





SHADOWS OF ESTEREN

3

THE BLACK MOON HANDBOOK

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

"Where are you?

Are you hiding from me?

Are you still looking for things that no-one else can see?"

Coil



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Shadows of Esteren is a role-playing game imagined and designed 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.

The association also organizes creative contests: "Démurge en Herbe" (for role-playing games) and "Plumes en Herbe" (for literature).

Check for news and the latest publications of the collective on <http://www.forgesonges.org>



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Foreword



he Black Moon Handbook is written by an occultist, Steren Slàine, and annotated by an alienist, Enyl Mac Bedwyr. Their points of view about the nature of the strange phenomena occurring in Tri-Kazel differ greatly. This dichotomy should provide arguments and guidelines for investigation methods for both paranormal enthusiasts and their detractors.

The resulting book is what we call a thema. The purpose of this kind of supplement is to offer game aids and scenarios along a precise subject and through a short format that generally includes cross-media content.

The Black Moon Handbook is divided into four chapters:

- **Chapter 1:** Details for the various ways a haunting may manifest itself (cold, darkness...) and how to exorcise one. This section also provides advice and material for the Game Leader to create and diversify unsettling atmospheres, from the simply strange to the spectacularly supernatural.

- **Chapter 2:** Five Tri-Kazelian figures are detailed, each with a particular connection to occult phenomena. Among them is Steren Slàine, the book's narrator, and also Amy Dust Mèirleach, a Varigal who has escaped from the Ashen Yard; Keir Mac Farquam, knight and last of a cursed line; and Yzrael Mac Baellec, a mad assassin tormented by the horror of his crimes.

- **Chapter 3:** Four canvases with associated game aids including classic horror elements, such as a haunted house, or more unusual ones, such as a possible case of mass hysteria. The Leader will be free to choose between a rational explanation or a supernatural one, the scenarios' dynamics mainly resting along these two axes. The idea is for the PCs to be faced with unexpected outcomes so that they do not develop certitudes and will remain cautious inferring that anything strange is necessarily the result of mysterious powers.

- **Chapter 4:** At the end of this book are profiles for four creatures, complete with legends and speculations. Each one can be included in at least one canvas or has a connection with one of the figures.

The Black Moon Handbook in Tri-Kazel

The Black Moon Handbook can be found throughout Tri-Kazel, so any individual wanting to know more about occultism can potentially acquire it, even if he does not live in Reizh or in a city. The book is slowly reaching remote regions through hawkers and Varigals. It is a printed booklet with a black cover, obviously manufactured in Reizh. It can fit in a pocket and was designed to be handy and easily searchable. It generally costs 5 Ad and, in game terms, its Availability is Rare.

However, although its purpose is to warn its readers of the danger of haunted places and to provide advice for safe behavior, being found in possession of this book by Sigires in Gwidre or by fundamentalist Demorthèn would certainly result in a great deal of trouble...



Optional Rule: The Black Moon Handbook as a Piece of Equipment

If this optional rule is used, the Black Moon Handbook will be made available to any Character with the Esotericism Discipline in the Occultism Domain. A Player with this Discipline will be authorized to read the Black Moon Handbook and keep it with her during gaming sessions. However, the Leader may want to wait until the Players have gone through the included canvases before handing this book to one of them. This optional rule is an opportunity to reward Players who choose to specialize in the occult. Obtaining the book can also be the purpose of a scenario in itself.

How to Use the Black Moon Handbook

The Black Moon Handbook is written from a subjective point of view. This opens the following possibilities:

- The optional rule "The Black Moon Handbook as a Piece of Equipment" makes it possible for the Leader to use this book as an item that the PCs can obtain.
- The Leader is free to decide what is true and what is false in this book. Thus, even if the Players read its contents, the Leader will have potential surprises in store for them: reality can be very different from what Steren describes in her handbook.

And Finally...

We wish you a pleasant reading and many strange, spooky, and fascinating adventures through the nights of Tri-Kazel, disentangling truth from falsehood, and battling mysterious forces!

Iris

Prologue

The Black Moon Handbook: Warning

Dear Reader,
Whoever you may be, know that through this book, you hold the essence of everything I have been able to learn about hauntings, ghosts, specters, and shades. My name is Steren Slàine, and I have had the good fortune of having access to rare sources of information, which were a valuable addition to my experience with investigations and exorcisms. Too often, occultists speak in a purposefully confusing jargon, probably because they believe it necessary in order to elude the wrath of hateful traditionalists and fundamentalists. I am taking the risk of making my discoveries and speculations known because I believe the right thing to do is to share knowledge instead of making it the privilege of a select few. History teaches us that many pieces of ancient knowledge about the Aergewin or the Continent have been lost. It is time to learn from such mistakes and to dare speak out what we believe is true. We can make our time a time of change. The Ice Era that our forefathers had to suffer through is now well and truly over, and the new era offers solid ground to build new paths.

Today, occultism is perceived as an obscure field, and even its fundamentals are known to only a few. Yet, the core concept is simple: as the human being is divided into body and mind, there are both a material and a spiritual world. When our mind is in good condition, our conscience is sound, untroubled by desire, torment, or painful passions, and we are not even aware of this part of us. We live as “whole” persons: our intents and actions are one and the same, our emotions are clear, and our thoughts remain lucid and unhindered. The human mind only becomes of concern to us when it is unsettled to the point of making daily life and relationships a challenge. The works of Ernst Zigger provide us with a precious typology. This researcher makes distinctions among four states: balance, symptom, syndrome, and finally, madness. The more one's psyche is tested, the more the individual's behavior will appear as senseless and out of proportion.

Hauntings can be understood similarly. If we refer to the analogical theory—according to which human bodies and our material world are comparable—a parallel can be drawn between our minds and the spiritual world as well. When the unseen dimension of our universe is in good condition, there is nothing for us to notice, since we only pay attention to anomalies and dangers. In the end, hauntings in the broad sense are nothing more than a sick, abnormal condition of what surrounds us. I believe it is important for you, dear Reader, to keep all of this in mind, lest you develop an exaggeratedly grim vision of everything that eludes us. With this book, you will get to take a glance at the manifestations of hauntings, the insanities, and terrors of the night and mist, a dimension as frightening as the direst deliriums of raving lunatics screaming madly from their cells.

All through this book, I have endeavored to be as objective and accurate as possible, but remember that every science is subject to improvements. New discoveries can bring new theories, and some phenomena I have no explanation for will certainly be elucidated a few years hence... possibly thanks to you, Reader, my dear friend.

Steren Slàine

Dear Friend,

Along with this letter, you will find the writings I mentioned, this nauseating mixture of folklore and mystical nonsense. Scientists like us must protect the youth of our kingdom from these kind of delirious ideas, because they are no more than insults to human intelligence. Any educated person will immediately be able to spot the faults of this pseudo-scientific logic, this ill-sorted jumble of history, religion, science, and Magience. Its author is nothing but a former maid who haphazardly read the books of her mistress's library. Additionally, I suspect her of suffering fits of hallucinations, unless she is simply an ambitious manipulator.

At any rate, we must go farther than simply making this nonsense known for what it is, so I have undertaken my own investigations and drawn my own conclusions, which are detailed in the following pages. My intention is to make an article that will fully shed light on this whole business. I hope that these revelations will make it possible to take another step to repress and then formally interdict the quackish practices of soothsayers, exorcists, and the like.

Yours sincerely, Enyl Mac Bedwyr



Chapter 1

Haunting Phenomena in Tri-Kazel





ear Reader,

I will now attempt to provide a synthesis of my knowledge of haunting phenomena so that you may be able to better evaluate the danger of any situation you might find yourself in. It is important to know when to act and when to seek help. Keep in mind that this chapter is only the result of my personal investigations.

I have tried to be objective and methodical, but do remember that our knowledge of the unseen, as is the case with ancient history, is tentative at best.

The main reason why I consider occultists to be better than Sigires is because their judgment is not clouded by dogma. It would be most unfortunate should this handbook be taken as an absolute and certain revelation, leading to the same intellectually prejudicial attitude.

In a rather scholarly fashion, I will go through four steps to expound on this subject:

Origins of Hauntings

I will start by discussing legends and past events, traditions or tragedies that are likely to be the source of some of the phenomena we observe. We might not be able to change what happened, but at least we can try not to repeat the same mistakes.

Haunted Houses

Most of the cases I have encountered were clearly connected to locations where great misfortune occurred and where great suffering was experienced.

Cursed Places

The term “cursed place” refers to a phenomenon of a scale and magnitude much greater than a “haunted place.” Although occultists may still be of help in the case of hauntings, we must acknowledge that we are simply powerless against manifestations of exceptional dangerousness. Even in the best cases, there is little that can be done.

Obviously, solving a problem does not stop at ascertaining its existence. Here I will give an overview of the various existing methods to end a haunting.

Traditions and Legends

Throughout the history of Tri-Kazel, two main sources of haunting phenomena can be identified, each one dating back to a faraway past of which only bits and pieces have been preserved through oral tradition and chronicles... as if deliberate attempts had been made to forget them.

Legends of the Aergewin's Prisons

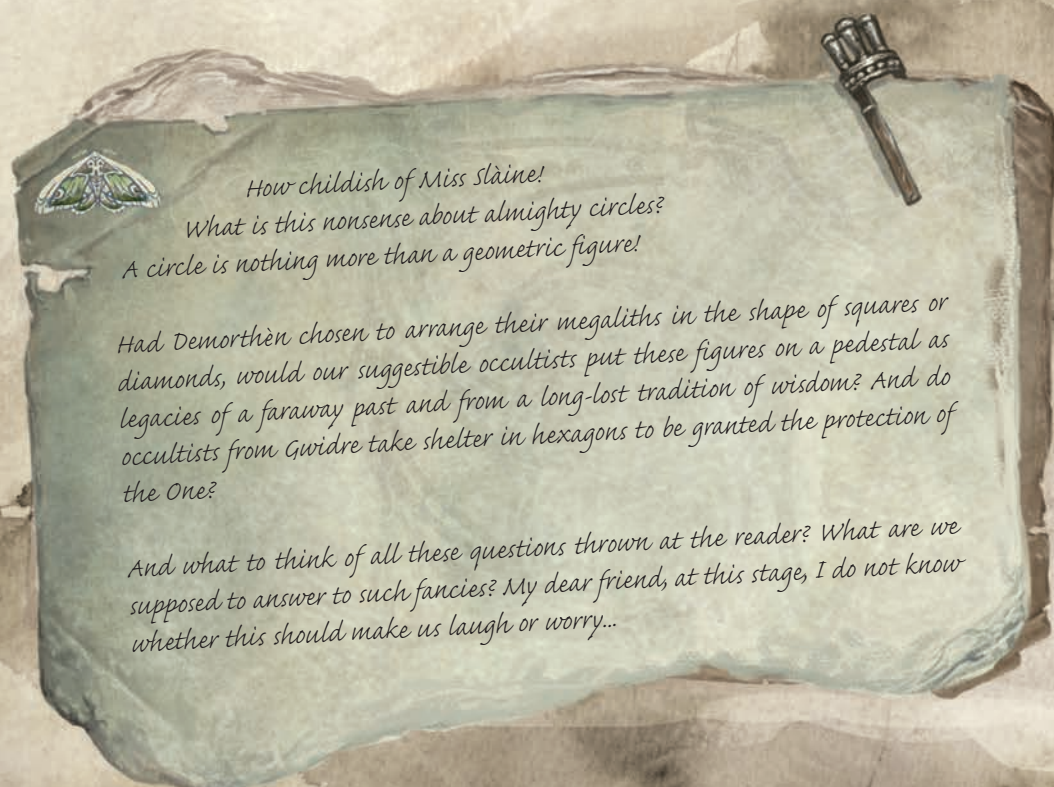
There are many variants of stories of gigantic creatures imprisoned by the Demorthèn of old, and just as many legends designating such and such place the location of an ancient prison. An example of such rumors is the small budding town of Deh'ad, currently thriving from the traffic on the Holy Way connecting Ard-Amrach and Fionnfiuar. It is said that something lies deep beneath the earth, under the building site of a town hall, a grand temple, and a library. The evil presence is considered to be the cause of multiple accidents... which may as well be due to the construction proceeding without proper regard for safety rules, and with the meddling of opponents to the project. Another such history takes place in Kaer-Daegis and makes vague mention of an ice prison.

Most often, however, the alleged prisons are clearly associated with Demorthèn vestiges. It is said that the keepers of the tradition used to wield powerful arts to confine destructive, violent powers. I speculate that these worked similarly to the protective circles now used by occultists to perform certain rites. Unfortunately, none of our current methods

could prove as long lasting as those of the past. The use of stone could be a factor, but even this enduring material is vulnerable to erosion, and today's Demorthèn seem to have forgotten the techniques they formerly made use of...

What will happen should the barriers break? Maybe this is already happening. Could cursed, wild places such as Broken Stones, Calhtair's Wood, or the Slope of the Fallen be the manifestation of the prisons wearing out? Could their prisoners be long dead, with only their ghosts remaining, but still possessing great might through which they express their wrath? Should this prove to be true, it could mean haunting phenomena of an unheard of magnitude. So far, we have only applied these principles to the deaths of humans, something the creatures of the Aergewin were clearly not. Yet, could they have had a degree of consciousness comparable to ours? Is the notion of consciousness a key element in a haunting? Could the psyche of these monsters be similar to ours?

II





My dear friend,

I cannot but react to this. You must be as appalled as I am by such naïveté. So, since the arrival of the Temple and Magientists on our peninsula, the collusion of political and spiritual elites has allegedly stopped? It seems to me that Gwidre is a kingdom governed by a diarchy composed of a king and a hierophant leading an army of Blades. You would be hard-pressed to find a better means of quelling any protestation against an official dogma!

As for the Magientists, one just has to see that their influence has extended directly to the king's council to rest assured that they take the material interests of their lodges very much to heart! One thing is for sure: Steren slaine is not going to make many friends! I hope for her sake that her book will not end up in the hands of some fanatical Demorthèn who would immediately be after her head!

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The First Morcail

Morcail are often portrayed as evil Demorthèn, malevolent beings that their masters should have killed before they were fully initiated, and who now behave like power-hungry, bloodthirsty lunatics. Sometimes, more matter-of-factly, it is simply said that they have deviated from their fundamental dogma.

The ancient Demorthèn animist tradition depicts the existence of great spirits, but also of many lesser ones. Amidst this network of beliefs, and from the earliest age, “home” took a particular meaning, which sometimes went well beyond merely sheltering oneself from tangible perils. It was about protecting oneself from roving spirits and from the Oradh, the Morcail's corrupt magic. To that effect, some used to consider that the surest way was to bind a spirit, or even the soul of an ancestor, to their home. But the Demorthèn ethics hold that after death, one's spiritual energy (which the Demorthèn call Rindath and which we can refer to as the soul) must free itself to become part of the great cycle of existence once more. From this point of view, binding a soul to a place is obviously a deviance—an abomination, even.

In spite of that, the practice of seeking to commit a being to the stone is associated with several families of nobles and with several castles erected before the Continentals came to the peninsula. This leaves me wondering how much the holders of spiritual and ritual knowledge were willing to compromise when a request for supernatural protection was made by the mighty... If the Demorthèn of yore were the sages they are famed to be, how could they not have identified the first Morcail, who were necessarily isolated cases? I believe that a possible explanation might lie in the alliance between the nobility and the Demorthèn to lead the peninsula: secular power on one side, spiritual authority on the other. This rigid, deeply inegalitarian social system only started to come apart with the arrival of new ideas: namely, the Temple's and the Magientists'.



The arrival of missionaries of the Temple probably strengthened the belief in protecting a home with the spirit of a departed person. Indeed, a fundamental aspect of the religion of the Temple is the faith in eternal life, where Demorthèn believe that the spiritual energy animating an individual is only temporary and frees itself at the person's death to animate other living beings. It is likely that, even though faith in the One God is still a minority on the peninsula, the belief in the persistence of the soul beyond death mixed with the traditional Tri-Kazelian folklore. Here are some of the various rituals practiced:

Children


In some regions, the custom is to bury children who have died during the first age circle under the house's threshold or hearth, so that they may continue to be a part of their families' lives. Due to their very young age, they were considered to still be relatively close to the spiritual world and could therefore naturally assume the role of intercessors with other immaterial beings.

The Founder

The firstborn of a line, the founder of a village, the builder of a domain, etc., was sometimes deliberately buried deep in the castle's heart, so that the ancestor may keep inhabiting it and protecting it. The custom of the kings of Reizh being inhumed in a crypt below their castle stems from this belief: the former rulers thus provide protection to their dwelling.

The Sacrifice

Apart from taking advantage, so to speak, of the natural death of an infant or elder, human sacrifices were performed. A person associated with the line, chosen by its head, was buried alive below the home's threshold or immured. Such a cruel practice seems to have stopped now, but some testimonies seem to indicate that Morcail may still observe it.



I find it quite amusing of Miss Slàine to associate great noble houses with ancient Morcail, at a time now forgotten but during which dire profanations took place that are still of consequence today. A rather clever trick to find wealthy clients: "Your castle, the one which your line has inhabited for 500 years, has given you full satisfaction up until now, but it turns out that the few unfortunate domestic accidents you recently suffered are caused by the evil spirit dwelling in your walls. For a few frost Daols, I'd be glad to rid you of it..."



Haunted Houses

Dark places whose aspect changes after nightfall; shadows twisting familiar shapes to make them gloomy and eerie: a haunting is the dramatic loss of a home. We generally live in fear of exterior perils such as brigands or Feondas. To protect ourselves, we build ditches and walls, but when danger comes from the house itself, most of us stand powerless and have to call upon specialists such as Sigires and occultists.

The Emotions of Ghosts

Treatises inspired by the Temple's dogma tend to quote the fourth ordinance to explain the behavior of ghosts: "You shall master your passions and be moderate in every thing." Actually, every ghost is as unique as the human being it was during its life; hence, an overly simplistic approach of their state of mind will certainly doom any dealings with one to failure. I prefer to make the distinction between ghost with ties to their past and those with desires for the future. The first accept death when they find solace, but the second are much more problematic.

Regret & Remorse

Ghosts dominated by their ties to the past look for some form of reconciliation. They may ask to have a message brought to a loved one, to look over a child, or to right a wrong they have committed. Conjuring and dealing with such entities seldom causes ethical concerns. Frequently, helping them even turns out to benefit their relatives, helping them to bear their grief.

Desire & Yearning

Unfortunately, there also exist ghosts dominated by an intent related to the future. They cannot bear their death because it prevents them from accomplishing something. Dealing with them is then not only about bringing a conclusion to a life, but facing an impulse full of denial, resolve, aggressiveness, and passion. These ghosts can be open to negotiations, but they will then present serious ethical issues. Typically, they may want to trade their disappearance for revenge, and therefore ask living beings to kill their murderer or the one who drove them to suicide, for example. These beings are often manipulators, and it may very well happen that they alter their story to make sure that they obtain what they want. Striking a deal with them can have extremely negative consequences. Against such ghosts, I advise you to directly jump to exorcism without losing time with negotiations: these beings will not give up on their malevolent goals.

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I must have misread something...

Some people volunteered to be immured or buried alive? I am truly curious as to how such persons can be found.

They must be particularly suicidal individuals, a most rare sort indeed; very hard to come across!

Is Miss Slaine now going to tell us about how wars were waged to get one's hands on a willing victim making it possible to have a castle under the protection of some kindly ghost? This is absolute nonsense!

Walls of Stone from Ancestral Bones

Deliberate and, theoretically, protective hauntings must not be confused with the harmful, out-of-control ones of ghosts. The guardian spirit is dedicated to uniting with the wall's stone, to become the home's soul, silently watching over the future generations. Its identity mixes with that of the family—that is, all those who carry the same blood. I believe that in the case where the sacrifice was voluntary, the ritual may indeed be beneficial.

However, I am rather certain that forcefully binding a spirit to a place will only result in problems sooner or later.

Haunted Caravans

I suspect that the Tarish also have similar practices, through which they seek to ensure watchfulness and protection from their ancestors upon their clans through their wanderings. It must thus be possible to consecrate and invest not only a place, but an object, creating anchors connected to supposedly benevolent spirits.

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Regarding haunted houses, two phenomena must be distinguished:

The devouring house

When too many strong negative events occur in the same place, or maybe sometimes due to powerfully corruptive Objects of Power, the vague presence animating the place reacts as if struck by madness. Instead of protecting, it begins to overwhelm, to kill, in order to—as I understand—psychically devour those inhabiting it.

The manifestations of an anchored ghost

Less powerful and easier to quarantine or exorcise, a ghost is a dead person who, for one reason or another, was not able to quietly stop living. A brutal death (accident, suicide, murder), particularly if it took place at a meaningful, symbolic time, is the most frequent cause for the rise of a ghost. Many occult traditions hold that those who bore the “evil eye” during their lives—that is, true sorcerers and Morcail—are more likely to become phantoms. I surmise that to manifest, a ghost must need a physical anchor in which it can invest itself emotionally; something representative of its identity. It can be a personal belonging, or even its own remains. In exceptional cases, it seems that even a person may become an anchor, being, for example, possessed by the ghost. A ghost bound to an anchor in a house erected according to traditional rites—particularly if a sacrifice took place to consecrate its threshold—will never be able to leave it: it must be freed from the inside. However, a ghost can be bound to an outdoor site, such as the surroundings of its grave. In that case, it has a variable action radius, which may, for example, extend when the weather is close to its nature (fog, storm, night, cold, etc.)

Manifestations of the Deceased

Ascertaining the existence of a haunting is often difficult, since the signs of a ghost's manifestations may be subtle and similar to other types of supernatural phenomena. The oddities they trigger can be narrowed down to several main aspects. These can occur independently or together, and range from a benign anomaly to catastrophes whose scale is on par with the feats of legendary Demorthèn.

Nightmare

The most common and elusive phenomenon is the multiplication and recurrence of nightmares, resulting in unease during the day and painful ordeals at night. When the victim manages to sleep, he frequently feels anxious and oppressed, as if something were weighing on his chest, crushing it to choke him to death. The dreams he remembers are frantic and frightening, involving symbolic clues about the ghost, its identity, and its goals. In the worst cases, the experience is downright horrific: the dreamer feels in total control of all his senses; he is conscious, and reacts normally, without any confusion, but feels entrapped. It may then become impossible to wake him up as long as the entity imposing the dream has decided so!

Other phenomena, rarer and more extraordinary, but also easier to subdue through the destruction of anchors, may take place in haunted houses:

Cold

It can be a simple shiver, a gust of cold air, or become so intense that frost or even ice starts to appear in a room. Abnormal cold is generally the sign of the presence of a ghost remaining invisible. It seems possible to identify those who are the precise object of an intangible entity's attention from their visible, misty breath, similar to that on a cold, damp day.

Draft

Impossible air currents are often noticed in haunted places. Testimonies mention the smoke of a fire that took the evanescent shape of a face contorting in inaudible whispers. Likewise, curtains may move abnormally, looking like a liquid surface disturbed by some indescribable creature. Doors may open or suddenly slam shut, then remain stuck for a few moments or minutes. Echoes, moans, and sobs express a painful message. Only the most sensitive can make out words, sometimes at the price of their sanity.



☯ Shadow

Torches and candles drive darkness away and seem to push back ghosts, but it is also true that darkness is denser in haunted places and that light shines less brightly. It seems that a ghost's prey, the object of its attention, can be identified by the shadows that seem to cling to the victim's skin and flow back more slowly than they should. In the most severe cases, the darkness's onset can manifest with overt aggression: I was in a room entirely lit with lamps that the house's residents and I were holding. Shadows suddenly poured from every corner, slithering toward us so fast that it seemed to be devouring matter! Light could not overcome the invading black veil, and very quickly, our lamps only extended to a single yard in radius.

☯ Mirror

Reflections in general and mirrors in particular are frequently influenced by the presence of a haunting. It may manifest as distortions in the image, or delays compared to physical reality; for example, when a face still shows in spite of the reflected person having moved. Mirrors may reveal the presence of blurry or clear shapes without anything to cast them. In the most extraordinary cases, sentences may very briefly appear on condensation or frost, generally written backwards and shakily, as if from the other side of the mirror.



Mental and Natural Phenomena

Considering their characteristics, haunted houses must be plentiful in Tri-Kazel! Who never shivered, felt an isolated draft, or saw the flames on a candlestick waver in a poorly insulated dwelling?

☯ Nocturnal Oppression:

Many people who repeatedly experienced striking nightmares turned out to suffer from heart and lung troubles, hence the impression of paralysis or the feeling of being crushed by some heavy, evil cat sleeping on their chest. The phenomenon is similar to the one of a sleeper with a full bladder dreaming of rain or of relieving herself: the physiological condition of the sleeper dimly affects her slumbering mind through a metaphoric message in her dreams.

☯ Lateral perception:

Many tall tales mention phantoms seen "out of the corner of one's eye." Actually, this phenomenon is due to the peculiarities of our peripheral vision: we are able to perceive moving things, particularly in low-light conditions, but we cannot clearly make out shapes and colors. These aptitudes granted by our eyes allow us to notice a threat, such as a predator or a falling object, more easily. A very useful ability in wild environments, as any Varigal or hunter will confirm. Unfortunately, it is also the source of delirious exaggerations when all there was to the "ghost" was moving foliage...

☯ Overinterpretation:

Our mind is reluctant to accept its ignorance. As soon as it perceives something that eludes it, it reflexively needs to give that thing a meaning. It imagines, creates, makes up stories and fantastic creatures.

☯ Emotional Contagion:

Should any member of a group yawn, how many others will yawn as well? It only takes one slightly impressionable person seeing movement and believing it is some ghost for several others to be convinced that it just pointed toward one of them, or whispered grim words!

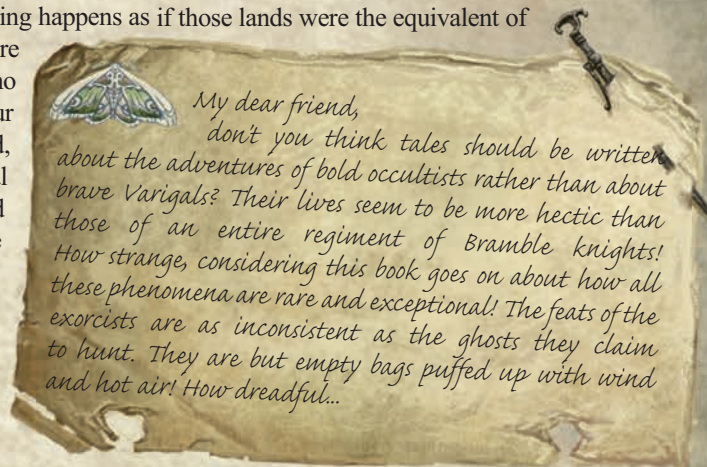
Overinterpretation, Influence, and Creativeness

The Influence (see Book 1 – Universe, p.234) of people with high Empathy is frequently Tested. As a result, they often suffer emotional contagion.

Creativity may also be Tested as regards to overinterpretation.

Cursed Places

Supernatural manifestations are generally rare in Tri-Kazel, but happen more frequently in some places, sometimes with very negative consequences, sometimes with strangely positive ones. My hypothesis is that haunted or cursed places must be a tormented equivalent of Demorthèn Cinthareid. Everything happens as if those lands were the equivalent of a spiritual medium: they allow spirits to take visible action where their presence could otherwise only be inferred. Generally, since no one restricts access to cursed places, it is easy to go there—at your own risk—while it is much more difficult to reach the Cinthareid, which are closely watched by the Demorthèn. I have heard several stories about overzealous occultists who mysteriously disappeared while seeking to study them. It is a fact that the keepers of the ancient traditions sometimes prove even more hostile toward us than they are toward Magientists... and that is saying a lot! Of course, the possible profanation of Candlewood by occultists is an aggravating factor, but such quarrels put a strong brake on progress.



Distinguishing a Haunting from a Curse

I must make a clear difference between two closely related concepts:



Haunted Location

This phenomenon occurs when one or several people die in awful circumstances: their spirits cannot find rest and manage to seep back into our reality by clinging to anchors—most of the time personal belongings or their remains. Once these beings have been exorcised or placated, the problem is solved. In Gwidre, I have heard that the most frequent solution is to call upon an Elect who can perform the Miracle of Purification. Where we occultists struggle with our rituals, they are easily able to reach definitive results. How unfortunate that Sigires consider us enemies to be struck down; cooperation would benefit both of us so much!



Cursed Location

This phenomenon occurs when a great number of people die in one place: at once, in the case of a tragic battle, or over an extended period of time, in dreary prisons. In such places, the feeling of oppression is constant, and the most sensitive individuals can fall into trances or possession, hear voices, and even suffer hallucinations both lurid and alluring. In addition to ghosts, creatures straight out of a nightmare may lurk here, an example being the Claws of Limbo, which I will describe in the Bestiary. As far as I know, no cursed place has ever been purified, whether by an occultist or an Elect.

The problem becomes particularly alarming when you consider that a location remaining haunted for a long time is likely to become cursed. I believe it is due to the misfortune of the locals who feel permanent fear and horror, and thus feed their environment with even more negative emotions.

Hypotheses on the Origin of Cursed Locations

A critically-minded reader will object that it is unlikely that mass atrocities took place in every place I consider cursed, that most of them are hard to reach, and that I am unable to point out the origin of many of them: Calhtair's Wood, the Slope of the Fallen, the Mist Bridge, the Howling Chasms, etc. Although I have no conclusive answer to provide on the subject, I believe it is possible to base a theory on two facts.

First, the site of Broken Stones is a relatively recent cursed place. The bard Aeldred Firdh mentions that many Demorthèn died to defend this Liagcal and that magic was heavily used. There was indeed a battle, but the number of belligerents was surely not very high: Demorthèn are not many to begin with, and the ones who remained for a last stand must have been fanatics, which means a minority. Battles during the War of the Temple saw many warriors die without strange phenomena appearing. Death and blood may be necessary, but it is certainly not all there is to it. Maybe the intensive use of magic powers acted as an accelerator and an amplifier?

My second point is about Objects of Power. I already mentioned that ghosts need anchors to be active in our world. These anchors are their remains, or favored items into which they invested much of themselves, so much so that they became part of their identity. The fact is that Objects of Power appear exactly in the same way, while presenting

additional characteristics. They bestow various advantages on their bearer—like Cethern's armor, which seemed almost alive—but put his mind in great peril, harrowing him mainly through his dreams. I experienced it once. I had identified what I believed was an anchor, and it was unfortunately made of metal. I had decided to go to a foundry near Baldh-Ruoch to properly get rid of it. My few days of travels were literally nightmarish. If we consider Objects of Power to be simply greater anchors with a corruptive influence, perhaps there exist “things” filled with supernatural energy, generating spiritual corrosion around them and becoming the heart of cursed locations?

Another explanation, upheld by some of my colleagues, may be that the source of the evil is an entity from the Aergewin buried deep below every ancient cursed place. This would explain why it is impossible to purify such places: as long as the deathly anchors of these immensely powerful monsters remain there, there is no way to lift the haunting they generate. To put this idea to the test, it would be necessary to organize archaeological searches in highly dangerous locations. Such an initiative should not be undertaken lightly.



Ghosts and C'maoghs

Occultists are convinced our world has a spiritual dimension, but there is much speculation as to its exact characteristics. My position is that to a certain extent, the beliefs of the Temple and of the Demorthèn make sense. Ghosts exist, and so do C'maoghs. In both cases, they are intangible beings, associated with supernatural manifestations.

The way ghosts manifest is often associated with shadows, drafts, cold, and nightmares. All these characteristics can be found in testimonies of mystical visions showing the fate of tormented souls wandering in Limbo. C'maoghs are associated with verdant nature. I have heard that Demorthèn believe that C'maoghs can be either good or evil, but what they dub “evil C'maoghs” are what the occultists call ghosts.

I believe that it all becomes clear if we regard death as the starting point: the restless dead become ghosts, but what about the peaceful ones? My hypothesis is that C'maoghs are reverse ghosts: dead people who are at peace, content, without an anchor or any expectations toward the living.

Purifying and Exorcising

For a ghost hunter, occultist theories are mainly useful because they provide an efficient method to deal with a haunting and hopefully purify it. Since we do not have special powers like the Elect, we have to understand, think, analyze, and devise strategies.

Spiritualism and Directed Dreams

Spontaneous appearances of spirits are the exception, but the practice of spiritualism can force a contact. The basic principle is to always use carefully drawn protective circles, mainly in order to avoid undergoing forced sleepwalking (see "Anchored Ghost" in the Bestiary). According to how experienced they are, occultists may attempt to communicate with spirits through various means.

Spiritualism Session

It is possible to enter a state of altered consciousness in which one's sensitivity to entities from beyond is heightened. This usually results in the medium being the ghost's voice or expressing its will through automatic writing.

Directed Dreaming


Directed dreaming is a more informative technique. Sometimes, just standing over the deceased's remains while holding her anchor or saying her name is enough for her to show in a dream. That is why some occultists make use of sleep-inducing drugs such as Morphenose.


All those who take part in the ritual share a common dream where they may encounter ghosts, and sometimes abominations such as giant centipedes! Such explorations are not devoid of danger, and may involve fights and wounds as painful as when awake.

Dear reader, it may perplex you that this ritual is only practiced by experienced occultists, even though sleeping in a haunted house may be enough to obtain such a contact. It is for a very simple reason: only a properly trained individual is able to stay fully conscious in a dream, help his companions remain so, and, if need be, wake up, which requires a period of quietness to will oneself away from this other reality. Without such mastery, the nightmare travelers will be confused and partly amnesiac, stumbling groggily through the events.

Drug - Morphenose

 **Addiction:** Slow

 **Harmfulness:** Moderate

 **Dependency:** Mild

An annual creeping plant, Morphe is fairly common, blooming beautifully in forests, fallows, and gardens. It looks like a sort of creeper with spectacular purple, white, and blue inflorescence. It grows slightly sour edible fruits. It is traditionally used in soothing and sedative infusions. However, Morphenose, a chemical compound of Morphe, is a drug which induces a state of dreamy sleepiness in which the imbibor is more receptive to suggestions, and psychically more sensitive. Hence why this substance is frequently used by occultists, whether for spiritualism experiments or hypnosis sessions.

Most herbalists and alchemists know how to synthesize the substance (Complicated (14) Demorthèn Mysteries (Traditional Medicine), Erudition (Herbalism), Natural Environment (Herbalism), or Science (Medicine) roll), which looks and tastes like sugary syrup. It is usually mixed with honey, or burned as a resin.

A patient undergoing withdrawal feels anxiety, and sleeps restlessly, troubled by bad dreams. The Leader can find more information about drugs and addiction in Book 1 – Universe, pages 243 and 244.





The subject becomes more suggestible and vulnerable to Influence Tests, hypnosis, and suggestion (+1 to +3 according to the quality of the drug). The recipient gets a temporary +1 bonus to Empathy. The duration depends on the dose, and can range from 1 hour to 1D10 hours.

 **Drawing a confinement circle:**
Standard (11) Occultism (Esotericism) roll.

 **Spiritualism Session:**
Difficult (17) Occultism (Esotericism) roll.

 **Directed Dreaming:**
Very Difficult (20) Occultism (Esotericism) roll.

 **Willing oneself away from a directed dream:**
Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. If the roll is failed, the nightmare traveler is confused (a good example being the Loch Varn scenario in Book 0 – Prologue, p.34).

 **Performing a Purification Miracle:**
Difficult (17) or Very Difficult (20) Miracles roll, according to the strength of the haunting.

Ending a Haunting

To definitely remove a ghost's ability to manifest, there are four solutions:

Destruction

The anchors must be thoroughly destroyed, with fire or through Flux extraction, for example. In the case of razed haunted houses, the destruction is generally partial (stone, metal, and bones do not burn well), and the haunting is likely to persist in the resulting ruins. More generally speaking, if the cause of the haunting is not discovered and brought to an end, there is a risk that another object connected to the ghost may be taken over between a few days and a few months. Therefore, destruction is a preliminary step—sufficient, sometimes, but not always.

However, even in the worst cases, it will still afford a respite, leaving time to get to the root of the matter.

How Fire is Perceived in Tri-Kazel

A beginning occultist may be tempted to consider destruction with fire or through Flux extraction the answer to any problem. Indeed, the anchor will thus be destroyed, and with some luck, burning a house and everything inside will also leave a ghost with no available channel through which it may express itself. In practice, such a method might work, but it can have long-lasting consequences for the perpetrators of the deed, who may be branded as criminals, even if the fire was caused accidentally or simply grew out of control. Here are a few useful reminders for novice occultists:

The Fear of Fire

There are two reasons why fire is feared in Tri-Kazel and those who make use of it are frowned upon. First, most houses include many objects made of wood and other flammable materials. As a consequence, burning a room or an entire home may very well devour the whole district, or even town. Firefighting means, even in large towns, are scarce, if not downright nonexistent in lower-class districts. Narrow, winding streets and congestion are other aggravating factors. The second reason fire is feared is linked to Demorthen beliefs. The spirit of fire is described as evil, so any person making use of it will attract suspicion. Finally, the adepts of the Temple worship the cold and burn sorcerers, which contributes to the very negative image of fire.

The Arsonist

Setting property on fire, whether accidentally or deliberately, is, as far as I know, punishable by death everywhere. The responsible, even if there were no fatalities, will be regarded as equivalent to a murderer or, at best, as a heinous criminal. Occultists generally attract suspicion due to their fringe methods and ideas, and should an investigation start getting nowhere, those who are considered deviants by the majority will very quickly become scapegoats. All in all, should investigators explore a haunted house, and then said house burn down soon after, they had better have an airtight alibi, or leave the region quickly and never come back.

Ruin

Burning a house to the ground can have dire consequences for its owner. It can mean ruin and extreme poverty; the loss of everything she had in order to be sure of it not being haunted anymore... Who would be ready to go this far? This is why, rather than destroying an anchor, some prefer to throw it away or sell it to a dupe who knows nothing about the nature of the object: they believe that as long as the ghost is tied to an undestroyed anchor, it will not want to settle in another and will leave them alone.

Unfortunately, this method has never prevented a ghost from communicating nightmares to its victim; at best, it decreases their frequency.

This mention of arsonist occultists is probably the only sensible part I was able to find in this preposterous compilation of Steren slaine's babblings. To think that many tragic fires have been caused by a few irresponsible occultists claiming to "purge evil through fire"... it is obvious that the propagation of these mystical delusions must be halted!

The Case of the Disappeared Child in Melwan

For a long time, I believed that ghosts were systematically tied to anchors. However, the testimony of a rationalist Varigal, Mòrdan, has led me to question this. Mòrdan traveled through Taol-Kaer, in the Dukedom of Tulg; more precisely, to Dearn and Melwan. In Melwan, he heard about the story of a young girl who has since become a Demorthèn. It seems she was held responsible for the disappearance of a child in the mist, and some details lead me to believe that she is haunted by the boy's ghost. It could be a case of an anchorless ghost. Should this be true, an anchor would then only be one possible channel, and the phenomenon would be more complex than it first seemed. However, it may also be that there is actually an anchor but that it was lost somewhere.

Conjuring and Negotiating

The most efficient solution to end a haunting is within anyone's reach and consists of speaking with the ghost to ask what binds it. Unless it is not aware of its death yet, it will likely take the initiative of establishing contact, whether directly, by appearing, or indirectly, through a dream or cryptic whispers... The occultist's purpose will then be to determine what the ghost wishes for so that he may free it. Often, it will be righting a wrong (or even stopping an act of vengeance), or getting to the end of an unfinished investigation. However, one must be careful and not naively believe that whatever the ghost asks for must be done.

As it must have been the case for you, dear friend, any hope that the part about arsonist occultists had given me quickly died! Here, fraudsters-to-be are told about how to fool their prey—I mean their clients. Gather the family in a dark, drafty room with chiming noises, serve them a nice helping of tea spiked with Morphenose, and explain to them what they are witnessing by making use of hypnosis or simply by speaking with that deep, monotonous voice you have learned to make. If you are a ventriloquist, it's even better! Do not forget to suggest a nice bonus in addition to what you initially required for your services. Tell them it is the ghost's final demand, the token of its eternal gratitude toward the con artist that revived it for a few hours in order to rob its heirs blind.

Exorcism Ritual

Sometimes, it is ill advised to establish contact with a ghost, either because it is malevolent and brutal, or because it seems perverse and dangerous. In these cases, an exorcism will have to be performed in order to sever all ties making it possible for an intangible being to manifest in our world. Several different rituals are described in various books, and they are all laborious and very formalistic, sometimes even mixed with groundless superstition. They are also long, involve the destruction of the anchors, and take place in the heart of the haunted location. However, things are not so simple: it is not possible to devise a paint-by-numbers ritual. The incantation always involves variables, such as the ghost's name and the cause of its lingering connection to our world. The lead occultist stands inside a confinement circle and talks to the ghost. This experience can be very testing for the officiant's mind, since he is in a space located at the same time in our world and in the ghost's. He will be able to communicate with the ghost more easily, but it will also be able to act against him more easily, with horrific illusions of heightened intensity, for example. Conjuring is simply about satisfying the ghost so that it may leave, whereas refusal remains a possible option with a ritual, as I will explain below.

Purification

In the case of buildings, should there remain any doubt after an exorcism, my advice is to take the precaution of performing a global purification of the place, if possible. First, any possible remaining anchor must be systematically destroyed. To that effect, the site must be left to go back to its natural state, which may imply watching over it during the years this might take. I would like to add that this is an uncommon method among occultists, and that it is the consequence of my theory that the C'maoghs are the opposite of the tormented souls of Limbo. Indeed, if we consider C'maoghs to be the benevolent spirits of dead people, and that they are strongly connected to a nature teeming with life, then it seems sensible to me to believe that by letting a forest grow, it must be possible to appease the last tormented energies remaining in the ruins. Of course, the process spans decades, but I believe it is worth it in order to purify the most deeply infected locations.

Exorcising a Possessed Person

It may happen that a ghost invades the body of a living being to possess it and use it as an anchor. Freeing a possessed individual is a very taxing experience, both for the victim and for anyone else involved. The victim must be put in the center of a confinement circle, preferably tied up in order to prevent the possessed body from moving out. Many occult books add to this requirement many folkloric details, presenting them as necessary for the ritual to succeed: nudity, fasting beforehand, flogging, etc. However, these are nothing but fantasies from the authors.

The first part of the ritual is to conjure the entity in order to try to reason with it and make it leave the body. This can be solved with negotiations and the fulfillment of one of its wishes, but some spirits want nothing but to live, clinging to the body no matter what. In such cases, an exorcism is required.

The ritual will then extract the ghost from the body, which may even make it visible. During this preparatory phase, the entity clutches the flesh with all its strength, resulting in tremendous pain for the victim who will suffer convulsions and cramps. It is then a clash of wills between the exorcist, the ghost, and the victim. If the exorcist is skillful or lucky enough, the spirit will then be drawn out of the body with little pain for the host. However, it may become necessary to choose between the ritual's success and the victim's life. I have heard stories of unrelenting Sigires who consider the death of the possessed person to be the lesser of two evils since the soul is saved by the success of the ritual...

Spiritual Combat

During an exorcism session, the Leader may decide to forgo game mechanics to favor interpretation from the Players. Conversely, the game system may directly be used: extracting the ghost then becomes a fight with alternative Attack, Defense, and Health scores:

- ⌘ **Attack (spiritual):** Occultism or Prayer (for a member of the Temple) + Conviction
- ⌘ **Defense (spiritual):** Mental Resistance.
- ⌘ **Health:** the ghost suffers spiritual Damage that weakens its Connection with the victim, who, in turn, suffers physical Health Damage

The average characteristics of a ghost are:

- ⌘ **Attack:** 10 ⌘ **Defense:** 10
- ⌘ **Connection:** 20/15/10/5.

The exorcist attacks the ghost's Connection while the ghost's resistance takes its toll on the possessed person. Thus, each turn of an exorcism session takes place with two simultaneous rolls:

- ⌘ **Attack (spiritual) of the exorcist vs Defense (spiritual) of the ghost.**
The resulting Damage affects the ghost's Connection.
- ⌘ **Attack (spiritual) of the ghost vs Defense (spiritual) of the possessed person.**
The resulting Damage affects the possessed person's Health.

Those who witness the exorcism of a possessed person have to pass a Mental Resistance check ranging from Complicated (14) to Difficult (17) to bear the nerve-racking scene

One might believe that from the exorcist's point of view, the fight is only about ethics: how much pain should one let the victim suffer? However, there are entities who imbue their victims with supernatural abilities, as I have heard it is the case with some sorcerers. Such spirits can use their powers inside the confinement circle to attempt to break the bonds holding their victim. How long will ropes be able to bear the flames of a furnace? As soon as the body is free, it can cross the confinement circle and directly attack the exorcist...

Once the spirit has been extracted, it's back to the standard method, so to speak. In order to banish it and free the victim for good, the exorcist must be able to name it and mention the reasons of its binding to the material world. Barring sufficient knowledge about its name or motivations, the banishment will only be temporary: the entity will only be weakened and will still be connected, albeit thinly, to our dimension.

What Becomes of Exorcised Ghosts?

My hypothesis is that there are at least two spiritual realities: that of the peaceful dead, who sometimes become C'maoghs, and that of the tormented dead, who wander in Limbo. According to this postulate, ghosts are initially creatures of Limbo, but conjuring, or sometimes exorcism, may help them leave it. However, malevolent spirits that resist any attempt to be reasoned with probably remain there. However, the shock of the rituals, of the loss of their anchor, and of seeing their desires thwarted must have an impact. Maybe they lose part of their identity? After all, anchors represent a connection with their lives, a stable ground through which they can exist.

Other Forms of Exorcism in the Peninsula

Obviously, only those individuals who are fully aware of the existence of dark supernatural powers are likely to become interested in ways to deal with them. Therefore, apart from occultists, only the Demorthèn and the adepts of the Temple give it any attention:

Demorthèn

In Demorthèn beliefs, there are seven elements according to which they categorize their powers: air, water, vegetal, life, animal, fire, and earth. Practices related to purification call upon the “life” element. It can be conjectured that some megalithic sites were erected to confine something. This is probably related to the legends making mention of sealed creatures of the Aergewin, which may come back for the end of times; Saoghal-Dheir... I was quite surprised to learn that the spirit of fire is considered to be most evil in the traditional religion. It is all the more perplexing to me since fire—from my experience as a “ghost huntress”—can be a tool of purification against the forces seeking to worm their way into or settle upon our world.






Temple

In Gwidre, anything out of the ordinary tends to fall into the jurisdiction of the Sigires, who have specialized in tracking down heretics and, on occasion, occultists, since they are suspected of sacrilegious practices such as grave robbing. Elects wielding the Purification Miracle are frequently trained to become exorcists, regardless of the order they were initially part of. The Estellines prayer is often associated with the fight against the manifestations of darkness, and it is sometimes repeated by frightened believers during dark hours.



As a Conclusion

Now that this long presentation is over, I believe it is necessary to sum up the fundamentals:

-  Hauntings are rare.
-  Most ghosts are connected to an anchor; a concrete object invested with emotions from their living days.
-  Destroying an anchor will halt any current manifestation, but the ghost may create a new one out of another object and bind itself to it.
-  In exceptional cases, the anchor can be a person, which leads to cases of possession.
-  The most expeditious methods (destruction by fire or Flux extraction) offer no long-term guarantee.

Only slow, in-depth methods, such as letting nature purify the place or solving the cause of the ghost's refusal to fade away, will conclusively end the problem.

Taking the path of occultism means becoming something of an outcast, and fighting invisible, sometimes mind-wracking dangers. It is a perilous, but equally fascinating life, which offers the opportunity to get to know about people, their lives, their hopes, and their fears, but also to try to understand our world as a whole. This is why I believe that these uncertain works and quests are worth being undertaken. However, all aspiring occultists must be certain of what they are ready to offer to know the truth... should it even be possible to fully uncover one day.





Chapter 2

Figures



Experiencing the supernatural may vary greatly from one person to another. Some yearn to know more, while others remain broken, in the thrall of powers they cannot even hope to understand. In this chapter, I would like to tell you about four people; four destinies giving glimpses of the invisible powers surrounding us. I have written down these descriptions to the best of my knowledge, often having to rely on second-hand information. In that regard, I believe providing details about the sources of my information may help understand these characters better:

Amy Dust Meirleach

This Varigal had a very rough life that left its mark on her, but she still possesses remarkable fortitude. I am interested in her story—which, I believe, holds a mystery that might let us learn more about hauntings—but, more than that, she has become a friend to me and helps me spread my works.



Yzrael Mac Baellec

A highly dangerous individual, responsible for the murders of many nobles and their collaborators, and also of some Magientists connected with Kalvernach. I first heard of him through the testimonies of a few survivors, which I compared with other tales and rumors. In addition, his story is tied to a place that seems to present a characteristic case of haunting. Meeting him might yield precious information about the events that befell his familial home, but would probably be suicidal.



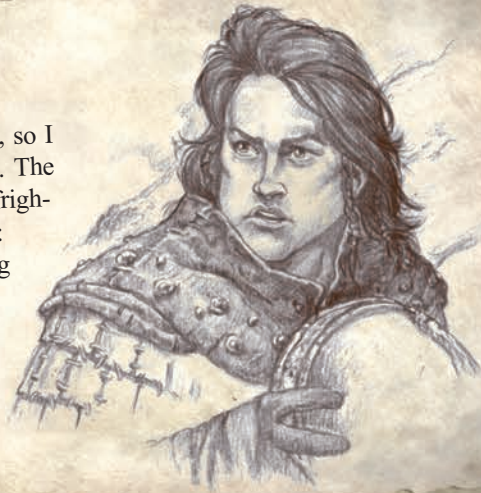
Brother Brathos

What I heard about this man left me in awe. He is a living mystery to me, and I would very much like to meet him to better distinguish between truth and legend. Here we have the case of a Tarish who became a Sigire, then a sorcerer, and now struggles to resist the call of the dark, burning powers that allowed him to survive. For anyone interested in haunting phenomena, he is a fascinating character. However, as with Yzrael, an investigator had better stand wary of what may result from encountering him.



Keir Mac Farquham

This man lives almost on the other side of the peninsula, so I hope what reached me about him was not too distorted. The case of the Claws of Limbo is particularly disturbing and frightening. It reminds me of a particularly striking nightmare: I could see haunted, cursed places spewing forth a fog killing everything in its path, leaving a barren, frost-covered landscape while the animated mist kept spilling, annihilating everything that was formerly fair and living...



Finally, you will find a few notes about my own life and my activities in Baldh-Ruoch.

They probably do not portray me at my best, but I would rather be entirely honest than pose as a fearless heroine.

In the future, I will also share a more detailed account of my stay at the High-Winds.



How about that!

A renegade Sigire, a Varigal who is none else than an escapee from the Ashen Yard, a paranoid serial killer, and a commoner claiming to be the heir of an extinct noble line. This supports my idea that all of these so-called "paranormal experiences" only happen to already mentally disturbed people, which immediately sheds light on the causes of their woes. This is getting simply ridiculous...

Amy Dust Mèirleach

Female, 23 years old, Varigal

- ⌘ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 5. Reason: 2. Conviction: 1.
- ⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 7). Craft: 2. Erudition: 2. Feats: 5 (+1 bonus to extended actions). Magience: 3. Natural Environment: 5 (Survival: 7). Occultism: 1. Perception: 4. Relation: 5 (Reading Emotions: 7). Science: 3. Shooting and Throwing: 5. Stealth: 5 (Hiding: 6). Travel: 5 (Orientation: 8, Signs: 7).
- ⌘ **Advantages:** Strong Mind, Sturdy.
- ⌘ **Disadvantages:** Trauma (1), Enemy (Ashen Yard).
- ⌘ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 7.
- ⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 8 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 10) (Carath Damage: 2). Defense: 13. Speed: 8. Potential: 2.
- ⌘ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 11.

Everything started off badly in Amy's life. A Tarish abandoned in her early years, she ended up in an orphanage in Farl. It wasn't actually so bad to play with the others and run around in the city like a flock of birds... But one day came a tired-looking man afflicted with constant coughing—and quite well-off, judging from his clothes—named Mogwern who adopted her, without any explanation. He bought her new clothes, called her “my daughter” expecting her to call him “dad” in return, and took her on a journey to a mysterious location. She learned that the place near the Ashen Archipelago was named the “Ashen Yard,” a reclusive Magientist town with a top-of-the-line hospital where she went with her father. There were negotiations, the details of which eluded her completely. She couldn't understand a thing about what she was told to sign with an X, and she just complied without a word, not wanting to upset her new family.

It was an addiction contract*. She had given her body to science for a total of seven years—from her tenth to her seventeenth year—in order to write off the costly treatment that would cure her “father.” She was only part of Mogwern's family because such an agreement had to be performed willingly as a sacrifice from one family member to another, but the deal had been distorted, corrupted. She had not accepted or chosen anything; she had been fooled, caught in a trap the entanglements of which she was powerless against.

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The years went by, more or less smoothly depending on the nature of the experiments and the personality of the researchers. Some were very benevolent, while others were totally indifferent, sometimes even brutal. She clung to life and to the hope of getting out of this ordeal, and while she remained there, she learned a bit about Magience and medicine, as well as letters and numbers. She held on and kept looking for an opportunity, convinced that one would present itself eventually. There was no way she would simply wait for the experiments to kill her! One night, she managed to slip by her jailers, then went for the sea and paddled to the nearby coast. Amy was about fourteen then, and she swore never to be caught again. From now on, her life would be on the road, and no one would ever hold her in captivity!

She started wandering, but after a while, she ended up desperately lost and starving. It was then that she met a Varigal who called himself Van. The man offered her to become his pupil, so that she could learn to live free and sustain herself. He would tell her what to do, but it would be up to her to feed, shelter, and defend herself. She accepted, and he led her to a secret hiding place where she found food and clothes. Then, her rather strange apprenticeship began. He gave her an instruction in the evening, went away, then came back to check up on her progress and tell her what the next step was. After some time, she had learned about most of what he could teach her and was able to become a full-fledged Varigal, free to decide on her own life and future. As for Van, one day, he left her his Carath, and she never saw him again.



Personality

Character Traits: Free/Emotional.

Disorder: Symptom of Absent-mindedness (Mental Confusion).

Amy is at the same time loving and evasive, full of hope but plagued by fears, convinced that happiness is not for her. She seeks her place in the world with child-like curiosity. Her biggest dream is to help people—both alive and dead, the difference being unclear to her—find happiness. She can easily become careless and is prone to daydreaming, which can easily lead her to get nosy about the personal business of other people.

Rumor

I met Amy some time later, and now, she helps me spread word about my handbook. Hearing her story, I wondered whether Van may have been an Anchor bound to his Carath. I suppose that he is now at peace... But sometimes, I wonder if he could be using Amy for some purpose. What might it be?

* See Book 2 - Travels, p.32



Yzrael Mac Baellec

Male, Reizhite, 22 years old, Assassin

- ⌘ **Ways:** Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 2. Reason: 5. Conviction: 2.
- ⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Short Blades: 9 (Daggers: 10), +1 bonus). Erudition: 3. Feats: 5 (Climbing: 6, +2 bonus to rolls related to agility, +1 bonus to rolls related to strength). Magience: 3. Perception: 5 (Observation: 10, cannot be taken by surprise). Relation: 5 (Manipulation: 7). Stealth: 5 (Furtiveness: 10, Mimicry: 10, +2 bonus). Travel: 5.
- ⌘ **Advantages:** Agile, Quick, Strong.
- ⌘ **Disadvantages:** Evil Eye, Enemy (Magientists).
- ⌘ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 7. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 16.
- ⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 11 (Short Blades: 15, Daggers: 16) (Dagger Damage: 1). Defense: 14. Speed: 8. Potential: 1. Fighting Arts: Sneak Attack.
- ⌘ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 10.

The Mac Baellec's domain—or at least what remains of it—is located near Kalvernach. Fifteen years ago, the lord's only son, aged 7, disappeared in the forest. The search went on for days, but to no avail, and in the end, the boy was presumed to be dead. Driven mad by desperation, young Yzrael's mother killed herself by jumping from the castle's highest tower, while his father, Hedran, fell into deep melancholy, progressively letting his lands return to a wild state.

For a long time, the Mac Baellecs had been faithful allies of the great lords of the Emerald Crescent, well-known opponents to the king and Magientists. Hence why Joderine, a Vitalist, told no one that she had chanced upon the child. She had a score to settle with Hedran, who had orchestrated her dismissal from her position in Kalvernach on the basis of rumors that she had taken part in the trafficking of organic Flux. Driven away from her home, she found in this unexpected stroke of luck the perfect opportunity for a sweet revenge.

Dragging the child with her, divided between hatred and a perverse form of affection, she shaped him into the instrument of an ever-broadening scheme of revenge—against the Magientist lodges that had not given her support when she needed it, against the lords of the Emerald Crescent... As time went by, she pursued the inhumane training of her pupil, filling his head with wild ideas of conspiracies, each more abject than the last, and made him her private henchman. Yzrael became a fearsome assassin, aided by his mistress's Magientist devices and drugs. The apex of the experiment was meant to be the murder of the father by the hands of his own son—preferably with gratuitous cruelty.

At first, everything went as planned: Yzrael slipped into the practically deserted castle, killed the few remaining servants, then found Hedran and tied him up so that he might take his time killing him slowly under the eyes of Joderine, who made a point of being present. But then, Yzrael, in spite of the mysterious nature of the words exchanged between the two old enemies, started to understand the truth as childhood memories of the place flowed back to him, explaining the strange familiarity he had felt since he had stepped back into his childhood home. It was then, as the full extent of his actions dawned on Yzrael, that his father, hurt and tormented, lost consciousness. His son believed him dead, and Joderine, noticing the dangerous epiphany, ran away. He caught up with her in the courtyard, grievously wounded her, and threw her into the well where she died a slow death. Unable to face his dead father, his mind a shamble, Yzrael hurriedly left the castle. Hedran, with nobody to rescue him, starved to death a few days later, a thoroughly broken man.

It was all over. The political struggles between Magientists and lords of the Emerald Crescent had brought the downfall of Joderine, who had resorted to vengeance, destroying the life of her enemy, progressively sinking into madness up to the point where only revenge mattered to her... A never-ending thirst Yzrael inherited from her. He now wanders over Reizh, searching for Joderine's hidden masters to exact revenge for all the wrongs she did to him and had him perform, looking for clues and leads, cutting a path of blood toward an ever-elusive goal.

⌘ **Personality**
Character Traits: Focused/Uncompromising.
Disorder: Organized Delusion (Paranoia).

Yzrael lives haunted by the conviction that there are more enemies—always. Hidden enemies, whom he must unmask. He takes note of everything, every thought and paranoid rambling, in a notepad he always keeps on his person. He is so perpetually on edge that he is impossible to surprise and will react with violence against anyone he suspects of being sent by his enemies.

⌘ **Secret**

Ever since he left his father to his fate, Yzrael keeps having dreams of the domain, its walls, and its forest. It is as if it all beckoned him... The dead are waiting for the lost child. The castle has become a feared, haunted place. According to some occultists, the key to lift the curse on this nightmarish place would be the son who disappeared so long ago, but where to find him?



Brother Arathos

Male, Gwidrite Tarish, 30 years old, Witch Hunter

- ⌘ **Ways:** Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2 Conviction: 5.
- ⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 7, Swords: 9, +1 bonus). Craft: 1. Erudition: 5. Feats: 5 (Endurance: 6, +2 bonus to extended actions, +1 bonus to rolls related to strength). Natural Environment: 5 (Survival: 7). Occultism: 5 (Black Magic: 6). Perception: 5 (Alertness: 6). Prayer: 5 (Knowledge of the Temple: 6). Relation: 5 (Body Language: 8, -1 penalty). Shooting and Throwing: 5 (+1 bonus). Stealth: 5. Travel: 5.
- ⌘ **Advantages:** Strong, Strong Mind, Relentless.
- ⌘ **Disadvantages:** Trauma, Enemy (Sigire, Sorcerer), Disfigured.
- ⌘ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 11. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 6. Hardening: 3.
- ⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 9 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 11, Swords: 13) (Staff Damage: 2, Sword Damage: 3). Defense: 15. Speed: 7. Potential: 1.
- ⌘ **Health:** 19. Stamina: 12.
- ⌘ **Exaltation:** 20. Major Spells: Fire Resistance, Inferno.
 - ~ **Fire Resistance:** the effects of this power are identical to the Fire Resistance Ogham (see Book 1 - Universe, p. 254).
 - ~ **Inferno:** this power unleashes a potentially fatal combustion within the target's body. Mechanically, the effects are identical to the Castigation Miracle (see Book 1 - Universe, p. 259).

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Many years ago, a time he now barely remembers, he was a little Tarish boy named Matis. Along with his loving family, he traveled the peninsula, discovering a fascinating new world every day. His best friend at that time was Tirwen... and today still, he can feel a lump swelling in his throat at the mere mention of her name. She died—or at least, he hopes she died—on that grim night when brigands swept through the camp, pillaging, raping, and slaughtering. The young ones were kidnapped to be sold as slaves. Matis was taken to clandestine mines of Azulrock in the south-east of Gwidre. The small, thin children were ordered to squeeze through the narrow galleries to find veins of the precious stone, and they often died of exhaustion. As for him, he hardened, ready to seize any opportunity to survive or escape.

Such an opportunity occurred when Blade knights assaulted the mine. Matis, despite his young age, took part in the ensuing fights and killed one of the guards, a sadistic brute who, in his eyes, would have deserved a fate worse than death. Saved by the One's troops, freed from his servitude, he was entrusted to a monastery near Expiation. From then on, he grew in peace, nurturing a faith born from deep gratitude toward the Temple. Disciplined, tireless, and stout-hearted, the teenager grew up with a burning desire to fight evil in all its forms and was encouraged to become a Sigire.

Wanting to sever all ties with his painful past, he swore a vow of anonymity and was given the name Arathos. In spite of his zeal and his devotion to the community of the Creator, he felt that he did not totally belong—maybe because of his Tarish origins, or due to the dreadful ordeals inflicted on him—and asked for solo assignments. In the end, he was granted the authorization to investigate alone and incognito a sorcerer infamous for his charisma and persuasiveness. The individual was also known for his ability to change his identity and appearance, now an androgynous woman, now a man of almost any age. Arathos found him in Kroazen, not far from the Ordachai Peak, under the alias of Reskad. However, as Arathos began his investigation, his enemy got the drop on him and managed to convince the villagers that the roles were reversed, the so-called Sigire being in fact a Tarish sorcerer posing as a member of the Temple. Reskad did so well that the frenzied locals decided to burn Arathos at the stake. Everything became a confused blur. The unbearable pain of his burning flesh drove his mind into an abyss. Caught in a delirium, it seemed to him that he heard Tirwen calling him as he called upon the One and every one of Limbo's demons with inhuman wrath.

A few days later, he woke up in an isolated ditch near a brook where his half-charred corpse had been thrown. He slowly recovered from wounds that should have killed him. Jumbled memories and unnameable impressions were seared into his mind. He felt that he would from now on lead a bitter struggle against the demon inside him: his order would consider him a black sheep while his enemy was still at large, uncatchable.

Today, a sorcerer against his will, he must constantly drive back the temptation to light fires and burn his enemies alive. He knows that should he lose himself for good, he will not only be damned, but turn into a being as evil as those he secretly keeps hunting... something he could not bear. However, there is something else: he heard Tirwen. She is there, somewhere, waiting for him. He knows it, and he will stop at nothing to find her again.



Personality

Character Traits: Receptive/Rash.

Disorder: Symptom of Mysticism.

The former Sigire is still carried by his conviction and has undertaken a lonely quest coupled with an inner struggle, shared between the One's icy ideal and the ashy pyre threatening to devour his soul. He is the embodiment and nexus of the fight of good against evil.



Keir Mac Farquam

Male, Talkéride, 25 years old, Knight

- ⌘ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 3. Reason: 2. Conviction: 5.
- ⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 5 (Polearms: 7, Swords: 9). Craft: 3. Erudition: 3 (+1 bonus). Feats: 5. Natural Environment: 3. Perception: 4. Performance: 2. Relation: 3. Shooting and Throwing: 3. Stealth: 1. Travel: 5 (Riding: 8).
- ⌘ **Advantages:** Ally (Roak Nefar), Lucky, Well-read.
- ⌘ **Disadvantages:** Aftermath (-1 to Health and Stamina), Enemy (Nobles of Tulg-Naomh).
- ⌘ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 10. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 4.
- ⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 10 (Polearms: 11, Swords: 13) (Spear Damage: 3, Sword Damage: 3). Defense: 14. Speed: 10. Potential: 1. Fighting Arts: Parry, Cavalry.
- ⌘ **Health:** 18/14/9/5/1. Stamina: 9.

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An old family of nobles, whose origins trace back to a companion of the Three Brothers, the Mac Farquams owned a vast domain close to the border and controlled an old road crossing the Sighing Forest in the direction of Terkhên. From the castle of Laräch, they watched over a great bridge spanning the Kreizhdour, an alternative to the mountainous paths and the symbol of the dynasty. Their renown stemmed from the safety of their lands and from their great talent in breeding horses, some of which even the Duke of Tulg used. Their long and illustrious history made them worthy of the title of Count of the Marches—simply put, a border-keeper. The title acknowledged them as defenders of the dukedom and of the whole kingdom of Taol-Kaer. This made their fall all the more appalling when Proinsias Mac Farquam, who had become head of the family in 855, shortly before the War of the Temple (857-863), gave up his land to the Gwidrites under mysterious circumstances. At the end of the conflict, Proinsias and his wife were ignominiously put to death on the orders of the King of Taol-Kaer, while the Lord's last son fled with his wife through the passages underneath the burning castle of Laräch. Ruined and stripped of their title, ashamed and despoiled, the couple took shelter at the farm of some old, faithful servants, resigning themselves to live clandestinely. Today, part of the domain has been annexed into the lands of the Mac Nodlaigs, neighbors and friends of the Mac Govrians. As for the rest, it has become the property of the Mac Vonig, vassals of the Duchess of Tulg living in the Sighing Forest. When Keir was born, his father had already died of exhaustion and despair. Only he and his mother remained; the only ones who could rightfully succeed the Mac Farquams. As a child, the tales of his disgraced family left a very strong impression on him, feeding in him an intense desire for revenge. As soon as he turned fifteen, thus reaching the third circle of age, he asked for the opportunity to become a knight in order to restore the honor of his name. To be part of Duchess Cortessa Mac Lichorl's court, the young man needed proof connecting him to the Mac Farquams. He decided to go back to his ancestors' castle and to explore its ruins. Almost no one had been there in half a century, the place having a reputation for being cursed. It was said that the weather often turned abnormally foggy, that travelers could hear maddening voices, and that monstrous creatures sometimes leaped from nowhere to tear the unwary apart. The young man kept no memory of his exploration. He was found several days later by fishermen, floating down the river and bearing serious injuries, as if slashed by dozens of clawed paws, tightly holding a medallion engraved with his family's coat of arms in his fist. An idealist, he believed this would be proof enough and went to Tulg-Naomh as soon as he had healed. His story was met with skepticism, but he was still accepted into the court, with a rank barely above that of a common servant. He owes this favor to the Duchess herself, who was moved by the young man's story and ingenuousness, a source of much jealousy and contempt. However, as luck would have it, he met and earned the friendship of Roak Nefar, a formidable warrior and descendant of a famous architect. The man took him as his pupil and trained him to the best of his abilities to give him a chance to realize his dreams: to restore the name and castle of the Mac Farquams. However, to do so, he needs help to free Laräch from its curse... and maybe also to survive the venomous intrigues of Tulg-Naomh. In exchange, his allies might in the future earn the support of a powerful Count of the Marches.

⌘ Personality

Character Traits: Upright/Reckless.

Disorder: State of Balance (Melancholy).

For Keir, chivalric and noble ideals are models worthy of structuring his life and sense of honor around. He sometimes suffers from not living up to his aspirations, and he constantly seeks to improve himself and his situation.

⌘ Secret

As other ancient families of nobles did, the Mac Farquams of old secretly requested Morcail to perform a human sacrifice to consecrate and protect the castle that was then under construction. Something happened during the War of the Temple or at the fall of Proinsias that made the “spirits” within the walls mad. The heart of the evil is probably located in the castle's crypt, buried deep below, dating back to the very first centuries of the era of the Three Kingdoms.



Steren Slaine

Female, Reizhite, 24 years old, Ghost Hunter

⌘ **Ways:** Combativeness: 1. Creativity: 4. Empathy: 3. Reason: 4. Conviction: 3.

⌘ **Skills:** Close Combat: 1. Craft: 4. Erudition: 5 (Doctrine of the Temple: 7, Heraldry: 7, History: 7, Magientist Principles: 6). Feats: 2. Natural Environment: 1. Occultism: 5 (Esotericism: 10, Hypnosis: 6, Mental Phenomena: 6, +3 bonus). Perception: 5 (Observation: 7). Performance: 3 (-1 penalty in public). Relation: 5 (-1 penalty in public). Science: 5 (+2 bonus). Stealth: 3. Travel: 3.

⌘ **Advantages:** Brilliant, Strong Mind, Well-read.

⌘ **Disadvantages:** Shy.

⌘ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 2.

⌘ **Combat:** Attack: 2. Defense: 12. Speed: 4. Potential: 2.

⌘ **Health:** 19/14/9/5/1. Stamina: 10.

Many think that there are clear boundaries between nobles and commoners; well-defined categories that cannot be mixed or confused. Alma, Steren's grandmother, was the youngest daughter of the Mac Emmanons. Out of love, she married Ebert Slàine, a craftsman, earning the disapproval of her family, who disinherited her along with her descendants. Later, Steren's parents suffered several unfortunate setbacks that led them to beg their well-off cousins for help. They agreed to take the child in as a maid in a domain close to the Gwidrite border, near the River Donir. Lady Haelara, her aunt, raised her along with her two sons and two daughters and gave her a proper education, while never letting her forget that she was no better than a servant.

Lady Haelara's father had been a hero during the War of the Temple and had ransacked monasteries fitted with rich libraries. He saw the books as interesting loot and gathered a wealth of them over the years, including rare and precious ones, even some forbidden to the uninitiated. After his death, almost no one took care of the documents, which were seen as an embarrassing inheritance. But for Steren, the library was a blessing, and she spent all of her free time there, studying everything she found under the vague pretense of tidying up the place and making an inventory for the books' sale. Her curiosity was all encompassing.

Meanwhile, Lady Haelara grew older and weaker. A shrewd, composed woman, she prepared her succession, carefully wedding her daughters, giving most of the domain to her eldest son, and a small fief in the spurs of the Mòr Roimh to the youngest, Cethern. He was a brave warrior and, through his deeds, he would surely make the most of his inheritance. It was to everyone's surprise that he proposed to Steren. He had always been kind to her, but no one had expected that. The Mac Emmanons saw it as a unique opportunity for the young girl to regain social status, and Lady Haelara put all her influence into favoring the union. Used to obeying as she was, Steren ended up accepting and moving with her husband to the Domain of High-Winds.

It was an ill-fated decision, for the stay ended in tragic circumstances...

It was a different woman who came back from the few months she had spent in the mountains. With her, she brought back a treasure, a good portion of which she spent to buy some of Lady Haelara's books. With what remained, she settled quite comfortably in Baldh-Ruoch, where she devoted her time to not simply rounding out her knowledge, but above all consolidating her findings. It was her belief that knowledge should not be exclusive to the elite. In contact with a printer and a few Varigals—including a personal friend, Amy—she is doing her best to spread handbooks about occultism throughout the peninsula, drawing from her experience as a ghost hunter. Her books are not always welcome, sometimes seen as profane or heretical, but she is confident that their contents may save lives.

⌘ Personality

Character Traits: Thoughtful/Self-conscious.

Disorder: State of Balance (Hallucination).

Even though she has gained some self-confidence, Steren is still someone quiet by nature. She has neither the will nor the skill to fight creatures upfront, weapon in hand; all the more so since she knows her imagination can get the best of her when she is under pressure. For these reasons, she often calls upon reinforcements in the form of adventurers and investigators. Making numerous contacts is also her first step in putting together a network to exchange information. In the long run, she hopes this will make it possible to lift the veil of mystery over certain phenomena.

Rumor

The last time anyone saw Gliten Mac Nollick and her twin Nollaig, an apprentice bard, they were leaving for some sort of treasure hunt with one Cethern Mac Emmanon. It has now been months since they were last heard of... I've been told that a woman with the same maiden name as Cethern's wife is living in Baldh-Ruoch, in a middle-class district. This cannot be a coincidence! I don't know what happened, but I would not like to be in the shoes of that Steren Slàine the day the agents of the Mac Nollick house knock at her door to ask for an explanation!






Chapter 3

Ghost Hunting



Now that I have detailed my general theory on hauntings in Chapter 1, and presented a few concrete situations connected to the occult world in Chapter 2, I will, in the following pages, develop some case studies. Such a method is common among teachers in medicine and law: pupils are given a situation—real or based upon real facts—for which they must find the most appropriate solution. The students can draw from their own theoretical knowledge, or undertake a complementary investigation. When they believe they have solved the case, they offer their conclusion and arguments.

The background of the page is a dark, atmospheric illustration of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a path leads through a grassy field with a few gnarled, leafless trees. Three figures are walking away from the viewer along the path. In the middle ground, there are more trees and a small, dark structure. The background features steep, rocky mountains under a heavy, cloudy sky with a hint of light breaking through. The overall tone is somber and mysterious.

⌘ Rounding Up Stray Souls:

This case involves disturbing events in an enclosed environment inhabited by sensitive, suggestible adolescents surrounded by a very devout staff. It will be up to you to ascertain whether the source of the problem is a haunting or an emotional contagion blown out of proportion.

⌘ Spectral Dance:

A ghastly mass murder that defies reason occurred in a place of debauchery in a very murky social and psychological context. People start linking these events to terrifying superstitions. Amidst this climate of horror and disgust, one must keep one's mind clear to discern the truth from fiction.

⌘ Key to the Past:

Kalvernach is a Magientist city set in a mostly traditionalist territory, influenced by both the Osags from the mountains and the Lords of the Emerald Crescent from the coastline. Due to this situation, every affair here has some political relevance, one way or another. The castle of the Mac Baellecs is infamous for being haunted and very unsafe: many people have died there under tragic circumstances, and rumors run rampant. Many factions vie for the ownership of these lands. Which one will you choose to serve? How will you deal with the exorcising of this place when there are such high stakes to consider?

⊕ Bloody Trail:

It may be that, to fulfill a promise to an Anchored Ghost in the castle of the Mac Baellecs, or simply to recover the domain's papers, you choose to pursue a dangerous criminal: Yzrael Mac Baellec. His story will surely evoke both sympathy and horror. It is important that you be able to stand firm in regard to your motivations and personal ethics. As an exorcist, you will constantly face choices that will be all the harder as you have to deal with long-term affairs, not limited to only mortal justice and life, but requiring a form of resolution that goes beyond death.

⊕ The Return of the Missing One:

A catastrophe such as that of 892's Buried Battle, near Crail, leaves deep scars. Elder Prince Eammon disappeared with his troops as he was battling a horde of Feondas, swept away by a titanic landslide. To this day, rumors say that he survived and will return to take the crown back from his younger brother Bronchaerd, who has been facing discontent from the Osags and the Lords of the Emerald Crescent for ten years. The return of a missing person is something I always take care to examine most thoroughly. I do not like those presumed dead who come back years after their funeral; they are an endless source of complications. At best, they are mentally unbalanced people who have taken up an identity that is not their own, at worst... there is no upper limit in that regard... The present situation will have you facing just such a problem on a local, human scale, through the return of a man who was believed dead for fifteen years. His relatives have rebuilt their lives after his unfortunate passing. Occultists must never forget the personal, intimate dimension of the situations they investigate.

Creating a Journey

Apart from canvases whose plot is associated with a particular political and economical context, which makes it hard to set them elsewhere—such as *Key to the Past* and *The Return of the Missing One*—every story here can be located as the Leader sees fit. It is also possible to organize these into a journey that will shape a campaign centered on occultism. For example:

⊗ Near Gouvran, in Gwidre, the Characters find out about the crisis the Saint Noenys boarding school is experiencing in *Rounding Up Stray Souls*. They are able to solve it by drawing information from a copy of the *Black Moon Handbook*, forbidden in the kingdom...


⊗ Possibly chased by Sigires infuriated by the means they used to resolve the situation, the PCs then travel through the Mòr Roimh toward Reizh. On their way, they meet Brother Arathos and may want to help him chase the sorcerer that nearly caused his death.

⊗ Guided by Varigal Amy, and possibly eager to know the author of the *Black Moon Handbook* that brought them such trouble in Gwidre, they go to Baldh-Ruoch where they meet Steren, who may offer to collaborate with them.

⊗ Through her, they may be led to investigate the case of the Wing of Death in *Spectral Dance*, which will then take place near the Reizhite capital.

⊗ Steren would also be interested in obtaining information about certain locations, such as Candlewood or the site of the Buried Battle. She will send them to a contact in Kalvernach, who will house them there. Once they reach the city, it will be easy to get the Characters involved in a series of adventures: *Key to the Past*, *Bloody Trail*, and *Return of the Missing One*.

⊗ Since Kalvernach is a Magientist city, it should not be hard to organize a meeting with Anaïs Cruyssec (see *Book 2 – Travels, A Life Choice*) and start a new cycle of adventures...

 *There is one thing I have to give Miss Slaine credit for: she recognizes the possibility of natural and psychological phenomena being at the origin of most of the cases she mentions. However, it remains clear that she favors eccentric, supernatural explanations. No doubt her audience of avid readers of action-filled drama and unfathomable mysteries would be disappointed to have to face reality: madness can gain a grip on any human's mind, and psychological conditions are enough to explain these apparently incomprehensible situations.*

Education and Reeducation in Gwidre

One intrinsic peculiarity of the kingdom of Gwidre is the consideration for the fate of an individual by taking into account his or her possible salvation. The prophet Soustraine was the bearer of a message of hope that left a deep mark in the Gwidrite customs and penal system. The ultimate goal is to save the souls of as many people as possible. As a result, and as opposed to Reizh and Taol-Kaer—which mainly seek to suppress a nuisance—penalties and punishments are designed to educate. Through them, sinners must become aware of their actions, understanding that they are detrimental not only to society, but also to themselves, putting their immortal soul in peril of being damned to Limbo. As long as there is hope for one's redemption, it is inconceivable to sentence an individual, even a criminal, to death. All the subtlety of the doctrine of Gwidrite law resides in looking for elements that will establish that an offender is definitely impenitent and irredeemable. This is how Gwidre became the kingdom of confinement, with prisons of varying degrees of harshness, generally adapted to particular types of convicts. There, the sinner is supervised by a religious staff that both enforces discipline and brings the individuals they are in charge of to the path of redemption.

Corvus Abbey*.

Violent criminals are sent here to learn to channel their aggressive tendencies and combativeness by wielding weapons in the service of the One.

Expiation**.

The Sigire prison is a place where heretics and occultists are detained instead of killed, due to sometimes obscure mitigating circumstances.

Monasteries.

In the entire kingdom, thieves and petty delinquents are almost systematically taken to monasteries where they must spend a number of years determined by the judge. Their time there is mainly divided between prayer and manual labor. In isolated regions, religious institutions must care for practically all convicts. Within their walls, they keep dangerous criminals, and sometimes even sorcerers, until the higher authorities of the Temple come to take over such a perilous burden.

Schools.

Religious schools have been erected close to the largest Gwidrite cities, offering a toned-down version of monastic life. Orphans are indiscriminately entrusted either to monasteries or schools, the distinction between the two not always being clear, particularly when a monastery includes a school.

The timetable is strict, uniforms are mandatory, and the teachers strive to shape the children into responsible adults. Generally, the pupils study ethics, basic theology, crafts (sewing, wood crafting, etc.), gardening, cooking, writing, choral singing, history, and medicine. Some schools specialize in teaching rebellious children and young adults who have just reached the third age circle, whether they have been in conflict with their parents or guardians or have committed serious offenses. Criminals of a very young age are also sometimes taken there, with the hope that such an environment will lead them to mend their ways, far away from the place where they have, for example, set a fire or poisoned someone over a trifle.

* See Book 1 – Universe, p.74
& Book 2 – Travels, p.10

** See Book 1 – Universe, p.24
& Book 2 – Travels, p.33

These juridical and educational projects can mean both the best and the worst for those who undergo them.

The unluckiest ones will suffer traumatizing abuse, brutal mortifications leaving scars, and may even lose their lives. Add to that gratuitous cruelty, torture, and rape, which are made possible by the impunity from which the supervisors often profit. Halfway between Broken Stones and Norgord's Plateau, there used to stand a monastery dedicated to Saint Albérich, where many children and adolescents died in puzzling circumstances (disease, cold, violence?) The place collapsed during an earthquake. It is said that some were unaccounted for, buried deep in the underground area connecting with one of the ancient troglodytic Gwidrite cities*.

On the other side of the spectrum, a monastery in Rhingal has acquired a reputation for obtaining very good results, even with deeply scarred patients. A local cleric, Kanneg, is said to be the epitome of compassion.



Collective Fears

Collective fears are a most interesting phenomenon. They may easily give the illusion of supernatural manifestations, but they stem exclusively from the dark aspects of people's psyche. Schools and monasteries provide a framework particularly vulnerable to such episodes, which may baffle a layman. It seems urgent to me that Steren Slàine should gather information on the subject.



Common identity.

Fear is an emotion that arises when someone feels targeted by a serious threat against which he or she feels powerless. Generally, fear in itself, which involves a defined peril, is distinguished from anxiety, with which the subject of one's unease is ill-defined, unclear, and may be the simple apprehension of a potential danger. For fear to affect more than one individual, the group must share a strong identity, with each member subjected to the same lifestyle, the same worries, the same pressures, and guided by the same beliefs. This can be the case for the pupils of a school, the residents of a monastery, or workers at the same factory.

A context of crisis.

An unexpected and important event disturbs the organization and overburdens it: the ensuing crisis raises questions, doubts, and uncertainty. Fear draws the attention away from anything other than the object of fear, and people's wits dull considerably. The result is that individuals, however bright or rational they may normally be, will easily adhere to simplistic solutions that will seemingly solve the whole issue in one fell swoop. Superstitions, stereotypes, prejudices, and rumors spread and gain strength.

Collective hysteria.

*This is a rare phenomenon of collective fear characterized by the contagion of psychosomatic symptoms (chest or abdominal pains, headache, fainting, nausea, rash, etc.) The afflicted individuals are at a loss, generally unable to explain what is happening to them. Since no objective cause, such as a disease or poison, can be identified, people tend to look for explanations in superstitious beliefs: sorcery, hexes, Tarish curses, demonic possession... The source of the problem actually resides in the psyche of the first affected patient, who often displays a disorder related to hysteria, or sometimes to mysticism or mental confusion**. The other patients are victims of emotional contagion***. To put an end to the phenomenon, the individuals must simply be separated and taken out of the social context the psychosis has festered in.*

Needless to say, the presence of nosy ghost hunters or fanatical Sigires only strengthens the conviction of the unfortunate victims of collective hysteria, feeding and aggravating the phenomenon rather than quelling it. The fanciful certainties of these occult specialists become self-fulfilling prophecies: as they look for spirits, they create them. Many are the innocents who died, burned at the stake or lynched to satisfy terrified or frenzied crowds...

My dear friend, this is all unacceptable, and we must do everything possible to shed on such ignorance the stark light of reason.

* See Book 1 – Universe, p.74

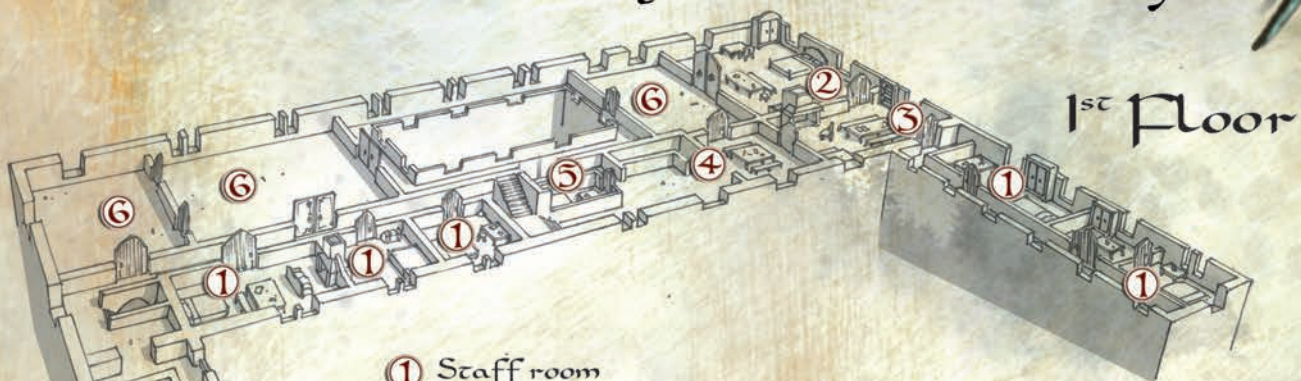
** See Book 1 – Universe, p.275-277

*** Reflected by an Influence Test; see Book 1 – Universe, p.234

MAP OF THE SAINT NOENYS BOARDING SCHOOL

I was recently informed that the Saint Noenys Boarding School has experienced strange events that its residents are now trying to sweep under the rug... It may be worth going there to perform an in-depth investigation. I have been able to obtain a map of the place:

The disposition of the two upper floors is relatively similar. One floor is occupied by the pupils' rooms and dormitories while another floor houses the classrooms and the library.



- ① Staff room
- ② Room of Director Efflamel
- ③ Great living room
- ④ Small living room
- ⑤ Supervisor's lodge
- ⑥ Room of the GL's choice



- ① Servants' room
- ② Chapel
- ③ Storeroom
- ④ Office of Director Efflamel
- ⑤ Administrative office
- ⑥ Refectory
- ⑦ Kitchen
- ⑧ Bathroom & laundry room
- ⑨ Common room
- ⑩ Service entrance
- ⑪ Small courtyard
- ⑫ Entrance hall

Rounding Up Stray Souls

- **Style:** occult investigation
- **Setting:** a religious school, preferably in Gwidre
- **Season:** fall or winter

Roots

The PCs are invited to a boarding school that houses rebellious children and seeks to lead them back to the straight and narrow path, far away from the circumstances of the nasty habits they have acquired.

Kaitria, one of the boarders, is a self-taught occultist dabbling in more or less improvised rituals seeking to attract the love of her music teacher, the handsome Kaelig. One night, she slips out to perform some dances and chants on the beach, but is caught unaware by a sudden tide and drowns. Two days later, her bloated corpse is found on the shore. End of story? Not according to Meirin, an impressionable, mystical adolescent, conditioned by the teachings of Segondel, the theology teacher, and by long hours of staying awake praying in the chapel. The young girl swears she has seen Kaitria, now a ghost that must be appeased and cleansed. The charismatic and persuasive Meirin convinces other boarders of the existence of Kaitria's ghost: more and more of them now report having seen her or felt her presence...

The Leader has two options: one supernatural one, the other mundane. Either Kaitria has really become a ghost and the visions are genuine, or Meirin is simply letting her imagination get the best of her and is misinterpreting mere echoes and drafts.

Gouvran's Saint Noenys Boarding School

Gouvran is home to the Order of the Reliquary (see Book 2 – Travels, p.11), but nearby is also Saint Noenys Boarding School, dedicated to housing young deviants, dropouts, and delinquents. These sinners are considered too young to be fully aware of the gravity of eternal damnation in Limbo, and the purpose of their stay is to turn them into good believers and future responsible adults. The boarders are sent there by anxious noble or middle class parents, but also in some cases by judges who see potential in the children and hope for their redemption.

The school is organized like a three-story monastery, with two inner courts enclosed in an ambulatory. It is surrounded by a wooded park that is at the same time awe-inspiring and gloomy. The grounds are confined by high walls that are watched by the dreadful Jock and his two monstrous black watchdogs. He has sworn that not a single soul will get past him. Actually, most of the boarders settle in relatively well, and escape attempts have been few. About 50 yards north is a steep cliff with a small beach below, accessible through a tiny staircase dug in the rock.



The GL will find a map of the school on p.43. As convenience dictates, it may be located elsewhere in Tri-Kazel. Since the PCs will be called here, the trip should not be too lengthy. It may even be considered that the school has been built in Talkéride territory, close to Osta-Baille, for example.

Saint Noenys's Staff

Efflamel, a composed, ascetic, middle-aged woman is the director. The teaching staff she manages is composed of: Kaelig, 25 years old, the charming music and religious singing teacher most of the female pupils are infatuated with; Saraid, 30 years old, the literature teacher; Segondel, 45 years old, a cleric who teaches theology; Fench, 35 years old, the arts and crafts teacher; Adeline, 23 years old, the needlework teacher; Yannaël, 40 years old, a priestess who leads the daily masses. Security and maintenance are ensured by: Bagloc for cooking and management, Baibin for repairs and cleaning, and Jock for gardening and dog handling.

Not all the members of the staff are directly involved in or aware of the events unfolding. Their names and functions are included to provide the Leader with groundwork for the PCs' investigation.

The Boarders

Kaitria, 14 years old, was from the middle class of Rhingal, not far from the capital city. Overlooked by her parents among her three siblings, she felt she didn't fit and tried to make a stand through various rebellious acts: truancy, flirtation, fits of anger, insults at authority figures, etc. The current situation stemmed from her desire for love and her sketchy knowledge of occult rituals.


Meirin, 15 years, was a street urchin from Ard-Amrach, stealing and prostituting to make ends meet. A benevolent judge, who knew about Saint Noenys, decided that she deserved a second chance. She was introduced to faith and embraced it ardently, becoming a zealous pupil. Her school results are average, but she is very conscientious. Her charisma and mystical temperament are behind the initial problem and the proportions to which it has grown.

Here is a list of names should the Leader need some to attribute to the other boarders: Tyronoe, Thiten, Nadolig, Muirchu, Morrigu, Gliton, Fiachna, Cairnech, Ywain, Zach, Ochel, Nar, Finden, Ythel, Yagou, Trustan.



The ensuing events happen in rather fast succession. It is therefore preferable that the PCs are close to Saint Noenys a few days prior to the disappearance of Kaitria (see the chronology below). To that effect, a solution may be to introduce the canvas by entrusting the PCs with taking a new boarder to the school. For example, Zurian, a 14-year-old boy who has been at odds with his father's young new spouse and has been shooed away from his home. They will be paid 2 azure Daols each for this task. If the PCs get along with Zurian, he may tell them more readily about the rumors exchanged among the boarders.

One of the school's teachers may know the PCs or have heard of their reputation as independent and open-minded jacks-of-all-trades. The director is willing to entrust the case to outsiders in order to avoid having to call upon Sigires and bear the ensuing scandal. The PCs will be housed in the guesthouse and will be presented as representing parents wishing to know more about the school before they send their rebellious children there.

 The job will pay 35 azure Daols, split among the group as they see fit. A Complicated (14) Relation (Haggling) roll may raise the payment to 40 Ad, and a Difficult (17) one to 45 Ad. Obviously, the higher the sum will be, the more the director will expect from the PCs.

Chronology

The events' pacing may be very quick due to the succession of incidents, many of which are red herrings:

- ⊕ **2 Days Before, evening:** disappearance of Kaitria, who has slipped out of Saint Noenys to perform a ritual on the beach
- ⊕ **Day 1 (beginning of the scenario):** the director of Saint Noenys asks the PCs to find Kaitria
- ⊕ **Day 1, evening:** Kaitria's body is found on the beach; the director tasks the PCs with shedding light on the matter as inconspicuously as possible
- ⊕ **Day 1, night:** in the middle of her nightly prayers, Meirin experiences visions
- ⊕ **Day 2, morning:** Meirin tells her friends about her visions. The rumor spreads in the school among the boarders, then among the teachers come the afternoon
- ⊕ **Day 2, evening:** disturbing phenomena start to occur (objects falling, minor accidents, nightmares, whispers in the dark, etc.)
- ⊕ **Day 3:** nascent psychosis. Every half-day, more and more boarders are reported ill (nausea, pain, rash, vertigo, fainting, etc.)

From Day 3, the situation will grow increasingly worse, and rumors about the events occurring inside the school might start filtering outside, for example, through the providers of fresh vegetables or a teacher on an errand.

I. Disappearance

Kaitria, a 14-year-old girl, goes missing one evening. In her room, hidden deep in the wardrobe, a small locked chest can be found—provided the Players describe a thorough search of the room or can manage a Complicated (14) Perception (Observation) check. Inside the box (which can be picked with a Standard (11) Craft (Locksmithing) roll, or simply forced open) is an assortment of vaguely occult knick-knacks: candles, a necklace, and a few mystic formulas and symbols. These items can be identified as associated with rituals of love magic with a Standard (11) Occultism (Esotericism) roll—all in all,

nothing much out of the ordinary. The director of Saint Noenys will be horrified, dreading a raid of Sigires hunting down apprentice sorcerers among the students and teachers. She will ask for absolute silence.

With a little patience and understanding (or simply a Complicated (14) Relation (Charm or Persuasion) roll), some of Kaitria's friends may be persuaded to reveal that they have helped Kaitria slip out to the beach by throwing meatballs to distract the watchdogs that are left to roam the park at night. An extensive—and tedious—search of the beach will reveal remains of an occult ritual. With these clues, a skilled occultist (Complicated (14) Occultism roll) will be able to guess that the young girl was seeking to call upon powers from the sea, a spirit of fate to attract to her the man she loved and bring them together forever. However, such a ritual has no solid ground, and is nothing but a mixture of traditional animistic beliefs, random occult ideas, and the belief in transcendence conveyed by the Temple.

2. A Body Out of the Sea

Three days later, Kaitria's bloated corpse is found on the beach. An autopsy (Complicated (14) Magience or Science (Medicine) roll) will confirm that the young girl drowned. However, such a procedure will have to be carried out discreetly, in order not to trigger another scandal that may draw the attention of the Sigires. Among the residents of Saint Noenys who are not aware of the presence of occult elements, there is much speculation about the reason for Kaitria's death. Did she attempt to run away?

Did she deliberately take her own life? Was it an accident? Far-fetched and slanderous rumors abound, some of which suggest that Kaitria was murdered because she knew too much about the unspeakable practices of some teachers.



At this point, the Leader should not hesitate to play with the Players' theories to direct the investigation or prepare twists.

3. Visions

The whole case could have died out and been left at that, but Meirin starts to have confused visions of Kaitria during her nightly prayers. Like a sullen siren, she beckoned to her from the sea, at the same time sinner and penitent. A tormented prisoner of Limbo, she tried to come back to escape the torment of death... The visions are confusing and can be contradictory, alternating between supplications to pray for her and threats to those who speak ill of her or behaved poorly toward her when she was alive.

Other boarders are starting to notice strange things: cold drafts, feelings of being watched, furtive shadows, doors slamming shut or creaking open on their own, distorted echoes... An epidemic of eerie sightings and visions breaks out in the school. Some are simply on edge, while others have full-blown panic attacks, running out of their rooms screaming, experiencing dreadful nightmares, going through fits of hysteria and trances, etc. Some are starting to fear an invasion of monsters, ghosts, and demons from Limbo! This phenomenon of emotional contagion keeps growing, and few are those who manage to keep their wits about them in such an anguished atmosphere.



An Intervention from the Sigires

Should too many rumors filter out, they might attract attention from the Sigires, who will arrive to shed light on the matter. This intervention will obviously ruin the reputation of the school, and it will have a hard time recovering from such negative publicity. Regardless, how the religious authorities will take care of the problem may go from one extreme to another. Best-case scenario, they will cooperate with the PCs. Should things turn sour, the Sigires may distrust them and choose to assume total control of the investigation, keeping them in confinement and hindering their progress amidst a nightmarish atmosphere strengthened by stormy or foggy weather. Worst-case scenario, the Temple's inquisitors will torture their main suspects and harshly interrogate the others; the school will become a prison and a trap. Should that occur, getting away will probably take precedence over solving the mystery.



4. Resolution

There are two possible explanations for the case: a supernatural one and a mundane one, to be picked at the Leader's discretion.

A calm observer during moments of collective hysteria (Influence Test with +1 to Difficulty) may notice that... there is nothing to notice. A PC with knowledge in Science (Knowledge of Mental Troubles) or Occultism (Mental Phenomena) may diagnose the phenomenon with a Complicated (14) roll and conclude that it is all about auto-suggestion and self-fulfilling prophecies. It would only take a change of environment for the most disturbed boarders (by sending them back to their families or taking them on a trip for a few days) in order for the phenomenon to run its course. The source of the psychosis is Meirin, the young mystic. Her mere presence keeps the others convinced of the existence of Kaitria's ghost, and even of other evil spirits. Fear, mixed with the inner turmoil of adolescents struggling to find their place in the world, was the cause of the crisis.



Kaitria managed to contact a supernatural entity who promised her an eternity of bliss with her love, Kaeleg. She now haunts the school, shaping the most suggestible boarders into her agents. Meirin is the prophetess of her return, voicing her will through sibylline speeches speaking of the sea and death. The possessed children feel compelled to carry Kaeleg to the beach and entrust him to the sea, bound and buried neck-deep in the sand until high tide comes. A good slap is enough to bring them back to their senses: they will come round, confused. However, getting rid of Kaitria is the crux of the matter. Several solutions are available to the PCs:



A rather spectacular remedy may take the form of a Third Stanza Miracle of Purification, with Kaitria struggling to keep her sway on the adolescents assailing the PCs. A proper ritual of exorcism may also be organized (Difficult (17) Occultism (Esotericism) roll) on a possessed victim. However, the efficiency of these methods will only be temporary: Kaitria will very quickly come back to haunt the school.



A more down-to-earth variant may involve placating Kaitria's ghost. The PCs would then have to meet her, reassure her, convince her that she has been fooled, and guide her toward the acceptance of death to free her. To do so, they will need to understand her story well and manage to summon her through spiritualist sessions. As they will talk to her and soothe her torment, she will seem to fade away, only leaving a whisper in the mind, the scene ending in the melancholy stillness of a night on the seaside.



In order to optimize the atmosphere and the emergence of supernatural elements, the Leader may decide to go on a mundane track before suddenly bringing in the supernatural. A good source of inspiration is the movie *Ring*, by Hideo Nakata. When the PCs believe they have solved the case (through exorcism, for example) and the setting seems to lead to the scenario's end, Kaitria suddenly acts.

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Leaves

The school goes back to its normal state. Still, for a long time, people will whisper about what occurred, and the story will become an increasingly extravagant legend, but the case will be solved for good. No outsider will know the truth—apart from the PCs, who have sworn to keep it a secret. Officially, Kaitria went for a swim and drowned tragically. Anything else will be dismissed as the invention of bored troublemakers.

As for young Meirin, she seems fated to take holy orders. Cleric Fench and priestess Yannaël will work to find a place for her, far away from here, in a monastery where her zeal will be appropriately channeled. Everyone will be relieved to see the mystic leave. She may become an Elect of the One in the future, but for the time being, she was mostly a source of terror...

Wind

The setting fits the theme of a disturbed adolescence manifesting through the incomprehension of adults, ennui, boredom, doubt, and daydreaming oscillating between melancholy and a thirst for new horizons.

Salty winds blow from the sea, and at night, the figures and shadows in the park can turn frightening, while inside the school, ghost-like echoes of footsteps, laughter, and whispers may be unsettling for the most suggestible. By giving detailed descriptions of the weather, lighting, gray waters, sea spray, waves crashing on the rocks, etc. the Leader can draw a metaphor of death through the sea: close, yet unfathomable; at the same time fascinating and repelling.

The Key to the Past

- **Style:** exploration/survival
- **Setting:** the haunted castle of the Mac Ballecs near Kalvernach, in Reizh
- **Season:** preferably fall or winter, with foggy or stormy weather

How to Manage "The Key to the Past"

A canvas usually covers a scenario that can be played very quickly, with little preparation. However, in the case of this scenario, the Leader should read the following texts beforehand to be familiar with the Mac Ballecs' story: the figure "Yzrael Mac Baellec" focuses on the criminal at the origin of the haunting, and the game aid "The Castle of the Mac Ballecs" offers a map of the location that the PCs will explore. Additionally, the Leader may read "Chapter 1 – Phenomena," which offers information about haunted houses, as well as spiritualism and exorcism rituals. Finally, the bestiary introduces three creatures that can be used in this canvas: Joderine, anchored ghosts, and Claws of Limbo (see the Bestiary).

This canvas is rather open, and how it will develop will depend on the Players' initiatives. The Leader is encouraged to react to their ideas and behavior to move the story forward, so that they will get the feeling that they are steering it. If they believe that the caves hide a secret, then the Leader should improvise a horrific underground exploration and put in a few important elements to further the plot.

Roots

The domain of the Mac Ballecs has been the location of many tragedies: first, the disappearance of Yzrael Mac Baellec, son of Lord Hedran Mac Baellec, then the suicide of his distraught bride, and finally, after years of hopelessness, the grim end of Hedran following the slaughter of his remaining servants (see "Yzrael Mac Baellec" in the section on Figures for more details). They were all killed by none other than Yzrael, the lord's own son, who was kidnapped by a Magientist with a deep grudge toward his father and trained into a ruthless assassin. Yzrael realized whom he had just murdered, killed the Magientist Joderine, and ran away. The mentally unbalanced assassin has persuaded himself that he must find whoever is at the head of the conspiracy that ruined his life... and he will kill, time and again, as long as no one manages to stop him.

Since the slaughter, the castle has become infamous as a haunted place and is avoided by all. However,




for the rival factions of Kalvernach, the problem is that the lands of the Mac Baellecs include territories of great strategic importance. They are on the planned course of a future road that will connect Kalvernach to Baldh-Ruoch, passing through forests and across small mountains. This road would deprive the Lords of the Emerald Crescent of some of their income from taxes on merchants and travelers. The council of Kalvernach has decided to grant ownership of the Mac Baellecs' lands to the first of the two factions involved to be able to retrieve the domain's papers. Hence, both Magientists and the Lords of the Emerald Crescent are greatly interested in recovering these documents and are ready to invest much to secure them. However, doing so will involve venturing into a highly dangerous haunted place, and even possibly tracking down a demented murderer to bring him back to the land of his ancestors...

Trunk

Occultist PCs with a reputation are very likely to be contacted by the factions contending for the Mac Baellecs' domain. They may be approached by the Magientists, representatives of the Lords, or even opportunists planning to sell the documents to the highest bidder.

Should the PCs not be particularly well-known, they may still hear of the case of the Mac Baellecs' castle and manage to get hired by one of the two factions.


 The group will be paid 50 azure Daols to fulfill the task. A Complicated (14) Relation (Haggling) roll can bring the pay to 60 Ad, and a Difficult (17) one to 70 Ad. These sums are as high as the stakes are, and the payment will only be made upon the delivery of the documents.


Branches

The evolution of the events can greatly vary from one group to another, since the PCs will get to freely explore a haunted castle. The following suggested events are based on likely scenarios.

1. Fog Around the Domain

As the PCs get closer to the domain, bad weather makes navigation increasingly difficult. The Character guiding the group must succeed on two successive Complicated (14) Natural Environment, Perception, or Travel (Orientation) rolls, each one representing half an hour of walking. On a failure, the PCs are just going in circles. Once they are inside the castle, things get worse, and they will have two options to get out of the haunted place:

 Exorcising or appeasing all of the castle's ghosts.

 Swearing to Hedran that they will find and bring back his son, Yzrael. Should they prove untrue to their word, their nights will be plagued by horrifying nightmares. Experiencing these dreams results in Difficult (17) Mental Resistance rolls (see "Nightmare," Book 1 – Universe, p.271), but will also provide information about what happened and the story of Hedran Mac Baellec.

Should the PCs try to run away from the castle, the guiding Character will have to succeed on three successive Very Difficult (20) Natural Environment, Perception, or Travel (Orientation) rolls each one representing half an hour of walking. A single failure means they have wandered back to the castle...





Any PC who becomes isolated, however briefly, will automatically have to make an Influence Test with a +2 modifier (see Book 1 – Universe, p.234). A failure to resist will result in:

- ⊗ Flashbacks to the night of the massacre. According to the scenes shown (see the Figure “Yzrael Mac Baellec”), a Complicated (14) or even Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll may be required.
- ⊗ Strange beckoning whispers, cries for mercy, or threats from the ghosts. If a PC fails a Standard (11) Mental Resistance check, he or she is temporarily mesmerized and starts moving through the castle in a daze, heedless of any possible danger...

2. Exploration and Accidents



Joderine will be the PCs' main antagonist, devising traps all through the castle. However, the other ghosts, should they be frightened or infuriated by the actions of the PCs, might oppose them as well. The most unlikely accidents happen one after the other:

- ⊗ A chandelier or statue falls on a passing intruder (2D10 Damage)
- ⊗ The apparently sturdy wooden floor gives way, with an inconveniently placed pitchfork, scythe, etc. below it, ready to impale the falling victim (2D10 Damage)
- ⊗ The rope used to climb down the well breaks when someone has almost reached the bottom or starts to go back up, leaving the victim alone with Joderine...

3. Limited Supplies



The PCs probably won't have brought much water and food with them. Should that be the case, the ghosts' influence can spoil their rations (see “Anchored Ghost” in the Bestiary). With the fog covering their way back, the PCs may soon have to face food shortage. If the ghosts and “accidents” do not kill them, starvation might. It will be impossible for them to patiently wait outside the castle walls for the problem to solve itself. Time is against them.

To reflect this drastic situation, the GL can ask the PCs to make daily Complicated (14) Stamina checks. On a failure, they suffer a -1 penalty to all their rolls. A second failure raises the penalty to -2, and so on.

4. Deep Into the Nightmare

The castle can be discovered and explored in the real world as well as through the nightmare that manifests in the dreams of all those who sleep there, with or without their consent. An initial series of clues can be thus collected.

Well

There are spots of dry blood near the well (Complicated (14) Perception (Observation) check): someone was wounded or killed nearby, but there is no corpse. A more thorough examination (Difficult (17) check) will yield the deduction that the victim fell into the well... which happens to be missing its rope and bucket to draw water.

Courtyard

In a corner (Standard (11) Perception (Observation) check) is a Magientist bag that notably, contains a Lighter and five doses of Tonic (see Book 1 – Universe, p.267-268), all in good condition (see “Joderine” in the Bestiary).

Skeletons

A medical examination (a few Complicated (14) Medicine checks) will provide information about the deceased: a young man died in the stable; a young girl in the servants' bedrooms; an elderly man was thrown down stairs; and another was killed in the office. The absence of signs of struggle shows that their killer took them by surprise, executing them swiftly.

Tower

It is locked from the outside and looks more timeworn than the rest of the building, showing that it was condemned years before the tragedy (Complicated (14) Craft (Woodworking) check to notice it).

Office

The room was hastily searched. The desiccated body of Hedran, dead of torture or starvation, is still tied down to a chair. The Leader can decide that the domain's papers are still here, concealed by an illusion (Very Difficult (20) Perception (Observation) check), or that they were taken away by Yzrael, which may lead the group to go after him in the “Bloody Trail” canvas.

When the PCs explore the castle through the nightmare, they see it as it was at the time of the tragedy, which they repeatedly experience in an increasingly atrocious loop: the scene becomes bloodier, and Claws of Limbo threateningly stand in the way of whoever attempts to leave the castle. Talking to the victims and listening to their last words can yield information, but anyone doing so will experience the pain they felt as they died (Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll). The condemned tower is the only place to have a starkly different atmosphere: the neatly maintained child's room is filled with a feeling of demented melancholia, and with the soft singing of the mother who never truly left the castle.

The Protagonists

Most of this canvas's protagonists are dead people (see "Anchored Ghost" in the Bestiary), with whom the PCs can interact to appease them or exorcise them. If the PCs incur the wrath of the ghosts, they will retaliate with Harrowing Visions, Forced Sleepwalking, and poltergeistism.

⌘ **Hedran Mac Baellec:** An ally of the Lords of the Emerald Crescent and a staunch opponent of the Magientists of Kalvernach, he brought about Joderine's downfall. After he lost his son and wife, he remained brooding in his castle, leaving his domain untended. He was a broken man who was tortured before dying of his wounds. He wishes to have his son brought back so that he can hand the domain over to him. It is only upon this condition that he will reveal where the precious papers are.

⌘ **Lady Elora Mac Baellec:** Mad with grief at the time of her death, she haunts the tower, looking for her "dear child." Her speech is incoherent, and she knows nothing about the events of the night of the massacre. While Hedran wants his son to become the new Lord Mac Baellec, Elora only wants to cradle him... and bring death to her poor child who has suffered so much...

⌘ **The Perdoux Family, the Servants:** Kadored, the groom, was taken by surprise and fatally stabbed in the stable; young Maya was strangled in her bedroom; Dahud, the mother, was drowned in the soup she was cooking, which left deep scald marks on her face; Vawdez, the father, was thrown down the stairs leading to Hedran's office. They wander in a daze, fearful of any sign of further aggression. They are terrified of Joderine and will frightfully tell the PCs about "her" in veiled words. They will only be able to leave if she is at least weakened.

⌘ **Joderine:** A Vitalist Magientist, she was expelled from Kalvernach because of Hedran, on the basis of rumors of her being involved in the trafficking of organic Flux. She took revenge on him by raising his son to become an assassin and by sending him to kill all of her enemies. Filled with insane hatred, she died slowly and painfully, suffering for hours in the well where Yzrael threw her and where her animated remains still rest (See "Joderine" in the Bestiary).

Leaves

Since the PCs are left to their own devices, it is difficult to predict how the canvas will turn out. The two extreme scenarios are:

⌘ **Best:** The PCs have managed to exorcise Joderine and to comfort the other ghosts. They have secured the domain's papers, and maybe even stopped Yzrael Mac Baellec. The castle is now at peace; a bittersweet melancholy lingers, but it is inhabitable once more. The city of Kalvernach will deliver an additional reward of 20 Ad for neutralizing Yzrael. Finally, the PCs will have earned the reputation of fearless, efficient ghost hunters.

⌘ **Worst:** The mission is a failure. Several PCs are wounded, traumatized, or even dead, and the haunting goes on. Worse: the Mac Baellecs' domain has become a cursed place (see "Chapter 1 – Phenomena"). No one will ever be

able to recover the lands' papers, which does not matter much now since they are partly impassable due to the permanent fog enveloping the castle. Should adventurers want to go there, they will have to fight Claws of Limbo and vanquish an even more powerful version of Joderine... all of it without hope of reward.

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Finding Yzrael

Yzrael Mac Baellec ran away from the castle in a state of deep shock. The Leader can decide that he left with the land's papers, in which case the PCs' mission in the haunted castle will put them on the track of the murderer and will continue with the "Bloody Trail" canvas.

Wind

Depending on the choices of the Leader, this story can either be about exploring a haunted castle with constant action and suspense; or about surviving a horrific, deadly dungeon. The PCs go there attracted by the reward offered, but once they are inside the castle, they are trapped. Time is against them: they may fruitlessly tire themselves out and see their food supplies dwindle while strange accidents keep occurring. Three movies are particularly plentiful sources of inspiration for a nightmarish atmosphere.

⌘ **The Haunting, by Robert Wise (1963):** For its deeply disturbing environment, for the fatality of a home calling its visitors to die to join the shadows it houses... In the Mac Baellecs' castle, the dead outnumber the living.

⌘ **Ring, by Hideo Nakata (1998):** For the now iconic ghost of Sadako, creeping out of the well, with her long black hair hanging in front of her face, and her stiff, abnormal undead gait. All the elements are there for the confrontation with Joderine in the well.

⌘ **Final Destination, by James Wong (2000):** For the most unlikely and horrible fatal accidents one may ever imagine. The castle has become a trap, and Joderine is out to dedicate all her malevolent insanity to harming and killing the PCs.les PJ.

The Castle of the Mac Baellecs

There are infinite possible varieties of haunted houses. The Mac Baellecs' is an archetype; a perfect illustration of the purpose of Ghost Stories. It is associated with the story of Yzrael Mac Baellec and the "Key to the Past" canvas. These three elements are structured around the theme of revenge in the form of an endless succession of horror, cruelty, and madness. There could be no better warning against the deeply destructive nature of hatred.

① Courtyard

A paved area giving access to the servants' lodgings and shops. Wooden stairs go up to the nobles' floor.

② Well

At the very bottom is a small cave, filled with water almost to the ceiling. This is where Magientist Joderine died. Should PCs venture there, they will have to face the animated remains.

③ Stable

This is where the groom died. This is a wooden building with a barn in the upper part, accessible by a ladder.

④ Kitchen

The body of the cook still rests near the oven.

⑤ Cellar

It only contains barrels that are empty or whose contents have gone bad and are now undrinkable.

⑥ Locked tower

The highest tower of the castle, with four floors. It was condemned after the suicide of Lady Elora, wife of Hedran Mac Baellec. Only the ground floor is accessible; the doors leading to the upper floors are locked and sturdy. To go there, one has to pick the locks (Difficult (17) Craft (Locksmithing) roll), find the key, or break down the doors (Very Difficult (20) Feats roll). The rooms are comfortable, and the decoration is feminine. There is a child's bedroom and a lady's boudoir. Pilferers can get their hands on a small chest containing a few articles of jewelry for a total value of 5+1D10 Ad.

⑦ Reception room

Accessible from the outside by climbing wooden stairs. It is an impressive stone room with colonnades. Footsteps echo, creating an almost oppressive atmosphere of longing. Windows of stained glass overlook the courtyard, and other, narrower ones, the surrounding land.

⑧ Office

It is a shambles, and contains the corpse of Lord Hedran Mac Baellec, who was tortured by the hands of his very son, and died a few days later due to lack of help. Searching the place can turn up the register of the domain listing the names of the servants, which will make it possible to conjure them by calling their names at the location of their deaths. The ghost of Hedran will use most of its energy (see "Anchored Ghost" in the Bestiary) to keep hidden the secret cache in which the domain's papers are hidden. A Very Difficult (20) Perception (Observation) roll is required to see past the illusion, but there is also the option of convincing the ghost to hand over the documents (see the "Key to the Past" canvas).

MAP OF THE CASTLE OF THE MAC BAELECS



Bloody Trail

- **Style:** pursuit & traps
- **Setting:** hilly forests north of Kalvernach
- **Season :** any, with severe weather and difficult travel

Roots

Yzrael Mac Baellec is responsible for the death of his father (more information is provided in Chapter 2 – Encounters and in The Key to the Past”), since which he has remained on the loose, beset by voices and delusions mixing guilt and the burning desire to take revenge on everyone responsible for destroying his life. When this scenario begins, he is in a forest, having recently returned to the cabin where Joderine raised him. There, he looks for hints, leads, clues; anything through which he might deduce his next targets. Barricaded in his lair, convinced that powerful enemies are after him, he has trapped the surrounding area and plans to methodically kill anyone coming close.



An Inhuman Foe

There are two major avenues by which the Leader can complicate the situation:



Object of Power: Joderine's Dagger

Joderine (see the Bestiary) wanted to get revenge on Yzrael's father and on everyone else who wronged her. To do so, she raised the boy as the instrument of her insane quest. She trained him to kill, guiding his hand, always driving him forward. She gave him a dagger to better carry out the series of crimes she needed him to perform. This weapon was infused with Joderine's destructive madness, and Yzrael is as much the victim as the beneficiary of this Object of Power. The next person to touch it will also be at risk of falling under its mental domination (Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll).

⊗ **Description:** Il s'agit d'une arme d'excellente qualité (Dégâts 2). Elle porte la marque de Maître Ebert, forgeron de Baldh-Ruoch, mort il y a 5 ans dans des circonstances étranges. Ce poignard est sa dernière création, son chef d'œuvre.

⊗ **Properties :** The dagger grants a +2 bonus to Stealth-related actions. For example, to spring from the shadows, strike, then disappear...

⊗ **Influence:** Once a month, the owner is subjected to the influence of the weapon and must pass a Very Difficult (20) Mental Resistance check in order not to develop paranoid delusions. For up to several days, the bearer will notice signs of a conspiracy or aggression against him. If he has an Enemy (see Book 1 – Universe, p.214), everything will seemingly indicate that his nemesis is about to strike. In the end, the owner of the dagger will probably be driven to murder an innocent person in what he'll honestly consider to have been self-defense.



The Death of Yzrael

The Characters will be chasing a man they believe to be alive, but who has actually committed suicide, becoming a hateful Anchored Ghost (see the Bestiary), bent on killing anyone getting close to its lair, and identifying them all as enemies; agents of the conspiracy of which he was the victim. It will make use of the hostile environment and of the traps he laid before his death. His body is hidden, and it may take some time for the Characters to understand that the man they thought they were fighting is actually a ghost, and that they will have to revise their strategy. These two possibilities can also be combined: Yzrael is defeated, but falls into a pit or is carried away by a stream going underground. He becomes a ghost, and to defeat him for good by destroying his bones and Object of Power, the group will have to explore a particularly dangerous environment, facing both physical and mental harm.

Trunk

Bloody Trail is a follow-up to The Key to the Past and details the tracking down of the assassin Yzrael Mac Baellec. Investigators who have ventured into the castle of the Mac Baellecs may have decided to bring the lord's son back to the castle to free the souls anchored there more easily, or they may have noticed that Yzrael took the family's signet ring and property papers that are sought by the major factions of Kalvernach.



To play this canvas independently from The Key to the Past, there is another way the PCs can become involved: traumatized by his past, Yzrael may have unconsciously wanted to recreate his own story. To do so, he has kidnapped a small boy, Yonan, killing his mother in front of him, then taking him away into the forest with the insane idea of adopting him. The father, Kenan, ran after him and suffered a serious, though non-fatal, injury in the ensuing fight to save his son. Yzrael decided that Yonan must be the one to kill his father a few years later and therefore spared him. Kenan is ready to give everything he owns to have his son brought back to him.

Tracking down Yzrael will be relatively easy to begin with. Deeply unsettled by the events at the Mac Baellecs' castle, he was not as careful and composed as usual. Villagers and innkeepers along his path will easily remember the frightening man who constantly wore a hood over his face and whose coat sported spots of dry blood.

To create the best atmosphere possible, the roles during the hunt should be reversed: the Characters are initially the hunters, but then fall prey to a masterful assassin able to appear suddenly, strike at an isolated member, then disappear. How the scenario evolves will mainly depend on how skillfully and carefully the Characters handle their mission. Here is a template sequence of events:

⊕ **Into the Forest:** Tracking becomes increasingly difficult, being first Standard (11), then gradually becoming Very Difficult (20). There are few tracks, some of which were even deliberately left by Yzrael to lead the PCs into a trap. The progression of the group is also slowed by the difficult terrain, requiring several Standard (11) and Complicated (14) Feats rolls.

⊕ **Quick Attacks:** Yzrael's strategy is to leave behind terrorized, seriously injured victims, since they require medical attention and handicap the able members for the remainder of the pursuit. Additionally, the smell of blood can attract predators such as bears. Remaining isolated and fearing for what lurks nearby, calls for a Standard (11) Mental Resistance check. Being the victim of one of Yzrael's lightning assaults calls for a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check.

⊕ **Wandering:** The hilly region is perpetually damp, bathed in low clouds hampering the vision and sense of orientation of those who are not familiar with the land (Difficult (17) Orientation roll). The Characters can go in circles for hours under rain and wind while, unbeknownst to them, Yzrael keeps watching them.

⊕ **The Lair:** There are many hidden traps in the forest (see Book 2 – Travels, p.132) as well as in Yzrael's shelter, including poisoned needles on handles (Mild poison; see Book 1 – Universe, p.243). The house is both a home and a cell. The atmosphere is fascinatingly disturbing and requires a successful Test of Influence not to feel engrossed. There are many caves and swift streams nearby, so that the Leader can design the ultimate chase down into the surrounding underground area, possibly to find the kidnapped child, hidden in an almost inaccessible place while the water starts rising abruptly due to a sudden rainfall...



The Leader is invited to make some of the Characters' rolls so that the Players do not know whether they succeeded or failed. This applies in particular to Mental Resistance, Orientation, Perception, and Tracking rolls, and to Influence Tests. In the misty, twilight atmosphere of the mountainous forest, the Characters may suffer autosuggestion and emotional contagion, which can lead to critical oversights.

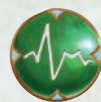
Leaves

According to how the Characters initially got involved, the conclusion will vary. Here a few possibilities:

⊕ **Appeased Souls:** Yzrael is brought to the spirits of his parents. Of course, "brought" might mean that the Characters kill him, unless the Leader would rather spare them the execution, leaving it to the castle's ghosts. The happiest conclusion would be a last sight of the dead family reunited before they disappear forever.

⊕ **Dying Like an Animal:** Yzrael dies in the forest. If the Characters go through the complete destruction of all the potential anchors, including his own body, his story will be simply, sadly, and conclusively over.

⊕ **Human Justice:** Yzrael is brought back as a prisoner to the villagers or authorities of Kalvernach. In the first case, his trial will be expeditious, and he will quickly be hanged amidst jeers. In the second case, the procedure will be longer... and will shed light on dozens of unresolved cases of murder. As insane as he is, Yzrael knows many things, and he will equally blame the Magientists for their schemes and the Lords of the Emerald Crescent for their intrigues. Such revelations may lead to large-scale political scandals that will last weeks or months!



A twist! Yzrael has managed to escape! All the efforts to catch him have been fruitless... What now? Will he seek revenge against the Characters? Will they have to fear him behind every shadow?

Wind

The forest itself is a grim place, so much so that Nimhs Cuirs (see Book 2 – Travels, p.188) may even be included should the Leader consider the situation insufficiently dangerous. When they do not have to trudge under a drizzle or through fog, the Characters may be caught in a sudden downpour. Cold and dampness may make resting difficult and spoil meals, possibly resulting in catarrh or canker (see Book 1 – Universe, p.242) should a Character suffer a wound that would easily fester under these circumstances.

The Return of the Missing One

- **Style:** occult mystery & investigation
- **Setting:** Crail, a small forest town in Reizh
- **Season:** any, but travel must be possible

Roots

Each of the three kingdoms is caught in a never-ending struggle against Feondas, which sometimes gather in great hordes. Such situations lead to epic, chaotic battles at the end of which it is always hard to ascertain the fate of each and every one of the combatants. Ehorn officially died during the Buried Battle (see the box below), but his body, like those of many others, was never found. For some, this means there is hope that these people who went missing in action might still be alive. A relative may have been wounded, lost, have amnesia, or feel ashamed of having run away. Most importantly, he or she may still be alive.

The Buried Battle (892)

This dreadful battle took place some 15 years ago, north of Crail, in Reizh. During the hectic fight against the Feondas, and due to the uneven ground and pelting rain, large landslides occurred and buried many of the combatants. In the following days, a persistent fog hindered the search and rescue efforts, and in the end, people had to come to terms with the fact that, although the Feond threat had been driven back, many had been lost, and the mourners would have to make do with cenotaphs*. The former king's eldest son, the much-liked Prince Eamonn, was among the missing. The next in line for the throne was Bronchaerd, his younger brother, who became king 10 years ago today, and who has faced constant opposition from the lords of the Emerald Crescent ever since then. This royal tragedy sometimes overshadows the fact that, everywhere in Reizh, there are families that still hope that a relative of theirs survived. Serious wounds or survivor's guilt can explain the long delay in returning to their own... The most unlikely scenarios justify an ever-thwarted hope.

*Monument erected in memory of a person or a group of persons, the shape of which is reminiscent of a grave, though it contains no bodies



15 Years Ago...

Ehorn Deormen was a proud warrior, the husband of Reunanen, whom he married when he was 16, just before he left to fight for Prince Eammon. He died during the Buried Battle and was among the many soldiers to be reported missing. The young woman waited a long time for her husband's return, refusing to remarry despite having many suitors. However, as time went by, life carried on. Reunanen Deormen inherited several acres of forest, which added to those she already owned and to those of her late husband. Being very involved in her responsibilities, she managed her land closely, becoming a shrewd and increasingly wealthy burgher. Out of habit, she has continued to dress in a mourner's fashion, strictly wearing gray and black. Though years have passed and taken away some of her beauty, Reunanen is still the object of courtships born of more or less calculating reasons.

Today...

The last few months have brought changes with the arrival of Immchadh Kamen, a merchant and businessman from Expiation. A believer in the One, but above all a pragmatic man, he settled in Crail with the idea of boosting the exports toward the thriving Gwidrite city. Being himself a widower who had found some comfort in religion, he found a kindred spirit in Reunanen, both having the same material and spiritual interests. Under his influence, Reunanen converted to the One. People began to believe that the stranger would succeed where everyone else had failed.

However, an unexpected event brutally changed everything. A raggedy man showed at Reunanen's door and claimed to be Ehorn Deormen. Reunanen received the strange man, and she came to believe his story. She set him in a comfortable part of her house, had him washed, clothed, and fed, and helped him get back on the right path in life.

The Truth


The truth of the matter can come down to two distinct realities. It will be up to the Leader to choose which one she prefers based on psychological subtleties or overall diversity compared to the sessions she has played so far. For example, if the mysteries encountered by the PCs have always had a supernatural source, this might result in increasingly and excessively dramatic scenarios to keep surprising the Players in the long run.


In either case, the man claiming to be Ehorn was initially Andras, a peddler and petty crook. He was traveling near the site of the Buried Battle when he met a hermit, Eflynn, a survivor of the battle. The hermit was half-mad and lived like a savage, getting food from the surrounding villagers every now and then. Eflynn knew Ehorn well, for they had been friends, so he knew plenty about the life of the late young warrior.

The Leader will decide whether Andras is simply a conman or has been possessed by Ehorn, who has become a Bodysnatcher (see the Bestiary).

Trunk

The sudden change resulting from Ehorn Deormen's return displeases Immchadh Kamen greatly. He cannot believe that the soldier remained secretly alive for so long, or that he came back from the dead... and even should that be true, it would mean he is damned; an evil being, since righteous souls are supposed to safely rejoin the One. Unfortunately for Immchadh, he is in Reizh, so calling for Sigires to shed light on the matter is out of the question. Since he cannot get any assistance from the Temple, he will hire an occultist. This can involve the Characters in one of three different ways: they are passing through and seize the opportunity; they hear about it in Kalvernach; or they are directly contacted as those who solved the problem of the Mac Baellecs' castle. The mission has a primary purpose, and a secondary one:

 **Proving the Truth.** Reunanen has been mourning for 15 years already, and she is housing someone she sincerely believes to be her husband. It will not be easy to make her see her mistake; proof and persuasiveness will be required.

 **Moving On.** Should you decide that Ehorn is a Bodysnatcher, his motivation to possess Andras is connected to the love he feels for the wife who never stopped mourning him, which he might interpret as encouragement and a justification for his actions. If Reunanen directly asks Ehorn to leave, things will work out for the better. The Characters will have to find the right words to convince her... maybe through her recent faith in the One?

Subtlety and Discretion

Immchadh has genuine feelings for Reunanen and wishes to marry her. Thus, it would be convenient for him if "Ehorn" turned out to be an impostor or an evil being. Every accusation he might level against his rival will be tainted by this conflict of interest. In addition to being suspected of being simply jealous and biased, Immchadh might see his relationship with Reunanen take a sour turn according to how the events proceed. She might even go as far as to blame him for taking this ghost husband away from her... For all these reasons, Immchadh will require of the Characters that they never involve him directly in their investigation. No one must know of his part in it.

The PCs will have to be careful about it, since their pay will depend on it. They will have to find a clever pretext to get involved; something that will not draw suspicion to their employer.



The group will be paid 20 Ad for this mission. A Complicated (14) Relation (Haggling) roll can bring the sum to 25 Ad, and a Difficult (17) one to 30 Ad.

The Tale of Eflynn the Hermit

"Ehorn's" tale concerning his disappearance is that he spent a great deal of time fleeing through the mountains, then living in the wilderness, shameful that he outlived his prince. Then, one day, he came back to the site of the Buried Battle, as if in a pilgrimage. Revisiting this place spurred him to come home and face his past.

A merchant, Anisa, is currently staying at Immchadh's. She is a heavyset, plucky woman in her forties, capable of holding her own with a spear or a club against most brigands. If mention is made of the Buried Battle, she will say she heard of a hermit living close-by and talking about the events that took place there to anyone willing to lend him an ear. The Characters need concrete proof to unmask the possible impostor: simply observing him and reporting the oddities of his behavior to Reunanen will never be enough to convince her. Immchadh will therefore encourage the PCs to explore this lead.



To make the trip more memorable, the Leader can make use of the tips provided in the "Traveling" chapter of Book 2 – Travels, on p.52-57, or even introduce a significant incident. The site of the Buried Battle is a shunned, gloomy place. Since the landslide, dark trees—mainly firs—have sprouted, while battered swords, spearheads, and helmets stick out of the ground. Suggestible individuals (Influence Test with a +1 modifier (see Book 1 – Universe, p.234)) may feel like the soft earth is rumbling and that hostile shapes are moving in the distance... At nightfall, Claws of Limbo (see the Bestiary) may even manifest in the middle of a suddenly rising fog patch!

On the site of the Buried Battle, the Characters will meet the deranged hermit, Eflynn, who lives in a wooden cabin covered with grass and moss. He lives with the conviction that Prince Eammon's decisive battle will take place tomorrow! The man was a friend of Ehorn, and in spite of his insanity, he remembers him well enough to provide accurate information about the late warrior and his young wife... enough, actually, for an impostor to pass himself off as him!

The hermit will remember having met a man matching "Ehorn's" description who called himself "Andras of Kalvernach," a town he had to leave under unclear circumstances... The time Andras spent with the hermit will depend on whether he was gathering information for his con, or only stayed for the night and then became possessed.

Who Knows Andras?

If the Characters follow the lead given by the hermit and go to Kalvernach, they will be able to learn more about Andras. The authorities of the town know him and will be able to attest to his identity, if need be. If they are persuasive enough, the PCs may convince the watch to send a sergeant to Crail, so that he may testify in front of Reunanen with the hermit. The presence of this figure of authority will be needed, since the unbalanced Eflynn is not a reliable witness. Andras was pilloried, then banished after one too many gambling-based swindles in a popular district. After that, he wandered through the forest between Kalvernach and Crail, preferring to avoid the main road in order to avoid anyone who might recognize him. On his way, he was noticed by the inhabitants of various villages and he is suspected of having stolen chickens, among other minor offenses.

The Deception

In a world without identification documents, where communication is difficult and where life can be dangerous—sometimes all the more so when mysterious phenomena are involved—news concerning the life or death of people is not always reliable. Living people are reported dead, and vice-versa.

Unbalanced or opportunistic people sometimes slip through the gap and usurp a missing person's identity. In the case of politics, whole cabals sometimes scheme to spread confusion through a region, or even a kingdom, by backing even the most unlikely of claims.

The best impostures owe it not so much to physical resemblance as to knowledge of details that it is believed only the imitated individual could know about. What generally works best is to devise an engrossing, dramatic story, with an engaging character and frequent references to one's past life to detract the listeners' attention from physical dissimilarities.

According to whether the Leader goes for the mundane option or for the supernatural one, the issue can change radically and lead to many interesting developments.



The Jig is Up

In the mundane option, the man claiming to be Ehorn is nothing more than a conman, a clever crook who took advantage of a married woman's despair. Reporting his wrongdoings will quickly lead to public punishment: the seal of infamy will be branded on Andras, and he will be banished from the region, with capital punishment awaiting him should he decide to come back...

The return of Ehorn Doorman



A Difficult Choice

Andras slept on the site of the Buried Battle and was beset by the hungry ghost of Ehorn, who tore his soul away from his body in order to possess it. Ehorn is therefore himself without being himself... This revelation should raise serious issues concerning what should be done. Andras is a crook, but he is also the victim of a Bodysnatcher, while Ehorn, as much a respected fighter as he was, is now an undead creature.

The debate will quickly get heated. Immchadh will remind everyone that stealing a body to escape death is an abomination. Reunanen will be horrified, but won't immediately be ready to see her husband killed or driven away. The locals, should they hear about the story, will probably demand that Andras be executed, preferably by burning him alive or drowning him in the River Seleanne, so that they may be rid of the monster for good.

Considering the situation, the Characters may decide to perform an exorcism (see Chapter 1 – Phenomena, p.23). If they cannot get Reunanen to agree, they will, in all likelihood, have to kidnap Andras/Ehorn and act quickly under the cover of the nearby forest at night... Usually, exorcisms are used for cases of possession, when two souls are struggling in one body. Here, the case is more severe, and driving the Bodysnatcher away offers no absolute guarantee as to Andras's survival. Regarding his fate, the Leader can go for one of these three outcomes:

- ⊕ **Good Ending:** the unfortunate man is in control of himself again, shocked and deeply unsettled, but safe and sound.
- ⊕ **Bad Ending:** Andras was deprived of his body for so long that his soul is lost and his body dies.
- ⊕ **In-between:** Andras's soul goes back to his body, but he will remain weak and confused for some time before recovering.

Wind

The region of Crail is wooded and very hilly. Located on the road between Kalvernach and Leacach, it is often visited by Gwidrite and Reizhite merchants, or by Osag from the mountains who come to buy wares from the local lumbermen and craftsmen, some of whom are also farmers. As a result, many small paths lead into the undergrowth, or to wooden buildings housing the members of families who breed animals, tend fields, and practice various crafts. The atmosphere alternates between a dark forest with shrouded paths, and clearings and lighted areas of a more or less welcoming aspect.

Spectral Dance

- **Style:** investigation
- **Setting:** a big town
- **Season:** any

Roots

The starting point of this scenario is a strange, disturbing event: the death of more than thirty guests and their host, a rich deviant. The mass killing took place during a masked ball, with everyone dying at the same time when the Wing of Death, a local legend, came for an impromptu dance. The tragic event arouses superstitions and takes on unexpected proportions... However, behind this grim, supernatural facade, there is simply the revenge of a father ready to use Magience to punish those who abused his daughter in a brothel used by depraved nobles.

Trunk

The PCs can be involved in solving this sordid case by:

- knowing one of the victims and having heard of the planned ball. When they learn about their acquaintance's death, they decide to investigate this hidden side of their friend.
- being hired by the Mac Spys, one of the mourning families of nobles. For 60 azure Daols, the PCs will be asked to quietly investigate the death of the family's eldest son, Conrad. Alternatively, they may be rewarded with a letter of recommendation that will grant them access to the higher layers of society.

Branches

The Authorities' Stance

- ⊕ **An Antagonist.** Officer Gaeran, a slightly alcoholic but iron-fisted middle-aged man. He will want to have nothing to do with the PCs' business, and may even threaten to arrest them.
- ⊕ **An Ally.** Lyderall, a subordinate of Gaeran, whom he hates. He would like nothing more than to make himself noticed and expose the officer's faults in order to replace him. He will be open to any collaboration with the PCs, as long as he can claim the credit of the PCs' discoveries so that he may pull a fast one on Gaeran and play him for a fool.
- ⊕ **The Other Guards.** They are unsettled by what took place and are slow to follow Gaeran's orders. The rumor, which awoke the worst superstitions, has made a strong impression on them, and they are therefore ill-suited to disentangle truth from falsehood. They are eager to be done with the investigation and are not above rushing it.

When they talk about the slaughter, some snarky guards will readily poke fun at some of the bodies' nudity. Indeed, few wore anything other than their ball mask. Their nervousness before the strangeness of the massacre easily shows through their boisterous attitude. Some will mention that the victims seem to have died of something like bloody diarrhea, which a physician might compare to a case of accelerated cholera.


I. The Location of the Crime

⊕ The Building:

The place where the mass killing took place is not the house of Rinn Cahan, the burgher who organized the ball. It is a refurbished warehouse remote from the center of the city, deep in one of the lower town's streets, away from prying eyes. The main room is furnished with a large table and comfortable chairs. The floor is covered with carpets surrounding a central hearth with a large chimney pipe. There are many alcoves filled with pillows and small tables covered with food. Some of them include wooden crosses, to which some of the guests could be tied.

⊕ Rumors:

Rinn, the owner of the building, organized parties for young nobles wanting to satisfy some licentious whims. Some see him as an influential man, but most know that his parties were basically orgies. Rinn had hired henchmen to keep snoopers away, and some say that the cries heard from the building were not only of pleasure. He was generally regarded as a deviant wanting to extend his network and to satisfy the twisted appetites of his clientele. He was said to have many enemies, including among the nobles, as he was not above blackmailing some of them.



It is also whispered that he handed out a drug that many abused: Red Death. He was also presumed to be dabbling in hypnotism and to be making use of it on some of the guests in order to condition them into doing him a favor when required.

A Helping Hand from Science

A thorough examination (Standard (11) Perception (Observation) check) will reveal regurgitated blood spots on the floor, and bits of a crystalline powder here and there. A Complicated (14) Science (Medicine) or Craft (several possible Disciplines) roll will identify it as a variant of arsenic used to whiten glass or purify metals.

2. The Victims

Rinn and some of the guests were found clutching daggers or knives, as if they had tried to attack their assassin before suddenly dying.

Most of the bodies have already been retrieved by noble families. They paid the guards handsomely to have their late relatives evacuated swiftly and quietly. Many of the bodies are therefore out of the PCs' reach. However, not all the bodies have been identified or claimed. Clever PCs might trick or bribe guards into revealing the location of the makeshift morgue used to store the bodies: a nearby warehouse requisitioned due to being a naturally chilly place. If the PCs are too late, they will have to go to and maybe even dig in the common grave... which will obviously put them at odds with the local militia.

⊕ **Autopsy.** A properly performed examination (Complicated (14) Science (Medicine) check) will reveal that everyone died from a violent poison, with convulsions and bloody diarrhea. Several bodies show telltale white spots under their nails, and their skin has whitened in some places. Despite excessive salivation, their lips are parched, and their skin is irritated, although less so than their respiratory tract. The connection can easily be made between these symptoms and the white powder at the location of the slaughter.

3. The Survivors

⊕ Irgwin, the Mercenary

Three of Rinn's henchmen died in front of the Wing of Death. The fourth one, Irgwin, managed to run away. The locals know him well, and any one of them who has seen the scene will mention that his body was not found in the morning. If they find him, the PCs will meet a haggard, coughing man. He will tell about the monster, a hooded figure wearing a large black mantle with golden thread, as well as a long mask shaped like a raptor's head, sporting gray feathers and two little glass beads instead of eyes. Since this individual clad like the legend's vulture had an invitation, they thought it was an oddball with a dark sense of humor, and let him in. The vulture remained for ten minutes, and when it left through the main door, the air suddenly became toxic—even though there was no strange smell—sending everyone into a coughing fit. When they tried to stop the creature, a white cloud hissed from its arm. Irgwin, who was already incapacitated by a debilitating coughing fit, remained behind. He then saw his friends fall down, twitching horribly, and he ran away in spite of the coughing and gastric reflux. He is positive that the vulture is tangible: it used the doors, and one of the guards was able to grab its arm. Finally, he will confirm that some of those invited were Rinn's toys as much as they were his guests: he had turned their deviant impulses against them, blackmailing their families in exchange for his silence.



The Cooks

Maera, Lisel, and Rana were spared because the kitchen has better ventilation and is located a bit apart from the rest of the building, but they still inhaled some of the gas. They rescued a man who had managed to stumble up to the kitchen. They will identify him as Rennlis Mac Maenteg, a young noble who quickly took off his wolf mask and suffered a great deal from the vapors of the Wing of Death.



Rennlis Mac Maenteg

The Mac Maentegs will not let anyone in, but the servants will mention that in the middle of the afternoon, Rennlis takes a stroll with his bodyguard in the gardens close to the manor. This will be the best opportunity for the PCs to meet him: he is too weak to attempt anything and will easily give in if the PCs attempt to draw information out of him. He has the same symptoms as Irgwin, but was more exposed, and suffers more. He is mentally affected and seriously fears the return of the legendary Vulture. He will tell everything he knows, but his parents will be angry should they learn he talked, since they want to keep their son's superstitions and vices a secret. He will mention Lina, a commoner he only knows the first name of. He knows that Rinn conditioned her to make her one of the guests' favored playthings. He will describe her as a young woman, gorgeous but psychologically broken, whom nobles too perverse to be satisfied with simple prostitutes could abuse to their hearts' contents without her showing the slightest reaction. For some time now, nothing could affect her, an apathy Rinn prided himself on, having her go through always more debasing experiences to satisfy his clientele of wealthy deviants. She was absent during the ill-fated festivities.



Lina

Finding her won't be easy, but a well-performed investigation through the city's streets will yield results. The PCs might hear about her from members of the middle-class envious of Rinn's success, or by gathering information in the town's slums, where Rinn's henchmen used to go to retrieve borderline illegal artifacts.

Those who saw her will describe her as an empty shell. Some knew her at a younger age and saw her sink into depravity as she spent time alongside Rinn. She dreamed of social ascension and easy pleasures, and he took advantage of that to break her by using drugs and hypnosis. The PCs will be told that during a spell of lucidity, she recently sneaked out of his house to go back to her father, a well-known craftsman who set shop in the lower town.

4. Ern

More than a craftsman, Lina's father is an independent Magientist. A genius factotum, his talent primarily lies in the construction of the complex glass and metal structures for which he has become famous and now receives orders from far away. Magience plays a central part in his work: several steps of his work involve Flux, without which his architectural feats would be impossible. Ern is also involved in personal biology-oriented research, but has not mentioned it to anyone for fear of reactions. His endeavors take up all his time and profits.

When he noticed his daughter was under the Rinn's sway, it was too late. His attempts to get her back proved fruitless. When she finally came back to him, he saw how miserable she was and understood that Rinn's mistreatment had made her lose her mind, making her physically and emotionally insensate to everything around her: a body bereft of its soul... She mechanically told him about everything he wished to know, and in spite of her lack of reaction, he pledged to avenge her. He planned to bring death to all those

who had abused his child. Among Lina's belongings, he found an invitation for the upcoming ball. That gave him the idea of dramatizing his revenge by putting on the appearance of an old legend. He designed a deadly gas from a chemical he used to whiten his sculpture's glass, knowing of its lethal properties. He used his Magientist knowledge to change the powder into gas through the use of Flux. After he tested the gas's properties on several animals, he added a final touch to the costume (a vulture mask) to protect himself from the gas he would spread in Rinn's cesspool of depravities. Ever since crossing the line and becoming a mass murderer, Ern has become sleepless, haunted by the death machine he has invented and by his victims' dying faces. He does not regret his vengeance, but the horror of it has left its mark on him. Frightened by his own invention, he has hastily burned his costume. Bits of it can still be found in his workshop, forming an incriminating jigsaw puzzle.

Leaves

Once they have pieced the story together, the PCs can conclude their investigation, but they may be torn between their mission and the reasons that have driven Ern to act, all the more so if they see Lina, whose condition can hardly leave anyone indifferent. They will have to decide what to do. At any rate, Ern and his daughter, shaken as they both are, will not offer much resistance.

If they refuse to report Ern and Lina, they will probably have to hide their findings from Lyderall. Having Ern as an ally can prove interesting, given his wealth of Magientist knowledge and materials. However, if the PCs investigated on the Mac Spyr's behalf, their employer will not be happy, possibly going as far as to hire another team to check their story. This will also mean trouble for Ern, whom the PCs may feel bound to protect as much as they will have to protect themselves.

On the other hand, if they choose to stick with Lyderall to the end, he will prove crafty enough to take his superior's place later on, which will make him an interesting ally, though a not so reliable one since he will prove as corruptible as his predecessor... As for the Mac Spys, as long as the PCs have kept quiet about working for them, they will be satisfied and will pay the promised sum. If they keep the guard out of this and tell everything to their employer, the head of the Mac Spys will be overjoyed and will reward the PCs handsomely, paying them and recommending them. He will have Ern and Lina killed one week later—a quiet vendetta nobody will care about...

The PCs should also keep in mind that they have peeked inside the closets of deviant nobles, which may infuriate some of them and earn the PCs warnings or lead to them being watched from afar. Even if they haven't uncovered anything, they will be suspected of being capable of revealing some dark secrets... maybe one of the families will even want to find this out themselves...

Note that the rumors about Rinn and his misdeeds are true: he was a relentless manipulator and procurer. He is dead now, but his ambitious projects targeted high spheres. It could be that in some cases, the conditioning has not worn off and will be triggered long after his passing. The Leader can use this as the basis for future scenarios by putting the PCs on the track of strange new events...

Supernatural options

By using this option, the Leader can give a more supernatural atmosphere to this canvas. Additionally, it can branch off into a side story. To use this option, the Magientist Ern has to die some way or another, whether he commits suicide or is killed by the Mac Spys. After his death, the mask he wore, spared amidst the burned remains of his costume, will become an Object of Power. It will then turn out the Magientist did end up giving existence to the legendary Wing of Death, ready to kill again on its path... To end this curse, the PCs will have to find the new bearer of the mask—a poor sap chancing upon the object, or maybe Lyderall, or even one the PCs—and destroy it.

Object of Power: The Vulture's Mask

The mask worn by Ern escaped total destruction and was emotionally imbued with its wearer's madness and with the mass murder during which it was used. The next person to touch it might be mentally dominated by it (Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll).

Description:

A vulture mask with scorched spots. Worn with ample clothing, it gives its bearer the appearance of a grim raptor.


Properties:

Once every night, the bearer can exhale an invisible cloud of deadly gas. The victims must pass a Stamina check or die. Outdoors or in a well-ventilated area, the Difficulty is Standard (11), but may be as high as Very Difficult (20) in an enclosed room. Regardless of the initial Difficulty Threshold, the gas is considered a Poison of Deadly Virulence with immediate effects: death ensues within the day. Immediate care will be necessary to save the victim (see the rules about Poisons in Book 1 – Universe, p.243).

Influence:

The mask induces in its bearer's mind the irrepressible will to track down and kill sexual delinquents. The bearer's Conviction score is then considered one point higher. When night comes, he dons the mask and a large black coat, then goes on a hunt. He is aware of what he does at night, but will never reveal his double identity. By day, he gathers information and clues about the criminals he hunts down at night. If Lina is still alive, the one called Wing of Death will become her protector, slaughtering anyone attempting to harm her.

Wind

 The major inspiration for this canvas is The Masque of the Red Death, by E. A. Poe. The ambiance of this short story and that of some scenes of Kubrick's Eyes Wide Shut (1999) are good examples for the corrupted atmosphere of the town in which the canvas takes place.

Should a Leader decide to go for the Object of Power option, the Watchmen comic can be a good source of inspiration to explore the theme of a deviant vigilante.



Chapter 4

Bestiary



he hardest part in dealing with intangible entities is precisely that their nature is so alien to what we know. The same questions invariably come to our minds: How to kill what is already dead? How to hit that which has no body? The few following examples, taken from my research, should bring at least the beginning of an answer to the reader.

I have been able to establish that manifestations of these creatures most often occur in specific circumstances:



Fog:

I have come to notice that, whether by day or by night, fog is the most reliable indicator. I have often wondered if it isn't the reason why, in the Temple's beliefs, the world of the damned is called Limbo, a name evocative of mist. Could mist be a conduit for lost souls to navigate between worlds and reach ours? Fog, whether it is inherently evil or a simple vector, is known to linger in notoriously dangerous, haunted places: Broken Stones, Calhtair's Wood, the Slope of the Fallen, etc.



Negative emotions:

It seems that the more an individual is psychologically vulnerable, the more likely he or she is to be targeted by ghosts. Why is this so? It may be that these intangible entities "sniff out" emotions. This means of perception may be similar to that of scavengers who seem to be able to feel death coming, or predators smelling blood from afar.



Night:

Supernatural events seem to occur much more frequently by night than by day. More data would be required to be sure of it, but it appears that shadows, or the absence of light, are a determining factor. Dark, cold, or stormy weather is conducive to manifestations.

Through all the books I have read, there was no shortage of versions of exorcism rituals. Currently, I have no certainty regarding what makes them effective. I have heard that the same ritual proved to be useful one time and useless another, which puzzles me to no end. This must be influenced by the occultist-exorcist's state of mind: it is impossible to perform a ritual if you are panicked, angry, or despairing.





Human Madness

Many unsettling phenomena or frightening behaviors result from mental disorders (see Book 1 – Universe, p.274-279). The boundaries of reason are not that of nature: the most unbelievable acts can have a concrete origin. It is often troubling to notice how common evil is. Any one of us can experience mourning or horror; likewise, the mind of any Tri-Kazelian can be deeply disturbed by Feondas, war, epidemics, or famine. These perturbations can drive some to extreme and frightening behaviors:

☒ An individual affected by Mystical Delusion can believe that he is communing with superior entities that only exist in his mind.

☒ A Frenzied patient may undergo such fits of rage that she will seem possessed by external, evil forces.

☒ Hallucinations can take the form of horrible creatures and phenomena.

Ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty are good ingredients for disquiet and suspense. It can be interesting to introduce varied situations, so that the Players will not be able to easily and immediately identify the problem at the core of the scenario or canvas.



Bodysnatcher

⌘ Attack: varies*
 ⌘ Damage: varies*
 ⌘ Defense: varies*
 ⌘ Protection: varies*

⌘ Speed: varies*
 ⌘ Potential: varies*
 ⌘ Stamina: varies*
 ⌘ Health: varies*

⌘ Perception: varies*
 ⌘ Stealth: varies*
 ⌘ Feats: varies*

*These values vary according to the body invaded by the Bodysnatcher.

A Bodysnatcher is a spirit seeking to live again by reincarnating in a human body. I have not been able to ascertain the fate of the host's original soul: maybe it is destroyed, or simply subdued under the Bodysnatcher's influence. Regardless, all the actions performed seem to be the responsibility of the creature, and in no way that of the host.

In my opinion, these entities represent one of the worst abominations possible. They sneak into homes, are welcomed as friends and relatives, but sooner or later, they show their evil nature. Be it through cruelty, perversion, malevolence, brutal desires, or senseless violence, the Bodysnatcher always ends up betraying others' trust and taking delight in the disasters it causes. It seems that these beings feel some kind of thirst for excess, power, and destruction, as if to prove to themselves that they are alive. I have heard that it is sometimes possible to reason with a Bodysnatcher, or that Elect of the Temple able to perform the Miracle of Purification have been able to exorcise them. This would be good news, but to this day, my experience is rather negative. According to my research, there are three typical manifestations:

⌘ Nightmare

These Bodysnatchers are located in places generally considered cursed. They beset anyone sleeping there, harrowing their victim until they kill him in his nightmares, so I heard. Then, while he is in a state of shock, they take his body. These horrors are capable of taking an adult body just as easily as forcing their way into the mind of an unborn child. The locations of great tragedies are where they lurk most often. It would be ill advised for anyone in Reizh to sleep near the site of the Buried Battle (892) north of Crail, or that of the Battle of the Bloody Ford (860) on the banks of the Donir. Other sites must certainly be avoided, but it would be difficult to draw up a list, particularly in duly setting apart facts from mere superstition. I believe Varigals and Tarish are the best sources of information in that regard.

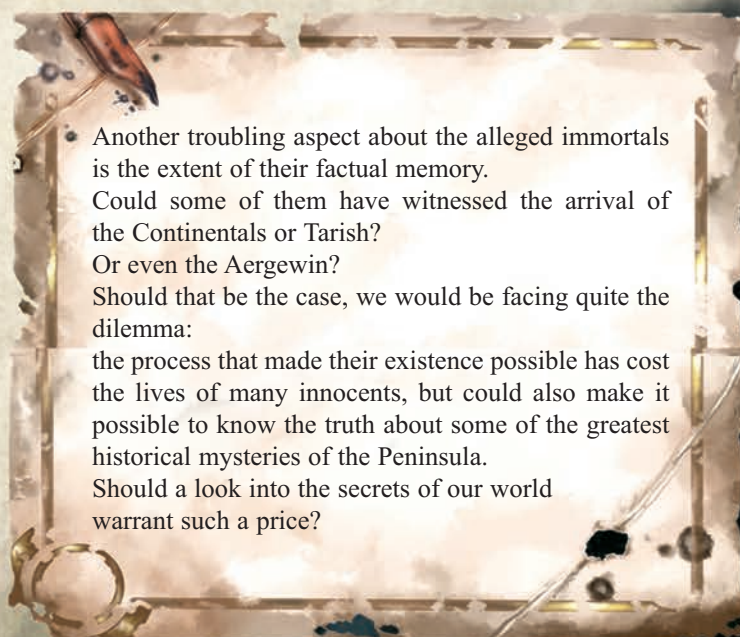
⌘ Immortal

Some legends speak of individuals—sorcerers or Morcail, depending on the version—who are able to cheat death by jumping from body to body. The Bodysnatchers I was able to observe did not seem to have a very developed identity, so if credit were to be given to these tales, it would imply that these immortals have found a way to control the process and remain themselves despite the change of body. I suppose that drugs putting the victim in a sort of coma must be used, in addition to meditation techniques for the sorcerer. Through such a process, one might be able to retain one's sense of self, or at least most of it. Indeed, it seems likely to me that, barring special methods, the Bodysnatcher's personality must be altered after living for so long and through so many different bodies.

⌘ Ancestor

The Tarish have a relationship with their ancestors that I find rather unhealthy, sometimes claiming that they may be reborn among a clan.

Could it be that some clans know of rituals forcing the reincarnation of supposedly Tarish spirits within the bodies of unborn children? A troubling question, but for lack of data, it is only conjecture.





Claws of Limbo

⌘ Attack: 15
⌘ Damage: 3 (slashing)
⌘ Defence: 8
⌘ Protection: 1

⌘ Speed: 8
⌘ Potential: 1
⌘ Stamina: N/A.*
⌘ Health: 40/30/20/10

⌘ Perception: 15
⌘ Stealth: 10
⌘ Feats: N/A.*

(*): Claws of Limbo do not run, jump, or swim, and do not chase their victims beyond about 15 yards from their attack spot. They cannot be poisoned, drowned, or suffocated.

Cursed places are filled with whispers seeking to turn minds insane, feeding on their doubts and worries. Those who lose themselves can then fall, body and soul, under the sway of dark, malevolent powers. Some become mad or die after exposure to these entities. The luckiest keep only confused memories, locked behind the veil of amnesia.

In some exceptional cases, danger becomes tangible in the form of a monstrosity springing from the fog. "Claws of Limbo," as they are traditionally called, are one of these manifestations. No one knows exactly what they are: their appearance is heralded by screeching noises similar to the legs of some gigantic arthropod, but there is no written testimony making mention of the body the claws are attached to. Some believe that these creatures are simply mist-dwelling Feondas that make use of a venom, triggering nightmarish hallucinations.



Terror

Facing Claws of Limbo for the first time is a terrifying experience triggering a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.



Confusing Mist

Claws of Limbo only appear in the thickest fog, and they seem to exude a mind-affecting mist themselves. Anyone nearby must succeed a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance check not to lose some or all of their memories of before, during, and after the encounter. The ensuing amnesia or confusion can last several hours, and the only clear reminders of the fight are the multiple lacerations the victim suffered.



Scars

Wounds inflicted by Claws of Limbo heal poorly and often leave scars or blemishes. Each day, a wounded Character must succeed at a Complicated (14) Stamina check instead of a Standard (11) one to recover (see Book 1 – Universe, p.240 for the rules about recovery).

Anchored Ghost

⊕ Attack: N/A
⊕ Damage: N/A
⊕ Defence: N/A
⊕ Protection: N/A

⊕ Speed: N/A
⊕ Potential: N/A
⊕ Stamina: N/A.*
⊕ Health: N/A

⊕ Perception: N/A
⊕ Stealth: N/A
⊕ Feats: N/A.*

(*): No physical characteristics are applicable. Ghosts always act indirectly, through the use of the powers described below. Depending on its strength, a Ghost may wield one or several of these powers.



Illusions. The victim must make a Mental Resistance roll to resist an illusion. For a large one, such as transforming a ruin into a luxurious, animated place, the Difficulty Threshold is Complicated (14). If the Ghost invests all of its energy in disguising a single object, the Threshold becomes Very Difficult (20).



Harrowing Visions. The target must make a Mental Resistance roll (the Threshold ranges from 11 to 17 according to the Ghost's power) or be assailed by visions imposed by the Ghost. These visions are often distressing, sometimes horrifying, and leave the victim irresponsive to external stimuli.



Forced Sleepwalking

The victim must make a Mental Resistance roll (the Threshold ranges from 11 to 17 depending on the Ghost's power) or fall deeply asleep while his body goes into a sleepwalking-like state, led by the Ghost's intent. Each time the Ghost tries to have the sleepwalker act contrary to his personality, he can attempt another Mental Resistance roll with the same Threshold as the first to come back to his senses.



Rot and Decay

Some Ghosts, perhaps due to their connection with the deathly energy they are made of, seem able to insidiously influence their surroundings. Their presence spoils food, makes water brackish, accelerates wear and tear, and chips at links and ties. As a result, accidents are more frequent where such a Ghost is located. Since this influence is slow and subtle, the skeptical will always find an explanation related to lack of maintenance or bad luck, turning a blind eye on the actual occult threat. Years can go by during which a place will simply be deemed dangerous and insalubrious.

My experience has shown that Anchored Ghosts are the most common type—so much so that the “Anchored” part is generally left out. Still, for your peace of mind, let me make it clear that “common” does not mean that Ghosts abound everywhere. They are, fortunately, an extremely rare phenomenon. The main characteristic these phantoms have in common is the existence of one or several Anchors tying them to the world of the living. They imbue their remains or a personal item through which they can act in a limited radius. The exact distance depends on how aptly the entity is able to wield its supernatural powers.

Fall, winter, night, tempests, and fog are circumstances that facilitate the manifestations and their magnitude.



Concerning spiritualism and exorcism techniques, the reader should read the first chapter of this book where they are detailed.

This creature—a fictional one, but does that really bear mention?—is the bastard child of several legends and superstitions. It is nothing but an example of syncretism between the so-called spirits worshiped by the Demorthèn and the afterworld, invented by the adepts of the Temple to support their belief in the survival of the soul. The Gwidrites love ghost stories; through them, they conciliate their culpability for trading paganism for other nonsense. What we have is therefore a combination of two influences: the pagan belief that ghosts are bound to a precise location, and the Templist theme of a soul torn by repressed human passion.

Why do ghosts keep showing themselves only to feeble-minded and probably already slightly deranged people? I have been in allegedly haunted houses. What did I find there? Mostly dust, bad lighting, toxic mold, and poor insulation resulting in drafts. Echoes and acoustic oddities also contribute to granting a disquieting atmosphere to what, in the end, is simply a poorly designed building. Inflicting unpleasant sensations or even hallucinations is by no means the prerogative of curses. Here is a tentative list of natural causes that do not imply mental diseases:

☞ *Chimerical Fever* (see Book 1 – Universe, p.242) triggers hallucinations and has been associated with sleepwalking fits among some patients.

☞ *Opallion* (see Book 1 – Universe, p.244), a disgusting drug, much too easily accessible in our kingdom's largest cities. Note that this is only one sample of a long list of hallucinogenic substances well known in our traditional pharmacopoeia.

☞ *Some among the peasantry also regularly fall accidentally victim to ergot fungus. Rather than blame ghosts for inflicting hallucinations on them, they should learn to spot the signs of this disease.*

Dear friend, this is basic education that should be administered to the people of our kingdoms rather than the inane fancies of Steren Slàine!

Joderine

⌘ Attack: 13
⌘ Damage: 2 (claws)
and 2 (tentacle hair)
⌘ Defence: 10

⌘ Protection: 0
⌘ Speed: 9
⌘ Potential: 3
⌘ Stamina: N/A.*

⌘ Health: 60
⌘ Perception: 15
⌘ Stealth: 10
⌘ Feats: 10

(*): Due to being an animated corpse, Joderine is immune to asphyxia, drowning, poison, or even Health penalties. Apart from the faint smell of decay she gives off, she is stealthy and knows how to use her environment to her advantage.

The motivations of Joderine, lurking in her lair, are unclear. Maybe she just wants to take revenge on every living being? Throughout her life, she felt cheated, and since her death, she is but a tormented mass of rage and hatred. A sadistic thing, she seeks to spread anguish and confusion, to methodically disunite, isolate, terrify, and break all those who come within her reach. Maybe she plans to prey on a particularly weak-willed individual whom she will be able to subjugate or manipulate... or whom she can dupe into believing that she knows the secrets of the world of the dead, or the location of buried treasures, asking for sacrifices in return for her services.

Most frightening is the idea that there might be other beings similar to this abomination...

Should Joderine be defeated, her crumbling body would no longer be able to house her vengeful spirit.

She would then be put out of her misery... unless the Leader decides to have her spirit become an Anchored Ghost (see p.69).



Insinuation

The perceptions of the target are altered according to what Joderine perceives of the victim's personality and desires: tactile or olfactory illusions; making a shape appear out of the corner of the eye; whispering words... A victim may believe that his or her companions are right here, then notice that he or she is actually alone. To resist the influence of an Insinuation, a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll is required.



Rot and Decay

Like Anchored Ghosts, Joderine can trigger accelerated rotting and wear and tear (spoiling food, making water brackish, rusting objects, etc.) She uses it to trigger an accident after her prey has been lured away from the group.



Tentacle Hair.

Joderine is seemingly able to extend her hair. Maybe this is a partial illusion; maybe her hair actually is made of tenebrous tentacles... At any rate, she can use it to grasp, pull, and strangle. On the Round she acts, in addition to her melee claw attack, Joderine can attack an opponent a few yards away, who will then not be able to strike back without a suitable weapon such as a polearm.



Terror

The simple sight of Joderine is a nightmarish ordeal that triggers a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance check, not only because of her horrific appearance, but also due to the darkness of the emotions she exudes. She has become a creature of Limbo. The first encounter with Joderine causes intense terror that can be fatal: on a 1 on the Mental Resistance check, the victim goes into cardiac arrest. CPR (Complicated (14) Medicine roll) or the injection of a Tonic must be administered for the unlucky soul to survive in a Critical Health Condition, and with the permanent loss of one Stamina point and an extra Permanent Trauma point (in addition to the one suffered due to rolling a natural 1 on the Mental Resistance roll).

Suantraige's Testimony

“The Varigal took another sip, then went on with her tale. The patrons were dumbfounded. The Mac Baellecs' manor was infamous for being haunted, but to hear this...

“We went there, me and a few others. I guided them there... I should have refused, but how could I have known? We walked around the place. There was blood everywhere. We found all those who lived there, and they were all dead. We didn't want to stay, but Mudho had found a bag with odd tools in it—probably Magientist stuff. He said the killer mustn't have been one, and so there was a body missing. Judging from the tracks, the dead Magientist had to be at the bottom of the well. There was no more rope or bucket, so we had to make do. Mudho saw it first, while we were lowering him down. His cries, which echoed on the stones, sounded like... I don't know... it was the most awful thing I ever heard. We quickly pulled him back, but something was clinging to him, dragging hard. It was like hair coiling around him; like a spider ensnaring its prey in a cocoon. We managed to pull him out, then we cut the hair. It was so soft; it was disgusting.

Mudho was dead, and from the bottom of the well, the thing was climbing. It had tentacle-like black hair and very pale, bloodless skin; like a drowned woman. I only caught a glimpse of its face, but I could see that its eyes, behind the mass of hair, were entirely black! It gave out something like an aura of death; the certainty of hopelessness and suffering. Absolute horror. One of the guys screamed. His face contorted, and he died on the spot. Me and the last one, we ran away immediately, and I thank the spirits for having allowed us to leave that abominable lair...”



On a somber autumn night, it was pouring. The rainwater was ice cold, gushing out of the overflowing gutters. In the paved, bending streets of Baldh-Ruoch, swift streams ran, trickling down the stairs. Sheltered under a balcony, a man was waiting for the downpour to relent, idly scanning the artificial landscape, of which he could never tire. He enjoyed the sight of the stout iron balustrades and parapets; of the Nebulars driving the shadows away. In his eyes, they were a metaphor for the human mind, with science and reason as necessary tools to keep in check the senseless excesses rising from superstition and emotion. Had he been the sort to make an analogy—a figure of speech he hated all the more for how often this Steren made use of it—he would have compared it to gardening. A skillful gardener had to pull out weeds,

poison intrusive roots, prune shrubs, and select which seedlings to crossbreed...

Finally, it would soon be over for Steren! He had written an incendiary article that would put an end to her career in the capital city. Everyone would understand how nonsensical her rants were. All these allegations, which were either childish mistakes or base lies, would fully come to light. After that, she would be free to spend her days in disgrace, eking out a miserable living from luring the simple-minded with paltry tricks... or she could go back to being what she should have remained: a servant.

These self-taught commoners always figured that they were suddenly capable of great discoveries that had eluded true men of science.

“Mister Mac Bedwyr?”

It was a young girl's voice. With her leather hood drooping low in front of her face, it took him a few seconds to recognize her. Her oddly shaped, ample coat reached down to her knees, and in the darkness, he could make out the ladylike boots she wore, as well as her legs left bare in spite of the weather.

“Good evening, Oannel. You can call me Enyl, you know... How are you?”

An already tall girl for her twelve years, Oannel was the younger sister of a demented patient committed to the local asylum. Out of friendship for the family, Enyl had taken charge of the unfortunate young woman after she murdered a man—under the influence of an evil doll, so she claimed. Had he been an adept of Steren, he would have burned the so-called “Object of Power,” or “Anchor,” but such ritualistic practices were only childish means of finding reassurance. A man of science had to acknowledge the existence of such abysses and face them. More to the point, he had to help others come to terms with them. That was why he had convinced Oannel's sister to leave the toy before taking her to what would probably be her last home.

“I am fine, Mister Mac Bedwyr.”

“But what are you doing here, at such an hour?”

“I went out for some fresh air. I believe it was necessary.”

“In such weather?”

“I was choking, it needed to get out.”

A strange way to phrase it. Ah, children!

“I needed to get out,” he corrected her, “It is late. Your parents must be worried. I will walk you home. You know, it's not safe for a young girl to be alone in a city... some men might want to hurt you.”

“Like the one my sister killed?”

Of course. The girl was obviously thinking a lot about her elder sibling... it had been more than a year ago already. What could he tell her?

“We will never know for sure what happened. The dead do not talk, and the insane say too much.”

Her sister had behaved like a misfit, always pushing the boundaries, rebelling against the authority of her parents and all other adults. It came as additional proof of her immature character that she had bought that doll, as pretty as it may be. It was secondhand, probably originally made by a skilled craftsman. Nothing indicated that it might have been connected to any horrible events, as the occultists' mythology would have had it. No, there was nothing, nothing else than the delusion of a madness-stricken teenager.

“I wanted to tell you, Mister Mac Bedwyr, that my sister was right. The doll really talks, you know.”

Turning aside sharply, he saw her take something into her arms, something she had kept under her coat so far. With the lack of light, he could not be sure, but it looked a lot like her sister's doll. Could Oannel be nurturing a delusion similar to her elder sister's? If she were treated quickly, it might be possible to save her...

... or was it to save himself?


Nonsense! Now he was developing irrational, absurd fears, the very things he fought against! A grown man has nothing to fear from a small girl, and even less so from a doll. It was an inanimate object, nothing more! How foolish it was to imagine that this thing could develop a consciousness, and on top of that, psychic powers of suggestion, and even of domination! Balderdash!

“Give me that doll, please.”

His voice was not as firm as before. Although his reason remained grounded, he could perceive a dull anxiety rising. However, the child handed him the toy obediently, without hesitation, without crying or throwing a tantrum... A far cry from her sister.

By dint of reading so much of Steren's ramblings, he had inadvertently let such worries creep in. How much worse could it be for suggestible people?

The doll was heavier than he remembered, and it held some of Oannel's warmth. He took shelter below an outreaching roof to



examine it, not far from a Nebular. Bathed in the eerie light, it felt like he was holding a dead infant. A face the color of old paper, and quality clothes now worn, embellished with newly added ribbons. The curly hair was silk-soft, possibly made from a real woman's. How odd that he did not notice it the last time: it was now what struck him the most.

"Well, the doll won't tell anything to me." He concluded once he was done as he gave it back.

"That is because you don't know how to listen."

"Really now?"

"It was made especially for a girl of about my age. Her admirer gave it to her. He used her braids to give the doll hair, so that they may look alike. It was a gift to reward her for being obedient to him and not telling anyone about their games. She had to go to him often, since her parents traveled a lot and it was too dangerous for her to go with them."

"What story is that? Who told you such things?"

He stared at Oannel intently. Was she telling him that she or her sister had suffered abuse? Or had she heard about it elsewhere? Was she aware of what she was saying?

It all made sense now: strange behavior, the need to go out unreasonably late, cryptic speech...

He could see it all clearly now! All... except the blow he took to the stomach. There was only a glimpse of something metallic, then something cold, painful. Struggling for breath, he clutched his stomach, feeling his blood pouring out in his mouth and through the hole in his abdomen as he tried to utter a simple "Why?" But the blows were raining now, and he had no strength left to drive them away, to protect himself. He might have, had he not been so deeply stunned and horrified.

"It's your fault, you forced me. You left me the doll. It needed to get out."

She was now standing above him, out of breath. Her strength was beyond comprehension. Was madness the cause of such might? Enough power for a child to strike a grown man down? Or had he been mistaken from the start and triggered this transformation by letting this thingtake possession of her? Was he responsible for what was yet to happen?

The pain was unbearable, but he knew that relief would soon come with death.



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

"Dear Reader, as you hold this book in your hands, wherever you may be in Tri-Kazel, know that you possess the summary of everything I have been able to learn about hauntings, ghosts, specters, and shadows..."

The Black Moon Handbook is a book written by occultist Steren Slaine and annotated by alienist Enyl Mac Bedwyr. They have distinctly conflicting points of view on the nature of the strange phenomena that occur in Tri-Kazel. This confrontation offers arguments and methods of investigation, both to aficionados of the paranormal and to its detractors.

Although it is primarily intended for Game Leaders, this book can also be made directly part of the game by having the Characters find it and then allowing the Players to read it. Contents include:

- Haunting Phenomena in Tri-Kazel

A chapter introducing how hauntings manifest and how exorcisms can be carried out. It provides ingredients and advice to enrich and diversify eerie atmospheres, from mere oddities to spectacular supernatural manifestations.

- Figures

A chapter detailing five Tri-Kazelian figures, each with a particular connection to occult phenomena: Steren Slaine, the author of this book; Amy Dust Mèirleach, a Varigal who escaped the Ashen Yard; Brother Arathos, a former Sigire turned sorcerer; Keïr Mac Farquam, knight and last of a cursed line, and Yzrael Mac Baellec, an assassin wracked by madness.

- Canvases

Four short scenarios complete with game aids offering unique plots woven around occult phenomena.

- Bestiary

The book ends with the profiles of four creatures which are the objects of many legends and much speculation. Each one is connected to at least one of the Canvases or Figures.



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