

SHADOWS OF ESTEREN

O ~ PROLOGUE




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O. PROLOGUE

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

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

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche



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Agate RPG is a brand of Agate
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Foreword



Picture a peninsula with steep hills, thick forests that barely let the sunlight through, misty valleys, and fortresses clinging to the mountainside... and beyond the oceans, the vast and mysterious Continent. In such awe-inspiring landscapes, the Shadows of Esteren role-playing game will introduce you to a gritty, realistic world, where supernatural elements are never trivial or meaningless, and where men have to face fierce threats lurking in the dark.

We are pleased to present to you Book 0 Prologue, which will help you discover the universe of Shadows of Esteren while preparing you for the first episode of the official campaign.

The first chapter, “Origins”, is an introduction to the main concepts of the game as well as a general presentation of the universe. It also includes a summary of the game system, comprising all the necessary elements to play through your first scenarios. And finally, you will find six illustrated characters ready to play: Yldiane the Varigal, Arven the fighter, Ean the fugitive, Liam the Scholar, Mòr the Ionnthén, and Urvan the Blade knight. This first chapter is perfect for familiarizing yourself with Shadows of Esteren and for introducing other players to this universe.

The second chapter, “Omens”, is a triptych of scenarios written by Nelyhann: “Loch Varn”, a scenario exploring the confines of dream and madness; “Poison”, an investigation scenario set in Melwan's Vale; and finally “Red Fall”, a story of disappearance and occultism in Dearg's Vale. These three scenarios constitute the prologue to the official campaign, whose first episode will be set in Dearg's Vale. You can find more information on that subject on page 32.

Esteren in a Few Words...

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If this happens to be your first contact with this universe, here are the main themes that have led to its creation and which will help you to better comprehend of Book 0 - Prologue.

- **A Dark Universe.** Esteren is a tough medieval world where the characters will be confronted with horror and multi-faced threats. However, this does not mean they are doomed to perish; their survival will depend on their ingenuity as well as their courage. The gothic tradition is epitomized in majestic landscapes where the forces of nature rage, the setting for impassioned and tragic stories. It can also be found in the characters portrayed by the players, animated by violent feelings such as love, hatred, or jealousy, as well as in the pervasive madness in the game. Horror is to be understood in a classical and literary sense; that is to say a feeling of dread, blended with admiration in front of a vertiginous reality.

- **Low Fantasy.** In Esteren, there are no fantasy races like elves or dwarves, nor are there wizards with devastating spells. The supernatural is far from absent, but its manifestations are relatively veiled, thus giving, at first, the impression of a realistic and gritty universe.

- **A Game with Secrets.** Esteren is a universe that holds numerous secrets, which the player characters can be led to discover, at least partially.

- **An Intuitive Game System.** Shadows of Esteren is a game of atmosphere, favoring the interactions among the players and their immersion over any kind of simulative aspect. The game system has been designed to be intuitive and quickly understandable, focusing on aspects like sanity and the creation of characters, rather than action or combat.

A Complete Series

The way horror is explored and the principle of revealing secrets (see “The Horror of a Revelation” on p.9) have motivated the structure of the various books of the series.

- **Book 1 - Universe.** The first book, Universe, depicts Esteren's universe the way it is perceived by its inhabitants. Most of the time, the supernatural, the horrific, and the fantastic are only present as underlying themes, as they do not make up the daily lives of most of the natives of this world.

- **Book 2 - Travels.** This book is a supplement of the Shadows of Esteren series intended for game leaders. Inside, you can find the leader's screen, a large color map of Tri-Kazel, as well as a ninety-page supplement, including five short scenarios (called “canvases”), twelve NPCs, and a bestiary gathering a few examples of Feondas.

- **The Monastery of Tuath.** The Monastery of Tuath is a fifty-two page supplement only sold with the album Of Men and Obscurities. You can find inside a scenario inspired by The Name of the Rose and several player aids dedicated to the Temple's religion. The supplement comes with a map of the monastery as well as a dozen loose sheets of various player aids: clues, portraits of NPCs, and more.

- **The Official Campaign.** The first cycle of Shadows of Esteren's first campaign is introduced by five episodes forming part of a large panorama, which will confront your players with the grimmest secrets of the universe. Including scenarios for one part and player aids for another, each episode will detail a particular location where the action will take place. The first episode is called Dearg and is set in the eponymous valley, depicted in the Red Fall scenario of this book.

- **Book 4 - Secrets.** While only Book 1 is required to play, it only reveals all of its depth with its match: Book 4 - Secrets. This book, intended only for game leaders, sheds light on the universe's backstage and provides tools to introduce the revelations the characters will have to confront.

Other books are in the making. To follow the current news of the series, go to: www.esteren.org

A Cross-Media Universe

From the beginning, Esteren was conceived to exist simultaneously on several media echoing one another. The aim is to heighten the immersion of the reader—and player—in this universe, while offering him a range of different experiences.

Role-playing holds a particularly important role in this idea of offering the reader a rich interactive experience: it makes it possible to enter Esteren's universe and to embody Characters in order to live entirely new adventures. Other media complete this experience, notably:

- **Music.** The Of Men and Obscurities album, composed by Delphine Bois, will introduce you to a mysterious atmosphere, sometimes delicate, sometimes dreadful. The album was released on February 2011 and you can find several extracts of it online (www.myspace.com/esteren). The album is also included in The Monastery of Tuath supplement.

- **Video Game.** Following the tradition of Point-and-Click games (Monkey Island, Broken Sword, Runaway, etc.), this video game has you follow the adventures of Yldiane the Varigal. The first episode, The Mac Lyrs' Legacy, takes place in Melwan's vale, adjacent to Loch Varn and Dearg's, found in this book.

- **Internet.** Shadows of Esteren's portal (www.esteren.org) will allow you to go on with the exploration of the universe, mainly via the official forum which gathers an active and impassioned community, offering scenarios and player aids.

Have a nice reading and enjoy the game!
The Team





Chapter I
Origins





Introduction to the Universe

The Guiding Concepts of the Game

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

Multiple Antagonisms

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

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A Dark Atmosphere

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

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

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

Rules Centered Around Psychology

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

A Shocking, Sometimes Horrifying Supernatural Aspect

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

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

Horror in *Shadows of Esteren*

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

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

The Horror of a Revelation

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

A System of Modular Scenarios

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

The Universe of the Game

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



The Tri-Kazel Peninsula: Rough and Beautiful Landscapes

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

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

The Three Kingdoms: Between Tradition and Modernity

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

The Demorthèn Cult

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

Tri-Kazel and the Rest of the World

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

The Influence of the Continent: Science and Religion

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

The Temple and the Religion of the One God

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

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

Magience: a New Science

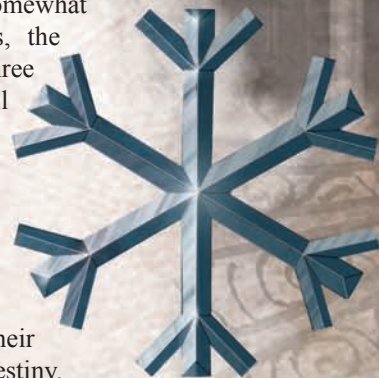
In Reizh, the envoys of the Confederation quickly aroused enthusiasm thanks to their miraculous tools. The Magientists, a scientific order initiated into remarkable knowledge, proved that their machines could greatly improve the lot of the people. Thanks to Magience, running water, public lighting, and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

A Culture in Peril

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

Factions and Antagonisms

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



Living in Tri-Kazel

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

Clan System and Feudalism

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

Emergence of a Clergy

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

Magience and Scientific Culture

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

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

Isolated and Fragile Communities

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

The Cities: Uncertain Shelters

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

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



A Harsh Weather

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

The Feondas: a Threat Lurking in the Shadow

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

A Mysterious Enemy

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

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

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A Continuous Threat

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

Some Sources of Inspiration

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



Summary of the Game System



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

The Ways and the PCs' Interpretation

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

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

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



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Interpreting the Rating in a Way

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

The Ways: a Tool for Interpretation

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

- ⊕ **Qualities:** assertive, optimistic, dynamic, instinctive, etc.
- ⊕ **Flaws:** impulsive, brash, proud, stubborn, etc.

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

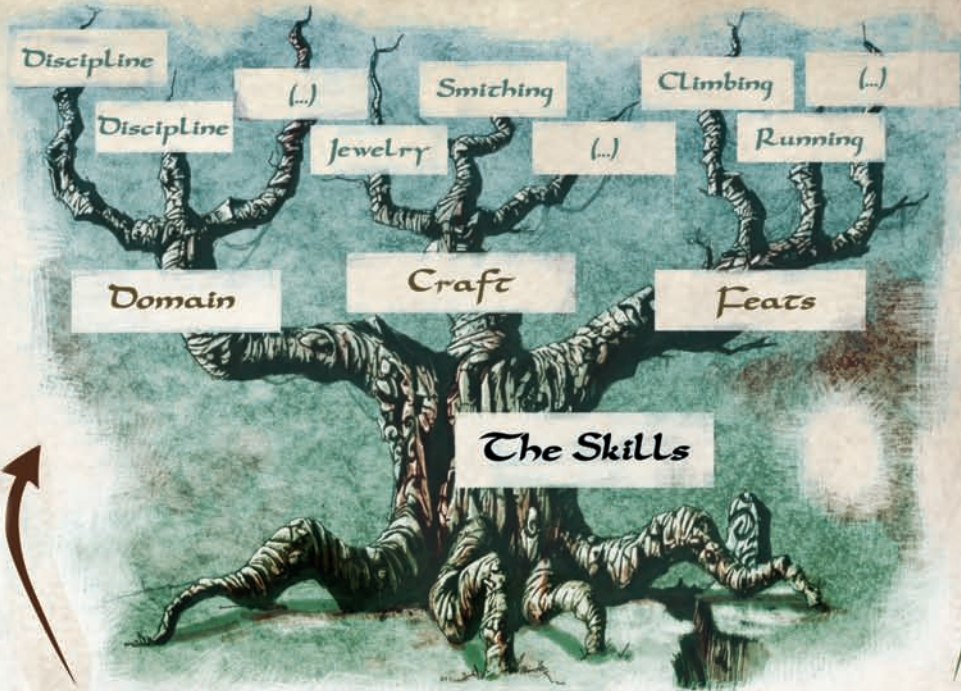
- ⊕ **Qualities:** calm, phlegmatic, levelheaded, etc.
- ⊕ **Flaws:** pessimistic, listless, sad, etc.

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

Skills

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

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



The 16 Domains

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

The Disciplines

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



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

The 16 Domains

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



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

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

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

- **Close Combat (Combativeness):** This Domain includes all melee-fighting techniques.

Interpreting a Skill's Rating

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Resolution of an Action

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

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



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

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

The Difficulty Threshold

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

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

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

Automatic Success

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

Contested Actions

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

Survival Points

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

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

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

About the Use of the Game System

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

Health

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



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

Agony

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

Healing and Resting

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



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

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

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

1. Determining the Order of Action

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

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



2. Resolving the Action

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

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

Fighting Attitudes

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

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

3. Calculating Damage

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



Margin of success - Protection rating
= Damage points

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

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

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

End of the Round

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

Sanity

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

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

Mental Disorders

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

Mental Resistance Rolls

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

Mental Resistance Roll

<i>Difficulty Threshold</i>	<i>Trauma Points</i>
11	1
14	2
17	3 (1)
20	5 (2)
25	10 (3)

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

Premade Characters

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

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



Use of Sanity in the Scenarios

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

What Next?

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

Yldiane, Varigal

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

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

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⊕ Personality

Character Traits: Intuitive / Impulsive
Latent Disorder: Elation

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

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

⊕ Equipment

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



Arven, Fighter

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

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



⊕ Personality

Character Traits: Upright / Bold
Latent Disorder: Frenzy

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

⊕ Equipment

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



Ean, Archer

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

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

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



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

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

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



Liam, Scholar

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

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

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

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<i>Health Condition Chart</i>	
<i>Good</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Okay -1</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Bad -2</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Critical -3</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Agony</i>	○

⊕ **Personality**

Character Traits: Resourceful / Irresolute
Latent Disorder: Elation

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

⊕ **Equipment**

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



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

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

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

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

<i>Health Condition Chart</i>	
<i>Good</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Okay -1</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Bad -2</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Critical -3</i>	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<i>Agony</i>	○

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

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

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

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



Urvan, Adept of the Temple

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





Chapter 2

Omens



he chapter "Omens" offers a triptych of scenarios whose seemingly independent stories are linked by a common theme, serving as an introduction to Dearg, the first chapter of the official campaign of Shadows of Esteren.

The recurring item is Nimheil, also known by Magientists by the name of fossil Flux. Throughout three distinct stories, the PCs may be confronted with phenomena caused by this substance, each case presenting commonalities as well as differences with the others. These three scenarios also give hints regarding the interest Dearg holds for the Magientists of Reizh. Thus, the presence of the agents who can be met in the Loch Varn scenario or the activities of Talacien in Poison are not coincidental.

The supernatural elements that pervade these stories may upset the PCs' beliefs. The dread caused by Verzal's spirit or the possession of young Elarig are a few of several occult manifestations; hints that something strange is occurring in the Vale...



Order of Scenarios

There's no specific order in which these scenarios have to be played: each Leader can therefore choose the order in which he will have his Players experience them. However, here are two examples of sequences introducing some leads that will give, from the first session, a certain atmosphere to the games.

1/ Loch Varn, Poison, Red Fall.

This is their order of appearance in this book. By making the Players discover Shadows of Esteren with the Loch Varn scenario, the Leader will go for a strong first impression, starting with a complex and horrific story, centered on madness. The two following scenarios—more classic investigations—will enable him to bring his PCs to Dearg's Vale where the first episode of the official campaign will begin, as well as to give them more information about Tri-Kazel and the kingdom of Taol-Kaer.

2/ Poison, Red Fall, Loch Varn.

The Poison scenario is undoubtedly the most accessible and easiest one to play. Several facets of Esteren's universe can be discovered through encounters with typical Characters. If the Leader decides to begin slowly (in particular, if he is a role-playing beginner), starting with Poison will certainly be the best idea. Then, tension will rise with Red Fall, before confronting the Players with Loch Varn's madness and horror.

Which Characters to Play Omens?

These three scenarios can be played with various groups of PCs. The Leader can give his Players the premade Characters of this book or those of Book 1 - Universe. In both cases, these are local Characters who will fit well into the three scenarios of this chapter. Moreover, these Characters will make for a smoother transition toward Shadows of Esteren's official campaign. In that sense, the premade ones of Book 1 are particularly recommended as the campaign begins in Dearg's Vale and incorporates the narrative arcs of those Characters. Do not worry if your Players do not use the templates from Book 1 - Universe, as there will be indications to incorporate these narrative arcs later on.

If the Leader is running his own campaign, and his Players already have their Characters, he may still play these three scenarios with his current group. He shouldn't hesitate to adapt the stories so as to involve his PCs while changing, if needed, involved places or personalities. Thus, these three scenarios could be used as interludes to his current campaign, unless the Leader finds a way to integrate them directly into the story. Finally, he could use these three scenarios to make his current group discover the region and prepare them to play Dearg, the campaign's first episode.

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Modular System of Shadow of Esteren's Scenarios

At several key moments of the scenarios, indicated by the icons below, inserts will offer different optional scenes that will help the Leader give the scenario a suitable atmosphere, highlighting some genre or another (gore, suspense, supernatural, etc). Of course, these are just examples, and each Leader can plan his own narrative choices in detail by imagining new scenes.

Gaming styles and symbols



Gore



Suspense



Psychology



Supernatural

The atmosphere around a role-playing table will mostly depend on the Players' involvement and the work of the Leader, who acts as the director. Several icons indicate technical aids in order to give him support:



This icon indicates inserts offering the Leader tips and advice to stress the atmosphere of a particular scene.



This icon underlines all the important information for the Leader, so that he can quickly spot them.



This icon offers musical suggestions to illustrate a scene. Esteren's universe gives a great importance to music, as shown by the album *Of Men and Obscurities*, the soundtrack specifically made to that effect.

Loch Varn

A scenario by Nelyhann



This scenario is intended for a rather experienced Game Leader, able to handle a peculiar chronology where most of the scenes described are nightmares and flashbacks. Several inserts and staging aids are given in order to help in understanding and preparing the scenario.

• **Style:** exploration, survival, mystery

• **Season:** Irrelevant

• **Location:** Loch Varn

Summary of the Scenario: At first trapped in the ruins of a Magientist factory, the PCs will suddenly wake up in the depths of a forest, with several documents in their possession. They all come round, although they are unable to tell if what they just experienced was a nightmare or reality. Their investigation in the vale of Loch Varn will help them understand the nature of the threat that weighs heavily on the local community, inherited from a fifty-year-old war. The PCs will have to return to the ruins and put an end to what is lurking there, which is responsible for the strange phenomena occurring in this place. They will then discover that it can be very difficult to draw a clear line between nightmare and reality...

Stakes and Aims: The main goal of this scenario is to understand what truly happened in Loch Varn's vale, in order to be best prepared for the final scene and make the right decisions:

- Discover the history of the valley
- Find out about Verzal's secret discovery
- Discover the truth about Verzal's death
- Understand Deorn's motivations

The end of the scenario introduces a moral dilemma for the PCs, the outcome of which will have a very important impact on the future of the region. Finally, this scenario is part of the "Omens" triptych and is an introduction to Shadows of Esteren's official campaign through the matter of fossil Flux and the "brown earth" phenomenon.

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Prologue

Beginning the Game



To strengthen the effect of disorientation in the first scenes, the Leader can randomly distribute summarized Character Sheets that only include technical information. This way, each Player won't really know which PC he embodies, which will reflect the confusion affecting the mind of the Character. This will work all the better if this is the Players' first session. By default, this scenario makes use of this book's premade Characters, but the Players can use other PCs, such as the sample Characters from Book 1, though these will require some adaptation work from the Leader.



If no Player embodies Liam, another PC will be Terent's brother. This is quite an important element in the scenario; it is therefore integral that one of the PCs has Terent as a brother.

A Distorted Narration

What makes this scenario unique is that it rests on a narration with a disorganized chronology. These distortions are caused by a spirit haunting Magientist ruins and will have consequences on the PCs' sanity.

As for the Leader, he must have a clear representation of the events, particularly when differentiating what is a nightmare and what is reality. Several timelines (see on the next page) and inserts provide him tools to keep track of things.

Horrific Aspects

- Difficulty in discerning what is a dream and what is reality, and in getting one's bearings in time and space. By immersing the Players in a story where they will have few

elements of reference, the aim is to make them feel the same confusion that their alter egos suffer from.
- Confrontation with ancient, forgotten horrors.

Structure of the Scenario

The first part of the scenario is dedicated to various game aids for the Leader: detailed timelines, central characters and their motivations, and a description of the region where the events take place. The second part is a set of important scenes divided into three acts forming the heart of the scenario. These scenes can be played one after another, or adapted according to the Leader's wishes. Finally, appendices with technical information and the reproduction of various documents found during the adventure are included. There are reproductions of these on pages 54-55, and they can be downloaded at this address: www.esteren.org/esteren.org/shadows_of_esteren/download/Esteren_appendices_prologue.zip

Timelines

The three following timelines will help the Leader get familiar with the scenario.

1. **History of Loch Varn** - sums up the local history of Loch Varn, where the scenario's stakes are rooted.
2. **Lived Events** - describes the events as they truly occurred for the Characters. This timeline is far from the way the Players will live the story during the game... Indeed, their Characters will be fighting against the supernatural effects of haunted Magientist ruins, altering their perceptions of time and space.
3. **Apparent Events** - sums up how the Characters perceive, erroneously, what actually occurs. This is also the scenario as it unfolds for them.

1. History of Loch Varn

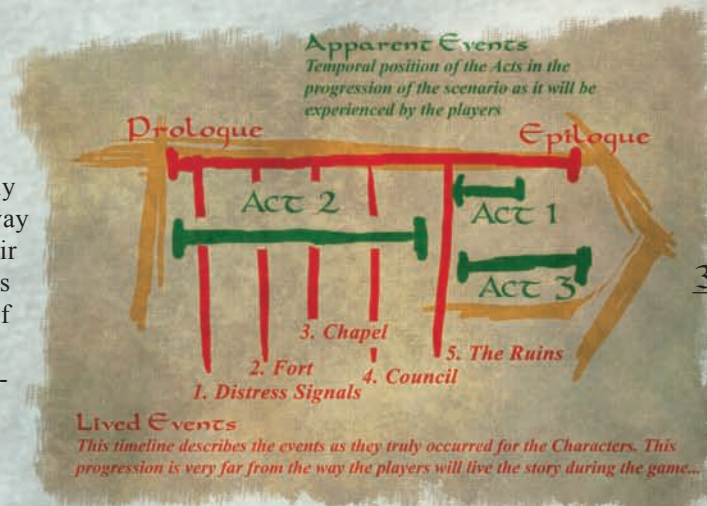
Despite the emergence of feudalism, Varn kept a traditional clan-like system, with the villagers remaining under the direction of their Ansailéir. However, the power shifted into the hands of the Demorthèn over the last few decades, mainly because of a phenomenon called "brown earth". This phenomenon, which has been present in the region for generations, causes an apparent rot of the flora, as well as the formation of boggy clay. It is considered to be the manifestation of Gluta, the swamp spirit. The cult of this spirit is important, and the Demorthèn have a lot of influence in this region. However, since the War of the Temple, it has reached a new scale.



Here is a timeline of the events that impacted the vale:

800-850: Magientists from the kingdom of Reizh are sent by their university to Loch Varn's vale, a wild region of Taol-Kaer, in order to carry out geological research. A royal edict from the capital city of Taol-Kaer—said to have been obtained through occult agreements—allows them to establish a laboratory which will progressively be extended to become a Flux production factory. The local community, who considers the ratification of the edict as a betrayal from the king of Taol-Kaer toward the Varn clan, takes this settlement very badly.

850: In addition to the refinery operations, active searches to find a vein of fossil Flux are undertaken. This mysterious amber-colored substance is far richer than Flux extracted from vegetal, mineral, or organic matter, but also far more toxic. The research finally succeeds when Verzal the Magientist discovers a hollow rock containing the precious liquid, which also seems to hold unknown properties. Led by a strange intuition, Verzal does not send the specimen to his superiors in Reizh, and instead keeps it for himself. New construction works are planned in order to build a special laboratory dedicated to the study of the rock containing fossil Flux. Deorn the Demorthèn and his followers, already nursing a bitter hatred for the Flux diggers, consider very unfavorably this new extension of the Magientist site. Being careful, the Magientist Verzal changes his mind and decides to have a secret underground laboratory dug instead, in order to avoid stirring up the hatred of the Demorthèn. However, he is only delaying the inevitable.



857: The War of the Temple, opposing the kingdoms of Reizh (in favor of Magience) and Gwidre (worshipping the One God), starts and soon spreads to the kingdom of Taol-Kaer. The region of Varn, close to the border, is soon threatened by violence. Helped by a few fanatics, Deorn the Demorthèn takes advantage of the situation and murders Verzal the Magientist as well as his peers, and wreaks havoc on the factory. The animosity between the advocates of Magience and the believers from Gwidre being well known, it was easy for the Demorthèn to make the Gwidrite armies bear the responsibility for the murders and the attack on the factory, all the more so since a squad of marauders from Gwidre had been spotted in the vicinity.

857–906: Verzal's experiments, suddenly interrupted, are left as they are, and years pass. The stone containing fossil Flux, stored in the secret underground laboratory, begins to have a more visible influence upon its environment, and gives birth to a few aberrations. On the surface, a swamp forms, which is interpreted as a sign of Gluta's presence. A menhir is raised there, and Deorn appoints the area as a place of worship for the swamp spirit. The factory, haunted by the spirit of the murdered Magientist, becomes a shunned place and is considered as cursed.

907: The manifestations emanating from the laboratory keep on growing in intensity (insect mutations, development of the "brown earth" phenomenon), to the extent that they threaten the whole vale. Warned by distress signals, a group from the nearby valley of Melwan (the PCs) is sent there to help the community of Loch Varn.



2. Lived Events



Here is the sequence of the events the way they really happened for the Characters. It is not how the Players will live the adventure, but this timeline will help the Leader to have a clear idea of what really happened to the PCs.

1- Distress Signals

The PCs come from Melwan's vale, in the extreme north of the kingdom of Taol-Kaer. Close to the Gwidrite border, it is a mountain region with a harsh weather. As winter draws close, they can see distress signals coming from the fort overlooking the pass that leads to the nearby vale of Loch Varn. The Varn clan being a long-time ally of Melwan, the community decides to send a scouting party: the PCs, accompanied by the Varigal Jearon, a native of Melwan, go there in order to evaluate the situation and provide help.

2- The Fort

When they reach the fort, the PCs find an abandoned, deserted place. No corpses, but in the small courtyard, a kind of three-foot-wide molehill indicates that something came out from the ground. A few documents indicate that a threat hangs over the valley: bandits, or perhaps Feondas. In fact, all the soldiers have been preyed upon by a gigantic insect-like creature; only one of them survived and managed to raise the alarm. Seriously injured, he reached a small chapel nearby where he eventually died. Any attempt to investigate the molehill is fruitless, because soon after the creature left, the ground collapsed on the tunnel it dug.

3- Saint Nyline's Chapel

Close to the fort there is a small chapel, a shelter for travelers and pilgrims. Here, the PCs meet a Vector of the Temple, Jaber, and an adept on his way to becoming a Blade knight (the PC Urvan, see p.30), escorting the religious. The surviving soldier has passed away. His injuries are deep, and were not caused by ordinary weapons. If one of the Players has chosen the premade Character Urvan, the latter decides to lend his help to the group, with the benediction of the Vector who stays at the chapel. Jaber indeed mentions that he must perform rites to make sure that the chapel has remained consecrated to the One, or restore its holy status if need be. It will probably take him one or two days, after which he intends to keep traveling toward Melwan's vale, where the PCs come from, and from there, toward the village of Dearg.

4- The Council of Varn

The PCs' stay at the village is the occasion for them to learn more about this region: a place marked by the War of the Temple, where the strange phenomenon of "brown earth" occurs, affecting the vegetation, making it appear as though rotting, but not preventing it from growing normally. This phenomenon has been noticed for a long time, but it has reached a new scale since the War of the Temple, which has strengthened the Demorthèn's influence on the vale's inhabitants. Afterwards, the PCs go to the traditional council, gathering the clan chief, the old Demorthèn, and the Dàmàthair. The community suspects that the origin of the troubles is the Magientist ruin, the former Flux refinery. According to Deorn, the Demorthèn, the noxious emanations of the ruins have triggered the wrath of the spirit Gluta, which manifests through the growth of brown earth areas. A first group has already gone to explore the ruins, but has not come back. The PCs volunteer to go there as well. It is therefore agreed that the local Demorthèn, escorted by a warrior of Varn and the PCs, will also go to this corrupted place, as the power of the Ogham may possibly do something against it.

5- The Magientist Ruins

The PCs go to the ruins where the warriors formerly sent by Varn and a group of mercenaries (mistaken as brigands) are killing one another. The sellswords were sent by Reizhite Magientists in order to recover the notes and materials probably forgotten in this old refinery. Soon, the PCs are subjected to the influence of Verzal's ghost, the Magientist who haunts his derelict factory. The Varigal accompanying the

PCs, Jearon, becomes possessed by Verzal. He disappears in the ruins, dragging the old Demorthèn Deorn with him. The PCs are forced to fight the mercenaries (including Terent, the brother of one of the PCs), and eventually find the secret laboratory, located outside (at the place of worship dedicated to Gluta), sheltering Verzal's ill-fated discovery. They must then deal with a possessed Jearon, and handle an important moral dilemma.



3. Apparent Events



The apparent events trace the key moments of the scenario as they will be

actually experienced by the Players, and give the Leader the main data to understand what really occurs in each scene. During the gaming session, the Leader should feel free to come back to this timeline in order to better prepare for each new scene.

1- The Ruins (beginning of Act I)

When the scenario begins, the PCs are immersed in a nightmarish environment, deprived of their memory. In fact, this first scene of the scenario takes place at the end of the story truly experienced by the PCs, and corresponds to phase “5- The Magientist Ruins” of the previous timeline (2. Lived Events). Of course, the Players don't know it, and the purpose of this time distortion is to reproduce the confusion that invades the Characters' mind, struggling with the supernatural phenomena of the Magientist ruins haunted by Verzal.

2- The Confrontation with Terent (Act I, Scene 1)

The precise moment when the PCs find themselves face to face with Terent, Liam's brother (see Act I, Scene 1 – Fight, “The Clash” on p.40), at the very beginning of the scenario, is a key moment.

3- Maze (Act I, Scene 4)

One or more PCs are likely to die in their fruitless attempt to get out of the derelict refinery. It is not a problem, on the contrary: all these scenes, which begin just after meeting Terent are not reality, but a horrible nightmare...

4- A Brutal Awakening (Act II)

When the PCs suddenly awake in the forest, they will think they are leaving the nightmare of the ruins. On the contrary; the whole of Act II is also nothing more than a mixture of dreams and flashbacks, and the PCs are still stuck in the ruins, their blurred minds victims of the distortion phenomena induced by Verzal's wandering spirit. During this act, the PCs will relive some former scenes (their arrival in Loch Varn, the meeting in Saint Nyline's chapel, the council of Varn, etc).



It is at this particular moment that the scenario swings over to nightmare and partly leaves reality. The whole continuation of the scenario, until the beginning of Act 3 which will suddenly come back to reality, is a mix between dreams, nightmares, real memories, and imagined scenes, all intertwined.

5- Justice (Act III)

When Act III begins, the PCs are once again stuck in the ruins of the Magientist refinery. At first, they will only witness what happens to them, the Leader describing to them exactly what they lived through in Act I, before the PCs are given control again.

At this phase of the scenario, the PCs are back in the present time and reality; what they are experiencing matches for a moment the sequence of the events as described in section “5- The Magientist Ruins” of the second timeline (2- Lived Events), until the time comes to face Terent, which is the very moment when the scenario leaves the nightmare to get back to reality. The PCs regain control of their actions, get out of the ruins and go to Gluta's sanctuary where Jearon, possessed by Verzal, is about to get revenge on Deorn.

Deorn the Demorthèn

Deorn is a man raised into the peninsular traditions, who became a Demorthèn in his twenties and developed magical as well as political skills. Today a man in his eighties, old Deorn retains all his authority and influence in the vale.

At the time of the conflict with Verzal the Magientist, half a century ago, the young Demorthèn wanted to kill Verzal for a very specific reason. He claimed he had discovered the true origin of the “brown earth”, the basis of Gluta's cult and, indirectly, of the Demorthèn power in the region. For the Magientist, the fossil Flux discovered in the region was responsible for this deterioration of the ground. The Demorthèn could not let such a theory spread, and therefore decided to eliminate the Magientist, using the War of the Temple to cover his tracks, in order to preserve his cult and his power.

What the Magientists call fossil Flux, and the Demorthèn “Nimheil” (poison), is rare and its effects hard to define. Verzal's assumption was simple and attractive, but Deorn refused to take it seriously. Nimheil is too rare to have such powerful or lasting effects; thus it could only be Gluta's will. The same goes for the monstrous creatures noticed in the vale: they are Feondas, Gluta's brood, conveying his anger. Also, in his whole life, Deorn has never had any direct contact with the spirit he worships. The pride and the certitudes of the Magientist deeply hurt him, and he killed him as much to quench his anger as to quell his fears. Since then, he has convinced himself of the righteousness of his choice by becoming more and more radical and devoted to the Demorthèn traditions.

Deorn suspects that the problems encountered in the vale have their origin in the abandoned Magientist factory, and tries to sort the situation out without revealing what he really knows. From his point of view, all these problems are the responsibility of the Magientists and of their unbridled quest for Flux. If there is a link between the brown earth and the Magientists, according to the Demorthèn, it is actually Gluta expressing his power to remind the mortals that they must not engage in the greedy exploitation of nature.

Verzal the Magientist

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This curious and intelligent man spent most of his life analyzing the geologic qualities of soils and reaching for a better understanding of how the world works.

When he uncovered the stone containing fossil Flux, his personality was strangely affected, and the selfish and paranoid sides of his psyche strengthened. Believing he had made a major discovery, he ordered the construction of a secret laboratory, with the aim of quietly pursuing his experiments while protecting his find from Loch Varn's inhabitants but also from the envy of his Magientist colleagues.

His experiments gave undreamed-of results: Verzal found out that the “brown earth” phenomenon, attributed by the locals to the spirit of nature Gluta, was actually a direct consequence of the presence of fossil Flux in the valley. If the entirety of the Flux was extracted, the phenomenon would surely subside. Moreover, as there was much brown earth in the region, he made the hypothesis that there had to be many fossil Flux pockets, and that it may hide some major deposit of this precious amber-colored fuel...

Unfortunately, he could not go on with his works since he was murdered in 857 by Deorn. His desire to make his discovery widely known was so strong that his spirit remained partly attached to the factory, trying in one way or another to communicate with the living. However, it proved fruitless, and the initial personality of Verzal was completely consumed by mixed feelings of hatred and desperation. Having forgotten about his original scientific project, he only yearns for one thing: to take his revenge on Deorn and on all the living beings of Loch Varn, to the very last.

- Loch Varn -

The Magientist Mercenaries

After the War of the Temple involving the three kingdoms of the Peninsula, the Magientist research programs in Talkéride territory became scarce.

Many years later, the Reizhite university which had funded Verzal obtained intriguing information about curious phenomena taking place in Loch Varn through a local agent, Terent—whose brother is one of the PCs, Liam. Despite the lack of diplomatic authorization, the university decided to send a group of agents to check the nature of the rumors about this region.

The group, guided by Terent, found itself trapped in the haunted factory, hunted by warriors from Loch Varn. Seeing his comrades killed one after the other, Terent managed to survive, until he crosses the path of the PCs...



Loch Varn's Vale

Here is some information about the vale and its noteworthy places:

1. The Inguard of Dohag's Pass

Inguards are small fortresses established by the various kingdoms, which make it possible to collect information on many strategic points. The living conditions are very difficult, especially since part of the soldiers is sent there following some disciplinary action. There are even a few criminals, who have been sentenced to serve there for many years before being granted freedom—if they survive...

It is from this Inguard that the distress signals that led Melwan's council to send a scouting party originated.

2. Saint Nyline's Chapel

Near the Inguard, a little chapel accommodates passing travelers, sheltering them from cold and snow. Its construction was dedicated to the priestess Nyline, who is said to have been granted the favors of the One God there, driving back a horde of Feondas and saving the whole group of pilgrims that accompanied her in her mystic journey toward Gwidre.

3. Varn's Lake

"Loch Varn" in the ancient tongue, this great lake gave its name to the nearby vale and village. Aquatic creatures are said to inhabit it, and there are rumors of sunken treasures of old. Its waters are permanently cloudy—which indicates eddies in its depths—and its surface is most often covered with a milky mist. In the center of the lake, a very small rocky islet can be seen.

4. Varn's Village

A fishermen's village, built on the shores of Varn's Lake, protected by a thick fence of pointed logs, circled by a ditch bristling with rusty-headed spears. A few watchtowers allow the inhabitants to keep vigil over the edge of the nearby forest. Inside, there are no streets to speak of; just muddy tracks, and rudimentary houses made of wood with thatch roofs. We are here in the heart of Taol-Kaer's mountains, in a lost valley, and this is reflected by the technological level of Varn. There is no inn or shop; the only buildings that can be differentiated from the others are the village hall of the Ansailéir (the clan chief), where the councils take place, and the house of the Dàmàthairs, the women who have the responsibility of teaching the children and protecting the weakest during the attacks. This habitation is certainly the sturdiest: it has no windows (only a few loopholes) and its walls are entirely made of stone.

5. Gluta's Sanctuary

This place of worship dedicated to Gluta is set on a rocky plate, in the heart of a boggy glade where the brown earth phenomenon is particularly present. This sanctuary is quite recent, built just a few decades ago. It is made up of a circle of menhirs, the erection of which, started not long after the War of the Temple, cost much energy and suffering to the people of Varn. Its imposing dimensions show Deorn's fervor for the cult of the spirits, and contrast with the poverty of the village's inhabitants.

It is precisely in the rocky underground area lining the swamp that Verzal hid the rock containing fossil Flux. The Magientist and two trustworthy apprentices began to secretly excavate a natural gallery with their Flux-powered tools, and a makeshift laboratory was set up in a little cavity, extended with great difficulty. In an ironic coincidence, after the death of the Magientist, Deorn had menhirs erected just above the underground laboratory because this boggy place, where brown earth abounds, was the sign of Gluta's presence for him. During the construction of the place of worship, the villagers have walked for days on the earth hiding the laboratory's trap door entrance, and Deorn stood on this very place for almost half a century when he officiated.

6. Magientist Ruins

Abandoned for several decades, this place has the reputation of being haunted, but also of being a den of brigands, Feondas, etc. It is a dreadful place where no one goes, fearing bad fortune. Deorn the Demorthèn feeds this fear during his speeches, ordering Varn's people to keep away from there. Deorn wrongly believes that the laboratory shelters Verzal's find somewhere: it is actually hidden in the secret laboratory, under Gluta's place of worship.



Act I: Ruins

The purpose of this first Act is to directly throw Players into the heat of the action, in the heart of a nightmarish environment. In fact, the main part of this act is just a delirium induced in one of the PCs' mind by Verzal's ghost. The Leader should not hesitate to slaughter the PCs at the slightest mistake in order to instil a heavy, horrific atmosphere.



The ruins in which the PCs are wandering are haunted by Verzal's spirit, which explains the distortion of their memory, the difficulty to get their bearings spatially, and the supernatural phenomena, such as the wrecked zone where the scenario begins, which seems endless and is a true maze.

Scene I: Fight



Akira Yamaoka - Silent Hill 2 Original Soundtracks - 25 - Betrayal.



Summary of the scene: The PCs are lost inside the ruins, in the middle of a fight. Overwhelmed, they have to withdraw and stumble upon Terent, a Reizhite agent.

In order to spice up the introduction, the Leader can choose a specific tune like this one, drawn from Silent Hill's original soundtrack, which will open the first scene in an incisive way.

This first scene is mainly a description by the Leader, who will set the scene, going over each one of these pieces of information, and describing them to the Players:

- State of Mind:

The PCs' minds are cloudy, they are confused. The only thing they remember is that they have been sent to lend help to the nearby community of Loch Varn. They don't even remember their names, or those of the other PCs. In this hell in which they are stuck, only one idea keeps some relevance: survive.

- Setting:

The PCs are surrounded by an oppressive field of ruins, made of twisted metallic beams and rubble, which fades in the obscurity. Only a few torches lying on the floor are lighting the surroundings.

- Starting Situation:

Arrows and crossbow bolts are whizzing above the heads of the PCs who are squatting behind a pile of rubble, tightly holding a bow or a crossbow against them. When things become somewhat quieter, they can take a look around, meeting the fearful eyes of their comrades. They do not know for how long they have been fighting against the group that is shooting at them, but they clearly have the lower hand. After exchanging a few shots, they have to withdraw...

- The Clash:

As the PCs are about to dive into darkness to leave this dangerous area, one of them (Liam) hears a metallic sound on his right, which immediately attracts his attention: a man suddenly comes out of the shadow and faces him. The PC feels like this man's face is familiar to him (this is indeed Terent, Liam's brother, but he is unable to remember that, since his mind is clouded by the distortion phenomenon occurring in the ruins) but the stranger points his crossbow at him and is obviously about to shoot. That is when the Leader lets the Players speak, asking them what they want to do. The Leader should put enough pressure on them to bring them to shoot as their only natural reaction.



On Terent, they can notice a silver-plated bracelet, engraved with a strange symbol. Later, Liam will recall that it belonged to his brother.

Scene 2: Withdrawal



Summary of the scene: After the confrontation with Terent, the PCs withdraw toward their camp, amidst endless, maze-like ruins.

The withdrawal toward the camp will be the occasion for the Leader to insert several elements, while keeping the PCs under pressure: they do not have time to think about what happens to them.

- Loch Varn -

1. **The Magientist Symbol:** If the PCs fight none of their foes, the Leader will make them find a locket engraved with a Magientist sign on a corpse pierced by arrows, upon which they will stumble during their roving into the ruins.
2. **A Dangerous Maze:** The ruins have no end, there is no ceiling to be seen, and if the PCs don't light torches, darkness is almost complete. The Leader can ask a Standard (11) Feats roll; a failure means that the PC fumbles, and causes a more or less important collapse of the surrounding ruins. Another Standard (11) Feats roll is necessary to avoid taking 1D10 damage points caused by the debris.
3. **A Fight:** The PCs are ambushed, and in a moment, chaos begins, with arrows whizzing everywhere. Here are the technical characteristics of the PCs' opponents:


Fighters in the Ruins

Wearing rags, worn leather armor, furs, a melee weapon (axe, sword) and a ranged one (bow).

Attack: 12. **Defense:** 10. **Speed:** 6.
Damage: 2 (Bow) or 3 (Axe, Sword).
Health Points: 19/14/9/5

What the PCs do not know is that they are fighting against the warriors sent by Loch Varn. Indeed, all the Magientist agents are already dead. They may become aware of it, but only later in the scenario.


If a PC is hit by an arrow, he will limp until he receives specific medical care: a Complicated (14) roll made in Demorthèn Mysteries, Magience, Natural Environment, or Science is necessary to extract the projectile properly without pulling the flesh out, by making an incision and applying bandages (which gives back one Health Point).

-  One way or another, Terent must die in the Magientist ruins. The Leader must not hesitate to add another fight to trigger this scene if it could not occur in Scene 1: Fight.

~ Scene 3: The Camp ~



Abigail Mead - Full Metal Jacket Original Soundtracks - 12 - Leonard

-  **Summary of the scene:** At the camp, the PCs meet two warriors and an old man. They must find the exit, by referring to a map of the complex, and look for reinforcements. As they are leaving for a new expedition, the elder will utter an enigmatic sentence about a chapel containing secrets.

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The PCs eventually reach a camp, set in the middle of the debris. A few tents have been planted next to rubble piles, and a crackling fire lights the weary face of three men: two warriors equipped with worn leather armor, and an old man wearing a talisman around his neck (a stone engraved with an Ogham, the sacred writing of the Demorthèn). A warrior calls out to the PCs: "So, did you succeed?"

Of course, the PCs will not be able to answer, none of them knowing what they were doing in these ruins... The PCs do not remember, but one of the "warriors" is actually Jearon the Varigal, their companion. What they cannot know either right now is that the elderly man wearing the necklace with the Ogham is none other than Deorn. As for the second warrior, he is a man from Loch Varn sent with the rest of the group to escort Deorn (see "4- The Council of Varn" on p.36).



Describing the Feelings of the PCs

In order to make the most of the atmosphere, the Leader should take the time to detail his descriptions, which will not only deal with the concrete environment of the PCs (setting, sounds, and smells), but also with their feelings and inner world. This should help the Players put themselves in the position of their Characters.

For example, when they arrive at the camp, the warrior will ask them if they succeeded. But succeeded in what? And who is this man? Besides the appropriate description of the makeshift camp, the Leader can describe the PCs' bafflement, their absence of any memory, and their inability to answer. The Leader can base his descriptions on the Ways of the PCs to make them more striking:

- For PCs having a high rating in Reason, the Leader can insist on the irrational dimension of the events and phenomena, confronting their logic to the absurd.
- For PCs having a high rating in Empathy, a feeling of oppression and uneasiness will dominate them. They feel bad, anxious, their chests compressed with a certain difficulty to breathe.

Various subjects can be raised at the camp:


- The PCs have been sent ahead to find an exit to these ruins.
- Strange noises have been heard beyond the camp, in the dark. Another group has wandered into the ruins to go and help the PCs but has not come back. The two warriors tell the PCs that they will wait for the other group here and protect the old man.

At any rate, it will be hard for the elder to make the way back: the PCs must find the exit and bring back reinforcements. -Like a fateful prediction, the elder may tell them that this place is cursed. The PCs must watch out for the horrors hidden amidst the ruins; creatures hungry for flesh. Panicking, a warrior may presume that everyone is already dead, and that they are all wandering in the depths of limbo. Such a notion is related to the Temple's dogma, and it may seem curious that a warrior from the mountains of Taol-Kaer knows about it. -One of the warriors reminds the PCs that they have a map of the location (see on Act I, Scène 4: "Maze") and that they must refer to it to have a chance to find the exit. Once they get out of the ruins, they should be fine. Very quickly, an expedition is to be tried anew. While the PCs are walking away, the elder calls out to them: "Don't forget the chapel, it holds secrets!" If the PCs turn back, they notice that the elder has fallen in a trance, touching his pendant engraved with an Ogham convulsively. The warriors urge them to hurry...



Here, the elder is actually Deorn, but the PCs will only realize it much later. As for the final indication about the chapel, it is not real, but a mixture between a memory of the PCs (the meeting at Saint Nyline's chapel with the adepts of the Temple who mentioned these secrets) and their nightmare.

~ Scene 4: Maze ~

 **Summary of the scene:** The attempt to find an exit turns into a nightmare when the PCs get attacked by creatures. When all hope seems lost, some of them being already dead, they wake up in a start, in the middle of a forest, emerging from what was at first sight just an awful nightmare.



During this scene, the Leader has to increase the pressure until a nightmarish atmosphere of desperation is reached. Here are some tips to optimize this scene:

- Be merciless with PCs' mistakes and carelessness, and do not hesitate to kill them. Note that the death of a PC has to be credible so as not to reveal the deception.
- Use Mental Resistance rolls in order to damage the sanity of the Characters and instill panic.
- Always make detailed descriptions, and do not forget to describe the PCs' feelings, particularly by relying on their Ways.
- Lastly, and probably most importantly, the Leader must keep his narration at a steady pace, the events following one another in order not to let the PCs breathe.

At the climax of horror, one of the PCs will wake up screaming in the middle of a forest.

The PCs venture into the darkness, leaving the camp behind them...



1. The Ruins

Despite the indications on the map, this area seems huge. It is possible to walk around in there for what will seem like hours. One way to get out of it is to follow the walls leading to the entrance that gives access to the silos. The Leader can ask for a Standard (11) Feats roll, a failure ending in the collapse of a section of the ruins. Another Feats roll must be made, a failure causing 1D10 damage points.

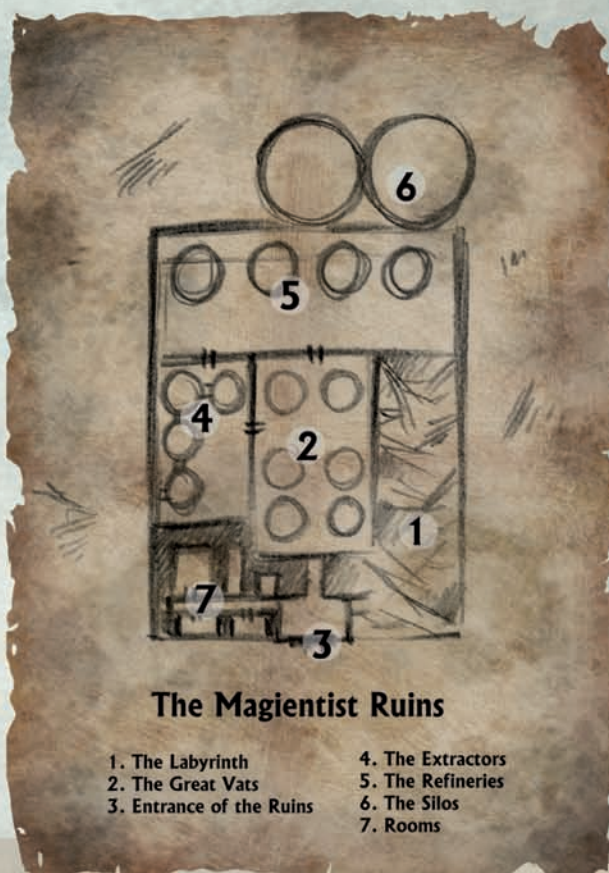


2. The Great Vats

Upon entering, one of the PCs walks on some viscid juice, of unknown origin (it is a secretion left by the giant centipedes infesting the place).

In this vast room are stored vats more than 16 feet high, and just as wide. On the floor, pipes lead to the nearby room, carrying the production of the vats.

A Standard (11) Magience roll gives information about what the vats are used for. These ones contain huge blades which must have been used to grind matter and obtain a paste ready to be treated to extract Flux. Each tank is equipped with a generator on which Flux cartridges can be plugged to make the blades work, but it would take hours to repair the machine and put it in working order.



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The Magientist Ruins

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. The Labyrinth | 4. The Extractors |
| 2. The Great Vats | 5. The Refineries |
| 3. Entrance of the Ruins | 6. The Silos |
| | 7. Rooms |



The Monstrous Plant

If the Leader chooses this supernatural scene, a Luck roll will be made (by rolling 1D10). The PC getting the lowest result will suddenly be pulled away by a creeper around his ankle: he will disappear into the darkness, screaming. A successful Complicated (14) Feats roll is necessary to hold the PC who is being hoisted up a silo inside which a huge carnivorous plant has grown. Cutting the creeper requires dealing it 10 damage points. The creeper has a Defense rating of 12. The Leader must not hesitate to kill the grabbed PC if he does not manage to get out of trouble fast enough. Witnessing such a scene requires a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll inflicting 3 Trauma points on a failure, and only 1 point on a success.

Carnivorous Plant

-Heart of the Plant:

Attack: 14. Defense: 8. Speed: 2. Damage: 6. Health Points: 30/20/10/5

To be able to attack, the plant must draw the victim inside the silo with one of its creepers and get him near its mouth. To inflict damage to the heart, it is also necessary to enter the silo.

-Creeper (4 of them): Attack: 8. Defense: 12. Speed: 8. Damage: 2. Health Points: 10



3. An Exit?

When the PCs think they are reaching the room that leads to the exit, they end up facing a corridor going left and right! The exit seems no longer to exist... The Leader can then insist on the psychological effects by describing the feeling of panic starting to take hold on the PCs as they compulsively check the exactness of their map. Being confronted with this distortion between their map and the refinery induces a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll for each PC.

4. Other Rooms

Visiting these rooms, the Characters can discover a few documents and may be confronted by a creature living in there.

- *The Extractors:*

This room houses metallic vats with portholes to see inside. The matter ground in the big tanks used to be carried to these extractors through pipes. These machines could then produce crude Flux from the matter. Having a very high ceiling, this room is crossed by metallic footbridges that can be accessed by stairs leading to the second floor.

- *The Refineries:* The vats were used to store crude Flux, which was then refined to reach its final state: a fuel to power Magientist machineries.

- *The Silos:* These huge empty silos must have been used to stock the raw material, the crude Flux, and the refined product.

- *Rooms:* A few empty rooms, which must have been used as storage rooms, offices, or laboratories. Some rusty tools remain (metallic locker, canister, experimentation table) but nothing particular can be found.



Here are the documents that can be found (see the Appendices on pages 48 and 55 for their content). It does not matter if the PCs do not look for or do not find them all, since they will have access to these documents later on:

- The Puzzle (see Act 2, Scene 7: "Verzal's Will", for the resolution of the puzzle).

- Verzal's Will 1 (this document is incomplete, the rest can only be discovered during Scene 7 of Act 2: "Verzal's Will").



Insect Creatures

With this game option, the Leader will confront the PCs with the gigantic centipedes infesting the ruins. Even if the Leader does not want the centipedes to actually exist in his scenario, preferring more realistic elements, he can make them appear here, still with the idea that this whole scene is just a horrible nightmare and that the PCs are actually meeting phantasmagorical creatures, inspired by what the sole survivor of the attacked Inguard was able to tell to the envoys of the Temple before his death.

It is important to insist on the monstrous nature of the creatures. A truly huge centipede will be the main threat, but it will be accompanied by the swarming of dozens, hundreds of creatures sometimes as long as an arm, very vulnerable individually, but impossible to eliminate quickly as a whole. This encounter must end this scene, as well as Act 1, in a climax of horror.

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Giant Centipede:

Attack: 14. Defense: 12. Speed: 8. Damage: 3. Health Points: 30/20/10/5



Here are several ideas to introduce this encounter:

-If the Leader uses music, he can play once more the piece used at the beginning of the scenario, in order to reinforce the idea of strangeness and inexorability.

-While the PCs are exploring one of the rooms, one of them feels something falling on his head or shoulder ; some viscid liquid. Raising his eyes, he will see nothing, unless...

-The Leader can first explain to the PC that he has the impression that the ceiling of the corridor he is walking through is alive. Reality is much different: a huge centipede covers the ceiling and squirms nauseously, which requires a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll for all of those who see it, a failure inflicting 3 Trauma points, and a success only 1 point.

-The Leader should then be insistent toward the Players, suggesting that there is a way to make it—even though there is not. This should put pressure on the Players, who will probably start panicking. If necessary, a second monster can appear, but the bites of the countless little centipedes should be as effective, if not more.

Act 2: Will

This second Act will give the PCs the occasion to understand the ins and outs of the events taking place in Varn's vale. Contrary to what they may think to begin with, this whole act is nothing but nightmares, memories, and flashbacks, interlocked and distorted by the influence of Verzal's ghost who guides the PCs toward the discovery of truth.

Scene 1: A Brutal Awakening



David Darling - Cello - 12 - In November.



Summary of the scene: After the exploration of the Magientist ruins has turned into a massacre, the PCs suddenly wake up in the middle of a forest. They then start to remember the reasons for their presence here.

In this scene, the Leader will describe a camp deep in the forest, with one of the PCs waking up screaming, frightening the others. It is pitch black, an icy rain has been falling for several hours. The Leader can give the PCs the following information.

- The group has been sent to Loch Varn's vale to lend help to the community living there. Indeed, distress signals have been seen rising from an Inguard located at the top of the pass between Melwan and Loch Varn.
- The PCs are currently walking toward the village of Varn to learn more about what is happening there. They have set a camp, and will leave tomorrow morning.
- The Leader can now give each Player his complete Character Sheet, including the name, story, and personality.



The Leader will talk to each Player in private to explain to him his position on the events that just occurred, choosing among these possibilities:

Liam: Although the visit of the ruins actually did take place, it had strictly nothing to do with the horror scenes the Players have just experienced. These were just the anxious nightmares of one of the PCs, nothing more. Liam has clear memories of the visit of the ruins: a deserted place, an indeed gloomy ruin, but empty, besides a few documents and items found there (the objects found by the PCs are detailed further). If no Player embodies Liam, the Leader will attribute these convictions to another PC.

Mor: He remembers nothing concerning the visit of the ruins, and could not say who is right. This memory loss worries him, and he wonders what is happening here: perhaps the anger of some spirit of nature?

Yldiane: She does not remember visiting the ruins, but she is convinced someone is missing in the group; Jearon the other Varigal. None of the other PCs remembers this person. If none of the Players embodies Yldiane, the Leader will attribute these memories to another PC.

Ean: He remembers almost nothing but feels a faint apprehension. The nightmare narrated by one of the PCs causes him anguish, and he is not at all convinced by Liam's explanation. For him, something is occurring in these ruins, even if he is unable to say what.

Arven: She is deeply scarred. For her, the "nightmare" of the whole Act I that the PCs have played is, in part, the sinister truth. This place is haunted, it is infested with monsters, and several members of the expedition have not come back (Arven concurs regarding Jearon's disappearance and thinks that some others are dead, but does not remember who). Actually, she is the one closest to the truth.

Urvan: The Temple's faithful does not remember anything, but suspects the influence of the demon. Something is wrong in this vale. He does however remember the scene before the visit of the ruins, that is to say the meeting with the PCs at Saint Nyline's chapel (see Scene 3, Act 2). If there is no Player to embody Urvan, another PC will hold such information.



Here are the items (previously discovered or not) in the possession of the PCs when they awake at the camp. They are all reproduced in the Appendices and on page 48:

-The puzzle (see Act 2, Scene 7: "Verzal's Will", for the resolution of the puzzle).

-Verzal's report 1 (this document is incomplete, its second part can only be discovered during Scene 7 of Act 2: "Verzal's Will").



Maintain Doubt

The goal of this scene is to instill confusion among the PCs, who have different versions of the facts. The Leader should try to fuel this confusion, so that the Players are not absolutely sure that one of the versions is the true one.


To that effect, he can in particular insist on the items discovered during the exploration of the ruin: some are nowhere to be found, having seemingly disappeared... which would tend to give credence to the thesis of a simple nightmare. But what about the wounds one of the Characters bears? They can come from a fall... or be the marks of an actual encounter with creatures! The Leader must disclose the paradoxical information sparingly in order to keep a feeling of confusion. As for the items in the possession of the PCs, the GL can add more (particularly ones related to the initiatives taken by the Players during Act 1).



Play on the Inconsistencies


Since this scenario implies numerous flashbacks and time distortions, the Leader may mix things up and end up with inconsistent elements. It is not a problem; on the contrary, the Leader should seize such an opportunity, taking a mysterious air and telling the Player who notices the inconsistency: "Yes, indeed, it doesn't add up. There is really something awry here. And the more you think about these paradoxes, the more you have the feeling of losing ground and getting lost in absurd reflections that can only lead to madness..."

Scene 2: The Arrival at the Vale

 **Summary of the scene:** The PCs recall their arrival at the vale and their visit to the Inguard.

The PCs being at the camp, they recall their arrival at the vale. The aim of this scene is to play their first moments in the vale, and the visit of the Inguard.

The Leader should then take the time to describe the distress signals seen from Melwan, then the council's decision to send a scouting party, and the expedition to Dohag's pass. When he considers it appropriate, the Leader can let the Players carry on. For instance, after a description of their departure from Melwan, then of their journey to Dohag's pass, the Leader can say: "You remember when you reached the stronghold's outskirts. In front of you, a half-raised portcullis... everything is silent, and a blanket of immaculate snow heightens this feeling of stillness. What will you do?"

 Remember that neither Blade knight Urvan nor Jearon will be present. One of the Players will therefore be a spectator for this scene. If that is the case, the Leader should take care not to make this scene last too long.

- The Inguard

The Inguard is composed of a tower, an inner courtyard, and barracks for the soldiers. There is no one here, and no signs of fighting. Last night, snow fell heavily, and everything is immaculate. In the courtyard, it is possible to make out an almost three-foot-wide molehill. The loose earth indicates that it has been disturbed very recently.



In the tower, a letter newly written by the captain commanding this Inguard can be found (see the Appendices p.54, "Letter by the Captain"). On the top of the tower, the brazier the distress signals came from is still warm.

-Saint Nyline's Chapel

After the exploration of the Inguard, the Leader can go back to his description. The Players should not have a hold on the sequence of events anymore; they are at the camp, and are just remembering what happened. If one of the Players embodies Urvan the Blade knight, it was at this moment that he met the group and decided to join them.



In the chapel, there was a soldier from the Inguard, dead of his wounds during the night in spite of the care given by Urvan. He seemed terrified, and told that monsters similar to giant centipedes had attacked the Inguard, dragging his comrades underground.

At this moment of the scenario, only one PC (at the Leader's choice, except for Urvan) remembers that the Blade knight was not alone, but with another adept of the Temple, a Vector called Jaber. The PC even remembers that at the moment of their arrival, Jaber was telling the knight the legend of Saint Nyline, and was talking about a secret hidden in the chapel. Urvan will deny this version, claiming he was alone.

~ Scene 3: The Secret of Saint Nyline's Chapel ~



Summary of the scene: The PCs come back to Saint Nyline's chapel, puzzled by the old man's words in the ruins "Don't forget the chapel, it holds secrets!" This scene is optional and depends on the initiatives taken by the Players. If they come back to the chapel during the scenario, they can discover a secret passage here.

The inside of the chapel is a mix between a place of worship and a mountain lodge. An inspection of the flagstones will reveal a trap door leading to an underground room. It contains several ancient documents, notably registers that seem to date back to the time of the War of the Temple. (see the Appendices on p.54 "Registers of the Temple 1 & 2")



This secret passage only exists in the PCs' dreams and not in reality. Actually, it relates to information orally given by Jaber. The Leader should keep in mind that nothing in Act 2 is real: it is only dreams and memories interlocked. At the end of the scenario, during the epilogue, if the PCs come back here once again, there will be no secret passage, but they will meet Jaber, the Temple's Vector, who will confirm that he is the one who gave them such information (see the "Epilogue" on p.53).

~ Scene 4: Varn's Village ~



Delphine Bois - Of Men and Obscurities - 18 - Under the Black Foliage



Summary of the scene: Following their visit to the chapel, the PCs' memories get blurry. At this moment, they are all at their camp in the forest, and the sun is rising. It is time to break camp and to head toward Varn's village. They will reach their destination at the beginning of the afternoon, the sky getting clearer after a morning of thin, icy rain. The Leader can make a striking description of this small community (see the descriptions in the "Loch Varn's Vale" section, in the Prologue, on page 39).

The PCs will be confronted with several events and revelations of a strange nature:

- The villagers seem to know the PCs, and rightly so: they have apparently already come here, and have been sent by the council of Varn to visit the ruins and solve what is going on in there. This will surely confuse the PCs, since after going through the Inguard and the chapel, they went straight to the factory. As far as they can remember, they had formerly never been to Varn.

- Loch Varn -

- The villagers are surprised that one of the members of the PCs' group is missing (Jearon). Several questions will confirm that it is indeed Jearon, and that the PCs went with him for their first expedition.

-Liam (or another Character, if need be) will catch sight of the figure of the mercenary killed in the ruins (none other than Terent) in a muddy alleyway of the village, in the shade of a house. Closer inspection will reveal that the eerie presence has vanished...


-The villagers tell the PCs that a council will take place tonight and that the PCs are expected to come, in order to tell about their visit in the dreadful place.



Between Dream and Reality

During Scene 4 the PCs are just dreaming of visiting the village, which never actually happens. In order to know what truly occurred, the Leader can go back to the timeline “2. Lived Events“. The aim of this scene is to spread confusion and heighten the strangeness of the atmosphere. One of the Players may consider that the Characters are even now still hallucinating, as in Act 1. However, any attempt to deny the truth of what is happening, whatever the means used, will lead to failure, up to the end of the current Act. A PC who would decide to kill himself “to wake up” will simply be dead for the others, and the Leader will have to let the Player think he has truly killed his Character.

~ Scene 5: The Council of Varn ~

 **Summary of the scene:** During the council, each PC is invited to give his own version of the story. It is decided that the Demorthèn himself will go to the factory in order to put an end to whatever is hidden there...

When the PCs enter the council room, located in the Ansailéir's house, about fifty people are gathered there. Varn's clan chief, the local Dàmàthair, a few warriors, fishermen, etc. can be seen. The atmosphere is tense, all the more so since some strange phenomena may make the PCs ill at ease:

-In the back of the room, nestled in a seat, next to a huge brazier, an old man wearing a necklace to which a stone engraved with an Ogham is tied. The PCs immediately recognize the elder they met in the ruins. This new paradox (how could he be there and here?) may disturb them. Depending on the intensity of such a realization, the Leader can ask for a Mental Resistance roll.


-In the assembly, Liam (or another Character, if need be) thinks he catches sight of the same man as before (the mercenary killed in the ruins), without managing to recognize his

brother, simply keeping an unpleasant sensation of déjà vu.

-Since they are unable to clearly remember their first visit, the council will reach the conclusion that the PCs are the victims of the harmful effects of the Magientist factory, which is known to be cursed here. Some will mention the toxic fumes of Magientist inventions. Anyway, the PCs will be invited to tell about what they saw in the factory. Given the contradictory testimonies and the gravity of the situation, the council will ask the Demorthèn to go to the Magientist ruin himself. He will be accompanied by the PCs, since they know the factory now, and by one of Varn's warriors, who will watch over the old Demorthèn. Varn's people praise the loyalty of Melwan's vale, and assure they will not forget it.

The PCs are to meet with the others on the morning of the next day.

~ Scene 6: Terent's Ghost ~

 **Summary of the scene:** Liam has a horrible nightmare, which makes him aware that he has killed his own brother in the ruins.

After the council, the PCs go to sleep, housed by the inhabitants. Liam will then have a horrible nightmare: he sees himself as a child, in a bright landscape. It is Melwan's vale, in the heart of summer. Liam is happy, running in a field, until the moment when he sees his brother, coming to him with a smile. The children start playing and Liam sees on his brother's wrist the telltale silver-plated bracelet. The scene switches to the Magientist ruins where Liam faces his brother wearing this bracelet, and he can only relive the scene, powerless.

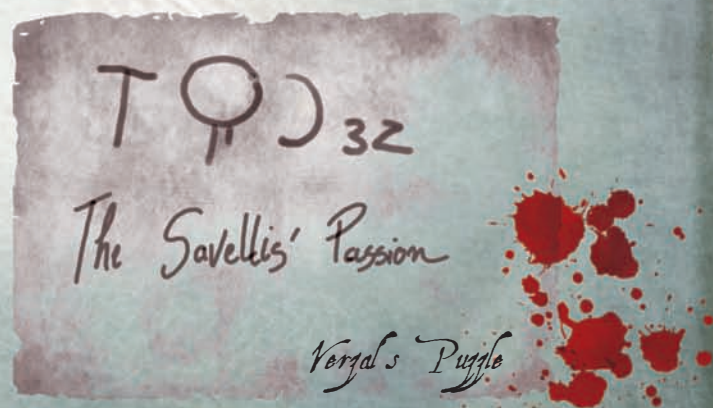
In a scream, Liam wakes up to catch sight of someone in the corner of the room; a shadow coming toward him to show its face: it is Terent, staring at Liam with an icy gaze filled with melancholy.

“You killed me, Liam”. As Terent utters these words, blood begins to drain away from his body, from his face, from his


eyes. He will reveal his true profession to his brother: he was not a bandit, but an agent of a Reizhite university. He never mentioned it because his mission required it, but above all, he feared the reaction of Melwan's traditionalists. Who knows what would have happened? Terent then takes out the parchment containing Verzal's puzzle (reproduction below) and hands it to his brother, blood soaking the paper, exhorting him to bring truth to light so that his death shall not be in vain.



This scene imposes a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll and ends with Liam startling awake in his room once more. This time, there is no one, but he can see the paper on which Verzal's puzzle is written on his bedside table. On it, a blot of fresh blood...



Scene 7: Verzal's Will

 **Summary of the scene:** The following morning, under Liam's impulse, the PCs will have the opportunity to solve Verzal's puzzle and discover his will, which is essential for the remainder of the scenario.

During their exploration of the ruins, in Act 1, the PCs found a mysterious document (see "Verzal's Will 1" on the Appendices on page 55). Now, the dreadful nightmare that came with the last Scene should encourage them to solve the puzzle recently given to Liam. Skills in Magience are required to solve it. The lower note, "The Savellis' Passion", refers to a famous anecdote about the founders of Magience, a couple who loved rowboat rides. It is said that it was during such a ride that they established the fundamental principles of Magience. A Standard (11) Magience roll or a Complicated (14) Erudition roll is required to know of this anecdote. The second note is the formula of a chemical known to react with minerals and to be able to reveal the presence of some substances. A Standard (11) Magience roll or a Complicated (14) Science roll gives this information.



To solve the puzzle, one must go to the central islet on Varn's lake and pour the concoction made from the indicated formula there. Gathering the ingredients can be more or less easy, according to the Leader's inspiration. Pouring the liquid makes the stone react and reveals a secrete inscription: cartographic coordinates. A Complicated (14) Travel roll is required to precisely locate the place.

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Delphine Bois - Of Men and Obscurities - 19 - The Shadows



South of the village, deep in the forest, the place is located at the foot of a tree. There, the PCs can unearth a damaged casket containing two documents (see the Appendices on p.55: "Verzal's Will 2" and "Verzal's Report"), as well as a map indicating the location of the secret laboratory (under Gluta's sanctuary).

As soon as the PCs are done with reading these documents, they will suddenly find themselves in the Magientist ruins once more... The transition with Act 3 should be brutal, the same way the scenario began.



Act 3: Justice

This third Act brings the PCs back into the Magientist ruins, repeating the first scenes of Act I before bringing them to a confrontation with Jearon, their Varigal comrade possessed by Verzal's ghost. They will then have to take a crucial decision concerning what will happen next in the vale. Contrary to the rest of the scenario, the main part of this Act occurs in the present time for the PCs. It is no longer a nightmare or a memory, but truly reality.

Scene 1: Coming back to the Ruins



Akira Yamaoka - Silent Hill 2
Original Soundtracks - 25 -
Betrayal.



Summary of the scene: The PCs relive their first scenes in the ruins.

When the scene begins, the Leader is advised to use the same music as in the very beginning of his scenario (Act 1, scene 1), in order to insist on the dimension of repetition that marks this moment. During the entire first part of this scene, the Leader will describe to the Players exactly what they have done during the first Scene of Act 1, without them being able to interfere with the course of events.

Of course, although the scenes will be the same, the way the

Players experience them will be totally different. The climax will be the confrontation with Terent, which will unfold the same way as in the beginning of the scenario and end with his tragic death, without his brother Liam being able to do anything. It is exactly at this moment that the PCs come back into the present. Terent will fall into his brother's arms, whispering with his last breath "You killed me.", the Leader bringing back the echo of Liam's recent nightmare, in which he saw his brother in his room, bleeding to death.

At this point, the PCs will be free to act as they wish. If they go to their camp, like the first time, they will find no one. However, the Leader can now reveal them that the three characters they had met the first time were the Demorthèn Deorn, the warrior from Varn who protected him, and Jearon the Varigal.

Scene 2: Find an Exit



Summary of the scene: Quickly, the PCs will try to leave the ruins in order to find Deorn. They will meet the warrior who was escorting him, who will give them the direction toward which Deorn and Jearon left.

Since they now have Verzal's Will, which indicates the location of the secret laboratory, the PCs will certainly want to leave the ruins as quickly as possible to go there.

The main interest of this scene is to play on the apprehension of the Players, who have already gone through such a scene before, and who will expect the worst. Actually, unless the Leader wants to include fighting scenes, and a particularly supernatural atmosphere, there is no creature or monstrous plant. Yet it should be easy to bring back the pressure:

- The Viscid Juice:

One PC steps on a viscid liquid: is this the gastric juices of a centipede? It actually is not; it could be the remains of a chemical used by the Magientists, or more simply, a smudge of oil.



When the PCs reach the exit, they find the warrior escorting Deorn, dying. He tells the PCs that Jearon has gone mad and taken the Demorthèn into the forest, shovel in hand. The direction shown by the warrior corresponds to that of the place of worship dedicated to Gluta, underneath which lies Verzal's secret laboratory.

- The Creeper:

One PC stumbles on a creeper near a silo: this is only some weed that has grown spectacularly over the years, but nothing to do with the carnivorous plant previously encountered...

- The Drop:

A liquid drops on one of the PCs' head: he will certainly feel some apprehension when looking up... but it is just rainwater seeping through the cracked roof.



Monstrous Encounter

If the Leader wishes to make a giant centipede or the monstrous plant appear, he can make use of the false alarms described above, and then describe a sudden and brutal attack from a creature. The characteristics of the creatures on pages 43-44 can be used.

The plant, if it exists, has developed in parallel to the appearance of the giant centipedes, and feeds upon the weakest specimens.

Scene 3: A Difficult Choice



David Darling - Dark Wood - 3 - Journey.



Summary of the scene: The PCs head toward Gluta's sanctuary where they find Jearon, possessed by Verzal, and Deorn the Demorthèn. They will have to make a crucial choice that will strongly influence the future of the vale.

When the PCs reach the sanctuary, the Leader should take the time to make a striking description of the place: a swampy clearing in front of which stands a circle of ritual stones, finely engraved with Oghamic writings. From this place radiates a heavy, solemn atmosphere.

In the center, Jearon stands, his eyes bulging. Possessed by Verzal's spirit, he yells at the old Demorthèn, trying to make him admit the truth. Jearon has dug a hole in the center of the circle, revealing a trap door. It leads to Verzal's secret laboratory.

- Loch Varn -

When the PCs arrive, they witness this dialogue:

“Your cult is nothing but a lie, Demorthèn! Your so-called sanctuary has nothing to do with Gluta! My secret laboratory, which you have never discovered, is built just below, and only fossil Flux is responsible for the putrefaction of this zone, nothing else!” Jearon grabs the Demorthèn and drags him toward the hole hiding the trap door. Deorn seems terrified, dumbfounded by what the possessed Varigal is telling him:

“See for yourself and accept this truth you rejected fifty years ago! Your cult is but an illusion!”

“Verzal? How is it possible... you died fifty years ago...”

“It is most ironic, old man. By killing me, you let my experiences rot in this laboratory and they eventually gave birth to monstrous creatures... if you had let me work, I could have cleansed this valley from that brown pestilence and offered Varn's people a better future...”

“Liar! Like your peers, you are only interested in the collection of Flux and its trade, without a care for men and nature! If you had never disturbed the earth looking for your cursed fuel, none of that would have ever happened!”

As the PCs are coming closer, the two protagonists stop and try to convince the PCs to help them. Here are the different possibilities to end this scenario:

1. Help Deorn

Here are the arguments put forward by Deorn:

-Someone must go to the laboratory and destroy the stone discovered by Verzal in order to preserve the vale from the creatures born from the “Magientist madness.”

-None of this must be revealed to the people! Otherwise, traditional culture would be threatened: do the PCs really want that? Moreover, this particularity related to Verzal's discovery does not discredit the whole Demorthèn beliefs.

-Jearon is possessed by a rogue spirit: he must not be listened to, and the Varigal must be freed from his hold.

If the PCs take this decision, they will have to hurry up and break the stone (see “The Secret Laboratory” on the following page), which will break the link between Verzal's spirit and Jearon's body. However, if the Varigal is killed, Verzal's spirit will try to possess another body at random. To resist the possession, one must succeed in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.

Jearon

Attack: 12. Defense: 10. Speed: 6.

Damage: 2. Health Points: 19/14/9/5

2. Help Verzal

Here are the arguments put forward by Verzal, through Jearon's body:

-Deorn must be punished: along with his fanatics, he murdered many people fifty years ago. Verzal's spirit will not be at peace until justice is done!

-Verzal's discovery must be openly revealed. Do the PCs want Varn's people to keep living in the lie of a worship based on nothing? The experimentation on the fossil Flux and its effects must go on.

If the PCs decide to follow Verzal, they will have to decide what to do with Deorn. If the PCs swear that Deorn will be punished and that the truth will be revealed to Varn's people, then Verzal's ghost will depart and Jearon will be freed. If the PCs do not follow their promise, the haunting will begin anew, and the liars will be hunted by the ghost.

3. Other Possibilities

Obviously, there are other alternatives, such as driving back Verzal's spirit by breaking the stone, while still making Deorn's crimes known. The Game Leader should leave his Players free to take whatever decision seems the best in this final scene.





In order to optimize the potential of this final scene, the Leader must handle the arguments of both protagonists well, and make the Players feel that there is not really a “bad guy” and a “good guy” in the story, but two personalities opposed in their philosophies, who will stop at nothing to defend their own point of view.



During this final scene, the Leader can add supernatural elements by making creatures intervene. Here are two examples of alternative scenes:

Deorn's Summoning

If the PCs side with Verzal, they will have to fight the Demorthèn who will summon swamp creatures. To do this, he will use his pendant: with a heavy, ground-shaking rumbling, the creatures will emerge around the PCs, which will induce a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. Jearon will fight alongside the PCs.

Swamp Creatures

These monsters, with misshapen bodies made of mud, branches, and stones, attack with long tendrils. There are half as many creatures as the PCs, rounded up.

Attack: 14. Defense 10.
Speed: 8. Damage: 3.
Health Points: 25
(no wound penalties)

The Gigantic Insects

If the PCs side with Deorn, the Leader can use the giant insects to oppose them to the PCs and protect Verzal. These monsters will emerge from the mud, coiling nauseously around the menhirs before leaping at the PCs. Such a scene also calls for a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. There will be two insects:

Gigantic Centipede

Attack: 14. Defense 12.
Speed: 8. Damage: 3.
Health Points: 30/20/10/5

Finally, the Leader may also make both the insects and the summoned creatures intervene, in a supernaturally cataclysmic ending.

The Secret Laboratory

Beneath the trap door is a rotting stairway leading deep underground. The PCs will discover a derelict laboratory, with some of the walls crumbled down because of the proximity with the bog. Large cocoons are hanging from the walls, their glistening surface apparently undulating under the movements of something inside. Some of the cocoons are empty. On a metallic table rests a crystalline stone with amber-colored tints of a truly hypnotic nature. Staring at it for a while induces vertigo, and it is possible to catch a glimpse of Verzal's wracked face. Breaking the stone requires inflicting it 20 Damage points, with Attack or Feats rolls against a Difficulty Threshold of 14. It looks like a crystalline geode filled with amber liquid: fossil Flux, or Nimheil.

The Cocoons and the Gigantic Centipedes

The radiations of the stone filled with fossil Flux have gradually triggered mutations on the living beings that have sneaked into Verzal's secret laboratory, as it fell into ruins. As it is, when the stone started crackling, insects who had made their nests in this lair mutated and, in the end, gave birth to aberrations...

Within a few generations, their offspring experienced amazing transformations and growth. According to Deorn's interpretation, these creatures are Feondas, progeny of the spirits of nature—in this case, Gluta. They are the manifestations of its wrath because it is not correctly worshiped.

Obviously, should the carnivorous plant previously mentioned exist, it also owes its existence to fossil Flux. In its case, it was affected like the surrounding vegetation, but developed an appetite for meat.



Epilogue

When the scenario ends, the consequences of the PCs' decision must still be dealt with, and may be the subject of an upcoming session. If they have sided with Verzal, they have also made a pact with him, and will have to honor it lest they are tortured by the rogue spirit that will not leave them alone. If the true nature of Gluta's cult is revealed, the reaction of Varn's people will probably be violent, and the PCs may make mortal enemies among the Demorthèn, as Verzal did in his time.

Revealing the existence of fossil Flux in Varn's valley to a Magientist university may have unpredictable consequences and trigger greed and tension among the kingdoms.

If they have sided with Deorn, the PCs will be the accomplices of a lie and of an unpunished crime, but they will preserve the region from many upheavals.

During the epilogue, the Leader may also shed light on a few elements:

- When he comes back to the chapel, Urvan will meet Jaber, who does exist. There is no secret passage in the chapel. The Vector will confirm that he was the one who told the Blade knight the history of the region. Also, it will be impossible for the PCs to find the registers previously discovered... they were only a production of their minds.
- The place where the PCs have discovered Verzal's Will, in the forest, is actually the Magientist's grave, or rather, the common grave where all the bodies were thrown away by Deorn and his followers at the time of the War of the Temple.
- The lake's central islet does not exist, and the formula indicated on Verzal's puzzle corresponds to nothing. The note in itself will remain nowhere to be found: it was just the influence of Verzal's rogue spirit in the Magientist ruins, who strove to guide the PCs toward the truth.

As for the true nature of the brown earth phenomenon, of Gluta's cult, or of the effects of fossil Flux... both Deorn and Verzal are mistaken. The truth lies elsewhere, and the PCs may discover it during the campaign of Shadows of Esteren.



Year 853

Births

This year, the community had the joy of twenty-four new births. Loch Varn is starting to show more openness for the path of the Creator, and I could bless five of these newborns. Unfortunately, eleven of them died during the year, but only one of the blessed children was called back by the One. I hope that this sign will be perceived as such by the inhabitants, and that they will let me bless even more children, in order to protect them from the many ills threatening them.

Conversions

Conversions remain difficult in this region, but over the course of the year, three persons have come to ask me to make them faithful of our Holy Church.

Missionaries

I had the joy of hosting a group of Vectors, bearers of the word, in a break from a journey of several months across the whole of Jaol-Kaer.

Notes

This year was marked by an increase in the Magientist experiments in the region. The authorities of Jaol-Kaer should be more careful, and not yield to the lures of riches from the Reizhite universities financing these operations. I know to what extremes the Magientists go in our country of Gwidre.

The relations have turned sourer in the vale: tensions are still gravitating around the Magientist works. Verzal's men are digging the earth, probably looking for their precious Flux. It would seem that, for reasons I cannot fathom, they have roused the anger of Loch Varn's Demorthèn. I have done my best to calm things down, mainly by advising the people of Loch Varn not to meddle with the Magientists.

Register of the Temple 2

Year 857

Births

This year, we have welcomed twenty-eight newborns. Unfortunately, I could bless none of them, and half of them have not made it through winter.

Deaths

The Demorthèn are still opposing any funeral ceremony that could yet allow the departed souls to join the eternal kingdom of the Creator.

Conversions

Two other faithful have joined our church. Unfortunately, their conversion was done secretly. The war opposing my country to Reizh may spread to Jaol-Kaer, which makes my task more complicated as the Demorthèn do not hide their hatred against the Temple now. The population used to treat me with politeness, and sometimes with respect, but it seems that this time is over indeed.

Notes

Unfortunately, the dangers of a war with Gwidre are putting me in a tricky situation. Many are those who fear an "invasion of the Temple", and my task gets harder every day.

There is worse though: the Magientists have been slaughtered, and their installations ransacked. Loch Varn's Demorthèn is not personally leveling accusations at me, but he has clearly been telling behind my back that my supposed "allies hidden in the mountains" are responsible for such a crime.

I think that the culprits are actually this man and his henchmen. It may well be that I am not safe here any more, and that I have to depart, which would leave this region in ignorance and darkness.

Letter by the Captain

Sire,

I am writing to you in order to inform you of a preoccupying situation here in Loch Varn. Several of my men have disappeared without a trace, and the same thing has happened to several of Varn's inhabitants. A few of my men have noticed strange activity in the forest, which indicates that there could be Feondas about. We have in particular found molehills three feet wide: an unfamiliar thing in the region. However, it is also possible that a party of marauders, active for several months, is at the origin of such troubles.

Several patrols have reported unusual activity near the derelict Magientist laboratory. It is thus possible that people, or worse, creatures, have made this place theirs. We require reinforcements to clean this place of what is lurking there.

I will be expecting news from you,

Your faithful servant,

Harald Torr

Activity Report

Date: 855

Subject: Experimentation on fossil Flux

Page: 1/2

The fossil element shows entirely new properties in contact with plants. We were already aware of the weed-killing effects of this matter, but it displayed an amazing reaction. At the direct contact of fossil Flux samples, the plants shrivel, rot, but do not die. On the contrary, after an incubation time, they start developing and growing. This would explain, in great

Verzal's Will 1

Verzal's Will 2

part, the "brown earth" described by Loch Varn's Demorthien, which they attribute to spirits of nature. Such a clue indicates that there must be other pockets of fossil Flux, and that our discovery was but a fragment of these. Even if it is impossible for the local Demorthien, it may well be that uncovering and draining these pockets would make the effects of this brown pestilence disappear.

Verzal

55

Verzal's Report

Activity Report

Date: 857

Subject: Return to Reizh

Page: 1

Unfortunately, the war has spread to Taal-Kaer. It is very likely that the greatest threat does not come from the armies of Gwidre, but from the obscurantism of Loch Varn's Demorthien. I suspect that he wishes to eliminate us. His threats were not followed by acts, but we must not take them lightly. He cannot stand that the fossil Flux we have discovered may be at the origin of what he considers to be a manifestation of the spirit Gluta. At any rate, we are not safe here any longer...

We are currently leading very complex research, and it would be a pity, and even a danger, if we had to suddenly halt them. This is why we are asking for important reinforcements to ensure our protection.

I hope to receive your support very quickly,

Verzal

Poison

A scenario by Nelyhann

P Prologue

This investigation scenario is suitable for novice Leaders and Players. The numerous inserts and staging aids act as support for novice Leaders and will provide ideas for more experienced ones to bring particular care to the setting and the Characters' interpretation.

· **Style:** Investigation

· **Location:** Melwan's village

· **Season:** Irrelevant

Summary of the Scenario : After noticing that a poison affecting Melwan is spreading at an alarming rate, the PCs start their investigation. They will have to show discernment to eliminate some red herrings: the rumors about Goater's mill, the worrying behavior of Ergor the hermit, and the strange experiments of Talacien the Magientist near the poisoned river. The PCs should eventually decide to go upstream, where they will find out that the source of the disease plaguing Melwan originates in the mines. There, a toxic substance called Nimheil leaks and seeps into the rock and through the earth to pour forth into the river, contaminating in turn all those who drink from it...

Stakes and Aims : The PCs will discover Melwan's vale and become familiar with it. This will also be an opportunity to confront them with the appearance of Nimheil, and to prepare them for Shadows of Esteren's official campaign.

Involving the Characters

The PCs could be involved in this scenario in various ways:

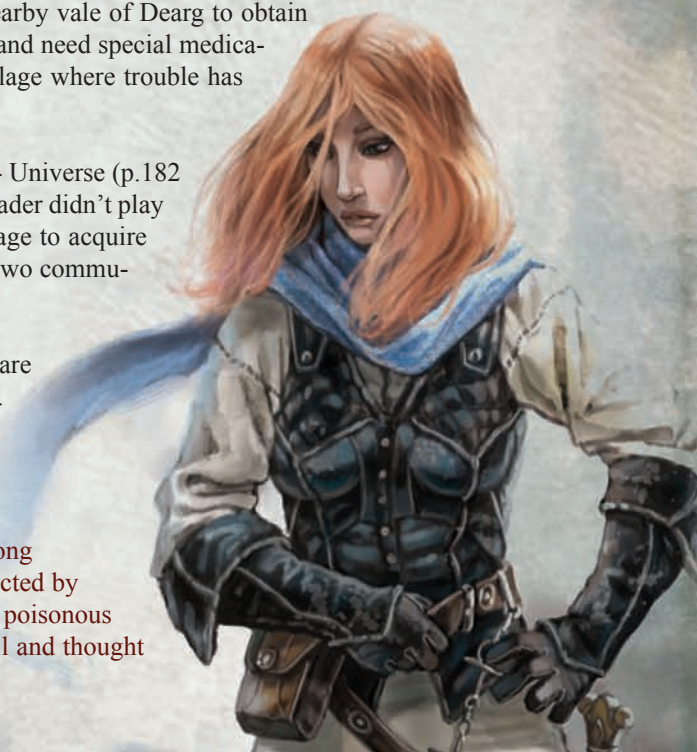
⊕ The first possibility is to use the "Premade Characters" on pages 20 to 31 of this book. The PCs will be highly involved in this story since they live in Melwan's village and are directly threatened by the spreading poison. If this option is chosen, the PCs will have been sent by Demorthèn Wailen to the nearby vale of Dearg to obtain medicinal herbs. Indeed, several inhabitants of their community are ill and need special medication. The PCs are not aware that when they return, they will find a village where trouble has direly worsened.

⊕ You can also play this scenario by using the templates from Book 1 - Universe (p.182 to 193). If this option is chosen, Yldiane the Varigal (or Jearon, if the Leader didn't play the Loch Varn scenario, or if Jearon survived it) is sent to Dearg's village to acquire medicinal herbs. For the sake of solidarity and friendship between the two communities, Ansailéir Maorn assigns the PCs to help Melwan in this ordeal.

⊕ Finally, the Leader could play the scenario with a group of PCs who are neither those introduced in this book, nor those from Book 1 - Universe. This way, he can create ties between his group of PCs and this region, in order to prepare for the official campaign.



If someone plays Yldiane, the following elements should be included: Yldiane came back to her village recently, after a long journey in Reizh. In fact, just before arriving, she became infected by Nimheil when she drank from the river, and suffered from the poisonous effects (see "Malignant Poisoning", on p.61). Yldiane has been very ill and thought she would die, but she has recovered by the time the game begins.



Horrorific Aspect

The introduction scene, the visit to the valley (in particular the meeting with Ergor the hermit), as well as the discovery of the poison's origin, will create most of the tension. The established atmosphere will mainly depend on the way the Leader narrates and introduces the different scenes. Several inserts give him tools for this task.



The Leader, especially if he is a beginner, should read over the whole scenario several times in order to immerse himself in it and be able to improvise according to the Players' actions, who will carry out the investigation in their own way. Experienced Leaders can add or take away some scenes to adapt the scenario to their preferences.

Fossil Flux and Nimheil

This scenario features fossil Flux. This is a toxic, amber-colored substance of varying density when crude: most often liquid, it can also be thick and viscous. It is often contained in a crystalline shell. Refined, it becomes an oily liquid of a bright yellow. Rare but extremely rich in energy, this Flux is much sought-after by Magientists. The Demorthèn gave it the name Nimheil. More information on this substance is given on page 61 and in Book 1 - Universe, page 147.

Chronology

Here is a chronological summary of the events affecting Melwan:

Four weeks ago...	Three weeks ago...	One week ago...	Now	In a few days...
The deposit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The poisoning - Talacien's experiments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manec Mac Lyr's death - Melwan's well - Talacien's research 	The mission toward Dearq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The return of the Players - The investigation - The confrontation

-The deposit. Four weeks ago, Octar and Naelen, two of Melwan's miners, stumble upon a strange deposit of amber liquid. Some of it splashes on Naelen's face, and he falls critically ill.

-The poisoning. The liquid seeps into a brook at the source of the Nuarranta, the river flowing through the vale. There is not much of it in the water, and it is undetectable. The poison has unpredictable effects but is most often deadly. Some animals drinking at the Nuarranta succumb to madness, but most of them die.

-Talacien's experiments. Several days later, after having drunk from the river, a mercenary working for Magientist Talacien falls ill. The scientist quickly theorizes that the river is poisoned with fossil Flux. To confirm this, he and his student take a sample of the river's water for analysis.

-Manec Mac Lyr's death. Three weeks ago, Lord Manec Mac Lyr went hunting with his son Erwan and some soldiers. They drank at the river and fell ill, and the lord died from the illness.

-Melwan's well. Meanwhile, the well, supplied by the river crossing the village, is in turn contaminated. Several people fall ill without the source being discovered.

-Talacien's research. By adapting a machine he uses to make experiments in the region, the Magientist constructs a large filter to remove the fossil Flux from the river and to purify it. Talacien has the feeling that he's coming close to a major breakthrough, and becomes obsessed with the discovery of the fossil Flux source.

-The mission toward Dearq. The population begins to realize the gravity of the situation as several people die. Wailen the Demorthèn sends a group to the village of Dearq to get some help from Loeg, her Demorthèn friend. He gives the agents of his female comrade medicinal plants and some remedies.

-The return of the Players. Several days later, the group sent to Dearq comes back to Melwan, carrying back the supplies. The situation has grown worse in the village. Several hints suggest that the water is poisoned.

- **The investigation.** The PCs investigate the poisoning. The group actively looks for the source and tracks it back, somewhere in an old mine.

- **The confrontation:** Upstream of the poisoned river, the PCs suddenly find a fault leaking fossil Flux. In the dark, danger lurks...

Melwan's Vale

Melwan is a little village in Tulg's dukedom, located close to the border between the kingdoms of Taol-Kaer and Gwidre. On one side, the road that crosses the valley goes through the community of Dearg and leads to the dukedom's capital city, Tulg-Naomh. Melwan and Dearg are often called "the twin villages" because of their close links, notably regarding mining works. On the other side, the road heads toward the dukedom of Dùlan and goes deep into the Mòr Roimh, the mountain range that crosses Tri-Kazel's peninsula.

Melwan is inhabited by little more than two hundred souls, each one taking part in the community's life, alternating their activities according to the seasons. The Mac Lyrs' castle is close to the village, separated by a bridge spanning the black river flowing through the village. When winter comes to the vale, snowfalls are heavy, and the community becomes isolated. In the first days of spring, the roads become passable again. Itinerant merchants return and trade resumes with the nearby villages, particularly Dearg.



Melwan's Village Square

This scenario takes place in Melwan's vale. Here are some personalities whom the PCs may meet:

- **The Goater family.** This family lives in a fortified farm along the Nuarranta, the "black river" that runs through the vale. The farm includes a mill which produces most of the wheat consumed in Melwan.

- **Ergor the hermit.** Ergor is a hermit living near the village. He doesn't worship the spirits of nature but "speaks to higher entities". He sometimes comes to the village in order to announce shadowy and horrific prophecies, although no one takes him seriously, and he even becomes the target of the youngsters of the community. Others just pity him, taking him for a poor, madness-stricken old man.

- **Wailen the Demorthèn.** Wailen is a mystic who gives vague answers and is not very involved in the village's daily life. Most of the time, she lives in a small and very austere hut close to Gluta's sacred circle. She used to be a gorgeous woman, and has had several children whose fathers remain unknown, resulting in much gossip: people talk about some traveler, a secret lover in Melwan, or even forest creatures. She is the grandmother of Yldiane the Varigal. People

think highly of the Demorthèn, and no one dares to question her authority. She has found in Mòr a likely Ionnthén.

- **Erwan Mac Lyr**. The Mac Lyr family comes from the clan that used to live in this vale. Feudalism made its members mighty warriors who lost, as ages went by, some of their strength. Erwan descends directly from the Lord of Melwan, who recently passed away. He is still a child, and it is his grandmother who truly holds power.

- **Lady Mac Lyr**. Maoda Mac Lyr has been holding the regency since the death of her son Manec Mac Lyr. She tries to defend the domain against those who try to get their hands on it, especially her own son, Peran Mac Lyr, brother of the late Manec, with whom she has been on bad terms for a long time. These inheritance issues take their toll on the old lady, who will appear tetchy and rather irritable.

- **Talacien the Magientist**. A man sent to this hostile region to carry out geological research. His work is briefly mentioned on page 163 of Book 1 - Universe.

- **Maiwenn the Dàmàthair**. Maiwenn is the oldest of the four Dàmàthairs, and sits for them at the council. Among its 200 inhabitants, Melwan has more than 50 children under ten, who are cared for by these women.

- **Maltaria the innkeeper**. A woman of character, and an outstanding figure in Melwan. Widowed, she runs the Old Chestnut inn by herself, a well-known place of rest for passing Varigals.

- **Venec the apothecary**. He is a collector, fond of all the astonishing objects brought by visiting travelers and Varigals. He is also a well-learned man and Liam's mentor.

- **Neala the bard**. According to tradition, the opinion of bards is heeded, and Neala sits at the council of the village. She is fond of animals too; she keeps her parents' stables and breeds a dozen Caernides.

- **Nar the blacksmith**. At almost seventy years old, Nar still retains broad shoulders, formed by years of service in the Hilderin knights's order. Since his return to Melwan, his native village, Nar has been running the forge as his father used to. Now, he shares his time between the forge and training the youngsters in the use of weapons.

- **Aessan the knight**. The son of one of the most loyal knights working for the Mac Lyrs. Forty years ago, Aessan was taken in by the Mac Lyrs, following the War of the Temple during which his parents died. Aessan won his nobility by saving Manec Mac Lyr during a hunt which almost turned out for the worst. Of all his soldiers, Aessan has a soft spot for young Arven. Although he is attracted to his protégée, who has become a beautiful young woman, he strives to keep a safe distance and keeps training her strictly, hoping she can one day be part of a knightly order, or take over from him and work for the Mac Lyrs.

The Mac Lyrs' Legacy Video Game

Like *Of Men and Obscurities*, the first album of the Esteren series, the video game is not a by-product, but is part of the project to create a cross-media universe, wherein the various facets of the project echo and enhance the Player's experience.

The Mac Lyrs' Legacy is a point'n'click game inspired by the Broken Sword series. Here, the Player embodies Yldiane the Varigal, investigating in Melwan's village. The story of the video game takes place just before the events experienced by the Players in the Poison scenario and focuses on Yldiane's character, as well as on the Mac Lyr family.



Act I: A Strange Evil

Scene I: The Beast Prowls



James Horner - *Braveheart: Original Soundtrack* - 6 - *Revenge*.

The PCs are on their way to Melwan, for reasons that vary according to their motivations (see "Involving the Characters" on p.56).



Before the beginning of the game, the Leader should only give the Players vital information. For instance, if the PCs are playing the templates of this book, the Leader can just tell them they are back from Dearg with an important package of medicinal herbs. Some of the inhabitants of Melwan, their village, are ill and the package must be brought to them as soon as possible. The rest of the information (what the PCs know precisely about the situation, the elements of the chronology page 57, information on Melwan's vale, etc.) will be given in Scene 2, Act 1, "Back to Melwan".

The aim of this first scene is to throw the Players directly into the heart of the story. The Leader can heighten the pressure by using music and by carefully narrating the scene. He can alter his voice, ask the Players to give quick answers, give abundant descriptions in order to set an atmosphere of emergency, etc. If he uses evocative music, he can throw in the action at the very moment when the rhythm increases. Too much preliminary detailing may interfere with this effect.

When the scenario begins, the PCs are stuck in a little mountain chapel dedicated to the Temple. The little building doesn't house any priest, although Dearg's monk, Firmin, sometimes goes there to do some maintenance. It is a well-known shelter for Varigals and mountaineers, located only a couple of hours away from Melwan. The PCs are spending the night there, and quickly, they start to hear unsettling noises. Strange snorting, the door of the chapel moving, claws scratching... it would seem that monstrous creatures, Feondas, are about to attack!

In fact, the PCs are the quarry of an enraged bear, infected with fossil Flux. When the Leader decides that the tension is at its peak, the beast will eventually attack. The Characteristics of the bear are as follows:

Enraged Bear

Attack: 12. Defense: 10. Speed: 4.

Damage: 3. Health Points: 30.



A PC who knows animals well (Standard (11) Natural Environment roll) should quickly notice that the bear's behavior is abnormal. Moreover, the examination of its eyes shows that its pupils are oddly dilated. When it dies, the bear will also spit some bile of an intense, abnormal yellow color.

Scene 2: Back to Melwan

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As the PCs are getting close to Melwan, the Leader can now take time to explain to them in a more detailed way the recent occurrences and the situation that they are experiencing: the village is affected by a serious disease of unknown origin (chronologically speaking, we are several days after "Melwan's well"; see the chronology on p.57). Although no one can say for sure, this illness seems to be the same one that killed Manec Mac Lyr, the local lord, several weeks ago, and infected several other inhabitants of the Mac Lyr's castle (see Act 1, Scene 5). Unfortunately, several other inhabitants of Melwan seem to have contracted it...

Wailen the Demorthèn recommended sending a group to the nearby village of Dearg to bring back medicinal herbs from Loeg the Demorthèn. Her aim is to prepare a concoction which can help the sick people survive, but considering the number of infected people, she needs huge quantities of raw materials. Therefore, the PCs have been sent to Dearg in order to fetch the ingredients, and after several days of travel, they are back...

When the PCs return to Melwan, they notice that the situation has grown worse: 40 of the 200 inhabitants are affected, and a dozen have already passed away. The cattle are also affected.



If the PCs are natives of Melwan, when they left the village, some of them also felt the first symptoms of the disease (fevers and headaches) soon before they departed, because they consumed water from the well. Fortunately, during their expedition, the symptoms have subsided. They can mention this, which may hint at the water poisoning.

Scene 3: Analyzing the Poison.

Relying upon the books of Venec the apothecary, discussing with Wailen, or experimenting (Difficult (17) Science roll or Complicated (14) Magience roll to make certain of it) will lead to the same conclusion: this is an unknown illness or poisoning that no one in Melwan can identify.



If the PCs want to meet Talacien at this point of the scenario, they won't find him: he has gone on an expedition in order to find the source of the fossil Flux. The PCs will only be able to meet the mercenaries who won't be very talkative.

A Mysterious Poison: Nimheil

The word Nimheil comes from the Demorthèn traditions and literally means “poison”. From the point of view of these cults' adepts, this toxin not only induces various illnesses, but also has the sinister characteristic of making the spirits of nature, the C'maoghs, flee. It is this particular property that makes the Demorthèn regard Nimheil as an unnatural substance to keep a distance from.

On a spiritual level, for the Demorthèn, the world is fed by a sacred energy coming from Corahn-Rin, the Life-Tree. According to this concept, Nimheil is a corrupted form of this energy, the origin of which remains a matter of debate among the Demorthèn. In the Magientists' point of view, all these beliefs belong to the local folklore and overshadow the true nature of Nimheil, which they call “fossil Flux”. According to these scientists, Nimheil is produced by the effect of time on some rare minerals and buried organic substrates. It has very important energetic properties, even more than those of Flux taken from plants, rocks, and animal flesh.



Nimheil Poisoning



If a PC is contaminated with Nimheil, he has to make a Complicated (14) Stamina Roll to avoid being poisoned and suffering one of its effects.

To determine which one, the Player rolls another 1D10:

1. Deadly poisoning and madness:

After 3D10 days, death comes while the sanity of the sick person is undermined. Some time before passing away, he exhibits a fit of rage. NPC Naelen is an example of this kind of contamination.

2 and 3. Malignant poisoning and madness:

Over five days, the effects of the poison can be felt. The sick person suffers 3 Damage points per day (the Player ticks boxes in the Health Condition Chart, as usual) while he is harassed by fevers driving him mad. On the fifth day, this madness peaks as a murderous rage. If he survives, the patient will start to recover from the sixth day.

4, 5, and 6. Malignant poisoning:

The same effects as those formerly described for 2 and 3, without the madness.

7. Madness:

The sick person doesn't show any physical symptoms, but his personality is highly affected. Over 3D10 days, he is stricken by deliriums of varying intensity. After this, the effects subside, and the sick person gradually comes round. Ergor the NPC is a striking example of this type of effects.

8 and 9. Fever:

Over five days, the effects of the poison can be felt. The sick person suffers 2 Damage points per day, along with fevers.

10. No effect:

The Nimheil has no effect on this person.

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Recovering from Nimheil

There is no antidote to Nimheil: some survive it, some don't. Medicinal concoctions give the best odds of survival. For instance, the remedy made by Wailen reduces the Damage points suffered daily by one, but cannot repress the madness caused by Nimheil.

In the case of a Deadly poisoning, only a Very Difficult (20) Medicine, Magience, or Demorthèn Mysteries roll can save the patient (the poisoning then becomes of Malignant Virulence, as in the case described for a roll of 2 or 3).

The Remedy Ogham or the Purification Miracle may also be used, at the fourth circle and fourth stance respectively. These powers neutralize the effects of Nimheil but don't heal the potential wounds or secondary effects induced by the effects of the poison. Medical care (and supernatural powers if necessary) will have to be provided as normal to cure such aftereffects.



The various hints

. Yellow bile:

The sick coughing people will sometimes spit a yellow and viscous bile.

. A quick and fatal poison:

The amount of Nimheil brought by the river is infinitesimal, invisible to the human eye, but sufficient to cause a poisoning.

. Tracking the presence of Nimheil:

By evaporating water from the river or the well, one can notice the presence of an amber-colored residue.



Scene 4: Around the Well

Near the well, the PCs may notice several dead little birds. In fact, the birds were poisoned when they drank water from the well. By making this water evaporate, some sand-sized particles of an amber color can be isolated. Very quickly, the PCs may become aware that the Nuarranta, the little river that crosses Melwan, is contaminated too.

Following these discoveries, Melwan is obviously deprived of drinking water. There only remain the alcohol supplies of Maltaria, the innkeeper, to supply the whole village.



During their investigation, when the Leader deems it appropriate, the hermit Ergor may make an appearance in the village and cross the path of the PCs, shouting doomlike imprecations at people: « I told you! The promised pestilence falls upon you! ». At this point, the Leader can introduce this well-known NPC of the valley. If the PCs try to speak with him, they will be aware of the madness that plagues him (see Act 2, Scene 2), but also of his supernatural strength, which could create a wave of panic in the village.



If the PCs do not discover these hints, the village's inhabitants will do it themselves. These discoveries lead to the organization of an improvised council in the common house of Melwan. However, more time will pass, and others of Melwan's inhabitants will fall ill. The quicker the PCs will be, the fewer deaths the village will suffer.

Alternative Introduction

The Leader can use Scene 4 of Act 1 as an introduction scene for the scenario. If he does so, the poisoning has just begun, and the PCs' help will soon be requested by Wailen...

Traveling to the nearby village of Dearg for remedies can then become a whole quest, and Scene 1 can be used as a strong moment in the return to Melwan. Such a choice is possible, but will considerably lengthen the global duration of the scenario.

Scene 5: The Council

About forty people are crowded in the common house; among them, the eminent figures are Wailen the Demorthèn, Neala the bard, and Maiwenn the Dàmàthair. Venec the apothecary, Nar the blacksmith, Maltaria the innkeeper, and Aessan the knight, standing for the Mac Lyrs, are also present. The atmosphere is heavy and the anxiety palpable; the community is deprived of drinking water. A solution must be found.

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The Leader should take the time to describe the atmosphere of the council, describing some NPCs with more detail and asking each Player to describe his state of mind.

Several ideas are suggested and debated during the council:

- Gather in groups to fetch water supplies: some little mountain torrents are perhaps spared by the contamination. Another idea is to go high enough to stock on snow, and then melt it.

- Wait for a rainfall to provide water. However, several days could pass before the rain falls in quantities large enough for both men and cattle.

- Pinpoint the origin of the evil affecting Melwan. Some speak of purposeful poisoning and, very quickly, Talacien the Magientist and Ergor the Hermit are suspected (see p.58

and 59 for more information about these NPCs). Others mention Goater the miller, who lives in the mill upstream from Melwan. He is suspected of being in cahoots with the Magientist in order to increase the production of his mill.

- Some state that the evil may not be that far and may be found in Melwan itself. The blacksmith is directly questioned on his activities (his workshop is located by the river).



In the end, the most important thing remains gathering water supplies, and the council ratifies the constitution of groups to that effect. However, identifying the cause of the mysterious poisoning is also essential, and if they don't volunteer, Wailen the Demorthèn will ask the PCs to take this in charge.

Scene 6: The Mac Lyrs' Mourning

The Mac Lyr family has been direly stricken these last weeks. Lord Manec Mac Lyr has passed away, poisoned, and his son Erwan is still ill. Nevertheless, the Mac Lyrs' castle is fed by a small torrent and no other person has been contaminated since the hunt. Maoda Mac Lyr, the regent, does her best to save what can still be, and prepare her grandson to rule.

The PCs can go by themselves to the castle and question its inhabitants, or be directly called by the Mac Lyrs. By discussing with young Erwan Mac Lyr and the other infected people, including a soldier named Veig, it can be deduced that their contamination came from a hunting afternoon during which they all drank from the river. If Yldiane the Varigal is present, she can confirm that she stopped by the Nuarranta to drink from it just before her arrival in Melwan, and that she fell ill afterward...

Maoda Mac Lyr, convinced that the river was purposefully poisoned, asks the PCs to find the culprit and to dispense justice. The Mac Lyr family will remember their actions.

Scene 7: Naelen's Agony

The next day, while the first lights of dawn break through the morning mist, horrible screams ring in the village... another poor man consumed by the illness. In fact, it is Naelen, a young miner, who is in a critical state. If the PCs come to his bedside, they will witness a horrific scene:

“In a shuttered room, where light rays scarcely break through, a young man is lying on a bed. The stench of decay is hardly bearable. The whistling breath of the sick man shows that his respiratory system is badly affected. Fortunately, the part of his face destroyed by the poison is hidden by bandages. When you arrive, he tries to move toward you, revealing a part of his jaw ravaged by a purulent gangrene. Poor Naelen cannot speak anymore, his begging eyes filled with a violent pain interspersed with amber veins. Obviously, the young man is doomed.”

For each present PC, it's time for a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. In case of a failure, the PC starts to feel unwell; he must leave the room and will probably have some nightmares...



Naelen is actually not ill like the others since he was the one who, along with his partner Octar, pierced the Nimheil shell in the mines and thus began the contamination. The PCs can meet Naelen's grieving family. Some questioning will enable them to learn that their son has been ill for several weeks; even before the hunt that led to the death of Manec Mac Lyr. In the end, the PCs may be able to deduce that he was—obviously—one of the first to fall ill.



The Nightmare



Elend - Winds devouring men - 6 - Winds devouring men

If one of the PCs falls ill, the Leader may use this optional scene. The aim is to make the Players believe, at least at first, that the experienced scene is true. The PC will discover remains of reptile sloughs. He will find a worrying number of those in the village... then the PC will face a giant snake staring icily at him. This nightmare aims to reinforce the impact of the upcoming scenes of this scenario: the discovery of lizard sloughs in the mine, and the confrontation with the mutated creatures. If the Leader takes this option, this nightmare could also foreshadow the meeting with Naelen and his snake eyes.

The other purpose of this nightmare is to create a debate about its nature among the PCs. A simple manifestation of anguish or a premonitory vision? One of the PCs will experience a similar nightmare at the beginning of Shadows of Esteren's campaign.

Finally, the Leader should keep in mind that the visions and other nightmares are narrative tools that must be used sparingly.

Though they are excellent means to create a particular atmosphere, they can also quickly lose their efficacy if used excessively. This is the reason this scene is optional, and it is up to the Leader to decide if it is pertinent to insert it into the scenario.

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Act 2: In the Valley

From the hints gathered at the village, the PCs will certainly want to know more. The Leader could put the following scenes in any order he prefers, according to the PCs' actions. If the Players follow red herrings, the Leader could of course introduce new scenes according to the PCs' investigations.



During Act 1, the PCs have had several opportunities to realize that the black river is contaminated. It is by going upstream that they will discover the origin of the evil.

Scene 1: Goater's Mill

This fortified farm houses the Goater family and their mill standing over the shores of the black river. It is located several hours away from Melwan and produces a significant part of the flour consumed by the village.

Upon approaching, the PCs will be welcomed by the barking of two huge dogs locked inside the building. The mill, as well as the large adjoining construction housing the family, is protected by a stockade fence. This is where the PCs will find the fifty-year-old miller Goater, his wife Rondina, their son Jobenn, and their daughter Jili, with her husband (Irvin) and their three children. Very quickly, the PCs will notice that the family is affected by the Nimheil and suffers from the same symptoms as those noticed in Melwan.

With some investigation, the PCs can find several clues:

- **The Residue.** By closely inspecting the blades of the waterwheel, the PCs will discover an amber residue of the same nature as the one found in the village. It won't be necessary to make them roll dice, because it is their idea that counts here. The traces are minimal, but this discovery could confirm the rumors from Melwan that Goater has done foul business with the Magientist to raise the production of his mill. The poisoning would therefore originate from the seepage of his machines. Far from it, this residue actually comes from pollution upstream of the mill: the contaminated water carries the substance which, despite the low quantity of poison it represents, has accumulated to form a deposit on the blades of the waterwheel.

- **Two Men at Dusk.** Jobenn will share the memory of a scene that has caught his attention. Several weeks ago, at dusk, he saw the silhouettes of two men, one of them screaming loud enough to scare the dogs. In truth, Jobenn saw, without recognizing them, Octar and Naelen, just after their accident in the mine, heading toward Melwan (see the “Chronology” part). Naelen was suffering from delirium bouts caused by Nimheil and, during his return to the village, Octar had to run after him several times, which led the two men away from the path they usually took.

- **The Magientist.** A family member can recount having seen Talacien the Magientist, along with two of his mercenaries, lurking near the village several times in recent weeks.



Creating the Atmosphere

During the PCs' excursion in Melwan's valley, the Leader is advised to thoroughly describe the surroundings so as to underline the impressions felt by the Characters. Therefore, he should first and foremost mention the contrasts between the various places crossed on the journey: a glade, the heart of a forest, a steep field, a rickety wooden bridge crossing an abrupt rift, etc. Of course, these descriptions will be all the more fascinating if they rely on all five of the Characters' senses:

- **Sight:** the forests' dark expanses of fir trees, the huge mountains surrounding the valley, the underwoods where a diffuse mist lingers, etc.

- **Hearing:** the whistling of the wind that rushes between the branches, the murmur of a stream, the faraway cries of wild animals, etc.

- **Touch:** the sensation of loose earth and moss sinking under their feet, the scratching of the branches, the humidity and the cold permeating their whole bodies, etc.

- **Smell and Taste:** the air filled with sometimes heady herbaceous perfumes, the smell of humid earth, etc.

A useful trick is to vary the qualifiers used and the senses put forward in the narration or, on the contrary, to insist on some points in order to highlight contrasting elements. Modulating the description according to the Characters' predispositions can also be effective. Those who have a high Way of Reason will perceive above all the physical facts surrounding them, in a more “clinical” and impersonal way than Characters with a strong Empathy. These will be more attached to their feelings and impressions—even fleeting ones—of what the surroundings seem to whisper to them. In the same way, the imagination of a Character with a strong Creativity will override his senses; he will tend to perceive allegories or hidden shapes everywhere, from clouds to the shadows of trees.

Threatening Shadows

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With a skillful portrayal of the setting, the Leader can also raise the pressure by adding some intriguing details in his descriptions:

- The wind seems to carry wails

- A sudden and unusual silence

- A tingling, itching sensation

- A strange and unknown perfume

- A glance at a lurking shadow

~ Scene 2: Ergor's Shack ~

The PCs arrive in the surroundings of the glade in which Ergor's shack was built. In fact, for several weeks, Ergor has been poisoned by the Nimheil but, curiously enough, though the poison severely affects his already fragile mind, it has had very little effect on his physical health so far, and even gives him extraordinary strength whenever he is stricken by some violent emotion. If the PCs go to his shack, the Leader is advised to detail his descriptions in order to create a tense and unsettling atmosphere:

- **A Sick Man.**

Old Ergor has a mad look, and when he speaks, he has a greasy and seeping cough, betraying the illness which affects him. His almost hypnotic stare is disturbing.

- **Poisoned Crops.**

The shape of the cultivated vegetables shows that they are contaminated as well. Indeed, Ergor goes to the nearby river to water his plants.

- **A Creepy Shack.**

The inside of the “house” is disturbing: dirty and stinking, its walls are covered with esoteric inscriptions beyond understanding.

- **The Stew.**

Ergor offers the PCs something to eat: very close to his cabin stands a big pot in which various vegetables and some meat are cooking. Ergor eats some vegetables, and the PCs realize that they have a bizarre, sickly shape, which doesn't seem to bother their host.

- **An Exceptional Strength.**

If the PCs molest Ergor, he will show unexpected physical strength which will be all the more surprising given his physical state: he will suddenly stand up and twist the arm of his attacker with an iron grip. This will only last a few seconds, after which Ergor will return to his elderly weakness. But it is sure to arouse curiosity, and even scare the PCs.



In fact, Ergor is innocent regarding the poisoning of the valley. He will only answer with strange and incoherent mentions of a sort of punishment from greater spirits.

Scene 3: The Magientist's Experiments

Upstream of the river, PCs who closely observe the shores will notice that the vegetation starts to show strange alterations: bleaching, distortions... although it is not obvious at first sight. However, it will be easier to notice several dead animals, including some which have been so for days, close to the river. Finally, the PCs will hear a strange humming noise upstream. When they get closer, they will discover a bizarre sight: a man dressed in a leather outfit working on a big machine with various bellows, tubes and gears. Nearby stand two warriors, recognizable as being the bodyguards of Talacien the Magientist, with two Caernides and a cart. The man in the suit is Herven, the apprentice of Talacien the Magientist. He is testing the machinery created by his master while he is somewhere in the vale, frantically searching for the source of the fossil Flux. Everything points to the guilt of the young Magientist: his machine is spotted with a yellowish residue that seemingly indicates it is the source of the pollution. The PCs cannot know in detail what this machine is exactly without having a solid knowledge in Magience. A Complicated (14) Magience roll enables them to understand its main function and to realize that this is an adaptation of an analytic machine. To know that, one must have the time to watch it working, examine its main mechanisms, etc. A mere look requires a successful Very Difficult (20) roll to deduce the same thing. Herven will refuse to talk to the PCs, obviously frightened and showing that his master forbade him from talking to them.



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⊕ Talacien

This Magientist graduate from the Reizhite capital city, Baldh-Ruoch, was sent by his university, officially to study the soils of Melwan's region, and unofficially to carry out research in the heart of the mountain. He was able to obtain a royal edict allowing him to conduct such research thanks to the active support of Maoda Mac Lyr, who personally intervened on his behalf.

Despite his cold and callous behavior, Talacien is a humanist and sincerely believes that Magience can improve the living conditions of mankind. But he is also an urban man who is having a hard time adapting to highland life and fears the superstitious reactions of Melwan's inhabitants, avoiding going to the village as much as possible. His Reizhite bodyguards deal with any supply issues, and he can spend several weeks—or even several months—without showing himself in Melwan. For the last few months, he has had a trainee, Herven, who has been sent to him by Baldh-Ruoch's university.

When one of his mercenaries fell ill, Talacien quickly suspected a fossil Flux poisoning. Before warning Melwan's community of the danger at hand, Talacien wanted to make sure that his intuition was right by analyzing the water. By evaporating some samples, he ascertained the presence of an amber liquid. For Talacien, this discovery certainly indicated a particularly rich deposit of this substance, which is as rare as precious for Magientists. Unfortunately, and despite his precautions, his manipulations eventually led to his own poisoning, at the very moment when he became sure that he was dealing with fossil Flux. Actually, Talacien doesn't know it, but he is facing a very particular sort of fossil Flux. His behavior quickly changed; he strictly forbade his trainee to go and warn anyone, ordering his mercenaries to watch him.



The filter is the ideal solution for Talacien: it collects the fossil Flux while purifying the river that waters Melwan. Talacien despises the inhabitants of the village, and according to him, it would be useless to explain the ins and outs of the poisoning to them. He has sent his trainee and the mercenaries to install the filter while he is searching for the source of the Flux.

⊕ Herven

A trainee Magientist, Herven is an idealistic young man who looks up to his master, Talacien. However, lately, the Magientist has been egotistic and brutal toward his trainee. Herven has deduced that Talacien has become a victim of the Nimheil as well, and that this substance is therefore dangerous, psychologically as well as physically. But Talacien has made it clear to his trainee that neither his health nor anyone else's should matter. Herven fears that his master or his sell-words will kill him if he does not obey.

If the PCs are particularly diplomatic (Difficult (17) Relation roll), the young trainee may briefly explain the purpose of his machine (to filter and collect the toxic substance) and specify that he's testing it. After a while, or if the PCs insist on questioning him despite the mercenaries' exhortations, Herven will eventually leave. He will pack up the machine on the cart, and head toward Neart's stronghold. The two mercenaries will keep calm, but if the PCs become aggressive or threatening, they won't hesitate to draw their weapons and use them if they have to.

An attentive observation will show that the mercenaries are closely watching the young trainee. If he has the opportunity, he will reveal everything to the PCs (see the previous insert).

Herven

Attack: 5.

Speed: 6.

Damage: 1 (knife).

Defense: 12.

Potential: 2.

Health Points: 19.

Reizhite Mercenaries

Attack: 11.

Speed: 7.

Damage: 2.

Defense: 10.

Potential: 2.

Health Points: 19.

Scene 4: Octar's Confession



The Leader should introduce this scene as late as he can in the scenario, first letting the PCs investigate the leads of Ergor, Goater the miller, or the Magientist. For example, if the PCs try to meet Octar at the beginning of the scenario, he will be nowhere to be found. He can be met when the PCs return after an expedition in the valley. The meeting with Octar will likely end in an important revelation that will guide the PCs toward the mines. However, this revelation is not essential for the progression of this scenario.

When the PCs eventually find Octar at the inn, he will be drinking. Maltaria the innkeeper can confirm that, for several weeks, his alcohol consumption has been growing worse. She can even mention that she finds Octar's behavior peculiar, as he sometimes mumbles to himself. This could be partly explained by the illness wearing down his close friend Naelen. Actually, Octar tries to forget that he is responsible for the disaster plaguing his village. He feels extremely guilty but will say nothing, fearing the village's inhabitants' retaliation.

There are numerous ways to make Octar talk. One of those is to make him drink.

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Although alcohol won't make him speak clearly, the PCs can nevertheless learn some crucial information and understand what occurred. The Leader shouldn't hesitate to portray Octar's behavior, drunk and desperate, when he tells his story. Yearning for something else than living in poverty and back-breaking labor in this lost valley, the two companions had devised a plan: discovering and exploiting on their own a huge vein of ore, collecting a fortune, and leaving south, to Osta-Baille, to live happily. They had to act secretly, most often by night and in old galleries, upstream from the currently exploited mines. These belong to the Mac Lyr family, and everything that comes out of the mountain depths is theirs. The miners finally uncovered a treasure, but not the one they thought: their pickaxes pierced a Nimheil pocket, which squirted on Naelen's face. The outflow began to collect in the cracks and come out some distance away, infecting the river...



Act 3: The Source of the Nimheil

The third Act covers the exploration of the mines and the discovery of Octar and Naelen. The conclusion is open-ended and will depend on the narrative choices of the Leader.

Scene 1: The Origin of the Poisoning

Carrying on their investigations and following the Nuarranta, the PCs will discover that, suddenly, the river is no longer contaminated. Noticing this will require analyzing water samples or observing the surrounding flora. PCs with a good knowledge of the region should know that they are close to the source of the black river, Nuarran an dubhar. The contamination could therefore come from a nearby stream pouring into the river. A Standard (11) Natural Environment roll gives this information.



The PCs will discover a pick spotted with Nimheil, lying on the ground. It belonged to the miners Octar and Naelen, who dropped it while they hurried away from the old mines. With a success on a Complicated (14) Natural Environment or Perception roll, the PCs will notice some footprint remains in the loose earth close to the river. They match two people, and their orientation indicates that they came from the mountain upstream. Raising their eyes, the PCs can see the entrance of a cave... Very soon, they will understand that it is an old mine which has long been abandoned.

Scene 2: The Old Mines



As with the excursion in the valley, the visit to the mines should create an increasingly strong tension until the climax. The Leader can once again make use of the tips given in Act 2, "Creating the Atmosphere".

1. Entrance.

The entrance seems natural, but very quickly, hints of manmade excavation can be seen: pickaxe prints are recognizable on the walls, beams have been erected, tools and bags litter the floor, etc. Progressing through the small, dark tunnel, the PCs will soon reach a dead end. If they don't watch their step while getting closer to the bottom, they will fall into a hole (1D10 Damage points). A ladder lies nearby for going down.

2. Underground Area.

The PCs reach a second, natural cave of small size. A fissure allows them to reach a larger cave. A handcraft-savvy PC (Standard (11) Craft roll) will be puzzled that the miners have dug vertically, as if they knew beforehand that they would find this little cave...

3. Natural Cavern.

Here, the atmosphere is very different: the air is filled with humidity, stalactites dive toward the floor. Silence is almost complete apart from the regular sound of water droplets splashing on the floor.

4. Strange Slough.

The PCs stumble upon a reptile slough in the shape of a three-foot-long lizard. Examining the remains, a competent PC (Complicated (14) Erudition or Natural Environment roll) will be able to recognize the species of the reptile, known to be a cave-dweller. However, it normally doesn't moult and is not as large. If the Leader has previously used the optional scene of Act 1 "The Nightmare", this finding may raise anxiety among the PCs.

5. A Handprint.

On a wall, the PCs make out an amber-colored human handprint: it belongs to the miner Naelen who, splashed with Nimheil, left this mark while hurrying out of the cave.

6. The Nimheil Leak.

The PCs arrive in another natural cavern, weakly lit by some phosphorescent mushrooms. They can hear the regular flow of a water stream. Getting closer, they discover a little crack in the wall, from which the Nimheil spurts. On the floor are many tools, a wheelbarrow, and bags. The Nimheil slithers alongside the ground to mingle in a little torrent passing nearby and disappearing into the depths of earth.



When the Players arrive in the cavern where the Nimheil leaks, it's time for the Leader to narrate to the Players what really occurred in the cavern in the form of a cutscene: the miners digging the rock, the Nimheil spurting out, their flight, Naelen leaving a handprint on the wall, etc. A closer examination of the wall reveals a very curious phenomenon: a kind of crystalline pocket seems to have formed, and the crack is far smaller than originally. A Complicated (14) Magience roll or a Difficult (17) Erudition roll enables the PCs to understand that some kind of strange and spotted crystallization of the Nimheil has occurred and that this phenomenon is going to completely obstruct the crack and interrupt the outflow. A Character with a strong Creativity or Empathy would certainly see in this event a kind of mineral analogy to a closing wound.

Scene 3: Confrontation



The final confrontation can be played in very different ways. The following paragraph gives the GL several ideas and scenes to bring into play during this meeting.

While the PCs are about to leave, or are talking about their discovery, a voice calls them. This is Talacien, the Magientist, escorted by several mercenaries who followed the PCs after their meeting with the Magientist's trainee:

His face distorted by a smirk, the Magientist calls out: "Ignorant peasants! You should have stayed in your village! What you see before you is fossil Flux, the end of years of laborious research in your backwater valley. You couldn't imagine the extent of such a discovery..." The Magientist's grimace then turns into a predatory grin: "You know too much... your pathetic lives must end here!"



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Then, Herven, the Magientist's trainee, shows himself as well. Confused and panicked, he says to his mentor: "Master Talacien, you are not in your right mind; the fossil Flux has poisoned you! You are a good man; you are the one who taught me that Magience's one and only purpose is to serve the well-being of mankind..."

Talacien answers with a cynical laugh and motions the mercenaries to kill Herven. They hesitate for a moment, but if nothing is done quickly, they obey in the end, and skewer him with crossbow bolts.

The number of mercenaries depends of the number of PCs constituting the group: there will be one less than the PCs.

Talacien

Attack: 8. Defense: 12.
Speed: 7. Potential: 2.
Damage: 2 (short sword).
Health Points: 19.

Reizhite Mercenaries

Attack: 11. Defense: 10.
Speed: 7. Potential: 2.
Damage: 2. Health Points: 19.



Several tools can be used to give this scene its full importance:

⊕ Psychological confrontation.

A fight can occur, but it can also be avoided. If a PC tries to calm down Talacien or to negotiate with him, the Player has to role-play his speech and pronounce it (or succeed in a Difficult (17) Relation roll). If successful, Talacien may be caught in an inner conflict between his personal convictions and the malevolent influence of the Nimheil. He will fall to his knees, clutching at his head, struck by an unbearable migraine. With some effort, the mercenaries can be persuaded to let the PCs go. Once they leave the cave, the Leader must make them understand that Melwan's future will depend on negotiations between the villagers and the Magientist. And that nothing guarantees that Talacien has recovered his sanity for good...

⊕ Insert background action.

The ground is steep, with risks of falling and the possibility of accidentally coming into contact with the Nimheil (see the insert page 61 for the effects of the poison).

⊕ Herven's sacrifice.

The trainee (unhurt or dying, according to the events) intervenes in the fight in an ultimate and tragic attempt to bring his master back to reason.

A Magientist has Been formerly Killed in the Scenario

The meeting between Herven and the PCs in Act 2 Scene 3 can end in a fight in which the young trainee and the two mercenaries die. This won't change the mercenaries' presence for the final scene; Neart's stronghold houses enough of them for the scene to occur anyway. However, Herven obviously won't intervene. If both Talacien and Herven are dead, the final meeting will confront the PCs with the mutated lizards.



The Attack of the Mutated Lizards

Using this optional scene, the Leader will introduce a violent and horrific fight. As the fight against the mercenaries is about to begin, mutated reptiles spring from nowhere and attack, devouring one of the PCs' opponents (a mercenary or Talacien). Very quickly, the PCs are also threatened. The ensuing fight becomes chaotic, and the PCs will probably have to ally with the mercenaries to survive. Moreover, the reptiles seem to have developed a peculiar cleverness.

Reptiles mutated by Nimheil

The creatures look like huge lizards with disturbing eyes and a hypertrophied jaw.

Attack: 8. Defense: 12 Speed: 8. Potential: 2. Damage: 2. Health Points: 15.

Epilogue

When the PCs return to Melwan, they discover a gathering close to the village square. Naelen's body is lying on the ground, pierced with arrows. The village's inhabitants will tell how he fell in a killing frenzy, seriously injuring several people before he was shot down. The most disturbing fact is that the miner died with his eyes still open. The PCs will be surprised by what they're seeing. Naelen's pupils have wholly taken on a silvery, metal-like shade, and their shapes have changed, now hauntingly reminiscent of a reptile's eyes... the same eyes one of the PCs saw in a nightmare.

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The Village under Attack



Delphine Bois - Of Men and Obscurities - 8 - Revelation

Using this optional epilogue, the Leader will considerably lengthen the scenario. It adds a new part centered on action and horror, and gives a very unusual supernatural turn to the events.

As the PCs are heading back toward Melwan, they can hear a foghorn in the distance, which is usually reserved for the most serious alerts. Seven years ago, the horn was used when the village was brutally attacked by a group of humanoid beings in the dead of the night.

When the PCs arrive in Melwan, they are welcomed by inhuman screams and the sounds of battle. A group of inhabitants driven mad by the fossil Flux are attacking the confused population. The Dàmàthairs, whose fortified house has been torched, have gathered about fifty people—the children and the old and infirm—in the square and are withdrawing toward the nearby castle of the Mac Lyrs, on the other side of the bridge crossing the black river.

The PCs can help this group, back them up, etc. It is likely that they will cross the glare of an assailant they formerly knew, and perhaps got along with. This will confront them with the reptilian stare one of them may have seen in his nightmare... Having to fight against neighbors or close friends who have become inhuman monsters is a very traumatizing event, and the Leader should impose Complicated or Difficult Mental Resistance rolls (14 and 17) to Players lacking conviction and coherence in the way they role-play their PCs. Lastly, this scene gives a gruesome finale, since other inhabitants are ill, and no one knows how their poisoning is going to evolve: are they going to survive, die, or become enraged themselves?

The Enraged

Melwan's inhabitants, who have become blood-thirsty inhuman creatures under the effect of Nimheil

Attack: 10. Defense: 10. Speed: 8.
Potential: 2. Damage: 2. Health Points: 15.

Red Fall

A scenario by Nelyhann

The Red Fall scenario is an investigation set in Dearg's Vale for Players and Leaders of all levels. Ideally, the Players will use the premade Characters of Book 1 – Universe, since they come from the Vale. The Characters presented in this book or PCs created entirely by the Players can also be used.

· **Style:** Investigation

· **Location:** Dearg's Vale

· **Season:** Fall

Summary: One of the PCs wakes up on a lake's shore in very bad shape, his bloody weapon in his hand and a half-eaten corpse beside him. A detailed investigation will enable him to understand the ins and outs of this story, recover his memory, and foil a ritual ceremony that would cause a new tragedy... and far more sinister things.

Stakes and Aims: The main stake of this scenario is to show a new aspect of fossil Flux and its-hypothetical-link with the occult. Red Fall is also the third scenario of the triptych "Omens". It takes place not very long before the events described in the first episode of Shadows Of Esteren's campaign, which begins at the end of fall. However, for the sake of his campaign, the Leader can set the scenario whenever he wants. He will just have to keep in mind that the campaign is supposed to begin when winter falls on Dearg's Vale.

For the PCs, two goals are set: - Find out who killed Herven and why - Bring Maella back alive

Supernatural Elements in Red Fall: At the Leader's discretion, the Red Fall scenario can be devoid of any supernatural element. In such a case it will rely solely on human emotions, madness, and the consequences of a brutal father-son relationship. However, at some key moments of the scenario, indicated with specific icons, inserts will suggest various optional scenes so as to allow the Leader to add supernatural elements to his story, essentially through the supernatural influence of fossil Flux and the introduction of an Object of Power called "Memory of the World".

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The Leader should know that, in the context of Shadows Of Esteren's campaign, the link between fossil Flux and the occult will be specified, and that fossil Flux can trigger paranormal phenomena, under certain conditions.

rologue

Dearg's Vale

Dearg's Vale is close to Melwan and Loch Varn's Vales. It is located in the North of Taol-Kaer's kingdom, in Tulg's dukedom, and the War of the Temple left its mark on Dearg's Vale because of its geographic location. It is dominated by Smiorail's fortress, a citadel which protects the one passable gap leading to Gwidre in the region, and is populated by two villages of several hundred inhabitants. The first village bears the valley's name, and specializes in mining, and the other, Fearil, in forestry. Huge mining installations stand outside Dearg and are protected by a kennel. Hilderin knights run the whole Vale since the death of the last descendants of the Mac Govrian family, whose members traditionally ruled over these lands.

This scenario takes place in Dearg's village. Here are some personalities the PCs can meet:

- **Ansailéir Maorn:** A respected 40-year-old man, a good hunter and well-trained warrior who upholds clan traditions. He has been the village chief for 15 years and is at the head of Dearg's council. Maorn has a 20-year-old son, Eoghan, and three daughters: Tanwen, Deila, and Geilis.

- **Demorthèn Loeg:** Dearg's patriarch, skilled in herblore, and an authority in Sigil Rann. He lived through the War of the Temple and is still resentful toward the faithful of the One God. An old man, he leaves the village less and less, but he sticks to the traditions and is held in high regard. Loeg sits on Dearg's council.

- Dàmàthair Glen:

Glen represents Dearth's Dàmàthairs at the council. She is a determined and courageous woman who, along with the four other Dàmàthairs, has the duty of educating about sixty children.

- Meog Elarig:

Heir of Dearth's mines, he is an austere and muscular man who has worked all his life. His essential role in the community's prosperity allows him to sit on the council. He has a very confrontational relationship with his only son Alban, who refuses to take over from him and would rather study occultism. Meog entirely rejects anything related to such a discipline: his father and grandfather sacrificed everything to finance this passion. Moreover, he suspects that his wife was keen on occultism and that she died because of it. Regularly, Meog uses violence against his son in order to impose his own will on him, and will do everything to drive him away from this passion, fearing that Alban ruins his life making the same mistake as his ancestors.

- Alban:

A young charismatic man who raises ambivalent feelings among the villagers. Everyone says that this scrawny boy doesn't want to take over Elarig's mines. After several years of conflict and violence inflicted by his father, madness has invaded his psyche (which corresponds to the "Elation" disorder). He sincerely believes in occult sciences and in the existence of mystical powers. His passion is also a means to withdraw from his father's persecutions and he even draws some strength from it, hearing that his grandfather and great-grandfather were also keen on this mysterious knowledge.

- Maella and Herven:

Fascinated by Alban, these two young villagers want to believe in his discoveries and hope they will help them to attain a better life than that which one can expect in Dearth. Maella is in love with the young man, while Herven's feelings toward him are a mixture of admiration and jealousy. Their hopes are as high as their naivety and credulity.

- Aïnlis the bard trainee:

Dearth has had no bard for a long time and Aïnlis dreams to fill that gap. She is a friend of Adeliene, Loeg's apprentice. Even though she is also close to the Tarish sisters, Mirna and Masha, the women are actually somewhat jealous of each other, especially because of their common interest in the bard vocation.

- Zaïg the secondhand goods dealer:

An old woman who, over the years, has stored a bizarre collection in her small shop. Ten years ago, she converted to the cult of the One and visits Firmin, the monk who lives in a small monastery outside Dearth. You can find almost everything in her shop... with a good result on a Luck Roll! She is assisted in her work by Ronan and Herven, her two grandsons, who are interested in continental sciences. Zaïg has a main role in the occult book supply of the Elarig family. She was close to Alban's grandfather.

- Harald the dovecote master:

This inhabitant of Dearth stands apart from the villagers. His dovecote's function is to raise the alert to the dukedom's capital city. He is nicknamed 'the weasel', or 'the mole' because he is said to be in the pay of Argan, the Hilderin knight, who occupies the nearby Smiorail's fortress along with his men. The Hilderins are not welcomed in the region because they abuse their position, even though things have been settling down lately.

- Tadh the brewmaster:

The owner of the Red Dog inn, a well-known place for Dearth's inhabitants.

- Fanch the master blacksmith:

Dearth lives on mining extraction and its craftsmen have developed a particular technique, repoussage, which enables them to decorate copper vases and goblets. Fanch is the proud holder of this traditional technique from Dearth, and is seconded in his work by a few blacksmiths and apprentices.

If the PCs do not play the premade Characters of Book 1- Universe, the Leader may use them as NPCs who can interact with the PCs.



Dearth's Vale will be the setting for the events of the campaign's first episode. The valley and its inhabitants are described in detail, and the Leader should begin to develop the relationships between the PCs and this community in order to prepare the follow-up.

The Underlying Story

Until Vaugh Elarig's arrival, Dearth was just a small miners' village. The man, apart from being a skillful merchant who made a fortune in the metal trade, was also an occult science enthusiast. He developed the certainty that Dearth's Vale hid a treasure dating back to the mythic time of the Aergewin, described in several occult books: Amber. He brought his wife and children to this isolated region north of Taol-Kaer, with the goal of undertaking large excavation works. Officially, he wanted to develop the trade of copper there, but his real wish was to search the mountains in order to find this fabled treasure of the Aergewin. His research gave no result, despite the opening of new mines on the other side of the mountain, in Melwan's Vale. Vaugh eventually perished in a rockslide.



One century later, Alban Elarig, his descendant, discovered “Memory of the World” in the back of the family house’s attic, an esoteric book written in the continental language and with numerous translation notes. This relic had escaped the wrath of Meog who, after his wife’s death, had taken special care to destroy the whole of his father and grandfather’s research works. The young man, much more interested in books than in the handling of a pickaxe his father forcefully trained him in, took a passion for the arcane text and his ancestors’ notes. He took over his great-grandfather’s quest, and a couple of years later, discovered something that would change his life: in the mountain’s heart, he found a precious golden rock, as big as a fist. For sure, he had just stumbled upon Amber!

72 In the following months, the relationship between Meog and Alban deteriorated. More and more often, Meog used violence to put some sense into his son. He did not know of Alban’s discovery but suspected him of spending most of his time reading instead of working in the mines. Alban even tried to make an escape for the nearby Vale of Melwan where the Mac Lyr family was known to have a small library, a rarity in this isolated region. In spite of the beatings, Alban kept holding onto his secret quest, convinced that he had made an important first discovery. Books as well as Amber became his shelters from his father’s violence.

The situation kept getting sourer, and little by little Alban’s sanity dwindled as the increasingly violent beatings multiplied and his research on Amber was going nowhere. One night, Alban had a terrible nightmare in which he sacrificed a person to Amber and got in touch with an entity that gave him great power. Elated by his dream, Alban resumed his research on occultism and his translation of “Memory of the World” with renewed vigor. He planned to fulfill his visions as soon as possible, convinced they were the missing piece of the puzzle. He convinced his comrade Maella and his friend Herven to help him in capturing an “experimental subject”, without revealing to them that he planned to kill this innocent person in order to awake the power of Amber and get in touch with this “superior entity”.

Nature of Amber

What some occultists might consider as a mystical relic is actually fossil Flux blended into a crystalline shell. Anyone studying Amber closely and having knowledge of Magience will realize this (Standard (11) Magience Roll). The PCs may have already come across such a crystal in the Loch Varn scenario.



Powers of Amber

If this option is used, Amber will have supernatural properties: it induces hypnotic nightmares (notably, Alban’s nightmare). Being in contact with Amber for more than a month calls for a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll to avoid being plagued with nightmares. Each month, another Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll is made and inflicts two Trauma Points for each failure, until madness is reached. The victim will therefore possibly fulfill his own nightmares, having the crazy conviction that they are supernatural intuitions. In Red Fall, it is not the crystal itself, but its contents which have a supernatural influence. Thus, breaking it does not end the phenomenon that Alban is a victim of. Nevertheless, the spilled Flux loses its ability to hypnotize new targets.



Using an Object of Power

With this second option, Vaugh Elarig and his grandson's all-consuming passion for occultism actually finds its source in a very particular book

Memory of the World

This occultism book is about relics from the Aergewin and notably puts forward the hypothesis of a direct link between fossil Flux and this mythical time (See Book 1 p. 26 for the Aergewin and p.162 and p. 286 for fossil Flux). Although nothing in the book backs up this hypothesis, it still attracts occultists who know something about it. Its mysterious lines, like the one reading “In the heart of the mountain, protected by the Snake, Amber rests, the memory of the world, treasure of the wise who can see the future as clearly as he sees the past.”, motivated the expeditions of a famous treasure hunter whose name has been lost over the years. This Continental crossed the whole world before reaching Tri-Kazel, guided in his quest for the Aergewin's relics. Unfortunately, he died in a rockslide as he was about to make an important discovery. Thus, the moment he died, the book became imbued with some of the adventurer's willpower and became an Object of Power, and has had different owners before falling into Vaugh Elarig's hands, then his descendants'.

Properties:

The book, written in a continental language, needs several days of reading and gives its owner a +2 bonus when he uses the Occult Domain. The bonuses subside after a month if the book is discarded.

Influence:

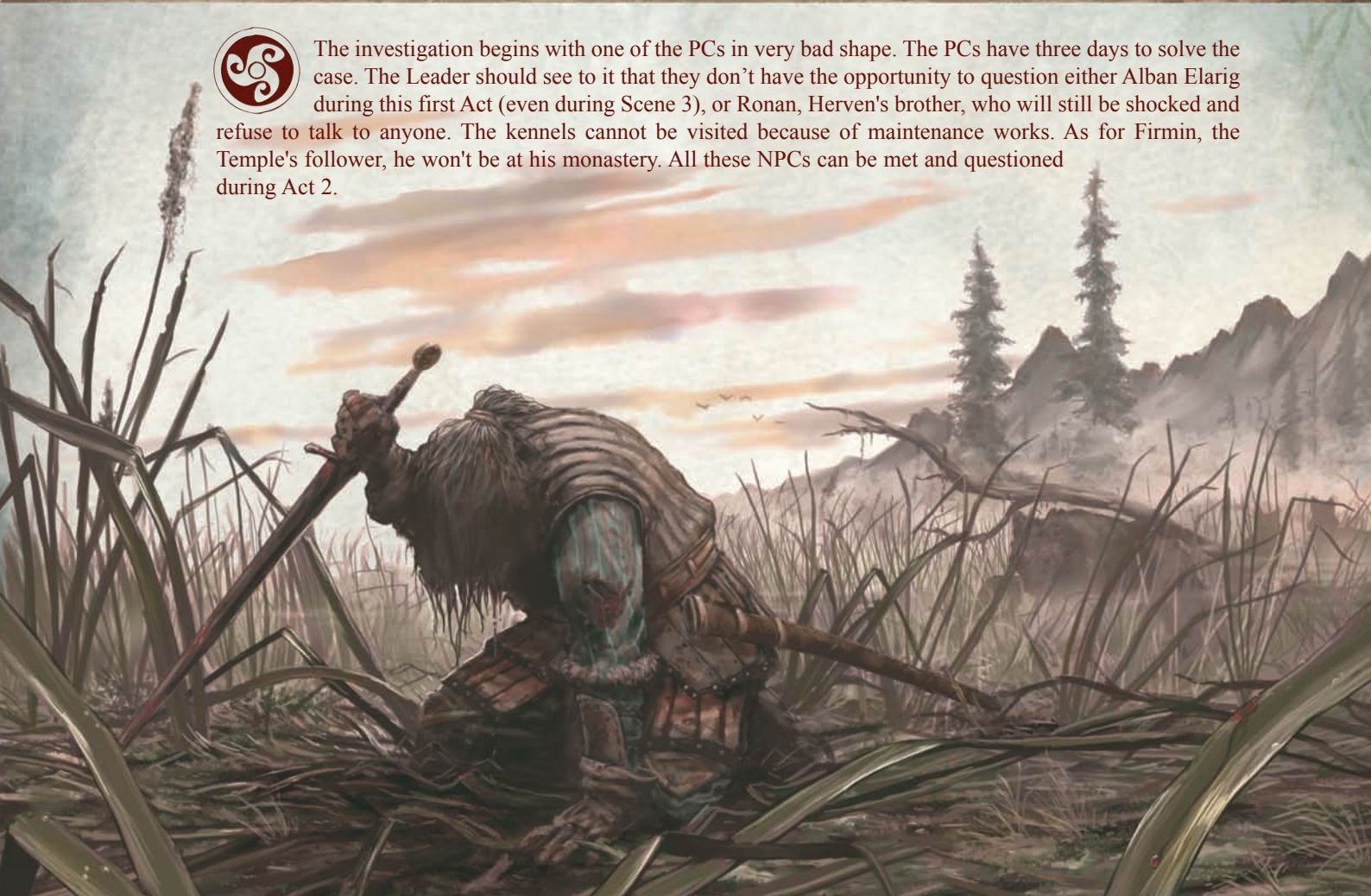
As long as he has the book, the owner will be very interested in themes related to fossil Flux and the Aergewin, unknowingly following the quest of the continental treasure hunter. He won't ever part with his book and will begin an expedition without hesitating, even a dangerous one, if directly or indirectly linked to this passion. Every now and then, he may have dreams induced by the book, which can help him in his quest... or lead him to his doom.



Act I: The Trap



The investigation begins with one of the PCs in very bad shape. The PCs have three days to solve the case. The Leader should see to it that they don't have the opportunity to question either Alban Elarig during this first Act (even during Scene 3), or Ronan, Herven's brother, who will still be shocked and refuse to talk to anyone. The kennels cannot be visited because of maintenance works. As for Firmin, the Temple's follower, he won't be at his monastery. All these NPCs can be met and questioned during Act 2.



Scene 1 - On the Red Lake's Shore

At the beginning of the game, the Leader will have each Player make a Luck roll, except for Eoghan if this premade Character is used. The one with the lowest result will be the involved PC. The Leader will take the Player aside and describe the scene to him, making sure to leave no detail aside, since they will all bear some significance during the scenario.

Sinister groans awaken the PC who is lying on the Red Lake's shore, not far from Dearg. He suddenly emerges from unconsciousness, screaming. His mind is still misty with nightmarish pictures in which he sees himself running in a desolated land. The PC, seriously injured (Critical Health Condition), has gone through a half-comatose state before recovering consciousness. A big scratch, more spectacular than serious, scars his face. He also has a huge and painful bruise above his right ear, and several cuts that look like dagger wounds. Finally, he bears the marks of two bites, which seem to have been caused by wolves or dogs.

This is not all, for the PC wakes up with his familiar weapon in hand, covered with blood, and with a corpse beside him. Wolves have begun to devour it (the groans heard when he woke up), but they carefully withdrew when the PC screamed. The corpse also has wounds (caused by the PC's weapon), as well as bites. The first impression is clear: the PC has killed the other Character, whom he can identify as Herven, the grandson of Zaig, the secondhand goods dealer. The PC's memory is blurry, his last reminiscence dating back to several days ago; nothing can explain his present situation.

In such a dire state, the PC would do well to return to the village... but he may be in for a chilly welcome! If he decides to go away from Dearg, he will meet a scouting party (the other PCs), sent by the council to bring back the missing ones (the PC and Herven). The wolves will keep their distance and will leave if threatened, but won't hesitate to pounce on Herven's corpse if the PC goes away.



What really occurred: Maella has seduced the PC and invited him to meet her the following evening on the Red Lake's shore. In fact, the PC had been chosen by the infernal trio to be the guinea pig of Alban's projects. The plan was simple: Maella's mission was to lure the PC to an ambush close to the Red Lake. Herven, Alban and two dogs (trained to protect the mines), lurked in the mist and waited for the best moment to capture their prey. But everything went awry: the PC struggled hard, killed Herven, and injured Alban and one of his dogs, before he was neutralized. Unable to carry anyone away, Alban and Maella decided to make the scene look like a simple settling of scores. The scar on the PC's face is a scratch caused by a ring worn by Maella. What the PC doesn't remember is that he went with his Caernide for the date. It fled and found shelter in Firmin's monastery. If the PC does not own a mount, someone in the village has lent one to him.



One interesting point of this scenario is to play on the cliché of the hero who has to exonerate himself from a murder he did not commit. However, in this case, the PC has truly killed Herven, and has to investigate in order to prove he had no alternative. The Leader can give much freedom in the investigation, and in the way the PC is going to take responsibility—or not—for the charges against him. The list of Dearg's inhabitants introduced above will enable the Leader to improvise various interactions with the PC, provide red herrings, or hints, etc.

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Scene 2 - Dearg's Council

At the village, the inhabitants are worried since both Herven and the PC have not been seen since yesterday. Of course, the PC's sudden reappearance, covered in blood, causes unrest. He is quickly accused and ordered to explain himself. The council gives him three days to prove his innocence. The other PCs are given the charge of watching and helping him in his investigation.

In the village, although the majority thinks that the PC is guilty, other hypotheses are put forward, which can be possible misleading clues as well: the priest Firmin making sacrifices for his god, the corrupt Hilderin knights, the Feondas lurking in the forest, or “the beast of the lake”, a creature of legend hidden in the depths of the Red Lake.

Scene 3 - A Suspicious Rendezvous

As the night falls, one of the PCs overhears a suspicious meeting between two shadowy figures. If he succeeds a Complicated (14) Stealth or Perception Roll, he can recognize a Varigal who has recently arrived in Dearg, speaking to Alban Elarig. “People from Baldh-Ruoch gave a lot of money to get that to you.” The Varigal gives this message to the young man without further explanation.

Should he be questioned later on, the messenger will just say he did his job by delivering the letter. He will also specify that he finds the young man weird. “Just my gut, friend, I’ve seen lots of blokes in my travels, and that one is strange.”


Jalfred the Varigal


Jalfred is a 30-year-old man, solitary and taciturn, his heavily bearded face marked by years of travels. He has crossed most of the peninsula and he is genuinely exhausted.

He was more than well paid to give a message to Alban Elarig. Jalfred knows nothing about his backers. He has accepted a large amount of money and has crossed the main part of the peninsula in order to deliver this letter. The PCs won't have the opportunity to look at its content, because Alban destroyed it. Much later in the campaign, they will have a chance to track the backers.

Scene 4 - A New Disappearance

On the first evening, Dearg's inhabitants notice a new disappearance: Maella the shepherdess. A quick investigation reveals that Maella and Alban were flirting. In fact, the young woman took refuge in Alban's hiding place. What she ignores is that the young man plans to sacrifice her. His plan to capture the PC has failed, and his father Meog wants to force him to participate in important excavation works in a couple of days. Alban is in a hurry and he fears a new confrontation with his father and the other miners. Despite the feelings he has for Maella, his madness (or the supernatural influence of Amber) may bring him toward the worst extremes.

 The news of Maella's disappearance strike the amnesic PC: he suddenly remembers he was to meet this young lady very recently, perhaps the very day when he woke up on the lake's bank. This flashback would be the opportunity for the Leader to throw a few false leads: what if the PC and Herven were love rivals? Or is the PC behind Maella's disappearance as well?

 This disappearance is also the emergence of a new objective for the PCs. Naturally, the council asks the PC suspected of Herven's murder to find back Maella as soon as possible, so as not to worsen his case. The Leader shouldn't hesitate to add scenes where the PCs get involved with Maella's family.



Act 2: Leading the Investigation

Scene 1: The Kennel


The warehouse—located in the heart of Dearg—is where the recently extracted ore is stored. It is guarded by several dog-handlers working for the Elarigs. Their big dogs are locked in a huge kennel, inside the warehouse. The dog-handlers will let the PCs enter the second day. If the PCs pay particular attention, they can notice that one of the dogs is injured (the wound was caused by the weapon of the PC who woke up on the Red Lake's shore in Act 1). If the dog-handlers are questioned, they answer that they do not know what has happened to the animal, but will reveal that it was indeed Alban Elarig who brought two of them with him, the very day when the PC woke up on the bank. This hint should put the Players on Alban's track.


However, Alban has a habit of going to the mines with his watchdogs; it doesn't sound surprising for the dog-handlers. If the Characters look for Alban, the dog-handlers will say that he went early to the mines. When they arrive, the PCs will find out that Alban is not there, and that no one has seen him. With this clue, the PCs will have an additional reason to suspect the young man.


In fact, what the Players cannot know at this point of the scenario is that Alban went to his hideout to do his ritual sacrifice...

Scene 2: A Passion for Occultism

During this Act, Ronan, Herven's elder brother, can be questioned. Ronan is a curious, intelligent and logical-minded young man. Fascinated with Magience, his dream is to study in Reizh. The PCs can learn that Herven used to spend a lot of time with Alban, which Ronan frowned upon. The elder brother despises occultism, considering it a bunch of nonsense, and has always deplored his brother's interest in it. Most of the meetings between Herven and Alban were secret.

 Ronan can tell about the violence of Alban's father, who overheard one of their meetings once. Ronan even believes that a third person was sometimes present in the meetings organized by the two boys (it is Maella).

 If they speak to Zaïg, with whom Herven had a secret complicity, the PCs will learn about a secret hideout (an old brigands' shelter in the forest, although Zaïg does not know of its exact location) used by occultist trainees.

 Ronan will allow the PCs to search Herven's room but they won't find anything special.

Scene 3: Alestor's Monastery

At this point, if the PCs go to the monastery, which is two hours away from Dearg, they can meet Firmin the old monk. He just came back from Fearil, where he met a carpenter and some other workmen who will be doing some repair work to the place of worship. Firmin tells the PCs that when he came back, he found a Caernide in his monastery.

When the PCs see it, memories suddenly come back to the one who awoke on the Red Lake's shore: he sees himself leaving Dearg with his Caernide to go and meet Maella... then, rushing out of the bushes, Herven and Alban with several dogs. The ensuing fight is hazy, but the PC will clearly remember one thing: he is the one who killed Herven! This sudden revelation will induce a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll.

Scene 4: The Brigands' Hideout

The only person from Dearg who knows the location of the hideout mentioned by Zaïg is Harald, the dovecote master. He got the story from Argan. The Hilderin knight, along with his men, tracked some brigands into the forest and discovered the hideout. Alban himself overheard the story and this is how he found the place and set up his small sanctuary.



Act 3: A Last Hope

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Scene 1: The Occultist Sanctuary

Thanks to the information given by the dovecote master, the PCs will find the entrance of the hideout, hidden on the ground under a few branches and moss. The trap door opens onto a small damp room, where a corridor leads to a larger room.



- Large Room.

When the PCs arrive there, the Leader should switch to Scene 2 (The Confrontation). A long time ago, this big furnished room was a place for storing supplies, barrels and loot. There are still a few crates here and there, but the room as a whole has been transformed by Alban. Most of the barrels and crates, covered with dark cloth and church candles, give off a dim light. A sickly mix of must and candle smell floats in the room. A big flat rock standing in the room is used as an altar.

- Alban's Room.

In a neighboring room, Alban has stored a straw mattress and weird objects. In a wooden casket, the book "Memory of the World" can be found, as well as his diary, in which the ambush planned for the PC is described. Reading the diary induces two Trauma points if a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll is failed. Though the descriptions of the planned sacrifice and of his nightmares are filled with unbearable details and make Alban's madness apparent, something more sinister confuses the reader's spirit without him knowing precisely what.

Scene 2: The Confrontation

The scene will be very different depending on when the PCs arrive. Seeing Maella, the PC who has been ambushed has one last flashback: the scar on his face matches Maella's ring, and he becomes aware that the young woman was in league with Herven and Alban. If he reads Alban's notes, he will have proof of the trap.

1. Before the ceremony:

The PCs have been clever. They arrive before the beginning of the sacrifice. Maella is tied to a big flat stone used as an altar. Terror can be read on her face as she understands she is going to die. Alban is in his room and the dogs (as many as the PCs) rush to the threshold. Alban then appears, in a daze, with crazy eyes and disheveled hair, in a complete frenzy (he is in a State of Madness), speaking with a subtly distorted voice: "You won't prevent me from performing my work!" He sets his dogs on the PCs and begins to attack, armed with a sword. The Amber can be found in the wooden casket of the room.

2. During the ceremony:

The PCs may rush in when the sacrifice takes place. Alban, intoning nonsensical words, is about to cut up Maella alive. He is holding a knife in one hand and the Amber in the other. If the Leader uses the modular scene with supernatural elements (See "The Mutation"), the Amber pulses with a hypnotic light. The dogs are barking, but Alban does not seem to pay attention to the PCs and is about to stab Maella while his dogs are pouncing on the intruders. If a Character rushes toward him, he notices him at the last moment and begins to fight. Destroying the Amber doesn't change anything since its mystical powers depend on the fossil Flux inside (See p. 72 "Powers of Amber").

3. After the ceremony:

The PCs have been too slow. When they arrive, they see a gut-wrenching scene in the middle of the dogs' barking. Maella's body is lacerated and her face distorted in horrid pain. This vision, added to the sickening smell of the place, induces a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance roll. On the floor, Alban is lying still, eyes closed and deathly pale, stuck in a trance. When he wakes up, the sight is pathetic: Alban believes that the PCs are sent by the entity he has desperately been trying to get in touch with. Putting him face to face with reality will make him collapse, sobbing, when he finally realizes the extent of his actions. If the PCs decide to bring Alban to Dearth, his own father is likely to kill him in a fit of fury. As it is, Alban is stricken with madness, and is not aware of the seriousness of his deeds. Only an appropriate psychic cure or a long stay in a sanatorium could do him some good.

Characteristics for Alban and his dogs

Alban Elarig

Atk.: 6. Def.: 10. Spd.: 5. Pot.: 2.
Dmg. 2. Prot.: 0. Health: 19

Watchdog

Atk.: 10. Def.: 10. Spd.: 7. Pot.: 2.
Dmg. 2. Prot.: 0. Health: 15



The Mutation

Using this optional scene, the Leader will give a very strong supernatural side to his scenario. The Amber will reveal unsuspected powers. Irradiating a strange light during the final scene, it will cause Alban's mutation, giving him tremendous strength, making him able to defy any human—including his father. During the final confrontation, Alban will first have white eyes and will not talk. He will pounce on the PCs to throttle them. The PCs should neutralize him easily but he will then be stricken with convulsions and will mutate in a horrific way. His bones will crack, his neck lengthen, his shoulders broaden, and his arms distend. This sight, added to the sound of tearing flesh and groans mingled with Alban's yells of agony and pain will cause a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll. A new fight will begin amidst inhuman crying and howling.

Alban's Characteristics - Mutated

Atk.: 16. Def.: 16. Spd.: 8. Pot.: 2. Dmg.: 3. Prot.: 0. Health: 40



From Nightmare to Reality

The PCs may never discover Alban's hideout (or find the sanctuary empty) and end up coming back to the village. During the following night, the PC who awoke on the bank of the Red Lake has a terrible nightmare. He sees his Caernide bringing him into a sordid den. The animal is then devoured by some horrible, half-human creature. The PC then suddenly wakes up, relieved to be in his bed, but still stressed by the nightmare. Just then, screams can be heard in Dearg. As the PCs get down onto the street, they come across a hideous stooping creature with a disgustingly long neck in the end of which hangs a distorted head. The most awful thing is that the PCs recognize the features of Alban Elarig on this monstrous face. The creature has already shredded apart two or three of Dearg's inhabitants, holding torn body parts in its clawed hands. Such a vision triggers a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance roll. The creature is looking for its father in order to confront him.



Epilogue

The Epilogue will greatly depend on the way the PCs have solved this adventure. One way or another, many questions will certainly rise about Amber, the “Memory of The World” book, or the mysterious backers who have sent the Varigal to deliver the message to Alban...

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