



Faq & Presentation

Foreword

Shadows of Esteren is a medieval role-playing game, with an accent on the horrific and the Gothic. Drawing inspiration from Celtic myths, this universe has a discreetly fantastic side under a bleak, realistic surface. This world is populated with humans who have to cope with tough daily lives, and face a supernatural threat lurking in the dark. With the focus of its adventures being investigation and survival, *Shadows of Esteren* is a game that favors an immersive mood and interactions among the Players.

This particular atmosphere is drawn from several sources of inspiration: the harshness and romanticism of Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*; the universe of Tim Burton, particularly the one of *Sleepy Hollow*; Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*; as well as *Berserk*, the manga by Kentaro Miura.

Here is more about the four main themes of the game:

o **A Dark Universe.** Esteren is a harsh medieval world where Characters will be confronted with horror and multi-faced threats. However, this does not imply they are doomed to perish; their survival will depend on their ingenuity and bravery. Gothic tradition can be found in awe-inspiring landscapes where the forces of nature rage, a perfect setting for tragic and passionate stories.

o **Low Fantasy.** In Esteren, there are no fantasy peoples such as elves or dwarves, neither are there fireball-casting wizards. Although supernatural elements are far from absent, they manifest in a subtle manner, giving way to a gritty, realistic universe.

o **A Game with Secrets.** Esteren hides many sinister secrets. Players will have to reevaluate their convictions as they learn about the reality of Esteren's world.

o **An Intuitive Gaming System.** *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 gaming system was designed to be intuitive and easy to become familiar with.

Shadows Of Esteren – FAQ

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Shadows Of Esteren – FAQ

This FAQ aims to give precise answers to the various questions you may have about *Shadows Of Esteren*

1. What is *Shadows Of Esteren*?

Esteren is a harsh medieval world where the Characters will face horror and multi-faced threats. That said, they are not doomed to perish; their survival will depend on their ingenuity and courage. The Gothic tradition can be found in awe-inspiring landscape where the forces of nature rage; an ideal setting for tragic and passionate stories. It can also be found in the Characters who are animated by violent emotions—such as love, hatred, or jealousy—and in the way madness, which plays a major role in the game, is treated. As for horror, it is dealt with in a classical and literary sense: a feeling of fright blended with admiration in front of a vertiginous reality.

2. What is the style of your game?

Shadows Of Esteren is a game related to the “medieval fantasy” genre. More precisely, it can be described as a “**low fantasy**” **universe, with horrific and Gothic influences**. There is a supernatural aspect, but it is rather underlying and will not be systematically involved.

3. What are the themes of the game?

The main themes of our game are hope and despair. Its other favored themes are survival—both physical and psychic—moral dilemmas, fear, courage, and its match, cowardice. **The horrific aspect is present, but in an underlying way**, like a threat lurking in the shadow. Although the universe is harsh and deadly, hope for a better future is allowed...

4. What makes your game horrific?

For Esteren, the literary definition of horror has been kept: a feeling of fright mixed with admiration in front of a vertiginous reality. A particular overtone was put on the very moment of this confrontation, since for the shock of this revelation to occur, one must first start with depicting an environment which first appears as a commonplace one. Thus, Esteren's universe may appear sober at first; this is on purpose. That way, and at least at first, this concept puts supernatural elements, and everything which could be linked to the gore genre, in the background. However, little by little, uneasiness will creep in this day-to-day life, and upset it...

5. What do you mean by “low fantasy”?

In Esteren, there are no fantasy people like elves or dwarves, nor magicians armed with devastating spells. The occult is far from being absent, but its manifestations are relatively hidden, and give way to a down-to-earth and realistic universe... or so it seems.

6. What is the setting of the game?

Shadows Of Esteren's setting is a peninsula inspired by medieval Great Britain, with elements from Celtic legends, "steampunk" technologies, and religious beliefs from a faraway Continent. Esteren's landscapes bear witness to the power of natural forces: abrupt mountains, cliffs beaten by the waves of a tumultuous ocean, steep-sided misty valleys, vast forests where daylight hardly pierces through...

7. What are your main sources of inspiration?

Mel Gibson's **Braveheart**, with its ruggedness and romanticism, gives a good idea of the daily life in Tri-Kazel's peninsula. Tim Burton's universe, especially **Sleepy Hollow's**, as well as the movie **Dark City**, have inspired us regarding the technological aspect of the game.

Hayao Miyazaki's **Nausicaä of the valley of the wind** and **Princess Mononoke** represent two major manga inspirations. For other aspects, **Berserk** by Kentaro Miura and the **Final Fantasy** saga are important sources of inspiration for our game. As for literature, **Lovecraft** and **Masterton** are the major references, as are **Anne Radcliffe**, **Bram Stoker** and **Mary Shelley's** Gothic novels.

Regarding role-playing, *Shadows of Esteren* would be somewhere between **Ravenloft** and **Call Of Cthulhu**.

8. How are Celtic elements included in the game?

Esteren's universe is highly impregnated with Celtic myths, the cult of the spirits of nature, and its legendary stone circles. Therefore, the Demorthèn have a very important role in Esteren's traditional culture. They are inspired by the classic druids, and in the game, they embody the link between humans and natural spirits.

Although the game strives to display a credible and coherent setting, it does not have a historical purpose. The codes of the Celtic genre have been modified

and combined with other inspirations in order to create *Shadows Of Esteren's* specific atmosphere, with no pretension for historical accuracy.

9. Who will the Characters be?

The Characters will be ordinary humans confronted with the harsh world of Esteren. In the long run, **they may become heroes**, in the classical sense of the term: able, at a more or less large scale, to change the world they know through the force of their ideals.

The system of rules will make advancement possible so that the Player's choice may eventually bring his Character to become a true expert in a field. He will nevertheless remain a normal human being; not an invulnerable superman. This principle applies to Characters embodied by the Players as well as those controlled by the Game Leader.

10. What types of Characters can be played in *Shadows Of Esteren*?

The Characters will be inhabitants of Tri-Kazel's peninsula. At creation, though young and beginners in their fields, they will be skillful enough to practice a trade. Therefore, it is possible to play **a professional fighter, a young Demorthèn** (druids specific to Esteren's world), **an herbalist, a Varigal** (message-bearers), **an investigator, a bard** and so on. Similarly, they can be born in a slum or in silk sheets; they may have lived in the highlands, in the seedy parts of a city, or in the castle of a feudal lord. Whatever their origins, the Characters can embrace Tri-Kazel's traditions as well as be influenced by the ideas from the Continent. The Players can for instance embody **adepts of Magience**, which technology relies on Flux—an energy extracted from animals, plants and rocks—or **faithful of the monotheist religion of the Temple**, determined to save humanity by gathering it under the One God's banner.

11. Can fantasy races—such as elves, dwarves, or gnomes—be played in *Shadows Of Esteren*?

No. All Characters are human, but from sometimes very different cultures. The **Tri-Kazelians** are a majority on the peninsula, and are as attached to traditions as open to new ideas. Their remote cousins the **Osags** keep living according to the ancient customs, and do not mingle with foreigners. The **Tarish** nomads have uncertain origins, and travel all over the peninsula. Finally, the descendants of emigrants from the **Continent** are generally very close to the ideals their ancestors passed down to them. This cultural, social, and ideological blend will be a source of diversity and exchanges, but much more often of antagonism and conflicts.

12. What is the content of the core book, “Book 1 – Universe”?

Intended for the Players as well as for the Game Leaders, Book 1 – Universe is composed of two parts. The first part describes the world according to its inhabitants' point of view—through letters, short stories, testimonies, etc.—structured around a detailed table of contents and index, so that a reader may easily get his bearings. The second part contains a complete Game System, as well as six sample Characters, and several player aids for an optimal preparation for the first gaming sessions.

13. What will the Game System be?

Shadows Of Esteren is a game of atmosphere where the interactions among the Players and immersion are sought before any “simulationist” aspect. The Game System was thought to be intuitive and easy to handle, stressing aspects like sanity or the creation of a Character, rather than the resolution of actions or combat. *Shadows Of Esteren* can be played with **one ten-sided die**. The whole Game System can be found in Book I – Universe, and takes about a hundred pages out of the 280 of the book.

14. How about *Shadows Of Esteren*’s “secrets”?

Undeniably, many mysteries hover over the world of Esteren. Behind the daily life and the rumors hides a reality that the Characters will be led to discover in the course of their adventures. We have decided to bring precise answers to the major mysteries of Esteren's world. Everything will be **compiled within a special book exclusively for Game Leaders, The Book of Secrets**. Finding out about these secrets does not mean the end of the game, but rather a fresh look on it, as well as new stakes.

15. Is *Shadows of Esteren* an ongoing series?

Yes. It will be divided into three cycles exploring the three aspects of the universe. *Book 0 Prologue* and *Book 1 Universe* are to be released in 2012. *Book 2 Travels*, and *The Monastery of Tuath*, along with the CD album *Of Men and Obscurities*, are to be released in 2013.

16. What will the style of the scenarios be?

They will be varied, but the two main types of scenarios will be **investigation and survival**. More generally, the scenarios will have a psychological dimension, with a particular attention for the atmosphere. Fighting is a liability, and very often, it will be inevitable to resort to force... or to flee! The Game System depicts a quite deadly and ruthless combat style, and each confrontation must be carefully thought through. That stated, the Characters will still have substantial means (Ogham, Magientist inventions, Objects of Power, influence, ties...) which will enable them to truly act on the oncoming events.

17. How about the “modular scenario system” of *Shadows of Esteren*?

In the official scenarios proposed, it will be up to the Leader to decide on the degree of horror, suspense, psychology, or even supernaturalness he wishes to display, according to his tastes and his sensitivity in the matter. This modular scenario system, used in the *Prologue*, gives the Leader several game options, according to which aspect of the horrific genre he wishes to stress. Such options are presented in the form of asides introducing optional scenes and advice for the atmosphere.

18. What are the creatures of Esteren’s bestiary? Are there orcs, dragons, or trolls?

No. In *Shadows of Esteren*, there are men and creatures lurking in the forest's depths. Humanity calls these beasts “**Feondas**”; literally “the enemy” in Gaelic. Fortunately, they do not clash with them much, as they protect themselves from them and do not wander carelessly into the wild... but it happens that a community suddenly disappears, swallowed by a Feond hord.

19. Who are the “Feondas”?

The Feondas are beings whose origin and nature are still controversial. Some seem to be animals or plants gone through abnormal transformations; others put on much more surrealistic, or even disturbing, forms. 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 heinous crimes even lead people to believe that Feondas can possess the spirits of the weak, or take a human guise and infiltrate the heart of towns. Much more dreadful, there is word of Feondas said to animate the corpses of men or beasts in order to strike at the living.

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 deserving only sword and torch. As for the Magientists, the rational thinkers from the Continent, although the majority sees 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.

20. Will *Shadows of Esteren* extend to other mediums than role-playing?

From the beginning, Esteren has been 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 brand new adventures. Other mediums 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 will also be 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 Lyr’s Legacy*, takes place in Melwan’s vale, adjacent to Loch Varn and Dearg’s, found in the *Prologue* 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.

This FAQ will be regularly updated.

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