorthèn is perceived as a serious insult.

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Calhtair's Wood

It is said that whoever ventures into this forest is at risk of getting lost in a strange mist that disorients travelers. Finding one's way here requires a Difficult (17) Travel or Orientation roll. A Varigal may have the surprise of finding some time-worn Stermerks; namely the Sacred, Haunting, and Fangs ones. Closer examination will reveal that the symbols related to the sacredness of some places are more ancient than the other two. The Sacred notion generally applies to the ritual stones of the Demorthèn or to the Cinthareids, and such sites are normally never qualified as being Haunted... Could this be a clue to understanding the disappearance of the mythical Southern Liagcal? For once, Demorthèn and occultists could share a common interest in solving this mystery. If what is said is true, and a few days in this wood are equal to several weeks outside, this observation could provide food for thought for occultists regarding the possibility of different realities that are nevertheless connected.

However, people wanting to explore such places and times must steel their resolve... On the first day, an Easy (8) Mental Resistance roll must be made. On each subsequent day, the Difficulty increases by 1, and confusion may quickly take hold of the most fragile minds. There are certainly answers in the heart of the wood... but what if it is a one-way journey?

Ashen Yard

For a long time, there was only a promontory looming toward the sea, facing the islets of the Ashen Archipelago. At night, the lava of ever-erupting volcanoes cast a reddish glow, which was reflected in the low clouds and dark sea. In the old beliefs, fire is associated with evil, destructive spirits. Dangerous—if not downright deadly—ash storms strengthened this idea and drove humans and animals away from these shores, seemingly for good. However, soon after the War of the Temple, a pair of Magientists studied the region, feeling that its strangeness must hide natural and scientific treasures. Since ancient customary laws still valid throughout the whole peninsula allow anyone to take possession of a territory left unused for several years, it was not very difficult to settle without opposition on this neglected parcel of land. A secret research base, financed by their Mineralist lodge, was established, and the initial discoveries encouraged the development of facilities that grew to become a village, then a town.



A Secretive City

The name “Ashen Yard” describes its status and architecture. Building a Magientist city on former Gwidrite territory, conquered after the War of the Temple and close to the holy city of Fionnfar, could have been perceived as a provocation. Therefore, the researchers decided to adopt utmost discretion, which explains why even now the Ashen Yard is missing from most maps, and many people do not know of its existence. The secretive nature of the town is further stressed by rivalries between researchers determined to take advantage of the site's opportunities, as well as of the profitable material conditions, to make discoveries that could change the future of Magience and science in general. Such all-out competition leads some to steal inventions or to smuggle experimental substances, but the net results are rather positive. Should some inventions come to change the future of Tri-Kazel, the researchers at the Ashen Yard are convinced that this is where they will come from.

The buildings had to be adapted to resist bad weather, in particular the infamous ash storms. The gardens have been replaced by greenhouses, and high walls, glass, and steel dominate an austere architecture where every building is a mystery. The facades are often anonymous; all the richness and originality are inside. The town is ever-growing and ever-changing. Even its most important districts may change quickly:

⌘ The Port:

located at the bottom of the cliff, its continuous expansion is an ongoing project. It is partly built on the sea, resting on wooden and steel stilts. Heavy goods are carried some 230 feet upward through a system of elevators, to be brought to the manufacturing or Magientists' districts.

⌘ The Prison:

probably inspired by the Gwidrite example, Reizh has built a prison on some of the volcanic islands east of the Ashen Archipelago. The convicts have to work in an environment of fumes, boiling mud ponds, and lakes of sulfuric acid on a dark land of basalt from which terrifying fountains of lava sometimes geyser. The buildings of the prison have very thick walls, half-buried, and thus relatively safe from volcanoes. Wearing sturdy clothes and masks to protect themselves against fine ash and toxic gases, the prisoners extract raw materials used by the Reizhite industry and Magientist researchers: sulfur, acid, semi-precious stones, and even strange fossils of creatures now extinct in Tri-Kazel.

⌘ The Maze:

a very densely built lower-class district, a true labyrinth where all the buildings look alike. It is easy to get lost there, and a stranger had best stick to the large paved streets that cross the town perpendicularly.



⌘ The Cliff:

the district gathering all the Magientist institutions, with laboratories, clubs, universities, etc. It is built at the top and within the walls. In the early days of the settlement, strange pagan vestiges were found in the cliff, but seeing the superstitious reactions of the workers, the founders decided to wall up the passages, which have now been forgotten, and to bury in the sand beneath the port what could not have been erased otherwise. The research sites are only accessible to the staff, for secrets are jealously guarded.

⌘ The Factory:

spilling out of the first wall, the manufacturing district is the mark of the Ashen Yard's transformation into a home of growing industrial activity. Since it has begun exporting to Fionnfuar as well as to Farl in search of new opportunities, the old secretive policy is starting to become a thing of the past. In spite of all the work available, not everyone manages to get a job, and the immigration of the surrounding paupers causes some difficulties.



⌘ Promising Works

All researchers have their favored domain, with workgroups dedicated—always in relation to Magience—to zoology, geology, oceanography, botany, mineralogy, etc. However, there are three general trends:

⌘ Flux Theory:

underwater creatures sometimes seem at the intersection of two kingdoms—animal and vegetal for example—which seems to imply that the borders between organic, vegetal, and mineral Flux are hazier than they seem at first sight. However, fossil Flux remains a mystery that the “theory of everything” cannot seem to explain.

⌘ Output:

for Magience to be viable and definitely overcome the obscurantist reluctances in Gwidre and Taol-Kaer, it is imperative to improve output in the extraction and use of Flux, in order to lower both the amount of toxic waste and the quantity required to operate the various artifacts.

⌘ Medicine:

drawing from the resources of the sea and taking a transdisciplinary approach to medicine, between science and Magience, researchers have developed innovative treatments and remedies against previously incurable illnesses.

The Hospital and the Addiction Contract

The most well-known achievement of the Ashen Yard is its hospital, partly built on an islet—barely more than a rock—and connected to land through a covered bridge, a gallery about 160 feet long.

This enclosed city within the secretive town houses teams researching into physiology, sleep, illnesses... The part dedicated to health care is relatively small, but high-quality. Since the treatments and operations are often out of the patients' financial reach, the addiction contract was designed. Health care is provided to a patient for free, under the condition that a friend or family member signs this document, agreeing that the relative becomes a willing test subject for any type of research: the person will donate blood, be studied, test new products, etc. for a number of years determined according to the price of the initial health care.

Only a small minority die from the addiction contract, but side effects and strange aftereffects are not rare.



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An Extreme Climate

As opposed to the rest of the Reizhite territory, the Ashen Yard is not protected by the Mòr Roimh. The entire northern coast of the peninsula is swept by cold winds rising from the Furious Ocean. This region experiences freezing winters during which a seasonal ice field sometimes forms. If credence is to be given to the tales of seasoned local sailors, it once stretched from Calvary to Dullfrost. That year, some tried to walk across the ice field to reach the Continent, but they were never seen again. Actually, this irregular ice field that takes form during some years is very dangerous, and the inhabitants of the region know better than to venture onto it.

In addition to such extreme winter conditions, the Ashen Yard is located very close to the volcanoes of the Ashen Archipelago. Volcanic eruptions, hot springs, and geysers are peculiarities that can alter the weather and catch an ill-prepared traveler off-guard.

-Ashen Yard-

Expiation and the Pilgrims' Way

In the beginning, there was the small town of Lightrock, a city similar to many others in the mountains, but where a pernicious heresy allegedly brewed. Even though the events that led to its disappearance and to the construction of Expiation on its foundations only date back to 20 years ago, very little is known about them. More than that, everybody knows that it is best to remain quiet on the topic. There is no reliable account of the number of direct or indirect victims, and the reports of the Sigires are not available to anyone. Only members of the hierarchy of the Temple with the appropriate authorizations could be able to learn the version of those who led the repression... assuming they are trustworthy and have been made fully aware of the stakes...

From the ancient town, there only remain cellars, old vestiges of troglodytic tunnels, and a few buildings lost amidst the new constructions. The architect cleric Albérich, named after the famous saint, was entrusted with the project of edifying an ideal, perfect city for the glory of the One, whose whiteness would rise from the mountains in a striking and near-surreal sight.

The Ideal City

A visitor is first dazzled by the animation of a budding great city. One can appreciate the large, easily passable avenues built to make communications easier. Once completion is reached, a few years from now, a road for the most part paved and well-maintained should link Expiation to Caiginn in Taol-Kaer and to Leacach in Reizh. Diplomatic activity is at its fullest here; the aim is to convince these towns that there is nothing to fear from Gwidre, and that the purpose is truly common good, and not a future invasion. In the town, merchants have quickly understood that it would be profitable to offer housing and souvenirs for the many pilgrims who come to spend their money with the hope of earning Salvation. Many come looking for work: there is always much to do to erect massive and impregnable walls, majestic towers, vast courtyards, paved streets; all of this being built with a rigorously geometric organization of space based on the number six, in the honor of the One.

The Ambiguity of Expiation's Message

Amidst the Temple and among the believers, the opinions regarding the message of Expiation differ greatly. Many, with naivety and idealism, believe in this pure city, rebuilt to become a center of pilgrimage whose exemplarity should inspire all travelers and lead them to be touched by the grace of the One.

The Sigires and the militaristic Gwidrite society, whether religious or lay, are proud of the uncompromising strength and purity expressed by Expiation. It is a model to be followed; an example for all of Tri-Kazel. Some also hope, more or less secretly, that one day, they will be able to use Expiation as the spearhead of a revenge that will wash away the humiliation of the failure of the War of the Temple. They see a fortified, powerful town with accessible roads, making it possible to dispatch troops quickly, and to strike deftly at one of the two neighboring kingdoms. It may even be possible to restore Aelwyd Saogh and to make it the capital city of a peninsula entirely converted to the One...

However, the pragmatic members of the Temple are worried. In their opinion, Expiation is a dire mistake. It is a very negative message sent to their neighbors; it can easily stoke the fear and hatred associated with the War of the Temple, and as such, it can only be detrimental to attempts at diplomatic reconciliation. The Vectors, who are the most aware of the reluctance of the populations, are the most unconvinced, backed by some monks and clerics, since the members of these two orders are often less involved in politics. The logic of such skeptics seems rather lukewarm for the most zealous who suspect them of being only schemers who have chosen the Temple to rise in society, ready to stoop to anything in order to succeed.

Great Hierophant Anthénor is an old man, and these quarrels and dissensions will most likely surface when the matter of his succession arises. In the meantime, everyone is choosing sides and joining informal alliance networks.



The Pilgrims' Way

The road connecting the town to the capital city is commonly called "The Pilgrims' Way" since there are so many people walking the way to Expiation to cleanse themselves of their sins, before going to Ard-Amrach to be bestowed a blessing, pronounce an oath, or solemnly enter an order. The Mòr Roimh are known for their dangerousness and their harsh climate, and currently, the Pilgrims' Way is the only actual road making it possible to travel through these mountains without too much danger.

The pilgrimage generally only takes place during spring, and starts with a visit to the sanctuary of Lightrock's spring. It is located some distance away from the town, and draws its prestige from its direct and visible source, the glaciers. The cascading water is remarkably clear and cold, coming from an immaculate snow, evoking the purity of the soul sought by the penitent on a quest for Salvation. Some only sprinkle themselves with this water blessed by the One, while others who show their faith more zealously dive into the stream crossing the valley. In that regard, it happens that a few of these people drown, most often accidentally, but sometimes on purpose. To dare suggest that a murder could soil this sacred water is simply blasphemous.

The next step consists in taking the sacred path six times across the town, visiting six great landmarks, each one of which is associated to a district. Some display their fervor by doing so six times for six days, rising and bowing to the ground every six steps. It is also customary to buy a coat of white cloth and a long white scarf. Pilgrims can have it embroidered with symbols related to each one of the great sanctuaries they will visit in the course of their lives. These new clothes are visible proof of the pilgrimage, and can be brought as material evidence, notably in cases in which such a journey has been dictated as a sentence to atone for a crime.

Afterward, the pilgrims make their way to the capital city, taking shelter in a place of worship each night. Many monasteries have been built along the Pilgrims' Way and provide hospitality. In such places, it is possible to rest in a dormitory, to be tended to, and to pray. It is customary to give something back according to your means. The wealthiest travelers can even sleep in private rooms and dine with the local abbot. Unfortunately, some rogues shamelessly don the coat and scarf of the pilgrims just to mingle with them and rob them once night has fallen.

A pilgrimage is an important step in one's life: it changes the believers going through it, and allows them to reach a deeper understanding of Soustraine's writings. Meditating on the beauty of the world offered by the One to mankind while they walk, they go through an exercise of introspection, examining their fears and desires in order to free themselves from them.

A Strange Fervor

Some travelers have noticed that an unsettling phenomenon is associated with the long processions. Those who take part in them seem to temporarily not be themselves anymore. They seem vacant or elated, and sometimes spontaneously go through self-inflicted mortification in public, showing their contempt for this weak flesh so full of desires. Mixing in such crowds and following them for some time seems to trigger some sort of insidious psychical contagion, to such an extent that miscreants are said to have been suddenly been "touched by grace" in spite of themselves (Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll for whoever partakes in the entirety of the rituals). There is something in Expiation that drives one to entirely give oneself to the One, and maybe this is one of the ill-known reasons for which so much energy and money were invested in this town.



A Sigure City

The order of the Sigires dominates the entirety of Expiation's activities. They govern criminal matters as well as commercial ones, but most visibly, they have a citadel here; a town within the town including a library and a prison. There is little reliable information about what takes place there. It is whispered that not all of the sorcerers and heretics are executed; some of them remain imprisoned for years, to expiate, or maybe also because they hold disturbing knowledge about Limbo, among other things. Experiments to redeem the body and soul are also said to be undertaken there, on heretics, but also on children. Some also say that among the books kept there, many are about occultism and sorcery. It is certainly necessary to know the enemy you fight, but isn't there a risk of being corrupted? The absence of onlookers, the stoking of human passions by abstinence and repression, and the perversion of needs by asceticism can lead to the direst sins behind the mask of virtue.

Although these are only malicious rumors, no one can ignore the convicts who are led back to the narrow path through hard labor. In Expiation's law system, there are many offenses added to the usual theft and violence, and which are found nowhere else, among which are being drunk, lying, failing to uphold an oath, prostituting oneself... They are all punishable by this sentence, which is essentially a thinly veiled form of temporary slavery.

Expiation Seen From the Outside

The rise of Expiation is certainly profitable to merchants who find opportunities and envision the future with hope. From their point of view, even if the order of the Brambles assists caravans and makes trade easier with their letters of exchange, the condition of the roads is still much too bad, particularly in the mountains, for an economy to actually thrive. Some already have dreams of an Expiation connected to the three capital cities with good roads, safe and well-maintained: Pilgrims' way toward Ard-Amrach, the road of Taol-Kaer toward Osta-Baille through Ard-Monach, and the road of Reizh toward Baldh-Ruoch through Kalvernach. This could bring unprecedented changes to life in the peninsula, but at what cost? Indeed, more than potential riches, others mainly see the threat of well-trained troops of fanatics, Blades, and Sigires, progressing quickly and effortlessly on roads that would be adapted to heavy cavalry and to wagons transporting supplies for conquering armies. Diplomats have to make carefully weighed decisions between the promise of important benefits and the fear of actions from the parties of staunch believers of the Temple who could lead the kingdom of Gwidre in a new war...



A Sample of Expiation's Laws

The laws in Expiation often seem much harsher than elsewhere, but this is because punishing also means purifying. Chastising drunken travelers is only a way to help them make amends, and drive back the Evil they are giving in to. The rigor of the Sigires is actually helpful; a support for weak souls who have taken bad habits. They see themselves as strict but fair, only inflicting what is necessary to save an unfortunate stray soul. Most people find out about such rules only when they break them, but it is also possible to know about them through the Prayer Domain (and possibly the Knowledge of the Temple Discipline) or through the Doctrine of the Temple Discipline (from the Erudition Domain). Knowing about the moral norms in force is Standard (11); negotiating the mitigation of a sentence with a Sigire is Complicated (14); convincing a Sigire to write off a sentence is Difficult (17); managing to make a Sigire question the exactness of the law is Very Difficult (20).

The Offenses

The most frequent offenses are: lying; forswearing (failing to uphold a promise or an oath); being drunk; wrath with profanities, threats, or violence; lust (adultery, orgies, failing to keep a vow of chastity); exhibition (ostentatiously wearing precious jewels or clothes); blasphemy (speaking ill of Soustraine or the One); illusionism (trying to convince a believer of the truthfulness of the C'maoghs, of the rightfulness of Magience or occultism); false worship (being caught praying to the C'maoghs or the spirits); deafness (cutting an adept off in the middle of an explanation, not listening to a sermon until the end); impiety (not performing the six daily prayers).

The Sentences

The sentences given are variable, and depend on the creativeness of the Sigire pronouncing it: hard labor (from 1 week to 1 year); one or several baths in Lightrock's spring; flogging; penance time (kneeling in prayer from one hour to one day); soaking (hard labor or penance after having been splashed with ice-cold water); confiscation to the benefit of the Temple; warning... Only complex cases lead to trials. The Sigires can deliver a sentence on any person they witness the immorality of. Some suspect that this is a twisted game played by some of the order's members who take pleasure in ruining the lives of those they do not like, permanently on the lookout for faults to punish.

The Island of Calvary

Large, yet sparsely populated, the Island of Calvary is a political prison. The southern and western edges of its coasts are occupied by small fortresses outfitted with lighthouses and maintained by a small contingent relieved twice a year. Two of the fortified lighthouses are also complete with small stone docks, while the others only have wooden jetties.

Only experienced seamen know the currents one must follow or avoid to get there safely. It is possible to take shelter here during a storm, sell grain, and do some trading in one of the four coastal villages. Each one of these villages was built around a great monastery that gave its name to each community: Saint Persked, Saint Heskenen, Saint Arpan, and Saint Nihesk. However, it is strictly forbidden to venture inland, unless one has an official warrant bearing the royal seal of Gwidre. Therefore, very few know of the paths following the beautiful, wild coast of the island.

In the south-west, shepherds watch over their flocks on moors of white and mauve brier where immortal, tormented firs sometimes tower, while streams flow from the high hills, sometimes disgorging straight from the cliffs into the sea. Occasionally, water accumulates in dales, turning them into swampy areas where the odd sheep wanders to sink to its death. The Torn Woods, although they offer a striking sight, are nonetheless shunned by the locals lest they meet a Morcail, a witch, or any local variant of ghostly beings, which are sometimes described as masked. There must be as many versions as storytellers. There certainly is some force, somewhere inside, but no one can be sure of it.

Lady Fir Patience

There is indeed an entity dwelling in the Torn Woods: Fir Patience, a Dréin wearing a mask of roots and clay, bearing signs reminiscent of Ogham. She seems to wear a floating dress of stringy moss and wooden attire. Moreover, should someone come close to her territory, she will strike the intruder down with arrows made from strange poisonous fir, which are her own bones that she draws from her flesh. Endlessly wandering, she has caused few problems, since it seems she can be avoided just by staying away from the woods and their secret.

On the north of the island stands the great, dark fortress-prison: the Rock. Schemers of discreetly quelled conspiracies are locked up there, sentenced to oblivion. Corrupted people, whether laymen or religious, whose acts threatened to cause scandals with heavy repercussions, officially withdraw to the countryside to cure a disease or rest away from public life, and disappear on the island. Along with them are some heirs of important lineages who have been squandering the family's property. Their parents, uncles, or cousins have denounced them as immoral and dangerous for the well-being of the social order, and here they are now in a bleak jail, brooding and chewing over ideas of vengeance, their assets entrusted to the hands of someone apparently more virtuous... Only a mandate bearing the royal seal is necessary for the arrest to take place: no questions are asked, and the facts are not checked. The reason matters less than the results when things are about matters of state!

Nerin Mac Sengar

So far, his life had been filled with delights and pleasures; he had never had to worry. He had a wealthy inheritance, a name he was proud of, and his fair love Seirine, his betrothed. At that time, he had faithful friends: Ernmas the warrior, Idawc the rider, Olgaeth the schemer... Or at least, he thought they were his friends. Now, he has been betrayed, humiliated, rejected, and thrown into a dark cell. He has had little contact with the other prisoners, but has been able to secretly communicate with his neighbor, a half-demented old man, by taking away a stone from the wall and digging a tiny duct. He has been his only friend, and after so many years spent here, the ancient seems to be reaching his final days. Bilcimos has imparted to him his greatest secret, the reason why he was imprisoned on the Island of Calvary: an ancient treasure he had hidden and refused to deliver to a powerful member of the Temple working at Gouvran; the loathsome Berthan, a prideful, greedy cleric. Now, Nerin knows where a veritable fortune is hidden: on one of the Ashen Archipelago's islets... well, supposing Bilcimos is not as mad as he seems. Then again, he has to escape first, but he may have a plan...

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Fionnfhuar



he jewel of northern Gwidre, Fionnfhuar is a majestic holy city. It has grown rich from the many pious donations of all those who come to contemplate at the tomb of Saint Jamian, who brought the word of the One to faraway Tri-Kazel in the year 713. He was brave enough to cross the Furious Ocean to accomplish the third Ordinance: "You shall impart the Truth to any person you meet." A legend goes that he was warned through a dream of an attempt of the unbelieving Magientists to rally a land forgotten by all, and was given a mission to grant them salvation. Many tales circulate about the life of Jamian, and most of them are more likely to express the fervor of believers rather than historical truth. According to one of these accounts, one of Jamian's tasks was to recover relics of crucial importance in Tri-Kazel. The problem is, how could one reconcile the idea of such a project with the apparent absence of any sign of belief in or intervention by the One in the peninsula before the arrival of the missionary?

Waiting for a Renewal

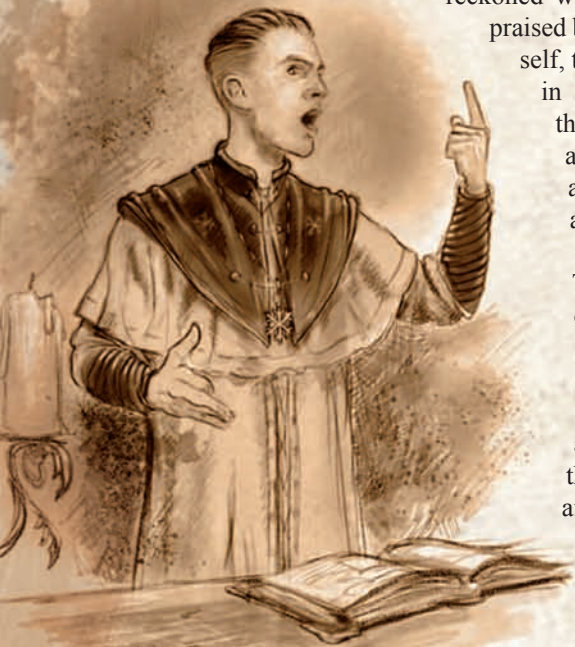
The road between Expiation and Ard-Amrach is called "The Pilgrims' Way", and has been built to purify them on their sacred journey. As for the road between Ard-Amrach and Fionnfhuar, it is the "Holy Way". The town of the Holy Cold is an architectural wonder with a history of more than two centuries of religious passion and sublime artistic inspiration, the most striking example of which is the grand tomb of Saint Jamian, with his remains resting within a stone sarcophagus under an immense dome with a hexagonal base. For several years, construction works have been undertaken close to the sea. Indeed, a rather unorthodox idea has started to become popular: although the Furious Ocean is hostile to navigation, it is not so continuously. Thus, a solution might be to methodically found ports and harbors to provide shelter against storms on the islands of the Ashen Archipelago and all the way to the Continent. This laborious engineering and exploration project is fed by the hope of a pilgrimage toward the holy city of Chaïna.

Defiance

Unfortunately, power struggles never stop, even in a place where everyone should devote themselves solely to their salvation and to celebration of the One. Unexpectedly, Hierophant Anthénor appointed a Reizhite by the name of Andreu as keeper of Jamian's tomb.

Andreu is a priest whose lightning-speed ascension is something to be reckoned with: first rector of Farl, his work is said to have been praised by the Hierophant himself, who spoke of him thus: "By himself, this young man has done much more to implant faith staunchly in Reizh than the complete hierarchy of his order." Obviously, this created a few tensions within the order... particularly considering that a position as rector of Fionnfar's church made Andreu leader of the order of the Priests and a member of the capital city's Great Cenacle. Such a reshuffle is rather recent, and some still do not know of Andreu's promotion.

This contested decision leads some faithful to suspect that the supreme leader of the Temple may be losing his mind, unless people are taking advantage of his old age to deceive and manipulate him. Other and more progressive members see in this nomination a hand held out to Reizh, which is experiencing a period of instability, while in Farl, efforts are made to attain a more peaceful relationship between the three dogmas dominating the peninsula. This could be an opportunity to definitely turn over a new leaf after the War of the Temple.



The County of Frendian

Seeing Frendian for the first time is an enchanting experience. The dark forests and the eerie bends of the mountains are suddenly replaced with a vale plentiful in fields, rivers, hedges, hamlets, and villages practically devoid of defenses.

The castle itself, which overlooks a majestic lake, was not built for defensive purposes and is essentially ornamental. A feeling of calm and tranquility pervades it all, as if even the light and colors were different from elsewhere.

For two generations, the county of Frendian has been almost completely isolated from the rest of the world, only maintaining token diplomatic ties with the crown of Taol-Kaer. The grandfather of the current countess, Adnae Mac Marzin, had to lead a bitter struggle against hordes of Feondas, but since then, the castle and its immediate surroundings have been prospering, enjoying their remoteness. In about 30 years, the county only had a visit from one royal messenger...

The most striking feature of Frendian is the vast circle of stones that protects it and was carefully tended to by Demorthén Alawn until recently. It is said that this man, who jealously kept his knowledge to himself, had managed to restore this ancient circle and activate its powers, so that the Feondas from the dark forests around could not threaten the community.

Unfortunately, he shared almost nothing of what he knew, and Loeiza, his only known Ionnthén, left on the roads to live as a wanderer, in accordance with the oldest traditions, in order to find a place to inhabit and protect. No one seems to know where she could be, nor whether her master handed down his secrets to her... provided his supposed powers were real.

On the Track of Aoda Mac Iseanor from Seòl

The Duke of Seòl, Angus Mac Iseanor, lost track of his daughter and heir, Aoda, more than six months ago (Book 1, p.57). Since then, he has frantically been looking for information, and even offered a reward of several hundred frost Daols to the one able to retrieve his daughter. At Terkhên, a Varigal mentioned that the disappeared probably took a route through the county of Frendian to go to Ard-Monach, before heading downstream toward Kel Loar. According to the Varigal who made this hypothesis, it was a bad idea, because there is currently a Feond of large size lurking near Frendian, and it is said to be able to possess humans, driving them to perpetrate heinous crimes. This crafty creature seems determined to harass the vale... but why, and to what purpose?



Possessed by the Monster

Leaders using this optional scene will introduce the Beast of Frendian, whose characteristics are detailed at the end of this book.

In this version of the story, Aoda has fallen under the influence of the Beast of Frendian. The PCs will first find out that the entirety of Aoda's escort was slaughtered, and then realize that the young woman is responsible for these atrocities.

If they investigate, they will find her with her clothes in tatters, practically living like an animal, terrified at the idea of what she might do if she were with humans again, horrified at the prospect of committing new murders...

Alternatively, the Leader may decide to depict a strange relationship between the Beast and Aoda, the monster seeming to protect an obviously mentally unbalanced Aoda.

For occultists and Feond specialists, this experience may give them an opportunity to wonder about the nature of the Beast of Frendian: everyone seems to believe that it is a Feond, but is that all there is to it? Indeed, Feondas are not known to behave in such ways, and even less to develop a relationship of any nature with a human...



The Reizhite Rivers

Because of its many waterfronts, Tri-Kazel is regularly drenched by rain or covered with snow during winter. When it thaws during spring, or when rainfalls are more frequent, the streams originating from the mountains at the center of the peninsula swell, sometimes causing dangerous floods. No map shows all of the rivers, lakes, and streams of the peninsula; there are far too many of them, and their flows can vary dramatically from one season to another. The most extreme cases are the streams that are suddenly turned into tumultuous, destructive torrents by a storm. Their courses change through the years, due to topographic changes and erosion.

A River's Life

Even though a river or a stream may simply and indiscriminately appear to be a mass of running water to a city-dweller, those who live near them almost consider these bodies living organisms. They know many stories and tales about them, as well as their dangers and particular rhythms:

Whirlpools:

often invisible from the surface, whirlpools can swallow an adult and are the cause of many drownings (a Feats roll ranging from 14 to 17 can be required to swim away from one). Dangerous areas can be deceptively close to more peaceful spots where children play during summer.

Fords:

veritable landmarks, fords are places where one can cross on foot. Villages frequently settle near them, since they naturally attract merchants and travelers. In times of war, fords hold strategic importance, as they allow an army to cross a river with the heavy wagons necessary for logistical purposes.

Floods & Swells:

people living near the banks of a river or stream know its story: how frequently it breaks its banks, the minimum safe height to build nearby, etc. However, greed and recklessness can lead some to overlook the risks of centennial floods or landslides. For example, Magientists have a reputation for frequently underestimating natural risks, mistakenly thinking that everything is under control and sturdy enough to resist a natural disaster.

Even the most tumultuous watercourses are means of communication, if only because roads are built alongside them. Going downstream—provided the stream in question does not end in a bog or a lake—is one of the surest ways to reach civilization when you are lost. Sailing a river, one can easily notice political tensions and commercial stakes protected by various factions.

River Donir

With its strong flow, the Donir is a border that is hard to cross between the South and the North of Reizh, which are further separated by rather different political situations. In the South, the lords of the Emerald Crescent, sometimes supported by the Demorthèn of the Liagcal of Fairean Ear, tend to protest against the authority of the king, and power games are actively played. In the North however, the combined influence of the loyalist Prince of Farl and a few Magientist Lodges that encourage the King to lead his country toward a modern era bring greater institutional instability.

The Donir has only a few fords, and they are most often appropriated to build expensive bridges, whose crossing generally requires paying a toll and which are fitted with fortifications on either side to ensure optimal control. None of these precious bridges are remote from living places, and almost every time, there is a village or a small town nearby. One of the fords further north is very close to the Gwidrite border. Before the War of the Temple (857-863), it belonged to the kingdom of Gwidre, but was claimed by Reizh at the end of the conflict, notably in memory of the Battle of the Bloody Ford (860), where the Princess of Farl, Murisca Mac Lenneïda, called the Silver One, was cruelly slain by the Corvusian troops.

More recently, along the Donir, the Talkéride bard Lyrielle of the Finery has done wonders (see p.160). Since then, she has gone away, but her diplomatic prowess was noticed by the high authorities of Baldh-Ruoch, who would like her to help them calm the situation along the border, not far from the Bloody Ford. But would the strange powers of the young woman really have an effect on a negotiator trained in the Corvus Abbey? In the disciplined minds of these people, could her frightening brooch find dark purposes to feed from? Of course, no one suspects her of anything and no one knows her secret... but what would happen if, driven by the force expressed through the brooch, she attacked the wrong person, and jeopardized the negotiations in spite of herself, up to the point of sparking military tensions in the region? Perish the thought!

River Tealderoth

This natural border between Reizh and Taol-Kaer swells every year in the forest of Mór Forsair. Since many streams feed its flow, its banks and waters teem with specimens of flora and fauna: many species of fish, crustaceans, and scallops fished by otters; dam-building beavers; kingfishers on the lookout; wading birds of all sizes... The villages were built slightly higher up, on mounds. The inhabitants live off fishing, and travel in flat-bottomed boats from one small river harbor to the next.

Life is rather peaceful in the surroundings of Kel Loar and the Alliance Bridge. This region is prosperous, but the rulers of this town influenced by Magience are no less interested in the prospects resulting from the tensions in the southern part of Reizh. If the King has to keep struggling to be obeyed by his vassals, it may be that a local, targeted war will make it possible to take total control of the Alliance Bridge and of the river traffic on the Tealderoth with it. A new city could then be built at its mouth to be directly connected to Kel Loar, and in the long run, this first step beyond the river could be an opening for an actual conquest of vast portions of arable land.

River Oëss

With its languid flow, River Oëss is intensively used for communication without fear of shipwrecking and without need for particularly experienced boatmen. Along its course are several villages living off the exploitation of the wood from Taelwald's Forest, trading, fishing, and mining in the surrounding high hills and mountains.

Far into the north of the peninsula, the city of Farl is quite isolated, but wealthy, and its Prince seeks to build a road that would pass through Crows' Peak and possibly through Kermordhran's Citadel before reaching the river. River-based travel is slightly less affected by seasonal difficulties than land routes. Indeed, the current road to Baldh-Ruoch goes through Kell, a mountain village, which means it is sometimes isolated during winter. To make journeys between Farl and Baldh-Ruoch quicker would surely be a way for the North of Reizh to thrive. This project, although it can for the most part be financed by Farl, still requires the approval of the masters of the concerned lands, particularly the strange Nevermores. These have deliberately chosen to settle away from the rest of the world and obstinately keep shunning it. Yet, it is obvious that times are changing, and that tensions in Reizh are becoming such that it is now impossible to not take sides...

Farl, the Jewel of the North

L

ocated at the very north of the peninsula, Farl was able to develop into a rich city in spite of its remote position; almost the perfect example of the ideal city according to its inhabitants, who praise the well-maintained roads, the paved streets, the monuments, and the great castle of the ancestral Mac Lenneiden family.

A Prosperous City

Since their first days, the walls erected around 840 by Liarden Mac Lenneiden have been fitted with new doors, and the new fortifications include the suburbs where manufacturers and popular districts are located. Nebulars are by no means a rare sight, but the local Demorthèn are mollified by being reminded that these Artifacts are exceptionally productive thanks to the works of the researchers of the Ashen Yard, which is a way of limiting the ill effects of pollution or of overconsumption related to such commodities. Nocturnal light, especially in wealthy districts, is part of the pleasure of late walks: it decorates stone with colored hues, carefully chosen to satisfy aesthetic concerns, which come right after those related to comfort. Moreover, running water has become widely available in the ground floor of houses or, failing that, at many public fountains.


The sewer system is probably the most efficient of all Tri-Kazel and is the result of the Princes favoring combined efforts between the three factions, so that each one can benefit from the knowledge of the others.


All around the city, many streams and frequent rains water the fertile fields that ensure sufficient food for the population, even making it possible to export grain, in addition to many products of local craftsmanship. The wool taken from the sheep near the mountains of Eagle's Peak is worked, weaved, and dyed in dedicated districts before being exported toward Fionnnfuar or Kell and Baldh-Ruoch, these two destinations having been dubbed, respectively, "Western Road" or "Sea Road", and "Southern Road" or "Mountain Road".


One of Farl's most remarkable industries is based on paper, produced from recycled rags or plant fibers treated in various ways. Correlatively, the printing industry is very dynamic, and sometimes, holy Gwidrite books are actually printed in Farl. The current Prince hesitate between promoting its development and exercising greater control over it, notably to avoid the production of clandestine pamphlets criticizing the royal power or such and such faction. Although harmony has officially been reached, there are still misgivings, and crises could arise even when everything seems to be going fine...


A Line Tied to the Destiny of a City

What sets apart nobles from commoners is their ability to weave the fate of their line with that of a place, up to the point where the two are so inextricably linked that it becomes impossible to study one without knowing the other. Even if the powerful would like to give the illusion that ruling is their natural purpose, studying the past shows exceptions, despicable behavior, and transgressions reminding that they are nevertheless human. The history of Farl is proudly worn by its inhabitants, and it beats to the same rhythm as the evolution of the peninsula, forming a microcosm representative of the debates and prospects. Here are the pieces of information that can be gathered in the town:

 **Circa 840:** end of the erection of the town's great walls under the rule of Liarden Mac Lenneiden (818-841), known for his taste for military affairs and great public works. He is remembered for his heroic struggle against massive raids of Feondas, but left the public finances in an alarming condition. As he died without heirs, his younger sister succeeded him.

 **841 to 860:** rule of Princess Murisca Mac Lenneiden, called the Silver One (born in 806), who came to the throne when she was already the mother of a teenage boy. She died in 860, on the banks of the Donir, during the Battle of the Bloody Ford against Gwidrite troops that notably included Corvusians. The events of this period are well known through the many ballads telling of the heroism of the late Princess of Farl. A great statue bearing her effigy towers over one of the largest squares of the city, which also bears her name.

 **857 to 863:** War of the Temple. New Prince Gilvaethy Mac Lenneiden (born in 826, ruling from 860 to 866) learned of the death of his mother from a Gwidrite herald while the siege of Farl was being prepared. The legend says that the tale of this murder was particularly humiliating and cruel, but the town held out, and its new ruler emerged from the conflict with greater prestige. According to another story, the signet ring of Princess Murisca, which she had inherited from Liarden, was lost during these times of troubles, and is still sought after by the descendants of the Mac Lenneiden.

 **864:** Sacred Union. An appeal is made in the whole country for healers from all factions and traditions, but no one managed to cure Alyn, a young commoner who was betrothed to Lauden, the heir of the Prince, and who had remained mute and unrecognizable ever since she had been attacked by Feondas. The concentration of a great many talented physicians in Farl has been a boon for its population ever since, and through the years, a dispensary and later a hospital were built where specialists from the three factions sometimes work together and compare their methods. For surgical problems or more experimental treatments, the most informed Magientists refer the patients to the Ashen Yard.



✠ 865: voyage to the Continent in the hope of saving Alyn. The data collected on this occasion was gathered in the town's archives, but it was all irredeemably lost during the great fire of 900.

✠ 866 to 868: rule of Lauden Mac Lenneiden, called the Brooding (born in 849). Although he inspired poets, his political accomplishments, on the other hand, are strongly criticized, and it is generally considered that his council ruled in his stead. Prince Lauden spent his life mourning a commoner victim of Feondas, which some considered intolerably debasing for the Mac Lenneiden, an old and great family related to the one wearing the crown of Reizh and even eligible to succeed them... The circumstances of his death are suspicious; some talk of suicide, which would be a great shame on the family.

✠ 868 to 882: rule of Kaileen Mac Lenneiden, called the Bastard (born in 852). Born out of wedlock from Prince Gilvaethy and a courtesan who was a former Vectoress, Kaileen could have never come to the throne of Farl if her line had not been on the brink of extinction because of the disappearance of Lauden (who died childless) and quarrels between cousins with comparable legitimacy. It took complicated procedures and ceremonies to simply grant her the right to bear the name of her father's line. She was unwaveringly supported by Primus Nagguérand de Greenwood. Her rule was hindered by many opponents, and even her rapid marriage in 868 to Count Delbeth Mac Arawn, one of her cousins, only barely compensated for her disgraceful origins. She died in 882, at only 30 years old, as a result of a miscarriage and of the disease that, at the time, took its toll on Farl, as well as on her youngest children and her husband.

✠ 882: the cold peak of 880 was followed by famine and by an epidemic that cost the life of Princess Kaileen. Hunger, cold, and exhaustion sorely tested the inhabitants, including the healers, and most families grieved losses during this episode remembered as a collective trauma, one of which the Elders still talk with emotion.

✠ Personalities of Farl

A prosperous city, Farl attracts populations within a large radius, and interests are compared, opposed, and reconciled. Apart from the figures and personalities of the city in itself, its prosperity attracts attention. The Great Cenacle of Ard-Amrach has shown much interest in its businesses, and so have many Reizhite lords or lodges that would appreciate being the allies of wealthy Farl in the troubled times they foresee.

✠ Primus Nagguérand de Greenwood.

Holder of the position in the Magientist school of Farl since 860. Known to be a wise and benevolent man, he is extremely old, and is expected to pass away soon. There are many contenders for his succession. His granddaughter, of Tarish blood from her mother's side, a Vitalist and a great admirer of Alana Naighan (a member of the Magientist Council of Baldh-Ruoch), is among them.

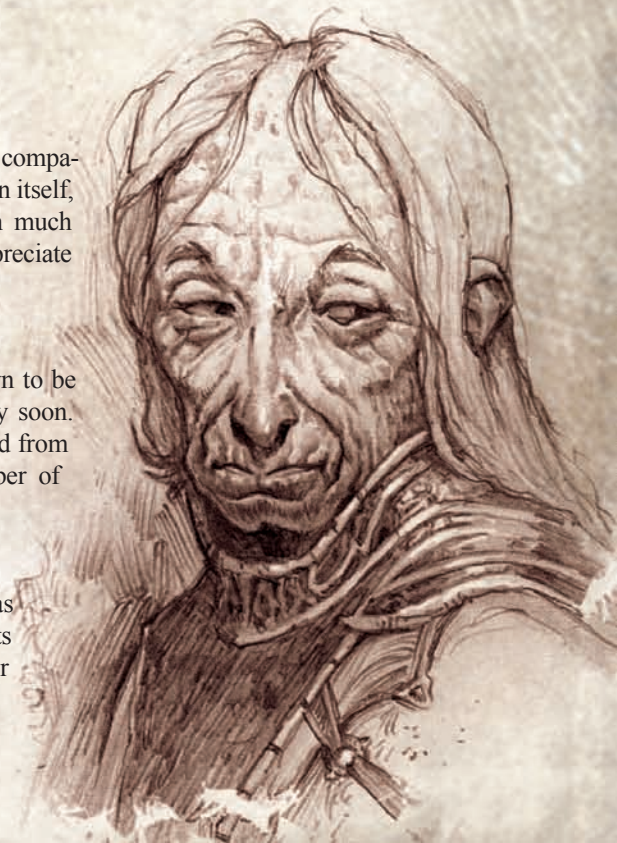
✠ Priest Andrev.

Appointed as Farl's rector at a very young age, this Reizhite priest was noticed for being an Elect, and for his aptitude to handle the most delicate conflicts by soothing the tensions between Farl and Fionnfiar following the murder of Princess.

✠ 882 to 892: rule of Annamoragan Mac Lenneiden (born in 868). Succeeding her mother Kaileen, Princess Annamoragan inherited a very difficult situation. She was too young to directly take over the leadership of the city, and was assisted by the same Primus Nagguérand de Greenwood who had formerly aided her mother. She set in motion an active and rather discreet policy in favor of the development of the Ashen Yard, and promoted partnerships, both commercial and scientific, that still bear fruit under the continued efforts of her younger brother. However, after she converted to the faith of the One to show openness, she went to Fionnfiar, and was murdered during this pilgrimage. The wildest rumors still go around on this subject. The possibility of a heinous crime was quickly singled out, and Gwidrite authorities were prompt to find a band of thieves to gruesomely execute on the altar of diplomatic relationships that had to be preserved.

✠ 900: a great fire consumed most of the town. It is said that although the fire damaged the libraries of the Mac Lenneiden, some precious documents were actually stolen. Investigations in that regard have led nowhere so far. Following this disaster, it was decided to rebuild everything greater and more beautiful, notably by getting rid of the ancient walls of Prince Liarden Mac Lenneiden, since they were rather narrow and did not leave enough room for the new constructions and the development of economic activity.

✠ 901 to present: rule of Gweltas Mac Lenneiden (born in 869), the current ruler of Farl. Methodical, prudent, and known for being a close supporter of the King, the Prince is careful to maintain a healthy balance between the factions. His policy is based on the idea of stability and economic prosperity, and he pursues the work of his sister regarding the Ashen Yard. During all these years, the Prince of Farl has earned the respect, the loyalty, and even the love of his subjects who consider their town a model of what Tri-Kazel should become.



He was recently promoted rector of the holy town of Fionnfhur, which made him leave Farl but symbolically strengthened the bonds between his native town and Fionnfhur. This also made him a member of the Great Cenacle of Ard-Amrach. Such a dazzling career at a time when Hierophant Anthénor is elderly leads some people to gossip about his ambition and his more politically-oriented than religious talents. However, for others, it is a means to improve the relationships between Reizh and Gwidre. After all, if the tensions around the current King of Reizh lead to his removal or overthrow, the old and respected line of the Princes of Farl may be a likely candidate for succession... It would then be very profitable to have privileged ties with them.

Blind Priest Dallan.

Born blind, Dallan was still able to rise in the Temple's hierarchy in Farl, serving as a faithful advisor to Andreu. Possessing an impressive memory, he is known for his ability to recite many sacred texts. Now that his friend and protector has become a member of the Great Cenacle, he has been appointed as Farl's rector, and carries on with the policy of his predecessor with whom he still corresponds, assisted by his secretary, Eathall, in this task. This auxiliary is said to also be his bodyguard, and a formidable fighter formerly trained in the Corvus Abbey.

Demorthén Ethneile Eloas.

Born in 872, the current ruler of the Demorthén party of Farl has lived through three rulers, a famine followed by an epidemic, the development of ecumenism, and a fire... Gifted with the patience of a timeless tree, Ethneile is very much in favor of discussions for a less dangerous Magience. The "theory of everything" is, according to her, a key to developing spirituality through inspiration from sciences. One must be ready to see the details of one's beliefs evolve, provided the ethics that serve as their basis are not corrupted.

Essylt Mac Lenneiden.

Born in 886, the eldest daughter of the Prince is one of Reizh's best candidates for marriage. Her father insisted on giving her in-depth martial training, so that she may defend herself should she find herself in a situation similar to the one that cost her aunt her life. From her childhood, she has been under considerable pressure, and had to learn the fundamentals of the principles and dogmas of the three factions, in addition to lessons in geopolitics to make her aware of the worrying condition of the kingdom in the region of the Emerald Crescent. Having never been allowed to be carefree, she is getting ready for her responsibilities, increasingly aware that she represents a more and more important stake for the various political forces in play.

Alana Eochu.

The leader of the council formed by the town's guilds, and elected for the second time for a mandate of five years, this gray-eyed and harsh-looking woman is a seasoned politician. She works in close collaboration with the Prince's council, and an important part of the reforms and decisions made in economic and commercial fields can be attributed to her. The general opinion is that either you are captivated by her personality or you hate her, but it is hard to remain indifferent or neutral about her.



Slope of the Fallen

When the weather is good, the Slope of the Fallen becomes a splendid viewpoint offering an unobstructed view of the Mòr Roimh and part of the Forest of Whispers. However, it is often surrounded with shifting mists. They do not impede walking, and sometimes it even seems the path remains deliberately visible, as if some sinister consciousness was at work, luring travelers to their deaths. Those who come here on sunny days have nothing to fear, but will probably be troubled by the presence of the many skeletons and more recent bodies, all seemingly turned mummy-dry by cold and wind. Even scavenging animals seem to have left these corpses undisturbed...



The Legend of an Eternal Love

The local bards know many legends and tales related to the Slope of the Fallen. One of them tells of the origin of the strange phenomenon that leads so many unfortunate souls to come to die here.

A long time ago, there lived in the region the beautiful Peyrenne, beloved of Landel. But the father of the young woman was opposed to such a love and challenged her suitor to seek a purple-crowned rose growing in a lost clearing of the Forest of Whispers.

From the heights of the Slope, Peyrenne watched for his return, or at least for a sign of him. One day, she did not come back down. Her betrothed had already been dead for a week, but up there he had come to her, had offered her the flowers that had cost him his life, and they had lived the impossible dream of being together, until she succumbed to cold, hunger, and thirst, finally joining him, two pure souls united forever...

A professional in the field of Erudition (Difficulty Threshold of 14) will be able to notice that this tale mixes present-day beliefs with more ancient legendary patterns.

By making a minute comparison of the different variations, it is possible to come back to the original version, removing contributions from religious orthodoxy and artistic flourishes added to fill an apparent gap in the narration. Investigating in Expiation could yield results, since the town's Sigire library holds useful information. However, it is only accessible to members of the Temple respected enough to be granted the authorization to access books that could trouble insufficiently prepared souls.

Sigires as well as occultists are interested in the phenomenon of the Slope of the Fallen. It often happens that during summer, tough-minded Sigires go there and collect travel journals and useful writings from the bodies, while trying to fight the evil powers that lurk here with their prayers and miracles of purification. Someone meticulous with good Erudition (Literature, History, Folklore, or Politics) could gather the means to unearth the following information:



Historical clues.

Standard (11) Difficulty Threshold.

The story is old and precedes the arrival of Jamian in the peninsula, but the mystical phenomenon arose after the Great Renewal. The first historical occurrence seems to date back to the year 650, but the tale is rather enigmatic, and the handwriting of these old parchments is barely legible. It is a story about loss or mourning, but the use of plural forms and the gaps in the text seem to indicate that it is not only about a couple. The bulk of the Tale of Peyrenne and Landel—as it is commonly known—appeared in the years 820-850.



⌘ **Psychic rift.**
Complicated (14) Difficulty Threshold.

According to some theories, the phenomenon taking place at the Slope of the Fallen draws energy from the weaknesses in people's psyche, feeding from traumas, painful losses, shattered hopes, and unsatisfied desires, by assailing individuals with visions that force them to muster all their mental resilience to resist being entrapped in a deadly illusion.

⌘ **Broken stones.**
Difficult (17) Difficulty Threshold.

An occultist is reported to have hypothesized on a strong resemblance between the tale about this place and that of the Broken Stones, regarding their circumstances and details. This former, torn down Liageal is said to be a place where unnatural things take place, particularly under foggy weather. According to this theory, the two phenomena are evil manifestations, directly or indirectly connected to the demons of Limbo. With that in mind, one might wonder whether the "spirits of nature" worshipped by the nonbelievers could be demons of Limbo seeking to tempt humans into sinning so that many will join and feed them. Should that be true, then Demorthen would be no better than sorcerers, mistakenly believing in benevolent beings who actually manipulate them. In that regard, isn't there a resemblance between the great elemental spirits of the nonbelievers and the demonic abominations—also of elemental nature—which arrested sorcerers speak of when questioned? With the possibility of such a horrific revelation looming overhead, how can one convince those who remain deaf to the voice of reason and persist in ignoring the immensity of the disaster they are moving toward?

As it is advised in Book 1—Universe in the "How to Use Skill Rolls" box (on p.176), such an investigation should not simply boil down to rolling dice. Leaders should encourage their Players to describe how they carry out their investigations. Clearly, the aim here is to give PCs who have spent their XPs on intellectual Domains an opportunity to shine. According to how skillful and inventive the Players prove to be, Leaders may grant them bonuses to the Skill roll that will determine whether they find each piece of information; or even rule that the roll is an automatic success. On the other hand, for less educated PCs, some rolls could be considered Out of Reach (see on Book 1, p.232).

⌘ **Princess Paireinne.**
Very Difficult (20) Difficulty Threshold.

The mention of the purple-crowned rose is an inverted code that actually refers to the heresy of the White Rose, but which was altered by storytellers lest they be censured. The crown is a reference to a royal figure, and there did exist in the years 820-850 a certain Princess Paireinne who, according to the chronicles, should have become the Queen of Gwidre instead of King Kaergän; the one who, following the advice of Hierophant Tomar, started the War of the Temple. This episode is rather obscure, and even now, the reasons that led to the eviction of the future Queen are probably state secrets... The association between the "White Rose" and the "crown" shows that a potential Queen must have been an advocate of the White Rose, this infamous movement of heretics. Such an idea is simply scandalous, as it would be to imagine that the current King of Gwidre could be the descendant of a man who perpetrated a murder with the complicity of the Temple to come to the throne! But what could this have to do with the Slope of the Fallen? Was it the place of an experiment, or a mission undertaken by the White Rose? What did they seek in a place so forebodingly evocative of the nightmares of Limbo?



The Portal Theory

Since I have been promoted in Expiation, I have been granted much freer access to the library. Of course, it is very sad that such a privilege should be due to the fall of Brother Talfryn, who brought disgrace upon himself by collaborating in the evasion of the criminal Aindrid, but I had been waiting for such an opportunity for so long that it is difficult to show restraint and hide my enthusiasm. However, it is now hard for me to keep my questions to myself, to remain inscrutable. I am doing my best to seem indifferent and detached, but this is consuming me. I want to know as much as I need to believe!

We know Limbo from several sources. First, the holy scriptures of Soustraine tell of how he was tormented and harassed by demons for a long period, and how he vanquished them. Then, mystic visionaries, who, as far as I know, are all Elect and for the main part monks or hermits, are sometimes trained to catch glimpses of the work of demons in their world. Their tales are sometimes very detailed, and are both a warning to sinners, and an admonition to pursue the fight against Evil. Also, victims of the Vision of Limbo miracle who have been stricken by the extent of their errors and tread on the narrow path of True Faith again sometimes speak of what they have seen. Finally, the confessions of sorcerers have been received within the high walls of our prison, with all due caution, of course. Apparently, some of them claim that they are only victims,

unwilling agents: puppets rather than heretics. I believe that their nightmares, as chaotic and confused as they may be, leave no room for doubt. My opinion is that this could give us the means to methodically perfect our knowledge of Limbo, and maybe even determine its geography.



However, what troubles me most is this Slope of the Fallen. The reports made about this location, albeit fragmentary, lead me to believe that it may be a portal giving entrance to Limbo. However, if it is—and I am nearly convinced of it—I do not understand why there are not more Feondas lurking near it. Could demons rise from it as ghosts do? If it is truly a passage, are there others in Tri-Kazel? Could they be sealed in the same way as some Elect purify nests of Feondas?

Once more, on this evening, I do not know if I should impart this hypothesis to my superiors...

Diary of Geillis, Sigire



Visions of the Slope of the Fallen

If they use this optional section, Leaders will give a supernatural aspect to the Slope of the Fallen, and confirm the legends that can be heard here and there about a grim call emanating from the Slope.

Recently declared off-limits—as stated by a signpost left by Sigires annoyed by all the needless deaths—and marked with several “Haunting” Stermerks, the surroundings of the Slope of the Fallen leave no doubt as to how dangerous the place is, and no sane Varigals would agree to lead anyone here, unless they are paid in advance and their clients go up there by themselves.

The phenomenon occurs in dark or foggy weather, and travelers will first feel strangely stirred: curious, neglecting their safety, feeling confident, knowing that there is something up there for them (Test of Creativity), or feeling fascinated and filled with something great (Test of Empathy). This impulse can be blinding for the weak-minded (Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll). Those who give in so soon seem to be hypnotized, carried away, giddy... Stronger and stronger energies seem to draw from their psyche as they climb up, feeding from their minds: traumas, tragic loves, loss of relatives, temptations related to unfulfilled desires or to mad ambitions...

Once they reach the top, travelers who are still lucid and have only moved forward on an impulse are more strongly assailed (Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll). If they still manage to resist, they can flee or, on the contrary, stand their ground and face the deep truth of the place... When the true horror unfolds (Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll), it turns out to be more than many can bear, and it would probably require preliminary preparation to go through it without being broken (Difficulty reduced to 14). There are countless specters, which swarm toward living beings like moths to a flame, particularly toward those who radiate powerful passions and desires. Only adepts of the Temple who are able to remain perfectly detached are invisible to these terrible entities (Difficult (17) Concentration, Contemplation, or Spirituality roll).



Goran Bregovic - Arizona
Dream (Original Soundtrack)
- 9 - Death

This track starts with storm and rain, followed by a whispering, moaning flute... then faint percussion reminiscent of the painful beating of a battered heart. The threat looms closer and closer, like the voice of another time, as the percussion and the grim, warlike, or vengeful singing increase. Pain and melancholy can be felt with increasing intensity, until at last is heard the wailing and rising of the dead, who surround the unwary travelers from all around...



tear in the earth several dozen miles long and adorned with blood-red vegetation, the Carmine Chasm is a world in itself. It is not merely a rift, but an actual canyon; a maze whose heights and depths alike have remained uninhabited and where only the wind sings, alternately sounding like a lament, a sob, or a cry according to where it blows. In front of such a spectacle, travelers can only remain speechless. Facing them are 1000-foot-deep holes here, and steep heights that would be an ordeal for the most skillful climbers there. The land is strikingly barren compared to the rest of the peninsula; all the rainwater streams down gullies, turning into waterfalls and torrents pouring down pathways that previously seemed practicable, and finally feeding unlikely rivers. No one has ever found their sources or their mouths, and yet, it does seem that there is a current. The waters probably flow down an underground network connecting with the Gulf of Reizh.

Deadly Wonders

The skies are dominated by the great carmine eagle hunting flocks of swallows and fiery egrets with beautiful white and pearl-gray feathers. Heights are meaningless for birds: they are the free masters of this place, and uncanny mountain rabbits with short ears zoom between the rocks in fear of them and of the many snakes. Exploring the Carmine Chasm means potentially encountering unexpected danger. The venom of the great shimmering-scaled vipers (Poison of Malignant (17) Virulence, see Book 1—Universe, p.243) is the most likely threat. However, one must also be wary of small spiders called “white-cross widows” which weave great collective webs in concealed rifts and wait for large prey to fall in them. Then, they swarm at their unfortunate victim to sting it to death and devour it in a gruesome spectacle. Bats also bear mention: they gather in colonies numbering millions of individuals and fly out at nightfall. In their caves, the floor is literally alive with venomous red centipedes that can be up to three feet long, ready to eat alive any stray animal or to overwhelm any intruder that would venture there looking for underground secrets.

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Lenmar had managed to climb up to graves that were practically hanging in mid-air, clinging to these steep walls for centuries. I believed that this folly should be the last one: we had already lost Amin in that awful spider-filled hole, and Maeldeg had probably drowned, even though we had not been able to find his body. Tenaïme had been stung by a centipede, and even though she seemed to be recovering, I was still wary. Many had dreams about these old, inaccessible tombs that we could make out in the distance. They thought that the Chasm must have been a shelter for populations during the Aergewin, and that we could learn more about this time and the creatures our ancestors fought; they saw a means to tell the difference between historical reality and superstitious legends. However, of all of us, Lenmar worried me the most. He had chanced upon a necklace fallen from one of these dug graves, had put it around his neck, and had begun to behave as if he had been entrusted with some quest. I saw him climb down with a rapt look on his face. He told us he had seen a passable pathway, and that we should be able to make our way through the maze, stuck between a river that abruptly swelled with each storm and the wall, and reach the entrance of what he believed to be an old troglodytic city, a former shelter... The only thing I could see was that we were taking more and more risks for ridiculous fancies. I told them... I tried to tell them... But they would not listen to me. At one point, I even thought that they were going to beat me, maybe kill me. These people, stuck in a delirious fervor, were not the ones I had known. I wonder if there is a connection with this local species of mugwort: after exposure to it, they experienced itches, and some were even struck by fever... I hope that was all there was...

That night, I stole away.

Murrene's testimony to the investigators

The Past Expeditions

With such an atypical environment holding promises of fascinating discoveries in several fields of research, the Magientists have already undertaken several more or less ambitious expeditions. The most thorough and fruitful was the one of Lenmar and Murrene in 901. They were able to discover the astonishing hive mind of the white-cross widows, as well as the exceptional quality of their silk, and brought back various plant and venom samples. They also worked on charting the region, and apparently believed that people had lived as troglodytes there in the ancient days of Tri-Kazel. They identified cave paintings and carvings in a style comparable to that of pictures from the Aergewin in underground shelters in the north of the peninsula. Sadly, only one member of the expedition came back, and while she assured that most of the others had voluntarily stayed at the Carmine Chasm, one can only wonder for what purpose they remained. None of them were ever heard from again, and today, ten years past, the idea of a new expedition has been raised, to look for them and investigate what happened.





The Expeditions of the Ashen Yard

Since they have extensive funds, the researchers of the Ashen Yard, whether scientists, Magientists, or scholars, have the means to finance expeditions to anywhere in Tri-Kazel, although their priority remains Reizh. The purpose of these missions is to map out locations, to study sources of Flux and Flux itself, to list fauna and flora, and if possible, to learn more about Feondas or exceptional natural phenomena. Successfully carrying out an expedition in a place as terrifying as the Carmine Chasm is the best way for young and ambitious Magientists to be noticed and to be thereafter granted new responsibilities and funding for their own works.



Organic Flux

Many have heard of the red color of the Carmine Chasm's plants, but few know of the initial results of the studies done on Flux extracted from them. The researchers did not dare spread the news. How could they explain that plants can disgorge organic Flux, or at least Flux of a superior yet very similar quality? The new "theory of everything" formulated by Magientists from the Ashen Yard could be a lead. According to this theory, the borders between mineral, vegetal, and organic are artificial, similar to the belief that men and women are not of the same species because of their physical differences. The idea is to look at the world with a fresher mind to have a clearer vision of it. Through this method, seemingly illogical things could start making sense... but what sense? It remains to be discovered! At any rate, the possibility of easily cultivating a source of organic Flux without the usual restrictions is most attractive, and some already dream of building an extraction plant right in the heart of the Carmine Chasm...



The Thing in the Depths

Dangers are plenty in the Carmine Chasm, and it does not take a Feond for someone to die from venom or a sudden fall. However, in the heart of the maze, in the ancient troglodytic city, humans from times past had fought a horrible monster, a nightmarish beast. Their Demorthèn gave their lives to seal it, trap it... and yet, even after that, it kept radiating insidious influence. Living nearby became impossible, so the tribes of that time migrated, after making sure that no one could ever free this abomination. Yet, it calls, whispers, and lulls, eroding the psychic barriers of the weakest (Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll). For six years, Lenmar and his companions have been living like savages, bent on freeing the thing...

Traveling

Setting off on a journey is never a mundane prospect in Tri-Kazel. Most of the peninsula's inhabitants never leave their birthplace or travel more than a few hours away from their homes. Spending a night in the wilderness is a frightening idea, particularly for those who do not know where they can find good shelter. Still, the roads of the peninsula are far from lifeless: merchants, pilgrims, and soldiers make up most of the travelers that one may come across. On occasion, one can also meet a Magientist convoy, a Tarish caravan, or a lone Varigal. Of note, the students of sprawling cities are also among the most active travelers. They are not afraid of crossing a whole kingdom to attend a university where they may hone their knowledge. Finally, brigands and crooks of every nature are also among the hazards of the road and can be a serious threat for the unwary!

The first aim of this chapter is to give an idea of the general traveling conditions in Tri-Kazel, and of the benefits of hiring a Varigal or, if none is available, of the importance of training in the Travel Domain. However, this chapter is not restricted to practical aspects, and it is important to also know how to set a particular atmosphere. The second part, "Storytelling a Journey", will provide Leaders with tools and advice to round out their descriptions and give each journey a true narrative purpose.

Traveling Conditions

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Some Estimates for Journeys in Tri-Kazel

Estimating the duration of a journey is never easy. In Tri-Kazel, the weather is fickle; rain or snow can complicate even the simplest trip. The topography of the land is also varied, so much so that it is rare to spend a day without crossing at least one hill and one stream. There are many incidents that can force one to slow down or make a halt, such as a brook flooding and turning into a raging torrent, or a landslide blocking a narrow path, making it necessary to take a detour or to undertake back-breaking excavation works.

The chart below provides estimates of the distance traveled per hour. In normal conditions, one can travel for 10 hours each day, but Leaders are free to amend this, particularly as regards to the weather.

Distance traveled per hour according to the land type and means of transportation

Land Type	On Foot	By Carriage	By Horse	By Caernide
Flat	3 mi	5 mi	7.5 mi	7.5 mi
Forest	2.5 mi	2 mi	5 mi	6 mi
Swamp	1 mi	0.5 mi	2.5 mi	2 mi
Mountain	2 mi	2.5 mi	4.5 mi	6 mi



Using a well-maintained road or track makes progress as easy as on flat land. Thus, taking a track through marshes gives a speed of 3 mi per hour when traveling on foot. Going off-track or trying to cross an untracked swamp takes the rate down to 1 mi per hour.



Traveling on foot with heavy gear (heavy armor—chain mail or bulkier—several weapons, or a large backpack complete with a tent are a few examples) halves daily progression. The Forced March Discipline, described later in this chapter, can cancel this penalty.

Optional Rule: Using the Travel Domain to Calculate Traveled Distances

This optional rule gives the Travel Domain a prime importance in every travel. Leaders may choose to use it in order to stress the importance of Varigal PCs, and of investing Experience points in this Domain. The aim is not to change the game with numbered values; simply to have a few estimates and to offer several tools to make journeys a more exciting part of the gaming sessions, and to help Leaders spruce up their descriptions. Leaders are invited to apply common sense to adapt these rules according to the context and use them as appropriate.

Experienced travelers are able to keep walking for a long time, with a steady stride, keeping their strength and pace in check in order to tire less quickly. For example, they will know that they must go a little faster when going uphill, so that they keep a good pace, as opposed to novices who will slow down considerably and will have a hard time catching their breath. Managing thirst, hunger, and resting time is an art that goes beyond relying solely on one's stamina. The Travel Domain thus makes it possible to keep moving for a longer time while feeling less weary, and the difference very quickly becomes obvious among individuals. Here is an example for walking on flat land:

⌘ Sedentary (0):

Characters who have never or almost never left home will only be able to walk half the normal distance; hence 15 mi per day. Walking for two hours, and thus traveling 6 mi, already feels like a great journey to such individuals. From this threshold onward, their pace slows down, getting lower and lower.

⌘ Novice (1 to 3):

able to walk for between two and five hours—hence about 13 mi—without too much panting and complaining. Beyond this, they start to slow down and have a hard time keeping up, and should manage to pull off a maximum of 25 mi per day.

⌘ Itinerant (4 to 5):

used to traveling. Such people are able to walk for about 10 hours (hence about 30 mi), which implies setting off at dawn or even earlier, and stopping at nightfall.

The daily traveling rates take into account several factors, such as one's ability to maintain one's gear, or to anticipate and solve the hazards one may have to deal with. This applies to other modes of transportation as well. For example, one may think that whatever the PCs' Travel ratings are, they will always travel the same distance when riding on a carriage during the day on a clear plain, but the truth is much different. PCs with a rating of 0 in Travel most likely never left their birthplaces and never had the opportunity to drive or take care of a carriage.

Taking the same criteria as for walking, one can imagine all the difficulties and hardships such PCs will be confronted with. Considering their lack of experience, traveling 15 mi is already quite a feat!

⌘ New Disciplines

Additionally, specialists have designed two Disciplines intended for strategic uses:

⌘ Forced March:

soldiers are trained to carry kits weighing more than 40 lb and walk with them for hours. As soon as they reach their destination, they are supposed to be able to set camp, begin watch, or fight. Reaching a level of 6 in this Discipline makes the Character able to bear about 40 lb of equipment without this impairing their daily pace.



⌘ Messenger:

if they wear only a light load, Messengers can run the distance they have to cross, which makes them able to travel a greater distance per day than an untrained individual. Each point in this Discipline makes it possible to travel 6 additional mi per day. Thus, having a level of 6 in the Messenger Discipline makes it possible to cross 36 mi of flat land per day with 10 hours of running, and having 15 in Messenger makes it possible to cross 90 mi per day.

Arven wants to always carry her sturdy armor, some food, a tent, main weapons and secondary ones... without this barring her from traveling, admiring wonders, and fighting the many perils of Tri-Kazel. To that effect, she learns Forced March. With simply a level of 6, she is able to walk for 10 hours straight at a good pace—thus traveling 30 mi—with complete gear.

⌘ Hazards

As soon as one leaves properly marked roads and does not sleep in nice, clean inns, mishaps and incidents are bound to occur. Leaders have the difficult responsibility of keeping a good balance between hardships and strokes of luck, and it is the delicate art of storytelling to be able to pick ideas from a toolbox to draw a lifelike, striking, and unique fresco. A few possibilities are detailed below:

⌘ Wandering:

fog is particularly treacherous in Tri-Kazel, and the Varigals have learned to be wary of it if they do not want to get lost. Amidst mist, in the heart of a tempest, in underground galleries, or under the foliage of a dark forest, orientation is Complicated (14) at best, and Very Difficult (20) at worst. Apart from exterior issues, being feverish, poisoned, or in a bad health condition befuddles one's abilities and can therefore lead to taking a wrong turn, losing one's landmarks, and wandering astray.

⌘ Disease:

yellow fever, catarrh, and stomach flu are the most frequent ailments, respectively caused by swamp mosquitoes in summer, getting cold, or certain foods (unripe fruits, brackish water, etc.) As exhaustion makes one more vulnerable, the most tired members—most probably those with the lowest scores in Travel—will be the first to be afflicted. Add to that the risks of sunstroke, insect stings, ticks, toxic plants, itching spores, parasites...

⌘ Despair:

being alone, wounded, or abandoned is an ordeal. For those who are not used to such a situation, it may result in a Mental Resistance roll for each half-day, with a Difficulty of 11 or 14 according to how dire the situation is. On the other hand, a bard's songs, a priest's canticles, or a Demorthen's prayers may help others to not fall into despair and spare their weaker allies from this roll. It is also a way to strengthen the bonds of a group. Experienced travelers also know how important group songs are, and Varigals are known to write and sing such songs.

⌘ The Help of a Varigal

Varigals are specialists in traveling, and not only because they have striven to reach excellence in this field. They share bits of rare knowledge among themselves, and form in Tri-Kazel a solidary albeit relatively informal group.

They identify themselves in different ways, depending on the region. In Osag territories, the custom is to exchange a few key sentences in the ancient tongue. In Reizh, bearing a tattoo on the underside of the wrist is starting to become widespread.

The aim of this practice is to counter the difficulties caused by fake Varigals. Indeed, how can you prove you are a “true” Varigal? By deciphering a Stermerk, those marks that only Varigals can read? But what makes the client certain that the interpretation is not a mere invention?

The tattoo, shaped like a coat of arms, inspired by the style of the Stermerks, and indicating spiritual affiliation, is an attempt by Reizhite Varigals to create a proof that they genuinely belong to the order. It is somewhat effective, but experienced impersonators are still able to bypass such precautions.

The Stermerks

The trail-blazes of the Varigals bear the name Stermerk in the ancient tongue. These ideograms are carved into rock (for the more durable information), or in wood (for a message that does not need to last through the ages), and finally, painted or drawn with chalk or ochre for the most transitory data. The Signs Discipline from the Travel Domain is necessary to decipher such symbols, and Varigals are not inclined to share this code. A sign is most often drawn by itself, but combinations are possible. A Resolution roll is necessary to understand the most complex combinations or the rarest glyphs (Difficulty Threshold ranging from 14 to 25), but most Varigals know the following:

Accident:

unstable land, which has been determined to be a potential danger. This sign appears less frequently than one might believe, since avalanches and landslides tend to be one-time events. Another reason that explains their rarity is how obvious they may be: a warning about snowslides in a mountain during winter is pointless. A cyclic danger may be related to lands where erosion is so active that landslides occur each year when snow thaws at the end of winter; or to riverbeds that can very easily become raging torrents with a storm... Such information may be deduced from a study of the land combined with a good knowledge of Natural Environment. Only the most conscientious Varigals signal them.



Fangs:

it announces danger, more precisely a dangerous predator that has settled nearby. By itself, this sign is insufficient for a Varigal, since a grizzly may only spend one winter in a cave. This is the reason why a second symbol announcing the nature of the danger is added. Most of these messages are only drawn with chalk or ochre: no reason to worry colleagues with a danger that died years ago!



Haunting:

persistent rumors or proved manifestations of specters, or phenomena correspondent to the manifestation of Objects of Power. This sign is a warning to avoid the area, but Varigals guiding occultists may precisely be looking for such places.



Haven:

a hideout shared by traveling Varigals. The rule is to say nothing of it to those who are not members of the community, even if it means leaving one's protégés for an hour or two to go there alone. The custom is to leave something that one has in surplus, and that will not spoil (a jar of honey, a blanket, balm, arrows, torches...) Varigals who are in need, chased, famished, or wounded may find salvation there. Once they have gotten better, the beneficiaries have the moral duty of restocking the haven. To that effect, they may spend some time nearby, to catch and smoke fish, hunt and leave pelts, or even spears they made themselves... The craftiest ones tend to leave a mark of their passing and donation by carving their names on a wall, or even on the object left; an easy way to earn some reputation among colleagues.



Hospitality:

a village, a farm, or a castle inhabited by people well-disposed toward Varigals. Those who show themselves here know that they will be given food and lodging for free. The custom is to confirm the sign by drawing above it once one has been there, so that the following Varigals may be certain that the locals did not have a change of heart.



Hostility:

an unpleasant variation of the Hospitality Stermerk, the Hostility one is rarely met, for the simple reason that it is exceptional for Varigals to be shunned. At worst, they may incur some discomfort and suspicion, but clear animosity is abnormal, and certainly hides a greater evil. Is it a village dominated by a Morcail? A deceptively quiet hamlet secretly controlled by a dangerous cabal of occultists? Or maybe one must be wary of the legal authorities who have a rather peculiar way of enforcing the law, as in the Vale of Thoir under the reign of Mac Snor, or in the Dukedom of Dûlan as a whole.



☸ Poison:

the water is poisoned, the gas seeping from a rift is toxic, the waste spewed from a Magientist factory is dangerous... there are many reasons to use the Poison sign. In a case where the pollution is of human origin, Varigals tend to look for a Demorthèn possessing the Pure Water Ogham in their travels, so that the problem may be solved.



☸ Sepulcher:

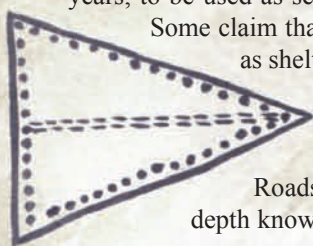
the tomb of a friend of the Varigals, and even sometimes one of their own, who died amidst nature and is to be given the honors for this. The custom is to stop to find it and spend some time in contemplation. Only a vital emergency would justify not making a halt there. In mountains, these places often take the shape of mounds of rocks, with each traveler adding one as a sign of devotion.



☸ Road:

this sign is present near shortcuts through harsh lands: thick forest in mountainous regions, maze-like rocky paths, or, more rarely, galleries of grottoes. The latter have been visited every now and then for thousands of years, to be used as sepulchers or places of meditation.

Some claim that some of these Roads were used as shelters during the Aergewin, and that Varigals are the only ones who have remotely kept the memory of such a use. The Side Roads Discipline corresponds to an in-depth knowledge of these shortcuts.



☸ Shelter:

the nearby presence of a hole, a cave, a ruin in decent condition... basically, a place where people can spend the night without fearing for their safety or being harassed by bad weather.



☸ Sacred:

the proximity of a Demorthèn holy place. Out of respect for the spirits worshiped since ages past, the custom is not to go any further. Only the initiated may tread on such places. In Gwidre, there may be seen variations of these Stermerks indicating sacred places connected to the Temple, which have probably been invented by Varigals who believe in the One.



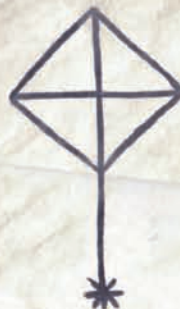
☸ Water:

since Tri-Kazel is a rainy country, there are plenty of springs and creeks. Thus, the only mentions of streams or wells are made in addition to their specificities: Water + Spirits, Water + Medicinal...



☸ Space & Time:

a few signs are added to such mentions. Seasons have symbols representing constellations rising at key-moments of the year: spring and fall equinox, and winter and summer solstice. If there is no precision, the mention is a principle that applies regardless of the season. The cardinal directions (North, East, South, West) can be used to make the localization more precise. A few "gabby" Varigals draw maps annotated with Stermerks showing streams, hills, crossroads, old stones, houses, and indications of distance with a unit based on a day of walking.



Storytelling a Journey

By carefully choosing what they are going to stage, Leaders can give travels a true meaning that will make the narration richer, while avoiding the pitfall of fastidious or repetitive scenes. Here are a few tools and tips to make each journey interesting and intense.

☸ Give a Meaning to the Instant

Shadows of Esteren is a gothic game, and as such, relies on a certain romantic tendency in descriptions. It means that the atmosphere of the places and the choice of the weather, like anecdotes drawn from the environment, have a meaning. They are part of a narrative principle. The art of the description is then to draw inspiration from real elements, to choose a few



details that will be put forward to express a whole and, above all, a state of mind. Dawn is a good example for this procedure. Leaders can pick the details corresponding to the times and places of daybreak that they wish to stress:

Propitious Dawn

Dawn is a beginning, but nothing ensures that the rest of the day will be as promising as its start. Leaders can use this particular moment to stress this notion of perspective, while relying on one landscape element or another for their descriptions. At the end of the night, the weather is fresh and dew forms, turning into an ambient dampness that can quickly become unpleasant for unsheltered travelers, particularly when you add the odd snail or slug. From the beginning of spring, birds form choruses in groves and trees even before the sun has fully risen—which means very early during summer.

Many animals are active during night or dusk, and can still be seen when a golden, teasing light starts to shine above mountaintops. Game is more watchful in areas where there is a human presence, which, for example, forces hunters to get up when it is still night in order to catch any. However in the depths of Tri-Kazel's wild regions, however, such as the Sighing Forest, the Forest of Whispers, or Mòr Forsair, the beasts feel less threatened, and have a more diurnal activity. It is then possible to catch sight of the animals more easily, since they will not try to flee on the spot. Symbolically, dawn is associated with new things, hope, renewals, and the end of nocturnal anguish.

In a similar vein, you can imagine a description based on dusk, a rainfall (which can be gloomy or, on the contrary, mean purification, refreshment), cloudy or sunny weather, etc.

Applying to A Life Choice

Leaders that would decide to end the “A Life Choice” scenario with a propitious dawn can soothe the hearts of hurt Characters. Attention can be given to this moment that stretches while being a wonderful instant bathed in beautiful golden light that glistens on foliage and transfigures every being, as if the whole universe offered its blessing and its smile; a way of confirming change and the beginning of a new life.

Conversely, Leaders can choose to stress a bleak outcome with a day that begins without seemingly bringing any consolation. Everything is happening as if the entire world was uniting against the PCs and laughing at them. Leaders may also decide to use a gloomy dusk, in order to put the emphasis on such a desperate ending.

Finally, there is the possibility of showing a paradoxically propitious dawn, for example by making a heart-wrenching tragedy occur when the sky is blue and the weather is cheerful... as if the universe was actually heedless of an abominable misfortune. The extreme suffering of one person is actually meaningless on the scale of a great whole. Besides, wild life itself is cruel when a predator takes a young animal away from a loving mother that attempted everything to save it, in vain. Maybe the harshest lesson here is that of generalized natural amorality. Only humans yearn to appease violence through ethical norms or ideals. From this point of view, the work of the Temple seems to take a positive meaning compared to that of the Demorthèn, who worship raw forces that may not care at all about humans...

In the end, the questions that the Characters will wonder about may be induced by the way the Leaders set the mood by calibrating their descriptions, by choosing them as carefully as the music they play during the gaming sessions.

⌘ Perceiving the World Through the Senses

Leaders do not need to be seasoned outdoorsmen to be able to depict a scene that will make an impression on their Players and will immediately set the scenery and the atmosphere. A few carefully chosen details, which should not hinder the pace of the game, should be enough. Another productive aspect may be to adapt the descriptions, and consists in taking into account the highest skills of the PCs, which does not imply asking for rolls; you can simply make particular descriptions for each one of the participants.

⌘ Sight:

it might seem like the easiest sense to put into words, but it is the one that can quickly make things complicated for Leaders who would want to convey precisely what they have in mind. A sure way to go is to restrict oneself to broad outlines providing the central information for the Characters: landmarks (peak, large tree, rock...); scale (narrow or clear ground...); human presence (desert, habitations...); visibility loss (bend, forest, cove, fog...)

⌘ Hearing:

nature is never silent; the quietness of the countryside is only a myth invented by city-dwellers. Therefore, expressing auditory perceptions is primarily achieved through a sound-based atmosphere that largely depends on the environment; a sudden change can then be introduced. Natural elements are of prime importance. Rock in mountains and caves sometimes carries sound very far through reverberation. Likewise, certain architectural oddities make it possible to hear a whisper several miles away without the schemers being necessarily aware of it. Wind can drown or carry sound, and storms sometimes make it necessary to yell to be heard by someone two feet away. Rain makes a pattering or clattering noise that has become so familiar to the Tri-Kazelians that they are more prone to feel annoyed or frustrated than to appreciate its poetic aspect. Fog distorts sounds, muffling them but also making it difficult to pinpoint the source of the noise. Any Perception roll in such conditions has its Difficulty increased by 3. The ever-changing sea offers a familiar music, made of waves and spindrift; sometimes soft, but quickly terrifying in the middle of a storm and mingled with ear-shattering thunderclaps. The fauna is part of nature's music. Spring and summer stand out with the singing of insects and birds that are active before dawn and only turn quiet during the warmest hours or if they are frightened.

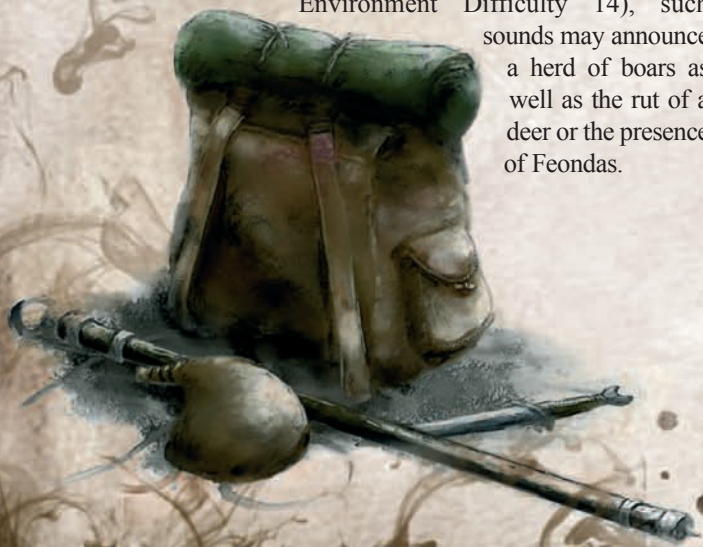
Listening to the reactions of the birds and to animal cries in forest is a good way to extend one's perceptions up to 300 or even 1000 ft. For someone who has a good experience of nature (Natural Environment Difficulty 14), such sounds may announce a herd of boars as well as the rut of a deer or the presence of Feondas.

⌘ Taste & Smell:

a sense often considered close to the animal, there is much more to smell than to sight or hearing, which are noble senses. For example, what to think of the smell of the skin of a loved one who has died tragically, rising from an abnormal mist? Or of a tuft of hair locked in an ancient piece of furniture and giving off a scent of slightly rancid perfume which—rather than the hackneyed vision of a White Lady—could haunt an occultist? One may close one's eyes or cover one's ears, but one may hardly stop breathing! Smell and taste overlap to such an extent that smelling the blood of carnage could give an unpleasant metallic taste on the tongue. As for the stench of decaying flesh, it is so powerful that it may be impossible to come within 10 feet of a corpse without feeling ill. It is not even a reaction of disgust in front of such a horrific vision, but simply the person's body brutally rejecting something unbearable (Stamina roll Difficulty 14 to resist and 17 not to feel faint). It is such an olfactory ordeal that the impression sometimes persists for hours... Apart from these unpleasant experiences, smell can simply be informative, as it is very sensitive to smoke, even during sleep. Taste, for its part, is a very good indicator of the toxic nature of a plant. There are wild fruits that look like palatable berries, but a wise eater should quickly become aware of dangerous flavors: acrid, pungent, stinging, bitter, and acid. Many things have a very particular smell: the spring wind laden with pollen; earth after summer storms; the white coat of snow; rotting leaves and peat in fall; the remains of a fire... The link between a smell and the experience of one's body can be used to conjure forgotten or repressed memories, or to soothe tormented psyches... Paying attention to the double meanings of taste and smell brings a more internalized experience of a Character's sensations.

⌘ Touch & Balance:

even closer to one's self than smell, touch is as much affected when traveling. The feet are constantly in contact with the ground, and even through shoes, they may be used to feel whether the earth is hard or, on the contrary, abnormally loose. Moreover, they can inform seasoned travelers that they are coming close to a swamp, or that the branch they are standing on may give in under their weight... Associated with sound, touch can take the form of an unsettling experience, such as in the case of a traveler treading carefully on ice and feeling it crackling with every move, trying to estimate how brittle it is and when it is going to finally break.



A Subjective Perception

Everyone has a tendency to immediately perceive what interests them and to discard what they are indifferent to. The idea here is to present a few examples of this phenomenon as support for the Leaders. Just take note of the skills in which your PCs have a score of 5 or more to adapt your descriptions, and maybe even anticipate the Players' questions. In cases where a Perception roll is made to spot something hidden, the roll may get a +1 or +2 bonus if the thing to find relates to one of the interests of the PC:

Combat:

look out for the elements in the surroundings that may be used to set up an ambush, but also to take shelter. They gauge the possibilities for defenses, the places where the group might be vulnerable, etc.

Craft:

identify quality material, wood, or stone in nature, or the technical aspect of a work of art, judging whether it was made by a master or by an amateur.

Demorthen Mysteries:

distinguish signs of rituals—sepulchers in particular—the way the local wilderness has taken shape, what types of spirit and atmosphere have taken hold, the borders between the human world and the one of immaterial forces, etc.

Erudition:

make full use of what they have learned, trying to make correlations between what they see and what they have read or heard about, sometimes remembering only remote trivia. Leaders can draw inspiration from the “Noteworthy Places of Tri-Kazel” chapter.

Feats:

easily assess the obstacles in their way, and particularly the challenges posed by the environment, quickly measuring which one they can overcome, and how: a raging river, a steep and unstable cliff, etc.

Magience:

analyze the concrete possibilities of installing extraction devices, the potential or likely quality of the surrounding minerals and plants. Their attention may be drawn by ingredients they do not know the characteristics and possible uses of.

Natural Environment:

perceive the coherence of the local ecosystem and the presence of oddities (such as birds or insects remaining silent). They notice edible or medicinal plants, and spot natural shelters and watering holes.

Occultism:

a good eye for noticing the presence of sepulchers, ruins, or strange patches of fog. They are easily able to see supernatural manifestations of the extravagant oddities of nature, which may drive them to go off-road in order to take a closer look at something some distance away that caught their attention.

Perception:

sensitive to presences, whether animal or human. They quickly notice when one of their senses is hindered by smoke, fog, abnormal echoes, etc.

Performance:

receptive to beauty, poetry, thinking about which poem, song, or dance would be appropriate on such a scene; notice the acoustic qualities of a site. Such Characters may suddenly feel inspired by the particular atmosphere of a place, and will absolutely want to write down their ideas.

Prayer:

susceptible to austere atmospheres, to the manifestations of the One in cold and ice, but also to everything beautiful in front of which they will feel grateful to their divine lord for gifting them with such a vision. They will quickly notice any geometrical patterns.

Relation:

anything related to traces of human activity: tracks, roads, ruins, or objects lost in the wilderness. In a village or a human community, they will be able to tell which people are the most friendly and open to discussion; or at worst those who seem the least hostile.

Science:

analyze more or less unconsciously the phenomena and reactions they witness, such as the rolling of clouds or the sturdiness of a bridge, while spotting medicinal, edible, or rare plants. They will tend to only pay attention to what they cannot explain, such as a storm brewing abnormally quickly in a clear sky, currents that nothing forewarned, or an atypical mineral formation.

Shooting:

careful of the wind that can deflect their projectiles, and the phenomena that can impair sight, such as fog or smoke; look out for opportunities to shoot wildfowl, etc.

Stealth:

take note of the shadows and potential hiding spots, their attention caught by anything that may conceal a danger or make it possible to disappear.

Travel:

such Characters are easily able to assess how difficult a path is, the possible shortcuts, and the dangers of the land (avalanches, landslides, flood risks...) Likewise, they can anticipate pitfalls: they know the rumors about famous places and their dangers (recent bandit activity, frequent shipwrecks in the region, Feond attacks, etc.), they can estimate how much longer they can walk before the sun sets or the weather changes, and they can notice Varigal signs, even though they may not necessarily understand them.

Sailing in Tri-Kazel



he surface of Bân's Lake looked like a great sooty mirror. For several hours, large clouds loaded with water had been gathering above Osta-Baille, preparing to unleash torrents of rain on the capital city of Taol-Kaer. The curved stone quays, adapted to the shape of the shores, were almost deserted. There were only a few grim-looking sailors and porters carrying heavy crates, walking around sluggishly.

A tiny shape in front of the towering ships of the royal navy, the slender figure of Milena Arweal stood out from the dark expanse of the lake. Loric stared with admiration at the young seafarer whose stormy temper provided fodder for many conversations in town. Mustering his courage, he strode purposefully in her direction. When he reached her, the young woman was looking at him with her blue eyes. The boy felt his cheeks flush, and he hesitated before bowing deeply before the daughter of the patriarch of Bân's Company. She smiled, and this gesture of sympathy gave Loric the courage to talk.

"It is said you have sailed the Furious Ocean and the Sea of Shrouds. It is also said you have fought strange sea beasts... I want so much to know about the sea as well."

The young woman stared at him without a word, her cobalt irises glowing with a mixture of amusement and melancholy. She was about to give a first course to the boy that had been recommended to her by one of her father's captains. Her father had an appreciation for her storytelling skills, which drew inspiration from many tales she had read over the years. He father had made sure that she received a faultless education, and she was taught to read and speak eloquently when she was a little girl.

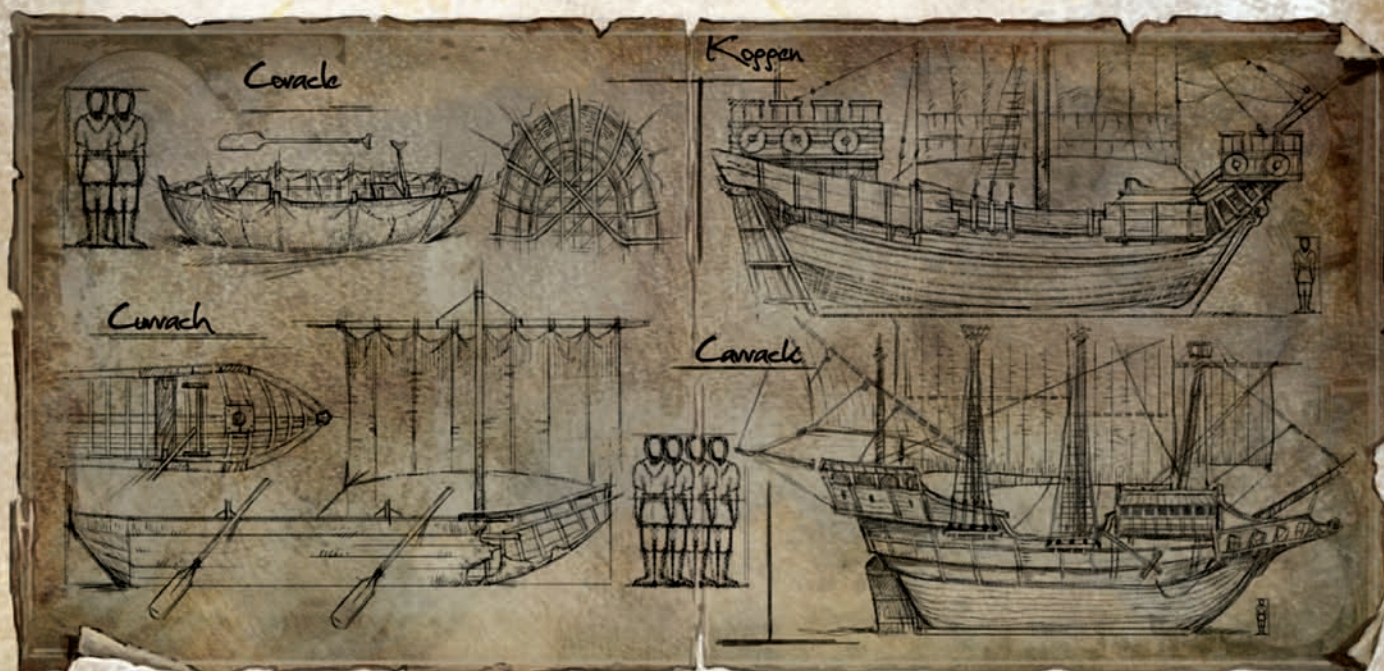
"Are you sure you want to?"

The boy nodded earnestly.

"Very well," she sighed. "But first, I will tell you about navigation as a whole. I think this is necessary for you to truly understand what it means to risk your life at sea, because it is always at your own risk that you venture on its immensity and confront its capricious moods!"



✧ Traveling: Prices and Other Useful Information ✧



Type of Boat	Crew	Passengers	Freight	Price	Renting
Coracle (or individual boat)	1-2	None	900 lb	1Ad	2Ed
Currach (or fishing boat)	4-7	2-4	1 ton	1Fd	4Ed
Koggen	10	6	3 tons	20Fd	1Fd
Carrack (2 masts)	20	15	10 tons	60Fd	-
Carrack (3 masts)	60	60	45 tons	300Fd	-
Carrack (4 masts)	80	100	60 tons	900Fd	-

As specified on page 223 of Book 1, a room aboard a boat generally costs about 2 azure Daols for each day the journey takes. For such a price, meals are included for the passengers, who are housed in a reasonably dry and weatherproof room where they can sleep and leave their belongings. For a minimum of 3 azure Daols, one may be given a private cabin, barely large enough for one person and a traveling bag. Of course, this implies that the boat is big enough to have such accommodations (thus, only Carracks, or very large Koggens). Loftier cabins, which can be as large as the captain's, may not be available on all ships, since such space is generally kept for other uses. When there is a usable one, its price is generally to be discussed directly with the captain.

The price for buying or renting a boat does not include the crew's pay, nor the food and the harbor toll. Moreover, regardless of her size, a boat must be maintained, even if she is not used. It can be considered that 10% of her initial price must be spent each year on repairs and minor replacements for her to remain in working condition and not have (too many) nasty surprises in store for her crew.

Captains or owners of a large-sized boat, such as the Carrack, are reluctant to stray from the areas and courses they are used to sailing, since their ship is a very important financial asset. However, it is still possible to agree on a round trip to a precise location, but the amount to pay will mostly depend on what the ship's owner is told: expected duration of the journey, risks taken, specific expectations regarding the crew, the passengers, or the cargo, etc. At the very least, the price will be calculated as between 1 and 2 frost Daols for each day times the number of the ship's masts; possibly much more if the project seems highly dangerous or if the sailors are expected to perform extra duties, such as acting as porters or sentries. Also, keep in mind that most sailors are not reckless fools: if things take a turn for the worse, the promise of more Daols may not guarantee their continued cooperation...



Shipping Crafts and Means for Orientation

Milena started walking calmly along the quays that formed a semicircle around Bân's Lake. She silently admired the titanic MÓrgacht, the ship of His Majesty Erald Mac Anweald. The boat, with her spiderweb superstructure and the top of her hull painted with sea scenes, was rocking lazily on the water. Unfazed by the wrath of the elements, she seemed to be waiting for a man brave or mad enough to dare maneuver her colossal body. Milena turned back and decided to get started with the boy's education.

“As opposed to my father's trading ships which you can see on Bân's Lake, and to those of the royal navy, most of our boats are not majestic; much the opposite. The people of the peninsula have always feared the sea and have only put a modicum of effort into attempts to exploit it and learn its secrets.

It has only been for a few decades that talented shipwrights, assisted by Magientists, have managed to create these splendid sailboats. Still, they have not been designed to navigate the oceans. They can sail up or down the Klaedhin with ease, but in no way can they penetrate the Ahman Glas; they would get stuck on the sandbanks and in the narrow navigable channels.

The Coracle

The most common type of craft on the peninsula is the coracle, whose flat bottom is designed to sail small streams. This small oval-shaped boat is light enough for a single man to be able to put her in or out of water without help.

With her high rail, she makes for an acceptable shelter against bad weather once turned over. Unfortunately, her qualities are also her flaws: strong winds and large fish can easily capsize her, and a collision with a rock will probably result in the hull being ruined. Woven with reed or willow fibers and covered with waterproofed pelts, she is rather flimsy and repairing her is often long and tedious. Coracles are essentially used for fishing, and sometimes to cross streams.

She has enough room for one or two individuals, but they must take care to balance their weight lest the boat capsize. A coracle is steered with a spatula-like oar or with a simple straight hook. Many varieties of coracles exist, such as the small, slender boats used for fishing in creeks or reefed areas.

The Currach

The Currach is a larger-sized boat with a flat bottom, sturdier than the coracle.

She can be used to sail large streams, but is mostly used on rivers.

Her hull is made of wooden laths—oak, most of the time—onto which

waterproofed pelts are glued with pitch. Eighteen feet long and nine feet wide on average, she can hold as many as two benches of three rowers. Some Currachs are fitted with a short mast rigged with a square sail. These boats are rather light, and can capsize easily, particularly if they have been poorly balanced.

The Koggen

To sail the sea, the Tri-Kazelians have built sturdier boats, the Koggens, shallow draft coasters whose hulls curve progressively from a flat bottom toward the prow and the stern. Fitted with one and sometimes two masts, a Koggen can easily carry up to three tons of freight. I have sailed on one such ship. They offer little comfort, and it takes a strong stomach to keep your lunch for more than a few minutes. Moreover, compared to Ostian sailboats, they are difficult to steer, as if the wood they are made of was reluctant to explore the waters surrounding them.

The Carrack

Finally, a few Carracks cross the waters on long-distance journeys, and they are the only boats capable of reaching Calvary or the Tri-Swezsörs. They are more stable and easier to steer than the Koggens, although they are under permanent threat of the forces that continuously shake the Furious Ocean or bubble treacherously under the surface of the Sea of Shrouds. Carrying up to four masts rigged with square or triangular sails, they can fight against opposing currents and ill winds. Still, reaching destination is never a certainty, and many of these ships now rest under the water, reduced to rotting debris.”

The Maps

Well-off navigators have maps annotated with the currents and the main dangers that can arise such as reefs, sandbanks, or whirlpools... Such maps are precious and expensive. They are a veritable treasure that may be coveted by people wanting to sell them on. Some navigators also use compasses, sometimes outfitted with sundials. However, such accessories remain rare, since the secret of their construction is jealously guarded by the few artisans capable of crafting them. Since navigable areas are riddled with shallows and countless reefs, lead lines can be found in every ship to quickly probe the waters. Unfortunately, these instruments have not prevented some boats from smashing against rocks or running aground on a sandbank.”

The young woman let her voice trail away in the wind. Twilight had settled into the capital city of Taol-Kaer, blurring shadows and lights together into a melancholy penumbra. The boy stared at the tall ships, whose sails were flapping languidly. A seaman, who seemed lost amid the riggings of his sailboat, was using the ratlines to climb up to the ship's top, where he would get an unobstructed view of the lake and its surroundings. Loric wondered whether he would one day be like him, with the wind howling in his face while the boat sailed down the Klaedhin... However, for the time being, he had many questions to ask Milena. Trying to bear the intense gaze of the navigator, he swallowed and said:

“Water sure seems dangerous. Why venture out on it if you may sink at the first storm?”

But even as he asked the question, Loric already had an intuitive idea of the answer.

Stars and Daymarks

Milena paused, letting Loric come to terms with the fact that most of the peninsular ships were much different from the proud sailboats anchored in Bân's Lake. The boy had grimaced several times, wistfully realizing that most crafts were quite vulnerable in front of the limitless ocean. All the same, he had been patiently, almost reverently listening to Milena, paying attention to every one of her words. This was a quality that was becoming rare: many pupils mindlessly interrupted their teachers, thinking that they knew more about them on subjects they had not mastered. Milena gave a smile to Loric and went on.

“Navigators know how to get their bearings from the stars, with the brightest one, Trine, giving them an approximate idea of the direction of the North. However, a second star of variable magnitude, dubbed the Liar by seamen, sometimes complicates such observations, since it glows as strongly as Trine. Its tricking light has led many of my colleagues into very dangerous and occasionally deadly situations. Sailors also know which direction they must take thanks to daymarks: unmovable, easily identifiable landmarks.

Tulg Naomh's lighthouse is certainly among the most famous of them, but there are hundreds of them, of variable shapes and natures, such as rocks looking like a human figure or trees with peculiar foliage.



Why Sail?

It is mainly to find sustenance that Tri-Kazelians have ventured on streams and rivers, then on the oceans. The streams are full of fish, and you can find plenty of salmon, trout, common catfish, eels, and carp. You can also catch a few chars and tiger catfish, the latter being famous for its delicate flesh, which is served at the tables of the nobility on great occasions. However, there is also the Marcar, which looks just like the catfish. It is a real plague, for eating it can cause severe brain damage leading to paralysis or death. Very plentiful, this fish still gives much trouble to the fishermen, although experienced ones have learned to tell it apart from its edible cousin because of its few distinctive features. Even so, many people die each year because of it. Finally, the streams and rivers are inhabited by a few crustaceans such as crawfish or brown spiders.

Oceanic waters are plentiful with sardine, herrings, cod, and in a lesser measure with rays, soles, or sea trout. There are even a few big red tuna that are the delight of fishermen. Apart from fish, mussels, clams, shrimps of all sizes, and lobsters are also sought. On the other hand, some sea-dwellers are much less kind to men: a striking example is the pearl shark, named for the smooth, iridescent substance that covers its skin. Deceptively beautiful, this great predator, which can be up to twenty-four feet long and weigh up to two tons, is able to take fearsome leaps out of the water. I have seen a man snatched away by one of these creatures with my own eyes, and it still gives me nightmares. Some daredevils hunt it for its pearly skin, but I have never heard about one of such foolhardy people managing to kill one.

Fishing

Fishermen use hooks attached to lines, nets, traps, or even large rakes, according to their fishing styles. A few rich ones use Magientist artifacts such as spear-harpoons for defense or even to catch their prey. In the past, a custom dictated that there should always be a Demorthèn present on a ship in order to bring her the favor of Loch and sea C'maoghs, and to ward off misfortune, mainly by keeping the terrible sea-dwelling Feondas at bay. Now, this tradition has somewhat faded, being replaced by blessing ceremonies performed from the ship's bridge when she is anchored. The Demorthèn call upon the favor of the spirits and shape small figurines representing sailors, which are then thrown as votive offerings as the ship sails away from the coast. On the prow, hull, or masts, they also paint symbols intended to avert the various hazards that the ship could fall victim to. Another custom is to throw a Daol in the water in order to bribe the dark powers of the ocean into sparing you...



The call of money leads some Tri-Kazelians to venture onto rivers, and even onto the sea, in order to be the first to sell their merchandise in the great cities. Thus, when fair weather returns after the terrible storm season that prevents ships from navigating, it is the start of a race to be the first to reach the most prominent commercial destinations at the time. Mistaking rashness for swiftness, many captains have smashed their ships against reefs after insufficient preparations for the hardships of the sea. A few lucky ones have managed to make a fortune, retiring on land after a few years, living off their dangerously earned money. Navigation toward large islands such as Calvary, the Cairns' Island, the Ashen Archipelago, or the Tri-Sweszörs is possible, although very risky. I will get to that soon. The call of the Open Sea is very rare, and there are only a few of us feeling so irresistibly attracted by it to the point of wanting to spend our lives with it. Ever since I was small, I have been pining for the waves and for the vision of a limitless ocean. I can read this same longing in your eyes, boy. I share it, and know what it means. But know that I have still told you nothing about the dark secrets held by the waters surrounding our peninsula. Maybe then shall you prove reasonable and leave behind you this deadly passion for a more sensible one..."

Loric was staring at Milena, hooked by the words coming out of her full lips like a fish caught by a fisherman.

"Well, the lesson is over for today. I propose we meet at the same spot tomorrow and continue."

Loric reacted a few seconds late, nodding then running off, drunk with his new knowledge and with Milena's presence.

Pearls and Corals

A few bold or simply foolhardy men have specialized in fishing pearls, which can mainly be found in the North of Farl and to the West of Tulg Naomh. They are produced by a very rare species of oyster, called Albanchs because of their sparkling white color. Since Albanchs only live a handful of yards under the surface of the water, these fishers have learned to hold their breath long enough to grab them and swim up to the surface. Many of them drown or are killed by nebulous jellyfish, a strange species of these animals that can paralyze an adult man with a single touch of its long milky feelers. Red coral, as well as the mythic black coral, are also sought by a few fishers who like to risk their lives. Plentiful with fish, the coral reefs are well known by seamen who frequently toss their nets near them. Less dangerous than pearl hunting, coral fishing still holds many risks, the most serious of which are the great predators lurking near the reefs, looking for their daily meal.



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Inland Navigation

The day after, Loric met Milena under a sky as cloudy as upon their first meeting. His eyes were heavy with dark rings. Too excited to sleep, the boy had spent the night tossing and turning in his sheets cut from a ship's sail, dreaming about the expeditions he would undertake on the sea. He felt a painful ringing in his head, and even the weak daylight was hurting his eyes. All the same, he listened intently to the navigator as she resumed her teaching.

"I will not mention the lofty Tealderoth, nor the swift-running Donir, not even its main tributary, River Oëss. Others have done so just fine, and they will gladly tell you about them if you ask them. Let us rather focus on the other rivers, each one of them holding beauties and dangers.

The Kreizdhour

This watercourse forms a natural border between Gwidre and Taol-Kaer. Many convoys from Gorm-Caladh cross near its mouth and go on toward Tulg Naomh under escort, and vice versa. There are towing paths for Currachs and smaller-sized crafts to sail up the upper part of the river onto Fearil. During winter, the Kreizdhour is often icebound, and people can then walk across it. However, sometimes, the ice sheet is too thin to support the weight of a whole convoy, and it crumbles, sending overconfident merchants sinking to their deaths...

The Klaedhin

With its deep, lofty waters, the Klaedhin is probably the stillest river of the peninsula. The great Ostian sailboats sail up its lower arm to the edge of the Mòr Forsair, and its upper arm to the foot of the southern spurs of the Mòr Roimh. The Klaedhin is a much-traveled trade route, but in spite of its relative safety, it can turn out to be a bad choice. Indeed, some brigands pose as officials and approach crews under the pretense of inspecting the cargo. Then, they put the whole crew to the sword and seize the ship and all its goods. Erald Mac Anweald has sent a hundred men-at-arms to fight such heinous crimes, but the results have yet to appear...

The Pezdhour

This river, which originates in the western part of the Mòr Roimh, is a vital element for the economy of Gwidre. It is the only river whose course was artificially diverted, and I am not certain that the Gwidrites will not pay the price for that one day. Although some think it has thus been tamed, there is no certitude further from the truth. The Pezdhour can be as treacherous as the other rivers, and it is when it seems the stillest that one should truly be wary. At intervals, its banks are adorned with strange steles formerly erected to honor Usgardh, then dedicated to the One by the clergy of the Temple. Supposedly watching over the safety of the ships and their crews, their hieratic shapes covered with moss and creepers sometimes seem to move under the light of a fleeting sunbeam. An old legend says that they have been made to keep a gigantic Feond from coming out of the waters to wreak havoc on the surrounding lands, as it happened during the time of the Aergewin. If you pay attention, you can even hear a muffled noise, like something breathing deeply..."

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Milena's face froze for a moment, and a shadow swept over her eyes. She drew a long sigh, avoiding Loric's stare.

The Sea of Shrouds

"It is now time for me to tell you about the Sea of Shrouds. Such a fitting name... It is a treacherous expanse of water, rarely as raging as the Furious Ocean, but just as deadly, in its own way. I would like to tell you that it is no different from the streams irrigating Tri-Kazel, but I would be lying. The first time I ventured on its liquid flanks, I was still a young girl. My father had intended for me to make a trip with him, in spite of the obvious reluctance of his crew. At first, I laughed in the face of what seemed like needless signs of worry. Then, on the third day, when the wind got up and an 18-foot-high wave smashed down on the deck of the ship, sweeping away several sailors, I was shaken to the very core. It was not that I was afraid of death, no... but I had felt that behind this wave, there had been a gargantuan presence; something hostile to mankind. This literally froze me: I fell seriously ill, and my father thought that my time had come. I recovered, and although my burning passion for navigation never left me, I know that this wave changed me for good."

Tears were silently streaming down Milena's cheeks, and Loric pretended not to see them. Mesmerized by the words of the navigator, he waited for her to break the silence she had locked herself in. Milena strained to quell the immense sorrow that washed over her each time she remembered the loss of her loved one in the Sea of Shrouds; this pain that surged every now and then, like a wave hidden behind the horizon suddenly crashing on the ship of her memory. She repressed the painful memory and focused on going on with Loric's instruction.

Sirens of the Tealderoth

There is a persistent rumor that people disappearing near the Tealderoth are the victims of sirens. These intelligent creatures are said to be unable to leave water due to a curse inflicted on them by the Demorthèn a very long time ago, even before the unification of the Three Kingdoms. Craving human flesh, they make use of the suggestive powers of their voices to drive men to dive into the waters of the river. Then, they lunge at them, and start to devour them alive, feasting on their suffering and terror. No one has ever seen them, but on the other hand, no one can explain the all-too-frequent disappearances along the Tealderoth. Another rumor goes that the sirens are actually robbers using bizarre Magientist artifacts capable of altering one's voice and influencing the human mind.



The Main Harbors

“The northern harbors of the Sea of Shrouds, Ear Caladh and Kel Loar in particular, have always managed to maintain rather stable commercial exchanges. Koggens keep trade alive all through spring and summer, then reduce their activity during fall. During winter, it is exceptional for a ship to venture on the sea, and even more so that she reaches her destination. The harbors of Seòl, Smaràg, and Koskan, further south, draw the bulk of their trade from the activity of the sail wagons. Only the largest shipments are still transported by way of the sea, with less success, unfortunately. Isolated at the south of the Ahman Glas, Tuaille essentially lives off fishing and off the rare plants that grow nearby. Few boats sail between Tuaille and Koskan, and there are even fewer risking a trip to Iolach, that den of vermin.

The Ciùn and the Shrouds

Suddenly, the wind stopped, and the sails fell limp against the masts. As if surging from nowhere, a thick patch of fog came crawling on the still sea toward our ship. Soon, all the other crewmembers were swallowed by its grayish coils while sounds were drowned. Soon, I was alone, amid heavy silence. A stunning fear took hold of me, and I started shivering. The world was reduced to a tiny portion of the bridge surrounded by coal-black roiling clouds. Time remained still before the mist started moving. Little by little, it took the shape of an all-too-familiar figure: that of my friend Edric, who had drowned in the sea last year. He stared at me with empty eye sockets in the depths of which nameless despair shone. I wanted to scream, but my jaw was so tightly clenched that I did not manage to utter a sound. Edric held out a gaunt hand in my direction. He grabbed my wrist, and it was as if a fist of ice had clutched my flesh. I felt an awful burning sensation, which spurred me to react: I tried to wrest my arm free, but the grip of my late friend was so powerful that it sent me to my knees. Then, Edric leant toward me and I heard the dreadful rumbling of an inhuman voice deep inside my skull, ordering me to forsake everything and join it. Today still, I do not know what in me decided to resist such a terrifying injunction. My left wrist still bears the mark of the grievous burn I suffered that day, and there is not one night when I do not wake up with my face soaked with sweat, while I hear the echoes of this impossible voice fading ever so slowly between the walls of my bedroom...

Tale heard from the mouth of a retired sailor in Ear Caladh



Toward the Cairns' Island

Making it to the Cairns' Island is a real challenge: few are the fishermen who take such a risk, attracted by the good catches one can make there. The only favorable time of the year to successfully land on the bleak banks of the island is between the second half of Og-mhios and the end of Luchar. Past this period, the sea currents become too unpredictable for the endeavor to be considered as something else than a folly; a folly that only a few lunatics who say they have drunk from the Fools' Spring claim to be able to perform. I have never checked the veracity of such assertions myself, for I have always gone to the island during the warm season only. Its jagged coasts are bordered by countless reefs on which several crafts meet their end every year. Whirlpools carry the castaways under the water within moments, their cries drowned amid the raucous calls of the many birds that live on the island: gannets, petrels, albatrosses, seagulls, puffins, and terns. The few unfortunate souls who manage to reach the shore are torn apart

Toward the Tri-Sweszörs

The Three Sisters Archipelago has given birth to more rumors than all of the other islands in the proximity of Tri-Kazel. Close to nothing is known about Bolcánir and Fortriù, for the simple and good reason that no one has ever been known to attempt to reach them and come back to tell about it. The only information I have about them is from natives of Tir na Loch, whom I met during my only stay on that island. Safely reaching Tir na Loch is a feat that can only be performed during the warm season, and even when the weather is calm there is much danger of running aground the many shallows a few miles from its western coast. It is impossible to land from the northern or eastern side: powerful currents rush ships toward blade-sharp reefs. As for the southern shore, it is said to be a morass of quicksand inhabited by an Osag tribe whose members are far from welcoming...

I was not given the opportunity to explore the inland of Tir na Loch, since I was forbidden to by the local authority; namely, men-at-arms obeying a triumvirate composed by a Demorthèn, a Ceilli, and a Carn-Curradh. The latter, a great champion expert in fighting arts, is supposed to be the leader of the island's most powerful tribe. My crew and I had to stay in the coastal harbor of Mân Atlach, a small burg built with wood and surrounded by high palisades preventing all from seeing anything around except for the ever-cloudy tops of the high mountains rising in the east. Mân Atlach exists for trade between the locals and the Tri-Kazelians; apart from the guards and a community of fishermen, few people live in this small village. The harbor's sentinels keep a watchful eye on everything, and I confess I felt ill at ease during the two weeks I spent in Mân Atlach. Only a few Demorthèn are allowed to go further inland, and they must be properly escorted.

However, I got to hear a little about the islands from a few of the locals who were chattier than the rest and whose tongue had been loosened by the Bümch, an alcohol with a very strong taste brewed from the venom pouch of the Ulthàn, a local fish.

One of them even told me about a strange story of sacrificial paths that are only opened to the initiates of Loch once they have accepted to have one of their eyes put out. I admit I shivered at the mention of these barbaric rites, all the more so when my informer confided with a smile that the initiates

also offer Loch young and pretty maidens to obtain similar results. These sacrificial paths connect with Bolcánir and Fortriù, which are otherwise inaccessible through the sea, but a dark threat seems to loom over those who decide to take them. However, when I told him I wanted to know more, he panicked, and drew a sign in the air with his hand to ward off evil influences before darting out of the tavern.”

The Fools' Spring

In Koskan, there are a handful of ferrymen who agree to sail to the Cairns' Island outside the favorable period. They are all considered fools, liars, or madmen. They claim that they have drunk water from a great clear pool located on the highest spot of the island. Dubbed the Fools' Spring, this isolated pond is constantly swept by cold winds howling between the labyrinth of rocks that mask it from sight. Only the terns, small birds with raven-black feathers and strangely mournful screams, endemic to the island, come to drink there.

Most of those who claim to be ferrymen have indeed drunk from the spring. Unlike the other people who have consumed this water, they have not died, protected by a few secret charms, so they say. Afterward, they feel irresistibly attracted to the spring, and are able to guess the surest path to reach the island. They only accept passengers in exchange for high sums, or if their intuition dictates them to lead them to the island. If one attempts to force them to set sail for the island, their intuition seems to desert them and they are unable to devise the only navigable path.

The ferrymen who inhabit the Cairns' Island fiercely forbid anyone from lifting or even touching the mounds' stones. They can turn violent against those who are reluctant to follow their orders. Sometimes, a flock of terns dives on a thoughtless individual who tries to disturb the ancient design of the stones. However, such incidents remain rare, since the cairns inspire instinctive dread in anyone who would attempt to inspect them. But there always are stupid or greedy people who are convinced that amazing treasures lie beneath and who would stop at nothing to get their hands on them.



The Kraken

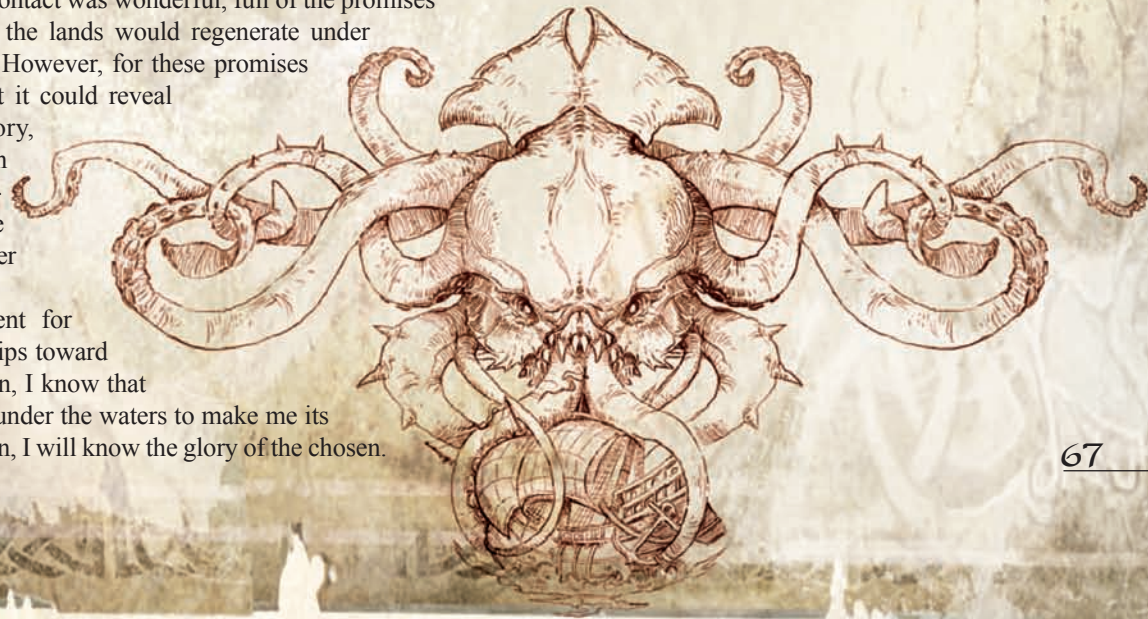
I hear it. It talks to me. It is with me, everywhere, at all times. It never leaves me. I feel it crawling under my skin and slowly changing me. I remember very well the day it began. I was sailing the Sea of Shrouds toward Tir na Loch with my fellow crewmen. Our ship was caught in a storm and I has been hurled into the raging sea along with part of the mast. I struggled amid howling wind, huge waves, and the screams of my companions. In the end, I lost, and the ocean poured into me. When I woke up, I thought it had only been a nightmare, but the wreck of my ship and the bodies of several of the crewmen, scattered on the rocky shores like so many pebbles, showed that it was reality. I was alone among the dead, but I thought I heard voices. I wandered for a long time before I reached a small village of fishermen. I do not know why, but they bowed down before me when they saw me coming. They gave me food and a craft with which I went back to the ocean.

This time, I was aware of the titanic vitality of the sea, of its inescapable force, capable of sweeping everything away on its path. Yet, I felt no fear. A prodigious presence was whispering from the marine abysses. It could see me with its thousand eyes while watching the remains of a forgone time. Its thoughts brushed

against mine, and this contact was wonderful, full of the promises of a new dawn, when the lands would regenerate under the benevolent waters. However, for these promises to be held, and so that it could reveal

itself in all its glory, it needed to be fed with life. Then, I understood what my purpose was, what my master expected from me.

I provide nourishment for it by guiding new ships toward it each year, and soon, I know that it will welcome me under the waters to make me its faithful servant. Soon, I will know the glory of the chosen.



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⊗ The Furious Ocean

Milena raised her head toward the dark mass of clouds accumulated above the lake. She had just felt a first drop of rain. Soon, the wind would rise and blow a few invigorating gusts. The navigator returned her attention to Loric. The boy was deep in thought, probably imagining his first sea voyage. It was time for him to hear about the Furious Ocean.

“If the Sea of Shrouds is capricious and full of tricks, the Furious Ocean seems to stir with almost permanent wrath. A stone's throw away from the coast, it is still possible to navigate laboriously. From a distance of two or three miles, the wind starts to howl and the ship faces a continuously upset sea. Outside the warm season, the sea is raging, and a few lucky survivors have mentioned colossal waves: veritable walls of dark water more than 30 feet high that swallow Koggens and Carracks with the voracity of a Feond. As for me, I have never dared to face such outbursts of power. If the Ocean is that way, it is for a reason, and it does not befit us men to go against the will of the elements.

⊗ The Main Harbors

Ard-Amrach, Gorm Caladh, Fionnfuar, Gouvran, Llewellen, and Tulg Naomh are the main harbors that have been established on the shores of the Furious Ocean. They essentially thrive on seaborne trade, which is active during the warm season, and from fishing. As much as possible, ships stay away from Aimliù and never call in there, since this coastal town holds a rather grim reputation. I went there a few years ago, and I must admit that I did not feel safe among its strange inhabitants. I have seen them staring at the sea for hours, watching for I don't know what. Sometimes, it felt like they were following me.

Once, when I turned, I came face to face with a girl of barely six years whose bulging eyes—the only mobile part of her misshapen face—were ogling me greedily. I hurried back to the rickety inn where my crew was unhappily lunching on some vile stew.

Toward the Ashen Archipelago

The Ashen Archipelago is a cluster of volcanic islets whose main appeal is to be surrounded by waters that are bountiful in fish and easily accessible for small fishing crafts. However, the archipelago has a bad reputation stemming from old legends speaking of mischievous and hostile spirits of fire. Most of the islets are devoid of life, except for the shacks of a few fishermen who settle there during the warm season, hoping to make some good catches and to gather pumice. Used in construction or as abrasive material with multiple applications, these volcanic stones sell rather well, and their lightness makes it possible to carry plenty of them in one trip. Also, there are a few springs of hot water whose therapeutic virtues have led people afflicted with chronic rheumatism to attempt the trip to get cured there. Of course, everyone lays claim on these springs that effectively belong to no one, and quarrels are frequent to determine who is going to get the Daols resulting from the use of these natural resources.

Toward Calvary

Calvary is an island with a sinister reputation, from which only a few rumors filter. The journey toward its ragged coasts is dangerous, but remains possible toward the end of the warm season. During the last days of the month of Lunasdal, a powerful sea current carries the ships sailing close to the mouth of the Pezdhour. It takes them away into the Open Sea, headed for the northwest. This current quickly takes an abrupt turn toward the west, and pushes boats north of the island of Calvary. There, a seasoned crew may be able to catch the northwester in their sails to disengage from the current and make for the island. If they fail to do so, the ship will be ineluctably carried toward the Open Sea, from which no one has ever come back. Returning to the peninsula is done via Corm Caladh. It requires sailing close to the west coast of Calvary, which is constantly swept by unpredictable winds likely to send a ship crashing against the cliffs or reefs or to break its masts. Once, I had to carry an important political prisoner to Calvary. I never got to know who he was, but I surely shall never attempt this journey again, which was probably the most exhausting one in my life.

Hòb's Cape, the Cape of Farewells, and the Wreckers

Many say that there is no sadder landscape in Tri-Kazel than that of Hòb's Cape. That is not my opinion. From its height dominating the sea, one can get a matchless vision of strangely shaped rocks on which huge waves crash in an unending tumult. Spindrift clouds can get you drenched in an instant, and the winds blow continuously, but there radiates from the place such energy, such a feeling of wholeness that the whole experience is exhilarating.

Weather is rarely peaceful on Hòb's Cape, and few birds take the risk of flying amid the raging elements.

However, there is a calmer but lesser-known place, accessible through a damp staircase sculpted in the rock leading inside the cliff. Shaped by erosion, oblong window-like openings separated by stone columns offer an unobstructed view of the Sea of Shrouds and the Cape of Farewells.

Heavy granite tombstones, extensively engraved with Oghamic motifs, each with a single face carved with expressive features and facing the sea, are aligned in rows of six.

There emanates from this bizarre graveyard a feeling of deep peacefulness that I have never felt anywhere else. I have numbered more than 30 tombs, but it is highly possible that I missed some, considering how thick the darkness is when you go deep inside the cliff. It could even be that this place is only the entrance of an important gallery of grottoes snaking deep into the rock.

Attempting to cross Hòb's Cape with a ship is pure madness. The sea is always upset there, and the only navigable channel, caught between the rocks of the Cape of Farewells and those of the Wreckers, is so narrow that only the best navigators could make it. Many things are said about the Wreckers, particularly that they pull in the few ships that sail too close to them. Some talk of mesmerizing lights, others of a voice of unreal beauty, others still of waves showing oceanic depths littered with riches beyond imagination. I think no one will ever try to verify such tall tales, and the Wreckers will keep their secrets for centuries still."

Milena's voice slowly faded in the first
cries of the eastern wind. Rain was

dripping on her forehead, her eyes, and her cheeks. Loric thought
he could make out tears on the furrowed face of the navigator
but he refrained from making any remark, lest he dissipate
with a single one of his words the awe-inspiring
evocation of a drunk sea crashing on the Cape
of Farewells.

Dullfrost, Land of Thwarted Hopes

I had embarked at Farl on a sturdy Carrack led by the only captain that had agreed to sail to Dullfrost. The last of my savings had been spent to pay for this uncertain journey that was to lead me to the island located near the easternmost end of Tri-Kazel. The ship was caught in a storm for two weeks, and I don't know what miracle allowed us to survive. At any rate, we finally arrived at a beach of white sand, which we reached on a few rowboats the captain had taken out. The water was freezing, the landscape desolate, the sky bone-white. I agreed with the captain that he and his men would wait ten days and ten nights on the beach and that on the morning of the eleventh day, the ship could set sail and go back to Farl.

I had come to Dullfrost resolutely determined to find my son who was said to have drowned at sea, but who regularly called for me in my dreams to plead for help. He described the place where he was as an eternally white land, covered with a thin layer of frost. It could only be this island. Carrying a knapsack filled with food, a thick blanket, and a flintstone, I ventured on the flat paths of the island. For ten days, I combed the island under the icy howls of the wind, slipping on black ice, tripping on stones and on the many cracks denting the ground. In the end, I had to face the facts: there was nothing and no one on this island, not even the ghost or grave of my child. I managed to find my way back to the place where the captain and his crew had been waiting for me. I remained silent all the way back to Farl. The voice of my son still calls to me in my dreams, but I have no hope left of finding him alive.

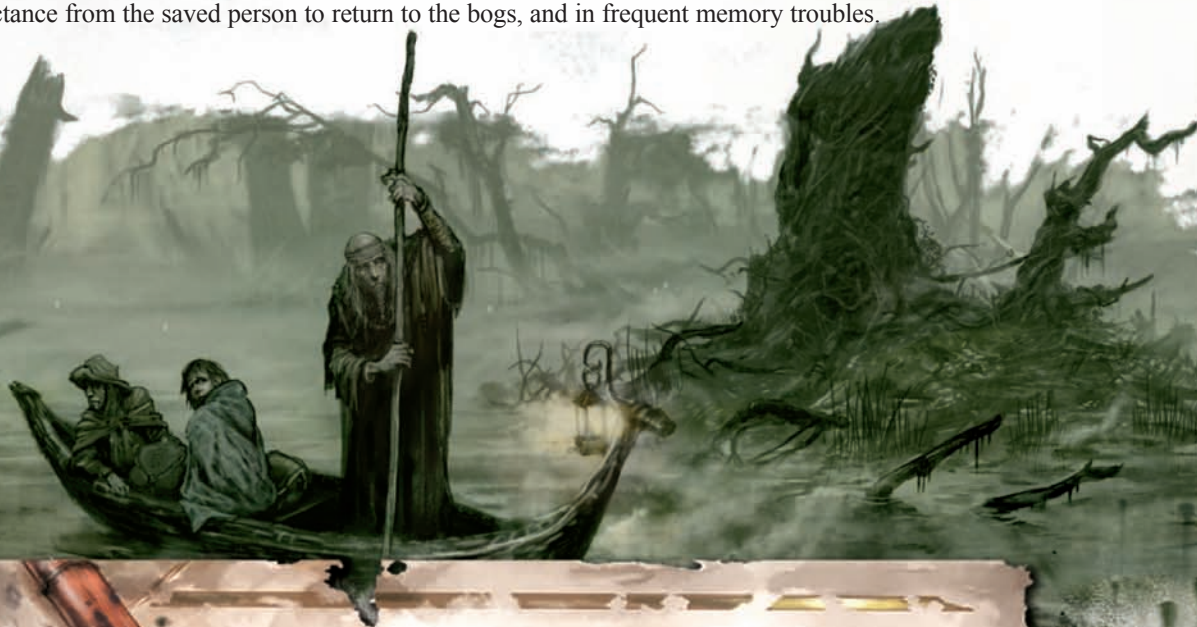
Tale heard from the mouth of a Tarish elder



The Ferryman of the Ahman Glas

My quick panorama of navigation in Tri-Kazel would not be complete if I did not tell you about the immense expanse of the Gray Bogs. With the notable exception of Tuaille, no city has been built in the Ahman Glas. Swarming with lush vegetation, the bogs are crisscrossed with navigable channels that only the 'Ferryman' have reliable knowledge of. In addition to the large insects plaguing the travelers, dangerous and hostile fauna, and the quagmires that can swallow a man within seconds, it is said that dangerous Feondas melding in the vegetation haunt the place. However, you can find plenty of hideous but succulent fish, medicinal herbs with powerful curative properties, as well as peat, which is an excellent combustible and can be used to make bricks. Many young people have attempted to make a fortune by venturing into the Gray Bogs by themselves. Some of them were lucky enough to be saved by the Ferryman, but as for the others... One can get lost very easily among the dull, similar-looking expanses of the Ahman Glas. There is a road maintained by the guild of the Pavers, but it is in very bad condition, and brigands who take advantage of the near-total absence of military presence rob unwary travelers and dump their bodies into the bogs. The Ferryman and a few Varigals who know the region well are the only ones who can go into the Gray Bogs with actual chances of getting out. They sail through the place in very light, small, and narrow crafts made of woven rushes and reeds. Very maneuverable, they allow them to pass through many tight spots and to carry their boats when a channel is obstructed by the vegetation or by piled-up peat. Unlike Varigals, the Ferryman do not use Stermerks to blaze their surroundings. When they are very young, they come with their Ferryman parent into the bogs and memorize an almost exact map. To do so, they rely on very precise landmarks, exactly like we navigators do with daymarks. I have been told that a town has been built by the Ferryman in the center of the bogs, and that they do their best to help unfortunate people who have gotten wounded, sick, or lost in the marshes. However, it is said that they take a strange 'return price' as their pay, which results in reluctance from the saved person to return to the bogs, and in frequent memory troubles.

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The Ocean, a Furious Mirror of the Human Soul

Bards and poets are the only Tri-Kazelian artists who have drawn inspiration from the deadly charm of the sea and derived from it the essence of their art.

They sing its unceasing changes, similar to those of the human soul. For some, it is a "slumbering giant whose terrible rise has engulfed the dreams of more men than Osta-Baille counts". For others, it is an "inconstant woman with countless faces, now a moaning lover offering herself in virginal embraces, now a capricious mistress with a treacherous grip". Poets have used thousands of metaphors to sing of her mesmerizing attire, without ever managing to solve the impossible mystery of her otherness. An ever-renewing source of beauty, "the ocean is the bizarre dream of sea spirits, who dance and play in the depths of the waters", "the canvas of a painter with an infinite palette of nuances", "the furious mirror of the human soul". A famous legend goes that, toward the end of his life, talented Bard Darwid Draned was so fascinated with the ocean that in the end, he dived into it to discover its "reverse secrets", to quote him.

He reappeared three days later, 10 miles away from the place where he had dived into the waves, incurably mute, but with strange pearly glimmers lighting his cobalt eyes...

The Call of the Open Sea

Here boy, I hope that I have hidden nothing from you about the dangers of sailing the sea. Because they are many, and more than one navigator who thought they knew what they were doing have been broken by the age-old strength of the ocean. Before you choose the profession of seafarer, do think it through. It is a wonderful, elating life, where you never get bored, but where you risk your life at every moment. And there is always a price to pay.

The sea took what was most precious to me, and all the tears of my body won't change that. There is in my heart an immense void that will never be filled, and all my life I will remain with a part of myself amputated.

Still, when I am at sea, I am very different, and the mysterious call of the Open Sea keeps resonating in me, obliterating all of my doubts, all of my sufferings. One day, maybe, it will become too strong, and I shall leave for my ultimate voyage..."

Chapter 2 Canvases

Introduction

Canvases are specially structured scenarios with a short format that will be used throughout the Shadows of Esteren series. As they are, they are intended to be played in two or three hours, but they can easily be lengthened according to the imagination of the Leaders. Their structure is intended to leave ample room for everyone to improvise and do things their own way. More experienced Leaders will be able to run the scenario right after they are done reading it; those with less experience will probably want to spend additional time taking notes, preparing scenes, etc.

The Structure of the Canvases

Each canvas begins with a set of technical information. Here you can learn about the style of the canvas (investigation, survival, action, etc.), the setting (urban, natural, etc.), the season, and the approximate length of the session. This information will present the Leaders with a general overview of the story.

Following that, each canvas rests on the metaphor of a tree and is divided into five distinct sections:

- ❧ **Roots:** This first section describes the origins and the underlying reasons of the plot, revealing its hidden aspects to the Leaders. The Roots define the basis of the story in which the PCs are going to intervene.
- ❧ **Trunk:** This second section details the heart of the action and describes the way the PCs will be involved in the story.
- ❧ **Branches:** This section proposes various alternatives and possible choices for both the Leaders and the Players regarding how they will progress along the plot and reach its conclusion. Of course, Leaders can round out this section as much as they want, and in most cases Players will have the opportunity to come up with their own alternatives.
- ❧ **Leaves:** The fourth section of the canvases describes the possible follow-up, aftermath, or consequences of the story the PCs have lived through. Again, these are only examples which Leaders are free to adapt so they can correspond to the story they want to tell and to the Players' decisions.
- ❧ **Wind:** The purpose of the last section is to give tips for the atmosphere as well as musical suggestions so that the Leaders may enhance the dramatic intensity of the game.

Using the Canvases in Game

Canvases can be used in a variety of ways:

Short Gaming Session: Because of their duration (two hours on average), canvases are quick to prepare and play. They are perfect for an improvised game or a short playing session; right after character creation, for example. Leaders with one or two canvases up their sleeves will be able to react to all sorts of difficulties related to the organization of role-playing games.

Interlude: The duration of the canvases makes it possible to use them as interludes between two longer scenarios.

Random Encounter: By having a few canvases in store, a Leader can improvise according to the actions of the Players, and spice up their travels or adventures following a more important scenario. Most canvases can occur during a journey, to make it more interesting and memorable.



Blood Feathers

- **Style:** Action / Enclosed space
- **Setting:** A miner's home in a remote location
- **Season:** Any
- **Length:** About two hours

Roots

The son of a Demorthèn and his successor-to-be, young Dorn married the daughter of his village's Ansailéir. Two years later, it was discovered that he had been having an affair with pretty Kynan, who was now pregnant with his child. Dorn had always been a rascal protected by his father's status, and this latest revelation gave all those who hated him the opportunity to demand his banishment, supported by the young man's father-in-law. His own father had already all but given up on handing down his secrets to him, and only showed a modicum of reluctance. Dorn and Kynan were sentenced to exile.

The exiles survived and, after several months of wandering, ended up settling down in a small depleted copper mine. Kynan gave birth to a boy, Tomar, who grew into a mighty force but remained simple-minded. The small family survived on the few copper nuggets found in the mine, which they traded for whatever they needed in a nearby village. In a cavern at the bottom of the mine, Dorn found the skull and bodily remains of a Demorthèn, as well as his Ogham. Unfortunately, the man had been a Morcail; a fallen, insane Demorthèn who had scribbled his ramblings on the walls of the grotto with his own blood. The hermit was hoping to become an eternal spirit, free and disembodied, and, of note, owned a corrupted Call Birds Ogham. Dorn knew enough about Demorthèn arts to use the engraved stones, and came to the conclusion that the old madman had not actually died, but reached his goal.

As time went by, Dorn and Kynan thought about robbing travelers. The village's trader seemed willing to accept many things without asking questions about their origin, and Dorn therefore devised a sinister plan. By using the Call Birds Ogham, he started to scare and harass isolated travelers, making the birds attack them to coerce them into taking shelter in his house. Then, when the time was right, he and Kynan captured the unfortunate souls and took them to the skull of the dead Morcail. There, Dorn slit his victims' throats and prayed for the late hermit to manifest himself in order to teach him his ultimate secret, immortality.

In time, Kynan gave birth to a second child, a pretty girl named Kathryn, crueler and more cunning than her big brother. Dorn used his knowledge of animals and the power of the Ogham to train the surrounding birds to obey a great horn, the sound of which would prompt them to leave their victims alone. Now, with the Ogham, he can send the birds at their targets, and the horn calls the attention of the travelers to a nearby shelter... where four seasoned renegades await them.

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Trunk

The PCs are at risk of becoming the next victims of Dorn. As they are traveling through the hills, they notice birds gathering on the surrounding trees and rocks, perching in clusters of different species, staring at them intently. From their house on the hillside, the renegades take turns watching the road below with a spyglass taken from a previous victim. As soon as interesting prey seem to have caught the birds' attention, Dorn is warned and uses the Ogham to launch the attack. Dorn can only command a few of the birds with the Ogham, but through years of habit, the others follow their lead. The birds near the house have had their behavior deeply altered by the repeated use of the evil Ogham through Dorn's efforts, and even those who are not under his control behave most peculiarly.

Several dozen birds will then suddenly swoop down on the PCs, doing their best to hurt or stagger them, but mostly to terrify them. When they are really panicking and some of them have been knocked prone or are in a bad position, the deep peal of a horn will sound and send the birds flying away, perching here and there. They will keep eyeing

the travelers without moving while in the distance, Dorn and his family will shout for the PCs to hurry up and join them.

Running, the PCs will then follow a path leading to a palisade protecting the house built on the hillside. A couple in their forties and their two children, aged twenty and sixteen, will welcome them warmly, blowing their curious horns when the birds seem to be flying toward the house.

As the head of the family, Dorn will explain that he and his son are miners, and that other people had apparently settled there in the past, and had the same problem with the birds. He pretends that he does not know what causes their bouts of hostility, but he will say he found two horns, the sound of which seems to keep the birds away. He praises the intelligence of the mysterious people who have given him the means to survive, and will invite the injured and frightened PCs to stay for a day or two before they resume their journey. Of course, Dorn will offer to accompany them on the first few miles with a horn, in order to drive away the birds should they go into another frenzy.

The house will turn out to be relatively spacious. The “miners” seem to be rather well-off, which Dorn will attribute to the copper he and Tomar find in the galleries. It is possible to descend directly into the small mine through a set of stairs dug into the rock, located in the store-room at the back of the building.



The Renegades' Plan

They have already claimed dozens of victims, and they are able to lie convincingly. They will always stick to the same story: Dorn is a miner who was laid off by his lord when the lodes he owned were depleted twenty years ago. After wandering in the neighboring vales, he heard about this mine one day, and settled here. It was said to be depleted, but in fact there remained enough copper inside to ensure the prosperity of a modest family. After a few years, Dorn will leave the region.

Kynan has become an expert in the art of sleeping herbs. Her husband will offer a glass of drugged brandy to the travelers before the meal, and will only wet his lips with his own drink. The herbs will not put the Characters to sleep directly, but will slow their reflexes. The small family has devised a complex system of discrete signals, gestures, and phrases to communicate amongst themselves unbeknownst to their “guests”. They will do their best to make them feel safe. At the same time, Kynan will take advantage of the kitchen's dimness to slip a few sleeping seeds into the Characters' bowls. She will then turn toward them and very visibly pour the stew into each bowl before handing them out.



Finding out the Truth

In spite of their craftiness, the murderers are not without fault, and have inadvertently left clues which can catch the attention of an observant PC. First, Dorn seems rather healthy for a middle-aged miner who works alone with his son in galleries of very tough rock. He and Tomar have very few calluses on their hands. The whole family wears relatively clean and undamaged clothes, which implies they change them often. The inside of the home is well-kept, even though they are supposed to work in a mine every day, and should therefore come back with a good amount of dust clinging to their sweat-soaked clothes... Finally, Tomar sports a beautiful copper armlet, apparently battered and twisted to fit his thick wrist. However, miners who find copper themselves and seemingly enjoy a certain level of prosperity should have the means to pay a jeweler for custom-made items at a fair price.

As for Kathryn, she owns a pretty silver ring without any trace of corrosion. It is hard to imagine such a jewel on the finger of a miner's daughter... Particularly wary PCs who pay attention to such clues may see Kynan slip the sleeping seeds into their bowls, or notice that Dorn is only pretending to drink the brandy served to the Characters.



The Confrontation

As soon as most of the PCs have fallen asleep, or if one of them proves too distrustful and the renegades do not manage to placate him, they will suddenly attack, armed with clubs. If they manage to capture their prey, they will be carried to the cavern and sacrificed one after another. In case of difficulties, Dorn will take shelter in the sacred cave, mistakenly convinced that the proximity of the skull will strengthen his powers. He has three Ogham: Call Birds, Stone Arrow, and Curative Berries. To determine the PCs'

level of drowsiness, the Leader can have each Player make a Stamina roll with a variable Difficulty Threshold according to how much they have drunk and eaten (11 for a light meal, 14 for a few glasses or a more copious meal, 17 for those who have eaten and drunk excessively). Failure means falling asleep completely (the PC can be slapped awake, but will feel dizzy, suffering a -4 penalty to all rolls). Success means only drowsiness with brief losses of balance: the PC has -2 to all actions for 1D10 hours.

Leaves

Kynan and Kathryn are completely convinced of the soundness of Dorn's ideas, and feel no remorse for their actions. As for Tomar, he is a simpleton and only wishes to protect his family, but he is neither cruel nor aware of what is happening.

If some of the renegades are captured alive, the PCs are free to hand them to the authorities of the nearest village, or to inflict upon them whatever punishment they deem appropriate. Dorn and his family are basically strangers in the eyes of their neighbors in the region, and no-one will show compassion or solidarity for them if they have attacked travelers... particularly if their crimes are discovered, in which case they will certainly be sentenced to death.

Once the renegades are dealt with, a quick investigation of the mine will show that no one has worked there for a long

time. The cavern where the victims are sacrificed contains some of their belongings, which the renegades have been stashing, waiting for the right time to sell them discretely to their accomplice at the nearby village.

When the PCs reach said village, they will cause a good deal of excitement if they tell of their misadventure. People will surely get inquisitive about the trader who is the only one, after all, who has seen the "nuggets" Dorn and Tomar have been bringing to the village for years...

Finally, the birds bewitched by the Morcail will keep harassing travelers every now and then, but the sound of the horns will make it possible to drive them away. Over the course of a few years, their unusual behavior will gradually return to normal.

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Wind



Musical Inspirations

John Frizzell - Ghost Ship
- 22 - Santos Dies.

Playing this track at a rather high volume, when the PCs start coming to in the cavern and understand with horror what their fate will be, is bound to cause a stir.

The attack of the birds will seem all the more frightening if the Leader first attracts the attention of a Player to a bird with an abnormal behavior; for example one that follows them, hovering above their heads. Then, the Leader can mention the fact that several other birds have joined the first, or are perching around, their stare following the PCs, etc... After this confrontation, the puzzlement of the Players over the mysterious attack should be maintained, and unless they prove wary and ask the right questions, nothing should seem out of place with their hosts. They just saved their lives, and seem to be simple people with no ulterior motives. If the Players do not look for clues, they will notice nothing alarming, and will be caught by surprise. The Leader should therefore be careful not to arouse the Players' curiosity or suspicion during this part of the scenario. Contrary to the attack of the birds, which occurs after a few signs that something is about to happen, the ideal situation would be that the Players are completely taken by surprise by the renegades. Such a contrast can only prove all the more interesting.



-Blood Feathers-

The Disappearance

- **Style:** Investigation
- **Setting:** A remote valley, a Tarish encampment
- **Season:** Any
- **Length:** About two hours

Roots

For several years, Farel has been in love with Luna. He would give his life for her. However, he is also very protective... he burns with a fierce, wild jealousy, as unquenchable as his love for the pretty Tarish, who is a charmer and enjoys the flattering glances of men. His clan is well aware of this fault, and tries to keep him under control until his wedding with Luna, which will hopefully quiet the young man. Unfortunately, this time will never come. When the caravan of the Ziramars took a halt close to the village of Dorelian, it was visited by a group of travelers which included a handsome stranger. The man quickly started wooing Luna, and she did not reject him.

It was too much for Farel when he caught the stranger with Luna. Everything went very fast: Farel murdered the stranger and, in the heat of the moment, Luna took a fatal dagger blow. Before he even realized what he had done, the Tarish had two corpses lying before him. Terrified, he remained prostrate for a while, then buried the bodies in the forest and came back to his encampment at the break of day. The disappearances of the Tarish woman and the traveler were noticed, and the companions of the latter are pressed to give explanations...

Trunk

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For the needs of this scenario, one of the PCs should be of Tarish ancestry, or have had an opportunity to befriend a group of the nomad people. If so, this PC will own an amulet, a ring, an armband, or any other object made of metal and forged according to Tarish craft, which will indicate the ties of friendship between the PC and them. This scenario can be set at any moment during a journey. The PCs are traveling and will be accompanied by an NPC.

Here are several possibilities for this NPC:

- If the PCs have played "The Shipwreck", he can be Varigal Jevron and/or his companion Maelgur. The two NPCs have simply joined the PCs in their adventures or until the next town.

- The PCs are escorting the bard Elrick Mac Baran, a poet who is as good a rhymer as a seducer. The bard is traveling with the PCs for protection... unless the PCs have met him in a previous scenario devised by the GL. If no PC has a conceivable reason to have a link with the Tarish people, then this NPC will play this part.

The PCs have been traveling for several hours, and night draws near when they see faint lights in the distance. They come from a camp of Tarish wanderers who have stopped here for a few days and have settled in an old fortified farm. The travelers are given a warm welcome, first because the Tarish are always eager to meet someone with good intentions on the dangerous roads of the peninsula, and also because one of the PCs (or the NPC who is with them) is

linked to the "people from the West". In any case, the PCs spend a pleasant evening which gives them the opportunity to share a moment with this astonishing people of Tri-Kazel. The Leader can look at pages 41, 42, and 202 of Book 1 – Universe for some information about them. The insert on the following page will provide the GL with data about the Ziramar clan. The Tarish know how to entertain guests, but they remain mysterious and vague about their culture and their secrets. The evening goes well, but the PCs can notice that their traveling companion is missing.

On the following morning, he remains nowhere to be found, as does Luna, a young and pretty Tarish woman from the clan. The PCs are surrounded, and explanations are demanded from them. The situation is very simple: they have to bring Luna back to the clan without delay, lest they be considered as the accomplices of their companion, who seems to have abducted the young woman. The Tarish are not stupid, and they are aware that the PCs are not necessarily guilty. However, their culture values loyalty and mysticism, two notions that often guide their actions when they are in a conflict with strangers. Old Zurka stings them with a needle and takes one hair from each one of them... if they do not come back within a week, a dreadful curse will befall them. Unfortunately for the PCs, Tarish powers are far from being a superstition: if they disregard Zurka's threat, they will suffer the effects of the magic she summoned. The "Mysterious Powers" chapter, on p.180, will provide the Leader with information about the curse and its effects game-wise.

The Ziramar Clan

All the members of the clan have the same surname. They are not all brothers and sisters by blood, but they share the same patronym. The Tarish prefer to marry members of other clans in order to perpetuate their people, as they are afraid of diluting their legacy by mixing with the Tri-Kazelians. However, this proves difficult since the Tarish form a small minority endlessly traveling the roads of the peninsula. Although there is still much reluctance over the idea, mixed weddings are sometimes tolerated, when they are the price to pay for the Tarish people to survive. Nevertheless, children are quite rare among Tarish clans, and adults constantly watch over those who are the future of their people. It is frequent for the Tarish to adopt children who have been abandoned or found amidst the ruins of a wrecked village. These nomad people are also rumored to steal children and raise them as their own to compensate for their lack of births.

Nosh Ziramar:

The clan's chief, a man with a face marked by the years. He has retained respectable martial skill, but as time went by, he became a wise man whose opinion is to be heeded. He will give the PCs a chance to prove their good faith, but he will be merciless if they try to fool him.

Farel Ziramar:

A handsome young man with a hot temper; a good warrior as well as a clever trader. He is the one who killed the PCs' companion and, by accident, Luna. He will be cold and distant. Still in shock, the young man regrets his actions, but is not yet ready to confess.

Djino Ziramar:

Luna's thirty-year-old big brother. He will yell at the PCs and threaten them, but still suspects Farel of being involved in the whole business... Djino is a smith; he is a talented, conscientious craftsman. He holds an important role in the camp.

Cindel Ziramar:

A young bard, rather supportive of the PCs, who will advise them to investigate at the village of Dorelian. Indeed, there seems to have been strange disappearances at the village as well...

Zurka Ziramar:

The clan's matriarch. She knows the secrets of Tarish magic and will not hesitate to make use of it against the PCs.

Luna Ziramar:

Barely twenty years old, this young Tarish has exceptional charm and beauty. She loves Farel and wishes to marry him, but she cannot help being responsive to the boys who court her.

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Branches

The investigations of the PCs can lead them on several tracks. If they question the Tarish, they will prove tight-lipped and untrusting toward them, only suggesting that the solution to their problem may hide in the close-by village of Dorelian... however, what is most commonly thought among the members of the clan is very simple: their companion gave in to Luna's charms and abducted her. Whether they are accomplices to the deed or not, his friends (the PCs) are his companions, and they are therefore responsible for his actions to a certain extent, as a Tarish would be for those of one of his relatives. The Leader should try to cut the investigation at the camp short, in order to send the PCs on the false-lead of the village.



Investigating at the Village of Dorelian:

One hour away from the Tarish camp is the village of Dorelian, built along the small river of Dorel. Dorelian essentially makes a living from fishing, but it is also a well-known resting place for travelers. Indeed, The Carp Inn has quite a reputation, and also displays several wonderful fishing trophies. The inn is even hosting a prestigious guest, Varigal Deirdre Louriène, who is passing by the region. The PCs may hear about her, but the Varigal will remain nowhere to be found.

The PCs will get to see Ansailéir Neventer, innkeeper Pedrog, fisherman Yrvrin, local bard Noeric, as well as old Demorthèn Rafer, who lives upstream. The PCs may also meet other inhabitants, the details of whom the Leader is entirely free to decide on: Vinoc, Tan, Katell, Vevina, Cethern.

Here are the various rumors and pieces of information that can be collected by questioning these characters:

- The manor is said to be inhabited by a blood-drinking creature. The Demorthèn believes this story and will tell the PCs about the Fasgadair ("blood-drinkers" in the ancient tongue), creatures from the Aergewin.
- One of Dorelian's inhabitants will confirm that he has found a fisherman, pale with blood loss, not far from the manor... The same thing happened to several cattle animals. Every year, a few of Dorelian's inhabitants disappear. And there are also travelers who never make it to the village...
- The manor is said to be haunted by the Mac Smàlan family. It is not by chance that "Smàlan" means "sadness" in the ancient tongue! The family is said to have died under strange circumstances, more than a century ago. Actually, the village was struck by a plague at that time, and it killed all of the Mac Smàlans.
- The PCs will learn of the presence of Magientists in the manor, right before the War of the Temple. Some hideous creature, bred from their unnatural experimentations, is certainly at the origin of the disappearances striking the village.

For the Leader, the objective is to make the village of Dorelian as credible as possible, to catch the attention of the PCs with many intriguing testimonies, so that the Players end up being persuaded that something horrible is happening in this infamous manor... Regarding Dorelian, there are indeed disappearances, but not that many in truth, and they are the consequences of several distinct phenomena: bandits, Feondas acting in the dark, accidental disappearances, bats infesting the Mac Smàlans' manor, etc. The Leader may eventually let the PCs investigate these issues afterward, but must ensure that first, they solve the mystery of the disappearances of Luna and their traveling companion.



The Mac Smalàns' Manor:

A visit at the old manor, whose architectural inspiration betrays Continental influence, will be quite tense. The PCs will never find the track of those they are looking for, but they will stumble upon the "vampires": a bat colony. This species feeds on animal and human blood. The bats, when they feel that their territory is being invaded, will attack the PCs. The Leader can find their characteristics on p.187.





Meeting Deirdre Louriène:

When the PCs come back from the fruitless exploration of the manor, they will meet the famous Varigal Deirdre Louriène. She is about to go on the road again after resting at the village of Dorelian. She holds a crucial piece of information, which she will mention to the PCs. On the evening of her arrival, she noticed a brief but violent quarrel involving three people, including a young woman. She remembers having heard what sounded like shouts, but she did not try to learn more: exhausted and slightly wounded, she went on toward the village to get some sleep...



The Tomb:

If they rely on Deirdre's testimony, the PCs can locate the place where their companion and Luna have been buried. Their bodies are marked with deep slashes made by a dagger.

Leaves

If the PCs do not manage to find out what happened to their companion and Luna, they will have to suffer the curse of the Tarish. A thorough investigation at the Ziramars' encampment after the discovery of the bodies can put them on Farel's track. For example, they can find bloodstained clothes in his tent, or he may bear a wound from his fight with the PCs' companion.

By making the truth known (if his deed is exposed, Farel will finally confess, bursting into tears), the PCs will earn the respect of the Tarish, which will be symbolized by a piece of jewelry given to each one of them: a ring forged by the clan's artisans. Farel will be sentenced to exile. Without any equipment, he will be sent on the road...

Wind



Musical Inspirations

*Empyrium - Where At Night
The Wood Grouse Plays - 02 -
Dying Brokenhearted.*

A track that can be played to illustrate the evening in the Tarish encampment. As a whole, this Empyrium album is an excellent source of inspiration for the universe of Shadows of Esteren.

a trick devised by Tarish: the soothsayer reportedly tried to put her asleep by pricking her with a needle during a divination session. However, Zurka and her clan are not brigands, and the old Tarish could even dispense a few important pieces of information to the PCs, at the Leader's discretion.



Exceptional Smiths: The Tarish are known to be excellent smiths, and they are worthy of such a reputation. The PCs may get to see a blade forged by a Tarish: it will appear to be of exceptional craft, as keen as a razor. Such weapons have a +1 bonus to Damage and are sold for about ten frost Daols by the Zimarar clan. It is said that some heroes, such as Sealgair "The Hunter", or powerful lords, would own weapons forged by the Tarish of an even better quality.

The visit to the "haunted manor" will probably be the second highlight of the scenario. The Leader can play on the PCs' fear of meeting a true vampire or being confronted to some vile spawn of Magience. All sorts of details should be brought up to set the atmosphere and put the PCs on the edge: spots of dry blood, creaking floorboards, feelings of oppression, furtive shadows, bloodless animal corpses, etc.



The Tarish clan is a major component of this scenario. The evening in the encampment will be the perfect occasion to set an atmosphere that should make a lasting impression on the Players:



Luna's Dance: The young woman is bewitchingly beautiful, and the Leader can let the PCs think that something supernatural is occurring during her dance. Remaining mysterious, the GL can ask each Player to roll 1D10. On a result from 1 to 3, the PC will simply be charmed by the young woman, but the Players will probably wonder what strange power is hidden behind this die roll...



Zurka's Predictions: For a few Daols, the old woman will agree to read the PCs' future. Before this, the Leader can mention the story of a young Varigal by the name of Yldiane (one of the PCs may even know her). She is said to have almost fallen for

Night of Fright

• **Style:** Thriller

• **Season:** Early spring

• **Setting:** A deserted mountain village

• **Length:** About two hours

Roots

The isolated village of Gévon is located a few miles from extensive caverns. Two centuries ago, the Gévonians, assaulted by Feondas, took shelter there. They discovered that, in the past, the place had already been used as a shelter by others, and wall paintings even proved that such a use dated back to the time of the Aergewin.

Since then, every year on the first days of spring, the Gévonians completely desert their village, only leaving behind a few stabled animals that would be too difficult to take along. The whole community, led by their Demorthèn, goes to the caverns for three days and three nights, with weapons and food, to symbolically commune with their ancestors while honoring the memory of the slaughter that occurred two centuries ago.

Since the vale is isolated and rather peaceful, there is virtually no risk of bandits or looters taking action during the few days when the inhabitants are absent, even more so considering weather is still quite bad at this time of the year. Proof is, in two hundred years, there has been almost no incident...

80

Trunk

The PCs have joined the caravan of a merchant, Master Verber. He used to make a detour through Gévon during fall, but health problems have kept him bedridden for several weeks, and winter forced him to wait for springtime. Therefore, as soon as thawing began, he went on the road, accompanied by the PCs: he offers them food and lodging, and in exchange, they help him protect his small caravan. After the detour through Gévon, which should only take one or two days, they will keep going toward their next destination.

The caravan includes Verber the merchant, three employees (Geran, Agos, and Mernel), and, finally, five mules carrying fabric, beer, and iron ingots to be delivered to Gévon's blacksmith. Master Verber is an honest man, thick-set, and used to traveling. His illness prevented him from finishing the year as he wished, and this had consequences on his finances: he has only kept his three most trustworthy employees.

Geran is the muleteer, a man in his fifties who drinks too much and often shows a patronizing side, expecting people to show him the respect owed to elders. Agos is only twenty years old, and is powerfully built. Although he pays close attention to Verber's orders, he is not adverse to playing dice with a good bottle or to venturing a hand in the bodices of young ladies. Finally, in spite of his crooked, blade-like face, Mernel the cook is a pleasant companion, with a refined sense of humor, and who does his best to make do with what he has. He is always eager to help, and few are those who do not come to appreciate him. All the members of the caravan have daggers as weapons. Verber and Mernel also have a gladius each. Agos wears studded leather armor and has an ax. Geran is a good shot and owns a bow.

The merchant knows nothing about the yearly ritual at the caverns, and the weather is still very rainy (early spring in a mountainous region). The caravan reaches its destination under the rain, at nightfall, in an apparently deserted village, without any explanation for such a phenomenon.

An inspection of the village will reveal that everything is in reasonably good order, except that the inhabitants and most of the animals are missing. The atmosphere is truly strange, and the Leader should make accurate, attention-catching descriptions of this rain-beaten village which seems entirely emptied of its inhabitants. With the water-soaked ground, it is impossible to find tracks, and night is falling. There are two problems awaiting the travelers:

- Kalden, a madness-stricken villager; a former fisherman who experienced something that made him insane in the past. He thinks that everybody he does not know is a Feond disguised as a human. In previous years, the Gévonians tried to take him with them, but he proved to be too much of a disturbance during the rites, and this time, he was locked in a lean-to with some food. He has managed to escape, and is now wandering in the village. He is convinced that the strangers are responsible for the disappearance of the other villagers, and that he is the next victim.

- A true Feond. A creature that normally lives much higher, in a riverbed in the heart of the mountain. A great swelling of the river, right after the villagers left, carried the creature to the outskirts of the village. The flood has also crashed down part of the outer wall, and the monster is now roaming in the "human nest". (see the Mudcrawler in the Bestiary on p.186). A brutal confrontation with such a creature should lead to a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.

The PCs and the small caravan will therefore end up under the rain, in the dark, in the middle of a deserted village, not knowing that a Feond and a potentially homicidal maniac are about.

The Feond

The Feond will first prey on the enclosed poultry, but it will not hesitate to attack isolated humans. The creature has a very aggressive nature, and if a human resists it and calls for help, it will not flee. It will avoid directly attacking an armed band, but it has some measure of cunningness, and can easily tell the difference between a group of people armed with daggers and clubs and a single warrior wearing heavy armor and wielding a dangerous weapon.

The Madman

The madman will use guerrilla tactics, striking and disappearing without leaving traces, looting the weapons of his victims, etc. As much as possible, he will avoid taking risks. If an opponent gives the alert, he will immediately flee. Above all, persuaded that he is dealing with Feondas, he will refuse to engage in any conversation and will not answer any calls while his deranged mind will try to take advantage of whatever the PCs and their companions will have the misfortune to reveal out loud in order to use it against them. In Kalden's mind, the travelers are not humans but Feondas under the guise of humans, and they are the ones who imprisoned him. Thus, he will be both frightful and hateful toward them.



Using or Not Using the Mudcrawler


Shadows of Esteren's scenarios are based on the principle of some degree of modular flexibility, notably as regards to the presence of supernatural elements. They do exist, and there will therefore be moments when Leaders will be free to consider whether a precise event is indeed supernatural, or if it is not. Likewise, alternatives will be proposed for horrific or gory scenes, so that Leaders may modulate them according to their needs, and to the expectations and receptiveness of their Players.


In Night of Fright, the presence of the Mudcrawler is therefore optional. Making the creature appear in this canvas is entirely left to the discretion of each Leader. Kalden the Madman is a more insidious, but also more ordinary threat, which the Players will not necessarily expect since the deserted village should precisely stimulate their imagination. Conversely, using the creature AND the madman can allow for more flexibility and give Leaders the opportunity to multiply tribulations. For example, if the PCs lock themselves inside a house, they can hear frightened crying outside, when Kalden comes face to face with the monster which will then try to catch him. As for the monster, it will remain away from the PCs, unless they seem weakened, one of them wanders away from the others, or their wounds become serious and numerous enough for the smell of blood to become intoxicating.


Leaves


The rites end during the night when the caravan reaches the village. The villagers return to their homes at dawn, which means that they will arrive when the PCs are still present. The villagers move together with weapons, food, children, and old people, but several experienced hunters have been dispatched around the main party, and two of them will move ahead when nearing the village. It is certainly these two scouts that the PCs will meet first. This initial contact will be rather tense, with the hunters keeping their weapons in hand and doing their best to keep the PCs at a safe distance, allowing time for one of them to warn the rest of the villagers and for the Ansailéir to come back with several warriors. According to how the events unfolded during the night, the meeting between the villagers and the PCs will be more or less tense. The first minutes can be determining in what comes next.

Unless they have assigned someone to keep a lookout from Gévon's watchtower, the PCs will probably be spotted by the villagers, or they will only notice them at the last minute. If the villagers notice the presence of strangers before the PCs see them, they might mistake them for looters, until they identify Master Verber... if he is still alive. If the PCs notice the villagers first, Verber or his employees will easily be able to identify several of them, which should reassure—but also puzzle—the Players.

 **Kalden has been killed:** The villagers will be rather hostile, particularly if the PCs have also damaged some houses or taken things that did not belong to them. However, the madman was an embarrassing burden. Therefore, the PCs will not really be considered as murderers, unless they mess up and aggravate the villagers.

 **The Feond has been killed:** If the PCs have killed the Feond, and are able to prove that the madman has escaped on his own, the villagers will be much more lenient toward them.

 **Best case scenario:** For the PCs, it would be to kill the Feond, capture Kelden, damage nothing, and not take anything or give it back afterward, explaining that it was a misunderstanding. In such a case, they will be heartily welcomed, and if they show politeness, they may even be offered some food for the road, a weapon, a coat...

 **Worst case scenario:** The worst that could occur would be that the PCs fight the scouts going ahead of the villagers, injuring or even killing one of them. In such circumstances, the villagers will immediately go to battle and show no mercy, unless one of the PCs drops his weapons and surrenders. Although this will be a very unfortunate misunderstanding, the community will be very hostile toward strangers, in spite of the likely presence of one or several caravanners. Many villagers will demand the death of the intruders, and it is highly possible that they will get their equipment confiscated before being expelled from the village... which is actually the equivalent of a death penalty. If one of the PCs shows eloquence, things can go differently: a “murderer” accepting to take responsibility for the group's “crimes” can simply have his main hand cut off, and his companions will be able to go unharmed. He should normally be executed, but after all, the Gévonians are not stupid people, and they realize that the strangers have extenuating circumstances. However the problem is solved, it may also be that the brother, the wife, or the son of the hunter killed by the PCs decides to get revenge and leaves Gévon soon after them, to strike at them the following night.



Musical Inspirations

Graeme Revell - *The Insider* - 09 - *I Am Alone On This.*

A track that is sure to set a heavy atmosphere during the exploration of the village.



John Frizzell - *Ghost Ship* - 09 - *Touring The Ship.*

This track, less melodic than the one above, can be used during the tour of the village in order to heighten the mood, particularly as the Feond's attack draws close.

Leaders should go through the exploration of Gévon at a slow pace, insisting on the description of each place visited, so that the PCs obtain an overabundance of facts and clues, most of which will be of no importance. The main challenge is to have the Players imagine plenty of things about the disappearance of the villagers, while two threats without any direct relation to this mystery are weighing on them. The darkness, the ceaseless rain, and the actions of the Feond and of Kalden must contribute to disorienting them. A cry outside, or a brief flicker of light where there was supposed to be no one, can help set the scenario's pace right again. The final confrontation with the madman, the Feond, or both at the same time, is left to the discretion of the Leaders, according to how much tension they want to create. At the Leaders'

discretion, it is also possible to confront the PCs with one of the two antagonists, then have the other leap in right after the group is done with their first opponent.

If the PCs barricade themselves inside a house rather than exploring the village, the Leader can (through the NPCs for example) lead them to think that since the villagers have disappeared in spite of the protection of their walls and doors, it will probably be of no use. In such a case, Kalden may climb on the roof and pour oil in a lighted chimney, or throw rocks at a shutter to drive someone to go outside. The Mudcrawler could try to batter down the door once or twice, then disappear into the darkness, lured by the proximity of Kalden, whom the noise has brought around.

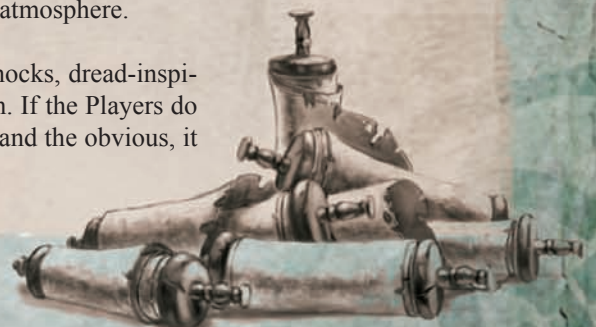
Stakes for Night of Fright

This canvas gives Leaders the opportunity to toy with the expectations of some of their Players, particularly those who deal with scenarios according to a very classic linear principle in which the main stake is revealed quickly after the beginning of the session. The point is that, in this case, the "disappearance" of the villagers is only a pretext, a diversion that will remain so until the conclusion of the scenario, whatever decisions the Players make during the night.

The return of the Gévonians on the day after should be both a disappointment and a surprise for the Players, which can give a very unusual turn to the conclusion of this scenario.

This possibility was deliberately considered, because it is relevant to the state of mind it is advised to establish in *Shadows of Esteren*: uncertainty. Keeping the Players on their toes, putting up smokescreens, and questioning what is apparently obvious are many means to preserve and sustain the atmosphere.

With such a perspective in mind, the horrific aspect is not only about shocks, dread-inspiring visions, or gruesome scenes, but also about a certain diffuse tension. If the Players do not feel confident, because they sometimes do not know how to understand the obvious, it can only help Leaders instill more anxiety when they need to.



Say it with Flowers

- **Style:** Investigation
- **Setting:** The city of Kalvernach
- **Season:** Any
- **Length:** About two hours

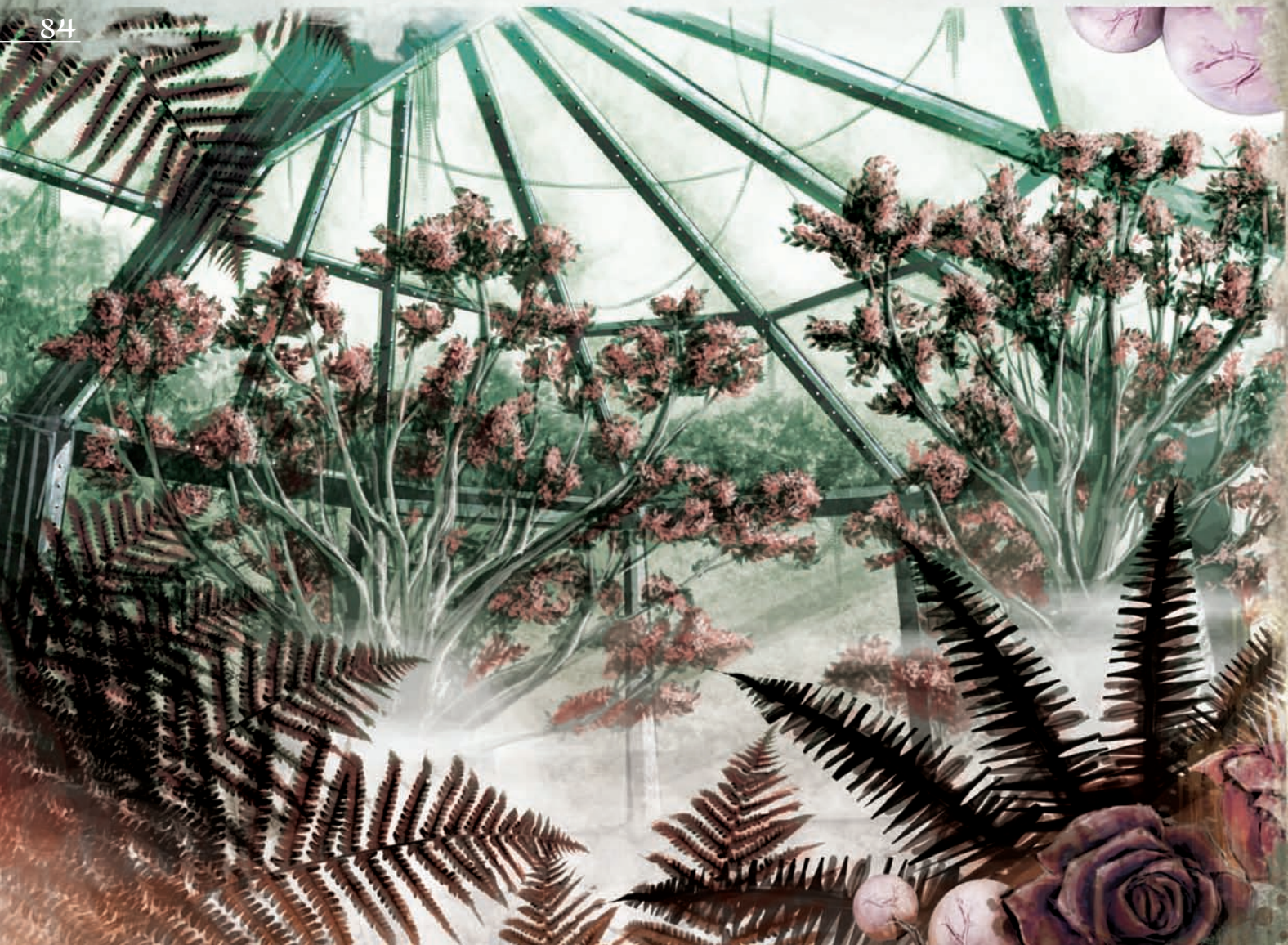
Roots

In Kalvernach, herbalist Jaran is mainly known for his talents in alchemy.

The town's gossipers also know that in the past he was a promising young scientist, but that he was expelled from the Magientist order because he had been one of the assistants of the infamous Yvon Joern. Jaran knew nothing about the dreadful experiments of his superior, who did not trust him, but the Magientist order dismissed him on the grounds of negligence.

However, few people are aware that for over a year, Jaran had a discreet affair with Neara, the youngest daughter of the university's Primus. Willing to slum a bit and knowing about Jaran's past, she was seduced by the atmosphere of scandal around him. A few weeks before the canvas begins, and after many quarrels, their tumultuous story ended very badly, and Neara decided to kill the herbalist, who was as selfish and insensitive as she.

To do so, she substituted one of the plants of Jaran's small glasshouse with a specimen that looks a lot like it, but whose pollen is violently hallucinogenic. The former Scientör has completely given in to delirium and killed himself in an atrocious way.



Trunk

The PCs must have a reason to pay a visit to Jaran and discover his body. They may need the expertise of the alchemist, or his supply of healing herbs. They may also have heard that he is a former Magientist, and require his knowledge. The shop of the alchemist is open, and its owner lies in the greenhouse in the back. Since Jaran initially had no choice but to settle close to a hunting dog breeder, no one heard his cries, which drove the dogs to howl even louder than usual.

Soon after the PCs enter the shop, Sergeant Heger from the watch barges in, coming to buy herbs for his recurring digestive problems. Heger is no stupid man, and provided the PCs do not attempt to flee, he will quickly understand that they are not the murderers. He will then ask them to investigate this case. Indeed, the watch has its hands full

with Feondas in nearby mining galleries. A modest sum given by the sergeant as a salary and the natural inquisitiveness of the PCs should do the rest. Should they refuse, Heger can mention that their presence on the scene of a crime could not bode well for them... Unless they are particularly stupid, the PCs should realize that they have been seen entering the shop, and so has Heger. Therefore, it would be dangerous, as well as foolish, to kill the sergeant; all the more so considering two of his men are waiting for him outside.

However, they are not the only ones to do so, and what the PCs do not know is that some other individuals, three foreign mercenaries who had precisely come to see Jaran, have also seen them enter the shop, then leave.

Branches

Jaran's corpse bears horrific scratch marks, as well as several cuts apparently caused by a weapon. Seeing the body leads to a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll. His hands are covered with blood, as is the pruning knife on the ground next to the body. Several pots of flowers and medicinal plants have been broken, indicating a ferocious struggle.

Truth is, the herbalist slashed himself with his nails and with the gardening tool, believing he was fighting against countless spiders trying to devour him alive. It would take someone with a good experience of forensics to understand that the victim killed himself in a fit of frenzy. A Difficult (17) Science roll can provide a clue about this.

However, there is also the hallucinogenic flower: if the PCs spend more than 10 minutes or so in the room, one of them may notice that the flower in question is rooted in a very dark corner, even though it looks like a gentian, which requires light to grow. A quick examination by someone who has some knowledge in botany (Standard (11) Herbalism roll) will reveal the deception: the flower is a very rare specimen of Blue Doom, infamous for its dangerous scent. Extended exposure to the pollen floating in the greenhouse's air can trigger traumatic visions.

To resist the visions, one has to succeed in a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll: a natural 1 triggers a bout of madness during which the victim will injure him or herself, suffering 2D10 Damage points.

A first look in Jaran's house above the shop will reveal nothing except that he led a rather comfortable life. However, under his bed is hidden a scroll case containing thick sheets covered with coded writings, as well as several notes showing that Jaran was making good progress toward deciphering the code. Completing it will still require a few days' efforts.

Asking questions about Jaran to his neighbors will reveal that until these last few weeks, he had often been seen going out at night with a young woman wearing a domino mask and a mantle. A little perseverance will lead the PCs to the Topaz Lantern, a little-known tavern with cozy alcoves: the kind of private and costly place where secretive couples tend to meet.

In spite of her disguise, Neara is known for being a hot-blooded woman, and the staff could identify her if asked in the appropriate way: polite, indirect threats will be more effective on people who are used to being paid high sums of money for their silence than trying to bargain. However, the Topaz Lantern has several bouncers, and complications are to be expected in case of a dumb move.

The three mercenaries who have reached Kalvernach soon after the PCs are in the pay of an influential member of the Magientist order in Baldh-Ruoch. This person, interested in the works of Yvon Joern, sent them to question his former assistant. Indeed, the man the mercenaries serve is convinced that Jaran must have held some information which he did not mention lest he make things worse for himself. The PCs seem to collaborate with the authorities, but are apparently not part of them. Therefore, the mercenaries hope that if Jaran had notes, the PCs will keep them with the idea of selling them. They will approach them in a quiet street to make them an offer.

The three mercenaries are not bloodthirsty thugs, and honestly intend to pay a pretty sum if they are not sure they can go rough on the PCs without any risk. However, if they are snubbed or feel that the PCs have what they want but refuse to sell it, they will draw their weapons.

Identifying Neara will raise a few complications. Indeed, the Primus of the university is well-regarded by the local authorities since his weapons helped drive back a Feond attack a few months ago. Heger will advise the PCs to let it go, unless they prove convincing; for example, if they tell him they have ascertained the presence of a Blue Doom, a flower of utmost rarity, which the university yet owns a few specimens of. Neara and her father will not remain idle if she is accused, but if the young woman is proven guilty and sentenced, the Primus will fall into melancholy.

The mercenaries know that their employer is a high-ranked Magientist in Baldh-Ruoch, who contacts them through messages delivered to an inconspicuous tavern. It will be impossible for the PCs to learn more unless they go to the Reizhite capital city. There, the PCs will have to act with care because there will be a very real risk of attracting dangerous attention. Like every great city, Baldh-Ruoch has its share of influential people who tend to react violently if they feel that meddlers are poking their noses into their little business. If the PCs maintain their efforts, they may be able to learn that the contact of the mercenaries is one of the subordinates of Alaina Naïghan, the youngest of the three Magientists of the Council which leads the order on the whole peninsula. Carelessly standing in the path of this equally powerful and ambitious woman is very likely to prove fatal.

Finally, deciphering the code of the parchments will reveal that they are notes that Yvon Joern could not take with him when he fled. Jaran found them in a cache whose existence he suspected when he secretly went to his laboratory a few months after he had been expelled from the order. He had hoped that Joern would have hidden some money there, or something that he could have sold. It is impossible to understand the intentions of the Magientist from these rather old notes, but he seemed determined to create from scratch some sort of creepers or flexible branches. If the PCs investigate the past of the herbalist, they will learn he was one of the assistants of Yvon Joern. The population of the city knows that this runaway criminal was the sinister Slasher of Kalvernach. He is said to have killed and cut into small pieces more than a dozen homeless people—if not more—with the help of one of his assistants.

Few are those who know exactly what the mad Magientist did, apart from the authorities of the city and the heads of the university, and no member of these two institutions will agree to reveal it to the PCs. The status of the order in Kalvernach is very ambiguous, and revealing the identity of Jaran's murderer will not quiet things down. Moreover, the Slasher case has truly macabre aspects that people feel are best left unmentioned. Above all, the PCs are only strangers, and nothing is owed to them. It will be strongly suggested to them to not mention this case and quickly leave the city troubled by this new Magientist crime.

Kalvernach is a tightly watched city with few places of ill repute. If most of the PCs are of rural origin, they will attract attention and quickly notice that they are met with something like condescension, and even with carefully hidden fear if they show intimidating behavior or wear impressive weaponry. Conversely, PCs who are used to cities, or who keep a low profile, will mingle very easily among the population, even if they will still quickly be identified as outsiders. Rural PCs would do well to play on the boorish aspect people from the countryside are often stereotyped as showing, which may lead their interlocutors to underestimate them. Urban or courteous PCs will have to tread carefully, because townspeople are suspicious toward polite strangers who start asking disturbing questions. Most of the people met by the Characters will therefore come across as rather haughty or distrustful.

A Pinch of Herbalism

The flowers of the Blue Doom, which can be confused with those of the Clusius' gentian, only bloom in some shadowed clearings of the Mòr Forsair. They are used in a variety of concoctions, mainly sleeping drugs, poisons, and psychotropics. However, it is hard to cultivate, and people who trade in recreational drugs prefer Gwylmine, a well-known yellow flower of the peninsula. Among the plants of Tri-Kazel, mention can be made of the Avernos, a bush whose roots, once ground, are used by Osag Demorthèn in sacred rites, because of its violently hallucinogenic properties. The bark of the ashy fir is an ingredient for many Demorthèn infusions, but the Temple outlawed its use, and it can only be found in the Sighing Forest and in the Forest of Whispers. There are also stranger plants, such as the Carmines, the blood-red flowers of the Carmine Chasm, the properties of which little is known about.

The Shipwreck



- **Style:** Exploration / Survival
- **Setting:** A small coastal village
- **Season:** Any
- **Length:** About two hours

Roots

Last winter, the small fishing village of Luad experienced an unprecedented disaster: a Magientist ship, carrying an important cargo of vegetal Flux and a few canisters of fossil Flux, crashed in the small bay on the shores of which the village is built. First damaged by a sea beast living close-by, the ship eventually sank, spilling the toxic fuel in the whole bay. Effects were very quick to appear, and the most vulnerable animals died one after the other. Then, the algae transformed to give birth to a venomous species capable of transmitting Aqueous Fever. Of unremarkable appearance, they grew abundantly in the bay before reaching the shores of the village and contaminating the inhabitants. The population was decimated: most of the villagers died on the spot, without a chance to go and raise the alarm; the others sank into madness and killed each other. The village became a deathtrap where passing-by travelers are at risk of being contaminated by the Aqueous Fever and dying as well. Only the wreck of the ship contains a few cartridges of Tonics (see on Book 1 – Universe, p.268) that can neutralize the very fast progression of the poison. However, to reach them, one will have to take the risk of swimming through the bay where the sea beast responsible for the wreck of the Magientist ship lurks...

Aqueous Fever

The mutated algae of the village of Luad (whose proliferation is due to contact with vegetal Flux) can transmit a deadly disease: Aqueous Fever. Any contact with the algae requires a successful Difficult (17) Stamina roll to avoid contracting Aqueous Fever. From the first day, this fossil Flux-based poisoning induces unquenchable thirst and burning fevers. In some cases, the patient sinks into aggressive madness. The contaminated person will keep drinking and swelling hideously until death comes, which generally happens after one week (each day, the disease inflicts 3 Disease points; see Book 1 – Universe, p.241).

A Complicated (14) Magience or Science roll will ascertain that Aqueous Fever is inadequately named, since it is actually fossil Flux poisoning. Without the corresponding serum, it is impossible to survive such exposure. For the Demorthèn, it is a manifestation of Nimheil, a cursed poison (see Book 1 – Universe, p.162).



Trunk

There are several possible ways to get the PCs involved in this story:

- They can simply be passing by the region and decide to take some rest at the village. Their map indicates the nearby coastal village of Luad (the exact position of said village on the map of Tri-Kazel is left to the discretion of the Leader), which is a stroke of luck, since bad weather seems to be brewing. Or it may be that one of the PCs is injured and requires healthcare...
- A remote cousin of one of the PCs lives in Luad, and has been out of contact for the last few months. Feeling worried, the PC in question and her companions decide to go together to find out what happened.
- The PCs, if they are Magientists, or of Reizhite origin, are commissioned by a Magientist university or lodge to establish what happened to a ship, The Orca, whose trail was lost around the bay of Luad.

When the scenario begins, the PCs get their first look of the bay: it is a peaceful place; a contrast with the surrounding sea-beaten cliffs. Here, the water is nearly translucent, and the light soft. The small village of Luad seems peaceful as well.

When the PCs approach, several elements can catch their attention and make them feel that something is awry, starting with the huge broken shape of the Magientist ship, a relic of wood and iron whose prow emerges from the bay's waters. As the PCs are walking along the beach, the translucent water will let them see a few rusty canisters littering the bottom. There are very few animals here, and among the sand and pebbles, they can find dead crabs whose corpses are streaked with yellow (a sign of fossil Flux poisoning). Finally, the village seems eerily silent...

Branches

The village will appear to be deserted, and deteriorated, as if abandoned several months ago. The Leader can elaborate on the derelict aspect of the wind-beaten houses: broken windows and dirty walls at the bottom of which weed grows. The air is heavy with salt, the sickly smell of algae fills the nostrils, and the wind carries sand that gets everywhere. Apart from the whistling wind, there is no noise; everything is quiet. A quick look inside a few houses will show the PCs empty buildings, where sand has accumulated in small piles against the yellowed walls. They also find a few bony corpses... one of which suddenly twitches, crashing on the floor. In spite of the appearances, it is only the wind or a sudden movement from one of the PCs which made the skeleton fall.

Here are a few events that may involve the PCs:



Meeting Veron

As they go on with their tour of the place, the PCs will come face to face with Veron, a Varigal. He is sick, contaminated by Aqueous Fever. His traveling companion, a warrior named Maelgur, is on the verge of death. He was infected five days ago, and although his friend tried to seek help from a nearby village, no one wanted to come with him. He was even driven away, since the villagers know of the grim fate of Luad's inhabitants. Worse, when he came back, Veron was contaminated by the algae as well while he was walking along the beach. Seeing Maelgur as he is now calls for a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll. The man has become swollen, his skin is distended, and he walks with great difficulty, begging for water. If some PCs have been poisoned as well, they are seeing what awaits them, which makes the Mental Resistance roll Difficult (17). On the day after the arrival of the PCs, the warrior will go through a fit of fury.



Contamination by the Algae

The tour of the village will be marked by an "attack" from the venomous algae that have multiplied in the region. During a moment when the PCs are walking along the beach or a large body of seawater left by the last tide, algae will slowly creep out of the water and clumsily coil around their limbs. Each Player will then make a Luck roll, and those who roll 5 or less will be affected: they will only notice it at the last moment, feeling a sting. They will have to succeed in a Difficult (17) Stamina roll or be infected by Aqueous Fever. It is easy to snatch the algae away, and no roll is required to cut the plants and clear the surroundings of their presence.



Investigating the Shipwreck

If the PCs do not get the idea themselves, Veron may drop a clue about it. When he went to the neighboring village, although he was rejected, an inhabitant advised him to go and see a Magientist... unless the wreck contains something that could cure him? Going to the ship should be an oppressive moment. First, the weather may change and the water may become cloudy. The sea is very cold, and swimmers will have to make a Complicated (14) Stamina roll or catch a nasty flu (see "Catarrh" on p.242 of Book 1 - Universe). The PCs can find a few cartridges of fossil Flux, as well as documents showing the name of the ship and its connection with the Duke of Gorm (who trades with Reizh's Magientists; see p.49 of Book 1 - Universe).

Finally, the PCs will find Tonics that can cure Aqueous Fever. If the Leader feels mischievous, a possibility is to have the Players make a Luck roll. A result too low will mean that there are not enough remedies to cure everyone, particularly Veron and his companion...



The Confrontation with the Sea Beast

Leaders wishing to include a horrific encounter can make use of the sea wyrm (see on p.184 of this book). They must take care to make the confrontation memorable by playing on the distress of underwater combat, the strange feeling of a huge body swimming past the Characters, etc.

Leaves

Depending on the actions and choices of the PCs, the scenario can evolve into very different sequels:

- If the PCs act quickly and efficiently, they may save Veron and his companion. These two might become allies of the PCs and lead them toward new adventures. For example, Veron might want to go to Kalvernach to deliver an important package. This makes it possible for the Leader to go on with a journey toward the city and the scenario "Say it with Flowers".
- Thorough investigation work about The Orca can take the PCs on the trail of Gorm's lord and his dealings with the Magientists (see p.150 of this book and p.49 of Book 1 – Universe).

Wind

On the PCs' first vision of the village, the Leader can remind them of the threats hanging over the human communities of Tri-Kazel. Through the seasons, as winter dissipates and roads become accessible again, it sometimes happens that a village is found with all its inhabitants missing. They are said to have been caught by some ineffable, ravenous threat; by Feondas striking during the most tempestuous days. Some even fear, probably exaggeratedly, that the entirety of mankind could progressively be threatened by extinction. At any rate, exploring a deserted village should give Leaders the opportunity to set a tense mood.

As for the algae, their attack, as startling as it may be, only hides the actual threat that the poison they can inoculate consists in. Of course, Leaders can devise a much more or much less spectacular encounter with the plants, according to the atmosphere they wish to give to the game.

Swimming through the waters of the bay will be another moment when Leaders can go all out on their descriptions. They can draw inspiration from the scene of the movie *The Road*, by John Hillcoat, when the main character dives in the ocean to reach the remains of a trawler. The confrontation with the sea wyrm will be the most striking moment of horror.



Musical Inspirations

Biosphere - Substrata - 10 - Sphere of No-Form.

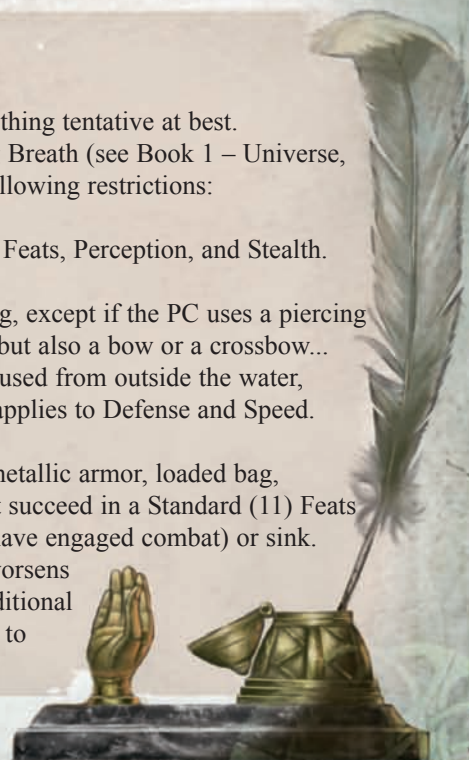
This track can heighten the mood during the investigation of the Magientist ship.

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Combat in the Depths

Moving and fighting in water is something tentative at best. In addition to the rules about Holding Breath (see Book 1 – Universe, p.240), the PC has to bear with the following restrictions:

- A 4-point penalty when the PC uses Feats, Perception, and Stealth.
- A 4-point penalty to the Attack rating, except if the PC uses a piercing weapon (such as a spear or a dagger, but also a bow or a crossbow... provided these shooting weapons are used from outside the water, obviously). The 4-point penalty also applies to Defense and Speed.
- If the PCs wear heavy equipment (metallic armor, loaded bag, cumbersome weapon, etc.), they must succeed in a Standard (11) Feats roll every minute (or Round, if they have engaged combat) or sink. Moreover, wearing such equipment worsens the aforementioned penalties by 2 additional points. Note that such penalties apply to every Feats roll to avoid sinking.



- The Shipwreck -



Chapter 3

A Life Choice

A scenario by Iris



One of the typical plots for *Shadows of Esteren* features a group of villagers facing a horror that is beyond them and forces them to leave the boundaries of the familiar, reassuring world they have lived in so far. The scenario “A Life Choice” has been designed according to this very idea of progressively losing your bearings. However, in this case, the Characters are from a thriving city and will find that the worst things can hide within walls that are supposed to protect them from exterior dangers. Here, the threat originates from the mind itself: it is a collective, sectarian delirium that makes its victims prisoners of themselves...

The story first appears to be a classic journey, with its share of meetings and highs and lows, before it slips toward isolation, anxiety, and an oppressing feeling of powerlessness in the face of imminent peril.

Close attention must be paid to successfully performing this transition, which will lead a difficult yet manageable situation to spin out of control. For inspiration, Leaders can study the storyline and atmosphere of a movie such as John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972).



- **Style:** a journey followed by intrigue in an enclosed space before a slip toward survival and horror
- **Setting:** nature (town, then forests and mountains in Taol-Kaer)
- **Season:** from the end of spring to summer, when the roads and oceans are accessible
- **Length:** enough for a short campaign

Summary:

Years after the death of her child and his father, a Magientist mother finds out that their disappearance at sea was a ploy to hide their kidnapping. The son and father now live in Taol-Kaer, among a self-sufficient, ultra-traditionalist community. Determined to stop at nothing, the mother organizes an expedition with the aim of finding her child and taking him away from the clutches of a dogmatic environment. The journey will be dangerous, but there is much more to fear from the village's inhabitants...

Stakes and Aims:

There are two sets of possible objectives to fulfill. In the beginning, the PCs simply have to make sure their sponsor makes it back safe and sound, but then they will also have to assist her in her endeavor to rescue her son. Also, once the Characters reach the village, two new goals will arise: saving a young, rebellious girl who is to be sacrificed because of her dissident attitude, and surviving the dangers of the forest surrounding the village. Through the situations and crises they will have to deal with, the PCs will be invited to reflect upon the notion of dogma. How can one know what is best for a child between two irreconcilable parents and two incompatible visions of the world? What stance should one take between two opposing ideologies?


Spinning the Web


The Shadows of Esteren series features many thematic scenarios (The Monastery of Tuath, the scenarios from Book 0 Prologue, the canvases from this book), as well as a large-scale campaign (in Book 3 Dearg). Each release introduces several possible leads to get the PCs involved and link these stories to those already available. “A Life Choice” is designed as a long scenario; a journey starting in a city where Magientists can be active in broad daylight. Therefore, the default starting point is in Reizh, and the most appropriate cities are Baldh-Ruoch, Farl, and Kalvernach. Playing the beginning of this story (Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2) is rather simple and, at this point, it is easy to insert canvases and encounters inspired from the figures presented in this book.


Of course, the purpose is not to delay or excessively slow down action, but to drive home the idea that traveling in Tri-Kazel is not an everyday occurrence. Traveling days are long, and it is impossible to plan everything in advance. No one undertakes a journey without a good reason. “A Life Choice” can be the first adventure of a party, on the occasion of which a Leader can make good use of the canvases, rumors, figures, and creatures from the bestiary described in this volume. A few possibilities are detailed in Act 1 – Scene 2. Following this adventure, the PCs will be somewhere in the mountainous forests of Taol-Kaer. From this point, they could for example go to Osta-Baille, the capital city of the kingdom, or north toward the Gwidrite border, where the Leader can have them go through the “Vengeful Words” scenario proposed in “The Monastery of Tuath”.


Chronological Markers

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 **Sixteen years ago, in the forest of Mör Forsair**, there was a couple—both Magientists. Following a journey in the wild lands, the husband decided to radically change his way of life, forsaking Magience which he denounced from then on as an evil of the worst kind. He left to find a mentor with the insane hope of becoming a Demorthèn, becoming an advocate of a very extremist ideology. However, afterward, he learned that his abandoned wife had given birth to his child.


 **Twelve years ago, in Baldh-Ruoch**. Convinced that the place of a child was not in a polluted city, so dangerously close to mad scientists, he decided to rescue his son and take him to lead a wholesome life in the forest. He organized the abduction so that everyone would believe he drowned with him, carried away by the sea. A daring plan, almost crazy, which succeeded nonetheless.


 **One year ago, in Lower Mūdan, north of Osta-Baille**. The child has become a teenager old enough to learn about the use of weapons and become an active member of the community. One day, chance had it that his martial skills attracted particular attention during a regional tournament. A friend of his mother, a roving merchant, happened to discover the truth and told her about it.


 **Present day, in a city**. The Magientist, both angry and determined to take back her child, decides to organize an expedition with the aim of confronting her husband. The fact that they live among an extremist society that sees Magientists as sworn enemies leads her to prepare for a possible confrontation.

Getting the Characters Involved

The most direct means to get the PCs interested in this story mainly depend on their skills. A few possible ways to involve them are proposed below.

 **Mercenary (fighter & guide)**. The Magientist who is the head of the expedition, Anaïs Cruyssec, is primarily looking for mercenaries with field experience and good knowledge of the region she is going to venture into. She needs someone who knows the local culture, the habits and customs. She also needs people able to guarantee her safety in the wilderness as well as protect her from the dangers of the roads, brigands, or hostile locals.

 **Magientist friend.** Magientist Anaïs Cruyssec is a teacher and a researcher who is very involved in her professional life and has a rather extensive web of contacts, both friends and rivals. Some of them may feel involved in this personal business, and decide to offer their support by accompanying her. Moreover, such a journey might be a good opportunity to research and explore. Also, a feigned friendship may be only a pretext to discreetly lead investigations that would be unacceptable for the inhabitants of the region. Such an opportunistic Magientist would be playing a dangerous game, since getting caught red-handed would antagonize the locals, and could lead to disaster, even causing the deaths of all the members of the expedition.

 **Diplomat.** Whether nobles or bards, such savvy Characters might be interested in local politics, even if it means going beyond the borders of their native kingdoms. Many possibilities can be explored:

From the point of view of such Characters, the mother's expedition is problematic: it will certainly give rise to tensions with the extremist Demorthèn branch (the Leader is free to decide the scale of such an issue)... but at the same time, offering their support to this Magientist delegation may be a source of income, or the basis of a profitable alliance in the future...

The sectarian community could be considered an intolerable counterpower, and anything that might denounce them as child-stealing criminals would be a good thing to undermine and weaken them, and truly return the power to the hands of local nobles, who are the only trustworthy arbiters of justice.

Finally, they may consider the cause of the mother as just, but also want to avoid diplomatic complications... Such a risk is all the more real considering Anaïs Cruyssec is not a lowly peasant, but a person of rank, influence, and connections. She is aware of the difficulties, and intends to be careful, but she will not give up on her objective.



The Modular Scenario System of Shadows of Esteren

At several key moments of the scenario, indicated with the icons below, boxes will suggest various optional scenes that will allow the Leaders to give the scenario the atmosphere they wish, with an accent more pronounced on certain aspects (gore, suspense, supernatural, etc.) Of course, these are only suggestions, and Leaders are invited to adapt their narrative choices more personally by designing new scenes.

Gaming styles and symbols



Gore



Suspense



Psychology



Supernatural

The atmosphere during the gaming sessions will mainly depend on the involvement of the Players, and on the Game Leader's work, who acts as the director. Several icons indicate technical aids providing advice.



This icon indicates boxes giving the Leaders tips and hints in order to optimize the atmosphere of a scene.



This icon highlights important information so that the Leaders may notice it easily.



This icon gives musical suggestions to illustrate a scene. The Of Men and Obscurities album, by Delphine Bois, is the first of a cross-media series composed for use as ambient music for Shadows of Esteren.

Script and Sandbox

A role-playing game scenario can have a complex structure, particularly if it stretches over the course of several sessions like “A Life Choice”. Such an adventure includes some scripted aspects and others that are left to the discretion of the Leaders, often called “sandbox” elements. The aim is to create a variation in pacing and style in order to offer a richer, more diverse experience. This is the opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the PCs’ questionings and psychology when they are faced with challenges and ordeals.

⌘ Script:

a scenario or a scene is linear or scripted when the key events are already precisely laid out. The stakes and difficulty of the required rolls are precisely defined, and atmospheric elements are suggested. For example, this is the case for most of Act III. Such an approach stresses the dramatic tension of the story’s turning points.

⌘ Sandbox:

a sandbox scene or act provides a few elements (NPCs, rumors, places, etc.) which the Leaders may freely use and improvise with, reacting to the ideas of the PCs. The purpose of such an approach is to describe an atmosphere, provide a sense of daily life, or detail the personality of an important NPC. This is the case in Act I, where the journey can be the right moment to get to know Anaïs Cruyssec better. In Act II, two instances of sandboxes are proposed: one in Lower Mûdan, and the other in Higher Mûdan, in order for the PCs to clearly feel the ideological contrast and the inherent dramatic stakes.

Horror and Dramatic Tension

Modular boxes have been included to allow the Leaders to set their own tone and style for the story. So that the Leaders may have an overall vision, here are the main axes of “A Life Choice”:

⌘ Inescapable tragedy.

A dull melancholy follows the mother’s quest. The whole journey, with the obstacles, bad weather, accidents, and in spite of the highlights, is tinted with the certainty that there is no justice. A feeling of loss and desperate denial should pervade the canvases played during Act I, Scene 2. Leaders are advised to instill this feeling into their sessions by depicting a sober atmosphere and making use of the “Psychology” and “Suspense” options to foster feelings of anguish and oppression. The discovery of the fundamentalist village is the opportunity to show how far the downfall of the individual has gone, each villager acting merely as an agent of the group’s will, like a puppet. The conclusion of the tragedy is brought in Act III, with the decision of the son to kill his own mother to purify his impious birth and become a hero for his ruthless, autarkic people... The PCs can only witness this appalling waste while they flee into the forest to escape from a fate similar to their employer’s. The only potential hopeful note can come from the rescue of the rebellious girl who would have been sacrificed as well, and who shows that even among a sectarian system, some manage to keep their individuality and desire for freedom. A variation of the tragedy can be an unbearable status quo: the scenario reaches its conclusion with the image of a horrified mother, forced to run away from a child that is not hers anymore. She may save the young girl from being sacrificed and adopt her, but deep inside, she will remain crushed.

⌘ Hard as nails.

The principle of this classic gaming style, which may be most suitable for a novice Leader, is to use the story as a panorama to have the Players discover Tri-Kazel. Psychological elements can be given less importance to focus on action phases and accentuate the differences between the factions, making it harder to empathize with the other. Inserted canvases will provide opportunities for combat as well as Stamina and Feats rolls in order to keep a nervous pace and leave no gaming session without an adrenaline rush. The “Suspense” and “Gore” will be emphasized. Leaders should then avoid disarming the PCs in the village, and favor a deft abduction in Act III, with the action scenes coming in close succession: withdrawal, running away through the forest, seeing the moral downfall of the fundamentalists who worship a monster, and possibly burning it down in an awe-inspiring final scene...

A variant, which could be dubbed “Gray Dawn” goes for a more psychological and inward-focused epilogue. The abduction of the boy was a success in spite of how hard it was and the fights it brought; several days later, the travelers find shelter in a fortified monastery, and the boy then starts treading the hard path leading back to reality, possibly helped by his mother and his childhood friend. At this stage, the “Monastery of Tuath” supplement can be used, which implies that the party will go there because they have heard of the good reputation of the local healers.

Decrypting signs.

The journey may be dangerous, but reasonable, careful Characters will tackle it methodically. They will avoid as many confrontations as they can, will go for furtive and subtle options when possible, but above all, they will try to understand. Each step, meeting, canvas, and scene is the opportunity to learn more about the world they explore, be it about society, customs, geopolitics, or supernatural things. All through the story, boxes and information will be provided to make it possible for a team of researchers, Magientists, or occultists to unveil mysteries or to find clues and leads. The Leaders will have to give prevalence to “Supernatural”-related options, with touches of “Psychology” and “Suspense”, and leave “Gore” in the background. For such a team, it should be possible to understand the nature of the great spirit worshiped by the fundamentalist village. A carefully concocted “Gray Dawn” conclusion could get the Characters interested in means to heal the soul. An occultist, for example, could oppose the methods of the Temple with the ones of the Mental Phenomena Discipline. Everything is an opportunity to learn and understand: horror is used as a brutal vector for revelations and initiation into the secrets of the world.

A Few Modulations Toward the Depths

The world of Shadows of Esteren is not black-and-white, and part of the mystery and feeling of horrific revelation depends on how Leaders depict ambiguity, doubt, and gray areas. This box provides a few leads and atmospheric elements which can be dropped throughout the journey and the ordeals in the village of the Pure, so that this voyage may be not only a change of scenery, but an opportunity to bring deep changes to the way Characters see the world. Three themes can easily be added to the main line of dramatic tension: the harshness of an impossible choice, the place of an individual among a group, and the contrast between civilization and savagery.

Impossible choice.

The core of the storyline rests on the question of familial ties when personal relationships are paired with ideological convictions. How can you be sure you are choosing what is “best” for someone? How should you choose between love from one person and another? How do you handle growing up between two cultures and beliefs that are almost entirely irreconcilable? All these questions are deliberately borrowed from the modern world so that the Players can perceive the tragic nature of a simple story: two parents, one child, and the impossibility of getting along or understanding each other, leaving only pain and sorrow.

Solidarity.

The conclusion of the story will have a much stronger effect on the PCs if they have sympathized with the mother, who is also their hirer. At the outset, their motivation is professional, since they are only mercenaries. The ideal evolution would be that they progressively get truly involved. The journey is the opportunity for Leaders to show the mother as a deep character, and to correspondingly bring the PCs to tell more about themselves. Mutual trust is necessary to survive in Tri-Kazel. Those who were only teammates, temporary allies, to begin with, can become friends. Interdependency is the key to survival. Realizing such a thing can have an even better narrative impact if contrast is made between the group of travelers and the self-centered, ossified, toxic solidarity of the sectarian village. Discussions with the members of this community can be a good time to bring the PCs to think about the opposition between individual and group—between egoistic pleasure and the greater good, for example. Is there a balance that allows the individual, who needs the group, to nevertheless exist without being lost within it?

From outside to inside.

The structure of the story follows two lines that evolve together and form dynamics and mechanisms for the rise of horror. The first consists in going from “civilization” to “savagery”, with a progressive loss of control over the events, which expresses itself through greater and greater strangeness and increasingly powerful adverse forces. The sectarian village is located as if outside human society.

The second line goes from physical ordeals to mental ones. The Characters' journey will begin with action-related rolls such as Feats or Travel, but they will progressively be brought to think about and question the certainties they may hold. Discussions, accusations, and insidious suggestions aiming to spread doubt can then lead to revelations about themselves, epiphanies, or breakdowns in the form of incurable traumas and wounds...

Mùdan, the Village of the Pure

Initially, there was only one Mùdan, but since then, a sectarian group calling themselves “the Pure” have grown into a community located in the heights. As a result, there is now “Lower Mùdan”, a town on the road between Osta-Baille and Ard-Monach that includes a castle and is faithful to the crown; and “Higher Mùdan”, isolated and hostile to strangers.

Sectarian Isolation

Living in Autarky

Although most villages in Tri-Kazel strive to live self-sufficiently, some products and know-how still require the contribution of outsider merchants and artisans. Real, complete autarky is an exception. The village of the Pure, despite its ideology, has to bear the consequences of its isolation. Since its inhabitants follow a rigid dogma based on respect toward nature, they had to reduce many of their activities related to economy and craftsmanship, which considerably complicated their daily lives.

Mines & Metal.

96 Extracting stone tears the land, and refining minerals often leads to pollution. Thus, metal, since it results from such offensive activities, is not tolerated by the Pure. Iron, steel, and glass are nothing more than tainted things, the offspring of burning bellies inspired by the evil Aingeal, the scorching master of fire (see Book 1 – Universe, p.142). As a result, the local weaponry is mainly made up of spears and clubs. Flint weapons and even stone polishing techniques are in use again. However, to be able to reach a satisfactory level of quality, one must have specifically trained in this discipline. Some members of the community have been to the Tri-Sweszörs Archipelago, a cornucopia of ancient knowledge, and learned about it there. They had to prove that their intentions were noble to be accepted, but it was worth it. According to the Pure, the islanders have been able to preserve authentic traditions left unsullied by the wretched Continentals, the devious Tarish, the vile adepts of the Temple, the nefarious Magientists, or the loathsome occultists. Progressively, metal was all but eradicated from the village. The only one to make use of it is potter Meldith, “mistress of the fire” and of the community's bread oven, who sometimes acts as an amateur blacksmith in case of absolute necessity.

Cereals.

Having crops implies deforesting an area and designing techniques to avoid exhausting or eroding the land. However, the Pure simply consider that plowshares claw and wound the earth, and have therefore not considered developing a more environmentally friendly agriculture. The result is that the community of Mùdan has discarded the idea of planting crops. Fortunately, the creator spirits of earth and water, as well as those of the forest, watch over their faithful and grant them many resources.

Inhabitants of Mùdan



The “fir-loving bulb” is a tubercle that, as its name shows, grows near conifers, particularly firs, which are plentiful in the mountainous forests all around Mùdan. These plants can grow up to seven feet tall during spring, and have slightly rough and sharp leaves, which take on a deep yellow hue when they get enough sunlight. The somewhat boorish ingenuity of the villagers has led them to extensively gather chestnuts, as well as acorns. They are used to feed great black pigs, which are hard to domesticate and have dangerous tusks. In their natural state, these fruits are slightly toxic for humans. To make them edible, one must perform long and toilsome operations consisting of dipping and roasting them, then grinding the obtained mixture into a flour-like substance. The whole population bears these tasks with the specific purpose of avoiding the decadent comforts of so-called civilization. To do so, one must be ready to live a harsh life, to take much more time for every daily task, and to accept an austerity worthy of the most zealous adepts of the One... Fortunately, growing vegetables in the clearings close to the village is tolerated.

Clothing.

Since grazing sheep or cultivating flax is out of question, the only remaining option is to raise Calyres, since they can feed from the most meager vegetation and provide good wool. However, it is hard to obtain quality dyes, since mordant is commonly used to fix the product to the fiber, and it generally includes chemicals that leave toxic residue. This is why it is very easy to recognize Mùdan's inhabitants. They can only choose among walnut-stain brown, wool beige or off-white, onion yellow, woad blue (in small amounts), and pale yellow-green (from various plants). To compensate for such a meager chromatic range, clothiers weave geometrical patterns into the borders of clothes, which are composed of large plain patches. Fur and leather are obtained by hunters encouraged to test their mettle by confronting forest beasts. By being predators, they are part of the cycle of nature. In return, the village's elders and infirm are encouraged to wander into the woods to feed wolves and bears, unless the Demorthèn offers them to Mùdan's “protector” in its sacred lair...

Life Among a Sect

Unfortunately, living in Mùdan is not only about leading a rough, harsh existence, but indeed going about your daily business under a constant, suffocating pressure made of taboos, terror, and blind obedience. Under the yoke of an extremist Demorthèn, a rigid Ansailéir, and an ardent Dàmàthair, the community has withdrawn into itself and fostered an oppressive culture.

The constant presence of the group.

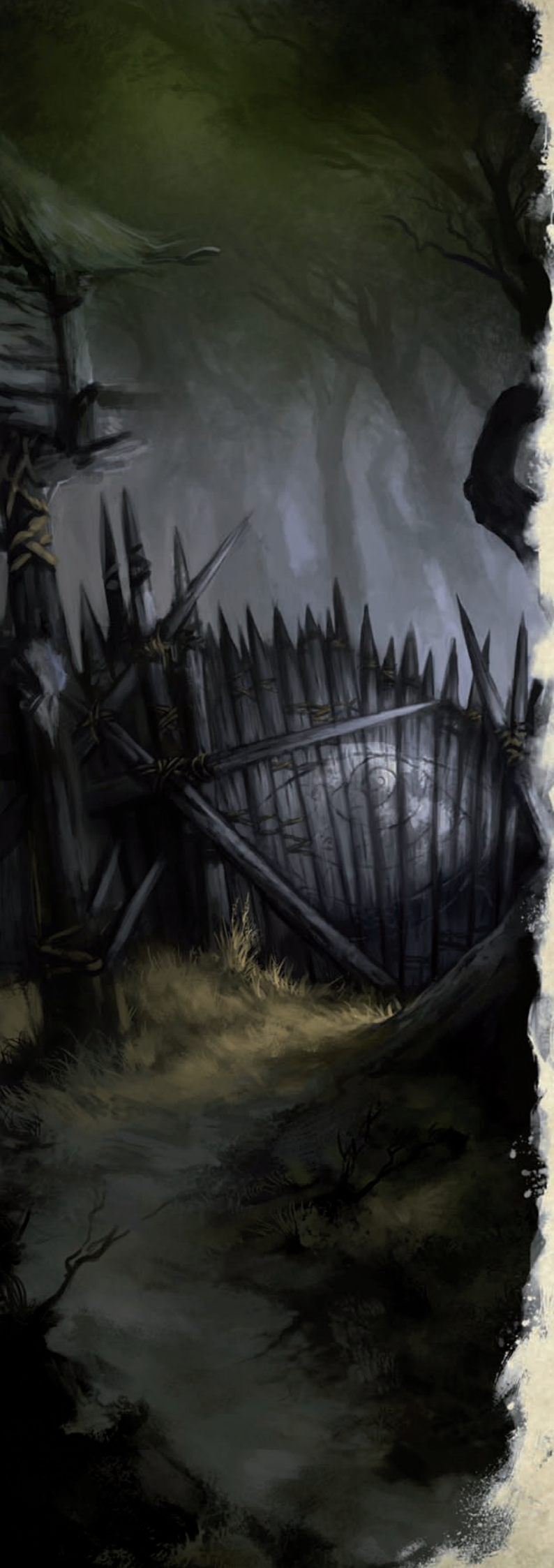
The community is everything: Mùdan is a living organism, and none of its members should actually consider him or herself distinct. Individualism is meaningless, and any desire for personal aspirations is not only a loathsome heresy: more than that, it is a disease, a plague! It means that the part considers itself more important than the whole it is supposed to blend into and fuse with to attain happiness. No inhabitants of Mùdan are authorized to speak to strangers by themselves. Generally speaking, any solitary activity is frowned upon, and may be denounced during the village's assembly. Explanations are then demanded, and purification will probably be required for the individual to be reintegrated into the social body. Through the years, almost everyone has already been subjected to painful public humiliation, then to a joyful return into the community. The ceremonies have been conceived to put nerves to the test, with a rejection followed by promises of unconditional love, which most of the time results in zealous conformism devoid of identity. Many of the locals behave like juvenile yes men, listening and obeying without showing doubt or asking questions.

Rejection of the outside world.

Only the community is right; it is the only one to see clearly what is right or wrong. The world is divided between “Us” and “Them”, the latter being systematically greatly discredited. As a consequence, all positive feelings tend to strengthen the illusion of a united, solidary group, where each member is gifted with extraordinary abilities. However, in addition to the outside world, which is used as a foil, the village has its own scapegoats. These individuals are progressively marginalized, isolated, labeled... For example, Trine, the rebellious teenager (see page 105), is rejected by everyone, including her family; a way to prepare the group's catharsis during the sacrifice she is destined for. Such a decision is diffuse; it is impossible to tell in which mind it arose, but it spread to become an obvious conclusion.

Higher Mùdan and its Surroundings

The geographical organization of the village of Higher Mùdan (also called True Mùdan or Village of the Pure by its inhabitants) is very representative of the isolated communities of Taol-Kaer. The place has been built from a defensive perspective, with a single access path that has been designed to be easy to keep watch and attack from a higher position. Several small observation posts concealed within the dark woods make for good sniping spots, so that a handful of bowmen can sorely hinder the progression of a contingent of much greater size. It is impossible to get close to Mùdan through the main road without being



noticed. And should that not be enough to drive away intruders, Demorthèn Neventer knows how to make use of the gnarled trees that menacingly raise their branches above strangers.

☸ *The fire bed.*

Birthered by the dangerous spirit Aingeal, the destructive fire must stay within the outskirts of the village, so that it may not defile the inhabitants with the devastating passions that corrupt humans and are at the origin of the appearance of Feondas. Therefore, the two community ovens—one for pottery and one for bread baking—are located outside of the palisades and are only manipulated by the “fire keeper”, Potter Meldith. Still, within the village, fire is tolerated to cook and provide lighting, under the condition that it is carefully watched, particularly as regards to the amount of wood it consumes.

☸ *The rivers.*

Two rivers run close to the village. The first one, partly visible from the access road, is practically a torrent where the villagers can fish with traps, nets, or tridents. Trout and salmon, grilled or smoked, are an important part of the local diet. The second river is more peaceful and abundant with crustaceans and fresh water mussels, in addition to a few succulent eels, as well as various mammals and fishing birds. A great part of the village's life is organized near the river, be it for hygiene or foraging. Fishing in unpolluted and sparsely exploited waters is almost child's play for people used to the Natural Environment (Standard (11) Difficulty Threshold). The Demorthèn sees to it that overfishing is avoided, and ensures that the species' cycle of life is respected.

☸ *Common houses.*

Life in the village is communitarian, with great houses inhabited by every generation of one or several families. The inside is dark and sparsely furnished. Containers are made of terracotta, and blankets, clothes, and personal belongings are stored in chests. All around, a few domestic animals wander around, in particular chickens and pigs that are taken to the nearby forest during the day. A common house in the center of the village, higher and sturdier than the others, is the place where the inhabitants gather for festivities, the sermons of the Demorthèn in winter, or legal proceedings. Essentially, it is a spacious place and easy to arrange.

☸ *The vegetable gardens.*

Farming is frowned upon, but tolerated for growing vegetables. These gardens are carefully tended to, and this is where most of the natural fertilizer produced by the community—namely, compost and feces—is used. It is collected in composting toilets located close to the hen house, the occupants of which never fail to cackle and prattle each time someone visits their pen, regardless of whether the visitor is a Pure or not.

☸ *The common forest.*

A great part of the nearby forest is cultivated in order to favor the growth of species useful to human life, such as medicinal plants, some edible tubers, raspberries and blueberries in clearings, hazel trees... There are often problems with pigs and boars, which feed on acorns, chestnuts, and fir-loving

bulbs, threatening food safety and making it necessary to laboriously import cereals. The trees here can be cut down once Demorthèn Neventer has been given authorization by the spirits. Woodworking with stone tools is more difficult and dangerous than with metal ones. Bringing down and cutting up a tree is truly demanding physical labor, requiring true Feats of strength (Complicated (14) Difficulty Threshold) over the course of several days. Helping the villagers with such works might earn some consideration, at the price of blisters and aches...

⊕ The sacred path.

Starting from a clearing in the common forest, and demarcated with stones of average size, the sacred path is the ritual way that the Demorthèn walks through, alone during most of the year, and accompanied by everyone on the occasion of the yearly ritual sacrifice. On this occasion, offerings are made in order to atone before the spirits for the presence of humans, and to feed the great Madarcht, who brings life and prosperity to the forest.

⊕ The spirits' forest.

The spirits' territory is very vast according to the Pure's conception, stretching as far as the road going from Osta-Baille to Ard-Monach. These woods are darker than the common forest, so much so that the sun's rays seldom touch the ivy and moss-strewn ground. Many rocks and granite jumbles cover a number of similar little vales. They look so alike that, taking into account the absence of landmarks and clear viewpoints, orientation becomes Complicated (14), and even Difficult (17) at night. The only advantage of this situation is that hiding spots are aplenty: behind rocks and fallen trees or in holes formerly inhabited by badgers, for example. These conditions make it undeniably easy to be stealthy (+2 circumstance bonus to related rolls). The importance of the area occupied by the spirits' forest is explained by the Pure as being the expression of Madarcht's might. Spirits are strong and many, but ruthless against impure strangers. Actually, it is the territory where Madarcht, in truth a Feond worshiped as a sacred spirit, contaminates beasts and plants. The Feondas thus created are nothing more than sick natural beings linked to the monster. Beyond the forest, they are not a danger, since the contamination creates in them the need to stay close to Madarcht's lair (see the Bestiary, on p.190).

⊕ Madarcht's lair.

The path snakes along a crest and leads to a rather inconspicuous rock shelter that suddenly opens into a tunnel adorned with white paintings drawn by Neventer and his Ionnthèn. The way is blocked by a rudimentary mechanism that closes access to the lair of Madarcht, which spends most of its time slumbering in a small subterranean lake (a map is provided in Act III, Scene 4).

Dietary Ethics

So that nature and its resources are given due respect, the Pure, like all traditionalist believers, apply certain rules related to food. First, the custom is to always finish a meal not totally satiated, and to that effect, one must eat a single serving, on one plate. To avoid the temptation of exhausting a single, plentiful resource, which may lead to its depletion, believers must take care to put three equal parts of foods of different natures on their plates. For example, a plate may include one third of fish or game, one third of chestnut or cereals, and one third of watercress or dandelion leaves. Of course, killing a prey and letting some of its flesh go to waste is forbidden, which makes it necessary to butcher or hunt moderately and to share game. This way, it is impossible to make excessive, deleterious use of techniques of predation, harvest, or gathering.

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Lower Mùdan

The village of Lower Mùdan is located on the original site of Mùdan, a step on the road between Osta-Baille and Ard-Monach. The castle overlooking it is inhabited by the Mac Evans family, stalwart traditionalists and faithful servants of the Crown. The existence of Higher Mùdan, known as the "Village of the Pure", is a problem that is beyond them as much as it divides them. The purpose of the welcoming community of Lower Mùdan is to contrast with the rest of the story.

It displays the point of view of those who dare not act against fundamentalism, who find excuses for it, blaming its harshness, but nonetheless having comparable practices concerning blind traditions: unswerving loyalty to the feudal system in spite of the problems in the dukedom of Dùlan; arranged marriage; refusal to give young people a choice; and reliance upon the—supposedly—wiser elders.



Lower Mùdan

☪ Evran Mac Evan.

The 45-year-old patriarch, a very pious man who closely abides by Demorthèn traditions. He is at a loss concerning what to do to restrain the actions of the fundamentalists of the higher village. Actually, he is mostly convinced of the soundness of their ideas, considering that it takes determined people to counter materialism or the Temple, but he deplores their methods... Uncertain and indecisive, vainly seeking happy mediums, he is unable to take an initiative. He has even renounced asking that Higher Mùdan's young people perform their military service, which is seen as a capitulation by many.

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☪ Mogrecht Mac Evan.

The 25-year-old firstborn; a Hilderin knight on furlough. He is a faithful servant of the Crown, very respectful of authority and hierarchy as well as laws. He is worried about banditry problems: a small band, whose members seem to come from the dukedom of Dùlan, has been causing trouble on the road leading to Ard-Monach. Mogrecht is fundamentally honest and upright—some might say uptight—and the practices in this territory hurt him. If he came to learn that the “Pure” worship a Feond, he might be a leading element in the organization of the eradication of the community and the contaminated creatures.

☪ Aïre Mac Evan.

The intrepid 16-year-old youngest, she is going to leave soon to perform her military service, but she would like to learn how to fight right now, and often asks strangers to train with her. Yearning for freedom, Aïre is a figure offering both contrasts and similarities with young Trine from the village of the Pure: they both have the feeling that others decide their fate for them; they both love their family; they both wonder how to find their place when their life has already been decided. Flirting with her will probably raise immediate reactions from the men of the castle with, for example, a duel against Méloir, and possibly debates and tensions regarding the weight of traditions (vassalage, arranged marriage...)

☪ Dallan Mac Evan.

The 17-year-old middle son, who has just returned from military service. As opposed to his father and brother, he considers it unacceptable that a Demorthèn can freely perform rituals from a bygone era. They should ask for reinforcements, and bring them to heel by force if needed! However, this hot-blooded young man is also very interested in Magience, which he cannot say in front of the rest of the family, and would like to secretly take lessons. Although he is still unsure, he is considering traveling to Reizh to learn more.

☪ Méloir.

The 20-year-old son of a poor vassal; honorable, loyal, and overly serious, he hopes to marry Aïre one day. For the time being, he knows that the young woman's father looks upon the idea favorably, but the prospective bride does not want to hear of it, even though she has noticed that everyone encourages her to follow this path.

☪ Rionnal.

An 18-year-old squire; his prankster nature offers a striking contrast with the very serious Mogrecht. He works at the castle, but is bored out of his mind, and kills time with stupid bets and slapstick pranks.

A Connection with the Hilderins

Since Mogrecht regularly has business to attend to between Ard-Monach and Osta-Baille, Leaders can use him to inform the PCs about the difficulties concerning the dukedom of Dûlan and Yvon Joern (see the “Figures” chapter). He may also introduce them to Ergon Tamir (“Figures” chapter), or talk with them about the case of the Jerryll of the Swamps (“Figures” chapter), provided he has not been killed during the events of Book 3 Dearg (see “Of Love and Fury”). Such an introduction is particularly adapted to a “Hard as nails” gaming style, since it can easily offer opportunities for missions on behalf of public personalities, providing a chance to rise in society.

Personalities and Motivations



Lady Anaïs Cruyssec
Female, Reizhite, 38 years old, Magientist (Mineralist) and physician

- ⊕ **Ways:** Combateness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 5. Reason: 1. Conviction: 3.
- ⊕ **Skills:** Close Combat: 1, Craft: 2, Erudition: 5, Feats: 1, Magience: 5 (Flux Extraction: 6, Flux Knowledge: 7, +2 bonus), Perception: 3, Relation: 5 (Diplomacy: 6, Faction Knowledge (Magientists): 7), Science: 5 (Medicine: 7, Pediatrics: 10, Pharmacy: 8, +2 bonus), Stealth: 3, Travel: 2.
- ⊕ **Character Traits:** Brave / Emotive.
- ⊕ **Sanity:** Symptom of Mysticism (Mysticism).
- ⊕ **Combat:** Attack: 5. Defense: 11. Speed: 9. Potential: 2. Damage: 0.
- ⊕ **Health:** 19, Stamina: 9.
- ⊕ **Advantages:** Brilliant. Setback: Wound (Poisoning).

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Anaïs Cruyssec is of average size, with cropped light-brown hair. She is almost skinny, with pale eyes and complexion, which contrast with her deep-red clothes and her large black coat. A very intelligent woman and talented physician, she nevertheless has an emotional approach to the world, which can come off as surprising given her austere, hard-working behavior. Much more than many Magientists or researchers, she deeply cares about doing what is “good”. Her sense of ethics is not abstract, but affective and empathic: she fights for what moves her. This particularity makes her representative of the ambiguity of the most wonderful human accomplishments. Her devotion toward the cause of children indeed stems from the pain of having lost her son, from the way she idealizes and dreams of him, the embodiment of fragile innocence exposed to a dangerous world. The energy Anaïs puts in her quest is remarkable, but it objectively borders on pathology.



Leaders can use this figure to illustrate an ambiguous personality that is socially useful but whose inner drive comes from a developing madness. This shows the “gray” aspect of the world. Through Anaïs, the Players will be led to remember that they are vulnerable to becoming similar to her through repeated traumas... The aim is therefore to make her likeable. Showing Anaïs’s vulnerabilities is rather simple, as is making her useful by having her heal sick children for free, readily dispense advice and knowledge, or stand up against injustices related to the poor treatment of children.



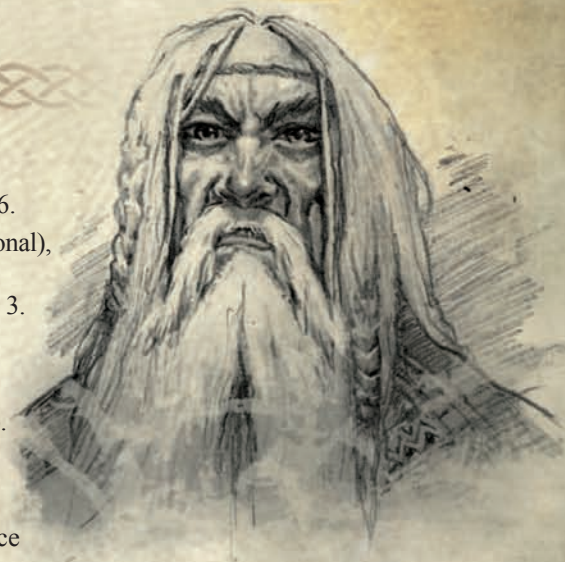
Anaïs’s trouble has developed following the loss of her child. It is built on the pain of loss and on idealization, and shows clearly whenever she has to deal with dead children. Simply telling her about the death of a child makes her uncomfortable, but witnessing difficult relationships between parents can also stoke her pain. She could go through “blank” spells, remaining overwhelmed and unable to act, or through nightmares, with nervous breakdowns during which she obsesses over such questions as “What if he does not love me?” or “Does he even remember me?” and which alternate with moments of hatred against her former love. It is worth noting that Eidan’s father is in a much worse psychological condition: the Players will therefore have to choose the lesser of two evils...

Magientists and Motherhood

The cultural weight of motherhood is particularly perceptible among societies that need strong demographics to survive, which makes births precious and fragile. This is the case of many rural Tri-Kazelian communities, which suffer much pressure and hardship related to survival, and therefore valorize fertility. In contrast to this norm, Magientists generally have few children, which is attributed to their life of studies, even though some think that it may be related to regularly handling poisons and more or less toxic substances. Such low fertility, which sometimes reaches actual sterility, makes the few children they have all the more unique and dear to them, since they clearly know that this may be their only chance at parenting. It may indeed be that barring adoption, they will never get another opportunity to have an heir to whom they will pass on their legacy, their knowledge, and their vision of the world.

Neventer the Demorthèn

Male, Talkéride, 60 years old



- ⊕ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 2. Reason: 3. Conviction: 6.
- ⊕ **Skills:** Close Combat: 1, Craft: 3, Demorthèn Mysteries: 5 (Lorn Rann: 8 (Optional), Sigil Rann: 8), Erudition: 3, Feats: 1, Natural Environment: 5, Perception: 3, Relation: 5 (Command: 8, +2 bonus), Science: 3, Stealth: 3.
- ⊕ **Character Traits:** Methodical / Uncompromising.
- ⊕ **Sanity:** Mystical Delusion (Mysticism) (+10 to Rindath).
- ⊕ **Combat:** Attack: 4. Defense: 10. Speed: 5. Potential: 1. Damage: 1 (flint dagger).
- ⊕ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 5, Old age penalties: -4 to physical actions.
- ⊕ **Advantages:** Magnetic.
- ⊕ **Ogham:** Animated Tree (Vegetal), Vegetal Growth (Vegetal), Madarcht's Peace (Life), Rustling (Air).
- ⊕ **Rindath:** 31.

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Several years ago, Neventer was strongly impressed by the position defended by Sellog during a Tsioghair (see Book 1 – Universe, p.35). He was already considering a stricter application of the traditions, and this confirmed the rightfulness of the path he had chosen for himself and his followers. They had to go farther and prove that it is possible to live in harmony with the spirits by casting off all foreign, decadent, and corrupting influences.

This noble task implied training Ionnthén to take over and spread his ideas, but it takes a lot of time to make sure that the mind of a young person is strong enough. Among the five Ionnthén he trained during his life, three, including two of his own children, were sacrificed to Madarcht. These were terrible ordeals, but today, Neventer is convinced that they were necessary. Indenne has gone on the road, the worthy heiress of her master, while Kareth, still a Ionnthén, is about to be entitled Demorthèn. Spiritual leader and soul of the community of the Pure, Neventer is a dangerously overzealous man, convinced of the soundness of his cause and the necessity of the efforts to see it through. Everyone in the village knows his power, and it combines with the threat of constant humiliation and ritual executions to reinforce a climate of terror and horror. Most of the villagers feel that escaping would be impossible. In spite of his age and the ravages of time, the Demorthèn is considered practically immortal, invulnerable, and all-powerful.



Morvail are more than madmen or fanatics; they are individuals who use power for personal profit. Should Leaders decide that Neventer only seeks to maintain a reign of terror on an enslaved community as a way to satisfy his tormented ego, then the rules adapted to Morvail (see the “Mysterious Powers” chapter) should be applied to him. As a Morvail, he earns 10 additional Rindath points and a +1 bonus to his Sigil Rann rolls because of his yearly sacrifices to the great Madarcht, master of the forest's underground.



The Ogham Neventer owns have been chosen for narrative purposes, so that Leaders may accentuate some atmosphere components.

- ⊕ **Animated Tree** is typically used to block any way in or out of the village through the road. It explains why the people of Lower Mûdan are afraid of coming closer, and will help Leaders complicate attempts from the party to leave the place during Act III.
- ⊕ **Vegetal Growth** can be used to lock unfortunate victims up in Madarcht's lair, closing up any way out and forcing them to face the crawling horror...
- ⊕ **Rustling** serves to unsettle the village's enemies lost in the spirits' forest by confusing their senses or calling them to lead them on the wrong way.

⌘ The “Madarcht's Peace” Ogham, as Neventer calls it, was engraved by the Demorthèn's mentor with the art of the Lorn Rann. For Neventer, its purpose is to warn the great Madarcht that an offering is being brought, and to allow him to come as close to it as possible by showing piety through the power of this sacred Ogham. Indeed, the Ogham makes it possible not to be perceived as human by the Feond and its thralls; a form of psychic dissimulation that makes beneficiaries completely invisible to the creature's senses. Without the protective powers of his precious Ogham, Neventer would be immediately attacked and butchered by the Feond, and the Ogham would probably be lost forever... From the third Circle, the powers of the Ogham can placate Madarcht and its thralls, and dissuade them from attacking not only the Demorthèn, but also those the user focuses on. For the powers to be effective, the summoner and the beneficiaries must be in a pacific state of mind. Using this Ogham to set up an attack will not work; the Feond will notice its foes normally. This is a powerful Ogham, but it only affects Feondas of Madarcht's kind.

Choosing Neventer's Nature According to the Atmosphere

According to the atmosphere Leaders wish to create (see the previous chapter, “A Life Choice”), various revelations related to Neventer are possible.

For the “Inescapable tragedy” style, the Demorthèn is not out of the ordinary once you take out his extremism. It is precisely this mundaneness that characterizes horror. The man is respected and admired by many of his peers. If they eliminate him, the PCs may earn an “Enemy (Traditionalist Demorthèn)” Disadvantage. Word of their actions will spread during the next Tsioghair, and some Demorthèn will demand that they be judged and punished for their crimes. Even if not all Demorthèn are of the same mind, such a crime will complicate the PCs' relations with the political authorities in Taol-Kaer for a long time, since each noble will potentially be tempted to deliver them to earn the good graces of the keepers of the traditions.

The “Hard as nails” style allows for a more black-and-white and less complex approach. With this option, the Demorthèn is actually a Morcail. In this case, Neventer earns +1 to his Sigil Rann rolls, and +10 to his Rindath pool. The other Demorthèn suspected that there was something strange with him, and examining his Ogham as well as his rituals will leave no doubt. The PCs will not be ostracized by many Demorthèn and nobles of Taol-Kaer; on the contrary, they will probably be praised for their bravery and heroism. Moreover, part of Mùdan's villagers resented his tyranny, without daring to speak up frankly, so they will probably be grateful to the PCs as well.

The “Decrypting signs” approach is similar to “Inescapable tragedy” regarding the prospective unfavorable social consequences. Neventer was indeed a Demorthèn, but he also held a secret that the PCs may find out about only after his death: he mastered the nearly forgotten art of the Lorn Rann; the ability to write Ogham. Unfortunately, he kept no written trace of it since “writing is decadent”, and he did not have the time to train his Ionnthèn. The knowledge will die with him... unless he taught the basics to Indenne! The PCs can rationalize that he would have never shared it with them anyway, but it remains a great loss. A team including at least one Demorthèn might attempt to go back through the line of transmitted knowledge Neventer was part of. The course of action would then be to identify his master, and to find the other disciples, who may also have learned the precious Lorn Rann!

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Lem the Ansailéir

Female, Talkéride, 28 years old

- ⌘ **Ways:** Combateness: 4. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 2. Reason: 3. Conviction: 5.
- ⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Spears: 8), Craft: 4, Feats: 5, Natural Environment: 5, Perception: 3, Relation: 5 (Command: 6, +1 bonus), Shooting and Throwing: 3, Stealth: 5, Travel: 1.
- ⌘ **Character Traits:** Devoted / Suggestible.
- ⌘ **Sanity:** Symptom of Mysticism (Mysticism).
- ⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 12. Defense: 11. Speed: 8. Potential: 1. Damage: 2. Protection: 2.
- ⌘ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.
- ⌘ **Advantages:** Charismatic.



The previous Ansailéir was Lem's father, Erwan. When he reached elderhood and started losing

sight, he volunteered to be sacrificed to Madarcht. Such a passing, grand and awful at the same time, marked the community of the Pure, reinforcing their feeling of community and showing an example of supreme devotion to the cause. Lem lives as the steadfast follower of her father, but has always refused to get married. Actually, she feels no desire for men, and the only one who sets her heart ablaze is Dàmàthair Arsante. However, she knows that such a relation would not bear fruit, and maternity is valued in a village where life is short. If every woman refused to do her duty, within the confines and under the wise population control of Neventer, then Higher Mùdan would sooner or later be doomed. Thus conditioned, Lem is also aware that it is better to bring new blood to the community. Therefore, on the occasion of the few commercial trips to Lower Mùdan, she encourages furtive meetings between women of the village and men of the outside, as unworthy as they may be. As far as she is concerned, since she has borne no children yet, and she will have to go through loathsome efforts to do so.

Regarding Anaïs Cruyssec's request, Lem's stance is simple: Eidan belongs to the community; he is old enough to choose his own destiny, and is right to want not to be corrupted by Daedemorthys. However, deep down, she cannot help but understand and respect the determination of the mother, considering such a duty as an imperative, with men only being a regrettable requirement in the process. Thus, in spite of appearances, the Ansailéir may not be the fiercest opponent to the strangers' request.

Wrenching

Wrenching occurs during conflicting parental break-ups.

One of the parents takes power and ascendancy over the child's mind. The child is caught in a sort of mimicry of the dominant parent, completely adhering to the language of hatred and considerably developing it, sometimes even taking the initiative. Everything that represents the shunned parent is used to defame him or her. The child is caught in loyalty conflicts, but does not feel guilty since one of the parents is held responsible for anything wrong.

Eidan, the Son

Young male, Reizhite, 15 years old

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combateness: 5. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Spears: 6), Craft: 3, Feats: 4, Natural Environment: 3, Perception: 3, Relation: 3, Shooting and Throwing: 3, Stealth: 3.
- ⊗ **Character Traits:** Combative / Impulsive.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Symptom of Wrenching (see below).
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 11. Defense: 11. Speed: 9. Potential: 1. Damage: 2.
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

His whole life is in Higher Mùdan, which he briefly left only once, accompanying an excursion to Lower Mùdan, where he took part in a local fighting tournament while the others were trading. Apart from this hour of glory, Eidan makes a point of scrupulously following what his father tells him. He is all he has: he hates his mother, that wretched Magientist he was fortunate to be rescued from.

He seems very assertive, but it still happens that he has nightmares in which he is taken far away from his home, crying in the dark...

Ferian, the Father

Male, Reizhite, 38 years old

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combateness: 4. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 2. Reason: 1. Conviction: 5.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 2, Craft: 5, Demorthèn Mysteries: 2, Erudition: 3, Feats: 2, Magience: 5 (Flux Extraction: 6), Natural Environment: 4, Perception: 2, Relation: 4 (+1 bonus), Science: 5, Shooting and Throwing: 1, Stealth: 1, Travel: 2.
- ⊗ **Character Traits:** Protective / Fanatic.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Syndrome of Fanaticism (Mysticism).
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 6. Defense: 8. Speed: 6. Potential: 2. Damage: 1.
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Handsome.

During his studies in Magience, Ferian had grown fond of Anaïs, a brilliant woman, more so than he would ever be. They both shared a vision of a world full of generosity. It was mainly empathy for her

and a matter of principle for him. However, his opinion was that Magientists always lacked ethics. On the occasion of a journey to Mòr Forsair, he found out what he had always been looking for: a pure, absolute truth; a philosophy that answered every one of his questions. He had to forsake Magience and radically change his life. Expecting that Anaïs would not understand, he first tried to tread on such a path alone, but then, he learned that she had a son... his son! He had to save him from pollution and materialism, take him to safety, protect him from the corruption of his mother's certainties. To do that, he unfortunately had to stoop low and be deceitful... Ferian still feels very ashamed about it, but he sees it as a necessary evil. Since then, he has seen his beloved son grow up in a happy, united community to become a young man full of vigor and promise. Each day makes him increasingly proud of him. Obviously, Ferian has made the right choice, the only one possible.



Some Villagers from Higher Mùdan

Although they will often be spectators and extras, the other villagers can help the Leader depict the setting and the atmosphere. A few noteworthy noncombatant figures are:

Potter Meldith.

“Mistress of the fire” and of the community's bread oven, she lives outside of the village's walls, since she has been tainted by the fire of Aingeal. A taciturn woman in her forties, she has become something of an outcast by force of circumstance, but so far, none have taken their fanaticism so far as considering removing her.

Trine the rebel.

A 16-year-old girl, she is the reversed copy of her friend Eidan, who seems submissive and happy even though he is from outside, whereas she feels trapped in the village that saw her birth. She is an orphan and envies Eidan, who has a mother ready to cross a whole country for him. She would like to be loved, to be helped... She is doomed; she can feel it. She is afraid of Kareth but still holds her head high, shared between resignation and hope, between desire for acceptance and for freedom, perpetually torn.

Kareth, lonnthen.

A 23-year-old man, he must be initiated into the sacrifice to become a Demorthèn according to his master's criteria. He knows that young Trine has already been unofficially chosen. Having contradictory feelings for her, he reconciles them by imagining scenarios of rituals including sadistic tortures, already relishing his future status of spiritual leader with carefully hidden pleasure. Being taught by Neventer only traumatized him and worsened the cracks in his psyche: lies, power fantasies, elitism, extremism...

Arsante, ardent Dàmachair.

At first sight, Arsante looks like an attractive woman with spellbinding clear eyes. However, this first impression is quickly replaced by a feeling of fright. Responsible for the education of the community's children, she teaches them the dogma with a relentlessness worthy of the most dogged Sigire. Repeated lessons, unwavering ethics, corporal punishments, and humiliations are the norm while confusion or fanatical arrogance can be read in the faces of the children she takes care of with an iron fist.

Warrior of Higher Mùdan

In case of hostilities, the villagers will be called to arms, wielding spears with flint heads, reinforced lances, clubs, daggers, and stone axes. They wear light armor and know the land enough not to be at risk of getting lost. Since they are used to living as a community, they usually move in groups of at least two, and most often of four or five. They will not hesitate to call for reinforcements and to attack on sight, but apart from that, they will take few initiatives.

Attack: 10 | Damage: 2 (Spear) | Defense: 11 | Protection: 1 | Speed: 7 |
Potential: 1 | Stamina: 10 | Health: 20/15/10/5
Perception: 6 | Stealth: 8 | Feats: 8



Act I: On the Road



Summary of the act: During Act I, the PCs will be introduced to their employer, Anaïs Cruyssec, a Magientist determined to rescue her son who has been abducted and raised in a village of traditionalist extremists. The action will mainly consist of traveling from the starting point to the remote village. Several options are provided for the GLs to explore the psychological aspect and give the journey a unique identity. One interesting way to do so can be to make use of the suggestions from the “Traveling” chapter to adapt the descriptions or show the particular talents of the Varigals.

Scene I: A Mother



The scenario starts in any city where Magientists can work in good conditions. The default choice is Baldh-Ruoch, but Farl (described in this book) can be a convenient choice for a Leader while setting a different atmosphere at the beginning of the story. Below are two examples, but Leaders should feel free to choose another starting point or adapt the atmosphere according to their needs:

Baldh-Ruoch.

With this setting, the atmosphere will tend to be gloomy, urban, and crowded, likely to represent the dark side of Magience, mainly through industrialization and pollution, which can offer a contrast with the village of Higher Mûdan. Thus, during Act II, Scene 2, the Leaders should remember to remind the PCs of how much distance they have traveled and emphasize the opposition between these two worlds.

Farl.

In this case, the atmosphere will be more medieval and pleasant, with a stress on the Demorthèn's open-mindedness, greatly contrasting with the Pure's fundamentalism and sectarianism. A good idea might be to make Anaïs Cruyssec a friend of Primus Nagguérand de Greenwood, so that the PCs may be put in contact with the local political figures through him. In the future, this can be a way to make them go to the Ashen Yard or take part in an expedition to the Carmine Chasm.

The beginning is very straightforward: a pithy want ad tells of someone looking for people who can handle themselves and who know the roads of Taol-Kaer well. It was recently put up by Magientist Anaïs Cruyssec, an expert Mineralist and pharmacologist. Some of her colleagues, for the most part Magientists, but also merchants, have also been made aware of her intentions, and they could tell the PCs about this opportunity.

Anaïs Cruyssec is very concerned with childhood diseases and perinatal mortality, and has notably studied the dosing of medicines specifically intended for children. She is rather easy to find during the afternoon in the Dawnbridge hospital where she dispenses free health care to the destitute. During morning and early evening, she generally goes to the buildings of the Mineralist lodge of the Ardent Deposit to update her notes or move on with her research. This small, local group is relatively informal and frequently works in collaboration with more important, powerful, or wealthy lodges.

In spite of her austere looks, the red-and-black-clad Anaïs Cruyssec is as tenacious as she is devoted to her cause. She will closely observe the PCs to see whether she can trust them with the mission she is planning, and will be quick to sum up the situation, ready to answer their questions.

Anaïs Cruyssec's Tale



The mission consists of escorting her to a village in Taol-Kaer, on the road connecting Osta-Baille and Ard-Monach. Below is the tale Anaïs Cruyssec will tell the PCs. As the Leaders prefer, they can read it aloud or simply use it as the basis for what they will tell the Players.

“Sixteen years ago, I was in a relationship with someone I believed to be the man of my life: Ferian, an idealistic Botanist Magientist. During an expedition in the Mòr Forsair, he came into contact with Demorthèn culture. For a while, he had been nurturing second thoughts regarding what Magience entails, namely the toxic waste resulting from the extraction of Flux... however, his reaction was disproportionate. He became fascinated with an old, disheveled woman who went around with a staff adorned with bells made of shells, and decided to stay there. Later, he wrote to me to announce that he was breaking up with me and wanted to become the apprentice of that old bat.


I was pregnant with Eidan, but Ferian did not know about it... About twelve years ago, the egoistic lunatic happened to hear about the child, and he plotted to destroy my life. To sum it up, he came back to steal my son, and shortly after, I learned they had both died in a shipwreck. For a long time, I mourned them, even him. I could almost forgive him...

However, a merchant friend, Dalouarn, recently brought me news that changed everything. He had business in Taol-Kaer, in Mùdan, between Osta-Baille and Ard-Monach. That was where he recognized Ferian! He was older, marked by the years, tanned by the sun, but it was him. He could not believe his eyes, and since the local festivities had made people talkative, he was able to learn more. He was told that the man was indeed a Reizhite, that he loathed Magience, and that he had arrived some twelve years ago with a child, claiming that he was the father and that the mother was dead.

I am certain that Ferian faked his and my son's deaths with the sole purpose of abducting him, to take him to a village known to be populated by fundamentalist Demorthèn who live in complete backwardness and isolation. They have seceded from Mùdan and have founded their own community, which they have dubbed “Higher Mùdan”. They call themselves “the Pure” and revile Magience as much as the Temple.

Ferian destroyed my life, and I will never forgive him for doing so.

However, what I want above all is to find my son and free him from these maniacs! And to do that, I need your help.”

 Anaïs Cruyssec offers the party a pay of 40 azure Daols (she can go up to 50 Ad if the PCs are able to pull off Complicated (14) Relation (Persuasion Discipline) rolls): one half before they leave, and the other half on their return, which implies that Anaïs makes it back safe and sound. She may agree to part ways in a city crossed by Bramble knight caravans, but in such a case, the salary will be reduced to a total of 30 azure Daols, and the PCs will have to make do with a letter of exchange from her to withdraw the money after the mission.



Motivations for the PCs

At this early stage of the story, the PCs can be motivated by something other than monetary gratification, before they get to develop more personal relationships and to feel truly involved in the story:



Study of Flux.

Such a motivation mainly concerns PCs with a Magientist, occultist, or scientist profile. One theory to investigate regarding Botanist and Mineralist Magience concerns the potential resources of a Demorthèn worship site. In Reizh, such an attempt would be risky and might cause tensions... However, the village of Higher Mùdan is relatively isolated politically speaking, so attempting to stealthily extract some Flux near their sacred sites should not yield too many consequences. It would still mean taking considerable risks, but someone managing it would increase their reputation and fame within their lodge, and maybe even within the faction as a whole, who knows? Ambition tends to make people think big. If the group includes Demorthèn or strong upholders of the traditions, the Leader should probably tell the concerned Player(s) about this motivation in private.



Politics and power games.

This motivation will be more suitable for Characters with a bard profile or any other wishing to develop a network and circles of influence. Since she is very involved in social matters, Anaïs Cruyssec has connections with many people to get donations or organize charity events. Even though she is not a mover and shaker in any particular field, she can act as facilitator for an ambitious person. Among the societies of Tri-Kazel, honor is also a matter of giving and giving back, so helping a well-famed individual can ensure recommendations and support in the future, which may boost the social ascension of a PC.

Scene 2: Traveling



There are two ways the Leaders can play out “A Life Choice”: either in its short format, or as the basis for a campaign. Should they choose to go for a condensed story, Scene 2 “Traveling” can be narrative, played in an elliptic way, with a quick mention of the roads’ hardships: weariness, fleas, bad weather, landslide, necessity to take a byway, etc. Conversely, Leaders can choose to give a feel of the geographical distance through several small episodes. To that effect, the Leaders can use canvases and figures from this Book, or others created by the Shadows of Esteren community, which can be found in the “Secrets” section of the official forum (www.esteren.org/forum). By seizing the right opportunities for adventures, and by drawing ideas from the “Traveling” chapter, which suggests a few ways to spruce up a journey through personalization and descriptions, the Leaders will have all the tools they need to depict a poetic and mysterious portrayal of the peninsula the PCs are going to discover. Here are three examples:

Location: Frendian.

On their way across the dukedom of Seòl, the PCs may hear about the disappearance of Aoda Mac Iseanor (Players and Leaders can read the tale of her journey in the “Taol-Kaer” chapter of Book 1 – Universe). The Duke has promised a reward of 300 frost Daols to whoever can bring back his daughter alive. According to the last piece of information he has received, she may have passed through Frendian. Very few expect the bold heiress to still be alive after so much time, but the PCs may want to give it a shot nonetheless. After all, it is not a long journey from Mùdan to Frendian!

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An Adaptable Itinerary

The Leader may decide that Anaïs has already designed her itinerary and planned traveling expenses. In this case, they can simply follow the suggested main steps. In their course, the PCs will meet two high-ranking political personalities: the Duke of Seòl and the Duke of Gorm—connections who may prove useful in the future. They also offer the opportunity to hear about rumors or make contacts that may lead to other adventures, such as uncovering the mystery of Frendian...

However, the Players may wish to have a say in the matter, in order to anticipate any possible obstacle for their Characters. To do so, they can rely on the information from Book 1 – Universe and on the stories recorded by Bard Aeldred Firdh in Travels. Will they travel by sea, on Caernides, on horses, or on foot? Will they have the good sense to hire the services of a Varigal who knows about side roads? Where are the PCs from? Who have they trained with? Maybe they can make a stop at a cousin's or at a colleague's, which would cut down traveling expenses while giving the opportunity to meet a friendly face. By drawing elements from every Character's background, it is possible to plan several interludes that will provide opportunities to highlight everyone's peculiarities through small stories, brief scenes, or tailor-made canvases.

Figure: Preden Mac Blonag.

On the road to Smàrag, the Leaders can use the “Shipwreck” canvas, which may thereafter allow the PCs to get support from the Duke of Gorm, if they are clever enough to make good use of the documents found in the wreck. It will be no easy task, for Preden Mac Blonag is a feared man, with a reputation for being cruel and depraved (see Book 1 – Universe, and the section about him on p.150). Such support might smooth things over with the local authorities during the following steps. The Duke of Gorm is one of the few people to have some measure of understanding with Aliser Mac Geovran, the Lord of Koskan, another man of unenviable reputation. With these political safeguards signed by such an important personality, the PCs can travel through the Great Beaches and reach Koskan, where it will be easy for the Leaders to introduce some trouble with thieves or corrupt authorities. Then, the journey will resume toward Osta-Baille, where the PCs will be able to get some rest, restock on equipment, do some sightseeing, and get some information about the rest of the way.

Canvas: Blood Feathers.

The trip through the forest (see Scene 3) can be an opportunity to play “Blood Feathers”, which will establish a disquieting mood as a prologue to the atmosphere of the next Acts.

Optional Scene: Developing the Relationship with Anaïs Cruyssec



One way to bring the PCs to see how sensitive Anaïs Cruyssec is during the journey is to emphasize every now and then fragments and details of scenes that will help show the tragedy she is experiencing. Here are a few optional scenes to stress this aspect:

Helping a child:

if the life of a child is at stake, she will not remain idle and will require the support of the PCs if needed. Afterward, she will have an overly motherly behavior toward the child, and along the journey, she may reminisce about the color of Eidan's eyes, or the way he used to run playfully after pigeons...

The happy girl:

the PCs chance upon and help out a young girl about to get married who has, for example, gotten lost. During the time they spend together, she tells everyone about how happy she is, how she has met true love, and how she intends to have many children... Anaïs proves to be surprisingly harsh with her, and leaves her in tears with the PCs. She is actually deeply disturbed, her face white, fearing that her son may not even recognize her and wondering about what she has done to deserve such a wretched lot. Hasn't she always done everything to help other people?

Scene 3: An Eerie Forest

This scene is a glimpse into the future Act III. The purpose is to depict the dark and foreboding forest that will be the setting of the final scene. By giving the Players time to grow fearful of and avoid it, it will be easier to put them in an apprehensive mood when they have no choice but to go through it by night, running away from a madhouse... To do so, here are three suggestions:

Rumor.

During a previous pause, as the PCs and Anaïs were getting close to their destination, some villagers told them about the existence of a mysterious “spirits' forest”, of which the inhabitants of Higher Mûdan, called “the Pure”, are the self-appointed guardians. It is said that all those who come near it disappear, and that only the Pure, protected by their powerful and fearsome Demorthèn Neventer, are spared. There is a story running around that occultists dared to spend the night in a clearing said to be the location of an ancient tomb. When day broke, they had disappeared, and all that remained were a few of their belongings. It seemed there had been some turbulence, trampled plants and bushes, the remains of an orgy, then nothing. “There’s no way they’d have left without their money! Remember: never leave the road!” This story is actually a rural legend, a mishmash of several tales. It refers to a grim reality that the PCs will be able to understand only much later: Neventer may indeed have them captured as sacrifices to the formidable Madarcht...

Stermerks.

A byroad, which is also a shortcut, makes it possible to reach Lower Mûdan faster by passing through part of the outskirts of the “spirits' forest”. In some places, a Varigal may notice various signs meaning “Fang” and “Sacred”, as well as “Hostile” on a narrow path leading to Higher Mûdan. The symbol indicating the presence of dangerous creatures has been updated several times, which means that several Varigals have seen or heard something alarming here. However, the nature of the thing is not made clear: whether the threat is Feondas, bears, or a pack of wolves, it is not said...

Twilight.

Usually, travelers try to spend the night in a sheltered place, but a traveling hazard can slow them down to the point of forcing them to travel during twilight, which will make the spirits' forest even more impenetrable... A failed Luck roll might result in a sprained ankle for a PC or Anaïs Cruyssec, or in a horse suddenly limping. An incorrectly plugged bottle—or worse, a vial containing a chemical—may pour in someone’s bag, making it necessary to take out, rinse, dry, and put everything back in. According to superstitions, bad luck often comes from the influence of spirits. Being a pragmatic Magientist, Anaïs might make a crack on the subject, and having it be instantly followed by strange noises can make the tension rise...



During their last break, the PCs will learn that two days ago, there was another group of travelers making for the same direction as them, toward the village of Lower Mùdan, at the foot of the castle. Local hunters will mention that one is at risk of falling prey to Nimhs Cuirs (see the Bestiary at the end of the book) when going into the spirits' forest. There are many spooky legends about dark guardians keeping watch over these woods, and unfortunately, the road leading to Lower Mùdan passes but a few hundred yards from this sinister part of the region.

At one turn of the road, right behind a mound, a few miles away from Lower Mùdan, the PCs will suddenly see that felled trees are blocking the way. As the party approaches, a murder of crows will fly away, revealing the remains of the aforementioned group of travelers. The sight of corpses half-devoured by scavengers should not upset a seasoned fighter, but less hardened Characters may be subjected to a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll.

Inspecting the scene can give an idea of what took place here. For their investigation, the PCs can use Close Combat, Natural Environment, Perception, or Shooting and Throwing:

⌘ Standard (11):

The victims were clearly at a disadvantage, ambushed by experienced and ruthless assailants, probably well-trained and coordinated brigands.

⌘ Complicated (14):

The ambushers attacked from the mounds demarcating the road. They made any escape forward or backward impossible and launched a hail of arrows at their victims. However, it is very puzzling that they left the dead in plain sight, while they should have normally tried to hide any sign of the battle in order to be able to use this spot again, since it makes it easy to have the upper hand, even with numerical inferiority.

⌘ Difficult (17):

The scene has been disturbed by scavengers, but tracks of the assailants can still be found. They hid in the forbidden forest, in spite of the rumors about minion creatures lurking there (see “Minions” in the Bestiary).

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Investigative PCs may want to follow the trail (which can be done with a Complicated (14) Natural Environment roll), which leads to the brigands' encampment some 200 yards into the woods. Through the descriptions the Leaders make, they can fool the Players into believing that there is some movement there. This will probably make the Players act very carefully, and maybe even make them fruitlessly prepare an offensive maneuver, before they discover the truth: all the bandits are dead, their bodies torn apart. Until a little while ago, they had not run into Minions, since they did not go far into the spirits' forest and frequently made trips outside, but their luck recently ran out...

Compared to the previous scene, this one is clearly worse and calls for a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. The foliage here seems particularly dark, and the atmosphere is oppressive, as if haunted by the horror that took place there... could there be more to this than a trick of the mind? A good look at the place may lead to the supposition that they have been attacked by human-sized Feondas... by the way, could this plant right there be a Nimh Cuir? And those howling wolves, don't they sound strange?



The wolves are Minions: animals contaminated by Madarcht (see “Minion” in the Bestiary). This makes their behavior very similar to Feondas, and they even have weird mushrooms growing on their mangy-looking fur... However, a Complicated (14) Natural Environment or Perception roll will show that they are living animals that breathe, drool, and growl, as if afflicted with rabies. Without this information, the PCs will likely get the wrong idea about these creatures, which will result in overlooking a clue and thereafter make it difficult to understand Madarcht's role and influence on nature around its lair...

If the Leaders want to make things even worse, they can use Nimhs Cuirs exhaling sleep-inducing fumes (Standard (11) Stamina roll for Characters in the area, and Complicated (14) for those near the plants) that will not be dangerous in themselves, but will leave the victims helpless in front of their aggressors.

In the end, swiftly running away seems to be the most rational solution, since Lower Mùdan is now near! The minion wolves have a Feats rating of 10, which is rolled in opposition to that of their prey (see Book 1 – Universe, “Contested Actions”, p.234).



Act 2: Knots and Ties



Summary of the act: Act II's prevalent themes are networks and the way the inhabitants of a community can be ready to forfeit their personal aspirations to remain part of the group. From this common point, two very different villages will be provided for the PCs to explore: one very common (Scene 1), and one sectarian. From the moment they come into contact with the Pure from Higher Mùdan (Scene 2), there will be constant tension. Anaïs Cruyssec will air her grievances to the Ansailéir, who will deem that only a formal trial will make it possible to decide fairly and conclusively whether the mother or the father will get custody of young Eidan. However, the trial is biased due to the laws favoring the villagers and the deep-seated prejudices of the jurors (Scenes 3 and 4). Just negotiating for the right to intervene and plead Anaïs's case will be difficult for the PCs (Scene 5). It is possible to win, but it will be a very difficult victory (Scene 6) that will yet not guarantee a happy ending (Act III, Scene 1)...

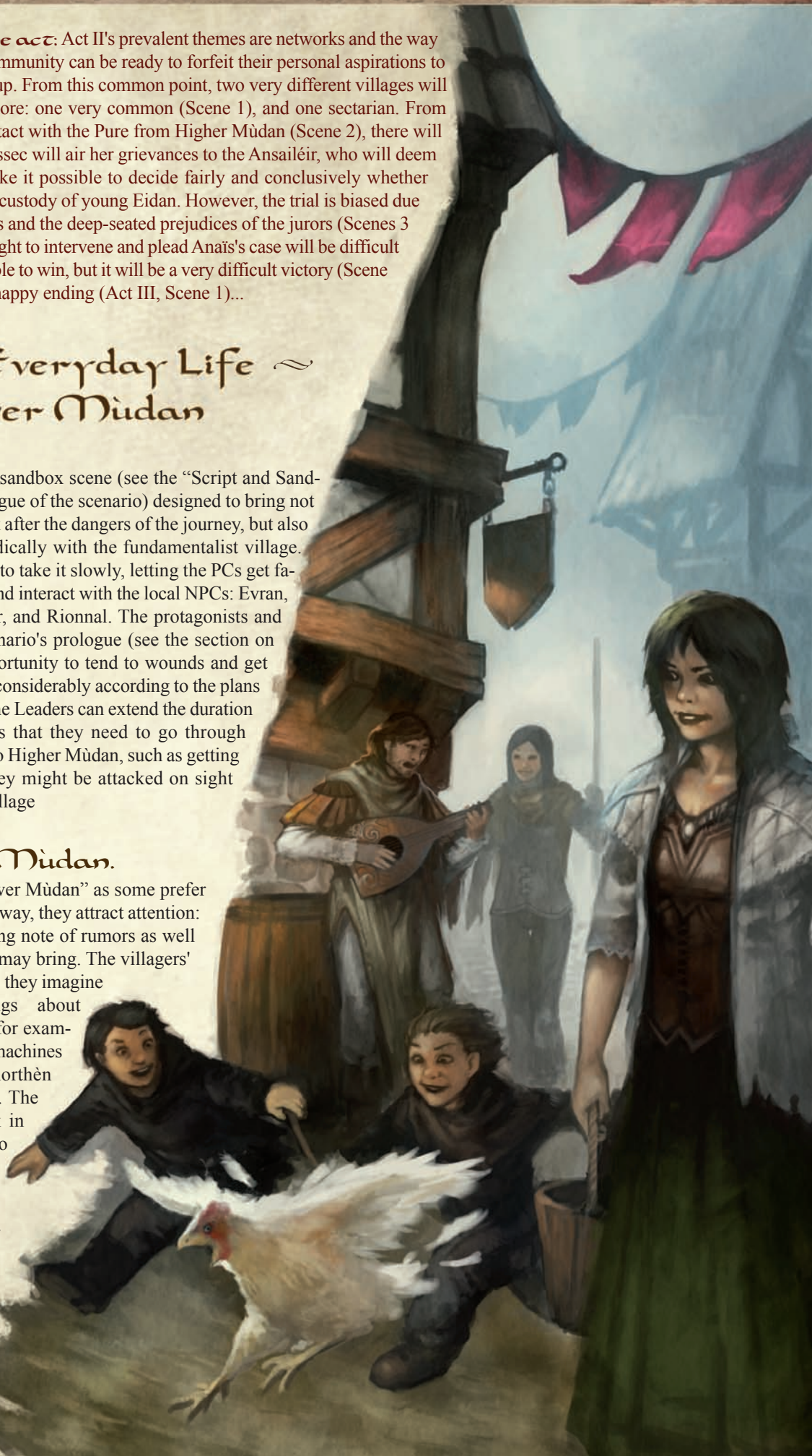
Scene 1: Everyday Life in Lower Mùdan



“Everyday Life” is a sandbox scene (see the “Script and Sandbox” box in the Prologue of the scenario) designed to bring not only a welcome break after the dangers of the journey, but also an environment contrasting radically with the fundamentalist village. Therefore, the GLs are advised to take it slowly, letting the PCs get familiar with their surroundings and interact with the local NPCs: Evran, Mogrecht, Dallan, Aïre, Méloir, and Rionnal. The protagonists and stakes are presented in the scenario's prologue (see the section on Lower Mùdan). This is an opportunity to tend to wounds and get informed. The events will vary considerably according to the plans and composition of the party. The Leaders can extend the duration of this stop by telling the PCs that they need to go through a formality before they can go to Higher Mùdan, such as getting an official pass. Otherwise, they might be attacked on sight when they reach the isolated village

First steps in Mùdan.

The PCs reach Mùdan, or “Lower Mùdan” as some prefer to put it. As strangers from far away, they attract attention: people ask them for news, taking note of rumors as well as the good and bad news they may bring. The villagers' knowledge of the world is hazy: they imagine the most extravagant things about Magience in Reizh, believing, for example, that there are factories and machines everywhere, or that the Demorthèn have completely disappeared... The Leaders should not hold back in finding ideas to lead the PCs to narrate their adventures and make them more dramatic. A few Performance rolls can give an idea of the impact of each one's tale in the course of a friendly competition: with less than 8, the audience is falling asleep or staring blankly, not managing to relate to the confused or austere story.



Reaching an Easy (8) Threshold makes for a coherent tale, whose contents are at least consistent. With a Standard (11) success, the tale is overall pleasant, with a few purple patches. A Complicated (14) performance is genuinely enjoyable, with everyone paying attention and some words of well-earned praise afterward. Managing to pull off a Difficult (17) roll makes the audience rapt: the jokes hit home, and the combat scenes scare the younger ones. Finally, a PC reaching a Very Difficult (20) Threshold will put stars in the eyes of the spectators, and the most impressionable ones may feel truly enamored with such a honey-tongued speaker...

The relationship with Anaïs Cruyssec.

This is an opportunity to take stock on everything she and the PCs have achieved, which may lead them to realize that their opinion of her has evolved. Maybe they have come to regard her as a friend?

Informing the authorities.

As for the local authorities, they will be very interested in the new political concepts the travelers may tell them about, as well as in the brigands' ambush. A quick investigation may reveal that the brigands who came to settle here were deserters from a harsher band.

In case the party spends some time looking around town, a few episodes are presented below to give more life and substance to the stop at the castle. The more cheerful and relaxed the Leaders make the mood, the more striking the contrast with the rest of the scenario will be. For astute PCs, this is also the opportunity to pick up on clues that may turn out to be significant afterward.

Flirting with Aïre.

An ill-advised idea, which may however lead to comical situations depending on the Characters involved. It can also illustrate the taboos and customs related to sexuality and, above all, the fact that part of the young nobles' fate is dictated by their parents.

The bet.

After a good meal seasoned with a few stiff drinks, one or several inebriated PCs get dragged by Rionnal into a foolish bet consisting of stealing the undergarments of a caricatural honorable widow. There is the risk of being caught red-handed by her and finding out that she would not mind someone to warm her bed... that, or being chased by her and subjected to a hail of crockery.

A passion for Magience.

Dallan's secret aspiration is to become a Magientist. He will keep pressing the PCs for information on the subject and will propose to guide the PCs or even escort them on their way back to Baldh-Ruoch. Needless to say, the baron will react rather lukewarmly to such a prospect... At any rate, Dallan would enjoy nothing more than to witness an extraction of Flux, no matter of which type. Anaïs Cruyssec is reluctant, but maybe a Magientist PC would be disposed to satisfy the young man's curiosity? In that case, there is a risk that they may be noticed. The Leaders may choose to have an NPC blackmail them or report them to the lord straight away, particularly if the extraction is being performed on a corpse. This could go downhill quickly, with a fine for unauthorized practice of Magience, a punishment for Dallan, and tenser relations with the Lord of Lower Mùdan in the future.



An important clue. Aïre and Méloir (see p.100 for more information about these Characters) are currently training in the use of weapons and want to practice with the strangers to get to know about new techniques and styles.

This may be an opportunity to gather some information about the danger represented by the Pure as warriors, since the two young ones fought them in the local tournament. It was during one such occurrence that Aïre and Méloir met Eidan, about whom they can speak. However, what they have to say is not very encouraging, notably regarding his deference to his father and his fanaticism... It is possible to draw one critical piece of information out of this conversation with the two children: the young people from Higher Mùdan do not have to perform military service, and Lord Evran apparently consents to this, which seems unfair to them. Aptly used, this information may change the course of the scenario at its turning point, namely, the trial that will take place later (see Act II, Scene 6, "The military service case: a striking argument for the trial").

The Weakness of Lord Evran

By asking the right questions, a PC with law-oriented knowledge in Erudition (Complicated (14) Threshold) may discover a few elements that will shed new light on the local political situation. Although the land occupied by the recently built village is officially part of the Lord's fiefdom, the Pure settled there without getting the authorization to do so or even asking for it. Since the fundamentalists settled in an area known to be inhospitable, that did not seem to pose a problem at first. However, Higher Mùdan should legally have become vassal to the Lord and should therefore respect his authority, which is obviously not the case: Lord Evran has no control over a part of his own land... Evran's superiors, whether at Osta-Baille or within the dukedom of Dùlan, are not aware of such a shameful situation. They do not know that the Lord of Mùdan is acting like a pushover and lets the fanatics from Higher Mùdan manipulate and scorn him. Knowing such a juicy bit of information may grant a +2 bonus to all rolls made to get his support against the village. However, the PCs will still have to reach at least a Difficult

(17) Threshold to have him put a modicum of effort into the case. It is only from a Very Difficult (20) roll that he will truly get involved, at the discretion of each Leader, according to how they wish the story to unfold.

The Fanatics' Political Strategy

The attitude of extremist religious leaders is often hard to make sense of for someone uninvolved due to the many facets of their behavior that may seem contradictory or illogical. The key is to understand that such behavior is based on the idea of a power struggle with the intent to establish long-term control.

Those who are considered weak are despised, humiliated, and tormented, with attitudes confusingly alternating between outward kindness, (“I am doing this for your own good”) and brutal bouts of anger pointing out all of the victim's shortcomings: “You are doing that on purpose”, “After everything I have done for you”, “You are unworthy of your position, you should be ashamed”, etc. Conversely, those who are deemed the strongest are treated with groveling or even seductive politeness, which is a way to delay and test which limits must not be crossed lest one be condemned.

This same logic translates directly to the realm of politics. Initially, at the foundation of Higher Mùdan, Lord Evran was considered strong. This meant that, at the time, the Pure's leaders trod carefully with him, arguing that the remote lands were the perfect location for spiritual retreat and that the elevation that would result from it would benefit everyone. However, they progressively distanced themselves more and more from the norms that they should have abode by: taxes, military service, participating in the defense of the fiefdom, following the law... Each time, the first step seemed like a minor, symbolic one at most, but over the course of the following months and years, it snowballed into other customs that deviated more and more from what should normally be done. Now, it has reached the point where the Pure have no respect for most customs and laws: they have developed their own fundamentalist practices, and experience has taught them that they have nothing to fear from Lord Evran. Of course, they must maintain certain things for appearance's sake, since even though he is considered weak, Evran is still part of a feudal system whose other members would be ready to act more forcefully: the dukedom of Dùlan and the Hilderin knights, for example. Likewise, if the PCs come to the village with a recommendation from the Duke of Gorm, the Pure will acknowledge that he is strong and that they have to be careful in the way they treat those under his protection.

All in all, in spite of the fact that the Pure from Higher Mùdan keep touting dogma and moral integrity as necessary things that are not to be trifled with, their leaders, on the other hand, make use of a rather underhanded policy. That is how they have managed to attain more and more power, and, more importantly, the freedom to act as they see fit, with almost complete impunity.

The Leaders can choose to instill these elements progressively, or to explain them directly if at least one PC is savvy in Erudition (Politics) or Relation (Diplomacy) and is able to perform a Complicated (14) roll for partial information, or a Difficult (17) one for a global vision.

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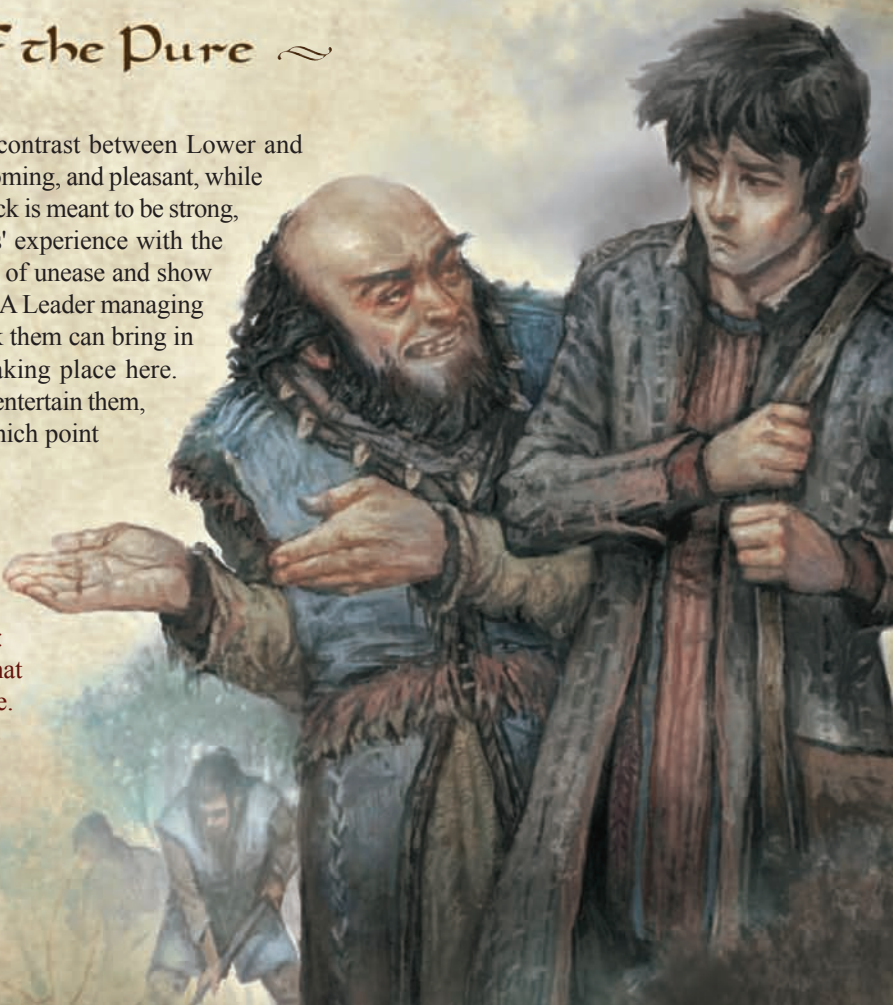
Scene 2: The Life of the Pure



The purpose of this scene is to depict the contrast between Lower and Higher Mùdan. The Lower is peaceful, welcoming, and pleasant, while the Higher is hostile and suffocating. The shock is meant to be strong, with a “no more Mister Nice Guy!” feeling. The PCs' experience with the community of the Pure should mainly create a feeling of unease and show the sectarian, totalitarian dimension of Higher Mùdan. A Leader managing to drop a lead weight on the Players and to truly shock them can bring in a consequent part of the human and social horror taking place here. The peculiarity of the community of the Pure may first entertain them, up until they find out how far fanaticism can go, at which point their amusement should turn into fright.



The sponsors. Custom has it that strangers are always accompanied by at least two villagers “to favor sharing and supporting”. Actually, the PCs will never be alone: the sponsors are here to watch them and make sure that no Pure can ever be tainted by their pernicious influence. The villagers are part of various workgroups the PCs can ask to join with and assist: vegetable-planting, fruit-picking, fishing, wood-cutting, hunting, child-minding, crafting, cooking, etc. Here are a few names the Leaders can use as a basis for the creation of extra villagers: Raff, Ladra, Levan, Lerig, Erlys, Cahal, Cait, Weltaz, and Wilame.





- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1- Entrance to Madarcht's Lair | 6- Small Valley |
| 2- Sacrificial Well | 7- Uneven Ground |
| 3- Higher Mùdan | 8- Stream |
| 4- Way to Lower Mùdan | 9- Lower Mùdan |
| 5- Spirits' Forest | 10- Sacred Path |
| | 11- Common Forest |



⊕ A hostile environment.

To get to the village of the Pure—aka Higher Mùdan—one must follow a steep, winding path surrounded by thick vegetation. During the whole trip, the party will feel watched. The surroundings are such that if the Pure wished, they could kill them in seconds, with well-aimed arrows shot from the forest's shadows. The people from Lower Mùdan warned the PCs: the woods are trapped, and one is safe on the road only, which makes it impossible to approach without being seen.

⊕ The isolationist policy.

An anonymous, unwelcoming villager will meet with them halfway to the village in order to ask them about the reason for their visit, taking a quick

look at the recommendations from Lower Mùdan on which the locals still officially depend, albeit grudgingly... However, the authorities of Higher Mùdan know that their autarkic autonomy results for the most part from the lord's permissiveness. Therefore, although they regularly test its limits and go farther and farther into abusing their rights and extraordinary privileges, they are well aware that they cannot flout all the laws. Recommendations originating from Taol-Kaer's nobility must be respected, lest they insult the very concept of feudalism. The fact is that Mùdan is halfway between Osta-Baille and Ard-Monach and, therefore, on a road frequently traveled by Hilderin knights. Pushing things too far may aggravate them and lead to a punitive expedition with disastrous consequences. Thus, they go as far as they can be allowed without incurring the risk of massive retaliation.

⊕ The Pure's justice.

The Pure apply a cruel judicial system with only three types of sentences: humiliation (or banishment if the offender is an outsider), the spirits' test, and the sacrifice to Madarcht. They usually play along with visitors and treat them politely, but if the strangers blatantly break the law, the Pure maintain the right to kill them. This explains why, in spite of their fanaticism, the Pure are careful and apparently rather passive or unctuously polite: they want to catch the PCs red-handed. The Pure's laws are sacred: they express the will of the spirits, and this is why they must be followed scrupulously. The rules were designed to leave virtually no chance to strangers who cannot know them or master them. However, should outsiders unexpectedly manage to do so, the village's authorities would be forced to admit that they are right, lest they question the power of the spirits and lose their legitimacy.

⊕ An oppressive atmosphere.

For a stranger, getting into Higher Mùdan, even with official documents, gives the feeling of progressively losing one's ability to act, of becoming powerless, crushed by peer pressure. The experience may be particularly hard for individuals with strong Empathy (which will test Influence; see Book 1, p.234), since they will intensely feel the ambient fear, sense of community, and faith. The newcomers are constantly assured of the community's benevolence, and the villagers pretend to listen to their arguments, but they actually act deceptively, hiding their true feelings and trying to undermine the interlopers' efforts by isolating them and sparking conflicts between them... Ferian, the former companion of Anaïs Cruyssec, and Eidan, their son, are particularly agitated. The child has been conditioned to hate his mother, and the father is frightened to see his past catching up with him, while still having total trust in Neventer.



As soon as she arrives, Anaïs Cruyssec goes to pay her respects to the authorities of Higher Mùdan, explaining the purpose of her visit: her son has been abducted by his own father, and she wishes for him to be returned to her, as he was brutally and unjustly taken away from her.

Once he has gotten past the initial shock, Ferian will confirm that Anaïs is indeed Eidan's mother, but will contest her rights over the young man. Ansailéir Lem will take the two parents aside to discuss the situation, away from the crowd. She will afterward come back to the village square and announce her decision: a trial will be organized to decide which of the two parents should legitimately have the custody of Eidan. A group of jurors (Scene 4, "The Jury" box) is appointed that very night by Demorthèn Neventer after he has consulted with the spirits. They will be in charge of pronouncing the final verdict after the debate. Lem

mentions to the PCs that they can only get personally involved in the trial under certain conditions (Scene 5). The trial itself (Scene 6) will take place as a contest of rhetoric and arguments (legal, moral, and logical) starting when the spirits deem it right. How many days are to pass before the trial begins is left to the Leaders' discretion. With fewer than 5 days, there will be a feeling of urgency since the PCs will have very little time to act, which is the right option for a "Hard as nails" party. On the other hand, going up to 15 days will give plenty of opportunities for an intrigue-oriented party. Until the trial takes place, the PCs will get to explore the village, and the Leaders can use the information in the next two boxes to depict the very particular atmosphere of the place.



A Few Events to Strengthen the Atmosphere

The PCs will likely spend a few days among the Pure. To depict the setting, a good option may be to alternate elements related to daily life with more noticeable events suggested below or designed by the Leaders:

- ⊕ **Kethel**, a young man of 18 years, has made a mistake. He had to spend a day praying close to the spirits' forest, almost naked, and scourged, before going back to the village. There, he is insulted, spat at, and hit without having the right to react. Then, the Demorthèn stops the villagers in their orchestrated rage and pronounces a speech about purity, explaining that the faults have been wrenched from his body. He takes water from the river and washes the penitent, saying that he is worthy of being loved anew. At this moment, demonstrations of unconditional love suddenly occur: the villagers embrace one another, and no one talks or will ever talk about what anyone has done...
- ⊕ One night, young **Trine** sneaks off to the room where some of the strangers sleep in order to talk to them, curious about these people from elsewhere. She is apparently regularly battered, judging from the bruises she sports all over her body. Trine can have a determining part in the preparation of the trial (see Act II, Scene 3, "Trine's Role" box).
- ⊕ On the occasion of the celebration of a birth, sports competitions are organized. If the PCs win (Feats for running, Close Combat for grappling), it may spark additional tensions. In the evening, inebriation (due to the consumption of mead or mushroom tea with similar effects) can also lead to aggression of a physical and/or sexual nature against an isolated PC or **Anaïs Cruyssec**.

A Typical Day

Here is how a typical day in the village of the Pure goes:

⊕ **Sunrise**: Rekindling the fire and heating the first meal of the day. Before eating, collective prayer with contemplation and whispered praises.

⊕ **Day**: During working hours, no one is ever left alone. Lunch takes place in the village or as a picnic, according to one's position. A prayer to thank the spirit takes place before one eats, fishes, cuts wood, lights a fire, or crosses a river. In every thing, one must take care not to offend them. Prayers during the day, sometimes led by the Demorthèn, give the authorization to fish, hunt, and cut down trees. For each action that may hurt nature, one must ensure that the spirits are well-disposed. Accidental deaths are interpreted as the spirits' vengeance against people who were too prideful at heart.

⊕ **Evening**: There are small shrines where one can leave small offerings gathered during the day (some food, meat, etc.) If birds come to eat them, it is an omen of the spirits' blessing for the observance of the hunters and gatherers. These times, along with prayers of thanksgiving, are opportunities to strengthen the community's bonds with discussions, games of skill, and exchanges of the day's news. The humiliations of those who were unworthy have been revealed to everyone, and the one who has been purified is welcomed back into the community in a great moment of deep union. Each evening, the Demorthèn leads homilies and prayers. They can be of variable length according to whether there have been particularly noteworthy events, or if the community has to be preventively purified after an offense against the spirits, deliberate or not.

⊕ **Night**: Time to sleep, or to take watch duty for some. Everyone sleeps in the same room, dormitory-like. Lovers are expected either to meet quietly in the dark (their neighbors pretend not to hear) or to have a quick intercourse outside of the common houses (the sentries pretend not to see).



Scene 3: Investigations in the Village

Doing some investigation in the village to understand the local rules and customs can be decisive for the remainder of the scenario. However, it can quickly prove risky, mainly because the PCs' sponsors will always tag behind them, and it will not be easy to elude them.



For each important action, a Skill roll with associated Difficulty Thresholds will be proposed. If Players prove crafty or convincing in the way they describe their actions or in the way they act toward the villagers, it will not be necessary to have them make a roll (see Book 1 – Universe, “How to Use Skill Rolls”, p.176). In the present case, should the PCs fail to get somewhere, Skill rolls are a means for the Leaders to nudge the PCs in the right direction by giving them another chance to obtain an important clue with a successful roll. Alternatively, the Leaders may decide to favor the resolution system and the use of rolls in order to speed up the pace or because they know their Players enjoy this kind of gaming style. Either way is fine; it all depends on the style and atmosphere that the Leaders wish to nurture during the game.

Here is the bulk of the information the PCs can gather, as well as some of the difficulties they will have to face:

The personalities of the village.

By tagging along with the villagers during their activities and dropping a few seemingly innocent questions (Relation Domain), it is rather Easy (8) to get a list of the leading members. However, being told more than names and being introduced to one of these personalities will be Complicated (14). To find out someone's secrets, the PCs will have to either be very skilled at getting people to confide in them (Very Difficult (20)), or simply pick up on the right details (Difficult (17) Perception rolls) and put two and two together. In the village, tormented personalities and skeletons in the closet are plentiful (see “Personalities and Motivations” in the Prologue, and Act II, Scene 4, “The Jury” box). In that regard, it is possible to make use of psychologically-oriented skills to try and decipher body language and attitudes in order to gather a few additional pieces of information. This can be done with the Relation Domain or with a Discipline specialized in the study of psyche such as Occultism (Mental Phenomena) or Science (Knowledge of Mental Troubles). In an entirely different approach, the Acting Discipline from the Performance Domain may also be used. If the investigation boils down to dice rolls, a Complicated (14) success brings fragmentary information, a Difficult (17) one gets rather complete data, and a Very Difficult (20) one results in an exhaustive panorama.

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A PC tries to get information about Ansailêir Lem. By being a good observer or by asking the right questions, he may potentially deduce that she is lesbian and in love with Dâmàthair Arsante, but also concerned about her duties, one of which is maternity. The Leader decides to give the Player an opportunity to gather some clues with the Perception Domain. The PC gets 15 on his roll, so he will only obtain limited insight. The Leader tells him about the tender and bashful way Lem watches Arsante and the children around her: in her attitude, there is something else than the mere desire to be a mother—there is a strong yearning... The PCs now have to formulate hypotheses and devise plans according to how they wish to make use of this information.



The outskirts of the village.

Strongly-built PCs (with the “Strong” or “Sturdy” Advantages, or with a good Stamina rating) will be appreciated if they offer their help with physical labor such as woodcutting. Deft fishermen (Complicated (14) Natural Environment roll) may also make an impression. Helping the villagers with efficiency, humility, and kindness grants bonuses to earn their trust (+1 or +2, at the Leaders' discretion). However, even with patience and understanding, reaching some level of familiarity with the villagers is not easy (requiring an at least Difficult (17) Relation roll). These days of outdoor work will present the best opportunities for the PCs to approach the members of the jury, try to understand them better, and maybe even make them doubt (see Act II, Scene 4). By spending a lot of time in the surroundings of the village, the PCs may also notice or learn about the presence of traps (see Act III, Scene 2, “Traps” box), either by spotting them (Complicated (14) Perception roll) or by being told about them by a friendly villager. These trips can also give a good idea of the local geography, which may be useful in case the PCs have to run away (see Act III, Scene 5).

The local rites.

Only a Ionnthén or a Demorthén may be deemed worthy of speaking with Ionnthén Kareth or Demorthén Neventer. They tend to use a deliberately obscure jargon, so a Difficult (17) Demorthén Mysteries roll is needed to be able to understand them and grasp the subtleties of their vision of the world. Earning a modicum of trust from them likewise requires tact and diplomacy (Difficult (17) Relation roll). Only once these two conditions have been fulfilled might they tell a PC the following: the Pure consider themselves the keepers of traditions and protectors of Great Madarcht, “The Lord of Roots”. Madarcht is the great dispenser of life, the one that safeguards the spirits' forest, guaranteeing that the community is never threatened by Feondas. Of course, in return, offerings must be performed in the form of human sacrifices.

Disquieting secrets.

An attentive PC will notice that some villagers are even stranger and more asocial than the others (Complicated (14) Perception roll). They are minions (see Bestiary, p.191, and Act III, Scene 4, “Minions” box), villagers contaminated by Madarcht whose behavior only remains marginally normal because of Neventer's use of his Madarcht's Peace Ogham. To assess the gravity of the situation, the PCs can watch the behavior of the minions more closely, and try to get closer to them. They had better be quiet (Complicated (14) Stealth roll) lest they draw attention. It will appear that these villagers seem to have something in common with the Feond-like wolves encountered previously (see Act I, Scene 3). With Complicated (14) rolls in Demorthén Mysteries, Natural Environment, or Occultism, the PCs may deduce that they are afflicted with some sort of disease or contagion presenting similarities to a mushroom-based infection. However, the Pure show some sort of deference toward them... Thus, there is possibly a link between their religion and these strange-looking people. Of course, the link is Madarcht, the Great Lord of Roots, of which jurors the PCs have befriended may speak.

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Privacy.

For various reasons, the PCs may want to elude the villagers. Any Character wanting to have some alone time for 1D10 minutes must succeed on a Complicated (14) Stealth roll. To truly disappear without attracting attention or suspicion, they must make a Very Difficult (20) roll. In this case, such PCs have such a smooth and natural way of tiptoeing away that even the villagers who were with them are convinced that they are still around, or that they have simply joined another group...

If the PCs have a hard time starting the investigation by themselves or fail to see the significance of these critical clues, the GLs can use Trine to prod them. The young girl may even explain that it is in their best interest to know more about each villager, or even to win them over in preparation for the trial.



Dealing with the Initiatives of the PCs

According to how the PCs perform in their investigations, they may end up finding out crucial information, which may strongly alter the remainder of the scenario. The Leaders should not discourage such major discoveries, but rather reward the ingenuity and daring of their Players with strong, memorable scenes:



Neventer's Lesson.

By being particularly convincing or diplomatic (equivalent to a Very Difficult (20) Relation roll), a Ionnthén or Demorthén PC—and he or she alone—may be permitted to visit Madarcht's cave, along with an escort, of course. Such a PC may also get to learn about the existence of the mysterious “Madarcht's Peace” Ogham or be told that, for this year, young Trine has been chosen as an offering... These walks through the outskirts of Higher Mùdan will also prove very useful should the PCs have to flee (see Act III, Scene 5).



The Lord of Roots.

Players focusing their investigation on the Pure's rites and wishing to learn more about Madarcht will have to try to sneak into its lair (See Bestiary and Act III, Scene 4), which may lead them to discover that Higher Mùdan is worshipping a Feond...

Trine's Role



Trine will only speak if the PCs swear to take her with them when they leave the village. This is the only condition she requires.

A childhood friend of Eidan, Trine was saddened to see him adhere to the dominating dogma. While she will do so discreetly, she will do everything in her power to help the PCs win. Her motivations are a mixture of rebelliousness, indignation, sympathy for the strangers, and terror regarding her own fate. She fears that she will soon die as an offering. Each year, the Demorthén reveals the spirits' prey, and although she has no proof of it, she is sure that her time will come soon, considering how the council and the leading villagers are treating her.

She is the only support that the PCs will get on their arrival, and she can give them precious information. More to the point, she can tell them about some of the things mentioned in “The personalities of the village” and “The outskirts of the village” (previously mentioned in this Scene). However, her knowledge about the rituals or the nature of Madarcht is muddled, if not downright faulty. Given the propensity of the villagers to constantly keep an eye on everyone, no conversation can last without attracting attention. Therefore, it will take perseverance and repeated meetings to learn everything that Trine has to say.



The Leaders can use how watchful the villagers are with Trine as a variable to adjust the difficulty of the scenario: at some moments, the PCs can get help from her, and sometimes, they will have to manage by themselves. Having a suspecting villager barge in is also an efficient way to bring a stop to any conversation that has been lasting for too long or that may give too much important information at a time. Here are a few examples for such scenes:

⊕ Contact.

It is night. In the common house where everyone is sleeping, the PCs are trying to get as much rest as they can when they notice some movement—someone getting closer as stealthily as possible. In the darkness, it is impossible to know who this thin figure is that seems to be beckoning them to come out. She tiptoes away, being careful not to bump against things lying around before taking the PCs away to a dark spot outside, then talks to them in a low voice, nervously looking around for the sentries.

⌘ Accident.

As hard work is being undertaken in the forest (cutting down a tree, dragging logs), a heavy fall takes place and everyone runs to the location of the accident to assess the damage. Meanwhile, Trine leaps from a hiding place and takes the PCs behind a tree where they can talk for a few minutes.

⌘ Water duty.

Trine volunteers to fetch water at the river for cooking or for bathing a baby, but she overburdens herself with leather and earthenware buckets. When villagers offer to lend a hand, she assures them that she will be okay, but in front of the PCs, she drops everything, hoping that the PCs will help her and give her an opportunity to talk to them as they go back to draw water.



During Act III, Scene 1, the PCs will have a chance to win the trial, but they will earn the right to leave with Eidan only. The villagers will forbid them from taking Trine along, since she is to be sacrificed. The dilemma of whether to leave her to her fate in spite of the support she was able to provide can only be strengthened if the Leaders were able to play out the acquisition of information like an espionage plot:

short meetings, just a few questions lest the others notice something suspicious, the quick glances over their shoulders, and the fearful yet hopeful expression of Trine who is turning against her brethren.

≈ Scene 4: A Conflict of Values ≈

The PCs can attempt to influence the upcoming trial by undermining the villagers' beliefs. The objective is to convince as many of them as possible to join their cause by toppling their system of beliefs. However, this will be no easy task! Freeing someone from a sectarian worldview is very hard. To begin with, their adherence is so intense that no argument seems effective against it. To make a dent in it, the PCs will have to make the villagers experience several revelations. For example, they may prove

the falsity of Neventer's dogma, or expose the duplicity of the community's members.

The stronger a person's Conviction is, the harder it is to shatter their illusion and free them from their indoctrination. In terms of game mechanics, Indoctrination will be represented as a numbered value given to each one of the jurors. If the Leaders need to calculate the indoctrination rating of another villager, a coherent basis could be Conviction +2.

Ferian, Eidan's father, has a rating of 5 in Conviction, hence an Indoctrination rating of 7. The Leader can increase or lower the rating according to personal experiences or a particular structure of the personality. Since one of Ferian's Character Traits is "Fanatic", the Leader adds +1 to Indoctrination. Moreover, the mental condition of Ferian shows a "Syndrome of Fanaticism", so the Leader decides to add +2 to Indoctrination. In the end, Ferian has a maximum Indoctrination of 10.

Each revelation lowers Indoctrination between 1 and 3. At 0, the villager is him or herself again, revolted against the coercive system he or she has been part of. He or she will be favorably disposed toward the arguments of Anaïs Cruyssec during the trial (see Scene 6, "The Trial").



Preemptive Observations

A party of Players who are rather comfortable with investigation and role-playing will be able to work efficiently to spread doubt. The previous investigation phase (see Act II, Scene 3, "Investigations in the Village") makes it possible to learn the inner workings of the village and to acquire information of a psychological nature about the jurors and main personalities of Higher Mùdan. Generally speaking, there are three main tendencies in the village:

Those who lead:

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very hard to convince. They are better informed than the others, and it is probably in their best interests that the system lives on so that they may keep their material or social privileges (prestige, power, etc.)

Those who have faith:

as described in the above passage, these individuals, in their fervor, have had no negative revelation upsetting their beliefs and rules of conduct.

Those who are afraid:

they came here looking for a rural paradise in which to settle down with their families. Initially, they were content with the idyllic life offered to them, but afterward, they progressively understood the truth, and their faith is now hanging by a thread. They are afraid of their leaders as much as of the spirits, and the village has become a prison. In the worst cases, they are even suspicious of their own children, who have been indoctrinated and fanaticized, and who could report any wrong behavior on their part, resulting in their deaths to "purify" the community... Concretely speaking, these individuals, who try to be as inconspicuous as possible, have already gone through so many revelations that their adherence is about to break, or that all they are waiting for is exterior help to be freed. In a "Hard as nails" gaming style (See Prologue, "Horror and Dramatic Tension", p.94), they can be the village's silent majority, ready to support the strangers as soon as they have defeated Demorthèn Neventer and Great Madarcht.



The Right Opportunities

It is one thing to understand a situation; it is another to determine how to act on it. The PCs are constantly spied on, but if they coordinate their actions, some can create a distraction while others go and discuss with a juror.

Working together.

It is easy to volunteer for the daily chores, so all the PCs have to do is pick tasks that will allow them to spend the day close to a juror. With luck and subtlety (Complicated (14) Stealth roll or 6 or more on a Luck roll), it is possible to find a few minutes to talk. The conversation may be segmented and take place over the course of several hours, but the PCs should be able to make do with this much.

Daily life and ceremonies.

Births, funerals, weddings, and seasonal religious holidays are celebrated. Less important festivals may take place during the day, on the occasion of the cutting down of trees in prevision for the construction of a house. Work is then undertaken as a common effort: some are in charge of heavy labor, while others cheer them on and bring them water or tools... or simply rest. On each one of these occasions, singing, chatting, and various activities disorganize the habitual scheduling. For the PCs, it means that it will be easier to quietly have a few words with a villager without being constantly interrupted or watched. The Leaders can plan a birth, a death, or the construction of a house from start to finish—from choosing the trees to placing the roof—which will pace the action between the arrival at the village and the trial.

The Right Arguments

Here are a few examples of how the Players could spread doubt among the Pure, or even get some of them to reach an epiphany. Some arguments may be brought up by a PC specialized in a related Domain, while others may simply be devised by an inventive Player. The GLs can also use Trine to suggest ideas to the Players.

Questioning Madarcht's nature.

A Character with the Demorthèn Knowledge or Demorthèn Traditions Discipline (or who succeeds on a Complicated (14) Demorthèn Mysteries or Erudition roll) will know that traditionally, the C'maoghs are defined as insubstantial beings who have no hunger for blood. Such a characteristic instead brings to mind a Feond. It is also odd that a worshiped being remains "entrapped" in its sanctuary. Considering its power, could the purpose be not to protect it from intruders, but to prevent it from wreaking havoc outside? In that regard, why does Neventer need a particular Ogham to get close to Madarcht? A charismatic PC may be able to spread unease and doubt by confronting Neventer with these questions (Complicated (14) Relation roll).

Showing that Neventer has deviated from a fundamental Demorthèn principle.

A PC specialized in Demorthèn myths (see above) may attempt to demonstrate that Neventer is not a faultless Demorthèn (see "Demorthèn Ethics", Book 1 – Universe, p.147). To start with, it is not possible to directly denounce the practice of killing unworthy Ionnthén or sacrificing human victims to the spirits. Even though they may be considered revolting, such methods are sometimes advocated among the strictest Demorthèn and in certain Osag clans. However, Demorthèn ethics forbid the use of rites and powers to further personal goals, and it appears that choosing Trine for the sacrifice is mainly motivated by political considerations and personal enmity. Putting forward such arguments may bring some of the villagers to notice that the previous sacrifices were also ordered to strengthen the Demorthèn's power.

Healthier ideals.

Most of the members of the sect adhered to it because they experienced a crisis, because their existence had lost meaning. They were looking for a cure, and the authenticity of a communitarian life close to nature seemed like the ideal answer. Therefore, an eloquent and crafty faithful of the Temple might easily take advantage of these partly deceived hopes by narrating an idyllic depiction of monastic life, for example: why suffer and be constantly afraid when it is possible to elevate oneself through prayer, devotion, faith, and a work as steady as it is honest? The Temple protects its adepts from Feondas, does not ask for senseless suffering, and the Elect are the living proof that the One cares about his followers. Note that should they use such an argument, the faithful who try to preach the good word will regularly be shunned, insulted, and assaulted by the most zealous fanatics, who will use them as scapegoats when things turn bad (see Act III, Scenes 3, 4, and 5). In the end, their devotion to the Creator may very well lead them to become martyrs... Leaders with a taste for ironic conclusions can have some converted villagers follow the faithful for some time. In particular, the Epilogue suggests an aftermath in which Anaïs Cruyssec goes to the Monastery of Tuath to request support from a healer to help her soothe the wounded soul of her son Eidan. If the converted villagers decide to seize this opportunity and become monks there, they will discover, along with the PCs, the darkest and most unsavory aspects of the Temple. This will be a source of cruel disappointment, both for the newly converted and for the idealistic faithful who sincerely believed in the message of hope...

Emphasizing how vile it was of Fèrian to abduct a child and fake their deaths, regardless of the imperatives of truth and purity.

The PCs will make this argument all the more effective if they feign naivety. For example, they may witness the Dàmàthair teaching the children not far from one of the jurors, who seems to approve of the lesson given. The children are made to repeat over and over that one must never lie, that truth is the natural state, that lies are a corruption from civilization and cities, and that the way one acts counts more than the result obtained, that a favorable outcome stemming from a lie will be corrupted sooner or later since it sprouts from an abominable seed. The Dàmàthair keeps on with her lesson, reminding that children are precious, that they are the duty of women toward mankind. Knowing that such a moral is taught, the PCs can easily stress the contradictions between the message inculcated and the truth of the facts. According to such logic, Eidan's presence, even though it seems positive considering he apparently enjoys his life, actually bears seeds of corruption and is a danger for the whole community!

The danger of lies.

This argument may be brought up by attentive PCs who are politically savvy and have noticed that the power of Higher Mùdan partially rests on lies, which makes them traitors against the feudal system of Taol-Kaer (see Act II, Scene 1, "The Weakness of Lord Evran"). Depicting a very dark future, with Hilderin knights barging in and rampaging through the village, can instill fear and doubt in the mind of the listener.



Finding out that a charismatic leader is a hypocrite acting in contradiction with the values he extols is one of the most powerful levers, even more so than a factual revelation concerning the erroneous aspect of a particular belief. After all, the person a believer believes in is supposed to be exemplary.



The Jury

The members of the jury are briefly characterized by their Indoctrination and by the notable events of their lives that can allow the PCs to possibly influence them. Here are the core elements of each member of the jury for the trial to come. More than any other, these NPCs will be the ones that the PCs should try to convince. One way or another, they must get the votes of at least three jurors to win the trial.



Arian:

Indoctrination: 3. 35 years old. He does not really believe in the dogma anymore and lives in fear, scarred by past humiliations. Sullen and worried with a shifty look, he is mainly looking for comfort. The PCs can persuade him that they will take him with them, but since he is particularly fearful, they will have to be particularly convincing (Very Difficult (20) Relation roll) for him to believe that they will truly keep their word. Alternatively, the PCs can try to scare him into submission, in particular with arguments regarding the destruction of Higher Mùdan (see the “danger of lies” argument), which can remove several of his Indoctrination points until the end of this threat.

Loan:

Indoctrination: 5. 25 years old. He disapproves of the boastful attitude of the current Ionnthén, which leads him to question Neventer's good judgment in the matter, but he still believes in the communitarian ideal. He is genuine in his search for an ideal, so arguments presenting new positive perspectives such as a religious conversion (see the “Healthier ideals” argument) remove 2 Indoctrination points from him. It is likely that if he abandoned the sect of the Pure, it would be to adhere to another movement more worthy of his devotion.

Edel:

Indoctrination: 4. 30 years old. She is mother to several children whom she sees grow up under the ever-increasing influence of the Dàmàthair she secretly hates. The seething hatred of Edel can be seen in her behavior, her looks, and her attitude; an attentive observer (Difficult (17) Relation roll) will easily perceive her murderous desire. It is possible to tempt her with the possibility of taking her far away from the village. After all, if Anaïs Cruyssec can have Eidan back, why couldn't Edel do the same with her children? Mothers must stick together! Whether the PCs are sincere or not, a Difficult (17) Relation roll is enough to persuade her. Such hope can remove 2 Indoctrination points, but beware of her revenge should she discover that she has been lied to! The Leaders may use her as a jailer during Act III, Scene 3, in order to confront the PCs to their promises.

Miriann:

Indoctrination: 7. 45 years old. She is one of the most devout members of the community, and a seasoned gossip, always informed of the latest rumors. She might secretly tell the village council about everything she learns regarding the PCs... Trying to win her over would be rather bold from the PCs, since she will attempt to manipulate them and use anything she knows against them. The Leaders can make her a double agent: she will pretend to lend a helpful ear and root for them, all the better to betray them. Conversely, the GLs can make her a caricature of a fanatic and a lost cause for the PCs. The latter is more appropriate for a “Hard as nails” gaming style, since it is a way to reinforce the strong opposition between the oppressors and the victims, Miriann being part of the former.

Elwin:

Indoctrination: 4. 30 years old. He was recently injured in a hunting accident that left him with a limp. He feels like a burden and is afraid of being sacrificed, but knows that he cannot oppose it. Torn between his survival instinct and his shame over not accepting to die as an offering for Madarcht, he will first come off as rather aggressive. Learning that the creature the villagers worship is a Feond will be the greatest possible shock for him, and will remove 3 of his Indoctrination points.



Any jurors who become allies can share information about the village. They can explain why everyone is so afraid: at least once a year, a villager is sacrificed to great Madarcht. All the adults know about it, even if they do not all get to see the rites from start to finish (see Act III, Scene 4). The children, however, only know a sweetened version of reality: they are told that some go into the spirits' forest never to come back. The sacrifices are perceived as an absolute necessity by the believers and as a loathsome political tool by those who have lost faith. Madarcht itself is seldom brought up: people speak of “the cave” or of the “Great Spirit, Lord of the Forest's Roots”.



Potential allies.

All the villagers who have forsaken the Pure's ideology may potentially become allies, although their actions also depend on the fear they feel toward the community. The Leaders decide the number of villagers who can be convinced by the PCs, in accordance with the intended atmosphere.

The primary objective is to gather support for the trial. However, according to how far the PCs manage to take it, it may go as far as leading to a revolution, or merely to a getaway with a few unfortunate souls who have decided to escape the sect's tyranny. In the latter case, the villagers can be used to drive home the feeling of the scenario: they could die during a frantic flight, which would give the PCs the feeling that they have barely made it through themselves. On the other hand, leaving them alive would make the atmosphere more heroic.



Getting rid of a troublesome juror.

It goes without saying that Neventer and his followers are not going to stand back and let the PCs do as they please. For example, Kareth can intimidate the jurors who seem too close to the PCs or who show signs of doubts. Although Trine is the planned sacrifice, Demorthèn Neventer could receive new instructions from the spirits asking for a more important offering in exchange for their protection—a convenient way to take jurors who have sided with the strangers out of the picture... Optionally, a more extreme scene could depict the “accidental” death of a member of the jury who supports the PCs.

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Scene 5: The Spirits' Test

In the Pure's legal system, not just anyone can testify as a witness or plead for the defendant. The plaintiff, Anaïs Cruyssec, is authorized to express herself by default. However, for PCs who might want to vouch for her, to speak about her or on her behalf, it will be harder to earn this right. Only “honorable” or “dishonorable but purified” PCs may intervene. Only a minority can expect to be considered “honorable” by the Pure's standards (see below), while the others will be subjected to a test of judicial torture beforehand: the “spirits' test”, which may result in their deaths. The scene detailed thereafter offers the possibility for one or several PCs to go through the Pure's rituals in order to get a chance to personally influence the course of the trial.

For Anaïs, getting support during the trial may prove decisive, so she will try to convince the PCs by all possible means to subject themselves to the spirits' test.



Remember that in Scene 2, soon after the PCs arrive in the village, Ansailéir Lem makes it clear that during the trial that is to take place, the PCs may only testify and plead “under certain conditions”; namely, being honorable or purified.

Honorable:

a member of the community of the Pure, a full-fledged Demorthèn or bard, or a noble. Applicants must prove that they belong to one of these groups with Ogham, recommendation letters, a coat of arms, etc. If the PCs managed to get a recommendation from the Duke of Seòl or Preden Mac Blonag, it will only apply to a single member of the party, whom the PCs will have to pick carefully.

Dishonorable:

the only way to be authorized to speak up during the trial is to be purified and accepted by the spirits. The test has a standard duration of three days, but if an individual behaved particularly poorly, it can be extended to a maximum of nine days for a heinous criminal, which almost certainly results in death.



The Pure's judicial torture. The Pure will not reveal the particulars of their judicial torture in advance, and will only mention a “purification” and a “trial imposed by the spirits”. Those who refuse to undergo it are simply cowards who are unworthy of testifying. With a Standard (11) Relation roll, the PCs will gather enough information to make it clear that it is in no way a mere formality. With a Complicated (14) roll, they will understand that the volunteers had better be strong people with great willpower. Indeed, the Pure's judicial torture consists of suspending the dishonorable individuals from trees using ropes tied to wooden spikes driven into their flesh. Such an initial ordeal inflicts three Damage points. They are to remain like this bare-chested and bleeding, about 10 feet from the ground, suffering from cold, hunger, thirst, the aggravation of their wounds, etc.

On top of it all, each day, the Dàmàthair encourages the children to come into the spirits' forest to taunt the strangers and throw stones at them. Rains are frequent enough that dehydration is debilitating but not life-threatening. Each half-day spent like this requires a Complicated (14) Stamina roll, with the PCs suffering one Damage point on a failure. Each night, the same roll is made to see whether the PCs catch a Mild fever. Finally, the Pure's judicial torture is also very taxing psychologically. Each day spent in such an uncomfortable position requires a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.



Jocelyn Pook – Eyes Wide Shut: Music From The Motion Picture – 8 – Masked Ball

This incantation-like track is a good way to strengthen the optional scenes described below. With subdued lights, the Leaders can set a strange, mystical atmosphere.



Mystical visions.

Using this optional scene will intensify the psychological dimension of the spirits' test. Enduring a lack of food and sleep and being subjected to unceasing pain, the victims progressively lose hold as their bodies are driven to exhaustion. They become more vulnerable to suggestions and gradually fall into a mystical, hallucinatory delirium. Each night, the Leader secretly makes a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. On a failure, the PCs are totally convinced that the strange noises and moving shapes they perceive are the manifestations of spirits or demons. For PCs who are naturally predisposed to developing hallucinatory or mystical disorders, the Mental Resistance roll is Difficult (17), and this ordeal may mark them durably. Characters who are very vulnerable to influence may even start believing that the Pure are right. The Leaders are free to adapt the visions to the PCs' systems of belief: for example, an adept of the One may believe even more strongly than before that the so-called Pure must be eradicated. With the Players' agreement, it is also possible to play their Characters as brainwashed from so much trauma, which will lead to tensions and complications. Can the other PCs still trust them? Aren't they going to betray their companions?



The beasts.

During the night, minion creatures come to prowl close to the victims, growling frighteningly. These beings (see the Bestiary at the end of the book) never come out of the spirits' forest and only pay attention to what they perceive to be a possible threat to their master. The rites and customs of the villagers make it so that they are only rarely attacked by the Minions, which is considered a punishment from the spirits. The PCs are tied too high to be in actual danger, but seeing monstrous wolves leaping at them and snapping at their feet can be an upsetting experience. According to their gaming style, the Leaders may favor a distressing approach, with the shapes moving and drawing nearer, entertaining the possibility that they are yet more hallucinations. Alternatively, the Leaders may prefer to depict a direct, plainly supernatural threat, with the Feond nature of the creatures and their aggressive intent being readily apparent.



Scene 6: The Trial

The trial will be the moment for the PCs to gather the fruits of all the preparatory work they have done during the previous days. The whole village gathers at the square in front of the common house. The tension is palpable as everyone takes their position:

- ⌘ The council at the center, with Ansailéir Lem, Demorthèn Neventer, Dàmàthair Arsante, and Ionnthén Kareth.
- ⌘ Facing each other, on either side of the empty space, Ferian the father with Eidan his son on one side, and Anaïs Cruyssec with the PCs on the other.
- ⌘ A vast space is left empty for the litigants and witnesses to speak.
- ⌘ All around, the crowd listens and sometimes reacts, against or in favor of the orators.
- ⌘ The five jurors: Arian, Loan, Edel, Miriann, and Elwin (see Act II, Scene 4, “The Jury” box). Some of them have already decided their votes, while others are still hesitating.



The previous night, Anaïs was very ill, with terrible stomach aches. Her life is not in danger, but she is very pale and can only stand with difficulty. She cannot focus on talking and pleading, so she will ask the PCs to speak on her behalf. Has she been the victim of an assassination attempt, or is it simply collywobbles at the thought of the imminent trial?

With the blessing of the spirits confirmed by Demorthèn Neventer, Ansailéir Lem sums up the situation: two parents are asking for the custody of young Eidan. If the mother is found to be in her good right, she will take him to Reizh, and if the final decision is in favor of the father, the child will stay in Higher Mùdan. At the request of Anaïs Cruyssec, the Ansailéir adds that one of the PCs will be her representative. This announcement creates quite a stir among the audience, but Lem calms the villagers down by explaining that the Demorthèn was consulted and has consented.

Lem then names the PCs who will be authorized to speak during the trial and their justification: bard, Demorthèn, noble, or having gone through the spirits' test. Finally, she lets the litigant PC speak so that he or she may present Anaïs's version of the facts, express arguments, and call a witness (PC or NPC) to testify. The PCs' goal here is to appear as convincing and eloquent as possible in order to overcome the jury's reluctance to give Anaïs the benefit of the doubt.





The trial is comparable to a battle of words. In the same way that the PCs confer before carrying out an ambush or an attack, they had better agree on their strategy.

Improvisation may certainly be more thrilling and lead to more lively situations, but discussing the situation beforehand will make for a serious and solemn atmosphere. Here, the Leaders can stress this aspect by reminding the PCs of the stakes, the mood, the feeling of menace, and the fear of failure. Particular attention can be given to describing the distraught and uncertain look of an agonized Anaïs, both hopeful and fearful. The goal is to get the vote of at least three out of the five jurors. As the plaintiff, the PC standing for Anaïs Cruyssec presents his or her arguments with a speech and brings witnesses to testify. Then, Ferian will get to speak as the defendant. He may ask the witnesses previously called to testify again for a rebuttal, or simply make his own speech. Finally, the jurors will vote, with a white stone in favor of Ferian, or a black stone in favor of Anaïs.

The Leaders have two options to play out this scene: either exclusively on the basis of the Players' interpretation and descriptions, in accordance with the "How to Use Skill Rolls" box (Book 1, p.176), or through Contested Actions (Book 1,

p.234), with the litigant PC in opposition with Ferian. One opposed roll is made per juror, for a total of five rolls. In this case, many circumstance modifiers can be applied to the Relation rolls.

⊕ There are several in favor of the father: is a member of the village (+2), is well-considered by the Pure (+1), has peer pressure on his side (+2), enmity toward Magientists and strangers (+1), and possibly a dismal failure from one of the PCs to reduce the Indoctrination of a juror (+2).

⊕ There are other factors which crafty PCs can benefit from: Indoctrination of the juror brought to 0 (+2), secret means of pressure over a jury, or promise of vote after some bargaining (+2), being a bard (+1), being a Demorthèn (+2), testifying as a moral witness and posing as an example for the mother's qualities (+1 per testifying PC), speech carefully prepared with, for example, strategic information obtained from Trine (+1 to +2, see Act II, Scene 3: "Investigations in the Village") or convincing demonstrations (+1 to +2 for each well-thought argument, at the Leaders' discretion), etc.



Anaïs's Arguments

During the preparatory phase, Anaïs has told her representative about her ideas. The PCs are then free to combine them with the testimonies or arguments agreed on by the team.

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Her main argument is the treachery of Ferian, who faked his death and took her son from her. Anaïs cannot understand how the community of the "Pure" could condone such an act. Also, from her point of view, all children need to know about their history and parents in order to grow up developing their own identity without being merely the result of what one adult wants them to be. All individuals are free to make their own choices, but this implies that they first know both sides of the story. She respects how attached Eidan is to an ethic that gives importance to a simple life close to nature, but she thinks that he should see Reizh and Baldh-Ruoch with his own eyes to make up his own mind. She realizes that Eidan is almost an adult and may not remain with her for long... but she nevertheless hopes that it will be enough to give him a more open vision of the world and let him experience the love of a mother—not just the rigid attention of a Dàmàthair who takes children away from their parents. This last argument could grant a +2 bonus with Juror Edel, but -1 with Loan and Miriann, who are both in good terms with the Dàmàthair. Using it during the trial will therefore cut both ways.



Ferian's Arguments

Sometimes, the end justifies the means: it was necessary to rescue Eidan from Magientist corruption to let him live a healthy life that, in that regard, seems to suit him perfectly. To come now is fruitless: the young man is nearly an adult; he is no longer Anaïs's child who, in a way, died 12 years ago. What good is there in asking for the custody of a 15-year-old teenager who is reaching the end of his third age circle? In a few months, he will be an adult, and will surely come back to the village! Wanting to take him away is an insult to his free will: he may still be considered as a Pàisde (a child) but his will should still be respected. The point is that he approves of his father's life choice and should remain in Higher Mùdan to peacefully go on with his existence.



The Jurors and the Ansailéir's Roles

During the trial, there is no judge strictly speaking. Ansailéir Lem presides and makes sure that everything is going properly: she regulates speaking time, but takes no decisions, and will not settle the dispute. The jurors will be the ones to vote in favor of one party or the other, without resorting to half-measures or arrangements. It is a rather crude system of justice, on par with the brutality of the spirits' test, one that expresses a binary vision of the world: guilty or innocent, fair or unfair, true or false.

Other tribunals in Tri-Kazel, however, function in a much subtler and more complex way, mainly in towns or the religious tribunals of Gwidre. Basically, the jurors will ask no questions, and the Ansailéir will simply decide when the moment has come to vote. The trial is divided into simple phases:

⌘ Opening, rundown of the facts.

⌘ Anaïs's representative is asked to speak, call for witnesses, question them, and put their contributions in perspective, then plead before the jurors to attempt to convince them. Ferian is asked to speak.

⌘ At the Leaders' discretion, he will call the witnesses back for a rebuttal, or he will directly start with his speech to the jurors.

⌘ Once both parties have talked, the Ansailéir asks the jurors to vote by putting a white stone (for Ferian) or a black one (for Anaïs) in a bag. Lem publicly empties it, counts the stones, and announces the result, which will be received with cheers from the crowd if Ferian wins, or with boos if Anaïs does.

⌘ After she has called for order, the Ansailéir will formally acknowledge the jurors' vote. According to the time of the day, the departure of Anaïs and the PCs, with or without Eidan, will take place on the same day or the day after, at dawn.



Choosing Denunciation

This optional scene will take place if the PCs decide to use the arguments denouncing the falseness of the Pure's beliefs (see Act II, Scene 4) during the trial to shock the villagers into action and to induce a revolution. This plan will only succeed in the case of a "Hard as nails" gaming style where the Leader decides to discard most of Act III in order to go for a spectacular, heroic, and positive conclusion instead.

⌘ *Emotion and reason.*

Arguments rest on facts and are articulated in a logical way, point by point. To be able to measure their strength, one has to listen to them and take time for reflection. However, the members of a cult perceive things in an emotional, hypersensitive way: criticizing what is most important in their lives will instantly trigger an outcry of indignation. Additionally, the effects of conditioning nurture very negative prejudices against everything from the outside. This means that the listeners will pay very little attention to what the orator has to say, and that they will have to calm down to reflect on the truth of the matter.

⌘ *Crowd dynamics.*

The villagers are used to reacting as a group, and emotional contagion is very strong (Empathy Test, see Book 1, p.234). It will begin with boos, then insults, and will end with violence. The PCs—the orators in particular—will be beaten up and imprisoned in a fit of hysteria barely restrained by the Pure's leaders. Demorthèn Neventer, in front of such despicable blasphemies, sentences them to experience supreme truth by being purified by the Great Madarcht (see Act III, Scene 3 and 4).

The speaking PC must reach a Difficult (17) Threshold on a Relation roll to get an argument in, and Very Difficult (20) to get two in. Another Difficult or Very Difficult Relation roll must be made to manage to be heard above the boos and the uproar, and so on until there are no more arguments to present. Therefore, it is rather unlikely that a PC will manage to get in all of the intended arguments. However, each striking argument that the PC manages to make heard is a blow to the certitudes of those who heard it. Once four successes have been made in a row, the crowd's mood begins shifting, and a true revolution may break out with a fifth one.

An Elect possessing the Litany Miracle can attempt to placate the crowd by reaching the fourth Stanza (Difficult (17) Miracles roll). Such an action will lessen the hostility and improve the PC's chances of making themselves heard to the end. The villagers will keep obeying Demorthèn Neventer, but there will be more of them doubting and supporting the PCs.



The military service case: a striking argument for the trial

With this optional scene, the scenario can take an unexpected turn. It requires that the Players have been able to pick up on the right clues at the right time, mainly during their time in Lower Mùdan, or that they know the social rules of Esteren very well, particularly regarding the age circles (see Book 1 Universe, p.97) and military service (see Book 1 – Universe, p.98) systems.

Officially, mandatory military service is still followed in Higher Mùdan, but in practice, no villager has undertaken it for a dozen years. The PCs may have discovered it by talking with the inhabitants of Lower Mùdan (see Act II, Scene 1). The Pure even tend to use the friendly competitions in Lower Mùdan as an opportunity for an implicit demonstration of strength, in order to prove that they are free to do as they please. They send young people from 13 to 17 years old to participate, pretending that they are adults. If they are asked, they claim that they have obviously done their military service elsewhere. Everyone knows the truth of the matter and is aware of such a masquerade. This provocation is a taunt at the wavering authority of Lord Evran, but he refuses to do anything about it, vaguely arguing that the age of the participants cannot be proven and that the Pure's lifestyle must be respected. This information can easily be obtained by talking with Aïre or Méloir.

A clever Player—or a Character who can manage a Difficult (17) Erudition roll (Politics Discipline)—will understand that this is a legal matter that may fuel their arguments. First, Anaïs Cruyssec can testify regarding Eidan's age, and Ferian, his father, can confirm it... Childhood is divided into three age circles of five years. Once teenagers turn 16, they are considered to be adults: they are no longer Pàisde (which means “child” in the ancient tongue), and must do military service, which will get them fully involved in both the community and the kingdom's life. Eidan is less than 16 years old, so he has not reached the end of the third age circle yet. Therefore, he is still considered a child and cannot have done his military service, a step confirming that one has reached adulthood. And yet, Eidan was present during a friendly competition that took place several months ago. He was seen there by Aïre and Méloir, as well as by Anaïs's friend, Merchant Dalouarn (see Act I, Scene 1). And it is also a fact that those who participate in the competition are presented as “adults”. Therefore, the holier-than-thou village of Higher Mùdan as a whole can be caught red-handed in the act of lying.

It is also a proof of deceit and lying toward Lord Evran, and through him, toward his superiors. And lying to one's lord is treason, a crime that, at best, is punishable by heavy fines, confiscation, and banishment.

At worst, the culprit may be sentenced to death. As a consequence, this rather subtle political and legal argument may become a powerful means of pressure against the authorities of Higher Mùdan for a team of crafty PCs. There are two ways it can be used:

⚙️ **Blackmailing.** The PCs go to Ansailéir Lem to tell her about their terms. If she does not give them Eidan, she will have a scandal on her hands during the trial. In this case, Lem promises to make it so that some jurors will vote in favor of Anaïs Cruyssec. She adds that she will only be able to convince a portion of them: those she knows well and who will follow her instructions without asking questions, as long as it is for the good of the village. The Leaders will choose the number of voices they will grant to the PCs according to how difficult they want the scenario to be. Three votes (Miriann, Edel, and Loan) ensure that the trial will be won and take all the suspense out of Scenes 3, 4, and 5. Two votes (Miriann, Edel) will make the PCs' task considerably easier and will speed up the game. One voice (Miriann) is a valuable asset, but it will not make things too easy for the PCs, leaving them many occasions to fight the indoctrination of the inhabitants.

⚙️ **Scandal.** Presented during the trial, the argument can spark such a scandal that the council of Higher Mùdan will have to stop the procedure, gather at Ansailéir Lem's, and accept a deal: give Eidan back to his mother in exchange for silence. What may seem like an adapted solution from the PCs' point of view will actually only be agreed upon on the surface. Indeed, among all the members of the council, Ansailéir Lem will be the only one to be genuinely disposed to stick to her word, while all the others will quickly start scheming to get rid of the PCs...



Whether through blackmailing or through a scandal, this military service case will speed up the events and lead the community of the Pure to want to get rid of the PCs, who have become too nosy. Demorthèn Neventer, Dàmàthair Arsante, and Ionnthén Kareth will plan to capture the PCs, ambushing them and taking them prisoner to then eliminate them (Act III, Scenes 3 and 4).



Act III – Beneath the Mossy Ground

The events of the third act are more difficult to predict than those of the previous two. Therefore, this act describes dramatic scenes that are likely to occur and details the most foreseeable scenario. It assumes that the PCs will be indignant in the face of how everything unfolds, but that they will not go as far as taking hostages or slaughtering the village. A quick look at the act's contents will allow Leaders to organize the succession of the scenes and to adapt them to their campaigns:

⌘ A bitter success.

The PCs have managed to win the trial. They are allowed to leave with a furious Eidan, but they are forbidden from taking a desperate Trine with them...

⌘ Abductions.

Odds are that when push comes to shove, the PCs will resort to illegal acts, probably to take Eidan away or to help Trine to leave the village. In either case, knowing about the area and the local customs will make success in this initiative more likely.

⌘ Prisoners.

Whether the PCs scorned the Demorthèn, defied a taboo, were too forceful, or failed in their abduction attempt, the alarm was sounded, and they were captured. In the best-case scenario, only some of the Characters were caught and found guilty, while the others were expelled. Will they be able to save their imprisoned companions?

⌘ The lair of the Great Madarcht.

There are two main reasons the PCs could go to this place: either to be sacrificed following a diplomatic or legal blunder, or to stealthily save Trine.

⌘ A grim hunt.

In case the evasion was a success, or the PCs managed to escape Madarcht, the alarm is now raised, and they have to flee. Leaving via the road is no longer an option because of Neventer's animated trees, so their only way out is through the spirits' forest, chased by villagers and harassed by the Feond's Minions.



~ Scene I: A Bitter Success ~

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A crafty party might be able to pull off a feat of diplomacy and win the trial. This victory deserves to be rewarded and narrated as if it were the end of the story. The bad guys are thwarted: sulking, they seem to be seething, but are held back by the word they gave. Injustice is going to stop, and everything will go back to normal in the best of all possible worlds...

Esteren is far from being the best possible world.

Truth is, nothing has changed in the village: evil strangers have come, and convinced the Pure to give them a boy from the outside, but life will go on as before. The description of a lack of any apparent impact on the population, the heavy atmosphere, and the cold, unspoken contempt should come as a shock right after the short-lived satisfaction of a success that is, in the end, rather limited.

Worse, even if they are not forbidden from leaving, it will be impossible for them to take anyone with them except Eidan. This means that they will not be able to save Trine and will have to bear the sight of the young girl sobbing and begging, "Don't let them kill me!", calling the PCs by their names and pleading for help before she is dragged inside one of the houses to put a stop to such a pathetic and dishonorable scandal.

To any question or complaint, the Pure will only answer in variants of "We take care of our own." However, the PCs know that she fears she is soon going to be sacrificed (see the "A Few Events to Strengthen the Atmosphere" box, p.115).

It is a paradox to take Eidan away almost forcefully while having to leave Trine against her will... Anger, hatred, despair, and terror... How can one remain idle while fanatics kill innocents begging you to help them? Survival instinct dictates to not do anything, but can one still bear the sight of one's own reflection after having left an unfortunate soul to an atrocious fate? How can one bear the memory of Trine's eyes? There are several options:

⌘ Leaving without turning back.

The Leaders can ask these very questions to the Players to make them aware of the tragedy's intensity and let them mull it over on their way out of the village. A possibility is to have them make a Conviction-based Test roll (Book 1, p.234). Actually, odds are that the PCs will not bear to depart and leave Trine and other victims in the clutches of the sectarian community. However, should they choose to do so regardless of any feelings of guilt, this can be the opportunity for the Leaders to bring a dark, horrific end to the story. For example, one of the PCs, such as the most sensitive one (Empathy) or the most upright one (Conviction), will have awful nightmares depicting Trine's torment...

Ambush.

If the PCs decide to leave following their victory at the trial, the Leaders may decide to go on with the scenario nonetheless. For example, a fanatic minority of the village may be unsatisfied with the decision and ambush the PCs. The Pure have the advantage of familiar ground and may take the PCs as prisoners. Even though Demorthèn Neventer and the Ansailéir do not wish to break the law, they are faced with a choice: to either punish the overzealous members of the community or get rid of the strangers, who are troublesome witnesses... Before going for such an option, Leaders should think about the themes of remorse and guilt, or even the possibility of Trine's ghost haunting the party's dreams, which could be more interesting for the remainder of the campaign.

Political support.

In front of the complexity and importance of the task, some PCs may wish to call for the help of Lower Mùdan's lord, or to pull some other strings in order to bring a solution to the issue. The Leaders are invited to point out the faults of such reasoning: Evran does everything to avoid an open conflict, and it will be very hard to convince him... and they do not have much time to save Trine. Mentioning that the Pure intend to sacrifice a member of their own community will not be enough to rouse him into action. After all, the people of Higher Mùdan have their own laws, and like all laws, they must be respected. Demorthèn Neventer is not the only one in the village to believe that human sacrifices are necessary... In the end, the PCs will realize that if they want to save Trine, they will have to do so by themselves, putting their lives at stake due to the urgency of the situation, which will require them to outdo themselves. This depiction of a feeling of imminent danger, the lucid awareness of having to fight something powerful without knowing what it is exactly, is a way to bring dramatic tension and to prepare for a dark yet assuredly heroic final scene.



A moral conundrum.



This optional scene stresses the moral dilemma of which Trine is the focus, and how the Leaders can emphasize this psychological aspect of the story.

Maybe the PCs will consider attempting to rescue Trine at their own risk? This choice is as hard to make as deciding whether to leave the young girl to her fate. The central issue is determining what is truly important in one's life. Is it to survive no matter the cost, even if it means others have to suffer? Is it better to uphold ethics, whether philosophical or religious, possibly going as far as to decide to die in its name? Are those who have been dubbed "honorable" by the Pure truly so? How far could the determination of these Characters go?

For example, noble PCs, since they are part of an elite from birth, are supposed to have exceptional moral qualities. Even the Pure, as much as they despise everything coming from the outside, acknowledge that, which is why such Characters did not have to undergo the test of purification... However, in front of a concrete choice, when faced with a blatantly odious injustice, how will they behave? Are they as noble as they make themselves out to be, or are their values no more than a facade for the empty shells they are? Coming to such a realization is likely to be a personal horrific experience in itself. It can be purely traumatic if those going through it remain stuck on it, but can result in an epiphany if they pull themselves together and do their best to outdo themselves and represent something they can be proud of.



The Horror of Debasement



Horror does not only stem from external events of a repugnant, dangerous, or unfathomable nature; it also grows from confrontations with oneself. Finding out that the monster actually resides within oneself can make for a powerful dramatic twist, but one that is hard to bring about. Shadows of

Esteren's Sanity system makes it possible for the Leaders to depict the erosion of certainties, the impossibility of being sure of oneself, of being in control in any circumstances. In this case, the idea is to give particular attention to heart-wrenching moral conundrums: Is it fair to kill one person to save several? Is it fair to leave a relative or a friend in danger of death if it means you can survive? How do you live after you have saved your own life in such a selfish way? Are there fates worse than death?

The way the events of Act III unfold will vary considerably from one group of PCs to another. However, most groups will likely have to run for their lives, but with members in different physical conditions. If some have been wounded for the group's benefit during the spirits' test, will those who have remained unscathed abandon them to save themselves?

Below are some tips to translate these concepts into the game:

Headlong flight.

For a quick flight that will require a sprint, the Feats Domain (and the Running Discipline) will matter the most. However, to be able to keep a good pace during the course of several hours, one had better be well-trained in Travel or in the Endurance Discipline. In order to stress the idea that the PCs are truly running

for their lives, the rolls for the flight can be made with Combative-ness, hence: Feats + Combative-ness, and Travel + Combative-ness. The weakest and least pugnacious will be left behind, along with the wounded.

⌘ Last chance.

A dramatic option may be to have the expenditure of Survival points result in a heroic burst of energy, a second wind borne from a last-ditch effort. Here, the PCs could outdistance their pursuers for a moment, possibly at the price of aggravating their wounds... The world of Shadows of Esteren is dangerous, but it is not devoid of flair: according to their game-mastering style and how they allow the PCs to make use of Survival points, the Leaders may decide to alter the outcome of the events. A possibility can be that some members are left for dead, comatose, and perhaps wake up several hours or days later (see Book 1 – Universe, Survival Points, p.217).

⌘ The pain of abandonment.

The shock of being betrayed by someone you thought trustworthy is all the greater when the situation is critical. The victims of such an ordeal can be subjected to a Mental Resistance roll: Standard (11) for an ally, Complicated (14) for a friend, and Difficult (17) or possibly Very Difficult (20) for one's dearest friend, child, or great love.

⌘ The weight of cowardice.

Betraying one's companion causes suffering for the one being abandoned, but it also hurts the author of such an act performed for the sake of survival instinct. Those who abandon others suffer a Mental Resistance check: Standard (11) for an ally, Complicated (14) for a friend, and Difficult (17) for a loved one. The Difficulty can be increased between +1 and +3 according to how abject the circumstances of the act are.

~ Scene 2: Abduction ~

In several possible cases, the PCs will consider fleeing from the village or taking someone away from it. Variations can take place close to the site of the sacrifice to save Trine or captured PCs. In either case, some elements must be taken into account for the operation to go as smoothly as possible.

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⌘ Rounds & watches.

The Pure work in groups of at least two, and their organization of watch duty in the village can be compared to the one of a military camp during a state of war. Each night, the duos rotate every three hours, keeping track of time with the stars or according to the time their torches take to burn. Simultaneously, within the village itself, only two armed sentries keep watch, but the whole population contributes in its own way as well... Still, even though the Pure will be more watchful when strangers are present, efficiency is not only about motivation, and most of the villagers only have basic training in the domains likely to be of use to stop an escape or an abduction.

⌘ Climate of distrust.

In the chapter detailing Mùdan, the statistics for an average village fighter are presented, but for the PCs, danger is much more treacherous and diffuse. They must trust no one, especially the children. Indoctrinated by the Dàmàthair, they are the eyes of the community, and they are very nosy... Therefore, the PCs will probably be seen plotting if they are not careful. Any whispered conversation, any isolated gathering, and in fact anything they will do will be mentioned to the Dàmàthair and afterward repeated to the village's council. The Pure will let the PCs plot and will take them prisoners as soon as they are able to catch them red-handed. Overconfident or careless PCs will think everything is going as planned... until they walk right into a trap!

⌘ Boundaries.

The surroundings of the village of the Pure are hilly and wooded, plentiful in shelters and hiding places. This will mainly be an advantage for the locals, since they know the region well. However, strangers who have had time to adapt and are skilled in the appropriate Domains (i.e. Natural Environment, Perception, and Stealth) should be able to take note of pathways and details that they may use to plan an abduction or an escape. Among other things, they will be able to notice weak spots in the poorly-maintained palisade through which they may sneak out... Moreover, the land around the path leading to Lower Mùdan is set with traps.

Traps

Handicapped by their ban on metal, the Pure have nevertheless proven very creative in booby-trapping their land to ensure that intruders from Lower Mùdan cannot do otherwise but go through the main path. At night, even with lighting, the Difficulty Threshold to notice the traps is increased by 3. The Leaders should not hesitate to design other traps, but they are also advised to reward clever thinking from the PCs. For example, they may get bonuses to their Perception rolls if they make their way at a slow pace, probing the ground with a pole.

⌘ Tripwires.

Simple and efficient, they make an intruder stumble. Combined with a nearby spike pit or a boulder trap, they make for a potentially deadly obstacle, although a simple jumble of sticks whose fall will signal a presence can also do. This is certainly the most unnoticeable trap, and it can only be spotted with a Difficult (17) Perception roll.

⌘ Spike pits.

There aren't many of them, but they have been strategically placed and hidden. A fall is potentially fatal (2D10 Damage caused by the spikes), and it takes good reflexes to catch the ledge or a falling ally (Complicated (14) Feats roll). Each pit is more or less well hidden (Perception check ranging between 11 and 14).

~ Scene 3: Prisoners ~



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The PCs will become prisoners due to the consequences of a failed abduction attempt, or if the Leader wishes to have them face Madarcht. In any case, their capture will at least be spectacular. It is important that the PCs feel how isolated they are: they are far from any exterior support and surrounded exclusively by hostile people. The Pure wield spears and look at the PCs with rabid eyes... even though some of them are only going along to save their lives. They are a wall of spears and anonymous bodies, an organic crowd blindly obeying the orders of their demented but charismatic leader. They will be quickly surrounded, and PCs who surrender and lay down their weapons quietly will not be manhandled for the time being. They will immediately be tightly roped: their elbows, wrists, and necks are tied behind their backs, so that any movement strangles the victim. Any personal belonging that can potentially be used as a weapon will be thrown in a bag whose contents will be dumped into Madarcht's lake as an offering. Fortunately, this lack of greed from the villager is also a future opportunity to recover any lost equipment—including money—when leaving the creature's lair. Resigned or revolted, the PCs will have to suffer humiliations (being spit upon, getting slapped) and taunts that will echo their acts in the village or their pitiful abduction attempt. They will also be told of how they have been uncovered, which can be the opportunity for the PCs to understand that they have been exposed by a child or betrayed by cowardly villagers who, even though they do not have faith, would rather be on the good side of those who have the power... Here, the aim is to stoke the PCs' thirst for revenge and determination to get away no matter the cost.

For the mob, the PCs' fate is obvious, so much so that a trial does not even seem necessary. Madarcht will engulf them and purify the world of their existence. The PCs will spend the last hours of their lives in a cave not far from the sacrificial grounds. In addition to the PCs, the prisoners gathered in prevision of the sacrifice will be: Trine, Anaïs Cruyssec, and other possible accomplices.

Attempting to escape.

The prisoners are not watched carefully since the Pure tend to underestimate their victims' will to survive. An escape will probably begin with chafing their binding rope on rocks, at the price of several cuts and at the risk of strangling themselves. This can be simulated with a Craft (Clothing, Leatherworking, or Locksmithing) or Feats (Evasion) roll, with a Complicated (14) Difficulty Threshold. Two successes are necessary to cut the ropes. Freed PCs can give a +2 bonus to the ones they actively help.

Success is likely, but things can get tricky with the sudden and unexpected visit of a jailer (to give them a meal, check their bindings, or simply rough them up). The PCs will then have to stop, play dumb, and possibly lie to fool their captors (Standard (11) or Complicated (14) Relation roll) and avoid a "What's that you're doing? I'm sure you're up to something..."



The optimal moment to make the jailers barge in is when only one third of the party has freed themselves. This will force a minority of disarmed PCs to get rid of one or two jailers in a hurry. This option leads to a short fight that does not involve all the Players, some of them being only witnesses to the brawl. However, in the meantime, they can try to cut off their bindings too, so that the fight and the urgency to get free become two equally intense actions.

Scene 4: The Lair of the Great Madarcht



Jocelyn Pook - Eyes Wide Shut: Music From The Motion Picture
- 8 - Masked Ball.



The PCs can discover Madarcht's lair for very different reasons. Some of them will be led there as prisoners, ready to be sacrificed by being thrown into the pond where the creature slumbers. PCs attempting to flee might get here by mistake or because they have been cornered by the Pure. Curious Characters might want to understand what this "Madarcht" is about, at their own risk. Finally, courageous ones could be determined to save Trine. The description of the creature and some elements of its lair are included in the Bestiary.

The sacrifice consists of hurling someone from the natural well at the foot of the great tree located above the web of caverns where Madarcht sleeps. However, sometimes, when more victims are scheduled, Neventer prefers to organize a more elaborate ceremony. In this case, some of the villagers stay above the well, chanting droningly, and the privileged get the front seats, inside. From there, it is possible to see the Demorthèn call Madarcht with much ritual crying and staff pounding on a sonorous stone. Then, he comes close to the beast without being attacked, thanks to his precious Madarcht's Peace Ogham. As for the Feond, it answers with its presence, lured by the intrusion, placated by the Ogham, and probably used to being fed during visits in its lair. After this scene that steels the community's trust in its spiritual leader's almightiness, the victims are thrown from a rock into the water, or left hastily tied to a boulder. Afterward, everyone departs from the lair, leaving behind a large stone to prevent any possible flight, then they move away, marching slowly...

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The Minions

It is possible that lost villagers or travelers have become Minions of Madarcht (see the Bestiary). In this case, the PCs might find out with horror that without the Demorthèn to placate them and make them act like human beings, they become bloodthirsty killers set on protecting their master. Encountering them does not only represent an obstacle and a danger, but also a chilling glimpse at what may happen to those who are contaminated by the creature's spores...



1- Madarcht's Lair

3- Underground Stream

5- Entrance to the Sanctuary
(can be closed off with
a boulder)

2- Cells Dug Into the Rock

4- Narrow Galleries
With Frescoes of the Aergewin



The Sacrifice of Anaïs

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If the PCs do not manage to escape, an optional scene centered on Anaïs's sacrifice in Madarcht's lair can be a horrific highlight and drive home a deep feeling of failure. Changing from the ritual habits, Neventer has decided to galvanize the community around the spectacle of the Magientist's death. The purpose is to feed Madarcht with the blood of Anaïs before hurling her into its lair. She is tied to a large flat rock, near the natural well. The Demorthèn, after an ode to the "Lord of Roots", hands a sacrificial knife to Eidan who suddenly comes within the PCs' line of sight. Then, there is nothing they can do but powerlessly witness the bloody execution of Anaïs by her own son (Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll).



Along with the escapees, the PCs are in the spirits' forest in the middle of the night. The hunt results from the escape of prisoners, the interruption of the sacrifice, or the sentries noticing suspicious activity. In any case, the purpose is to end the scenario spectacularly, with a headlong flight in a wild and dangerous world that reaches its conclusion with the rising of a new dawn, ending with a soothing break or an upsetting summary (see the "Traveling" chapter and the "Horror of Debasement" box in Act III). According to the Players and to the Leaders' wishes regarding the atmosphere, the result can go from the most anguishing fear to the most heroic action scene.

The following elements can be included in this scene:

Scene 5: A Grim Hunt



Fighting the Feondas.

The Minions of the spirits' forest are devoted to the protection of Madarcht, and will attack any human being intruding upon their territory or threatening their master. The Leaders are free to determine how dangerous the situation will be according to the nature of the Minions: a bear, a pack of wolves, a herd of boars, a band of villagers from Higher Mùdan that seemed even stranger than

the others from the beginning...

The mushroom-like sprouts on the possessed beings' bodies are much more visible than before, almost glowing, as if reacting to anger and the desire to kill, completely disfiguring the parasitized creatures.

Natural obstacles.

It is dark and the ground is uneven: the runners are bound to stumble at some point, particularly the least athletic ones (Standard (11) and Complicated (14) Feats rolls). Small ditches may cause non-damaging falls, which can nonetheless separate the members of a group during their flight. The local weather is rainy, and if a thunderstorm occurs, it will be even harder to move forward and get one's bearings. Finally, the survivors end up cornered at the edge of a cliff.

Below, they can hear the gurgling of a stream, but they have no way of knowing whether the water will be deep enough to break their fall...

And even if it is, fighting the current will be a tough task, with Feats rolls of varying Difficulty: Standard (11) not to drown, Complicated (14) to swim in a precise direction, and Difficult (17) for more complex actions. The rocks also constitute a serious danger (Damage ranging from 1 to 3 for each impact)... In the end, making it through this last ordeal should be really taxing, as draining as a fight against nature itself!



Fast-paced Action

Each group's situation will be very different according to the actions the PCs previously undertook. Therefore, it is not possible to give definite answers to the questions below, but they should provide easily adaptable ideas:

Why flee?

There are several possible reasons: the village is aware of the escape, the flames and smoke rising from Madarcht's sacred lair have been noticed, a pack of Minion wolves is after the PCs, etc.

Where to flee?

They have to get out of the spirits' forest where the Minions lurk, they have to run away from the village, they must avoid the traps on the paths leading to Lower Mùdan, etc.



Epilogue

A new day begins, and depending on the choices made by the Leader and the PCs, the outcome and consequences can be very different. A few themes are detailed below to design the epilogue and aftermath:

Vengeance.

The PCs have learned enough to undertake action against the village of Higher Mùdan, and even the very passive Lord of Lower Mùdan cannot remain idle. The facts are reported, Trine's testimony is airtight, and the mobilized Hilderins will likely lead an attack that will force the Pure to scatter. Part of them will simply go to Lower Mùdan, while the others will probably meet with other extremist groups.

Complications.

The PCs actually seem to be the criminals at fault and will be reported by Neventer, who will make every effort to ensure that they are chased, rejected, and their lives become a hell worthy of the wretched pariahs they are...

Connection.

After finishing their mission, the PCs can go on with the following one: finding Aoda Mac Iseanor near Frendian.

Succor.

As they go back to civilization with Anaïs and Eidan, the PCs come to learn about Selwyn, a nurse at the Monastery of Tuath (see the eponymous book, p.24) located in the Vale of Thoir. He is said to be able to perform Miracles, but also and more importantly to be skilled in bringing succor to tormented souls. This means he could probably help Eidan and his mother... This option implies that the Leader adds the "Spirituality" Discipline at 6 to Selwyn. It will provide a very good reason for the party to go to this isolated vale in spite of the grim reputation of its lord, Mac Snòr...



Experience Points

According to the Leaders' choice, the adventure may have been particularly active, spanning several gaming sessions with many potential confrontations and tough choices to make. This should be taken into account when distributing experience points (Book 1 – Universe, p.228). Here is a reminder of the main issues and stakes that can be met or solved.

Each one may be considered as a step in the advancement of the overall plot: establishing a deep and personal relationship with Anaïs Cruyssec; obtaining endorsement from Duke Preden Mac Blonag; getting to know about the situation in Lower Mùdan (understanding the political climate, the current matters, the local figures...); adapting to life in Higher Mùdan (communicating, understanding the rules, earning some respect, managing to make some inhabitants doubt...); winning the trial in Higher Mùdan or managing to take Eidan away; saving Trine; identifying the nature of Madarcht and its influence on the Minions; unmasking Neventer (if he is a Morcail); escaping from Higher Mùdan; putting an end to the barbaric rites (by destroying Madarcht, by killing Neventer...); finding a solution to reestablish a bond between Eidan and his mother.



Experience in a Composite Story

According to the Leaders' style, which will be more or less down-to-earth or heroic, the total experience will vary considerably. Leaders should make a rough calculation in advance in order not to be caught unprepared. Normally, experience is calculated on the course of a single scenario by taking into account the Progression of the plot, the Interpretation of the PCs, and the Confrontations, with each one of these factors granting between 1 and 5 XPs. In the case of A Life Choice, some stakes or options presented in the scenario may have been given enough importance to become practically autonomous adventures. In such a case, the Leader may decide to consider A Life Choice as equivalent to two, three, or even four scenarios (which corresponds to a small campaign), and to multiply the total amount of XPs accordingly.

A Life Choice lasted 6 sessions, including a complete session devoted to the "Shipwreck" canvas, which the Leader decided to add at the beginning. The Leader decides that this long scenario as a whole is equal to three regular scenarios. Thus, each Player will be granted between 1 and 15 XPs three times: for the Confrontations, for the Progression of the plot, and for the Interpretation of the PC.

Another example: the GL has gone through the scenario at a swift pace, and it reached its conclusion in a single long gaming session. In this case, Leaders can use the regular method detailed on page 228 of Book 1 – Universe.

Chapter 4

Figures of Tri-Kazel





hat morning, Aodren woke up with a crushing headache. He had not slept much, his night plagued by nightmares separated by long spells of wakefulness in silence and darkness. He rose from the uncomfortable bed in which he had been sleeping for three months now since he had left Baldh-Ruoch for Osta-Baille. His meager income meant that he could not sleep in one of Trådail's nice inns, particularly since most of it was spent in renting his office, a rickety building located in the depths of the lower town.

The occultist slipped out of his large nightshirt and quickly performed his ablutions with cold water before donning his usual blue-colored frock coat. He clumsily walked down the steep stairs leading to the inn's main room and made for a corner partially shaded from the dazzling daylight that was pouring through the open windows. He sat down, wincing from the pain in both his back and his knee, where an old scar ached. He sat for a while, immersed in muddled thoughts.

When he raised his head, a young woman was standing in front of him. Her piercingly green eyes stood out on her pale face surrounded by long, raven-black hair. Her long, dark eyebrows underlined the force of her gaze, and Aodren reflexively cringed when their eyes met.

The young woman's fleshy lips stretched in an impish smile as she ruffled her hair in a poised gesture, as if to bring some discipline to the tangle of locks. The gesture moved a fine copper armlet on her wrist, which briefly twinkled under the light from outside.

"May I have a seat?"

"Please do," Aodren answered in a voice still hoarse from sleepiness, trying to get a grip on himself.

As the young woman seated herself, Aodren's eyes were irresistibly drawn up to her cleavage, pleasantly underlined by a plunging neckline.

"I am sorry to disturb you so early in the morning, but a cousin of mine told me about you and where to find you. He also told me that you were quite the looker, and I must admit that he did not lie."

The flattering double entendre did not go unnoticed by Aodren, who awkwardly started to twiddle the scarf tied around his neck.

"My name is Ciany," the young woman whispered, as if she feared that someone might overhear her name.

"Doctor Twain, at your service."

Ciany smiled, but remained silent. She stared at him quizzically, her eyes burning brightly. Aodren's heart was pounding, and he instinctively knew that his nights would henceforth be haunted by a new fantasy of a much more comely nature than the dark fancies that troubled him.

Figures of Tri-Kazel








This chapter features 18 figures from the Tri-Kazel peninsula: Magientist, knight, renegade, bard, etc. Several of them are recognized as heroes while others are known as nefarious villains. Some of them are nobodies, while others have a reputation reaching beyond the borders of their native kingdom. In the end, they are all human beings, each with unsavory aspects, and for some of them, horrible secrets of which even they are sometimes ignorant.

As with the archetypes from Book 1 – Universe and Book 0 – Prologue, they are described comprehensively and can be used by the Leader as allies or enemies for the PCs, as a scenario's starting point, etc. The figures are also meant as examples so that Leaders can create their own protagonists. This introduction sums up how these figures are presented, how they can be used in-game, and how to create new ones.

Presentation of the Figures

Each figure is presented according to the same structure, detailed below:

-  **Technical Characteristics.** This set of technical information displays all the data required during the game: ratings in the five Ways, Domains and Disciplines, Advantages and Disadvantages, and information about Sanity, Combat, and Health Condition. Unlike the archetypes from the previous books, the ratings in the Domains and Disciplines do not include the Ways. Leaders will have to do the corresponding addition when using one of the skills. Using Erward the knight as an example, a Leader using the Natural Environment Domain (in which Erward has a level of 5) will have to add the Way of Empathy (3), which will result in a total of 8. Similarly, when using the First Aid (7) Discipline, the Leader will use a final rating of 10 for the Resolution roll. During the game, the Leader screen, which incorporates the data about the Domains and Ways, can be used as a reference.
-  **Description.** The core of the profile for each figure is dedicated to the description of his or her background and motivations. This section provides Leaders with everything they need in order to know about each individual's reputation, peculiarities, and the way he or she interacts with his or her environment.
-  **Rumor.** This box gives a narrative example of how other people perceive the particular figure. Leaders should not hesitate to create new rumors in order to give depth to the figures they use and to flesh out the impact they have on their surroundings.
-  **Personality.** This paragraph sums up the Character Traits that characterize each figure, their Latent Mental Disorder, and the symptoms they are afflicted with, if any. A broad outline of the personality of each protagonist is also provided.
-  **Secret.** Many protagonists are concerned with secrets that are mentioned in a special paragraph. Sometimes, these secrets are information that the figures will keep to themselves to the bitter end; in other cases they do not even know of the secret's existence, or only have partial knowledge of it. If there is no such paragraph, this does not imply that the figure in question has no secrets. Rather, it is left to each Leader to invent one or more.

Using the Figures

Here are a few tips to help Leaders include these characters in their scenarios:

Allies and Enemies

Initially, some characters, like Argala or Jerryl, will only come across as criminals and potential enemies, while others, such as Aodren or Marn, will seem more likely candidates for allies. However, things are not so simple, and will depend on how a Leader will introduce these personalities to the Players. What if Argala were the mentor of a Ionnthén PC, and the future of the community depended on the use of her corrupted Ogham? What if Marn's endless hunt went on with absolutely no regard for the survival of those who come with him?

Building a Scenario from a Figure

Writing a scenario starting from a blank page can prove a difficult task, and a starting point often makes things easier. The story for each figure and the rumors or secrets linked to them can provide many possible scenario hooks. The Leader can pick one of the figures, imagine a story about him or her, and find a way to make the PCs part of it.

Recurring Characters

Memorable characters can bring life to the universe experienced by the Players. Leaders can use some figures as recurring characters: an ally helping the PCs every now and then, or an enemy they will fight in the course of several scenarios. Such recurring characters do not need to be in the spotlight every time, but events (sometimes trivial ones, or not connected with the current scenario) can regularly remind the Players of their existence. By accumulating such indirect interactions, Leaders will give their Players the feeling of a living universe, teeming with intrigue and which, above all, does not only revolve around what they are doing.

Using the Figures as PCs

One or several figures can be used as ready-to-play characters and given to the Players for the duration of a session, or even for an entire story arc, at the Leader's discretion. For example, if the PCs meet Aodren Floyd, the Leader may decide that a scenario will have them experience one of his cases by making them embody Aodren and his associates. And when the scenario ends, he can explain the Players that Aodren has just finished telling the PCs about the case they just played... in such an enthralling way that they feel like they just lived through it! Remember that most of these characters are tangibly more hardened and experienced than the average newly created PC. Several of them are even famous, and their abilities are on par with such renown.

Creating New Figures

These 12 personalities provide many examples of typical Shadows of Esteren characters. By using the structure adopted for each of them, and by following the guidelines mentioned below, Leaders can create new figures as well, thereby populating the peninsula of Tri-Kazel.

Define the Characteristics.

It is possible for Leaders to copy the technical data of a figure onto an NPC they have created and then adapt the figure according to their needs. Of course, they can also make use of the Character Creation system to exactly define the amount of Experience points and the levels in each Domain and Discipline. This is in no way mandatory; the ratings can be assigned arbitrarily in order to represent the general idea the Leader has of the character being created. However, attention must be paid to the calculation of some attributes (Defense, Speed, Mental Resistance, etc.) that depend on the Ways, and to the inclusion of related modifiers, such as the chosen Advantages and Disadvantages. The specification of technical characteristics can be completed at the beginning of the creation process, or at the end, after the story and the personality of the character have been determined. Each Leader will find the way they are the most comfortable with.

Develop the Story.

This aspect is crucial and will give the figures depth. It also generates possible scenario hooks. The Leader can define the characters' background, what made them choose one path and not another, their current motivations, and their reputation.

Play on the Stereotypes of the Genre.

This series of figures draws on some of the common stereotypes in gothic imagery, such as the figure of the mad scientist, represented by Yvon. When creating a figure, Leaders can draw inspiration from such archetypes, which are ripe with the potential for scenarios, but they can also turn them topsy-turvy. For example, although Ciany is adapted from the image of the witch, she is also a victim of powers that are beyond her.

Specify the Personality.

Describing the personality of the figures, their Character Traits, and the condition of their Sanity are useful tools for helping Leaders play a character in a realistic, convincing way during the game.

Imagine Secrets.

What unmentionable secrets could a character hide? By answering this question, a Leader will set new scenario hooks. Along with the previously defined current motivations, secrets are excellent tools to encourage the PCs to interact with each figure and include them in future scenarios.





Quentin Erward

Male, Talkéride, 65 years old, Bramble knight

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 3. Reason: 2. Conviction: 4.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 9, Polearms: 9 (Lances: 11), Swords: 9 (Long swords: 12)), Erudition 4, Feats: 5, Natural Environment: 5 (First Aid: 7, Survival: 9), Perception: 5 (Observation: 9, -1 penalty to sight), Science: 2, Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Bows: 9, -1 penalty), Travel: 5 (Orientation: 13, Riding: 12, +1 bonus).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Intuitive (+1), Strong Mind (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Nearsighted (-1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 10. Hardening: 3. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 9.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 9 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 13, Lances: 15, Polearms: 13, Long swords: 16, Swords: 13, Bows: 12). Defense: 16. Speed: 7. Potential: 2. Fighting Arts: Archery, Cavalry, Parry.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 6. Penalties from old age: apply -4 to the results of rolls related to physical action.

Few are those now who have known the time when a young pockmarked boy passed the gateway of the Order's house for the first time, to become a Bramble knight. And yet, for old Quentin, this memory is as clear as if it was from yesterday. He was fifteen, and his heart was ready for anything. Today, he is sixty-five and, in spite of his old age and wounds, he is still ready for action. Indeed, years and fights have marked him, and harshly so, but his will is strong, his mind clear, and he knows he will die sword in hand, protecting those who need it. In fifteen years of combat, the old Bramble knight has fought against everything one could imagine, and much more: bandits, renegade knights, soldiers of the Temple, and Feondas.

One might think him bloated with pride, after all these deeds which finally made him worthy of being ennobled by the king of Taol-Kaer himself. "The Ballad of Quentin" is known as far as Farl and Gouvran, and so is "The Siege of the Red Peak", of which he was the only survivor. However, Quentin has remained a simple and humble man. Demorthèn respect him, bards admire him, ladies sigh and imagine a thousand romantic things... Reality is much simpler and less pretty, when one takes a close look. Quentin Erward remembers the face of every one of his comrades at arms. He has likewise not forgotten about the promising young men who wanted to be his disciples. Some of them have become important members of the Order, but most of them have fallen like Bramble knights: sword drawn and facing the enemy.

At night, sitting by the fire, Quentin feels very old. He knows that in spite of the respect he is the object of, an era will soon disappear with him. It was not the best of eras, but the future does not look encouraging. His last disciple died a short time ago. He had talent, but no intelligence. His death was stupid, but certainly not a surprise. The order is teetering, he is sure of it. Financial concerns have gained too much importance, and the promotions are no longer given to good knights, but to good managers. Quentin is not so prideful as to think he could make a difference. But he ponders how little time he has left, and how the Brambles would need a few brave youngsters to join them... just to prove to him that he is wrong, that people like him still have a place in the Order. This is the only fear of the old knight, who has fought formidable warriors and legendary monsters. He is afraid of having been a fool, of having been on the road and listened to his own legend for too long to see the truth: people need a hero because, deep down, most of them have no courage; even the so-called knights.



Personality

Character Traits: Compassionate / Ascetic

Disorder: Symptom of Morosity (Melancholy).

In spite of his presence and his deeds, Quentin behaves with the stable boys who take care of his mount as with the barons who have him at their tables; with respect. He knows most of the rural lords of Taol-Kaer, and has even seen some of them in diapers, when they were just mewling babies. He has become increasingly prone to fits of nostalgia, and often mentions lost friends through various tales of his past deeds.

Rumor

Here you go cousin, it was right here, near this postern, that the battle took place. The looters lunged and he killed three of them in an instant. That is when they saw his armor, and one of them gasped his name. Several of them ran away, but four remained, full of bravado and willing to kill the legend. And since you've met Master Erward, you can easily guess what happened. He did not make it through unharmed, but you can take my word for it: he is true to his reputation, and I would even say he surpasses it.





Brother Daernic

Male, Gwidrite, 30 years old, Sigire

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 1. Reason: 3. Conviction: 5.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 9 (Two-handed swords: 10), Unarmed Fighting: 8), Feats: 5 (Climbing: 9, Endurance: 10), Perception: 5 (+2 to rolls related to alertness), Prayer: 5 (Miracles: 8), Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Bows: 8), Travel: 5 (Riding: 7).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Survivor (+2).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Poor, Trauma (3).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 10. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 11.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 9 (Two-handed swords: 14, Swords: 13, Bare hands: 12, Bows: 12). Defense: 17. Speed: 7. Potential: 2. Fighting Arts: Archery.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 5
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.
- ⊗ **Exaltation:** 30. Major Miracles: Might of Faith, Vision of Limbo. Minor Miracles: Holy Vigor, Miraculous Healing.

The inhuman coldness of Daernic was noticed from the first day of his novitiate, when he was just one adept among many. And no one was surprised that he intended to become a Sigire. None of the other novices missed him when he left to join his order. The years since have only fed this coldness, and shaped Daernic into a true killing machine. Discipline and faith have set boundaries for his murderous nature, but have barely managed to keep him channeled. Daernic is obedient, brave, and a good fighter, but also insensitive and determined to punish any true or suspected violation of the Ordinances. He has claimed many victims through his dreadful and rash actions, including innocent people, and even children. No one ever knew why he was so ruthless, and even he would be hard-pressed to explain it. He has gone through so much denial over the punishments and horrors that were inflicted upon him as a child that he has lost all memory of them.

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Four years ago, a ploy was devised to finally get rid of him: he was sent to track down heretics. One of his superiors assigned him to a "secret mission" which should lead him to operate for an indeterminate length of time in the mountains. After four years of wandering, Daernic still has not figured out the truth. The letters he is sometimes sent contain only inaccurate or falsified information. He is used to terrorize the Gwidrite villages close to the border, and to fetch fugitives fleeing to Taol-Kaer. Daernic has survived every danger, and has become a sort of grim legend in the mountains: Brother Carrion. And yet, in spite of this, people sometimes reluctantly accept to house him overnight. Because, several times, he has struck like thunder at brigands, starving wolves, and even Feondas. And although he has killed innocent people, he has also saved several villages thanks to his insane bravery. Few are those who would dare stand up against him, even though he is alone.

Rumor

Brother Carrion, that's what they call him. And since he's lost somewhere in the mountains, he's not a threat to the capital city's good folks. I suppose the Creator made Daernic his instrument, but like all blades that are too sharp, he must be wielded with care, which is our responsibility. That is the solution our master found, you see. This way, his talents serve our holy church, and if it happens that some mountaineer suffers from it, well... it's still better than the daughter of a favorite of the king, don't you think? And, after all, mountains are riddled with dangers. One way or another, Daernic will serve the Creator.

A discussion between two Sigires, in Ard-Amrach.



Personality

Character Traits: Brave / Fanatical.

Disorder: Syndrome of Abusive Interpretation (Paranoia).

Upon first sight, the Sigire is a sinister individual; even more so than his peers. He speaks with a dull voice, which sometimes shows aggressiveness. His eyes have a distant look, as if he were able to see through those he observes, or peer into the very depths of their souls. His clothes, mended countless times, hide an ascetic body just short of anorexia, but animated with tireless energy. Daernic is constantly watching for signs of a phantasmagorical network or conspiracy. No one seeks the company of Brother Carrion, who is seen as an unpredictable and fickle force, as frightening as a storm. However, he does not care, for he is neither one of them, nor their friend. He is their judge.



Secret

Daernic's father inflicted atrocious abuse on him, while his mother and sisters looked away from such unspeakable things. Although he has repressed all of this, there is nothing that stokes the Sigire's anger more than those who betray others in the hope of obtaining leniency from him. He shows no pity for those he judges to be sorcerers or heretics, but it happens that he spares their relatives so that they may repent. However, he never does when they try to save their lives by running away or by claiming that the culprit forced their hands.





Aodren Floyd

Male, Reizhite, 33 years old, occultist

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 4. Reason: 5. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 2, Erudition: 5 (History: 7, Magientist Principles: 6), Feats: 2, Magience: 2, Occultism: 5 (Hypnosis: 9, Interpreting Dreams: 6, Mental Phenomena: 10, +1 bonus), Perception: 5, Performance: 3, Relation: 5, Science: 5 (Medicine: 7, Mind Treatment: 9), Travel: 2.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Well-read (Occultism).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Enemy (Mac Senners).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 4.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 4. Defense: 14. Speed: 6. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

A few years ago, Aodren was a famed occultist in Baldh-Ruoch. An undeniably talented hypnotist whose help some fortunate people furtively sought out, he was not after his clients' money. He simply wished to help those who suffered from psychical troubles. Most of them were only people with slight mental disorders, and it was not difficult to find corresponding cases in the works of Ernst Zigger. In the eyes of Aodren Floyd, the Continental pathologist has always been the greatest contribution from beyond the Asgeamar. Compared to his delving into the mysteries of the mind, Magientist wonders are only toys or base utilitarian tools. There is no higher knowledge than that of the human soul.

Aodren must now confess that he would rather have been wrong. Everything took a turn for the worst with the case of young Émalie Mac Senners. The daughter of an influential courtier, she had remained prostrate for several days in a strange state of catalepsy, her eyes wide open. The occultist made use of his skills in hypnotism, trying to break the trance of the young girl. Over the course of six days, he persisted, obtaining nothing more than an occasional batting of the eyelashes. And then... at a moment when they were alone in Émalie's room, she suddenly gave him a strange stare and lunged at him, her teeth seeking his throat.

Surprised by the strength of the young girl, Aodren struggled. They wrestled, and when the domestics burst in, the occultist was found standing above Émalie's lifeless body, whose head had slammed against the edge of a desk. He was imprisoned. He had blood on his hands, the young girl's nightdress was torn; the conclusion was that she had regained consciousness as he was trying to abuse her, and he had panicked...

One of his friends, a former patient, managed to arrange his evasion on the day before his execution. Since then, he makes a meager living under the alias of "Doctor Twain". In Taol-Kaer, close to nothing is known about occultists, and although he has managed to set up shop in the capital-city, business is slow to say the least. Thus, he is reduced to rather unsavory expedients: working as a petty physician, as a maker of infusions and poultices, as a hypnotist, or as a "consultant" for all the treasure-hunters and adventurers who lack information. He is afraid that Mac Senners may send sellswords after him, so he keeps a low profile. However, what worries him the most, while at the same time stirring a morbid fascination in him, is what he saw and heard while he was fighting with Émalie: the malevolent intelligence that glowed in the eyes of the young girl, and the guttural sounds that came gurgling from her throat... like words from a horrible, unknown tongue. Aodren is obsessed by such an enigma. He strives to gather as much information as possible, and has initiated a correspondence with scholars from across the entire peninsula. In so doing, he has been able to learn about other cases of a similar nature, attributed to psychical disorders, demonic possessions, the whims of the spirits of nature, or simply tall tales.



Personality

Character Traits: Cool-headed / Irresolute

Disorder: State of Balance (Mysticism).

"Doctor Twain" is a well-mannered man who keeps to himself, and even has something austere about him that seems to show that he does not trifle with his mysterious knowledge. Usually dressed formally, he may even be perceived as somewhat grim, although he is not truly intimidating and does not try to be particularly impressive.



Secret

Floyd does not know it, but his research has started to attract attention, especially from Sigires of the Temple, unscrupulous occultists, and even some individuals of a more sinister nature. He may stumble into something over his head, or be mistakenly threatened by people who think he knows much more than he lets on.

Rumor

Reizhites are fond of this sort of nonsense, but who could seriously believe in such humbug? Some occultists, such as this famous Twain fellow, even have the honesty of saying that they have no mysterious powers. Generally speaking, I doubt his works will ever be of any use, but at least he does not spend his time spouting mystical twaddle.

Algwrich Dert, Demorthèn of the court.





Argala, the Devourer

Female, Talkéride, 36 years old, Morcail

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 4. Reason: 1. Conviction: 4.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 4, Demorthèn Mysteries: 5 (Herbalism: 10, Meditation: 8, Sigil Rann: 8 (+3 bonus to Sigil Rann rolls*)), Feats: 4, Natural Environment: 5 (Agriculture: 8, First Aid: 10), Perception: 4, Relation: 5 (+1 bonus).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Charismatic (+1), Good Health (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Slow (-1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 8.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 7. Defense: 10. Speed: 6. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 20. Stamina: 10 (+1 bonus against disease and poison).
- ⊗ **Rindach:** 65* (+40 bonus). Ogham: Call Animals, Healing, Poison, Vegetal Growth, Withering.

Rumor

Undeniably, the people of Jarnel are happy. They fear neither hunger nor cold. Few of the surrounding villages are as lucky, which of course brings many people to speak spitefully of Jarnel. That is how people are. And yet, I cannot shake off a strange feeling. There is something... something not right.

Deirdre Lourière, Varigal.



*See page 178 – The Morcail

With a good-hearted expression on her face, Argala comes across as a cheerful, red-faced countrywoman; not as a corrupted Demorthèn. The small village in Kel-Loar's dukedom where she lives, Jarnel, is completely under her thumb; just like it was under her mother's and grandmother's before her. And with three generations spent under the yoke of Morcail, the villagers have forgotten the actual meaning of traditions. She and only she determines those who have the right to hunt, fish, and cultivate... when, how, and what. In exchange for such obedience, she uses her powers to protect the community. When game is scarce during the cold season, Argala uses her magic to make

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animals come in sufficient numbers. Frost spares the newly-planted sprouts, and although the land is said to be sterile in the vale, crops are bountiful. Life is much easier since her kin have seized power, and although they fear her wrath, the villagers are at the beck and call of Argala. However, there is a price to pay.

Argala needs blood to thank the spirits. That is what she says, and that is why each season, a female newborn is offered to her. By now, the inhabitants of Jarnel have grown accustomed to the necessity of this regular sacrifice, which Argala's mother and grandmother also required. The survival and prosperity of the community are more important than the fate of a single child. However, there is another, more insidious price for these decades of abusing the forces of nature. Indeed, all the animals that Argala calls through the force of her magic to be killed by her faithful are as many less individuals to perpetuate their species in the region. And although new predators and new prey sometimes take the place of those killed, there is undeniably an erosion of animal diversity in the vale of Jarnel. Moreover, the land is overtaxed, and although the might of the C'maoghs more than compensates for now, its already mediocre quality is inexorably deteriorating. Soon, the powers of Argala will not suffice; she will not be able to fulfill the expectations of her faithful, and tensions will arise in the community. People will look for explanations... for culprits. Argala will have to maintain her power by designating expiatory victims, sacrifices to the spirits, to delay the inevitable. She is clever enough to understand that when the time comes, it would be more appropriate if her first victims were strangers.



Personality

Character Traits: Extrovert / Rigid

Disorder: Symptom of Mysticism (Mysticism).

As much as possible, Argala does her best to seem friendly, and even cordial, but her authoritative nature is quick to return and take the upper hand. A sly woman, she tries to remain amicable with strangers, even though Jarnel's inhabitants look out for such false gestures of goodwill and fear her bouts of anger. When she loses her temper, it happens that she lashes out at her followers, screaming curses and profanity around.



Secret

The villagers do not know that Argala does not need to thank the spirits by offering them infants. She uses the sacrifices to reinforce her powers, and to prepare for the future. The Morcail kills the babies and devours their flesh. That is what the women of her lineage have been doing for generations, and their powers have been magnified by this. And like them, Argala also believes this to be the only way to one day give birth to a talented girl to whom she will pass on her secrets in due time. One day, this girl to come will be an adult. Then, using a knife with a carved bone handle, she will kill Argala and take her place, as the Morcail took her own mother's. That is how things must be, and that is how they will be.





Preden Mac Blonag, Duke of Gorm

Male, Talkéride, 27 years old, noble

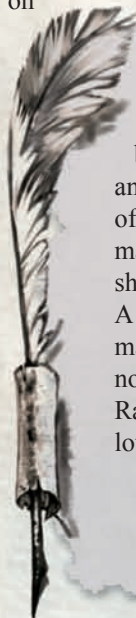
- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 2. Reason: 4. Conviction: 1.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 7), Erudition: 5 (Heraldry: 9, History: 8, Politics: 8), Feats: 5 (Endurance: 7, +1 bonus to extended actions), Perception: 4, Relation: 5, Science: 5 (Architecture: 7, Botany: 6, Engineering: 6), Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Bows: 7), Travel: 4.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Financial Ease, Sturdy (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Trauma (1), Unlucky (-1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 4.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 10 (Swords: 12, Bows: 12). Defense: 13. Speed: 8. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 11.

The childhood of Preden was marked by the thinly-veiled contempt in which his father held him. Duke Brand Mac Blonag had been quick to take his eldest son under his wing to prepare him for succession, but his wife had managed to keep Preden for herself. She catered to his every whim, and at the slightest vexation, he ran to her apron strings. He grew up to become fat, selfish, and lazy. He found out about the pleasures of the flesh in the embrace of not-so-virtuous maids and wallowed in it without hesitation. Paternal contempt only grew with the years, and when the duchess died from a severe fever, Preden was suddenly alone. Apart from the wenches who only showed cupboard love, everyone despised him openly. In the end, he even grew tired of debauchery, and he gave up on it, unsatisfied.

Gradually, something deep within him began to stir and give meaning to this state of stagnating frustration and inconstancy. However, on a day spent leading an expedition against Feondas, his father and brother were both slain, weapons in hand. In the course of a single day, Preden became a duke. It took him one month to come to terms with this fact. One month of cheap liquor, tears, weeping, and nightmares. Then, the people of Smàrag finally saw him show himself; pale, defeated, but with a strange look in his eyes...

Rumors die hard, and people keep saying that Preden Mac Blonag is greedy and vicious. Yet, in the three years he has spent leading the dukedom, he has done his best to turn over a new leaf: he has lost his belly, and started practicing swordsmanship as well as archery and horse-riding. His excesses are things of the past, for his nights are now spent mulling over accounts and reports. His ambition and pride have awoken, and he leads his domain with an iron fist. To make the most of his land, he has even gone against popular opinion by calling upon the support of strangers, including a Magientist lodge. In the meantime, he keeps a close eye on his subjects as well as on

those he encourages to come to Smàrag. Woe to the one who does not fulfill his expectations. Preden can be a reasonable man, but he is absolutely ruthless. His subjects have quickly learned to fear him, and have started spreading all sorts of lies about the perversions of which he is supposedly a secret adept. The neighboring dukedoms are careful not to invite him, and as a consequence, Preden still has not taken a wife even though he is twenty-seven. However, he knows that contentious vassals are of great concern to the crown. Therefore, he takes care to pay his taxes and give tokens of faithfulness in order to obtain the support of the capital city. Preden knows that it is better to be the vassal of a king who worries about keeping his allies close rather than to chase after delusions of grandeur, surrounded by wary neighbors.



Rumor

I have been told Lord Blonag does not keep his court of whores anymore, nor does he bathe in tubs of swill. I find it hard to believe, and I must say I do not have the slightest intention of finding out with my own eyes. I remember his manners of five years ago all too well. But even should it be true, I can only find this worrying. A man does not renounce vices like that. Since he made a display of them in the past, why hide them now? Because he is a duke? I do not think so. Rather, I think that it is because he has sunk to even lower levels of perversity.

Lyrielle of the Finery, bard.



Personality

Character Traits: Strong-minded / Cold

Disorder: State of Balance (Exaltation).

The young duke wants to surpass the father who always treated him as worthless, even though his predecessor had not even been able to run his dukedom and family properly. Preden is very demanding of others, and even more of himself. Discipline, organization, prosperity, and obedience are the only things that matter. He is the duke, and other people are here to obey. Those who forget this simple truth had better keep silent if they do not wish to perish. Preden is not a cruel man, and he has cast aside the unhealthy pleasures of his past years. But he leads his people with a firm hand, and will let no one deny him his rightful due or look down on him. No one.





Deirdre Lourière

Female, Gwidrite, 32 years old, Varigal

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2. Conviction: 4.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 7), Feats: 5 (Climbing: 8, +1 bonus to rolls requiring agility), Natural Environment: 5 (First Aid: 7, Survival: 9), Perception: 5, Relation: 4, Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Sling: 8), Stealth: 4 (+1 bonus), Travel: 5 (Cartography: 7, Orientation: 11, Riding: 6, Side Roads: 9, Signs: 8).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Lucky (+1), Nimble (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Trauma (1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 6.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 8 (Swords: 10, Sling: 11). Defense: 16. Speed: 9. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

Sometimes, it happens that Deirdre thinks about the life she will never live. The life of the humble, devout, well-off commoner who hoped to marry a good man and raise beautiful children in the faith of the One. Instead, her daily life is one of wading under the rain, trudging along rocky trails, making her way through snow... or even running breathless with bandits, wolves, or even more sinister things chasing after her. At thirty-two, the Varigal feels the years catching up: knee aches, a persisting cough when the weather is humid, a lighter sleep than before... that does not make things better. Still, she also has good days, such as when she goes to see people who know her and who look forward to her visits. Stories shared about what is happening far away, and what the people nearby are up to. The warmth of a hearth, a bedroll, and even occasionally a clean bed. Songs, laughs, and memories too. And sometimes, the arms of a man around her in the night. Not a stranger, like when she was young, but one of the men she has known for a while; old friends, almost traveling companions, in a way.

Rumor

Varigal Lourière? Ah, you mean Deirdre! Oh, she's good for sure, captain. Still, if I were you, I would rather not hire the services of a Varigal to snoop on these Reizh crazies. At any rate, I wouldn't ask her. Military stuff is not her thing, and your Daols... well, she might throw them to the birds; just to see your face.

Eargan, sergeant of Gwidre's royal army.

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Even though she never told anyone about it, Deirdre knows that all the dangers of the road are nothing compared to what she has left behind her; the Mauve Death, which struck the small town where she lived, like the fist of the Creator himself. After twelve days, there were more corpses than living people, and the Blade knights, along with the royal troops, had circled the place, killing all those who tried to run away. Thanks to a miracle that still baffles her, Deirdre survived an arrow shot that should have killed her, and no one found her in the shrubs among which she fell. For several days, she lived in fear, not daring to venture into nearby villages lest she be recognized. Fortunately, a Varigal found her, starving, wounded, and took her under his care. She had nowhere to go, so with a desperate willingness, she did her best to prove useful, so that her savior would not leave her.

He perished a few weeks later, from the aftermath of a serious wound. Before his passing, she took his saddlebag and promised the dying man that she would perform his duty. Some time later, she was approached by a Varigal and they had a long conversation about those events and about Deirdre herself.

Since then, she has been wandering on the roads and pathways. Throughout the years, travelers seeking to cross the mountains between Gwidre and Reizh got wind of her flattering reputation. Although she sometimes goes south, as far as the borders of Taol-Kaer, she knows the passes and crossings of the north of the peninsula far better. Today, she has no strong feelings about the One, even though it happens that she occasionally stops to pray in a chapel. However, the beauty of what she sees often dazzles her, and she feels humble, at peace with the world. And if the price to pay is fear, discomfort, or death, deep down, Deirdre is content. Although she knows she will not die in a bed, her disease-ridden body will not be thrown on a bonfire either. She will die alone, in the middle of the wilderness, and under the distant stare of the One. Either way, she is fine with it.



Personality

Character Traits: Intuitive / Careless

Disorder: Symptom of Morosity (Melancholy).

Most of her traveling companions think Deirdre to be rather pleasant, and few are those who know about her beliefs. She is also curious and has a gift for listening to others. However, when a shadow falls over her eyes and she only answers with monosyllables, it is time to leave her alone, with memories she would rather keep for herself.



Sir Jerryl of the Swamps

Male, Talkéride, 37 years old, renegade knight

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 4. Reason: 3. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 9, Short Blades: 8, Swords: 9), Erudition 3, Feats: 5 (Endurance: 7), Natural Environment: 4, Perception: 5 (+1 bonus to sight), Relation: 5 (Command: 7, Intimidation: 8), Stealth: 3, Travel: 5 (Riding: 10).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Good Sight (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Enemy (Duke of Salann Tir), Trauma (1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 7.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 10 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 14, Short Blades: 13, Swords: 14). Defense: 16. Speed: 9. Potential: 1. Fighting Arts: Cavalry, Parry, Sneak Attack.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

Poets and bards sing praises to the beauty of pure love, but they are liars. In that regard, Jerryl kills all the rhymers he comes across. And among the band he leads, no one plays music or sings by the fire, which makes them a particularly grim group of outlaws.

Once, Jerryl strove to be a proper knight. The order of the Hilderins had made him a man, and he proudly bore their colors. When he was sent to the dukedom of Salann Tir at the head of his troop, it was only supposed to be a courtesy visit... to tighten the bonds between the crown and the dukedom, and act as the king's representatives before the duke. At that time, the latter was already an old man, soft-hearted and rather dull, but there was young Ainlis, who had been wed to him a few weeks earlier. It was an arranged marriage, without love, without esteem. As soon as he saw the young girl, barely a woman, Jerryl was stunned. Soon his thoughts were about her only, his imagination going to such heights that his hands were shaking. Jerryl was almost thirty, and was not a novice with women. He acted methodically, gently, although the violent passion he felt required a great deal of effort to be kept in check... and she spurned him. Firmly. And when he insisted, she called for guards.

154 His men were by his side, but they were Hilderins, not mercenaries. When the duke ordered the knight to leave his land, Jerryl refused, and quickly, things got out of hand. In the end, two of his subordinates had to wrestle him away while another did his best to offer apologies to the duke. They left the castle within the hour, Jerryl's features distorted by hatred. After a few miles, still burning with anger, he ordered a halt and, drawing his sword, killed one of the two men who had held him back. He would have murdered the other as well had his opponent not been a seasoned warrior, and after a few blows, Jerryl was forced to flee, chased by his own men.

The mists of the Western Swamps saved him; he eventually lost his pursuers. All of this took place eight years ago. Since then, Jerryl has been determined to kill the old duke and take Ainlis for himself. He had no difficulty finding allies among the renegades hiding in the swamps. He has gathered several dozen men to whom he has taught the basics of tactics and fighting, and now he uses them to commit acts of banditry. There are enough of them so that all together, with their spears and pikes, they form an impressive group, so much so that they have been called "The Iron Reeds", a name which they have adopted. Actually, the members of the band are rarely all together. Jerryl and his followers hide in the poorest villages, buying the complicity of their hosts with their loot, or sometimes in an old ruin. However, the fallen knight hopes that one day he will have the necessary manpower to take the duke's castle. And then...

Bards are idiots, because love has nothing beautiful, great, or noble. Love is a poison, a poison that kills a little more each day. And there is only one cure to it: satisfaction.

Rumor

Jerryl has already killed three of our peers, to say nothing of his other victims. I tell you guys, if it was up to me, we'd already be on our way for Salann Tir to go and slit his throat. There are enough bad eggs in the order; we don't need a bandit who goes around bragging he was a Hilderin. However, since nothing has been done about him yet, there must be some political reason.

Ergon Jamir, Hilderin knight.



Personality

Character Traits: Free / Impulsive

Disorder: Aggressive Symptom (Frenzy).

The renegade knight has a volatile temper, and does not accept anything being refused to him. He is not bloodthirsty, but woe to the one who provokes his wrath, or shows him any disrespect. He is sometimes merciful, but it only takes the wrong kind of look, or a reminder of his own fall, to make him furious.





Ciany Lorn

Female, Reizhite, 24 years old, scholar and witch

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 3. Reason: 4. Conviction: 4.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 3, Erudition: 5 (History: 9, Magientist Principles: 7), Feats: 2, Magience: 2, Occultism: 5 (Black Magic: 6*, Ritual: 6*), Perception: 3, Relation: 5 (Charm: 7, +1 bonus), Science: 5, Stealth: 4, Travel: 4.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Beautiful (+1), Survival Instinct (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Trauma (1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 8.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 5. Defense: 12. Speed: 5. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 4
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.
- ⊗ **Exaltation:** 17*. Major Spells: Slashing*, Supernatural Hearing*.

*See page 179 – The Sorcerers

Ciany had no interest in technical things, which eliminated the possibility of a career as a Magientist. Thus, she became a scribe at the university of Baldh-Ruoch. She thought she could be content with such a position which, although it lacked prestige, ensured her a comfortable future. This was until she refused the advances of Scientör Adler, who had her transferred to the archives. It was in the middle of this disheartening mess, among the incredible amounts of documents of all kinds that had been haphazardly gathered over the years, that a fatal secret awaited her. A few leaflets hidden inside the binding of a register mentioned strange works. The anonymous author, an alchemist, explained how he had survived accidental poisoning, and went on about the strange psychical phenomena he experienced during his coma. According to his writings, he had managed to establish contact with a nameless being, who proved violent and hostile, but whose will he had managed to overpower. This being had then reluctantly granted him powers. Their descriptions were unbelievable, but the author had worked diligently to devise a formula close to the one that had poisoned him, in order to trigger this contact once more. Ciany knew a few things about the theories of the alienists, and believed that the alchemist had gone through some sort of hallucinatory trance. Yet, his formula seemed interesting, intriguing even. Therefore, she secretly started making use of the contents of the university's alchemical laboratories in order to reproduce his work. Finally, wanting to put the idea to the test, she imbibed the mixture. What came next was absolutely awful: winds cutting at her flesh, nightmarish landscapes, fear, the laughter of an invisible thing that stalked her... When she regained consciousness, she was sprawled on the floor, with Adler looming over her.

When she saw the Scientör's leering smile, Ciany understood that she was in big trouble. Adler then knelt above her and, with mocking eyes, started fondling her breasts. She remembers that she let out a cry. A moment later, she opened her eyes and saw pieces of the Scientör's torn body strewn across the floor. Before dawn broke, the young woman had left the town and was fleeing toward Gwidre. For two years, Ciany has been trying to learn more about the mysterious power she seems to hold. She has been looking for clues; particularly writings or rumors of contacts with mysterious entities that are suggested to be related to wind spirits. She has already managed to get her hands on the notebook of a woman killed by the Sigires of the Temple, in which the alleged witch wrote of her experiences with a being of flames and made mention of a Talkéride cousin; a scholar who might be able to provide more information. Now, Ciany must show determination, but also caution.



Personality

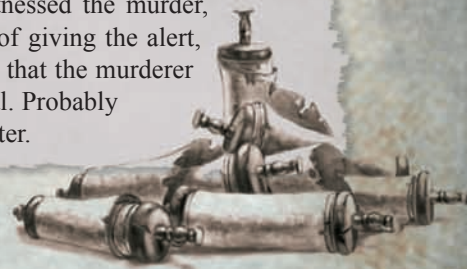
Character Traits: Persevering / Anxious
Disorder: Symptom of Distrust (Paranoia).

Ciany is a young woman too pretty to be left alone. Of a sheepish and easily influenced nature, she has often been led about like a lamb to the slaughter in the past. However, her newfound powers sometimes make her more daring, and she has proven less reluctant to use her beauty in order to get her way.

Rumor

Report by Urielle Erzrhine to the Council of Baldh-Ruoch.

We will never know why Adler died. He kept his notes very secure, and nothing in them explains what may have happened to him. However, there is also the disappearance of Lorn, a young archivist. Given Adler's distrustful nature, I think his death is far from accidental. I would go as far as to assert that another member of the Order is responsible for it, in order to appropriate his works. Lorn probably witnessed the murder, and chose to flee instead of giving the alert, which leads me to believe that the murderer is someone very influential. Probably a Primus, or even a Magister.



Secret

In her quest, Ciany has already killed several strangers with her powers. And their Daols were most welcome. Oddly enough, their deaths did not trouble her that much, and it could even be said that the shock diminishes with each killing. The only thing she is afraid of is that after each murder, she always has the same nightmare, in which an invisible thing chases her, and this worries her more and more. Often, she begs this frightening and mysterious being to spare her... even though she is not certain it actually exists.





von Joern

Male, Reizhite, 53 years old, Magientist (Botanist)

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 1. Reason: 5. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 4, Craft: 4, Erudition: 5 (Herbalism: 10), Feats: 2, Magience: 5 (Artifact Repair: 7, Artifact Use: 9, Flux Extraction: 8, Flux Knowledge: 9, Flux Refining: 8, Medicine: 11), Perception: 4, Science: 5 (Botany: 13, Geology: 8, Mechanics: 7), Stealth: 5.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Mental Rock (+2).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Unwelcoming (-1), Enemy (the authorities of Kalvernach).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 9. Hardening: 3. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 3.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 7. Defense: 11. Speed: 4. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 9. Penalties from old age: apply -2 to the results of rolls related to physical action.

Joern is a man with a pale complexion, a caricature of the withdrawn intellectual. While his prime interest is alchemy, he has always been fascinated by anatomy. Like many Magientists, he pursues the old chimera of mechanical prostheses to replace limbs of flesh. However, he has his own vision on such things. Why not try living grafts? A vegetal substitute can be used to replace a limb; exactly like a cutting on a plant.

When he lived in Kalvernach, he had the means to pursue his ambitions. Mainly, he had guinea pigs. In this backward society that was unable to acknowledge his works, there were always the outcasts and the desperate, ready to do anything to get by. They all represented subjects for experimentation and, for the most part, nobody would miss them. Many died, and the authorities were hard-pressed to identify the "Slasher of Kalvernach", whose victims were sometimes found in carefully cut pieces. Ten years ago, the botanist was unmasked, and he had to flee. In the end, they lost track of him... but he is not dead, and he has not given up on his research.

To obtain the money necessary for his projects, Joern has devised a very efficient process to refine the essence of Gwylmith, the flower from which the energizing drug called Gwilmine is extracted. The purity of his Gwilmine reduces the amount required for a single dose by nearly 15%, which represents that much more profit for those who deal in its trade. Thus, money started flowing in, until the authorities of the dukedom of Dulan began investigating the alchemist. The duke's chancellor gave Joern a choice between the hangman and an appropriate job. So it was that two years ago, Joern settled in a remote miners' village where a gold vein is secretly worked for the chancellor. Recruited in the prisons of Ard-Monach, these miners know that they will never leave this place, although it is still better than the gallows.

Joern has become their physician, and sees to their Gwilmine needs. The work of the miners is difficult, and injuries are common. He has already grafted artificial limbs to several of them. The guards are horrified, but they care little about the fate of the captives, as long as they supply the gold expected by the chancellor. The miners are convicts, after all. However, the soldiers have not realized that Joern understands the rancor of the prisoners very well. He keeps trying to discreetly persuade them that they have nothing more to lose... and that thanks to his blasphemous cuttings, they will have the means to be free again. Soon, a miner will self-mutilate in order to obtain a graft. And others will follow his example... Then, the miners will rise up. After that, it will be time to share the gold and think about the future. With this gold, a few devoted men and Gwilmine, Joern knows that such a future will be promising. And that he will have to answer to no one.

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Personality

Character Traits: Thoughtful / Insensitive

Disorder: State of Balance (Obsession).

Joern has a cold demeanor, and tends to look at people with intimidating inquisitiveness, as if he were wondering what they are made of... and that is indeed what comes to his mind. Most people do not try to know more about him, which suits him perfectly.



Secret

The authorities are not the only ones looking for the Slasher. Despite the fact that Joern was publicly condemned by his peers in Kalvernach, and his works reduced to ashes, snatches of rumors have spread among the Magientist Order, and several unscrupulous researchers are discreetly trying to recover what they can.

Rumor

Indeed, terrible things are done in the name of science. I have heard about the feats of this mad Magientist, in Kalvernach. But let me make myself clear: Flux is only a means. The deep nature of man, and not the miraculous fluid, is responsible for such crimes.

Docteur Jvain, occultist from Osta-Baille.



Lyrielle of the Finery

Female, Talkéride, 23 years old, bard

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 5. Empathy: 4. Reason: 3. Conviction: 1.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Short Blades: 8), Erudition 5 (History: 8), Feats: 3, Perception: 5, Performance: 5 (Acting: 8, Dancing: 9, Singing: 10, +2 bonus), Relation: 5 (Charm: 8, Diplomacy: 7, Persuasion: 9, +2 bonus), Stealth: 5 (Furtiveness: 8), Travel: 5 (Riding: 6).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Magnetic (+2).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Trauma (3).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Hardening: 2. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 6.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 7 (Short Blades: 10). Defense: 13. Speed: 6. Potential: 3.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

Lyrielle is only twenty-three, but her reputation as a bard has spread among the lords of Taol-Kaer. People have heard of her as far as Kalvernach and Gorm Caladh. When one sees her for the first time, most often dressed in her traveling clothes, she looks plain. And yet... give her a dress, any dress, one or two trinkets, a comb, and she becomes the epitome of femininity. It only takes something a little refined, and suddenly all eyes are upon her. However, it is not this slightly peculiar charm that makes her reputation, nor her repertoire, although it is very respectable. Neither is it her remarkable sophistication or her innate sense of etiquette. These are things for which she is respected and admired, but they are not Lyrielle's most impressive abilities. What is paramount is her gift for convincing people to sit down at the same table and discuss the things that divide them. If they are sincere, then despite anger, resentment, or hatred, in the end they always find an agreement. Always. In fact, several times, enemies who were thought to be implacable have made peace and have even sworn oaths of friendship. This can take a few hours, or several days, but Lyrielle never fails.

This gift is not what people imagine. It is a curse that has already caused several deaths. Lyrielle was only a little girl when she fell into a hole on the side of a hill, while she was playing with other children. When the adults rescued her, they made her open her hand, and then quickly threw away what was inside; the thing she had gripped so strongly that her nails had pricked her flesh, the thing she had found down there, among the rotting bones she had fallen on. No one ever knew who those were that had been buried under the hill, but the Demorthèn took a look down there, and when he climbed out, he only uttered a single word: Morcail. Then, torches and piles of dry wood were brought.

However, one night, Lyrielle sneaked out to salvage from the ashes what she had snatched below, among the dead: a brooch—a bronze coat clasp. Since then, she has always kept this aged piece of jewelry with her and it is the source of her strange faculties. Visibly or not, she always wears it and curiously, other people almost never seem to notice it, and pay it no attention when they do. But it is what manipulates their minds, and from it, Lyrielle draws her reputation... and much more.

⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Inventive / Doubting

Disorder: Symptom of Illusion (Hallucination).

Although she is a charming and persuasive woman, Lyrielle is also quite reserved, and is more at ease as a negotiator than as a minstrel. Her collection of tales and songs exalts the virtue of noble sacrifice, and she appreciates as a connoisseur the painful or tragic stories some of her interlocutors tell her.

⊗ Secret

The brooch is what the peninsular legends refer to as an Object of Power. It strengthens Lyrielle's talents by feeding on the negative emotions of those around her. However, all of this darkness periodically needs to resurface, pouring into Lyrielle's soul. When this happens, she dons a coat and goes out at night, stalking isolated pathways, seeking lonely travelers... Some have been found, atrociously mutilated. Lyrielle remembers it all very well. Of course she is horrified, but the evil force that inhabits her trinket is stronger than she is. So she tells herself stories. That is what bards do, don't they? She sugarcoats the facts: sometimes she must take a life in order to save many others. It is dreadful and beautiful at the same time. But the most frightening thing is that no one ever suspects her.

Rumor

Well yeah, I tried to seduce her! You know me well, li'l brother. And no, it didn't work. But what caught me off guard was the stare she gave me when she understood what I wanted. I mean... I'm not the most handsome of men, but really, for a moment, she looked terrified.





Marn
Male, Reizhite, 37 years old, Feond hunter

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 4. Reason: 3. Conviction: 1.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Axes: 9 (Hatchets: 10), Short Blades: 9, Unarmed Fighting: 9, +1 bonus), Feats: 5 (Climbing: 7, Endurance: 7, +1 bonus, +1 to extended actions), Natural Environment: 5 (First Aid: 8, Tracking: 7), Perception: 5 (Alertness: 7, +1 bonus to hearing), Shooting and Throwing: 5 (+1 bonus), Stealth: 4, Travel: 5 (Orientation: 7).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Sturdy (+1), Strong (+1), Keen Hearing (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Phobia (Rodents), Trauma (3).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Hardening: 1. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 8.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 11 (Axes: 15, Hatchets: 16, Short Blades: 15, Bare hands: 15). Defense: 16. Speed: 9. Potential: 2. Fighting Arts: Two-weapon Fighting.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 11.

With his imposing stature and impulsive nature, Marn always thought of himself as a warrior. However, he felt no inclination to stay in the backwater village where he was born, and as soon as the opportunity presented itself, he signed up as a mercenary. There were good times and even more bad ones, but overall this life suited him and it led him over a good part of Tri-Kazel. The risks were part of the job, and while the pay did not always meet his expectations, there was money to be made, and money opens many doors. Three years ago, Marn left this life behind when, after a night of blood and terror, he became the lone survivor of an attack against the Inguard where he was spending the winter. It was supposed to be only a contract to provide help during the cold season, when the lords do not wage war and Daols are scarce. Everything was going rather well... until the Feondas slaughtered the garrison.

They were like big rats, but in some places, they had scales on their fur. Once they closed their jaws, it was impossible to pry them open, even after the beasts had died; you had to cut everything around their maws. Above all, they were sly. They had gnawed at part of the main beams in the cellar, and dug out the earth. One night, the dormitory's floor collapsed and they swarmed the sleeping men. Marn was on duty at the watchtower, and he came to join the battle as soon as he heard the first cries. He had fought Feondas in the past: once, a creature that looked like a plant, but with hands of bark; another time, a pair of strange wolfhounds with bald heads. But not dozens, hundreds of devilish rodents that smelled of rot and devoured their victims alive.

He fought, but apart from him and the two other sentinels, the surprised men had no armor, and most had no weapon at hand. At one moment, he found himself cornered and alone, so he ran to the forge for shelter and locked himself inside. But even then, the things squeezed in through the loopholes. Blood, fear, pain... sometimes, he can hardly remember how he got out of it alive. At dawn, apart from a few half-eaten corpses, only he remained, haggard and covered with wounds. Since that day, Marn has not been the same man. He still works as a sellsword, but only when he thinks Feondas are involved. As soon as the opportunity presents itself, he strikes at the monsters, filled with a cold and ruthless rage. His reputation has slowly spread, and today Marn is known in the western dukedoms of Taol-Kaer, as well as in the south of Gwidre.

Rumor

Diary of Jovian.

The hunter came back, covered in blood, wounded, and with haunted eyes. He told me that we would never see Elsar and Norwen again, but that the Beast was dead. When I asked him where the body of my brother was, so that I could offer him a decent burial, he stared at me with his bloodshot eyes. He made a gesture toward the woods and said that if I wanted Elsar's death to be for nothing, then I could go and keep him company. He took the money he was due, and on the following morning, he was gone. And with despicable cowardliness I remain, thinking about the corpse of my brother rotting among the trees.



Personality

Character Traits: Independent / Impulsive

Disorder: Obsessive Idea Symptom: Feondas (Obsession).

Scarring: Phobia of rodents

Marn no longer has the bawdy sense of humor and the thundering laugh he formerly displayed. His bloodshot eyes restlessly stare at corners, and he often pricks up his ears. The warrior never sleeps in the hay of a barn until he has thoroughly examined it; he meticulously inspects all of the places where he rests, and refuses to go into towns. He knows they are all full of rats...



Secret

Marn tries to discourage those who want to lend him help, but is not always successful, which puts him ill-at-ease. Indeed, his obsession sometimes drives him to leap into dangerous or even suicidal situations. Several times, he has remained the sole survivor of a group of hunters, due to his often rash decisions.





Ergon Tamir

Female, Talkeride, 26 years old, Hilderin knight

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 2. Reason: 4. Conviction: 3.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Polearms: 8, Swords: 9 (Long swords: 10)), Erudition 3, Feats: 5, Natural Environment: 2, Perception: 5, Relation: 2, Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Crossbows: 7), Travel: 5 (Riding: 9).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Quick (+1).
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** None.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 2.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 9 (Swords: 13, Long swords: 14, Polearms: 12, Crossbows: 11). Defense: 16. Speed: 7. Potential: 2. Fighting Arts: Cavalry, Parry.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

Her parents had wanted a boy, so they raised her as such from the first moment. But now, few are those who still dare tell her that she does not have a girl's name. The young woman with the appraising eyes and close-cropped hair is neither tall nor burly, but with her armor and martial stature she certainly makes an impression. From her first days, her parents, who had no other children, saw in her the tool of their ambition. In the past, the Tamirs had influence. They owned several fishing boats and lands. However, their business had fallen apart, and the high society of Tuaille had snubbed them. Her father, using the last of the favors he could obtain, arranged for Ergon's acceptance into the order of the Hilderins. They did not go easy on her, but after all, neither had her parents, and she proved herself worthy. She has always proven herself worthy. This is the only way for her to make the name of the Tamirs shine one last time. There are influential people in Tuaille, as there are in the order of the Hilderins. If Ergon plays her cards well, she can earn a position of authority. It has been a long time since a woman has been Tòrr Ceann, and more than two hundred years since the last female commander. If only she could attain such a prestige... then, she could marry the second son of a baron, or a well-off commoner. Someone whose family would be disposed to let her keep her name, in exchange for the prestige of having a high-ranked Hilderin in the family tree. Indeed, the merits of warriors are still given due recognition in Taol-Kaer.

However, she still has a long way to go. The order is rife with rivalries and conspiracies, the plotters of which would rather make her a pawn and not a leading member. And Ergon knows that she is not the scheming type, so she needs to find support outside the order: people in high places, dukes, royal advisors. And for that, she needs the right people to acknowledge her existence and her skills. So she volunteers for the riskiest missions.

Her martial prowess is well-known, as is her composure. The knights of her squad, a small troop made of elite warriors both cautious and experienced, obey her unhesitatingly because they trust her entirely. Still, Ergon is not a fool; she is aware that she is treading on her superiors' feet. They certainly hope that she will die in action, which would suit their needs. Just they wait. A day will come when they will have to execute her orders. And then, she will give them a taste of their own medicine.



Personality

Character Traits: Focused / Prideful

Disorder: State of Balance (Frenzy).

Ergon comes off as cold, but she often has a smirk on her face, particularly when she is told to carry out a particularly stupid order. She talks little, using short and direct sentences. She never hides the contempt she has for those she is supposed to respect, yet show incompetence.

Rumor

Master,

Since my arrival in Smiorail, my relations with Knight Argan are tense. Sir Argan holds abusive authority over the vale of Dearg, and some whisper grim things about his past. Also, even though I am still but a novice, there are things that can only shock me. Last week, we were visited by a squad of the order, led by Knight Tamir. Argan was rather condescending toward her, as if his status allowed him to take liberties with women who have the rank of knight. During the meal, he showed a familiarity that I would qualify as bawdy and obnoxious. And when he laid his hand on the young woman's knee, she punched him in the face, almost breaking his jaw! It almost came to blows between her men and those of the garrison, and I saw in Argan's eyes that for a moment, he had thought about sending us against our brothers. Master, is that how Hilderins are supposed to act? Are we not knighthood brothers, and devoted to the kingdom? Inappropriate behavior, power abuse, squabbles... is it in such a quagmire that I will have to live in after my novitiate?

Roderic, Osfei.



Sneachda, the Cold Lady

Female, Talkéride, 42 years old, Morcail

- ⌘ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 6. Reason: 2. Conviction: 1.
- ⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 3, Craft: 4, Demorthèn Mysteries: 5 (Herbalism: 9, Meditation: 8, Sigil Rann: 11, +1 bonus), Feats: 4, Natural Environment: 5 (First Aid: 7, Survival: 9), Perception: 4, Shooting and Throwing: 5, Stealth: 5 (Furtiveness: 9), Travel: 5 (+1 bonus).
- ⌘ **Advantages:** Intuitive, Survival Instinct.
- ⌘ **Disadvantages:** Slow.
- ⌘ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 18.
- ⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 7. Defense: 13. Speed: 10. Potential: 2.
- ⌘ **Survival Points:** 4
- ⌘ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.
- ⌘ **Rindach:** 62. Ogham: Call Birds, Call Feondas, Camouflage, Cure, Healing, Stone Arrow.

There is a woman that every child in Tri-Kazel knows of, a bogeywoman spoken of in Tri-Kazelian tales. For some, she is much more than a legend: she actually exists... For the occultists, the Cold Lady is a vengeful spirit that reincarnates from one generation to the next by possessing weak-minded or desperate people.

The most recent Cold Lady is currently in her forties. When she was born, her parents called her Sneachda, which means Snow in the ancient tongue. As she grew up, she became a kind, cheerful, and friendly girl, then a pretty young woman. During early spring, when she was 14, she was on a walk with her parents in the foothills of a mountain, picking flowers and gathering berries, when the tragedy occurred. What happened exactly? No one ever knew, but she was badly hurt, and her parents were atrociously murdered. The local Demorthèn, an old man, took her under his wing, but in spite of his efforts, she remained silent, frightful, and fragile. In the village, people came to the conclusion that the party responsible must have been monsters, since humans could never kill one another in such a horrible way. Renewed efforts were made to protect the community.

During fall, it became obvious for everyone that the girl's belly was getting rounder, and the Demorthèn confirmed that when she had been brought back from the aggression her family had suffered, he had noticed that she had been raped. However, he had said nothing of it, hoping to spare Sneachda additional trauma. The villagers began to consider her differently. What sort of monster would she give birth to? From then on, when a child fell ill, a hunter broke her leg, or a Calyre got lost in the forest, she was systematically blamed: "She bears the evil eye! She is only going to bring misfortune!"

The Demorthèn stood up for her, but he could not protect her from everything, and she had already heard too much. One morning, upon awakening, she realized that the old man had died in his sleep. She feared she might be held responsible and decided to flee, hurriedly taking every valuable thing in the shed with her. She wandered for days, then weeks, in the freezing mountain as winter came. She experienced hunger, the taste of bitter roots and animal corpses. She found a cave, a secluded shelter where she settled. She had seen the Demorthèn use his magic stones, so she took them in her frostbitten hands and fruitlessly attempted to use them a thousand times. Then came the contractions of childbirth, the fear of spawning a monster, pain, suffering, and, with a final scream, delivery.

The baby was beautiful and sound of body; in a word, normal. She cradled him, loved him, foreseeing her return to the village and how she would be welcomed there, with everyone apologizing when they saw her child. He was not a monster! She bore no evil eye! But during the first night, the cold stole the warmth and life from the newborn, and in the morning, she found him blue and hard as an ice block.

Her mind snapped, her thoughts revolved solely around Vengeance, and soon, she understood how to use the Oghamic stones...

⌘ Personality

Character Traits: Pugnacious / Immoral

Disorder: Mystical Delusion (Mysticism).

Sneachda has become a most evil Morcail. She is convinced she is communicating with superior beings, and her sole purpose is to kill humans. By corrupting the Ogham of the old Demorthèn, she has even managed to make contact with the monsters, and to some extent, she can make use of them to fulfill her nefarious intents.

Nursery rhyme

She enters houses in the dead of night,
Walks to the infant in her icy gown,
Sucks out its life, with unholy might,
Turns it dead and stiff and then she is gone.

The Cold Lady took warmth from the baby,
She flies away to her cave as winds blow,
Singing to her oh-so-still progeny,
That remains sleeping amidst stone and snow.



Liadan Ni Connell

Female, Talkéride, 30 years old, Demorthèn

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 5. Reason: 2. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5, Demorthèn Mysteries: 5 (Meditation: 9, Sigil Rann: 10, +1 bonus), Feats: 4, Natural Environment: 5 (First Aid: 8, Tracking: 10), Perception: 4 (+1 bonus to hearing), Stealth: 5, Travel: 5 (Orientation: 8, +1 bonus).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Intuitive, Keen Hearing.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Shy, Trauma (1).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 4.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 7. Defense: 12. Speed: 10. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10. Rindath: 41. Ogham: Call Animals, Calm Animals, Regeneration, Stone Arrow, Tracking.

Liadan knows nothing of her past: neither where she was born nor the name her true parents gave her, and not even the circumstances that brought Nerlog Ni Connell to chance upon her deep in the Sunken Forest as he returned from a Tsioghair.

The old Demorthèn told her many times about this story, her story: how he was walking, mulling over the last revelations of his peers' gathering, following a deer's path through the undergrowth, and how he saw this enormous she-wolf who had been grievously wounded, drawing her last breaths on a carpet of ferns. He carefully drew closer, and the animal laid her feverish eyes on him. In the wolf's stare, he could see, he could understand that she had to give her life to save her children from a terrible danger. She asked Nerlog to take over this responsibility, and, overwhelmed by compassion, the man had accepted to take care of her progeny. The wolf died without a noise, and the Demorthèn then looked for her lair to honor the silent oath he had made. He was immensely surprised when he discovered, nestled among a litter of pups, a naked child of about two or three years of age who was peacefully sleeping inside a hollow tree. He took her along with the pups, which he made sure grew up properly until they were all able to survive on their own.

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The girl was given the name Liadan—"she-wolf" in the ancient tongue—and Nerlog made her his only apprentice, the holder of all his knowledge. So she was raised, wandering among the Osag clans of the Lands of Dèas, she the Tri-Kazelian, she the wolf-born, rootless and pastless. She became a talented Demorthèn, and when her adoptive father died, nothing held her in the Lands of Dèas anymore, so she traveled deep into the Sunken Forest and started journeying on the roads of Tri-Kazel, lending her help and advice everywhere her wisdom was needed, without ever staying anywhere for long.

She is often mistaken for a Varigal, and people offer to pay her for her services for the duration of a journey. Often, she accepts, with no other purpose than to travel farther. However, those who have traveled with her, although they have nothing bad to say about her services, sometimes mention with discomfort how listless and tight-lipped she is...

⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Sensitive / Sullen

Disorder: State of Balance (Melancholy).

Liadan always feels the unknown portion of her past nagging at her mind. She wonders about it constantly, but knows that she will most certainly never find an answer to her questions. She seems gloomy, pensive, lost in dark dreams.

She seldom talks, and never without a good reason: she gives advice and instructions, but never takes part in conversations.

Liadan? Yep, I know her: she once scared me out of my wits! She had agreed to guide us through Calhtair's Wood to Kaer Daegis. I was driving the wagon, hauling salts and potions of my making, and we were escorted by three mercenaries. Suddenly, at dawn, we were assaulted by a band of marauders, and in the time it took for me to come out of my wagon, two of my men had been killed! But then, I heard a terrifying howl, and a beast looking like a big wolf lunged at the thieves, wreaking death upon them. I remained frozen, believing that the ferocious beast would do me in as well, but as soon as all the bandits who still had legs had fled, it ran off...

Along with the man who was still alive, I remained hidden in the wagon for some time, and when we went out, the woman was gone. She had obviously been devoured as well, or so we believed...

However, later, we saw her back in an inn at Kaer Daegis, but she would not say anything about what happened!





Two-Blades Nic

Male, Talkéride, 32 years old, mercenary

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 1. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Short Blades: 9 (Knives: 10), Swords: 9 (Long & short sword combination: 12)), Feats: 5 (Endurance: 7, +1 bonus to agility), Natural Environment: 5 (First Aid: 6, Survival: 8), Perception: 5 (Alertness: 8, Observation: 7), Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Bows: 8), Stealth: 5 (Furtiveness: 6, Pickpocket: 6, +1 bonus), Travel: 5 (Orientation: 7, Riding: 9).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Nimble.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 8. Hardening: 2. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 9.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 10 (Knives: 15, Short Blades: 14, Long & short sword combination: 17, Swords: 14, Bows: 13). Defense: 15. Speed: 8. Potential: 2. Fighting Arts: Sneak Attack, Two-weapon Fighting.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

From the first days of his life, Nic did not have much of a choice: born a pauper in great Osta-Baille, he quickly resorted to thievery to survive, starting with petty larceny. And as the years went by, he grew ruthless and violent. He was not afraid to take out his knife and stick it in the guts of the hapless fellows who got in his way. At barely 14, he was already a full-fledged gallows bird and took his first contracts as an assassin. One night, a year later, he shadowed a man he had been hired to dispose of: a knight, so it seemed. He had been promised a pretty sum for his death. Nic followed him to an alley where it was planned that two of his accomplices would set about him so as to distract him while Nic would swiftly slit his throat... That night, he got his very first lesson. With dazzling speed, the man parried his attack, threw him down, and drove away one of the two brigands while the other writhed in a pool of his own blood. Nic tried to get up, but the tip of the man's longsword came to rest on his chin. He would have liked to have been brave and wait for death, but instead of that, he blubbered a pathetic "Mercy, sir" which revealed to the knight how young he was.

"Walk in front of me kid. I'll give you one—only one—chance to become a man."

He took him to the Currency House, in the district of Trádáil, and had him placed in custody for the night. The morning after, he came back at daybreak.

"I am Quentin Erward, and I will let you choose: this morning, convicts are being hanged, and new recruits are being trained. Which group do you want to be a part of?"

Three years later, Nic left the Brambles without having taken an oath and enrolled in the regular army. For 10 years, he journeyed here and there across the peninsula, wherever his service took him. Inguards, preemptive strikes, or rebellion-quelling—he always volunteered for the most dangerous missions, the ones where he could be sure there would be some fighting.

In spite of it all, his thirst for blood was never quenched, and he was often placed under arrest for starting brawls and damaging public property. In the end, his superiors had enough of this unruly soldier, and one morning, he had to flee in order to avoid being sentenced to death after he had killed three or four upper-class braggarts.

Since then, Nic has been working as a mercenary. He picks his missions according to their dangerousness, because he cannot stand inaction. Now, he goes solo: he has finally understood that he is a rather poor companion, more likely to cause trouble than fix it.

Sometimes he thinks about old Quentin Erward, and wonders whether he would be able to defeat him today. He never saw him again, but knows that he owes him a lot: if it had not been for him, Nic would probably be hanging from a rope by now.



Personality

Character Traits: Combative / Belligerent

Disorder: Aggressive Symptom (Frenzy).

Nic loves combat, adrenaline, and blood. However, he is not an assassin or a thief anymore. He is a warrior paid to fight, and he is proud to make a living out of it.



Two-Blades Nic, the mercenary? 'Course I know him, we spent three years together in the army.

A real handful, for sure! He's like a double-edged sword: wield him carefully, and only use him when necessary, or you'll likely get in over your head for nothing. Suffice to say, if you need someone for a dangerous mission packed with action, he's your man... but if nothing happens, he'll get you caught in a tavern brawl at the first opportunity, sure as eggs.





Eberict, "the Shadow"

Male, Gwidrite, 29 years old, occultist

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 2. Reason: 5. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Daggers: 8), Erudition: 5 (Doctrine of the Temple: 7), Feats: 5 (Acrobatics: 8, Climbing: 6), Occultism: 5 (Black Magic: 9*, Esotericism: 8, Ritual: 7*, +1 bonus), Perception: 3, Relation: 5, Science: 5 (+1 bonus), Travel: 4, Stealth: 5 (Furtiveness: 9, Hiding: 8).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Smart.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Trauma (2).
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 6.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 9 (Daggers: 12). Defense: 14. Speed: 6. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.
- ⊗ **Exaltation:** 26*. Major Spells: Shadowwalk**, Spectral Illusion**.

* See page 179 – The Sorcerers

** See below for the descriptions of the powers

Eberict is a rather unsavory man who always tends to get into trouble. When he was a child, he was raised in the brand new city of Expiation by parents who strongly believed in the One and had agreed to be among the first to settle on the still-smoking ruins of Lightrock. A rowdy, hyperactive child, he behaved quite irresponsibly and caused much trouble in the alleys of the model city. Warned several times by the local authorities, Eberict's parents had to admit that the boy was indeed a tough nut to crack, who did not relent in spite of the reprimands and harsh beatings they gave him. They decided to entrust him to the religious institution, so that he might be given a strict education and his overflowing energy might be put to the service of the Creator. That is how, at the age of eight, he heard the Temple's doors closing on his life. What happened behind the thick stone walls? According to Eberict himself, he was trained—forged even—into becoming an unrelenting Sigire. He was granted access to secret, blasphemous information and read diabolical books, finding out about unholy, unspeakable truths. However, he was able to keep for himself his most dreadful secret, the one that his masters would have been terrified to discover. Once he was set free from the fortress and the city, he was able to scream at the sky, as if sending a terrible threat to the Creator. During all these years, he had never, never had faith...

Armed with what he had been taught, he fled to Baldh-Ruoch in order to put to practice the investigation techniques and the knowledge he had stolen. In barely three years, he made interesting contacts among the occult cabals of the capital city and of the kingdom's major towns. Thanks to his peculiar knowledge, and to the watchfulness he had been inculcated with in Expiation, he avoided many traps and was able to understand many things about the dark side of Esteren.

Hunted by the ecclesiastic authorities of Gwidre, he is considered a great potential danger by the Temple, since he was granted access to much knowledge forbidden to the uninitiated. However, Eberict knows how to lay low and use his chameleon-like abilities to frustrate his pursuers.

⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Cautious / Rigid

Disorder: Symptom of Distrust (Paranoia)

Eberict grew up in an isolated, austere, and very strict environment. He still behaves very carefully, trying never to lose control, as he has been taught to. The infiltration and camouflage techniques he uses in his daily life, as well as his habit of looking everywhere and watching out for the slightest noise, make him a strange, disturbing person. Still, his very peculiar knowledge and his rigorous methods in occult experimentations have opened doors to him and allowed him to cultivate partnerships with powerful people he knows he can rely on. When a situation calls for it, he always has a few strings he can pull.

⊗ Secrets

Similarly to Ciany Lorn (see p.156), Eberict has developed a form of control over occult powers that the Temple's ecclesiastics consider unholy. Guidelines for these powers are provided on page 179. However, a difference from Ciany is that Eberict does not recover Exaltation by performing violent acts. His only method is to study occult texts, which works like the Contemplation Discipline (see Book 1 Universe, p.258). As long as he has his grimoires with him, Eberict can recover thrice as many Exaltation points, up to a maximum of 15 each day. Here are the powers Eberict has developed so far:

Shadowwalk. When he calls upon this power, Eberict seems to blend into the shadows around him. This power grants bonuses to all attempts to hide in the dark or move furtively.

Spectral Illusion. This power induces nightmarish images in the victims' mind: a hellish sight of a ruined world where specters dwell. Mechanics-wise, its effects are identical to Vision of Limbo (see Book 1 Universe, p.261).





Kavan Mac Dougal

Male, Talkéride, 30 years old, Demorthèn



- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 5. Empathy: 4. Reason: 1. Conviction: 2.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 9), Demorthèn Mysteries: 5 (Concentration: 7, Sigil Rann: 9, +1 bonus), Feats: 5 (Endurance: 7), Magience: 2, Natural Environment: 5, Perception: 3, Relation: 5 (+1 bonus, -1 penalty in public), Travel: 5 (Orientation: 7, +1 bonus).
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Ally (Ainmire, Demorthèn of clan Mac Dougal, influential mentor), Financial Ease (20 azure Daols), Intuitive.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Enemy (Aonghas, warrior of clan Mac Rory), Phobia (Chemophobia: fear of chemicals), Shy.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 4.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 8 (Swords: 12). Defense: 11. Speed: 8. Potential: 3.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 3
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10. Rindath: 32. Ogham: Ice, Call Birds, Curative Berries, Eagle.

Kavan is a man who keeps to himself, so very few among his acquaintances actually know more than a few bits of his past. The mountainous valleys west of Còmhlán are the ancestral land of clan Mac Dougal. It was in this primeval country that he was born, grew up, and, in accordance with the law of the Osag clans, was to marry Aisling, from clan Mac Rory. They knew and loved each other... so when he came back alone, haggard, wounded, and with no memory of what happened during the walk they had taken far into the wooded hills, his clan had to protect him from the wrath of Aonghas Mac Rory, the young woman's father. The two clans collaborated in forming search parties for Aisling while Kavan was recovering from his wounds in a secret location. When there was nothing to do but accept that she was dead, clan Mac Rory demanded redress from the Mac Dougals. Not wanting to be the catalyst of a war between the two clans, Kavan chose to go into exile.

The rest of his story is nothing but battle after battle. He fought by the side of the Burned Sorcerer against the madmen of the One, and the mysteries of the Demorthèn's art were revealed to him. Even now, Kavan uses his Ogham very cautiously and parsimoniously, as he has learned to do so in Gwidre, where such knowledge is punishable by death. While he was in the North of the Peninsula, he was taken prisoner. He was expecting to die by the hand of a Sigire or a Blade knight, when he saw a strange being point at him with a bony hand. What happened to him? Where was he taken? He remembers a boat, ashes covering the sea, and the everlasting rumble of a mountain... then a cell, and pain. Alien tools of iron and glass, leather bonds, masks and smocks, and, above all, those strange and terrible substances, freezing or burning, that came close to killing him or ravaging his mind a hundred times. Of how he escaped from such a hellish experience, and why he came back to his senses under a thundering rain near the doors of Osta-Baille, he does not remember...

It took him one year, working as a mercenary, fighting for the highest bidder, before he dared to come back to the Mac Dougals. There, he was welcomed as a prodigal child that everyone thought lost, and even the Mac Rorays greeted him warmly. Of course, Aonghas had kept a deep-seated grudge against Kavan, but he knew how much he would lose should he decide to enact his revenge...

However, memories and tensions are like capricious spirits, and Kavan did not remain happy with this homecoming for very long. Aware of the more than uncertain future of the Demorthèn tradition, he took to the road once more, looking for ancient knowledge and for the powerful Ogham of old. He came back to Osta-Baille and was able to arrange an interview with Algwich Dert, who was intrigued by the strong conviction of the young man and the mystery that shrouded his past. The old Demorthèn entrusted him with one mission, then with another, and finally took him into his service, always sending him farther in his search for lost traditions.

⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Intuitive / Careless

Disorder: State of Balance (Mental Confusion).

Kavan is very independent and capable of making sound decisions based on his gut instinct. However, rational thought may not enter into play when weighing decisions to be made, which makes him appear rash and impulsive at times. Although shy in large groups, he is confident in more personal interactions, particularly with those close to him, and can relate to and understand others well.

My dear friend,

The man I am sending to you is Kavan Mac Dougal, and he should arrive a few days after this courier. Tell him everything you have learned about the mysteries of the Fall Tree and Taelwald's Forest; he is my emissary and will know what to do with such information. Whatever help he will ask of you, grant it to him, for this young man is promising, and if I manage to forge him according to my expectations, he may one day be able to take over after me and continue my work. As you see, old fool that I am, I still chase after hopeless dreams, in spite of the years and the past disappointments. May the spirits aid us and the C'maoghs guide his steps.

Algwich Dert





Jed, "Slivers" Talkeride, 17 years old, woodworker

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 6. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 2. Reason: 2. Conviction: 1.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Short Blades: 6), Craft: 5 (Woodworking: 6), Feats: 4 (+1 bonus to agility), Natural Environment: 4, Perception: 5 (Alertness: 6), Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Throwing Knives: 6), Stealth: 4 (+1 bonus), Travel: 4.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Nimble.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** None.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 6. Hardening: 2. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 12.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 11 (Short Blades: 12, Throwing Knives: 12). Defense: 11. Speed: 8. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 4
- ⊗ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

Jed looks like a regular boy. He arrived one morning in a small village, went to Woodworker Magrus's home, and said: "Hello, Uncle. My father, Arius, told me about you right before he died. He told me that you would take me in as your apprentice. If that's all right with you, I'll settle in your shop..."

Magrus remained speechless. He had no idea who Arius was, but before he could utter a word, Jed had already stashed his few belongings in a vacant spot and immediately started carrying on with a cutting plan the woodworker had left unfinished the day before. In only a few days, Jed got as used to working in the shop of his so-called uncle as if he had spent his whole childhood there.

With the village's kids, things were not that easy. For his age, Jed's body and features are rather lean, a contrast with the bulky, graceless forms of the local boys. Indeed, the girls are not immune to his charms, even though he does not seem to be interested in any of them. And when the guys bawdily boast of their alleged performances with girls, Jed keeps silent on the subject. Still, they know that he is the ladies' favorite.

When a scuffle breaks out, Jed is always nearby, and although he actually rarely fights, he always does so fiercely and without ever leaving a blow unreturned. This earned him the other boys' respect, for lack of making any friends.

Who could understand, anyway? Jed hides a secret under his short, messy hair, his scrawny arms, and his thin legs... A secret he wants to tell no one about. Jed is actually a city girl, a hurt, wounded young woman who suffered loathsome acts from a bunch of boys, and who got back up, determined to never be abused again.

Being an apprentice woodworker, she always carries a keen blade or a sharp chisel with her, but so far, she never had to make use of it during a brawl. The village boys believe her to be a boy and treat her as such: a few bruises, sometimes a black eye, but things never go farther, so long as no one finds out about her secret...

During the day, woodworking provides Jed with a source of soothing from the dull anger that constantly plagues her thoughts. However, at night, alone in the shop, the nightmares keep her awake, and the thirst for vengeance feeds her darkest thoughts. Then, she gets up and spends long hours stretching her limbs and strengthening her thin muscles so that the quickness and accuracy of her moves may compensate for her lack of brute force.

Jed skates on thin ice: the smallest fault in the illusion she strives to maintain could turn her life upside down. Never again will she accept that a boy looks at her the way he looks at girls; she is ready to do anything to ensure the silence of whoever blows her cover. Boys are all pigs; she knows what they are capable of. No one will touch her again, or she will kill him. She will kill all those who try.



Personality

Character Traits: Pugnacious / Cold

Disorder: Impulsive Syndrome (Frenzy)

Jed is like a coiled, sleeping snake. She seems indifferent to whatever happens around her. However, should someone chip the veneer of illusion she is covered with, she will strike deftly and leave her prey no chance.

During the day, when she is busy working wood, all anyone can see is a diligent young boy, a model apprentice, dedicated and talented. Among other people, she still manages to maintain the illusion, but it is during the night that her wounds open and the yearning for revenge roiling in her calls for extreme violence.

During my visit to the town, I crossed a district in turmoil: everyone was in a frenzy of panic, and it took me much time to understand what happened, given the agitation of the locals. I was able to gather that in the morning, they had found three people dead, all of them youngsters from the district showing multiple stab wounds. Meanwhile, some other boys remained nowhere to be found, so I offered to help with the search. At the end of the day, two of them were still missing and assumed dead, dumped in the sewers by the bastards who had performed this vile deed...

I went back there almost a year later. The people were still scarred, and no one had the faintest idea of what may have happened.





Mysterious Powers

Book 1 – Universe mentions on pages 171 and 252 the notion of black magic, which the Tri-Kazelian traditions also refer to as Oradh (which means charm or spell, in the ancient tongue). It bears mentioning that such conceptions are partially wrong. The truth about them will be dealt with exhaustively in the Book of Secrets. However, through two particular cases, the following paragraphs provide more information about how Oradh manifests from its users' point of view. This chapter also deals with the mystic powers of the Tarish, and the way peninsular people perceive them. The purpose of the rule mechanics provided here is simply to approach the possibilities available to these individuals. The Book of Secrets will provide more details about the potential offered—and the price to pay—when one takes an interest in knowledge better left unknown. Thus, here is a quick glance at some realities lurking in the shadows of the world of Esteren.



The Morcail

Argala the Devourer and the renegade Dorn from the “Blood Feathers” canvas are two examples of what the Demorthèn call Morcail, meaning people trained in Oradh, who misuse sacred knowledge for personal ends, or to serve causes much different from those promoted by the Demorthèn. Moreover, the Morcail presented here draw their peculiar powers from cursed Ogham. They are themselves ignorant of the origins of these engraved stones, and do not know whether they have been crafted as such, or if what they were used for ended up corrupting their very nature.

Argala and Dorn use blood in their rituals, but this is not a universal rule among Morcail. Indeed, each Morcail is affiliated to a certain philosophy that involves particular ceremonies. The basis of such a philosophy can be unwavering confidence in one's own abilities. It can also be related to the beliefs constructed by other fallen Demorthèn. In the case of Dorn, the remains of the other Morcail he worships have become the center of his faith; as for Argala, she perpetuates a family custom of utmost savagery.

Becoming a Morcail

To earn the status of Morcail and gain the advantages it provides, a character must abide by three prerequisites:

- Having been initiated into the Demorthèn mysteries.
- Genuinely wanting to accumulate might and power regardless of the Demorthèn teachings, particularly the one related to meditation.
- Performing a specific ritual, which will strengthen (or replace) meditation. It will symbolize the strength of the Morcail's convictions, and it will be at this moment that the fallen Demorthèn will gather Rindath energy.

Generally, Morcail will accumulate as much Rindath as possible by forcing the elements around them. There are many different types of Morcail rituals, and each one leads to particular effects.

Powers of Dorn and Argala

Concerning Dorn, his cult grants him an increase of 20 points to his maximum Rindath level, as well as a +1 bonus on his Sigil Rann rolls. To keep these bonuses, Dorn must perform at least two human sacrifices each year. The sacrificial ritual lasts one hour, and also enables him to recover all of his Rindath points.

As for Argala, she gets an increase of 40 points to her maximum Rindath level, and a +3 bonus on her Sigil Rann rolls. To keep such power, she must sacrifice a newborn each season, which means four each year. She loses 10 Rindath points if she performs no sacrifice in the days following the beginning of a new season. If, for any reason, she performs no sacrifices during a whole year, she loses all of her advantages.

Cursed Ogham

Cursed Ogham that grant access to Oradh look just like the ones the Demorthèn use, and it is not possible to identify them for what they are by examining their shape.

On each attempt, Demorthèn using a cursed Ogham can make a Difficult (17) Demorthèn Mysteries roll to realize its true nature. With a success, they will intuitively understand that they are dealing with a corrupted Ogham, and that a worthy Demorthèn should not make use of it, but seek to destroy it instead... Unless the lure of power is too strong...



The Sorcerers

Ciany Lorn is convinced she is in contact with a mysterious entity that stalks her in her dreams. The young woman is a representative example of what the Temple would call a witch, dealing with unholy forces. As Ciany's story shows, it is not so much a pact than the consequence of overzealous curiosity. The young woman believes in the existence of the mysterious entity that seems to be interested in her, but ultimately she has no proof showing that she has not simply gone mad. Her powers can have very different origins from what she imagines...

Her profile shows a Discipline called Black Magic, from the Occultism Domain, the technical description and reality of which will be described in an upcoming book of the series. Still, here is a glance at the possibilities available to the young woman.

Black Magic works like the Miracle Discipline of the Temple's faithful, and makes use of the same chart. It is fueled by the conviction of the young woman, but Ciany does not recover Exaltation by following the Ordinances of Soustraine. She does so by performing cruel acts and by committing senseless murders. Each such act is equivalent to a Minor Act that allows her to recover 5 Exaltation points. One can imagine that Significant or Major Acts represent particularly sinister or bloody accomplishments. For a while, Ciany has been trying to organize her ideas, and she frequently begs her mysterious "mentor" to spare her, or promises it her service. For her, this (the Ritual Discipline, from the Occultism Domain) is a means similar to the Contemplation Discipline for recovering Exaltation.

Currently, Ciany has only discovered two powers, the potential of which is equivalent to Major Miracles of the Temple (she can use them beyond the second power stanza), but others certainly exist.

⌘ Supernatural Hearing

If she focuses, she can hear the faintest noises. However, they always have a troubling quality, some sort of metallic echo, and sometimes the young woman fancies she hears unexplainably chilling whispers.

⌘ Slashing

By focusing her willpower on a target, Ciany can cut it (or even rip it apart) with supernatural gusts of wind. The first time she used it, on full power, the result was so horrible it shocked her deeply. She is starting to find it less atrocious, but this affects her mental balance. Damage dealt is calculated normally according to the power stanza.

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The Leader's Choice

This short chapter proposes a first glance at secret and mysterious powers, drawn from the shadows of the world of Esteren. Initially, this universe has been intended to have a realistic and ordinary appearance behind which horror and supernatural elements are hidden. There is a fantastic side, as this chapter illustrates, but its manifestations are relatively rare and subtle, which encourages the persistence of false beliefs and doubt regarding the truthfulness of some facts. However, Leaders should always feel free to insert such supernatural aspects the way they wish. It is their job to shape the world of Esteren to make it so that it can best serve the story they wish to tell.

Thus, one could imagine an Esteren setting where some supernatural aspects are absent, with the aim of creating a more bleak and down-to-earth setting. For example, a Leader might decide that Tarish powers are just a legend and the members of this community possess no special faculties.

However, by making supernatural elements more mundane and power users more common, Leaders will give their world a more fantastic dimension where such things will actually be part of everyone's way of thinking. Magientists will acknowledge the reality of such powers while looking for rational explanations (some may even believe in the existence of superior entities, like some scientists who also have faith), and the faithful of the Temple will see in them a profusion of signs related to evil creatures.

There are plenty of possibilities, and the Leaders should take some time to make their choices on the subject.





Tarish Curse

The Tarish are surrounded with mystery, and rumors about them abound. Among other things, some say that they have the power to curse someone over several generations. Stories of this kind are considered laughable by many self-styled “serious people”. Wrongly so, for the powers of the Tarish are very real. The subtle nature of such powers is the main reason for which scholars grant them so little credit. They are in no way spectacular, and come into effect as curses with slow but inescapable effects for the one who is affected. However, spells with protective effects also exist. How these powers work and their effects will be detailed in the Book of Secrets, but here is a broad outline for them. Tarish powers are used with the Bewitchment Discipline, from the Occultism Domain. Similarly to the adepts of the Temple, the Tarish use prayer (through the Ritual Discipline, from the Occultism Domain) to regain Exaltation points. They spend time in contemplation, thinking about their ancestors, focusing on small figurines depicting them. Exaltation points can also be recovered during trances. They work with the same system as the Miracles of the Temple (Stanzas, Difficulty Threshold, etc.) but use different values.

Tarish Beliefs and Culture

In Tarish tradition, magic is based on aid from departed ancestors whose spirits continue to protect the clans. Magic is only used by women, generally the matriarch of the clan or her spiritual daughter. Tarish powers come under various aspects, among which are:

⊕ Curses

These powers take effect over a long duration, spanning from one year (1st Stanza) to several generations (6th Stanza). The effects are subtle, and can for example affect a Character's Luck (inflicting a penalty to all Luck rolls), gradually and unnoticeably weaken his Stamina or his Health Condition, etc. The sorceress who wishes to summon a curse must know her victim, who must have wronged her in one way or another... or, at least, she must be convinced of such. It is said there are Tarish sorceresses who use their cursing powers gratuitously and arbitrarily, but this is rather rare, and spurned by the Tarish. In the “Disappearance” canvas, Matriarch Zurka does nothing to the PCs unless they flee or betray the clan, in which case she will use the hair and blood taken from each one to craft figurines depicting them and perform a curse. Each PC must then succeed in a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll lest he falls under the effects of a curse. It will last ten years during which the PCs will be beset by misfortune (-2 penalty to every Luck roll).

⊕ Conjurations and Trances:

As opposed to curses, these spells are performed to protect a place or a community. The Tarish use them to protect their caravans and camps on long journeys. As for trances, they allow them to recover Exaltation points.

According to their traditions, such trances put the Tarish in direct contact with an ancestor, who may also show her visions about the future or the past. Such trances are dangerous, and matriarchs only use them with care.



Supernatural Powers from the Factions' Point of View

Powers related to Morcail, witches, or Tarish are interpreted in very diverse ways in the peninsula of Tri-Kazel. For the Demorthèn, the powers of the Morcail are linked to the spirits of nature, but defile the ancestral arts by shunning their basic principles to serve the vanity of some individuals. The powers of warlocks are said to have the same origin, and a character such as Ciany Lorn would probably be considered as a Morcail. The Demorthèn, like the Magientists and most of the faithful of the Temple, do not believe in the existence of Tarish powers, discarding them as old wives' tales.

For the Magientists, the powers of the Morcail are not different from those of the Demorthèn. Their existence is accepted by most scholars, but they are considered as a scientific enigma, the existence of which can be rationalized. Many theories have been made on the subject, such as the one that holds that the Demorthèn could manage, through a process currently unknown, to use Flux under a pure, immaterial form. Anything related to Tarish sorcery and powers is discarded as popular superstition. The rarity and difficulty to study these powers probably explain such a stance from the Magientists. For the faithful of the Temple, the Morcail are the very illustration of the risk of dealing with the spirits of nature. As for warlocks, their powers are taken with relative seriousness, and are said to be the direct manifestation of demons, trying to spread out their influence throughout the world by offering powers beyond themselves to men foolish enough to accept...



Chapter 5 Bestiary

This bestiary provides characteristics for several commonplace animals of the peninsula of Tri-Kazel, and offers a complete description of much stranger creatures.



Using the Bestiary

⌘ Encounters that serve the story

The Leaders are the only ones to determine if a significant encounter must take place, according to where they are taking the story, the Characters' health condition, the progression of the scenario, and the available gaming time. As much as possible, combats should remain special moments, since making them too frequent can quickly render them bland and repetitive. This is why every Leader should try to think about the way each such encounter can serve the story being told.

⌘ Choosing the right dose of supernatural elements

This bestiary presents a few supernatural creatures. To preserve the horrific aspect of an encounter with such beings, Leaders are advised to limit their appearances. Most of the time, they can confront the PCs with normal animals, and keep the emergence of supernatural and horrific elements for the key-moments of their stories. If the PCs are investigating the sewers of a great city and the Leader directly uses the Cnaighs, it might take out all the spice of such an encounter, and it will be difficult to surprise the Players with a new confrontation against these creatures. However, if the pressure rises steadily and such an encounter is reserved for a strong dramatic scene, it is more likely to create a moment the PCs will remember for a long time rather than yet another random encounter at the turn of a foul-smelling corridor. Conversely, a thrilling fight on the occasion of a simple trip between two places can give a second wind to a long investigation. In each case, the Leader must determine the pertinence of an encounter and its interest for the scenario.

⌘ Toy with the Players' expectations

Shadows of Esteren Players will obviously suspect the existence of supernatural things, and a Leader can play with this by making them believe that a monstrous creature is after them, growling horribly... when it will only be a regular animal, albeit potentially under the effects of a rage.

⌘ Sustain the atmosphere

There are many signs of the presence of animals or strange creatures around: rustlings, shouts, movements, tracks, smells, corpses, shadows, faraway figures... It can only be good for Leaders to keep the atmosphere of their sessions alive with many background elements of this kind, even if it occasionally requires letting the PCs go off-track, because their curiosity has been piqued, or simply because they feel like eating stew for supper. Such opportunities can also take rash PCs into unplanned difficult situations, or allow the Leader to introduce new situations, places to explore, intriguing signs or omens, etc.

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Characteristics

⌘ Main Characteristics

The protagonists are defined by a set of characteristics that can be directly used in combat: Attack (Atk), Damage (Dmg), Defense (Def), Protection (Prot), Speed (Spd), Potential (Pot), Health points (Health), and Stamina (Sta). There are also three skills: Perception (Per), Stealth, and Feats. These represent their physical abilities in various domains which are likely to come up during play. Of course, such skills have limited applications, which vary according to the animal or creature. Leaders are advised to exercise common sense: Feats will not make it possible for a wolf to climb a wall, and the Feats rating of a cat will be about its agility rather than its strength, and the other way round for a bear.

⌘ Health

The Health of an animal or Feond first indicates its maximum score, followed by those which determine when the Okay, Bad, and Critical conditions are reached. When a creature loses all of its Health points, it is considered to be in Agony. Nevertheless, some protagonists of a very small size do not have enough Health points to make it useful to scrupulously follow the evolution of their condition. Thus, only the maximum Health rating is provided.



Animals of Tri-Kazel

The animal templates detailed here are for the most part provided in order to constitute an easily accessible and modifiable database for the Leaders. Thus, the characteristics of a wolf can also realistically be used to simulate a wild dog, for example... Such similarities only concern the physical abilities of the animals presented, since behaviors from one species to another can differ vastly.

The other books of the Shadows of Esteren series, mainly the Book of Secrets, will progressively introduce and develop new species, variants, and creatures which will diverge more clearly from these archetypical examples.

	Atk	Dmg	Def	Prot	Spd	Pot	Health	Sta	Per	Stealth	Feats.	Special Abilities
Bear	12	3	10	2	4	3	30/20/10/5	14	8	4	12	Rage
Caernide	8	2	12	0	9	1	25/15/10/5	12	9	6	10	/
Calyre	7	1	10	0	7	1	15/10/5/3	11	8	6	6	/
Cat	6	1	14	0	9	2	5	8	10	12	10	/
Crow	6 ¹	1	12	0	9	1	5	8	13	10	8	Swarm, Blinding
Horse	7	2	7	0	9	2	25/15/10/5	14	8	2	10	/
Horse - steed	10	2	10	0	8	3	25/15/10/5	16	8	2	12	/
Rat	4	1	12	0	7	1	5	10	11	11	7	Disease
Snake	10 ²	1	12	0	8	1	5	8	8	12	4	Venom
Spider	8 ³	1	10	0	8	2	2	5	8	10	5	Venom
Wolf	10	2	10	0	8	2	15/10/5/3	9	10	8	8	/

¹ If it does not attack as part of a Swarm (see below), the attack of a single crow will only deal one Damage point, no matter what the Protection of the opponent and the crow's success margin are.

² A snake only deals one Damage point when it bites, no matter what the Protection of the opponent and the snake's success margin are. However, its bite is also venomous.

³ A spider only deals one Damage point when it bites, no matter what the Protection of the opponent and the spider's success margin are. However, its bite is also venomous.

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⌘ Special Abilities

Some animals have Special Abilities, such as the rat's infectious bite, or the spider's venom. In such cases, this is indicated in the chart above and explained below:

Rage (Bear)

A bear can become enraged if its offspring or territory is threatened. If such a context presents itself, the Leader rolls 1D10. A result above 3 indicates that the bear becomes enraged until the end of the fight. It will fight to death, ignore pain, will automatically be in Offensive attitude, and will get a +2 bonus to Attack.

Swarm (Crow)

If there are ten or more of them, crows can attack as a swarm. The Leader then makes only one Attack roll for the whole swarm. The Attack rating increases to 10, and the swarm deals Damage normally, according to its success margin. Each additional 5 crows in a Swarm grant a +1 bonus to Damage (+1 for 15 crows, +2 for 20 crows, etc.) A swarm can attack several close-by targets (within a few yards at most) in a single Round.

Blinding (Crow)

On a critical success (natural 10 twice), in addition to the standard effects (5 more Damage points), a crow will gouge one of its opponent's eyes. This ability does not apply to Swarms of crows.

Disease (Rat)

Victims bitten by a rat must succeed in a Luck roll (4 or more) or they will have the misfortune of having been attacked by a disease-carrying animal. Most often, it will be a canker of Mild Virulence and Fast Incubation (3D10 days), dealing 2 daily Disease points for a duration of 5 days if a Complicated (14) Stamina roll is failed. The Leader can also pick another disease according to the context, and determine its Virulence and Incubation time (see Universe, p.241 and 242).

Venom (Snake and Spider)

There are many venomous species. Such venom generally has a Short (1D10 hours) Incubation time, but can be much faster and have immediate effects, at the Leader's discretion.

Virulence can go from Weak to Deadly (see Universe, p.240).

A bite only deals one Damage point, no matter what the Protection and success margin are, but requires an immediate Stamina roll to resist the effects of the poison.

Loch Snìomh

The sea wyrm

⊗ Attack: 14
⊗ Damage: 5
⊗ Defense: 8
⊗ Protection: 2

⊗ Speed: 8
⊗ Potential: 3
⊗ Stamina: 14
⊗ Health: 80/60/40/20

⊗ Perception: 14
⊗ Stealth: 10
⊗ Feats: 14



Swallow whole: On a natural 10 on an attack, the sea wyrm swallows its opponent up (must be of human size or smaller). Only a Difficult (17) Feats roll can avoid being devoured by the body of the creature. Each Round spent stuck in the body of the Loch Snìomh deals 1D10 Damage until death comes.

Silent and powerful, the sea wyrm is a water predator feared by all of Tri-Kazel's fishermen. The ancients, who also feared it, named it Loch Snìomh. It is not a Feond, but a species specific to the seas surrounding the peninsula; an omnivorous hunter that aggressively defends its territory. An adult is about thirty feet long, with a snake-like body protected by elastic membranes and ending with powerful jaws. The outside of the wyrm's head is covered with thick chitinous plates which make it able to pierce through the hulls of ships by charging against them like a ram. The sea wyrm is capable of swallowing an entire man, who will then be crushed by its inner walls and digested. Coming face to face with such a creature requires a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll, or possibly a harder one according to the context. The oldest and largest specimens can grow up to 100 feet (their scores in Attack, Damage, Defense, and Feats are increased by 4, and their Health goes from 80 to 120 points).

The sea wyrm is partly amphibious, but it mainly uses this feature for reproduction and, even more rarely, for hunting. This oviparous creature slithers out from the water to lay up about 100 eggs and then buries them under the humid sand. It will keep watch until the eggs hatch, protecting them against predators. Witnessing the birth of a litter of Loch Snìomh is a horrible and fascinating moment at the same time, for the beast shows unsuspected maternal attention considering its monstrous morphology.

Sometimes the sea wyrm chases its prey on dry land, but it will seldom choose to do so because its abilities are lowered (-4 to Attack, Defense, Speed, and Perception; -8 to Stealth). Magientists are greatly interested in Loch Snìomh eggs and pay high sums for them since they are rich in crude Flux. Each egg is considered as being of excellent quality, and can produce one dose of organic crude Flux (see Universe, p.262-263). One egg can be traded at 5 ember Daols.

The innkeeper was intently listening to the story of the Varigal, but remained unconvinced. If he went and believed everything he heard, he would never sleep at night.

"There have been high tides in the South these last days. When I reached the surroundings of the village of Bhlaosc, I saw them. I was at the top of a dune, and from up there, the bug-like things formed a web of silvery threads on the sand. There were dozens of them stranded on the beach, and the waves kept casting off new ones. Some looked like they were slowly creeping toward the village. I was rather far away, so I cannot be sure, but it looked like the bay was crawling alive with sea wyrms."

"Your eyes must have deceived you, Varigal!" The innkeeper guffawed mockingly, although some uneasiness could be perceived in his voice.

"They may have, friend. But if I were you, I'd advise my clients not to take the road to Bhlaosc."

Cnaigh The Gnawer

⊕ Attack: 6
⊕ Damage: 1
⊕ Defense: 10
⊕ Protection: 0

⊕ Speed: 7
⊕ Potential: 2
⊕ Stamina: 10
⊕ Health: 5

⊕ Perception: 12
⊕ Stealth: 11
⊕ Feats: 7



Infectious bite: Cnaighs can carry the canker disease (see Universe, p.242), but it remains rare. Victims of a bite must still get 4 or more on a Luck roll. If they do not, they have been bitten by a disease-bearing Cnaigh. Most of the time, it will be a canker of Mild (14) Virulence, but it is sometimes more deadly.

The Feond nature of the Cnaighs is obvious at first sight: these creatures that loosely look like very big rats have impressive dentition, and their grayish fur is speckled with scaly patches. They have large eyes with yellowish or milky tones. Cnaighs gather in packs that can number up to 100 individuals, and they favor dark, damp places. However, as opposed to rats, these creatures are definitively carnivorous and aggressive, and show no fear toward man or hostile animals much bigger than they are. The stench of the swamps and sewers in which the Cnaighs nest is mingled with a telltale smell of carrion and rot.

Gnawers may also settle in damp caverns or near pools of stagnant water.

Although they are not a prolific species, the Gnawers are relatively well-known Feondas. Rat hunters and sewage workers are among those who are the most likely to meet some, but it also happens that they go on nocturnal raids to assault cattle, a lone passerby, and even sometimes a watch patrol. Few people have actually had an opportunity to see these things, but in large cities, there are many stories and exaggerations about them. Actually, it is unlikely even for an important city to be inhabited by more than two or three packs, and most agglomerations are completely devoid of them. In comparison with rats and other urban vermin, Cnaighs are rather rare, which makes rumors about them all the more unsettling.

They can be very crafty and fearless, able to find ways to infiltrate where they wish with supernatural instinct. They fear fire and avoid light, unless they are starving or facing lone or wounded prey. They have proven able to gnaw through a cellar's trapdoor to reach the surface, and several testimonies seemingly indicate that they are equally capable of digging through wood, plaster, and even some types of rocks in order to weaken the foundations of a house. On several occasions, they have attacked isolated farms, stables, and even Inguards. Some rat packs manage to appropriate the Gnawers' excavations for their own use, but if the Feondas have not moved away, they will quickly wreak havoc on the intruders and kill them to the very last. It is difficult to raise domestic animals so that they do not shy away from a pack of Cnaighs, which makes the mission of rat hunters even more complicated, since they often use ferrets or dogs.

The reputation of the Cnaighs and their ferocity are such that facing a pack of these creatures requires a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll.

A few isolated Gnawers do not make up for a comparable threat, and no Mental Resistance roll is necessary in such a case.

Snàgan The Mudcrawler

⊗ Attack: 12	⊗ Speed: 5	⊗ Perception: 14
⊗ Damage: 3	⊗ Potential: 4	⊗ Stealth: 8
⊗ Defense: 10	⊗ Stamina: 14	⊗ Feats: 11
⊗ Protection: 1	⊗ Health: 40/30/20/10	



Toxic cloud: Requires a Complicated (14) Stamina roll or inflicts a -3 penalty on every physical action for 1D10 Rounds.

If contact is made with the cloud when underwater, the toxin is partly diluted, and the Stamina rolls lowers to a Standard (11) one.



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This variety of Feond is rather uncommon, but more and more of them are spotted in the Ahman Glas (the gray bogs). Most of them live in swamps, muddy ponds, or caverns dug by subterranean waters. Like all Feondas, they show unmitigated hostility toward humans, and some Mudcrawlers sometimes manage to swim up a village's well, then go out at night and wreak havoc. Others hide in the depths of ponds or swamps and ambush the unwary. Snàgans are able to see at night, and are absolutely not afraid of fire. Amphibious beings, they can live outside as well as under water. They are unmistakably carnivorous. Mudcrawlers generally live by themselves or in small groups that do not go beyond four or five members.

The morphology of a Mudcrawler is shocking, seemingly an unnatural combination of several animals. Physically, the Snàgan is part snake and eel, with a length of six feet on average. Two ophidian yellowish eyes are an addition to the disturbing aspect of the creature, which also occasionally emits hissing noises sounding like inarticulate whispers. It smells of silt and dead fish, but those who have already had to deal with a Mudcrawler can sometimes make out an underlying, oil-like scent, which comes from the secretions of the creature. Seeing a Mudcrawler for the first time requires a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.

A Mudcrawler moves by creeping forward, and has two short fins that help it change direction in water. The belly surface of its body has a series of muscles that, through coordinated action, have an effect similar to a snail's sucker. With them, the Mudcrawler can swim in water, crawl on the ground with ease, and even climb a vertical wall with significant effort. However, Mudcrawlers are not very fast, and they are easy to run away from. Their gray-brown epidermis is as thick as leather, and offers comparable protection.

The creature has several means of attacking its prey. The short teeth in its maw may not seem very dangerous, but the jaws of a Mudcrawler can display frightening strength, the victim being simultaneously perforated and crushed by the Feond's bite. Its long tail is also able to strike at knee height, and its strength is impressive. Finally, on its back and flanks, the Mudcrawler has three orifices that usually secrete a bilious, oily liquid, allowing it to slide on the ground more easily. This fluid is also useful when it hunts in water, since it is toxic and surrounds it with a sort of cloud stunning small-sized preys (fish, freshwater crustaceans, water snakes...) The creature can also inflate its venom sacs and spread a cloud of toxic droplets around itself. This burst only affects those within a one-yard radius of the beast, but can slow their reflexes down significantly. However, by using such an attack, the Mudcrawler empties its sacs entirely, which take several hours to refill.



Mealtag

The vampire bat

⌘ Attack: 6
⌘ Damage: 1
⌘ Defense: 12
⌘ Protection: 0

⌘ Speed: 8
⌘ Potential: 2
⌘ Stamina: 10
⌘ Health: 10

⌘ Perception: 10
⌘ Stealth: 8
⌘ Feats: 6



Bloodsucking: On a natural 10 for an Attack, a vampire bat clings to its victim and starts sucking its blood. During the following Rounds, it inflicts the same amount of Damage points as on the initial Attack, without having to roll again. Damage is inflicted as long as the Mealtag is alive, or until someone (who can be the victim) tears it away with a Difficult (17) Feats roll. Tearing it away deals the same Damage to the victim as the initial Attack.

At first sight, Mealtags look like large bats. However, their glowing red-hued eyes betray their Feond nature. These creatures are mentioned in Demorthèn tales along with Fasgadairs, vampiric beasts from the Aergewin.

Mealtags primarily attack humans, feeding on their blood, but they can also target animals if they get hungry enough. They attack as a group, trying to overwhelm their victim, which will quickly be drained to death (see the “Bloodsucking” special attack).

These Feondas are most often active at night, and fear fire, which is the only way to efficiently protect oneself from a swarm. Mealtags like to settle in ruins or derelict buildings, which they greatly favor over hot and damp caverns, as opposed to their natural versions. Large cities are not spared from the presence of vampire bats; on the contrary, an abandoned steeple, a ruined building, sewers, or a disused cellar can quickly become their habitat.

Mealtags are an aggressive species, and it frequently happens that members of a same swarm fight against one another. These Feondas do not hesitate to drive out other animals, such as rats or common bats, to occupy their territory. However, if there are Cnaighs or any other Feondas about, the Mealtags will not fight them, as if they could feel their similar nature. Mealtags are sly; some could even say that they are gifted with a true form of intelligence devoted to the destruction of mankind. They will not hesitate to move from their territory if they feel threatened, will try to kill their prey stealthily under cover of darkness, and will try to neutralize those who want to use fire against them.

Yes, I have heard about this mask-bearing creature that roams around Osta-Baille's slums. They call it “the ghoul”, and it is said it feeds from the flesh and blood of humans. Some swear it is a Drèin; some others have described it to me as a woman with enthralling charms, wearing a funeral mask lined with Oghamic symbols. They say she lives surrounded by a pack of Mealtags in one of the many abandoned buildings of this district. Take care my friend, for the lords of Osta-Baille do not care about poor people disappearing in the depths of this city, and no one will come to your aid...



Nimh Cuir

The poison-plant

⊗ Attack: Variable (between 6 and 12)	⊗ Defense: Variable (between 5 and 10)	⊗ Stamina: 10
⊗ Damage: 1 (a successful attack only deals one Damage point, no matter what the margin is)	⊗ Protection: Variable (between 0 and 5)	⊗ Health: Variable (between 10 and 30)
	⊗ Speed: Variable (between 1 and 10)	⊗ Perception: 10
	⊗ Potential: 2	⊗ Stealth: 12
		⊗ Feats: Variable (between 0 and 10)



Poison: The Virulence of the toxin produced by the poison-plants varies from one species to another, as does the Incubation time until the appearance of the first symptoms. Most Nimhs Cuirs produce poisons of Mild Virulence, which take effect within seconds. Failing a Complicated (14) Stamina roll immediately inflicts 10 Poison points.



Hallucinogenic: Some varieties of poison-plants also produce pollen with hallucinogenic properties. Exposure to such a poison requires a successful Mental Resistance roll (with a variable Difficulty Threshold according to how powerful the toxic pollen is) to avoid suffering Trauma points from horrific visions. The hallucination will last as long as the victims remain in the pollen's area of action, or 1D10 minutes if they move away. Proximity with hallucinating persons can be very dangerous, since they will perceive the people around them as horrible creatures that they will not hesitate to attack. Critical failure on the Mental Resistance roll induces murderous madness: the victims will savagely attack any person in their weapons' reach for 1D10 minutes. If there is no one around, they will end up hurting themselves in their fight against imaginary creatures, and will likely die.

The name “poison-plant” is the direct translation of “Nimh Cuir”, from the name the Demorthèn gave to these plants in times past. Animated ideological debates stir the Demorthèn circles about the true nature of these plants: some of them consider that they are dangerous but normal plants, whereas others are convinced they are the expression of the wrath of upset spirits of nature that wish to get revenge against man.

The plants presented here are definitely Feondas, and their monstrous nature shows through two peculiarities: their propensity for violently hurting mankind, and the particular form of intelligence which they seem to be gifted with. There are many different types of Nimhs Cuirs, and their Feond nature is variably easy to ascertain at first sight. Some look like normal plants, albeit with strange properties (roses exhaling a cloud of toxic pollen at will, or lilies wreathed with thorns), others have a strange and entirely unique morphology.

Nimhs Cuirs never attack animals: no pollen will be puffed, nor will the venom of the thorns be injected. However, humans will never be spared, and Nimhs Cuirs will always use their weapons. Most often, Nimhs Cuirs are small-sized plants, but they can be of a much greater scale: a wall of vines, a field of flowers, etc. Attack methods are varied (pollen, thorns), and the most dangerous species even exhale an infectious perfume. Other types of traps are also used: the plants will be as beautiful as possible to attract sight, a pleasant scent will be released to lower the defenses of the victim-to-be, etc. There are Nimhs Cuirs that are capable of moving, and although they only manage to do so very slowly (not more than a few yards per hour for the great majority), it is enough to try to deliberately kill humans. Thus, one of these Feondas may move several yards under cover of darkness, to surround or cover nearby sleeping humans. Most fortunately, this last category of Nimhs Cuirs is the rarest.

Magientist Experiments

Some plants, mistaken for Nimhs Cuirs, are actually the consequence of massive Flux pollution, or the offspring of failed Magientist experiments. The poisonous algae of the “Shipwreck” canvas are an example. These toxic plants can be told apart from Feondas because of their absence of will to harm human beings exclusively: they attack anything that moves. They secrete various poisons, and they can also have very different aspects. Mutated species can be recognized at first glance, vaguely reminiscent of the original plant but being of enormous size and strange appearance.



Frendialenn

The Beast of Frendian

⌘ Attack: 15

⌘ Damage: 3 (claws)

⌘ Defense: 14

⌘ Protection: 2

⌘ Speed: 10

⌘ Potential: 2

⌘ Stamina: 10

⌘ Health: 35/25/15/5

⌘ Perception: 12

⌘ Stealth: 14

⌘ Feats: 14



Puppeteer: The gaze of a Frendialenn is a psychic poison that contaminates its victims' minds and creates a mental link with them. Fighting the Frendialenn at close quarters is very dangerous, since odds are that the fighter will lock eyes with it long enough for the psychic venom to take effect (50% chance each round), at which point a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll is required. If successful, the Character is permanently immune to the power of this particular Frendialenn. On a failure, the unfortunate soul suffers three Trauma points (including a Permanent one), and becomes a thrall of the creature, which can take control of its prey once they fall asleep. The victims never remember the actions they perform during their sleep (most often ruthless murders). A Frendialenn can only have one victim under its command at a given time. The only way to put an end to the possession is to kill the creature or its victim. It is possible to use a special Magientist medicine called Hypnos, which induces very heavy sleep and temporarily severs the psychic link with the creature. Note that the doses must be precise (see Book 1, p.280) and that this substance can cause addiction (see Book 1, "Tonic," p.244).

Aoda's Thoughts

They call it Frendialenn. They think it is a Feond. If it was with them, in their heads, they would know that it has no name, that it is everything and everyone at the same time, that it is much more than a mere monster. What it makes me do, I know not. But when I wake up covered with the blood of those who were unfortunate enough to cross my path, I then understand, and I hate myself as much as I loathe it. And yet I revere it. It grants me such strength, and it protects me while it dominates me. It is so close, always in my thoughts. I feel it growing deep in my mind, I feel it invading me, then withdrawing, leaving me alone once more. In spite of how shameful it is, I cannot help but savor this peerless sensation, this abandonment of myself to this being like no other, so superior to the wretched little thing I was before I met it...

Those who saw this unique creature for the first time in the wooded area close to Frendian called it Frendialenn; "Frendian's Bane" in the tongue of the ancients. According to testimonies, similar beasts dwell in other regions where they bear various names, for example Tàmh Mallaichte, which means "cursed sleep".

A rare sight, this monster only lets its victims get away in order to sneak close to them a moment later and instill its poison before hiding away once more. Witnesses are few, but they agree on some very distinctive features. The first element of note is one that seems to haunt the memory of those who managed to escape the Beast: its three amber eyes, glowing malevolently. Those who were unfortunate enough to see the creature up close speak of a humanoid creature, taller than a well-built man, with thick, dark skin and a tail like that of a lizard.

In close combat, a Frendialenn can be a deadly foe, but its hypnotic gaze is considerably more fearsome, since it can turn its opponents against their own. Once it has contaminated someone's mind, it waits until the victim sleeps to seep in like a poison, deftly take control, and

cause bouts of bloody madness, leaving no memory of such atrocities. At most, the thralls will remember an awful nightmare during which they felt awake and paralyzed while clearly feeling the very near presence of an intruder whispering threats of an imminent death. Unable to move, they will vaguely see a dark shape crushing their chest, suffocating them until they wake up with a start, breathless and sweating.

Progressively, the psychic link gets stronger until the victims become aware of the existence of the Frendialenn and come to meet it. This phase occurs after 1D10 weeks and strengthens the monster's hold on its prey.

The thralls never speak of this relation, nor of the Frendialenn's existence, no matter what happens.

Only a hypnosis session can make them confess: the victims will then describe their morbid fascination for their master and may reveal the location of its lair. However, such hypnosis is very dangerous, since it can allow the Frendialenn to suddenly take control of the victim (Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll). Rarely, and according to unfathomable criteria, the Frendialenn may choose its victim—whether man or woman—to bear its spawn: the "pregnancy" lasts a year and leads to a blasphemous birth resulting in the death of the bearer.

Additional information and an illustration of the Frendialenn can be found on page 39.

Madarcht

⊗ Attack: 10
 ⊗ Damage: Absorption (see below)
 ⊗ Defense: 7
 ⊗ Protection: 0

⊗ Speed: 4
 ⊗ Potential: 1
 ⊗ Stamina: 15
 ⊗ Health: 100/75/50/25

⊗ Perception: 12
 ⊗ Stealth: 8
 ⊗ Feats: 5



Absorption: On a successful attack, Madarcht is able to engulf its target. Once it has absorbed the victim in its membrane, it attaches suckers through which it sucks out the entrapped being's fluids, transferring them to its own arteries at an astounding speed. Witnessing such an attack causes a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. With its size, it can devour two human-sized victims at the same time. The Round on which it takes hold inflicts no Damage, but the victims then suffer 2 Damage points each Round, with the Feond regenerating an amount of Health points equal to the inflicted Damage. Normal human beings will therefore have all of their blood sucked out in one minute. The absorbed person has no way of getting out of Madarcht's membrane short of a Heroic (30) Feats roll. An ally can try to cut the membrane from outside to pull the victim away, which requires inflicting 20 Damage points to Madarcht, with the risk of the engulfed person being injured as well, suffering half the Damage inflicted to Madarcht on a Luck roll of 1 or 2.



Spores: Once per day, Madarcht can make strange, fungus-like structures sprout on the surface of its outer membrane. After three Rounds, they burst open, expelling spores that, once inhaled, can transform a victim into a Minion. To avoid being contaminated, a Standard (11) Stamina roll is required, which becomes Complicated (14) if the being is close to Madarcht (i.e. less than 30 feet away).

A network of grottoes leads to a cavity at the foot of a great and majestic millennial tree. A natural well lets light flow into an environment both disconcerting and fascinating. The walls are made of moss-covered rocks, while intertwined roots form a roof. An awesome creature lives in this subterranean cavity, sleeping in a small lake of fresh water. Both beautiful and hellish, it is lit by fireflies, phosphorescent mushrooms, and delicate spiderwebs glowing and dancing with the movements of their entrapped prey.

Great Madarcht, worshiped by the Pure of Higher Mùdan, is a 12-foot-tall, rather sedentary Feond whose behavior is similar to that of a life form few people are familiar with: slime molds—collective amoebas—barely describable entities that suck the blood and fluids of their victims. These beings have an aspect reminiscent of mushrooms or lichens, but like animals, they are able to move and hunt. Usually, these wonders of nature are only a few inches big and pose no threat to mankind. Their inconspicuousness, their atypical nature, and Madarcht's out-of-proportion size explain why it is difficult to conceive the possibility of such a being. In that regard, seeing Madarcht for the first time requires a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. A Difficult (17) Erudition or Science roll might provide some information about this creature, mainly leading to the deduction that the best way to destroy it would be to burn it. However, considering how damp its lair is, it would take oil or a similar combustible to act efficiently (1D10 Damage each Round per fire source). In case of danger, or after it has absorbed two victims, Madarcht retreats to its pond (see the rules about underwater combat in the “Shipwreck” canvas, p.89).

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A Strange Manifestation

This option will give a fight against Madarcht a supernatural aspect. Its purpose is to bring the PCs to ask themselves questions, confront rumors, take note of abnormal phenomena, etc.

As the fight against Madarcht is raging, C'maoghs may come out of the walls, offering an enchanting sight, mute and dancing, witnesses to what is happening in the damp cavern. Why are there so many of them? Is this cave a Cinthareïd, a sacred place for Demorthèn? Is this an explanation for the exceptional quality of the Flux a curious Magientist may draw out? Why are the C'maoghs present when it is generally agreed that they shy away from Feondas, as it is the case in Candlewood? Could it be that, in spite of all appearances, Madarcht is really a great, monstrous spirit?

Minion of Madarcht



⊕ **Attack:** +2

⊕ **Speed:** +2

⊕ **Stamina:** +2

⊕ **Feats:** +2

⊕ **Health:** +5

Sometimes, in the spirits' forest guarded by the Pure of Higher Mùdan, there floats by a strange golden cloud. It is formed of the rising spores expelled by Madarcht, and borne by the softest gust of wind. Once spread, they contaminate flora and fauna, with effects that can lead to the generation of a Minion when the concentration of spores is sufficient.

These seeds stick to the flesh and start growing on the surface, like mushrooms. However, beneath the skin, they draw energy from the host's blood like parasites. They are hard to totally remove since the protrusions they develop first root into the veins, then into the nervous system. The infestation spreads progressively, the body struggling against the parasite in a contest of Stamina. It will completely enthrall the victim after three weeks of development (one month if a Complicated (14) Stamina roll is made, two months with a Difficult (17) roll). Until this process is complete, it is possible to use several types of remedies to neutralize the germs and purge the body: a Cure Ogham or a Miraculous Healing Miracle at the second Circle/Stanza; or a special Magientist Tonic.

If no cure is provided before the crucial moment, the infestation is permanent, barring the use of a Purification Miracle at the fourth Stanza. The animal or human then becomes a Minion of Madarcht. From this moment on, it feels an urge to stay in the surroundings of its creator's lair and to defend it against intruders. Should Madarcht be destroyed, the Minion would become a sort of predator, showing a very destructive, Feond-like behavior.

In combat, the Minion's behavior is very violent and brutal, but the means used are normal: wolves circle and tear apart, while humans wield swords, bows, etc. The constitution, physical strength, and fortitude of these beings are much higher, as reflected by the bonuses detailed above. These modifiers apply after the first week of infestation.

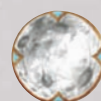
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Controlling and Curing

If they use this option, the Leaders will make merely using a Tonic insufficient to neutralize an infection by Madarcht for good. They may also make the Demorthèn and Elect's powers ineffective, or considerably raise the level of the required Circle or Stanza.

In a way, the parasite can be compared to Magientist Mékônes since it grants permanent bonuses. Moreover, under low-angled light, it is possible to see abnormally accentuated veins. In exchange, the host has to feed more, lest he suffers from terrible hunger or exhaustion. Magientists with medical and pharmacological knowledge such as Anaïs Cruyssec in the "A Life Choice" scenario could find a way to slow down and even stabilize the progression of the parasite before the infestation becomes permanent. The characteristics of the remedy will be similar to a Magientist Tonic (Book 1, p.244). Their whole lives, such beings will enjoy considerable benefits, but will be under the constant threat of insidiously changing into monsters should they run out of their remedy. Magientist researchers (in Baldh-Ruoch or the Ashen Yard, for example) might cure or help a prospective Minion, but they will also wonder whether it could be possible to stimulate the parasite while still controlling it, in order to draw out even more extraordinary abilities...



Neventer, Demorthèn of Higher Mùdan, owns a very rare Ogham called "Madarcht's Peace", which placates Madarcht as well as its Minions. Theoretically, it could therefore be possible for a Demorthèn in friendly terms with a Minion to regularly use the Sigil Rann to allow the infested to lead an almost normal life. Such a treatment, combined with adequate Tonics, might completely neutralize the negative effects of the contamination while keeping the advantages it grants... However, this solution would imply an alliance between a Demorthèn and a Magientist to study a phenomenon neither of them would understand!



Lady Fir Patience

⌘ **Attack:** 10 (Ranged: 15)
 ⌘ **Damage:** 1 (claw)
 or 2 (bone arrow)
 ⌘ **Defense:** 10

⌘ **Protection:** 2
 ⌘ **Speed:** 12
 ⌘ **Potential:** 2
 ⌘ **Stamina:** 15

⌘ **Health:** 60/30/15/8
 ⌘ **Perception:** 15
 ⌘ **Stealth:** 12
 ⌘ **Feats:** 8



Bone arrow: Fir Patience can replace a standard attack with the use of a projectile extracted from her own body. She sticks a hand into her flesh, which opens effortlessly, and draws out a sort of sharp arrow made of a substance between wood and bone. She can throw it as far as a dozen yards with a simple flick.

The Drèin of the Torn Woods, on the Island of Calvary, is called “Fir Patience” and is reminiscent of a melancholic lady, a macabre beauty lost in a madness she soothes with long walks amidst a tormented but pristine nature. The Lady watches over her domain and seems curiously attached to the ancient stones. It may be true she once was a Morcail... or maybe she grieves over something? Her pain might be connected to the heart of the forest where it is said a Cinthareid stands, a place where C'maoghs gather. However, very few explorers have made it that far and come back to tell about it, and tall tales are more common than authentic testimonies.



Vegetal propagation: With a mere stroke, the Lady of the Torn Woods is able to trigger the lush growth of wild grass, stringy lichen, mushrooms, or strands similar to the silk of an insect's cocoon. She can then use them to hide (Stealth bonus ranging from +2 to +5 according to the area), or to conceal something. She can also catch an opponent in these tangles (see Book 1 – Universe, p.251, “Physical Resistance” for the effects of immobilization). A Difficult (17) Stamina or Feats roll is then necessary to free oneself.

It seems that she is rather well-disposed toward children, although her affection sometimes shows in strange ways, drawing them inside the forest and letting them die of hunger or cold, then delicately leaving their bodies to rest on a bed of moss or down... However, should any other people tread on her territory, she might strike them down with her grim arrows.

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Should someone manage to defeat Lady Fir Patience, her wood-like body would crumble, and it would be possible to find two Oghamic stones in her remains: Camouflage and Stone Arrow. Beware, because these Ogham are cursed and bear the taint of Morcail (see the section about Morcail on p.178).

I am hurrying to write down this story while what I have been told of it remains relatively clear in my mind. My source is an occultist colleague who is working in Gwidre under the pretense of being a simple scholar and the private secretary of an important figure. This gave him the opportunity to go with his master to the Island of Calvary, and there, he was able to visit the outskirts of the Torn Woods. It is said they are protected by a sort of guardian that assails any adult entering her territory, yet spares children. My friend managed to meet a boy, apparently quick of wits, who claimed to have met the creature. According to him, she would be called “Fir Patience”. Actually, I presume that the child invented the name, considering that the lady, if such a name can be applied to that thing, does not speak. The description he made of her face leads me to believe that it is a Drèin we are dealing with.

I cannot help but wonder: how is it possible that a Feond tolerates a human presence? Isn't it in the nature of these creatures to systematically want to kill and destroy? Is our approach of the problem simplistic, focusing on the most exceptional and vile aspects of their manifestations?

A local tale has it that a Morcail named Uhenbrit was defeated by legendary Demorthèn Ruel a very long time ago. Usually, we know nothing of the origins of the Feondas we face. However, in this case, I think that Morcail Uhenbrit and Drèin Fir Patience are one and the same entity—I dare not say “person”. The point is that according to the legend, the Morcail had many children and attempted to replace their blood with sap, so that they would become perfect according to her twisted version of the world. Details aside, she was a mother... And my conjecture is that this aspect, which was so important for her, survived even through her transformation. This theory explains her relative benevolence toward children, but can similar hypotheses be constructed from other tales about the Torn Woods? Is Demorthèn Ruel truly responsible for her fate? Should we conclude that Drèins are beings who came back from the dead through Demorthèn rituals as a form of “damnation” to punish them for their blasphemous crimes?

From the diary of Athelsan Oxcendre, Occultist



Siren of the Tealderoth

⊕ Attack: 10
 ⊕ Damage: 1
 ⊕ Defense: 10
 ⊕ Protection: 0

⊕ Speed: 10
 ⊕ Potential: 2
 ⊕ Stamina: 11
 ⊕ Perception: 12

⊕ Stealth: 9
 ⊕ Feats: 12
 ⊕ Health: 30/20/10/5



Elend - Leçons de Ténèbres - 05 - Infernal Beauty

A perfect track to illustrate a horrific encounter with a Siren.



Bewitchment: Coming within 30 feet of a Siren is extremely dangerous. Its gaze can bewitch the target on a failure of a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. A success immunizes the target against this particular Siren. A failure means that the target is bewitched, ready to fall within the embrace of the creature, which will then take its prey away to the depths to devour him or her. Even away from it, the victim will keep being haunted by vivid dreams, as if under the spell of a powerful feeling of love. The Character suffers the effects of a Nightmare (see Book 1 Universe, p.271), and will attempt to rejoin the creature at the first opportunity.

Requiem: The song of the siren is a strange melody, inhuman but capable of hypnotizing those who hear it and of making them fall in a sort of hallucinated daze. The effects of a Siren's Requiem are similar to a Stupor (see Book 1 Universe, p.271): the victim remains frozen for 1D10 minutes and will only wake up from a sharp blow, a loud sound, or cold water—which will probably correspond to the moment when the Siren dives into the river's waters with its victim! This effect can only be resisted with a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.

The Sirens of the Tealderoth are extremely dangerous Feondas, but fortunately, there are few of them. Their lairs are mainly located close to the Tealderoth's estuary, where the currents of the Sea of Shrouds can be felt. Varigals commonly advise travelers to quickly cross the Alliance Bridge and to absolutely not linger. Someone mad enough to seek the lair of a Siren would have to dive deep into the water and explore natural galleries. Such a daredevil would find the remains of the Feond's victims and many riches accumulated through the years: Daols (for a total value of 1D10 frost Daols), and maybe a few items (see Book 1 Universe, p.221 to 226), possibly rare and precious ones (see Book 1 Universe, p.226 and 227 for exceptional equipment). At close quarters, a Siren will try to bite its opponent, but will be quick to flee. It swims twice or thrice as fast as a normal human.

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Majestic, she stands on a rock of which only the crest rises from the river's waters. She stares at me with those ruby-hued eyes, her thin mouth curved in a thoughtful smile. Her beauty strikes me like a stone, slices my mind with lascivious visions that I attempt to drive back. Yet, I cannot help but stare at her, completely engrossed in her ample bosom, her flat, firm abdomen, but also in her long tentacles with purple-tinted tips, which look like the hair of a drowned beauty.

I gaze at the translucent sac filled with a reddish fluid attached to her skull and the top of her forehead; it seems to throb with a life of its own. Sometimes, the thin appendages that clutch it like spider legs and the long tentacles that sprout from it shiver to the rhythm of its pulsations. They seem to speak to me in a secret tongue, to invite me to join their mistress and to nest in her impressive serpentine abdomen.

"Come, come..." Her voice, similar to the brief crystalline thrums of a harp, resonates under my skull. I lay in my bed, but sleep eludes me since the day when, three weeks ago, I ventured on the banks of the Tealderoth in spite of the locals' warnings. I feel her soft tongue and languid kisses on my skin, her womanly scent mingled with heady, incense-like fragrances, her smooth lower body grazing the tips of my fingers.

"Come to me, come..." How could I ever live without the exquisite melody of her words moaned against my ear?! No, never, it must not stop. I must join her now. She will take me in her arms and hold me against her coils, where I will taste her fabulous embrace. Then, we will sink together into the river's waters and we will explore its icy depths, heedless of the dying days...

Sir,

After hearing several matching testimonies, I suspect that creatures similar to the Sirens of the Tealderoth have infested the Gray Bogs. I know that you and your men are to cross this region soon in order to go to the Lands of Dèas. Be very careful! If you should hear strange singing, be wary, and do not hesitate to strike your men to bring them back to their senses. Above all, never get close to these abominations, as they hold a powerful hypnotic power.

I hope that you will receive this letter before you leave and that these few pieces of advice will be of use to you.

Yours faithfully,

Jugel



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"Come on, climb!" She was crushing his fingers, but the pain was distant, almost insignificant in comparison with the terror that had taken hold of his whole being. His right foot slipped, and he slammed against the rock, hurting his forehead and mouth. But the worst thing, he realized, was that he was slipping: he had let go of the rescuing hand, and just below him, the vile beast was waiting.

"Travels" is a supplement for the Shadows of Esteren series intended for Game Leaders. Contents include:

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