

SHADOWS OF ESTEREN



SAMPLE

1-UNIVERSE




SHADOWS OF ESTEREN

3

1. UNIVERSE

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

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



Credits

**Coordination of
the Shadows of Esteren Series**
Nelyhann

**Editorial Coordination
of the Universe Book**
Nelyhann and Frédéric "Tchernopuss" Hubleur

**Design and Development
of the Universe Book**
Nelyhann, Frédéric "Tchernopuss" Hubleur, Aldo
"Pénombre" Pappacoda, Joëlle "Iris" Deschamp, Ludovic
"Elenyl" Monnier-Ragaine, Joëlle "Iris" Deschamp, and
Laurent "Nico du dème de Naxos" Duquesne.

Additional Development
Nelyhann and Aldo "Pénombre" Pappacoda

Archives and Document Work
Joëlle "Iris" Deschamp and Olivier "Akae" Sanfilippo

Writing
Nelyhann, Aldo "Pénombre" Pappacoda, Frédéric
"Tchernopuss" Hubleur, Joëlle "Iris" Deschamp, Ludovic
"Elenyl" Monnier-Ragaine, Guillaume "Ikaar" Vasseur,
Ynis, and Dragon-Étoile.

Game System
Nelyhann and Frédéric "Tchernopuss" Hubleur

**Development and Revision
of the Game System**
Joëlle "Iris" Deschamp, Merryneils, Aldo "Pénombre"
Pappacoda, and Valentin.

Original Copy Editing
Ange gardien, Ludovic "Elenyl" Monnier-Ragaine,
Frédéric L., Ikaar, Joëlle "Iris" Deschamp, Krêsterion,
Merryneils, Nelyhann, Laurent "Nico du dème de Naxos"
Duquesne, Pascal Bonnet, Aldo "Pénombre" Pappacoda,
Frédéric "Tchernopuss" Hubleur, and Valentin.

Art Director
Nelyhann

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

Layout
Asami

Cover Art
Yvan "Gawain" Villeneuve

Interior Artists
Yvan "Gawain" Villeneuve, Olivier "Akae" Sanfilippo, Fred
Pinson, Bruno, Revolver, Rémi "Remton" Le Capon,
Nelyhann, Nicolas Jamme, and Joël Belin.

Logo
Nelyhan, based on original artwork by Rémi "Remton" Le
Capon.

Cartographers
Olivier "Akae" Sanfilippo, Christophe Bouvet, and Joël Belin.

English version Credits

**Editorial Coordination
of the Universe Book**
Nelyhann and Clovis

Translation
Clovis

Copy Editing
João Bento, Franck Bouvot, Nicolas Bowyer, Franck
Florentin, Natalie Gallecier, Sara Grocott, Elisabeth
Kvaalen, Clément Le Bis, Isabelle Le Bris, Véronique
Lejeune, Joseph LeMay, Travis Lerol, Stuart MacDonald,
and Dalton Paget

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thorough as possible.



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

ForgeSongs is a collective of
authors and illustrators gathe-
red under the form of an asso-
ciation, whose goal is to
create quality game material.



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Contact, questions, distribution:
esteren@agate-editions.com

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Foreword



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

Part One: a Subjective Presentation

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

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An Intuitive Game System

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

The Horrific and the Gothic Imagery

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

A Universe with Secrets

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

A Complete Series

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

Player Characters in the Game

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

Cross-media

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

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

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

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

Influences

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

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



Prologue



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

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

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

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

For a long time, Doern stared at his lord who had stopped at the threshold of the great room, his eyes lost in the contemplation of the shadows that clouded the high vaults. He waited for Wylard to step away from the chimeras the darkness concealed, and then pulled him a seat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As far as Doern remembered, his master had always collected all sorts of documents, manuscripts, and sketches that he had often paid a fortune for, or that some passing bards had offered him. They dealt with various subjects; with the peninsula's different regions, but also with trading or crafts. Among those documents were a few letters sent to him by faraway family members.

For many months after the grim disappearance of his wife and descendants, Wylard had completely left his collection aside. However, for some time, it seemed his passion for his old manuscripts burned anew, his research focusing on the acquisition of documents related to Feondas. Regularly, he would read them entirely once more, taking notes feverishly and comparing them again and again.

Wylard held out his hand and Doern brought him the file. The old lord untied the laces that held the leather covers together and took out the first parchment. He began to read furiously, poring over the lines written in red ink which he knew by heart...

Again, he read until dawn, when he fell into a nightmarish sleep. Afterwards, he resumed reading, scarcely taking time for a few sips of the brandy Doern had brought him.



When he was done with all of the parchments, late at night, Wylard drew a long sigh. He had spent a small fortune to obtain new documents depicting a roughly accurate panorama of Tri-Kazel's history and of its current state. Tensions were clearly visible between the kingdoms of Taol-Kaer, Gwidre, and Reizh, founded nearly a thousand years ago by three brothers who, at the time, yearned to federate the bellicose clans occupying its whole territory.

Taol-Kaer had kept strong ties with the ancient Demorthèn traditions. On the contrary, Reizh had—at least partially—adopted the so-called progressive ideas of the Magientists, those strange inventors from the Continent. As for Gwidre, it had appointed the One God dogma as the official faith. That was the origin of the infamous War of the Temple, the aftermath of which could still be strongly felt, even today. Gwidre had invested itself with the holy mission of imposing Soustraine's religion everywhere in Tri-Kazel, and the alliance of Taol-Kaer and Reizh had barely prevented it from doing so. Today, both the landscape and the mentalities of the people bore the stigmas of that conflict.

Much more interesting than this detailed panorama of the peninsula were the numerous passages about the Feondas. Indeed, those terrifying creatures that had destroyed his life and those of thousands of men and women were widely dealt with in the various texts. And he had noticed unknown details that he had hastily underlined with excited strokes of the pen, details that might allow him to enact his vengeance...

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

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

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

"Come here."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter I

Tri-Kazel



he children had gathered around Céliane. The young woman was watching them affectionately as they played and laughed heartily. Ranging between six and thirteen years old, they were part of the second age circle. They were Fearil's future. Since she was little, Céliane had known she wanted to become a Dàmàthair, tutoring the children of her village, as her late mother had done before her. Céliane loved children; she loved their vitality, their spontaneity.

She yearned to have one of her own, and was eagerly awaiting her wedding with Eoghan, which would take place in the next spring.

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

Landscapes of the Peninsula

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

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

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

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

"What about the Cordillera?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Mountains

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

“And there are broad-leaved trees; oaks!”

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

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

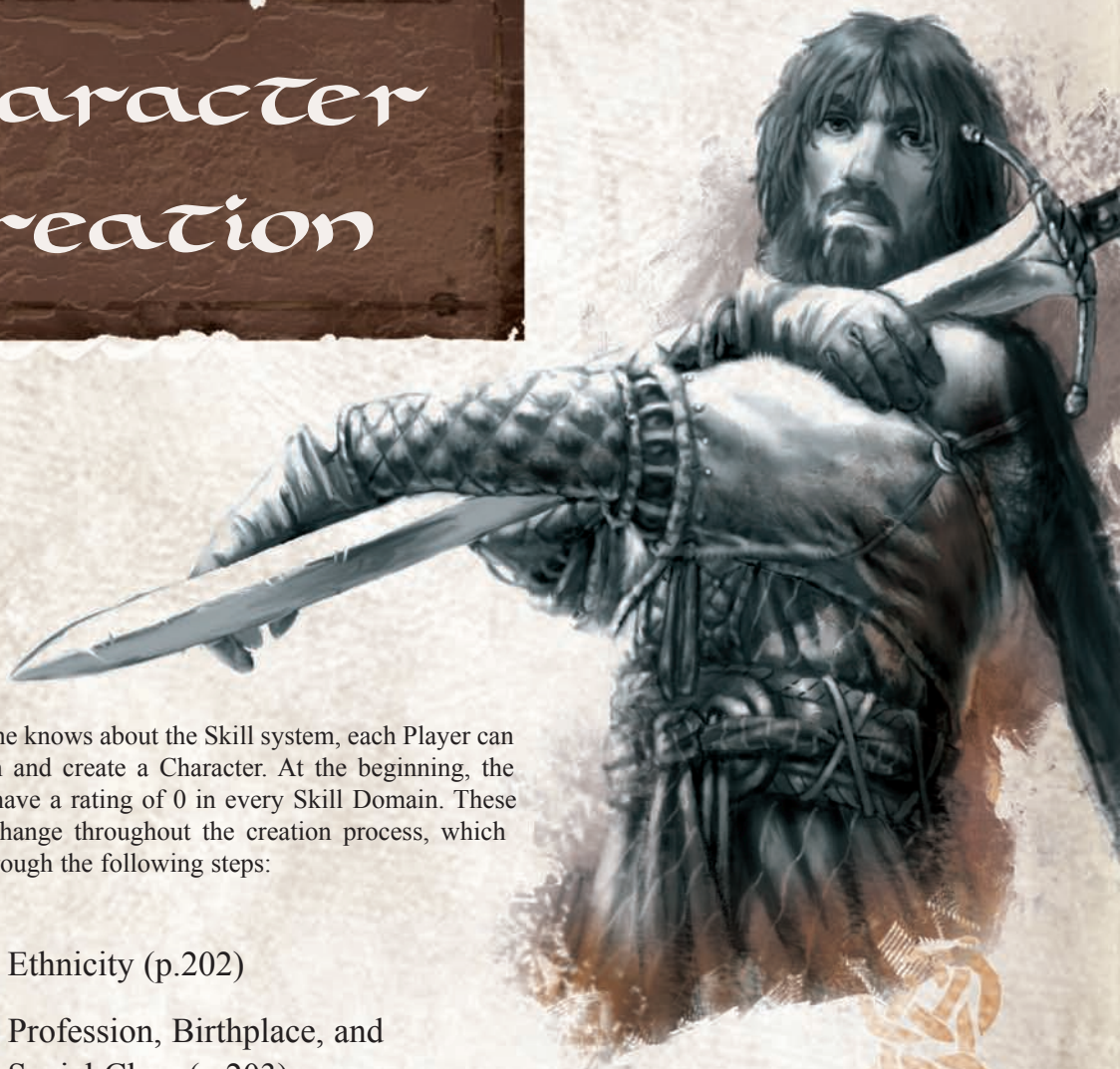


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“Soon, at the next age circle... you are still children and you must know that the beauty of the surrounding landscapes hides many dangers. Some paths run along steep cliffs, and snow may hide chasms. Our vale is fairly well-off, because it is crossed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

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

Character Creation



Once he knows about the Skill system, each Player can go on and create a Character. At the beginning, the PCs have a rating of 0 in every Skill Domain. These ratings will change throughout the creation process, which progresses through the following steps:

- 1 Ethnicity (p.202)
- 2 Profession, Birthplace, and Social Class (p.203)
- 3 The Ways (p.207)
- 4 Age, Setbacks, and History (p.208)
- 5 Character Traits, Sanity, and Personality (p.210)
- 6 Experience Points, Advantages, and Disadvantages (p.212)
- 7 Potential, Defense, Speed, and Stamina (p.215)
- 8 Fighting Attitudes and Attack Rating (p.216)
- 9 Survival Points, Rindath, and Exaltation (p.217)
- 10 Description and Equipment (p.218)

These ten steps are detailed in this chapter. It is possible for a Player to go through the creation of his PC by himself, but it may be more interesting to discuss it with the Leader and the other Players, so as to have good skill coverage in the group or justify the collaboration of the Characters.



Optional Rule: Alternative Creation Order

The Leader can change the creation order by having the Players distribute their ratings in Ways, pick their Traits, and determine the backgrounds of their Characters (steps 3, 4, 5, and 6) before they choose their ethnicities, professions, and birthplaces (step 1 and 2). That way, the Players will first get to determine a general concept for their Characters, by beginning with designing their personalities and then choosing their professions.

Optional Rule: Preliminary Step: Common Motivations

The aim of this optional rule is to have the game go more smoothly and optimize the pleasure of playing together by consolidating the team spirit binding the PCs.

The Players will create a group of PCs who will get to live many adventures together. It is perfectly possible to imagine a group including a Magientist, a Demorthèn, and a priest of the Temple, but the Players and/or the Leader will have to imagine together the reason for such an unlikely alliance.

This optional rule introduces a preliminary step to the Character Creation that will require the Players to define a common goal or binding origin for their PCs in order to facilitate the cohesion of the group. It can be: live a life of adventure and leave a stagnating rural community, be part of the same family or be childhood friends, be the pupils of the same mentor or the subjects of the same lord, giving them a long-term quest to achieve, a common enemy who has done wrong to the native community or the family of the PCs, etc. The Players can take the “Group of Characters in Esteren” text as a support to define this common goal.

With a little imagination, there should be no impossible combination of PCs. Each Player should be free to play the Character he wishes, even if the Leader can set some restrictions for the sake of the game, such as the starting place of the adventure.



Sid "the Wolf", Varigal

- ⊗ **Ways:** Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 5. Reason: 1. Conviction: 3.
- ⊗ **Skills:** Close Combat: 9. Craft: 4. Erudition: 3. Feats: 7. Natural Environment: 9. Perception: 3. Relation: 7. Shooting and Throwing: 5. Stealth: 7. Travel: 10.
- ⊗ **Advantages:** Survival Instinct.
- ⊗ **Disadvantages:** Trauma, Addiction: Tobacco.
- ⊗ **Setback:** Tragic Love.
- ⊗ **Sanity:** Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 3.
- ⊗ **Combat:** Attack: 9 (Carath Damage: 2. Short sword Damage: 2). Shooting and Throwing: 5 (Bow Damage: 2). Defense: 11 (Protection: 3). Speed: 9. Potential: 2.
- ⊗ **Stamina:** 9.
- ⊗ **Survival Points:** 4.

Sid was born in Louarn, in the west of Taol-Kaer, a humid region near the Western Swamps. He was destined to the life of a peasant, like the other members of his family, when an event turned his life upside down. The young woman he was to marry, Anaëlle, as well as her whole family, were found dead; brutally murdered. Signs of a struggle were clearly visible at the scene of the crime, and a dagger with a sculpted handle—reminiscent of the head of a bird—was discovered near the corpses. Sid, yearning for vengeance, took the weapon and swore he would find its owner.

Very quickly, his quest became an obsession, and led him to leave his native village. After he met adepts of the Temple, he converted to their religion, adhering to the faith in the eternity of the soul, which gave him the certainty he would be with Anaëlle again one day. His first travels were hard ones, and he almost died many times. Wandering in Taol-Kaer, he questioned sages, searched the dregs of cities, and visited many libraries, obsessed by the enigma that this mysterious bird head represented. Several times he had to resort to violence, either to survive or to achieve a goal.

One day, he was approached by a man who invited him to enter the Varigals' guild, which Sid accepted. It was the opportunity to continue with his investigations while earning a living, gathering and propagating important news or carrying packages across the peninsula. After several seasons on the road, his hunger for vengeance was not as gnawing, but it remained vivid, ready to resurface as soon as a new clue appeared.

A few weeks ago, Sid was found near Dearn, more dead than alive. This time, it had been a close call, and he needed to spend a long time in convalescence to get back on his feet. As winter was near, Sid decided to stay at the village for some time before hitting the road again. He has no memory of his misadventure, even though he feels like it might have something to do with his quest...

Health Condition Chart

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

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⊗ Personality

Character Traits: Pugnacious, Stubborn.

Latent Disorder: Obsession.

Sid's greatest quality is also his biggest flaw: he is a combative, determined man who can seem stubborn when his mind is set. However, Sid is intuitive and sensitive, attentive to the people surrounding him, but only showing his own feelings very rarely. Since the violent death of Anaëlle, he has hardened: his quest for vengeance guides his moral principles, and he stops at nothing to reach his goals. However, he has kept some sense of justice, and is reluctant to harm innocents. Along the years, he became a taciturn man who appreciates being alone. Each day, Sid says a prayer for Anaëlle, afraid that her soul would disappear otherwise. He will do everything to accomplish such a ritual, lest he feels anguished, absorbed in metaphysical questions about death and the permanence of the soul.

In Dearn, Sid quickly found his place, feeling indebted to the community that had saved his life; particularly to Eoghan and his comrades in arms who found him unconscious, not far from the village.

⊗ Equipment

Sid owns many things, most importantly: a rope and a grappling hook, tent canvas, climbing pitons, a blanket, a tinderbox, several torches, a notebook and some ink, chalk, a first-aid kit, maps of Tri-Kazel, small measuring tools, and a leather roll containing lock picks as well as a crowbar. He has 18 azure Daols, a short sword, a Carath (a Varigal's iron-shod staff), a short bow, some arrows, a quiver, and several knives. He also holds the aforementioned dagger with its pommel sculpted like a bird's head, which was found near the body of his betrothed. He wears studded leather armor as well as a shield.




Contested Actions


When two Characters do actions that oppose each other, each one rolls a regular Resolution roll. The one with the highest rating wins the contest. In this case as well, a success margin can be used to evaluate the degree of the success obtained; here, it will be the difference between the two results. A draw means a tie between the two opponents. Persuasion is a particular case: a Character being persuaded (with the Relation Domain) can, if he wants, use his Mental Resistance rating or his Way of Empathy instead of his rating in the Relation Domain.


Testing


The Players have most probably noticed that high ratings in Ways bring benefits in using the Domains and Disciplines. This way, a Character with 5 in Creativity can use her inspiration and her resourcefulness each time she makes something (Craft Domain); likewise, her knack for improvisation can help her during fights (as Creativity is used to calculate the Potential rating). But these high ratings in Ways can become serious hindrances in some situations—called Tests—in which it will be better to have the lowest rating possible... Thus, a high Combativeness is much more likely to lead to violence, the same way that a high Creativity can easily lead to rebellious acts. Each Way hides a Fault that can manifest at critical times.


The Five Faults

 **Passion** (Combativeness): this Fault manifests itself through fits of violence or anger, an excessive love or hatred, an irrational enthusiasm, an out-of-proportion pride, taking dangerous risks, etc. When someone or something irritates the PC, when it is related to something he strongly loves or hates, when he undergoes humiliation or comes to take risks, he will be tempted to react in an impulsive way if his Fault gets the better of him.

 **Subversion** (Creativity): Subversion comes under the form of constant non-conformism or all-out eccentricity; the inability to abide by a rule or to adapt to a system. When Subversion overcomes a Character, she will not listen to what she is told, will disobey and have it her way, without caring about the consequences.

 **Influence** (Empathy): this Fault can manifest itself when a PC risks being influenced, moved, or generally speaking, filled with the intensity of the events around him. When Influence takes over, the PC is overwhelmed by what he is going through and may take strange decisions or behave in a disconcerting way.

 **Doubt** (Reason): when facing an important dilemma, a Character can be beset by a doubt that will hinder her or stop her in her tracks. This can apply to social or intellectual situations, but also to physical prowess: being overcautious, the Character, stricken by doubt, will hesitate, not knowing what to do.

 **Guilt** (Conviction): when the PC has to betray someone, lie, or accomplish acts that go against his moral codes, his guilt and moral principles can catch up with him, leaving him in an awful state of hesitation. If he decides to accomplish the act at hand nevertheless, the Character will be consumed with remorse and a feeling of guilt. The principles in question can be of any nature: religious, social, personal, etc. and differ according to each Character.

The Interpretation of Faults

Like the Ways, the Faults can be given many different interpretations. The Player is left to characterize how a Fault can manifest with his Character according to the context. Thus, for Combativeness, a pugnacious warrior and a passionate bard could both have 5 in Combativeness and doubtlessly express their Passion in a very different way. Context can also make the manifestations of a Fault vary strongly: an act of betrayal from a person with a strict code of personal conduct and the transgression of a religious taboo do not have much to do with each other, yet they both involve Guilt.

Moreover, Faults combine with each other. Thus, a PC with high ratings in Passion and in Guilt will probably be led to commit acts on the spur of the moment, but will regret them very strongly thereafter... The Fault with the highest rating will generally overshadow the other.

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Test Roll

A Test roll is a very particular Resolution roll that makes direct use of the Ways. To succeed in a Test, the Player rolls 1D10 and the result must bypass a Difficulty Threshold, which will be represented here by the rating of the implicated Way. According to the intensity of the event or the context, the Leader can add from 1 to 3 points to the Threshold.

1D10 must be above the Difficulty Threshold (Way rating + modifier)

If she succeeds, the Character temporarily surpasses her Fault, but new solicitations can lead to a new Test. If she fails, she falls under the influence of the Fault for 1D10 minutes. A natural 1 is always considered a failure. The Player is then encouraged to play or describe the Fault besetting her Character the best she can. If the Player does not manage to do so, the Leader can tell on her behalf the way her Character behaves.

3 When Tests should be Used

These specific Resolution rolls have been designed to stress a particularly important moment of the story, when the PC ends up in a critical situation. They should remain rare and the Leader can do without asking for such a roll if the Players correctly portray their Characters by themselves.

Here are some examples of Test rolls:

Passion: Jos is a scholar with a rating of 4 in Combativeness. He is involved in a debate of the highest importance in which taunts spring from all sides and tension is palpable. Malik, the person playing Jos, shows his Character's anger as his companions try to calm him down before things turn out for the worst... In this case, the Leader does not need to ask for a Test roll for Jos as his Player gives a correct interpretation of the combative temper of his Character. Should Malik have remained completely stoical, the Leader could have asked for a Test roll to determine if his Character was overcome by his boiling temper.

Subversion: Fiona is a seasoned fighter with a rating of 4 in Creativity. Exhausted, she finally reaches the gates of a castle to deliver a vital warning and is asked to surrender all of her weapons before entering. The clock is ticking! Knowing how important the stakes are, Caroline, who plays Fiona, entrusts her equipment to the soldiers without complaining. The Leader asks her for a Test roll, for it is possible that Fiona could do things her way and try to keep a dagger on her, without thinking about the possible consequences...

Influence: Rhys is a young Demorthèn with 5 in Empathy. When exploring an ancient network of underground tunnels with his companions, he stumbles upon remains probably dating back to the Aergewin. The runes and the pictures engraved on the rock fascinate the Demorthèn. Maybe this place was of paramount importance in the ancient times? Suddenly, inhuman growls can be heard from the darkness. Fleeing is necessary, and Rhys's comrades at arms insist that they must leave this place. The Leader can ask for a Test of Empathy: the very peculiar atmosphere of this place could very well overcome the Demorthèn to the point that he would remain on the spot, hypnotized by what he feels, and taking senseless risks in the process.

Doubt: Seren is a Magientist with a rating of 4 in Reason. Chased by what appears to be mercenaries hired by a Magientist Lodge, she ends up cornered on a balcony. She is at a dead-end! The only solution would be to run and attempt a jump to reach the roof of the house in front of her... a quite uncommon situation for a well-learned young woman used to the studious atmosphere of the libraries of the Reizhite capital city. Moreover, there is a high risk of falling to her death! The Leader asks the person playing Seren for a Test roll linked to Reason: it is possible that the young woman would find herself paralyzed by doubt, hesitating to attempt this dangerous jump. However, these few moments of indecision could prove to be fatal as the mercenaries rush at her with their weapons drawn.

Guilt: Enor is a priest of the Temple with 5 in Conviction. He and his comrades must absolutely leave a region that is about to be attacked by an imposing enemy army. However, by departing immediately, they are surely dooming a small community that has not been warned... Enor, beset by his principles, tries to convince his friends to turn back, go to the village, and organize an evacuation of the population that remained there. The Leader does not need to intervene, since Enor's Player, Alan, is giving a correct interpretation of the strength of the moral principles of his Character.

Luck Roll

Sometimes, chance may determine a good part of an event's outcome. For example, the PC is chased and ends up in a dead-end: will he find a ladder or a manhole to make his escape? Another wants to create an antidote and needs a particular ingredient: can it be found in the only shop of this isolated village? Of course, the GL may arbitrarily decide this, but he can also resort to having the Player make a Luck roll. The GL determines a Difficulty Threshold between 2 (very likely) and 9 (very unlikely). The Player then rolls 1D10 and must reach or go beyond the Threshold to be lucky, and his roll can be modified by an Advantage or a Disadvantage. A roll of 1 always means a stroke of bad luck and a 10 some great fortune.



SHADOWS of ESTEREN

CHARACTER SHEET

Name: _____ Player: _____
 Sex: _____ Age: _____ Ethnicity: _____ Profession: _____
 Description: _____

Ways

Combativeness: _____

Creativity: _____

Empathy: _____

Reason: _____

Conviction: _____

Advantages

Disadvantages

Health Condition

Good		000000
Okay	-1	000000
Bad	-2	00000
Critical	-3	00000
Agony		0



Stamina: _____

Survival: _____

Domains & Disciplines

Close Combat

00000+(COMB:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Feats

00000+(COMB:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Perception

00000+(REA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Science

00000+(REA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Craft

00000+(CREA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Magience

00000+(REA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Performance

00000+(CREA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Shooting & Throw.

00000+(COMB:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Demorthen Mys

00000+(EMP:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Natural Environ.

00000+(EMP:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Prayer

00000+(CONV:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Stealth

00000+(EMP:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Erudition

00000+(REA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Occultism

00000+(REA:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Relation

00000+(EMP:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____

Travel

00000+(EMP:)
 Bonus: _____ Penalty: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____
 Disc: _____



Weapons

dmg:

dmg:

dmg:

dmg:

dmg:

Potential:

Fighting Attitudes



Standard

Atk: Def:

Spd:



Offensive

Atk: Def:

Spd:



Defensive

Atk: Def:

Spd:



Quick

Atk: Def:

Spd:



Movement

Atk: Def:

Spd:

Defense:

00000 00000

Speed:

00000

Armor:

Prot.:



Equipment



Treasure



Ember



Azure



Frost

Valuables



Artifacts



Resources

00000 00000 00000

00000 00000 00000

00000 00000 00000

Rindath

Rating:



Ogham:



Exaltation



Rating:



Major Miracles:



Minor Miracles:

Flux



Mineral Flux

00000 00000 00000

Vegetal Flux

00000 00000 00000

Organic Flux

00000 00000 00000

Fossil Flux

00000 00000 00000





History

Birthplace:
Setbacks:

Social Class:



Sanity

Mental Resistance:

	Balance	Symptom	Syndrome	Madness
TRAUMA:	OOOOOO	OOOOOO	OOOOOO	OOOOOO
Hardening:	OOOOOO	OOOOOO	OOOOOO	OOOOOO

Disorder:

Str./Weak.:

Scarring:

Special Ability:



Personality

Consciousness:

Instinct:

Orientation:

Character Traits:



Faults



Passion:

Subversion:

Influence:

Doubt:

Guilt:



Experience Points:

Highlights:



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

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

Intended for Game Leaders as well as for Players, this book is the first of the Shadows of Esteren series. Within, you will find:

- A Gaming Universe

Discover the world of Esteren through the eyes of its inhabitants, especially those of Tri-Kazel's peninsula. Divided into three kingdoms, its political, geographical, and historical aspects are described. The lifestyle, the antagonisms among the factions, and the problems its inhabitants have to cope with on a daily basis are extensively portrayed.

- A Complete System

Giving priority to the atmosphere and interactions among the Players, the game system of Shadows of Esteren will notably allow you to create your Characters, manage the evolution of their sanity, use Magience, uncover the secrets of the Oghamic arts, call upon the power of the Creator, etc.

- Player Aids

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