Shadows of Esteren



3.1 Dearg

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Foreword

Dear reader,

You hold in your hands the first volume of Dearg. This project is the result of a long maturation. When I started writing this campaign, Book 1 – Universe had not even been published yet. A few years later, we had the immense joy and honor of running a very successful crowdfunding campaign for Dearg. Among other accomplishments, it allowed us to organize a concert in Lyon, during which the Fourvière orchestra played Dearg's OST. As time went by, Dearg grew and improved, ultimately representing the result of some ten years of work.

This first volume is divided into three distinct parts. Part One presents the setting of the story, the Narrative Arc system, the rules for Advanced Character Creation, and a new type of scenario: Focuses. Part Two explores the main themes of Dearg through four Focuses meant to provide deeper insight into the main philosophies of Tri-Kazel. Finally, Part Three gathers several scenarios over the course of which the Vale and its denizens will be faced with an insidious, deadly threat.

Throughout this first part of the campaign, even though the actions and decisions of the PCs will influence the future of the Vale of Dearg, the stakes are elsewhere. The main purpose here is to weave a personal, dramatic narrative by portraying each PC's story and relationships with the other Characters.

It is with this in mind that I have written the campaign you are about to discover and that I have introduced the aforementioned new rules and Focus-related mechanics. These additional tools all serve the same goal: to put the PCs at the heart of the story and to put the emphasis on emotions first and foremost.

Safe travels,

Nelyhann



Estimating play time

A campaign is a succession of scenarios that can take several months, if not years, of game sessions. Depending on whether a group plays once a week or once a month, the campaign's duration and pacing can vary wildly. Making an estimation of how long the present campaign, Dearg, will last is a point of consideration that the Leader should give due attention to. A story that ends before its denouement is often the consequence of a misestimation of the available time. By having a rough idea of how much time and how many sessions they will have to play the campaign to its conclusion, the Leader will be able to better prepare and pace their sessions.

By default, with one session every week and going at a steady pace, Dearg can be played out in the span of a year. At minimum, it will take about thirty sessions of 4 to 6 hours each to go through the whole campaign, distributed as follows:

- At least 4 sessions for the prologue of Dearg: 1 for each of the scenarios of Book 0 – Prologue (p. 34, 56, and 70) and 1 for "Vengeful Words," from The Monastery of Tuath (p. 28).

- At least 10 sessions for Dearg – Volume 1: 1 for Advanced Character Creation (p. 54), 1 to explore the Vale of Dearg (p. 16), 1 for the Focus of each of the 4 main narrative arcs (p. 90, 118, 144, and 178), and 4 for the scenarios "Vestiges" (p. 214), "The Refugees" (p. 230), and "Fearil's Ruins" (p. 250).

- At least 12 sessions for Dearg – Volume 2, which gathers 2 Focuses, 3 scenarios, 7 modular scenarios, 1 big final scenario, and 2 modules as an epilogue.

The number of sessions can vary hugely, depending on the pace and style of the game. Some of the scenarios are particularly eventful, which may take several sessions to go through, especially if the Players and Leader are interested in exploring every possible avenue. And if the group does not shy away from improvising and digressing, it will take even longer for the story to reach its conclusion.

Adapting the campaign in accordance with the available time

If the Leader and Players can only meet once a month but want to play Dearg to its end within a year, they will have to make choices, since they will only have about a dozen sessions ahead of them. In this case, the Leader may decide to disregard the prologue and Focuses, and directly skip to the ensuing scenarios, which the group will have to play in an expedient manner. The contents of the prologue and Focuses can be used in other ways: flash-backs during play, game aids given to each Player, play-by-forum or by e-mail between games in order to flesh out each PC, etc. Alternatively, if the group has no problem with the campaign lasting more than a year, monthly sessions will take them through the campaign in about three years.

Prologue to Dearg: Book 0 and The Monastery of Tuath

Book 0 – Prologue gathers three scenarios that precede the events of Dearg. These scenarios include elements that set the stage for the campaign and let the Players familiarize themselves with this region of Tri-Kazel, all the while introducing one of the campaign's major components: fossil Flux. Getting in tune with the context in which Dearg takes place will be one of the keys to a successful campaign. The more the Players become attached to this small mountainous region, the more they will feel concerned with the upcoming events. The scenario "Vengeful Words," included in the supplement The Monastery of Tuath, presents a figure that will play a major role in the final part of Dearg: Mac Snòr, the sorcerer lord. If the Players are new to the universe of Shadows of Esteren, it might be a good idea to start with these four scenarios so that they can get accustomed to the universe and system.

However, going through these scenarios is not strictly necessary: the Leader can begin the campaign directly, without preamble. They may also decide to intersperse the scenarios of Dearg with those of Book 0 – Prologue and The Monastery of Tuath, either during the first part (which explores the narrative arcs) or later on.

Preparing the Characters

Dearg includes an "Advanced Character Creation" chapter. A few hours should be dedicated to reading it and putting it into effect. This section introduces new mechanics that will be used throughout the campaign. However, many groups certainly have their own PCs already; how can they get involved in Dearg's scenarios and make use of the new game mechanics? To answer this question, a chapter is included about integrating preexisting Characters, so that gaming groups do not have to start again with a new party to play the campaign.



Prologue

It had been but a few years ago, much less time than the charred remains of the mill suggested. As elsewhere in the Vale, people used to gather there–to grind wheat, but also to celebrate plentiful harvests. In those days, it was a place of life: a symbol of prosperity, a guarantee to survive the winter, and sometimes even a nocturnal shelter for lovers who dared sneak out of the village. Now, there was nothing left: the flames had eaten everything, burning the locals' efforts to nothingness, and from the ashes rose the specter of famine over Fearìl. However, the village had survived; the people had found other means of sustenance.

For a time, villagers came here to grieve, for this ruin was also the grave of the last heirs of the Vale's lords, Aline and Mael Mac Govrian. Their deaths had meant that the regency of the Hilderin knights would go on for quite some time, in the name of a king living in a faraway city in the south of the kingdom. But little by little, the ruins of the mill had been left alone, offered to winter and to the crows who had taken to nesting there. The fire had done its part, and time completed its work.

Now, no one cared that the fire may have been intentional, or that two innocents had perished like witches on a pyre, even though these martyrs had been the last representatives of a noble and esteemed line. The mill, like the lords of yore, was no more–end of story. The past did not count; only the future mattered. Poking at old scars was too painful, as was stoking the flame of a cursed memory.

Winters had come and gone, and the mill had fallen into decrepitude. Snow covered the crumbling stones and the blackened, rotting wood. Crows had made a nest of what remained of the mill. Their molting had left part of their feathers below to form a strange ebony carpet. When you came near the rubble, you could clearly hear them cawing, though few people still dared to venture close to this foreboding place. Many believed it to be haunted by the last Mac Govrian princes, or that the mill had become home to the Mariiaghan, a furious spirit who, according to the legends, took the shape of a murder of crows to suck the last breath of those about to die. The presence of the cacophonous concert of these birds was unsettling for most travelers, and these old legends often added to their anguish, though most claimed to know better.

Yet, only popular imagination gave this place such an infernal reputation: the vestiges of the mill, continuous cawing aside, were amazingly still. Nothing ever happened there... at least, until a certain evening when this quietness was disturbed for a very strange moment; an event which, should it come to be known, would strengthen the pagan beliefs surrounding the building.
For on this evening, in the cold, desolate mill, something was reborn, breaking, for a few minutes, the unceasing crying of the crows.

* * *

The creature, having just come back to life, let loose from the depths of its body a shrill, twanging sound in the nocturnal silence, a rattling cry in which inhuman, birdlike accents seemed to merge every now and then with those of a tortured child. It was a voice that seemed to still be searching for itself, fumbling for its pitch, lost as it was in this agonizing howl. As silence came back, the crows returned to perch on the highest stones of the crumbling mill, watching with their beady, wary eyes what their constant molting had given birth to. The shape raised its head to look at them, its black eyes gleaming in the moonlight. Its gaze set on the building's heights, the creature seemed to progressively form a grip on reality, finally realizing where it was... or perhaps simply that it existed. The fleeting remembrances of a past life flipped through its mind, then, suddenly, violent images burst through its memories: images of a headlong flight, a hand held by a woman, a sister, Aline. Flashes of the burning mill, creaking beams reddening under the biting flames, then crashing all around them, grievously wounding her and abandoning them to the fire eager to lick their bodies, to feast on their blinding pain. Then there was this laugh outside, this laugh ringing in their injured ears. The laugh of a madman, the laugh of a man rejoicing over gratuitous death. Not any man, no; Argan, a Hilderin knight, a man living on borrowed time. He was an abomination of nature; a monster among the other monstrous humans.

The creature clutched its head with both hands, waiting ragingly for the pain to end. It suddenly dawned on it that these images were its own, could only be its own, at least in

part. It, too, had been a man, a panicked man gripping the shaking hand of his sister before dying in the flames caused by one of his sadistic peers. The being who had been born on this night had been a man, too, weak and maladjusted. It had only been a worm, and was now a raptor... but still it kept within it these still-burning images and emotions. It could not put a name on this mixture of hatred, anger, and pain.

Other impressions sloshed around its mind: images of a young woman's face, the memory of a smell. It wasn't his sister dead in the mill, but another woman. It expected to feel the same violent, painful feelings, but nothing of the sort occurred. It was something else. It felt its body tighten up, like a swelling wave was about to crush it and sweep everything in its path. But all of these impulses vanished as a new and powerful instinct emerged: the humans who lived in this vale had to be destroyed. They would be, but without any resentment, just with a methodical, almost indifferent coldness. Only Argan could still stoke these strange emotions, but they were only the remains of a raging fire that still glowed within it, like half-extinguished embers; a fire that was not entirely its own, but that still consumed it. Beyond that, the creature felt only the necessity of destruction. A necessity that was cold, animal–perhaps even beyond animality. Just an imperious need to kill these prideful, harmful insects whose very existence seemed outrageous. Every one of them except her, this young girl he kept the memory of and could not associate with its predatory instinct. This restraint only came from remembrances that seemed that of another, but that it could not totally quash. These images stuck to its mind and perplexed it, disturbed it. Why were they here? Why did they linger and stay its destructive hand? The creature did not know. It should have been a crow, it should have been an animal, it should have been the death of men, but there still was something manlike in it. Oh, not like what some would have called a soul, or some so-called spirit. No, these remembrances seemed rather like simple animated paintings that flashed through its mind and took it aback, stupefied it, but toward which it actually only felt detachment. Not feelings... a sensation maybe, a question at the very least, a difficulty to grasp what it truly was, it who had been reborn on this night, without any witnesses but the crows.



A voice rang in the darkness and roused the creature from its torpor. All the remains of memories, all that was related to emotions or conscious thought was swept aside to leave only a deathly impulse that took hold of its whole being.

"Don't be so scared, you pansy! I tell you, we'll find plenty of them in these ruins. We ain't called the Black Feathers for nothing! If you wanna be part of the gang, you need a few, at least as a distinctive sign, you see? Our boss Rajen likes symbols... but mainly, he doesn't like pansies, and failure even less. Come on, bud, you'll see there's plenty of black feathers here. There's whole swarms of them crows here, and they keep molting. It's not the first time I've come to gather some. It'll be easy as you please, you'll see!"
"I don't like this place, is all. The villagers say it's haunted. I don't like anything to do with dead folk. My mother always told me that... did you hear that?"
"Hear what? Stop it, you wuss. There ain't nothing here except the damn birds. We go in, pick up a few feathers, and get back to the camp to hand 'em to the other guys, and that's that. We're the Black Feathers! You ain't gonna believe any old wives' tales, not even from your damn mother! There ain't nothing to fear from the... dead."

While saying those last words, the man's eyes met those of the thing: ebony jewels that gleamed amidst the coat of pitch-black feathers they had come for. The creature was the size of a strong man, but its body was entirely covered with crow feathers. Its head seemed partly protected by a black helm from which glowed an inhuman glare. The lower part of its face could still be seen: a whitish, milky skin, and an expressionless mouth.

"What in the..."

They wanted to scream and run. They had the time to do neither. The creature had stared at them, silently, as if it had been face to face for the first time with these odd humans and had attempted to familiarize itself with their lowly inner workings. However, the appraising look quickly burned anew with cold savagery. A mouse in the paws of a cat would have lived longer. It leaped at them, surrounded by a murder of crows. When night fell in the eyes of the men, the birds went on with their butchery. It was as if it had drawn the first lines of the sketch of a vaster painting.
A frosty gust then ran through it, a sensation that reminded it of a familiar presence. A perfume it remembered confusedly seemed to fill the air. The crows were still feasting on the two bodies. The shape clad in its long feathery coat laid its gaze on this scene for a while longer and felt new images rising in it.
They were pushed back, as the others had been. The creature let out a confused cry, and, with a few flaps of its wings, rose sharply from the ground. It flapped more intensely, swearing never to come back to this cursed place. The crows raised their heads, then rose as well to follow the first flight of the one who would from then on be their companion and master.
The tenebrous swarm quickly reached the sky, darkening the light of the moon for a moment before fading into the heavy winter clouds.



Part 1: Roots

Part One gathers the game aids concerning the Vale of Dearg, covers the Advanced Character Creation system, and goes over the workings of Focuses.

Chapter 1: The Vale of Dearg

In the present campaign, the Vale itself is like a full-fledged Character. This chapter focuses on the region's notable locations, describes the village of Dearg, and introduces the local figures.

Chapter 2: Narrative Arc

The second chapter is dedicated to two new game mechanics—Narrative Arcs and Advanced Character Creation—both of which will be made use of throughout the campaign. This chapter also includes several game aids meant to help the Game Leader put the campaign together.

Chapter 3: The Focuses

This chapter details how Focuses work. These scenarios, specific to the present campaign, follow rules that are different from a standard role-playing game scenario. Their purpose is to explore the personal themes of each Character.



Chapter 1
The Vale of Dearg

The children had gathered around Céliane. The young woman was watching them affectionately as they played and laughed heartily. Ranging between six and ten years old, they were part of the second age circle. They were Fearìl'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 her own and was eagerly awaiting her wedding to 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 that she had noticed on the face of Baorìg, her father, on a previous evening?

Book 1 – Universe, p. 14



The Vale and its Surroundings

In the ancient tongue, Dearg means "red," a reference to the color of the copper ore extracted from the surrounding mountains. The Vale comprises roughly nineteen miles of craggy slopes and rough terrain, with an average width of five miles. It is crossed by a river fed by mountain streams that the locals simply call "Dearg's River" or "Red River." Depending on the location, it can go from raging and impassable to quiet and shallow. The Vale houses two communities: Fearìl and Dearg, located at either end of the Vale. It takes a good day of walking to go from one village to another, though harsh weather can sometimes make that two.

The peaks of the mountains surrounding the Vale are perpetually snow-capped and feed several rivers and streams. The slopes are covered with forests of conifers, and broad-leaved trees can only be found in the lower regions, near lakes and along the river. North-east is the Pass of Lantrecht, which connects the Vale with Gwidre and is only traversable from the end of spring to the beginning of fall. Beyond the pass flows the River Kreizhdour, the natural border between the kingdoms of Taol-Kaer and Gwidre.

One road crosses the Vale. To the south-east, it shrinks into a snaking mountain path leading to the Vale of Melwan. This miners' village is Dearg's twin, and the two communities share close bonds. The road's other branch goes west and leads to Tulg Naomh, the capital of the Dukedom of Tulg.

The following game aid is intended for the Leader, and it should not be read by potential Players, since it includes crucial information they should not be aware of for now.

History of the Vale

Although Fearìl is historically the older of the two villages, it is Dearg that houses the sacred circle, an ancient holy place that the Demorthèn are said to have used well before the clan of the Mac Govrians settled in the region. According to a myth handed down by the Vale's Demorthèn, the mountains are inhabited by a powerful C'maogh, a manifestation of the primordial spirit of earth, Roimh. This presence is said to have led to the erection of the sacred circle in Dearg. The Mac Govrians first settled where Fearìl currently stands, not far away from the Red River, when the area surrounding the sacred circle of Dearg was still uninhabited.

Then came the time of the unification of the clans and the birth of the Three Kingdoms. The family that led the Vale was raised to nobility and kept the name Mac Govrian, while the remainder of the clan became commoners. This new social organization was not brought about in a day, and the new lords kept their roles as clan chiefs for a long time before feudal culture was truly accepted. During this transitional period, copper veins were discovered close to where Dearg would eventually be, and mining activities began on that side of the Vale. The mines were called the Dearg Mines, and as the years went by, it became a village in its own right. The name remained, and the village was simply called Dearg.

More recently–a century or so ago–Vaugh Elarig, a rich merchant from Tuaille, settled in the Vale and caused the community of Dearg to thrive in unprecedented ways. Elarig invested a great part of his fortune in the development of the mines. The village quickly grew richer and was prosperous for a time before it sank into chaos with the War of the Temple, during which the populations of Dearg and Fearìl, along with the Mac Govrians, were decimated.

After the war, the castle of the Mac Govrians was expanded, and in honor of the royal architect who supervised the work, it was renamed the Fortress of Smiorail. A large detachment of knights was sent there so that they might guard the border in the eventuality of another incursion by the armies of the Temple.



The Tragic Fate of the Mac Govrians

The family of the Mac Govrians was decimated during the War of the Temple, but one girl miraculously survived the horrors of the conflict. Young as she was when the war ended, little Ide Mac Govrian was not yet fit to govern. That is how the regency of the Hilderin knights began. Years later, Ide was wed to a rich noble from the region of Tulg and had her first child, Mael. The next pregnancy proved fatal to the young mother, who gave birth to a daughter, Aline, before she took her last breath. The father of the two children passed away the same year, and none of his relatives were of a mind to go through a tiresome battle to claim their rights in a faraway, inhospitable place known to be under the yoke of the Hilderins.

Despite these hardships, the existence of Mael and Aline might have meant the renewal of the line of the Mac Govrians, but it ended with a grim tragedy. Knight Argan arranged the murder of the last two heirs to secure his control of the Vale. His ghastly plan was executed, and the young Mac Govrians died trapped in a burning windmill near Fearìl a few years ago. For the inhabitants of both villages, it was the confirmation of a future where the Hilderin knights would tighten their grip. Here and there, people whisper names of prominent locals who could take back control of Smiorail and give back to the Mac Govrians power over their ancestral lands... but is such a thing even conceivable?



The Regency of the Hilderin Knights

According to the feudal law of Osta-Baille, the knighthood is part of the petty nobility. Its representatives can become regents of a region tied to the crown of Taol-Kaer that has no representative from the aristocracy fit to govern. After the War of the Temple, the Vale of Dearg was in such a situation. The Hilderins were to assume the regency until Princess Ide Mac Govrian was of an age to rule. Unfortunately, she did not have the opportunity to enjoy her status of legitimate heiress: even when she reached the appropriate age, the Hilderins maintained their influence until her death during the birth of her second child.

The regency continued with Ide's children, Mael and Aline. A new Hilderin knight was sent in 890, Argan Mac Darag, whose detestable manners only increased the animosity of the locals toward the representatives of the crown of Taol-Kaer. Since the brutal deaths of the last two heirs of the Mac Govrians, the Hilderins are regarded with suspicion, but there is nothing to prove that they were in any way responsible for the grisly events.

The Brigands of the Vale of Dearg

The inhabitants of the Vale call them the "Black Feathers" due to their distinctive adornment, a crow's feather. For the last few years, they have been marauding and attacking the people of Dearg and Fearìl. The gang is made up of about thirty rogues of various origins: exiles, deserters, outlaws, etc. A few months ago, the Black Feathers settled in the ruins of a remote fortified farm located in a valley neighboring the Vale of Dearg. They constantly remain ready to move out quickly in case they are spotted. During winter, the incursions into Dearg are rarer for two reasons: first, traveling is harder, and second, some of the brigands move away and only come back to the gang in the spring. The Black Feathers are described in detail in "The Black Feathers," p. 44.

Fearil's Haunted Mill

The mill where the last descendants of the Mac Govrians died is rumored to be haunted by the restless spirit of young Aline. The ruin is located uphill from the village, right next to a small river. It is covered in weeds and only skeletal remains are left of its sails. In the dead of night, when the sinister atmosphere is strengthened by the cawing of the crows that have built their nests in the ruin, it is said you can feel something: a presence...

Noteworthy Locations of the Vale of Dearg: A Toolbox

The following pages describe in detail particular locations in the Vale of Dearg. Each description, designed as a game aid, spans an entire page. The purpose is to provide the Leader with plenty of material to develop their own scenarios through the rumors and characters that are mentioned.

This game aid makes use of particular symbols so that the Leader may find relevant information more easily:


This symbol indicates scenario hooks.


Important notes for the GL.


Information about the characters related to the location. Some of these NPCs are described in detail in the next chapter, "Personalities."


Option to include supernatural elements.


Option to include a monstrous encounter.

Dearg's Tumulus

Many warriors died in the Vale of Dearg during the War of the Temple. A graveyard composed of a barrow and several dolmens was erected by the survivors after the last battle so that the remains of both Talkérides and Gwidrites could be laid to rest. It is located roughly one walking hour away from the village and is now a place of contemplation. Dearg's Demorthèn, Loeg, used to visit it regularly, but due to his old age, he very seldom undergoes the trip anymore. It is strictly forbidden to go down into the necropolis, which was sealed with a heavy boulder that serves both to keep graverobbers away and to symbolize the end of the war. Any desecration of the site will be punished most harshly. And yet, lately, the boulder has been moved, so that slipping inside is now possible... Could a group of thieves be responsible?

The Lair of the Weavers

The herdsmen stay away from the barrow, since several disappearances have been reported in the area. Local tales speak of dead guardians and of intruders being dragged into the depths never to be seen again. An accident, a disappearance, or the discovery of trafficked funerary items (see the articles of clothing, musical instruments, and weapons in Book 1 – Universe, p. 221 to 225) for a total value of 5D10 azure Daols may nevertheless lead the PCs there to investigate or to return the looted belongings to their deceased owners.

Exploring the underground area will prove dangerous. In addition to a few traps (Perception checks ranging from Easy (8) to Complicated (14) to spot them; dealing 1D10 Damage), the area also houses large arthropods called Figheadair Bàsmhor, which means "Deadly Weaver" in the ancient tongue.



Deadly Weaver

- Attack: 9
- Defense: 12
- Protection: 3
- Speed: 8
- Damage: 1
- Health: 10
- Special: Sticky Thread, Venom.

These dreaded chitinous creatures look like armored spiders the size of cats. They secrete a virulent poison as well as threads of sturdy, sticky silk that are very hard to rip free from. The thread of the Figheadair, once cleaned of its sticky covering, is a sought-after material. Thin and very strong, it can make high quality rope. It can be sold for 1 azure Daol per yard, and 5D10 yards of thread can be gathered in a lair of Weavers. An average lair typically houses between three and six of these arachnids.

Sticky Thread.
Being stuck to a Figheadair's thread inflicts a -2 penalty to all rolls. Only a very sharp weapon or a Difficult (17) Feats roll can free the Character. However, a failed attempt only binds the person further and increases the penalty by 1 point (up to a maximum of -10 to all rolls). A strong alcoholic liquid can also dissolve the sticky substance.

Venom.
The venom injected by a Weaver acts very quickly (1D10 hours). It is of Mild Virulence (10 Damage points; Complicated (14) Stamina roll to resist, see Book 1 – Universe, p. 243). Several bites in a row are known to be fatal, hence the name of the arachnids.



Red Lake

Less than an hour away from the village is the Red Lake, thus named for the carmine hues of its waters. Surrounded by great fir trees, the lake is a location well-known to the community. A local story speaks of an ancient monster dwelling in its depths. The amphibious beast is said to venture out at night to hunt, bringing its prey back with it deep into the waters, dyeing them red with the blood of its victims... This old legend does not deter the local herdsmen who regularly come here to water the cattle. It is also a place where bold lovers like to meet.
From one shore to another, the lake spans a few hundred yards. Going round it takes about twenty minutes. Due to the frequent presence of thick patches of mist, it is often hard to see as far as the other side. The lake is fed by a few torrents and a stream flows away from it to join the nearby river.



The Lake's Depths

The local tale about the "Beast of the Red Lake" is in truth the relic of an event that actually took place during the Aergewin. The legend, handed down from generation to generation, reached its current form as part of Dearg's folklore. In the depths of the lake, under a layer of sediment, lay the remains of a creature whose fossilized bones match that of no known species. The bones are several yards long and bring to mind ancient myths. Such vestiges would fascinate collectors and occultists. These bones could be traded for as much as a dozen frost Daols. Searching the bottom of the lake may also yield 1D10 amber-colored crystals containing approximately 14 ounces of fossil Flux (thus, 5 crystals contain enough fossil Flux for 4 doses). Someone enterprising enough may learn of the rumors and decide to visit the lake in a small boat, taking samples of the soil with a rope tied to a bucket. With a bit of luck, this rudimentary method will let them see the promise in the site. They will come back a few months later with a strange contraption (a sort of Magientist diving suit) and offer work to some of the inhabitants at a lofty wage. They will be tasked with exploring the lake's depths and bringing back any bones they find. If the PCs refuse, others will accept... and will then probably need someone to rescue them! Danger does lurk in the lake, for the bottom is inhabited by a dangerous species of venomous black eel, the Easgann Dubh.

Black Eel

- Attack: 8
- Defense: 14
- Speed: 10
- Potential: 2
- Damage: 1
- Health: 5
- Special: Venom.

The black eel only attacks those who intrude upon its territory, but it then proves very aggressive, biting ferociously. It injects venom (Mild; Complicated (14) Difficulty Threshold; 10 Poison points over one day, see Book 1 – Universe, p. 243), which is used by assassins and assorted schemers. Successfully extracting the venom of an eel requires a Complicated (14) Demorthèn Mysteries (Traditional Medicine), Natural Environment (First Aid), Magience, or Science (Medicine) roll. One dose can be obtained from an eel. Such a product is considered to be of Exceptional Availability (and is, of course, illegal), and a single dose can be sold for 1 frost Daol on the black market. At the bottom of the Red Lake, any intruder will likely be attacked by 1D10 eels. For a human being, fighting underwater inflicts penalties (see Book 2 – Travels, p. 89).

Sect of Snìomh

Some groups of occultists worship strange entities; the Sect of Snìomh is among them. According to them, the Loch Snìomh (see the Bestiary of Book 2 – Travels, p. 184), like everything else that dwells in Dearg's Lake, is spawn of a mighty snake of air and water, reminiscent of the Snìomh of the Demorthèn legends... One stormy night, they will attempt to call it forth, maybe by offering sacrifices that the PCs will have to stop at the last moment? In the end, the only thing that will answer their call will be a dangerous Feond...

Fortress of Smiorail

This fortress overlooks the village of Fearìl. It offers a striking sight with its massive keep surrounded by watchtowers and bartizans, and its two main towers flanking a sturdy drawbridge. The courtyard is wide and opens into the stables, as well as into the lodgings of the few permanent inhabitants. From the ramparts, one can behold the whole Vale. The purpose of the Fortress of Smiorail is to guard the Pass of Lantrecht, connecting Taol-Kaer and Gwidre.

For several years, the dukedom of Tulg has been using the more peaceful relations with Gwidre as a pretext to neglect the maintenance of the castle and of the road linking Dearg to the rest of the land. Part of the fortress has become derelict and is now covered with weeds.

Currently, only five Hilderin knights and a dozen soldiers are stationed here, in addition to a quartermaster and a few servants. During a period of crisis, Smiorail can house as many as a hundred men at arms. The relations between the Hilderin knights and the locals are tense, to say the least, and the situation has come close to an uprising several times.

Treasure Hunt

Boredom is the worst enemy of a soldier. They kill time by maintaining their weapons, spending their pay, and pacing around as if in a cage. In an attempt to lower the tension between the villages and the garrison, Dàmàthair Glen suggested, somewhat jokingly, to organize treasure hunts pitting the Vale's inhabitants against the soldiers. The goal would be to spot clues left here and there to find a "treasure" that would be the trophy of the event: a bundle of pastries, dried fruits, and woolen cloth to be made into clothing. She also suggested a more warlike variant with jousts and tourneys, the point being to release their aggression and to interact with each other up close.

The Leader can use these games in various manners. The first aim will be to humanize the soldiers of Smiorail, which may go as far as to result in a budding friendship with one or several PCs. Moreover, it is also an opportunity to offer a more light-hearted story, which will contrast all the more starkly with the other scenarios. Everything can go as planned (a chase, a few Feats and Close Combats rolls, a few harmless fights), or turn sour when a knife is drawn after an unfortunate taunt, or when a violent storm isolates some of the participants, who may have an unfortunate encounter, such as disturbing a bear...

Roderic

Roderic was sent to Smiorail in order to complete his novitiate and become a full-fledged Hilderin knight. This one-year assignment in the far north of the kingdom is his Anró: if he comes back alive from this assignment, he will be knighted. Roderic believes in the values of chivalry and has become appreciated by the locals. His relationship with Argan and his accomplices is tense. Argan tries to hide his manipulations from the novice, but Roderic suspects his superior's true nature. Argan plans to have Roderic assassinated on his way back to Osta-Baille.



The Mines of Dearg

The earth beneath the Vale is rich in ore, but it has remained largely unexploited. Loeg, Dearg's old Demorthèn, is adamant about upholding the traditional principles of the preservation of nature. This is the cause of tensions between him and the mines' master, Meog Elarig.
The situation is very difficult because mining, smithing, and charcoal-making are three of the most environmentally invasive activities. For example, they require large quantities of wood–and therefore trees–to support galleries, and to treat the waste resulting from mining. Through the years, these activities produce increasingly large amounts of refuse, heavy and taxing to evacuate in the absence of steel or iron rails. The rock must be carried by men or beasts of burden and discarded as close as possible, so that progressively, they take the shape of unsightly mounds made of worthless bits torn from the entrails of the earth.
Once the ore has been harvested, it must be extracted from its gangue and refined. This first process consumes a lot of combustible material, as it often necessitates raising the rock to very high temperatures according to complex techniques requiring extensive experience. Once this step has been performed, the stones and metals are ready to be worked by blacksmiths and coppersmiths. These activities also require the use of combustibles that give off a lot of heat, and wood is often insufficient. Charcoal, which is more compact and makes it possible to reach higher temperatures, is preferred. Unfortunately, the process of charcoal-making also requires very large quantities of wood, which unavoidably leads to deforestation.

Workshops, as well as the activities that make their existence possible, eat away at the forest and unavoidably consume wood, in addition to polluting nearby waters. Under these circumstances, it will come as no surprise that the Demorthèn are more than reluctant about the installation of such infrastructure and wish for it to at least be located as far as possible from the sacred sites.

The mine, located a few miles away from the Village of Dearg, is plentiful in chalcopyrite ore, from which quality copper is extracted. It is also possible, although technically more difficult, to extract iron from it. Finally, semi-precious stones, such as malachite and azurite, complement the production. Near the entrance are stacked lodgings for the seasonal miners, workshops, warehouses, etc. A total of about 15 regular miners–which can increase up to 30 during summer–work here. Behind the warehouses stand three hulking mounds of rubbish, resulting from the piling up of the rocks the copper is extracted from. To keep brigands away, the Elarigs had a kennel built among the infrastructure.

The surrounding conifers have paid a heavy tribute to the development of these activities. The miners regularly dabble in woodcutting, not always with the authorization of the old Demorthèn. A solution must to be found quickly: the Vale cannot remain in a near-wild state and at the same time support an activity that, even reined in by tradition, is so wood-consuming. The development of forestry could be a solution, but developing, channeling, and watching over these man-made woods would require scientific knowledge and mercantile methods that clash with Demorthèn values.



The Elarig Family

This influential family owns a large house in the village of Dearg. Meog Elarig, a powerful, white-haired man, is the current owner of the mines. Harsh and gruff with his workers, he is feared and little liked. During his youth, after a few years of studies in Reizhite universities, he hatched a project to reorganize the extraction and treatment of ore following Magientist theories. He even considered inviting advisors to assist him. This project was violently rejected by Demorthèn Loeg. Meog had to relent, but has nursed a strong grudge toward Loeg ever since.

Meog's son, Alban, is a slim but charismatic young man who looks more the part of a scholar than a warrior. He is fascinated by geology and mines, but has never actually worked in one. Due to his bookishness, he is mocked by the miners and pushed around by his father, who would like to see him get away from his studies to get some actual work done with a pick.



Alban's Dark Passion

These last months, the relationship between Alban and his father has hit a new low, and the violence toward the young man cannot be overlooked anymore (see Book 0 – Prologue, "Red Fall"). However, the miners prefer to stay out of this. They know that the Elarigs have always been rather strange; in days past, the family had been seen with books they were very secretive about... They disapprove of how young Herven, the grandson of dealer Zaïg, spends time with Alban. There is something unhealthy about the little sneak, and if many make fun of him, it is to better forget the unexplained feelings of muddled anxiety that he gives them.

Fortified Farm

Fortified farms are scattered all over the Vale of Dearg. These are built in locations that are generally easily defensible, and they house families who live there for most of the year. Since they stand on high ground, these buildings are also used as relays, or sometimes as shelters for herdsmen when needed. Matian's farm is among these.
There are only two mills in the vale, each settled along a river. The first one is under the control of the Fortress of Smiorail and sits below it. A tax must be paid to the Hilderins to use it. The other one belongs to a well-off farmer, Edwina, an aging widow who takes a commission to mill grain. Both buildings include a large oven to bake leavened bread and other types of baked goods to be kept all through the winter. There used to be a third mill, but it was destroyed by the fire that killed Mael and Aline.

Hanged by the Mill

Nebel is one of Edwina's sons and works for her as a miller. However, he is also the cousin and accomplice of a brigand, Algwich, whose profile is included on p. 45. The Hilderins see Edwina's mill as competition and would be very interested in throwing a wrench in the works. However, they do not wish to be the instigators of an investigation, lest they be accused of being both judge and jury.
A merchant was robbed and a Hilderin tracked the trail up to Edwina's mill. The Hilderins, through Roderic, wish for the PCs to investigate the farm, without rousing any suspicion, so that they may find out if and how the inhabitants are involved in this affair. The mill's basement has a secret passage with an underground chamber and a narrow tunnel opening into the forest. It was all dug during the War of the Temple, but has since been forgotten. Their orders are to arrest any suspects and recover the merchandise so that it may be returned.
Nebel, being an accomplice to the Black Feathers, will be hanged after confessing the location of one of the gang's hideouts to the Hilderins. Strangely, the nest will turn out to be empty; the brigands were warned of the operation! Argan Mac Darag has spared his unlawful allies. It will certainly be frustrating for the PCs to see the case meet such a dissatisfying end, with only 15 ember Daols for each one of them as a reward. However, it may provide additional motivation for them in what is to come during the campaign...

Matian's Farm

This small, fortified farm is located two walking hours away from Dearg. It provides the village with various foodstuffs, as well as a few barrowfuls of good quality tiles. A family of seven lives there:

- **Matian**, the patriarch, used to be a strapping, hard-working man, but he has become bitter ever since a nasty infection resulted in the amputation of a leg. He is rather rough, for although he has only good things to say about his son-in-law Simus, he hates to be dependent on him.
- **Simus** is a big fellow from Melwan who married Matian's daughter, Gaelde. He left his native village when he wed and has been in charge of running the farm since his father-in-law became disabled. He is a man of few words, slow to anger.
- **Gaelde** is a strong-willed woman who raises her three children with an iron hand.
- **Edel and Erein** are twins of sixteen. Although they are now of marriageable age, they are reluctant to leave their home. However, Erein is interested in Irm, a young man from Dearg, and is less apprehensive than her twin sister.
- **Karl**, the youngest, is an energetic boy of twelve. His whole family sees him as the next manager of the farm, but he would rather become a craftsman. He is more skilled in pottery, tilemaking, and maintenance works than in handling animals.
- **Jorn** is Simus's nephew, the son of his late sister who lived in Melwan. When she passed away a few months ago, Simus took Jorn in. He is of an age with Karl, and they get along well. A quiet, hard worker, Jorn is well appreciated by the rest of the family.

From spring to the middle of fall, the farm also houses up to five seasonal workers from the surrounding villages.



Alestor's Monastery

Long ago, Alestor, a monk of the Temple, got permission from the Mac Govrians to build a monastery that, in its heyday, housed some fifteen residents. The settlement's authorization was given under strict clauses, including the prohibition against proselytizing. The monks were at first known for their garden of medicinal plants, most of which were absent from the rest of the Vale and complemented the local Demorthèn's knowledge. In spite of a few episodic tensions, they lived on good terms with the communities of Dearg and Fearil. Their most appreciated talent was undoubtedly the distillation of a strong, tasty Gwidrite alcohol. Unfortunately, when the War of the Temple broke out, the monks were driven away or killed by the Talkéride armies, and the monastery was partially destroyed.

Today, Firmin the monk, who came alone from Gwidre, is attempting to restore the ruined building with the help of Joris, his adoptive son, whom he took under his wing some 20 years ago (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 188). The garden of medicinal plants is again a peaceful place, particularly beautiful in summer. Many flowers have bloomed there, protected from the cold winds by the walls. Parts of the monastery now have a roof again, and Firmin boasts a relatively comfortable home. He always has a room ready for travelers or Varigals, as he considers hospitality to be a prime virtue. A few rooms are dedicated to herbalism and to the brewing of remedies that are sold at a low price to the few visitors. The money earned is to be spent on paying craftsmen to rebuild the chapel's frame.



Ronan & Maëlys

Ronan is Zaïg's grandson, a peculiar boy who, like her, believes in the One and is at the same time fascinated with Magience. During his trips away from the village, he courts a farmer's daughter, Maëlys, and occasionally takes her to the ruins of the monastery, where they help old Firmin with his patient work. The two young people would like to be wed in the restored chapel, but they know that some in Dearg would be very hostile to the idea. Ronan remembers what his grandmother told him about the birth of Masha and Mirna, the Tarish twins. He suspects that some in the village know his secret and he wonders whether his faith will cause him some trouble. What will people say? Some talk of the future with pessimism: Loeg is old, and Adeliane is not much appreciated; who could reasonably claim to lead the community? If, on top of that, faith in the One were to spread, fear may lead people to react with brutal rejection of foreign ideas. Traditional religious festivals in particular tend to result in people getting drunk and taunting each other, or sometimes even fighting or ganging up on others. The most obtuse, those who like a stark world of black-and-white, might perceive Ronan and Maëlys as an insult to the village and want to make them pay for their defiance...



Village of Fearìl

Someone must have angered the spirits, and they will be merciless in their punishment! Nobility is the soul of this land: the cruel doom of the Mac Govrians cannot leave us indifferent, for sooner or later, we will bear its weight too. Misfortune hangs over that village. All the ingredients are there, I tell you... Varigals and merchants keep passing through there and being welcome, ignorant of the dreadful fate that awaits those smiling faces. Crows frequently fly over these parts and they seem to be staring at people with abnormal attention...

Testimony of a local from Dearg



According to the local oral tradition, Fearìl was the first populated settlement in the Vale. This choice was motivated by the proximity of fertile lands, woods plentiful in game and quality plants, and a river full of fish. Additionally, it boasted a location that could be used as a lookout while being easily defensible, which later became the Fortress of Smiorail. Only the subsequent discovery of a mineral deposit in Dearg led to the birth and considerable growth of the eponymous village. According to the elders, as long as the Mac Govrians ruled here, life was sweet and beautiful, the seasons succeeded with regularity, and the traditions were respected. But some dark curse seems to have stricken the family, and some fear that Fearìl's ordeals will not end with the deaths of Mael and Aline, the last two heirs of the line. Now, the Vale is under the control of the Hilderins, led by Argan, a hated, greedy man that seemingly no one can oppose.



A Few Figures of Fearìl

Ansailéir Arl:

He liked and admired the Mac Govrians. His world was then harmonious, well-ordered, and full of certainties stemming from a rigorous abidance to the traditional rules. Today, the years have started to take their toll on him, and he no longer has the necessary inner strength to resist Argan, even though he is now the only political figure who could legitimately do so.

Demorthèn Baorìg:

The youngest of the noble family of the Mac Readans, whose domain, Saltwaters, is located in the dukedom of Salann Tìr. This Demorthèn used to be an itinerant until he fell in love with Fearìl, where he has since remained, forsaking any political sway, both among his family and in the region. A widower, he is the father of Céliane.

The Dàmàthairs:

The village currently has three. Madenn and Jana are the most experienced, and Céliane recently joined them. They have friendly relationships with their colleagues in Dearg and focus on their role with determination.

Vector Ygain:

How this newcomer got the authorization to settle here is unclear. He has turned one of the village's sturdy houses into a makeshift temple, and his message of patience amongst trials and a guarantee of Salvation for believers has already touched several people. After all, if the village is cursed by the Spirits, why not turn toward the One?

The Village of Dearg

Dearg is built on three levels of a plateau overlooking the Vale. This position is fortified with earthworks and the erection of wooden palisades, making the community an easily defensible home.



Demographics and Daily Life

The community numbers about 500 souls. As is common, about half the population is less than 20 years old (including about 120 children below ten), and there are few elders. As soon as the young are past the third age circle, at 15, they become adults and fully take part in the life of the community. Most villagers–about 200–ensure the sustenance of the community through harvesting, hunting, and gathering. The surroundings of the village are devoted to growing vegetables and cereals, of which rye constitutes a large portion. Farther away, above the farthest thorn bushes, herdsmen graze their Calyres and goats. About 30 people take turns ensuring the safety of the village, while the mines employ about 50 people, some of whom are workers from other vales.

In the end, most of the villagers are unspecialized, alternating their work duties between the fields, livestock, and crafts according to the seasons. Winter is the season for work in the home, while summer is dedicated to working outdoors and tilling the fields. The organization of life is highly influenced by the constraints related to the mountainous environment. During winter, the village can be cut off from the rest of the world for several weeks, and the inhabitants of Dearg have become used to being on their own. When sunnier days return and the snow thaws, Varigals and peddlers return. It is then the time to sell what has been crafted during the colder months. This period starts with the great market of the spring equinox, during which the village is visited by a large number of traders of all kinds. During summer, merchants also pass through the region, traveling on the major road connecting the capital of the dukedom of Tulg Naomh to the rest of the kingdom.

Cultural Specificities of the Vale of Dearg

The village has a certain number of local values and traditions. As explained in the chapter "Advanced Character Creation" (p. 54), tight bonds between the PCs and the Vale of Dearg are one of the important mechanics of the campaign of Shadows of Esteren. For the Leader, these specificities are an efficient means of developing the ties the PCs will have with this region.

The Sacred Square

An old, gnarled beech stands in the middle of the square, surrounded by ritual stones that form a semicircle. Erected according to Demorthèn traditions, this gathering of menhirs is said to have been worshipped even before the clan of the Mac Govrians settled there, several centuries ago. These stones are consecrated to the primordial spirit of earth, Roimh. This place is very important for all the inhabitants of Dearg. It is a reminder of their Osag origins and is a testimony to both the antiquity and the might of the Demorthèn cults.

Famed Smiths

The skill of Dearg's Embossers is known throughout the dukedom of Tulg. This craftsmanship, typical of the region, is the pride of the locals, as well as a good source of income. Many peddlers travel as far as Dearg to trade all sorts of objects and foodstuffs against items from the shops of the Embossers. Traditionally, all the natives of Dearg are given at their birth a small piece of copper jewelry (typically a pendant or armband) that symbolizes that they are part of the community. Offering such an object to a stranger is a sign of extreme gratefulness, since they are then fully considered another member of the community. When someone dies, the family recovers the jewelry, which is handed down to a descendant.

An Aspiration to Autonomy

The inhabitants of Dearg are not fundamentally against belonging to the kingdom of Taol-Kaer, but the regency enforced by the Hilderin knights, symbols of the crown, has always been received poorly. The locals have managed to keep some degree of independence, partly thanks to the willfulness of their leaders, such as Ansailéir Maorn and Demorthèn Loeg. Keeping this independence, symbolized by the sovereignty of the traditional council, is an imperative fiercely defended by the inhabitants of Dearg.

A Carefully Balanced Dependency on Nature

This morning, Céliane was worried, and she found it very hard to concentrate. She couldn't forget about the talk she had the day before with her father. However, as a Dàmàthair, she had to be able to bear that kind of pressure. She knew that one day, she would probably have to sit on the council and that the community of Fearìl would then expect composure and reassuring words from her. When the village faced peril, she would have to keep her head cool, focus on her responsibilities, and bring the children and the other vulnerable inhabitants to safety. During these moments of doubt, she thought about Eoghan, and the love she felt for the young man warmed her heart.

The children were laughing and squabbling. Céliane softly clapped her hands.

"Come on, children, calm down. As I told you yesterday, we will continue with our lesson on fieldwork."

"I don't wanna be a farmer, I wanna be a warrior!"

"There is a time for everything. You will learn to use weapons during your third age circle. And crops are important. What would a great warrior like you do without food? Remember that all villages maintain a close relationship with their environment to develop suitable crops and ensure that everyone can eat."

"Dàmàthair, what's environment?" little Lena asked.

"Well... you see, depending on the land, whether it is mountains like here in Dearg, plains, or even the coast, each region develops different crops."

Vegetables and Fruits

Céliane went on:

" Actually, of all our foods, vegetables are the main way to bring some variety to what we eat throughout the year, and everyone, from the humblest farmer to the noble, owns a garden next to their house where they grow fruits and vegetables.

These cultivated plants and trees exist in all sorts of different types, each adapted to various climates and needs, which creates a large range of tastes, shapes, colors... Stewards, gardeners, cooks, and housewives all make use of onions, garlic, leeks... Well, do you know any other vegetables?"

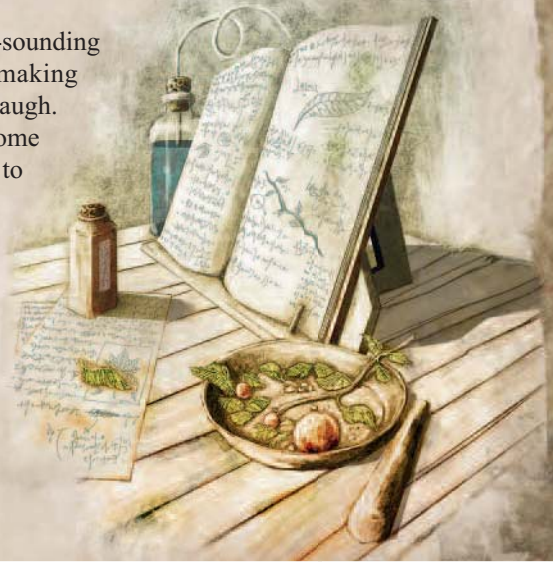
"I do, I do! There's lettuce and carrots!"

"Yes indeed... anything else?"

"Err... parsley... and chervil!"

"Those are cooking herbs. There is also coriander, for example. As for vegetables, there are also radishes and cabbage."

All the funny-sounding names were making the children laugh. This brought some courage back to Céliane.



When she was with them, it was as if she once again experienced the optimism and joyfulness she felt as a little girl. One of the youngest asked:
"What's savry?"
"That's 'savory,' Teren. It is a cooking herb with white flowers, and it has a peppery taste. You should know that orchards are also carefully tended, in order to grow fruits such as apples or pears. Gardening requires constant attention, as the plants can be ruined by heavy rains or long drought, hungry insects, diseases, mushrooms... No year is ever like the previous one. During one, one plant will prosper, but in the next, it will be very hard to gather a harvest, no matter the efforts invested. For this reason, growing several kinds of vegetables and fruits is a common solution, since it is the only way to reasonably avoid food shortages and famine. To ensure more reliable and bountiful harvests, we also select the plants most adapted to our region."
"Oh! Is that why there's a flower market right after Earrach Feis?"
"Yes, exactly! This is the opportunity for farmers to exchange seeds between villages. Actually, this allows everyone to share a discovery that will slowly spread through the years, in no small part thanks to Varigals. Now, I will show you a herbarium so that you can see what all these plants look like..."

Rural Tri-Kazelian Calendar



Each parcel of land and vale has its own peculiarities in how plants will grow, when they will have to be harvested, and when they will have to be sown. The gap between the different phases of harvesting can vary up to a month and a half within the peninsula, between the regions with the mildest climates and the coldest ones. It happened that I left a village in the middle of reaping, traveled for several weeks, and reached a community where it had not even begun yet.
Plowing takes place during fall or spring. One month before the spring equinox, people resume outdoor work, generally after festivities celebrating the passing of winter. Soon after the spring equinox and the festival of Earrach Feis, the animals are brought out to graze, and the land is hoed. In the regions where sheep are bred, shearing is a major event that keeps the whole population busy for several days.
Not only must wool be shorn off, but also washed, then worked for a long time to be storable or sellable. The birth of livestock mostly occurs from early to mid-spring. The villages then suddenly teem with new life: the chicks of hens, geese, ducks; the offspring of ewes, donkeys, Caernides, cows, goats, etc. In mountainous regions, it is time to move to grazing grounds: herdsmen remain in the heights all summer long, milking the cattle, gathering plants, and making cheese that will be stored for the winter. Most of them are escorted by members of their native community, who take turns in protecting them. Wolves are not the only threat…
The end of summer is dedicated to harvesting, which mobilizes the whole population to reap, thresh the grain to separate it from straw, store, transport, etc. Then comes the season of grape harvesting in viticulturist regions. This is another busy time of the year when everybody gathers outside to harvest the grapes, then stomp them in vats. The juice is kept in barrels, which are then stored in caves. During fall, people still must cut, transplant, repair, and prepare what can be preserved for the upcoming spring.
During winter, families stay inside. This is the season of spinning, weaving, sewing, embroidering, sculpting, etc. Since days are short and lighting is expensive, people gather in the village hall and try to spend time as pleasantly as possible during the good years, those when the crops are plentiful enough for everything to be fine... But the mood can easily be much darker during hard years, when every passing day brings people closer to hunger and famine, with the fear of not having enough grain left to sow during spring.

Notes of the Varigal Osvan Tadd

Crises

"Indeed, young Ionnthén, rural life is fragile. The crops depend on the farmers' care, but also on many other factors. It takes very little for a village to experience a food shortage and reach a crisis point."

Climatic Misfortunes

"Despite the farmers' efforts to watch over and control their crops, bad weather can strike harshly and in a variety of ways. Winter can seem to end early and spring to start settling in when suddenly, a few days of frost destroy all the buds, annihilating the planned fruit harvest. If spring is dry, the seeds will not bloom, and only hardy plants will grow–and weakly. A wet summer can cause standing cereals to go moldy by promoting the growth of fungi and facilitating parasites. Add to all of this hail storms that can destroy entire vegetable plots, and slews of ravaging animals that will devour or kill plants: some eat the leaves, others suck the plant's vitality through its roots; worms can infest fruits, while boars wreck growing fields and feed from ill-protected vegetable gardens!

"You will see it yourself, Adeliane: each year is unique and brings its own surprises, good or bad. Combined with weather mishaps, damages related to animals and parasites strike all the more harshly. This writes in the minds of the population a chronicle of rural time, silent but emotionally charged, full of worries and hopes.

As a Demorthèn, you will be able to help men know these changes and protect themselves against them better, while respecting the natural cycles."

War

Demorthèn Loeg remained silent for a while, then resumed. Adeliane kept listening to him without a word.

"Yet, foul weather and ravages from animals and insects are lesser evils compared to one of the worst calamities caused by man: war. As you know, I lived through the War of the Temple, and when I was your age, I wielded my claymore to strike at my enemies. This great war, as well as any private war between feudal lords, had lasting, disastrous consequences for the populations, when men at arms got their supplies from pillaging. This is the 'standard' procedure, less costly than maintaining a complex logistic service. Soldiers steal cattle, butcher them, and eat them, or take them with the rest of the army to eat later without risk of the meat going bad. Granaries are often burned, which greatly compromises the next sowing, or even short-term survival. In the worst cases, the fields themselves are put to the torch so that no population can conceivably survive in the region. These crises are harsh, but their impact is still limited in time. The more lasting depredations are those that target trees and vineyards. It takes about 10 years for destroyed vines to be replanted and give fruit again. As for the trees, nearly 30 years are required for them to reach a decent size. You now see how deep the scars of a war can run in devastated lands!"

Locations and Personalities of Dearg

In Dearg, everyone knows one another. Among the population of the village, some stand out, and the PCs will quickly get to know them: Zaïg, Glen, the Elarigs, Harald, etc. The following pages detail several of these personalities, and the complete character sheets of four of them are provided at the end of this chapter: Maorn, Loeg, Argan, and Rajen. The last two do not live in Dearg, but are still prominent local figures.

A few personalities of the Vale of Dearg: Aïnlis, Firmin, Glen, Zaïg, and Harald.



As for the eponymous Vale, the following pages will describe the noteworthy locations of the village of Dearg with one-page game aids. Special symbols will be used, which have been defined at the beginning of this chapter.

Village Hall



Eoghan and his father

Located in the heart of the village, this large building made of enormous beams houses the village council, as well as great community celebrations. Several chairs of sculpted wood are traditionally reserved for the members of the council: Demorthèn Loeg, Dàmàthair Glen, and Ansailéir Maorn. Since the time of Vaugh Elarig, the family of miners has also secured a seat on the council, currently represented by Meog. Maorn's wife, Nennoga, and their three daughters, Tanwen, Deila, and Geilis are generally around, maintaining the place and keeping both formal meetings and festivals running smoothly.

Tanwen, the Wise

The eldest of Ansailéir Maorn's three daughters, this 20-year-old young woman is enamored with Preden, a craftsman from Gwidre here to learn from Master Fanch. He believes in the One, and under his influence, she has privately converted. Her secret fiancé is nearly done with his studies and fellowship in Dearg and will leave soon. Till now, Tanwen has always been a model daughter, known for her wisdom and virtue, but it will be quite the blemish on her spotless record when her father learns that she has decided to follow the one she loves...

Deila, the Aspiring Hilderin

Deila, Maorn's intrepid second daughter, is 17, and she has always envied her older brother Eoghan, who was fully trained as a warrior. Having to train by herself, she has done her best; for example, always volunteering to bring packages or news to Fearìl. This is where she met the knight Ergon Tamir (see Book 2 – Travels, p. 164) and swore to follow the same path as her. Emboldened by Roderic, she is secretly getting ready to leave one day soon for Terkhên to enroll, whatever her family may think of it.

Geilis, the Frail

The family's youngest with her 16 years, Geilis is very bashful and of a fragile constitution. Many see her only as a delicate porcelain doll, but through her many ailments, she has built a great fortitude. She spent most of her bedridden hours reading all the books she was able to borrow from here and there. Developing a great curiosity, she has studied the history of the Vale and the genealogies of the various families. She may be the most learned person around. She is always eager to learn more and admires Finn the Magientist for his great journeys. She would like to do the same someday: study, go beyond appearances, and help in the advancement of knowledge...

The Embossers' Workshop and the Smithy

Master Fanch's workshop was founded when he came back from Tulg Naomh. He had acquired complete mastery of metal handling, be it for smithing, smelting, or jewelry-making. He associated the techniques he had learned with the traditional art of Dearg, the embossing of cold copper.
A very talented man, he attracted apprentices and fellows from both sides of the Gwidrite border.
He currently has some 10 fellows and a few apprentices, all specializing in one discipline or another.
Copper embossers mainly craft quality pans and cauldrons, which store heat very well. They also make decorative pieces such as dishes, vases, goblets, cups, etc. There is generally one smith for each village, and after learning from a master, an apprentice goes back to their community to repair or craft various tools. Dearg's jewelers work the semi-precious stones extracted from the mines, but they can also improve the ornamentation of existing pieces.



New Peddlers

Dearg's embossers and coppersmiths are aware that their activities are hindered by the lack of outlets. It is essential–for them, but for the Elarigs as well–to develop better infrastructure to travel more surely to Gwidre and to the rest of Taol-Kaer. The maintenance of roads and the availability of beasts of burden, perhaps even with regular relays, would be obvious improvements.
Smiths, workers, and miners agree on the subject and are ready to finance expeditions. Debates have taken place inside and outside the village hall, and several possibilities have been affirmed. The PCs' help will be requested, whether for their social skills (5+ in Relation), their ability to move through pathways easily (5+ in Travel or Natural Environment), or their martial aptitudes (5+ in Close Combat or Shooting & Throwing). According to these qualifications, they will be considered a "negotiator," "guide," or "protector." The group will have 150 ember Daols to share among themselves for the first missions, with half on the way out (mainly to finance the trip) and the rest on the way back if they bring results (letters, contacts, etc.). A few items will be entrusted to the budding merchants to testify to the quality of the production and, if possible, to sell them. They will be given half of the selling price. The pieces are worth azure or frost Daols: approximately 1D10 azure for a small piece (e.g. a cup), and 1D10 frost for a high-quality one.
The locals are already familiar with their surroundings, of course, but improving relations with Melwan, particularly with the ruling Mac Lyr family, would certainly be a good thing (see the "Poison" scenario in Book 0 – Prologue). Conversely, not much is expected from the Vale of Loch Varn (see the "Loch Varn" scenario in Book 0 – Prologue). However, there might be an opportunity for the sale of luxury products in the Vale of Thoir (see The Monastery of Tuath and the "Vengeful Words" scenario). There is a monastery of famed healers there, and they must have some funds to dedicate to buying decorative elements for their rituals. For this expedition, a member of the clergy of the Temple would be welcome, in order for the negotiations with the local authorities to go more smoothly. There is also word of a lord, Irvan Mac Snòr, who does have an awful reputation, but with all the pressure he places on his subjects, his coffers must be full, and it is said that merchants are well-received by even the worst tyrants. It is all a matter of diplomacy and subtlety. A bard, or at least an apprentice one, would generally be an undeniable asset for an introduction before the nobility.
The next step would be Terkhên, and from there, access to the trade of the whole dukedom of Tulg...



Fanch, the Master Smith

Dearg lives on mining, and its craftsmen have developed a very particular method, embossing, with which they artfully decorate copper vases and cups. Fanch is the proud holder of this traditional technique from Dearg and is helped by a few smiths and apprentices. Fanch has several children, including a son named Gireg who intends to run the smithy after his father.

New Discipline: Haggling

The Haggling Discipline, an offshoot of the Relation Domain, makes it possible to both increase selling prices and negotiate buying prices. The Leader establishes a Difficulty: Easy (8) for people with no experience in trading, up to Difficult (17) or Very Difficult (20) for experienced merchants or guild leaders. A bonus between +1 and +3 can be granted according to favorable circumstances, such as talking with a member of one's religious order, or having a prestigious social status recognized as such by the interlocutor (Demorthèn, bard, etc.). The success margin indicates how many Daols can be added or subtracted from the standard price. Of course, it bears mention that most people are rather poor, and even if they recognize the value of an article, they may still have to back out of the deal if it turns out to be too expensive. Thus, an astute merchant will make sure to weigh the pros and cons carefully between a potential sale and a sale that is actually possible.

Masha has decided to learn Haggling. Her total in the Discipline is Empathy (4) + Relation (Haggling: 6) + D10. She negotiates with a noble who appreciates her status as an apprentice bard (+1), but frowns upon her Tarish origin (-1). The Difficulty is Complicated (14). With a result of 5 on her die (for a total of 15), she obtains a margin of +1. Since she is trying to sell a set of quality copper cutlery, but without any particularly rich ornamentation, she can increase the price by 1 azure Daol for each item of the set. If she had been negotiating for copper and azurite jewels, she could have increased the price by 1 frost Daol.

House of the Dàmàthairs

Glen with children of the village

The Dàmàthairs are in charge of educating and training the children, as well as protecting them, since they are what is most precious to every family and even to every Tri-Kazelian community. In Dearg, the Dàmàthairs organize their activities around the fortified house where the teaching takes place. Under the direction of Glen, they tend to specialize by age circle or by subject.

Some take care of the very young children, from a few months up to five years old. Their mothers are generally there or nearby (to breastfeed the younger ones) as are the elders, now too worn-out to work, who frequently help them while performing small manual activities. Education is transmitted through tales and games, the primary purpose being to encourage sociability and confidence.

The second age circle emphasizes skillfulness and the development of intelligence with a more rigorous program: games of balance and skill, dancing, recitals of poetry or nursery rhymes, etc. In broad-minded communities, the Dàmàthairs know that, at this age, it is essential to teach reading, writing, and algebra. All children have at least basic academic skills (which, rules-wise, means a level of 1 in Erudition). Those who are gifted and interested in music are personally taught by Néanda. This woman, now an elder, is very proud to have trained the three most talented of Dearg's musicians: Aïnlis, Mirna, and Masha.

Finally, the purpose of the exercises of the third age circle is to discover everyone's individual personality and give them the means to follow their own path. The activities are therefore varied: reading, combat training, walks to identify medicinal herbs, cooking, arts and crafts, etc. Some progressively start to spend more time learning a trade.



Dàmàthair Glen

Glen represents Dearg's Dàmàthairs on the council. She is a strong-headed, courageous woman who, with the help of the four other Dàmàthairs, is in charge of supervising the education of the community's children. Their numbers change according to the years, the age circles, and the ravages of disease. Taken together, the three age circles can represent between a quarter and half the total population, which makes about a hundred children in Dearg. To protect them, Glen relies on no-nonsense martial training, the fortified house, and her knowledge of a few secret, underground passageways that can be used to evacuate the children toward other shelters.

The Red Dog Inn

Each evening, the inhabitants of the village and the nearest farms gather at the inn, which mainly sees use as a tavern. People like to kick back after an exhausting day of work in the mines, the workshops, or the fields. The atmosphere is warm, but in the evening, and particularly during festival days, things can go awry. Most often, it is just an isolated drunken brawl, but sometimes, small groups of teenagers ambush a rival to beat them up. Master Tadh, a specialist in brewing, is the owner of the Red Dog. He knows how to handle his clients, even though he sometimes has to use his strength and impressive bulk to avoid things getting out of control.



Brewer Tadh

During his youth, Tadh was a hot-headed young man, and he traveled for some time with a few friends before he came back to Dearg. He behaves toward budding adventurers with something of a rough tenderness and has plenty of advice for those who would like to leave the village and see the world... while never forgetting to mention that, in the end, everything he saw made him love his home, wife, and children even more.



Aïnlis the Musician

Charming and seductive, as blond as her friends Masha, Mirna, and Adeliane are brunette, Aïnlis, similarly to the two Tarish girls, has plenty of suitors. The three musicians learned their art under the tutelage of Dàmàthair Néanda and have also often worked together to hone their skills. Although the young girls are friends who share a lot, they are also rivals. Masha and Adeliane are generally aloof and distant with the other villagers, while Aïnlis and Mirna are often the center of attention, not to mention that Dearg is much too small to have three bards, or even three professional musicians...



The Contest of Bards

Among bards, there is a recurring jape about Dearg: it is said that in and around this village, every young girl dreams of becoming a bard, but none has a mentor or a protector who could introduce them to the high authorities of this profession. It is indeed true that, whether in the Vale of Dearg or that of Melwan, no man has this kind of leverage. Enter Bard Hafgan, a mischievous blond man in his forties from the village of Helefrt currently visiting a distant cousin. Hafgan is organizing a contest to settle the rivalry between the apprentice bards of Dearg: Masha, Mirna, and Aïnlis (and possibly a PC, in which case the prize will be more important).
He has offered to give the winner a set of three letters of recommendation to three colleagues: the first in Tulg Naomh, the second in Kel Loar, and the third in Ard-Monach. With such a document, it should be possible to be granted their hospitality and even to be introduced to their other relations. Obviously, this opportunity is only attractive for someone who would wish to one day leave the village. The contest is divided into three rounds, all of which will take place at the inn, on three consecutive evenings:

- **Music Contest:**
  Three Performance rolls for each contestant, with a potential bonus ranging from +1 to +3 depending on preparation, originality, etc. The total of the three rolls determines the overall quality of the performance.

- **Contest of Anecdotes and History of the Peninsula, or of Dearg and its Inhabitants:**
  Three Erudition rolls for each contestant for how accurate the recitals are, with a +1 to +3 bonus based on originality, the Player's interpretation, the coherence of the chosen stories (having a common theme between the three of them). The total determines the overall quality of the performance.

- **Contest of Eloquence:**
  Three Relation rolls for each contestant, with a bonus ranging from +1 to +3 for the arguments, the Player's interpretation, bribing or coaxing some members of the audience into favoring a particular contestant, etc. The total determines the overall quality of the performance.

Hafgan will entrust the three letters to the winner, with a prize of 15 ember Daols for the effort. He is hoping that the young women will learn from this contest what the profession of a bard entails: it is not only about talent, but also planning. It is also necessary to be informed about the people who live where you settle, to know them in order to be truly able to advise them. Finally, the eloquence contest gives something of a taste of intrigue. Behind what may seem like an attempt to sow discord among the musicians, Hafgan is betting on the possibility that they will share the prize equitably and will each try their luck on an equal footing.

Zaïg's Shop



Old Zaïg's secondhand shop is a chaotic jumble gathering all sorts of items: you can find traditional Osag statues next to Magientist trinkets; typical Gwidrite cutlery rests alongside ointments made by Talkéride clans; weapons and armor fill entire crates. On a straw mannequin stands an armor of woven reeds said to be typical of the region of Tuaille. Behind the piece of furniture used as a register, the only item that is not for sale is stored: the harp of the last descendant of the Mac Govrians, Mael.

A Luck roll can be allowed to determine whether an item sought by a PC (that may reasonably have ended up in Zaïg's shop) is indeed available for sale.

Zaïg, the Dealer of Secondhand Goods

Zaïg is an eccentric, cheerful old lady, assisted by her grandsons, Ronan and Herven. She has accumulated her goods through time and the seasons. When spring returns, snow thaws, and the roads passing through Dearg open again, many convoys on their way to Tulg Naomh or Terkhên pass through the village and stop there. All her life, Zaïg has been doing business with these passing strangers. Malicious gossip has it that her unrelenting greed is the key to her success.
In addition to her diverse collection of goods, the old woman is one of the few people of the village who have converted to the One, which has earned her the enmity of Loeg and some of the village's inhabitants. She regularly visits Monk Firmin at his monastery. Her grandsons, Ronan and Herven, are fascinated with Continental sciences as much as by occultism. Zaïg allowed the Elarigs to access books concerning this domain. She was particularly close to Alban's grandfather (see the "Red Fall" scenario in Book 0 – Prologue).

Meeting Aodren Floyd

A rather strange man has come to Dearg. He has introduced himself as "Doctor Twain" (see the profile of Aodren Floyd on p. 146 of Book 2 – Travels), and comes from Osta-Baille looking for a silver pendant set with a purple gemstone cut in a cabochon, of a style of Tarish influence. He claims to be a collector, intent on finding one of the pieces created by a genius silversmith.
This object belonged to Eberine Ofger, a dazzling comedian and courtesan who was the favorite of various rich and powerful men. She received the jewel from her one true love, Amro, a Tarish who then abandoned her. The experience made her jaded, and she started using other people. In the end, she grew old and died hateful and envious of a rival. The pendant went from one owner to another, young women who were all the victims of aggressions that left them disfigured, as if they had exerted a destructive fascination on men.
Called to investigate the latest assault, Aodren Floyd, aka Doctor Twain, was struck by the repetition of similar circumstances, always connected to the pendant. He thinks it may be an Object of Power. However, as misfortune would have it, it was stolen, and ended up in the hands of a Varigal who sold it to Zaïg... who sold it to a young man from the village, Elwin... who offered it to a young girl a few days before the arrival of Doctor Twain...
The new bearer of the cursed pendant can be one of the three budding bards: Aïnlis, Masha, or Mirna. All three are admired each time they play at the Red Dog Inn. It is only a matter of time before this results in a tragedy... but Floyd is reluctant to open up about the nature of the matter, lest he attract public condemnation in a Talkéride village where Occultism is very often misunderstood.
The PCs will have the opportunity to help Aodren Floyd break the pattern. The most curious of them may even acquire a smattering in this rare discipline (resulting in the acquisition of their first point in Occultism), while forming a contact with someone who may help and advise them in the future.

Amro's Pendant – Object of Power

Amro's Pendant is a silver Tarish piece of jewelry set with a purple gemstone. The pendant's powers only become apparent if it is worn by a woman.

Properties. The Pendant grants its bearer a +1 bonus to all Performance and Relation rolls due to the fascination it exerts.

Influence. The gemstone will make men who remain with the bearer obsessed with her. The effect will be particularly strong when the two are alone. The man must pass a Standard (11) Mental Resistance check to remain in control, lest he try to attack the bearer, focusing on her face in particular. Additionally, if the victim of the fascination has developed an instinctual derangement (see the chapter "Sanity," p. 269 of Book 1 – Universe), the check will be Complicated (14) for a state of Syndrome and Difficult (17) for a state of Madness. The properties of the Object of Power will only disappear if the stone is crushed. It will be no easy task, and doubly so: not only is the stone resistant, its owner will also compulsively do everything to prevent its destruction.



Dovecote

Located within the village, this building is the home of Harald, the pigeon keeper, and houses about 50 birdhouses to be used as nests by carrier pigeons. The Fortress of Smiorail used to have its own dovecote, but it has fallen into disuse. Argan has thus decreed that Dearg's dovecote belongs to him and that its keeper, Harald, whom he appointed, should always have pigeons ready to be sent so that he may communicate with Osta-Baille and Tulg Naomh.
Carrier pigeons can only do one thing: return to their home nest to join their mate and their eggs. Once a year, royal messengers from Osta-Baille and Tulg Naomh bring Harald new pigeons, who will be able to return to the city if needed. The last few years, these visits have become more spaced out, and the dovecote now numbers only a handful of carrier pigeons able to return to the capital of the dukedom or that of the kingdom. A carrier pigeon can fly up to 60 miles per hour in favorable conditions, but does not fly at night.



Harald, the Pigeon Keeper

Harald is the eyes and ears of Argan and of the Hilderins as a whole in Dearg. By day, all his energy is devoted to taking care of his birds, but by night, at the Red Dog, the one they call the Snitch or the Mole sits in a corner, drinking and pricking up his ears.



A New Dovecote in Smiorail

There is enough distance between Dearg and Smiorail for the requisition of such a faraway dovecote to be deemed absurd. The reason for it was an incident in the fortress's dovecote. Until the arrival of Argan, the pigeons fared well, but during the following months, things took a wrong turn: the pigeons laid fewer eggs and did not always come back. Such an unfathomable problem gave rise to rumors.
According to the traditions, animals, particularly wild ones, are said to be able, like the spirits, to feel certain things. For example, it is presumably possible to ascertain the presence of Feondas from an abnormal quietness in a forest. A Difficult (17) Natural Environment (Fauna & Flora) roll can decipher the behavior of animals and the overall atmosphere to sense a threat before it gets too close.
Hilderin Roderic, however, is not aware of the origin of the dovecote's closing, nor of the ancient legends, and has decided to find a solution. To that effect, he requests the help of the PCs, particularly those with scientific know-how. He will ask them to design a new dovecote for the Fortress of Smiorail, so that it will once again be possible to raise the alarm in case of an incident, even when Dearg is temporarily inaccessible, such as during the winter or storms.
To fulfill this mission, the would-be scientist must find out why the previous dovecote was closed. They will have to go to Fearìl, listen to the tales about Argan's arrival, and determine the amount of exaggeration or reticence to say too much in order to understand that things used to be different. Is disease the cause? Or were the birds somehow upset? Natural Environment rolls will establish that the pigeons' behavior seems to indicate fear, as if they felt threatened by a predator. With a Standard (11) Occultism (Esotericism) roll, one can remember that such abnormal behavior has already been studied. A Complicated (14) roll will learn that such attitudes are often connected to other manifestations. Finally, a Difficult (17) roll brings to mind some reports according to which sorcery is, one way or another, often involved in such cases. Indeed, it seems sorcerers have an unsettling influence over fauna and flora: something troubling, resulting in nervousness and stress...
A new dovecote can be built in Fearìl, the only requirement being to keep the birds a respectable distance away from the actual head of the fortress. At this stage of the story, the PCs cannot know of the precise cause of this anomaly. If the building can be completed before winter, it may be possible to send pigeons more expeditiously to Tulg-Naomh or Osta-Baille... This modification will have to be taken into account during the ensuing scenarios.



Maorn
Male, Talkéride, 41 years old, Ansailéir

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5 (Axes: 9, +1 bonus). Craft: 3. Demorthèn Mysteries: 4. Erudition: 2. Feats: 5 (Endurance: 7, +1 bonus). Natural Environment: 5. Perception: 4. Relation: 5 (Command: 7). Shooting & Throwing: 5 (Bow: 9, +1 bonus). Stealth: 3. Travel: 5.
- **Advantages**: Strong (+1), Iron Stamina (+2).
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 8. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 1.
- **Combat**: Attack: 11 (Axes: 15, Bows: 15). Defense: 15 (Protection: 1). Speed: 9. Potential: 1.
- **Survival Points**: 3
- **Health**: 21.
- **Stamina**: 10 (+2 bonus against diseases and poisons).

Maorn was born a few years after the end of the War of the Temple. He is the third son–and the only surviving one–of Dearg's previous Ansailéir, Selembor, a true hero of the war that pitted Taol-Kaer against the religious armies of Gwidre. This charismatic leader, loved and respected, left his mark on the history of the Vale. Like all the other children of the community, Selembor's son was raised by the Dàmàthairs, but when Maorn reached the third age circle, his father put him through very demanding combat training and made sure that Maorn developed a peerless physical condition. Little Maorn lived in both admiration and fear of this man who had lived through the war and could often prove violent and merciless with him. Fortunately, nature had gifted him with an exceptional constitution, which allowed him to hone his martial skills to match his father's ambitions. Another man was also closely involved in his education: Loeg, Dearg's Demorthèn and patriarch. These teachers have left Maorn with a deep respect for traditional culture, and a sense of authority that proved crucial.

When Selembor passed away, a great ceremony took place at Dearg's Tumulus. The body of the warrior was laid down on a flat rock for a whole day, his face covered with a mask of braided ropes, as tradition demanded. Dearg's inhabitants grieved for their esteemed leader, but the very next day, they welcomed Maorn as their new Ansailéir. They all hoped that Selembor's son would be able to carry on after his illustrious father and, in particular, stand up to the Hilderin knights. Sent by the capital, the envoys had become the regents of the region following the violent deaths of the Mac Govrian lords who had ruled over the lands of Fearìl and Dearg before the War of the Temple.

Maorn proved his worth, both as a warrior and a leader, taking part in hunting parties and defending the village himself against the bandits that roamed too close to the palisades. He quickly became respected as Dearg's best hunter and fighter. He showed the necessary backbone and savviness to negotiate with the knight Argan who led the group of Hilderins stationed in the fortress on the other side of the Vale. Thus, Dearg was able to maintain relative autonomy.

Maorn married Nennoga, a Dàmàthair from Loch Varn, the vale located to the south of Dearg. They first had a son, whom they named Eoghan, a birth that was the pride of the new father. Then, Maorn and Nennoga had three daughters: Tanwen, Deila, and Geilis. Even though he still felt in perfect health, Maorn was already thinking about Dearg's future, seeing in his son his successor as Ansailéir. Like his own father, the illustrious Selembor, he made it his duty to give his eldest son a strict education in order to prepare him for his responsibilities to come. The fact that Eoghan was the only boy among Maorn's children meant, from his earliest years, even more pressure. In some ways, through Eoghan, Maorn still strives to honor his own father, and he cannot see his son as anything but the next in line, the perpetuation of the hero called Selembor.

Personality

Character Traits: Pugnacious / Narrow-minded.
Disorder: State of Balance (Obsession).

In spite of his wife's reassurances concerning their son, Maorn worries about the future of the Vale. Dearg needs a strong leader, lest the village quickly be annexed by the Hilderins or exploited by some greedy city-dwellers, like the Elarigs who would have brought in Magience if he and Demorthèn Loeg had not firmly opposed it. And of course, there is also their proximity to the Gwidrite border and the constant fear of another invasion... Maorn seldom lets his worries show, and in the eyes of other people, he is still this tough man, somewhat gruff but concerned about the well-being of the community, on whom they have been relying for years. He is entirely devoted to his role as an Ansailéir and is often a bit quick to see the rest of the world, and strangers, as nothing but a potential threat.



Loeg
Male, Talkéride, 81 years old, Demorthèn

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 5. Reason: 3. Conviction: 4.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 8). Craft: 5. Demorthèn Mysteries: 5 (Concentration: 8, Demorthèn Knowledge: 7, Sigil Rann: 10). Erudition: 5. Feats: 5. Natural Environment: 5 (Herbalism: 10, Survival: 7, Tracking: 8). Perception: 5 (Observation: 7, +1 bonus to hearing). Relation: 5. Shooting & Throwing: 5. Stealth: 5. Travel: 5.
- **Advantages**: Allies (Demorthèn Wailen and Deorn), Keen Hearing. | Disadvantages: Unlucky.
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 9. Orientation: Rational. Trauma: 4.
- **Combat**: Attack: 7 (Swords: 10). Defense: 14 (Protection: 1). Speed: 8. Potential: 1.
- **Survival Points**: 3.
- **Health**: 19.
- **Stamina**: 3. Penalties from old age: apply -6 to Defense, Speed, and rolls related to physical action.
- **Rindath**: 38 | Ogham: Bear, Curative Berries, Heat, Pure Water, Shield, Vegetal Growth, Wound.

Loeg is an old man who is an authority in both Sigil Rann and herbalism. He regularly visits Dearg's Tumulus and gives speeches on the village square to share his predictions and advice. The patriarch of the community, his voice is always heeded: he sits on the council and is in charge of settling disputes. When he was younger, he could spend weeks in the wilderness, but his old age has led him to permanently settle inside Dearg.

Loeg lived through the dark time of the War of the Temple. He was 31 when the war broke out. He came close to dying several times, particularly at the beginning of the conflict, when the Gwidrite armies swarmed into the Vale to invade Taol-Kaer. What few people remember is that Loeg was a very apt fighter who took a direct part in several battles at the side of Selembor, Dearg's Ansailéir at the time. For many, the War of the Temple is an unpleasant, distant memory, but Loeg has precise, painful remembrances of these years. He still feels some aversion toward Gwidrites and the faithful of the One God. However, his grudge is mostly directed at the Continentals who, according to him, are the ones who truly sowed the seeds of this war by upsetting the peninsula with their religion and their science.

As the years went by, he took a tougher stance toward those who forsake the traditions. He approves of the policies of the king of Taol-Kaer, who restricts arrangements made with Magientists and the Temple that allow them to establish themselves on his lands. Loeg was both glad and relieved to hear about the closing of Athaontù's University in Osta-Baille. This symbolic measure, decreed a dozen years ago, proved in Loeg's opinion that it was still possible to halt the imperialism of the Daedemorthys.

Soon after, Loeg experienced something that would leave a deep scar. The desertion of his Ionnthén, Finn, who left Dearg to learn Magience in Reizh, was a harsh blow. Loeg had a very hard time getting over this development, which felt to him like an immense failure.

The Demorthèn noticed that he was not the only one to dread the forsaking of ancestral traditions in favor of Soustraine's faith and the technological miracles of the Magientists. Along with his fellow Demorthèn Wailen from Melwan (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 58) and Deorn from Loch Varn (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 38), he has founded a circle of independent Demorthèn who regularly meet to discuss such matters and the means to oppose them. The yearly Tsioghair has also provided an opportunity to convince other Demorthèn of the region of Tulg. Today, the group numbers half a dozen Demorthèn, and as many sympathizers from here and abroad. The goals of this assembly are clear: identify whatever could threaten the integrity of the Demorthèn cults in the region and take all necessary measures to halt them, as radical as they may need to be. The group has several targets: Magientist Talacien, who has settled in the Inguard guarding the pass between Melwan and Dearg (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 65), Monk Firmin who lives in the Vale of Dearg, and more recently, Loeg's former Ionnthén, Finn, now a Magientist. The Demorthèn also keep an eye on the Elarigs, as well as on the Mac Lyrs, Melwan's current leaders. They are reluctant to kill, but it is a possibility they do not exclude should the situation require it. As far as Loeg is concerned, he favors acting from the shadows and ousting his opponents diplomatically, as he has done with the Elarigs.

Personality

Character Traits: Disciplined / Pessimistic.

Disorder: State of Balance (Melancholy).

Loeg is a scrupulous, eloquent man whose aura contributes to ensuring a certain independence for Dearg, notably from the Hilderin knights. His knowledge of the Ogham is feared and respected. He now feels the end of his life coming, and the future of the kingdom and the evolution of society worry him. He has become rather fatalistic and, deep down, he finds it hard to believe that the Demorthèn traditions will live on for long.



Argan Mac Darag
Male, Talkéride, 32 years old, Hilderin knight

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 2. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5 (Axes: 6, Swords: 9 (Long swords: 10)). Craft: 2. Demorthèn Mysteries: 2. Erudition: 4. Feats: 5 (Endurance: 7). Natural Environment: 4. Occultism: 2. Perception: 5 (+1 bonus to sight). Relation: 5 (Command: 8). Shooting & Throwing: 5 (Bows: 8, bonus +1). Stealth: 3. Travel: 5 (Riding: 8).
- **Advantages**: Good Sight. | Disadvantages: Enemies (several influential nobles at the royal court).
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 8 (+3 bonus due to Hardening). Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 6. Hardening: 6.
- **Combat**: Attack: 10 (Axes: 11, Bows: 14, Long swords: 15, Swords: 14). Defense: 15 (Protection: 3). Speed: 7. Potential: 2.
- **Survival Points**: 3.
- **Health**: 19.
- **Stamina**: 10.

Darag means “oak” in the ancient tongue and refers to the land of Argan’s family, located in the Dukedom of Osta-Baille, which is covered with an immense forest. Many do not remember it, but the Mac Darags used to be a prestigious family, and Argan’s father, a Hilderin knight, served for several years at the side of King Erald Mac Anweald. This favor came to a brutal end when the Mac Darags were ejected from the royal court following some obscure political schemes. Their fall was not unrelated to accusations leveled against Argan when he was in his twenties. He was accused of having murdered a prostitute, something doubly dishonoring for a knight belonging to the royal order of the Hilderins. In the end, it is hard to say whether it was all a fabrication, or whether this crime, committed by a son whose rash temper was known to all, truly occurred...

Argan was demoted to a faraway border keep, the Fortress of Smiorail. It is widely known that such an assignation is used as a sanction. When he was younger, Argan was hot-headed, but he was also known for being brave and bold. Fifteen years in Smiorail have transformed him into a violent, manipulative man.

Early on, Argan started abusing his position, personally considering it a fair compensation for what he had been through himself. During his first years as head of the fortress, he levied taxes or corvées arbitrarily, under the pretext of, for example, works to be carried out in the Fortress. Argan very quickly gave up on these methods, which brought him dangerously close to several revolts in the Vale. Since then, he has been acting surreptitiously and taking steps to ensure that the locals do not hate him too much: as feared and little loved as he may be, some are still quick to praise his qualities as a leader.

No one actually suspects his true face. For example, the group of brigands called the Black Feathers, who have been harassing the Vale for several years, are in league with the Hilderin. Argan and those among his subordinates who are his accomplices have a deal: the bandits are warned of the patrols that may threaten them, and in exchange, the Black Feathers give them part of their loot. It is also a means for Argan to keep tabs on a gang of bandits who could put him in a difficult situation...

Personality

Character Traits: Combative / Erratic.

Disorder: Symptom of Absent-mindedness (Mental Confusion), Symptom of Dulling (Empty Fortress).

Argan became increasingly fierce through the years, and this hardening of his personality came with worsening mental disorders. He suffers from migraines that sometimes keep him shut away for several days. Moreover, he is an insomniac and dreads sleep, as his rest is haunted by horrible nightmares. At other times, he feels murderous or sadistic impulses that he finds more and more difficult to restrain. Argan is very preoccupied by all these phenomena and is trying to alleviate them. He sometimes even goes through fits of panic when he feels like his head is going to explode.

All these matters aside, Argan is still an ambitious, spiteful man. He is trying to earn some influence at the court of the Duchess of Tulg, the Queen’s own sister, with the aim of getting revenge on his enemies at the capital. Most of the money he extorts is invested into opening the doors of the Duchess’s court.

The Inner Enemy

About a dozen years ago, Argan came to Loeg for some medicine that could cure his troubles, but to no avail. Even now, the old Demorthèn is among the few to know of this weakness, and he awaits the best moment to use it. Desperate for a solution, Argan has even considered seeking a solution from religion, but his traditional education keeps him away from the faith in the One God.

More recently, one of his spies embedded in the court of Tulg Naomh has put him in contact with an occultist. This correspondent is sending him strange concoctions that are, to this day, the only remedies that bring him a few short moments of relief.

For some time, Argan has been exchanging letters with a neighboring Gwidrite lord named Mac Snòr, who claims to be able to explain, under a new light, his difficulties. However, Argan is wary of Gwidrites and has not answered the propositions of the lord so far.



Rajen
Male, Talkéride, 32 years old, Brigand.

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 4. Reason: 4. Conviction: 1.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 6, Swords: 9). Craft: 4. Demorthèn Mysteries: 2. Erudition: 2. Feats: 5 (+1 bonus to agility). Natural Environment: 5 (Survival: 8). Perception: 5 (Acute Senses: 7). Relation: 5 (Intimidation: 7, +1 bonus). Shooting & Throwing: 5 (Bows: 8). Stealth: 5 (Furtiveness: 7, +1 bonus). Travel: 5 (Side Roads: 6).
- **Advantages**: Charismatic. Nimble. | Disadvantages: Enemies (wanted by the authorities, hated by the locals).
- **Sanity**: Mental Resistance: 6. Orientation: Instinctive. Trauma: 7.
- **Combat**: Attack: 9 (Bludgeoning Weapons: 10, Bows: 12, Swords: 13). Defense: 16 (Protection: 2). Speed: 8. Potential: 2. Fighting Art: Sneak Attack.
- **Survival Points**: 3.
- **Health**: 19.
- **Stamina**: 10.

This man in his thirties, cruel and violent, was a Varigal in his youth. Tired of traveling restlessly only to be rewarded with whatever food a few commoners might feel like throwing his way, Rajen progressively became a criminal. A charismatic man, he has surrounded himself with a ragtag bunch of scoundrels he keeps under his control. In recent years, he has settled in the region of Dearg and its surroundings. Crossed by one of the few easily passable roads of the north of the kingdom, this region was a stroke of luck for Rajen and his thugs. At first, the bandit leader planned to rob the locals, motivated by how little resistance he would meet, but the presence of the Fortress of Smiorail led him to reconsider his project. When he reached the region, he realized that convoys and travelers made much more interesting targets than villagers, but that he would need the collaboration of the Hilderins in order for the situation to not get out of hand.

Rajen quickly learned of the ambitious, grudging nature of Argan, as well as how little he cared about his mission. It took some effort, but he was able to contact the Hilderin and forge a pact with him. Only his most faithful lieutenants are aware of his deal with the rogue knight: in exchange for the laxity of Argan and his accomplices, Rajen pays them tribute. He sometimes captures travelers to torment them for his amusement, and he was pleasantly surprised when Argan occasionally asked him to deliver him one of his prisoners. He knows that not all the members of Smiorail's garrison are in on their schemes, and this leaves him with an interesting card to play should Argan decide to tighten his grip or consider betraying him.

Although the presence of the Black Feathers is known to the authorities and merchant companies, they are not held responsible for all the disappearances on the region's roads. The threat that the band represents even tends to be underestimated, because patrols from Smiorail have so far only arrested a few isolated bandits, most of whom were bad apples Rajen wished to get rid of. The bandit leader and his Hilderin counterpart have understood that they could each rid the other of meddlesome individuals, but they don't often resort to such means, as neither trusts the other.

Rajen is perfectly aware that his "associate" could turn against him at any moment. The leader of the Black Feathers is not stupid enough to believe that what he knows about Smiorail's master will be enough to protect him. After all, dead men tell no tales... Of late, Rajen has been considering the possibility of leaving the region more and more often. For the time being, it is more interesting to stick around, but if things get complicated, Rajen will not hesitate to leave his companions to their fate and disappear.

Personality

Character Traits: Thoughtful / Immoral.
Disorder: Symptom of Mood Disorder (Elation).

Behind his slovenly, crude behavior, Rajen is a crafty, calculating individual. Although his cruelty is rather primal, he is nevertheless an expert in putting fear in the hearts of other people and making them suffer. Though he does feel some pleasure in tormenting those weaker than himself, he mostly does so to assert his own importance. He never was a warm man, and his time as a Varigal was riddled with misadventures and altercations that fed his resentment toward others.

He most often leads his men with contempt, or behaves with a hypocritical geniality that forces his accomplices to remain on guard. But since he is also a good fighter and is never afraid to draw his weapon, the other bandits would rather follow his orders without complaint. As long as they are in no serious danger, and the loot is good... Rajen is aware that should a problem arise, their loyalty will melt like snow under the sun, and he will be the one to pay the price.



The Black Feathers

A group of bandits led by Rajen, this gang has only been active in the region for a few years, but has proven itself to be a scourge on the Vale of Dearg and, to a lesser degree, other neighboring vales.

Members

The gang numbers about thirty members, both locals and wanted criminals from various places. Those with a bounty prefer to stick with their own, lest they get recognized. Native members are in charge of fencing the loot and acquiring supplies for the band. The majority of them make a living as trappers or farmers for most of the year, and only work with the Black Feathers on occasion. They are very careful not to let their relatives or acquaintances know of their activities, though some of them are notorious "bad sorts."

The Black Feathers accept no women. Rajen wants to avoid all risks of pregnancy, not to mention all the trouble that taking care or disposing of the resulting child would bring. From his point of view, this is a serious issue, and he does not want to have to deal with it. That said, Rajen will sometimes give some money and a few days off to his most frustrated men, so that they can go and relax in, for example, Terkhên. It is also no secret that some of the bandits have more or less official mistresses in the nearby villages.

Methods

Contrary to what city-dwellers think, brigands do not spend their time ambushing travelers. Instead they rely on intimidation, making a show of their numbers and apparent ruthlessness. The Black Feathers exploit several farmers, trappers, and fishers, extorting food from them in exchange for "protection." Violence is more of a last resort, for example in the case of travelers who are determined to protect their possessions. Sometimes, as a show of force, one of the more callous members of the band—which includes Rajen—will kill a stranger who made the mistake of crossing them. However, aside from the gang's hardened criminals—a dozen of them—most of the Black Feathers have never killed anyone. Since they are largely inexperienced fighters, Rajen trains them.

During winter, when opportunities and marks are rare, the band disperses. They usually go and spend their ill-gotten gains in places where they are not known, or return to their families.

The Deal with Argan

Normally, the presence of a group of bandits like the Black Feathers would have spurred the local authorities (in this case, Smiorail's Hilderins or the villages' militia) to mobilize men in order to track down the criminals and deal with them. However, Argan, the current regent of the Vale, sees to it that only part of the Black Feathers' crimes are reported to his superiors. Among his men, some are even instructed during their patrols to ensure that no signs are left of the bandits' activities. As a consequence, even the locals are unaware of the disappearances of some travelers, whose bodies are carried away and dumped in remote locations.

In exchange for Argan's complicity, Rajen discreetly gives the Hilderin part of the band's loot, and even sometimes a prisoner as tribute. The gang's members are also told to mostly leave the locals alone and to focus on strangers instead. Finally, Argan occasionally has the Black Feathers do his dirty work, like disposing of someone who might cause trouble. However, Rajen will not put himself in serious danger for the sake of his "associate," and will never be persuaded to attack major personalities like Maorn the Ansailéir or Loeg the Demorthèn.

Deep down, the bandit leader is not comfortable with this deal, made worse by the fact that Argan prefers getting his tribute in clean Daols rather than suspicious loot. To Rajen, this arrangement is a temporary one. He is ambitious enough to consider leaving the region. He plans to keep only a few of his best men and settle somewhere where he can make much more money, regardless of the risks.

Only a chosen few among Rajen's and Argan's men have been deemed trustworthy enough by their respective leaders to be informed of the pact. Most of the bandits and many of Smiorail's soldiers suspect what is going on, but among each group, whoever is to be in direct contact with the other is chosen very carefully.

The Hideout

Every now and then, the gang moves from one hideout to another. This is essentially a facade meant to convince the locals that the band is afraid of being discovered by the Hilderins. Most of the bandits do not appreciate having to move, but they know that it is necessary if they want the band to thrive. From Rajen's point of view, this presents another advantage: under the pretense of supervising the whole process, he can check whether some of his men have stashed away part of the loot instead of giving everything to him to apportion personally. Through this method, Rajen has noted that several of his partners have been holding out on him. However, he has done nothing so far. When he decides to leave the region, he will have plenty of opportunities to get rid of the bad apples.

As things are, the Black Feathers have three potential hideouts:

- An abandoned Inguard that used to stand watch over a strategic mountain trail connecting the Vale of Dearg and Loch Varn, a few miles away from the current road. Few of the locals even remember its existence, and the work of time has erased the paths leading to it. However, with a Complicated (14) Natural Environment (Tracking) or Travel check, someone could find signs of the bandits' passage and follow their trail.

- Aldwin's fortified farm. All of its residents died a few years ago from food poisoning due to the family's unhygienic preparation and storage of meat. Since the farm was isolated and offered little aside from a few pigs that other farmers took as their own long ago, it was left abandoned. Aldwin was not popular in the Vale: he kept getting into arguments on obscure spiritual points with the Demorthèn, and was generally seen as a know-it-all and an unrepentant miser. Most people see his and his family's death as a "punishment" dealt by the spirits, and are therefore reluctant to spend time in what is rumored to be a cursed place.

- A large natural cave near Fearìl, which was uncovered by a landslide a few decades ago. This would be the kind of place where the residents of Fearìl might envision taking refuge in case of a serious threat, but since the Fortress of Smiorail is much closer and better defended, this has never actually been considered. This hideout is rarely used, since it puts the Black Feathers too close to Smiorail for comfort, and Rajen does not trust Argan. The gang only settles there during winter, when the foul weather keeps the militia and the Hilderins behind walls.

Personalities of the Black Feathers

The full profile of Rajen, the leader of the gang, is included on p. 42.

Algwich



Attack: 12. Defense: 11. Protection: 1. Speed: 8.
Potential: 3. Damage: 2. Health points: 19.

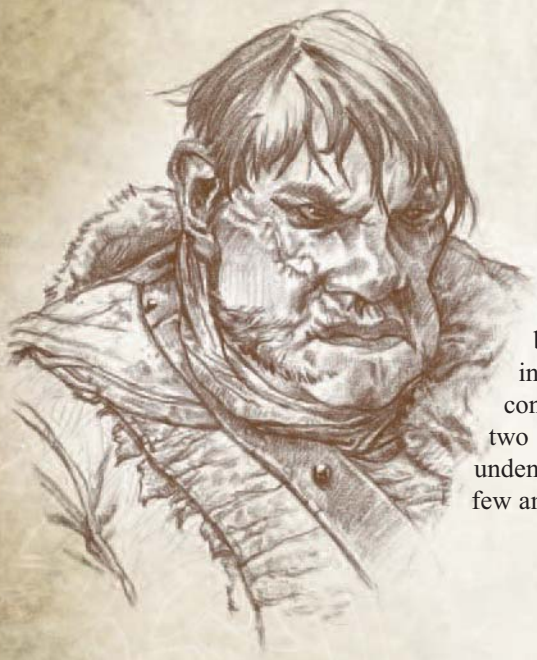
A talented bowman, Algwich is also an easy-going fellow, so for delicate matters the members prefer to come to him rather than have to face Rajen. This has made Algwich a rising star among the gang, to the dismay of Heger, the group's official right-hand man. Algwich used to serve in an Inguard in the dukedom of Tuaille, under a tyrannical leader. When the garrison ended up in mutiny, he elected to leave the region and traveled to the dukedom of Tulg where he had a cousin, a miller, whom he hoped could take him in. However, in the end, he joined the Black Feathers, because although he does not like Rajen, he knows an opportunity when he sees one.

Firgon



Attack: 9. Defense: 10. Protection: 2. Speed: 6.
Potential: 3. Damage: 2. Health points: 19.

A former farmhand, Firgon has always been lazy and more interested in drinking than working. He initially served Rajen as an informer, then joined the gang about a year ago. He wants to keep his membership in the Black Feathers a secret, but a businessman from Terkhên and several of Dearg's inhabitants have worked out the truth because he talks too much when he is drunk. Firgon is not a cruel man; he is more of a bully who likes to feel strong when he has his friends with him to push around people who cannot defend themselves. He is among those in charge of keeping contact with various people who are useful to the gang, but Rajen has little faith in him and rarely entrusts him with important missions.



Heger

Attack: 12. Defense: 12. Protection: 3. Speed: 7.
Potential: 3. Damage: 3. Health points: 20.

Being Rajen's oldest companion and genuinely devoted to him, Heger naturally became his second in command. However, most of the Black Feathers dislike him intensely. Taciturn and violent, Heger is an irritable, touchy man who shows off his considerable strength as often as possible. He has several kills to his name, including two that he strangled with his bare hands. Rajen may have a certain charisma and an undeniable guile, but Heger's only qualities are his loyalty and muscles. Should he die, few among the Black Feathers would mourn him.

Eymric



Attack: 8. Defense: 10. Protection: 1. Speed: 7.
Potential: 3. Damage: 3. Health points: 20.

Certainly the gang's oldest member, Eymric claims that he is 62. His past is shrouded in mystery, but he is clearly an educated man. His qualities as a crafty negotiator and a skillful healer make him a valued member of the band, but few of the bandits truly respect him because he does not have the presence or physical abilities of their leader. Most of the Black Feathers believe he is a former Ionnthén, or maybe the son of a guild master, but the old man brushes aside their many questions about his youth. When Rajen goes to speak with knight Argan, Eymric is almost always with him, and his talents are much needed to get those two equally suspicious men to have a reasonable talk.

The Black Feathers in the Official Campaign



The bandits can be involved in the campaign on several occasions before they meet their doom in the scenario "Fearìl's Ruins."

The Marauders

Jorn, a boy of about 12 who lives in Matian's farm (see p. 23 for more information about fortified farms and the residents of Matian's), managed to run away as the place was attacked by a group of Black Feathers: a nervous one called Machut, a hunchback called Beynac, a mercenary called Rhett, and Firgon (see the previous page).

Jorn climbed the farm's wall then ran for help. He may chance upon the PCs in Dearg or on their way to Fearìl, which can add a subplot to the scenario "The Refugees." This possibility is detailed on p. 237.

In order to save the farm's inhabitants, the PCs will have to sneak in and neutralize the attackers. Below is a map of the place. If they manage to deal with the bandits, the PCs may learn about:

- **The bandits' involvement in the fire at the mill.** As one of the bandits sees the PC following the arc of Love (see Gaol: Of Love and Fury, Act 3, Scene 5: The fire, p. 112), he may shout: "He's the one who got outta the mill!" This will clue in the PCs as to a connection between the fire and the Black Feathers. Firgon was not in on Rajen's plan to assassinate Mael, but he has kept his ears open and learned a few things…
- **The pact between Rajen and Argan.** Firgon is not aware of the alliance between Rajen and Argan, but clear threats will get him to reveal what he knows: Rajen and Heger were at the mill on the evening of the fire. Firgon also suspects that Argan and his leader are in cahoots, but that is about it.

The Bandits' Fate

Right after Fearìl is attacked by Feondas, the bandits will decide to ransack the slaughtered village. They see it as a unique opportunity to grab whatever they can before they leave the region for good. However, things will not go as planned: the Black Feathers will be set upon by the Feondas, and only Rajen and Algwich will survive. These events are detailed in the scenario "Fearìl's Ruins."

A Hostile Season

Winter and cold weather in general are dangers grossly underestimated by those who have no experience with outdoor life. This game aid provides the Leader with tools and atmosphere tips to play out scenarios that confront the PCs with cold weather and snow.

Daily life

The inhabitants of Tri-Kazel are used to suffering through the rigors of winter from the earliest years of their lives. Compared to the Ice Era (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 29), which was the coldest time span in Tri-Kazel, the present weather is slightly warmer, but still goes through very harsh periods.

The feeling of cold

Most houses are not properly insulated. Fireplaces give off heat, but most of it is dispersed and lost, carried by drafts from the roof, windows, doors, etc. Winter means living with a permanent feeling of cold that only a warm bath and clean clothes can temporarily negate. In practice, it is not possible to wash clothes in the freezing water of rivers and washhouses, and wet fabric left to dry outside is likely to freeze. Only small articles can be washed and dried inside, in a well-ordered house. In the end, most Tri-Kazelians have no choice but to make do with clothes bathed in cold sweat.

Dampness is treacherous since it increases the cold's bite. Only those who waterproof their gear with wax will avoid ending up with frozen limbs, their clothes soaked with half-melted snow. The wind is another aggravating factor that can make cold weather even deadlier. Finding shelter from gusts is advised, as it will reduce heat loss and will therefore increase one's odds of survival.

Optional rule: Hypothermia and Cold points

For the unwary who venture outside in the middle of a snowstorm and the unfortunate who fall into freezing water, death from cold is almost certain, since someone who is soaking wet loses heat twenty-five times as fast as someone who remains dry.

Hypothermia and Cold points work like diseases (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 240 and 241). The Leader defines a Virulence, Difficulty Threshold, etc.

The Virulence of the cold varies according to several factors. Several examples are provided below, but the Leader is free to increase or decrease the Virulence depending on the context and the PCs' actions.

The effects of cold weather are represented by Cold points that affect the Character's Health Condition the same way as the usual Damage points. Prolonged exposure to high levels of cold can be fatal for the Character. For example, a Harmful level of cold results in a daily Standard (11) Stamina check, with a failure dealing one point of Cold. A Lethal cold means that a Very Difficult (20) Stamina check is made every hour, for a deadly 20 Cold points on a failure.

VIRULENCE OF THE COLD

Virulence level	Difficulty Threshold	Cold points
Harmful	Standard (11)	About 1 point per day
Dangerous	Complicated (14)	About 1 point per hour
Extreme	Difficult (17)	5 points per hour
Lethal	Very Difficult (20)	20 points per hour

Harmful cold. This is the norm in winter. In the long run, Harmful cold can become exhausting, or even deadly. This is mostly a concern for stragglers and homeless people. While they can travel great distances in the cold without it leading to death or even frostbite, their health condition will progressively worsen as a result. This also applies to most travelers in winter, who will be in no serious danger but will still feel the need for a good rest and a warm fire.

Dangerous cold. This intensity is common and can result in death in a single night. Temperatures between 14°F and 32°F (-10°C to 0°C) can kill someone in poor health or with inadequate gear. Fatigue can also turn a Harmful cold into a Dangerous one. This applies to a traveler who spends the night outside, without adequate protection against nocturnal temperature drops. Being on the move for a long time without protective gear when the cold is Dangerous may also lead to frostbite.

Extreme cold. Such an intensity is rare and leads to death within hours. This applies to someone who goes out in a raging blizzard or climbs a mountain without proper equipment. Frostbite is very likely to develop on the hands, feet, nose, ears, and lips, and the ensuing damage depends on the quality of the care given. Surviving such harsh cold generally leaves lingering complications (permanent loss of one Stamina point).

Lethal cold. This intensity is as extreme as it is exceptional. Death is fast, taking less than an hour. Being in Dangerous cold after submersion in water, or going through strenuous activity in Extreme cold will most certainly lead to a condition of Lethal cold. It is possible to recover quickly and without lasting effects, but this requires adequate and expeditious medical care, represented by a Difficult (17) First Aid, Medicine, or Traditional Medicine check. Barring such help, surviving such a cold will still result in lingering complications (permanent loss of two Stamina points).

Prompt medical care has a Difficulty Threshold one step below that of the cold. For example, helping someone recover from Harmful cold (by the above chart, a Standard (11) Stamina check) requires an Easy (8) First Aid, Medicine, or Traditional Medicine check. As the Character suffers Cold points, their Health Condition worsens. Here are a few guidelines for the Leader to use to describe the Character's condition: From Bad, blood leaves the extremities, sticking to the vital parts of the body. The Character may develop frostbite, or even lose the use of all or part of some fingers and toes if appropriate care is not given (Complicated (14) First Aid, Medicine, or Traditional Medicine check). A Character in Critical Condition looks more and more like a corpse as their body gets colder and colder: the skin turns white, the limbs stiffen, and every movement is an ordeal. Finally, a Character in Agony looks all but dead, their inner body temperature having dropped considerably.

Stopping the progress of the cold

If victims of a potentially lethal level of cold do nothing, death might occur very quickly. It is advised not to waste any time in taking sensible measures in order to spare oneself the worst, such as taking shelter, finding or making a source of heat, and dispensing medical care if necessary. In such a situation, Characters don't have to make Stamina checks anymore, but any Cold points suffered remain, as these can only disappear through rest and recuperation, like any injury (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 240).

Hard soil

Some things that are easy the rest of the year are impossible during winter. Due to the frozen ground, digging a hole becomes very difficult. For example, making a simple grave for a fallen companion will require a sturdy pickaxe and between one and two days of continuous, back-breaking labor. The conditions of such an undertaking are particularly arduous: it requires working from dawn to dusk, without respite, to rip away small lumps of frozen earth, in addition to tree roots twined in the ground. These must be sawed or hacked, and one must take care not to hit rocks held together by frost, which could damage the tools.

Knowing the characteristics of frozen soil. Anyone with some measure of knowledge about Natural Environments will easily (Difficulty 8) know that it is hard, exhausting even, to dig through frozen soil. Such an idea will seem absurd to them.

Digging anyway. If making a hole is absolutely necessary, digging it will indeed prove a most tiresome task. Every three hours of work, the Characters must make a Very Difficult (20) Feats (Endurance) check. On a failure, the Character is drained and needs to rest for at least an hour before resuming. If the margin of failure is particularly high, the Leader can also inflict a temporary -1 or -2 penalty due to exhaustion.

Under the cover of snow

In the thick of winter, when snow has settled on the ground for good, it is extremely complicated to find plants–especially edible ones–in nature. Even animals, who are sturdier and more used to such situations than humans, suffer and sometimes die from hunger or exhaustion, when they don't end up devoured by predators, who focus on isolated, weakened individuals. Even if one knows where to find a given plant, it can be difficult to actually make something of it. Winter plants are shrunken, as they must survive until spring. Therefore, gardens only contain "winter produce," which are known to resist low temperatures. For a gardener, snow is actually a good thing, since it lays a cold blanket across the vegetables. In addition, it protects them from air temperatures, which are even lower than at earth level. It is therefore possible to sweep away the snow to pick various species of cabbage, leek, spinach, and winter lettuce, these vegetables being the only fresh produce of the season. Nursing a sick person back to health may require a nutritious diet; a vegetable garden is then a solution. Other sources of vitamins can be found in animal parts: liver, heart, marrow, etc.

Venturing through frozen nature

Snow makes everything more difficult, particularly when it falls in a storm. Knowing and evaluating the dangers of cold in addition to ways to avoid them can be done through a new Discipline: Winter Land, from the Travel Domain. Varigals in particular must know the risks of this seasonal environment that can quickly prove deadly.

Ice

In lands where winter is harsh, ice appears at the end of fall and lasts until the start of the spring equinox, sometimes even an additional month. The thickness and solidity of ice depend on, in addition to the temperature, the current (still water freezes more easily than a torrent) and on the salt content (freshwater freezes at higher temperatures than saltwater). In the coldest regions, it is not uncommon for a lake or river to become passable by foot, horse, Caernide, or even by cart. Some locations even organize festivals on frozen bodies of water! However, the risk represented by ice must never be underestimated. Temperature changes in the middle of winter can, for example, lead to superficial thawing where the sun shines directly, followed by superficial freezing during the night, which makes the ice floor unstable. In the case of large surfaces, the center freezes first, while the edges take longer. As a result, someone passing over a frozen lake is most in danger at the start and at the end of the crossing. Falling into freezing water puts one in immediate danger of death, due to the cold, disorientation, and the risk of being trapped under the ice, as large slabs can prevent the unfortunate soul from swimming back up.

Testing the solidity of ice.
This can be done with Travel (Winter Land), to assess whether the surface is safe. The Character must be light-footed and watch out for any telling cracks. The Difficulty for this check can go from Standard (11) to Difficult (17) depending on the environment. Lacking time or being in poor circumstances for concentration results in penalties ranging from -1 to -3.

Walking on ice.
Travel (Winter Land) is once again used, this time to be able to spread one's weight evenly on a fragile surface, or to use ice skates on a sturdier one. Among some communities, ice skating is an activity that children partake in from their earliest years.

Ice fishing.
There exist efficient methods for fishing under the ice from a hole. Considering how difficult it is to find food during winter, fishing on a frozen lake is one of the simplest ways to find food easily. The Character makes a Natural Environment (Survival) check with a Difficulty ranging from Standard (11) to Difficult (17) depending on the equipment used and how plentiful in fish the water is.

Avalanches

Avalanches most often occur on steep slopes where snow layers are not tightly packed together. This is due to temperature variations that may range from unnoticeable to obvious, such as damp snow falling during the day and freezing during the night. A seasoned traveler is aware of what type of land and weather conditions can lead to avalanches, and will be able to avoid danger. Conversely, someone inexperienced is exposed to great peril: an avalanche is an extremely violent phenomenon that sweeps almost anything in its wake, even trees and insufficiently sturdy houses. Once people are stuck in the snow, they are unable to move, as though they were trapped in sand. Although the prison is an immaculate white on the surface, no light reaches those below. The victims are clamped in a dark, icy vice, with their breath freezing in front of them. However, the main risk is not cold, but asphyxiation. They have no air to breathe except what was trapped with them, which is rarely enough for more than half an hour. Being buried more than six feet deep makes searches so difficult that survival odds are minute; the victims are only likely to be found if they are less than three feet under the surface. To locate the victim of an avalanche, the best option is to use a specially trained dog. In the absence of one, rescuers will have to probe the snow in the hopes of stumbling upon the body... but with the risk of missing the person by as little as a few inches!

Evaluating risks of avalanche. A well-trained mountaineer can spot dangerous areas and know what precautions to take to limit the risks of triggering an avalanche. The Difficulty of the check depends on weather variations, which can be so minute as to be practically imperceptible, and on how familiar one is with the region. The Difficulty of the Travel (Winter Land) check can range between Standard (11) and Very Difficult (20).

Training a rescue dog. A dog trained in finding buried people can be used in mountains, mainly for cases of avalanches and landslides. Such an animal must be trained and kept in shape with the Natural Environment (Animal Training) Skill.

Probing. Using long, thin sticks to find a body stuck under the snow requires no particular skills. Instead, this method relies upon watchfulness, patience, and above all, luck. Probing Characters must make a Luck roll and reach a result of 6 or more depending on the situation and the depth at which the victim is buried.

Snowstorms

When the wind rises with enough strength, it can carry falling snow or tear away superficial layers of snow. Travelers caught in a snowstorm must act very quickly if they want to stay alive. Dangers add up fast, and they are such that going out in the middle of a snowstorm is tantamount to suicide:

Visibility. In the worst circumstances, it drops to barely a yard, which means the Characters may not even see their own feet, even less so their traveling companions. Perception rolls will be of high Difficulty, ranging from Complicated (14) to Exceptional (25).

Strength of the wind. By definition, a storm involves strong winds that make it difficult to walk in a straight line, can knock people down, or make progression so hard as to bring it to a near standstill. The Leader can ask for Feats (Climbing or Endurance) checks ranging from Easy (8) to Very Difficult (20).

Orientation. In an environment that is reduced to a shapeless, raging white fog, getting one's bearings is impossible. One can only rely on memory and gut feeling. Therefore, even a short trip (going from a farm to an outhouse 30 yards away) will require a Complicated (14) Natural Environment, Perception, or Travel (Orientation) roll. In unfamiliar territory, the check is Difficult (17), and in a completely unknown, dangerous land (chasms, uneven ground), it can be Exceptional (25). In addition, the falling snow and raging wind will make it hard to keep one's footing or get one's bearings due to the low visibility, resulting in penalties between -1 and -3. Simply backtracking is no small feat considering how fast the wind and snow erase any tracks and landmarks. The way one has just come from can become unrecognizable within less than a minute...

Cold. The feeling of cold during a storm is particularly strong due to the blowing wind. One's body can go numb fast, and death from hypothermia can occur within less than a half-hour.

Chapter 2
Narrative Arc

The ambition of Shadows of Esteren's official campaign is to put the Characters at the heart of the story, and this chapter offers a set of tools for Leaders to help them do so. It includes an introduction to narrative arcs as well as assorted game aids to make use of this new system, which is at the forefront of the official campaign. However, keep in mind that the rules in this chapter are optional. The Leader is free to leave aside whichever they don't want to use.

1. Advanced Character Creation.
The main purpose of this step, which comes in addition to the standard Character Creation process described in Book 1 – Universe (see p. 200 and onward), is to introduce narrative arcs and attribute one to each PC.

2. Incorporating Preexisting PCs.
This explains in detail how to manage the various steps of Advanced Character Creation for preexisting PCs.

3. Adapting and Managing Your Campaign.
This explores several possible issues, such as the death of the PCs, and provides advice and tools to keep the campaign going.

4. Campaign Chronicle.
This optional rule allows the Players to obtain more Experience points by being more actively involved in the campaign.

5. Creating New Narrative Arcs.
This game aid provides tools to design your own narrative arcs.

To Each their own

This chapter offers many tools to help the group build strong stories where every participant can feel involved. It stands to reason that the Players and Leader should take some time to discuss their respective expectations for their upcoming Shadows of Esteren campaign. For example, do they wish to focus on the interpretation of their Characters and the development of a complex story, or would they prefer a lighter gaming style? This discussion should orient the choices of the Leader regarding the use of all or some of the optional mechanics introduced in this chapter.

Next page: Ambition is portrayed as Arven. Each narrative arc is represented by an allegory based on the codes of classic iconology.



Advanced Character Creation

Advanced Character Creation adds new steps to the standard creation process detailed in Book 1 – Universe (see p. 200 onward) and introduces a new game mechanic: narrative arcs. Whether the characters are newly created or have already experienced many adventures, these Advanced Creation steps should be followed before starting the official campaign.

A considerable part of Advanced Character Creation involves exchanges between the Players and the Leader. Therefore, it is best for it to take place in the presence of all the participants, which will increase both the depth of each PC and the cohesion of the connections between the Characters.

If the Players decide to use the premade Characters from Book 1 – Universe for the campaign, the additional creation steps described in this chapter are already included in their Characters. Indeed, the group of PCs located in the Vale of Dearg are specially designed for the official campaign. However, the Leader and Players should still read this chapter in order to grasp the stakes related to the narrative arcs and the involvement of the PCs in the story.

New Characters and Preexisting Groups

The main purpose of this chapter is to complete the creation of a Character in order to be able to play the official Shadows of Esteren campaign. However, it may be that Players have already created their alter egos and have already run them through many scenarios. In that case, there are two ways to use this chapter:

New Characters.

If the Players create Characters specifically in order to play the campaign, the new creation steps will take place even before the first step, "Ethnicity." Then, the standard creation proceeds normally, following the steps listed on p. 200 of Book 1 – Universe. However, this order is not set in stone, and it is actually likely that subsequent steps, such as the background, personality, or even profession of the Character will come up during the new creation steps this chapter details.

Preexisting Group.

The chapter "Incorporating Preexisting PCs" (p. 64) provides all the necessary tools to adapt each step of Advanced Character Creation to preexisting PCs. This may also be used for groups made up of new Characters that the Players have created on their own, without coordination between each other.

Fourth Character Sheet Page

Advanced Character Creation adds a fourth page to the Character Sheet, which is also available for download from the official website: www.esteren.org.



1. **Ties to the native or adoptive land.** Each Player describes the ties between their PC and Dearg. (p. 55)
2. **Drive.** The information summed up here is defined during Step 4 "Drive and Determination." (p. 61)
3. **Narrative arc.** This section records the components of the narrative arc: its theme and stakes, as well as the ally and enemy that come with it. (p. 55)
4. **Relations.** Records information defined during Step 3 "Developing the bonds with the other Characters." (p. 61)

Step 1
Ties to the native or adoptive land

This first step introduces a new prerequisite: the PCs must be connected to the Vale of Dearg in one way or another. They may have been born in the Vale, have been living there for a while, etc. One of the mechanics of the Shadows of Esteren campaign rests on the ties a Character can have to a place–generally his native land–and his will to defend it, come hell or high water.

For this first step, the Leader will provide the Players with a broad description of the Vale of Dearg by drawing from the game aid devoted to it in this book. By default, the Players will play as Characters born in the Vale. It is preferable that most of the PCs have this common origin to make the next steps easier. Should some Players want their Character to be a stranger, this is still a possibility. Whatever the Player's choice, they will have to determine their ties to this land, which may come from strong bonds with one or several of its inhabitants.

When this has been determined, the Players can complete the "Ties to the native or adoptive land" section of their Character Sheet with a short description of the nature of their ties to Dearg.

Step 2
Narrative arc

The official campaign introduces a major concept to Shadows of Esteren's game system: narrative arcs.

This second step is the main element of Advanced Character Creation, which will directly involve each PC in the campaign. A narrative arc indicates a story focusing on a particular Character while being connected to the global plot. In addition to introducing elements forming a great fresco, Dearg will explore several narrative arcs, one of which represents one of the campaign's major themes: Love. Other campaigns will explore different arcs, which will ultimately make up a veritable saga.

The choice of a narrative arc goes beyond the initial creation of a PC and commits the Player for an entire campaign. This should be made clear to all of the Players. This is detailed in the box below: "When the narrative arc goes beyond the Character."

When the narrative arc goes beyond the Character

Making a Character the focus of the story–that's a challenge for any role-playing game campaign! There is nothing like the intensity of a scene where the PCs are directly involved in what they are experiencing. However, such a commitment requires some thought, as well as a tacit agreement between the Players and the Leader before starting the game. Shadows of Esteren features a harsh world, where death can occur at any time. This is a problem for the Leader: considering that the campaign rests on the PCs' narrative arcs, what happens if they abruptly die?

To overcome this issue, Players starting a Shadows of Esteren campaign should keep in mind that choosing a narrative arc goes beyond their current Character. In fact, they choose this arc for the entire duration of the campaign and what is at stake is not the survival of their Character–which is subject to chance–as much as the final resolution of the chosen narrative arc.

For example, if a Player chooses the narrative arc of Love, they will be tied to Céliane. Should the PC created at the start of the campaign die before the resolution of the narrative arc, the new Character that the Player would then create would inherit the deceased Character's arc. This new Character will not necessarily be in love with Céliane, but they will have a strong connection with her, powerful enough to carry the narrative arc of Love through to its conclusion. The Character could thus be someone close to Céliane, a relative, a friend, etc. This question is further explored in the box "Dealing with the death of a PC." (p. 67)

Narrative constraint or freedom of interpretation?

The narrative arcs can strengthen the atmosphere of a campaign, but as we just saw, they depend on the involvement of the Players and are subject to a few conditions, which may sometimes feel like constraints.
In fact, narrative arcs allow each Player a great deal of freedom of interpretation. Although one of the major purposes of a Shadows of Esteren campaign is to resolve the narrative arcs of each PC, nothing says how each Player will experience the arc they have chosen. This subject is detailed in the chapter, "Adapting and Managing Your Campaign," p. 66.

Main arcs and secondary arcs

This section introduces a total of eight narrative arcs, four of which are main arcs. To follow the plot of the official campaign, it is important that these four main arcs are distributed among the Players, the major one being Love.

This arc will be explored throughout the Dearg campaign, from start to finish. The three other main arcs will also have their time in the spotlight, with Dearg focusing on them through several scenarios that will greatly contribute to the plot.

The secondary arcs are less deeply woven into the framework of the central story than the main arcs, but they still have a lot of dramatic potential for the Players who choose them. They will possibly be detailed as spin-off adventures in upcoming releases.

Finally, it is possible that a Player is not interested in any of the described arcs. The chapter "Creating New Narrative Arcs" deals with this possibility and provides the Leader with tools to help find a solution (see p. 70).

Distributing the narrative arcs

This choice can be made by agreement between the Players, or randomly. The first solution is preferable, so that each Player can pick the arc that inspires them the most. However, some groups may enjoy the challenge of having to roll with a story they have not selected, similar to using premade Characters. In this case, randomization can be a good idea. The Leader will start with the main arcs and, number of Players permitting, follow up with the secondary arcs.

Choosing multiple narrative arcs

In addition to a main one, a Player may also pick a second narrative arc from among the secondary ones. For example, the arcs of Love and Ambition can easily be made complementary. Though the relationship with Céliane and the love for her would take precedence, it would not exclude a desire to enter a chivalric order.
Choosing a secondary arc in addition to a main one can be a good idea for another reason: in addition to the arcs described in this book, the Players and Leader can imagine another story that will enliven the campaign and make it unique. In that regard, the Leader should not hesitate to react to the ideas of their Players, since it will then be all the easier for the Leader to involve them in the campaign.
These game options will require more work and commitment from the gaming group as a whole, but they will result in a very gratifying game experience. These possibilities are detailed in the chapter "Creating New Narrative Arcs," p. 70.

Narrative arc and faction

By default, each narrative arc is connected to a particular profile, which is often related to a major faction. For example, the narrative arc of Adoption, in addition to exploring the question of filiation, is tied to the profile of the premade character Joris, and has to do with the Temple faction. It is not incompatible to choose this arc while having a Character belonging to another faction, but this may have unexpected results. It is recommended that the PC choose a career related to the faction involved in their arc, or that they have a bond with it, which can be used to help build the narrative arc.

Narrative arcs and premade Characters

As previously mentioned, the premade Characters of Book 1 – Universe were specially designed to be played during the Shadows of Esteren campaign, and in two ways. First, they are all connected, in one way or another, to the Vale of Dearg, which corresponds to Step 1: "Ties to the native or adoptive land." But above all, their background stories include the narrative arcs that will unfold throughout the various campaigns of Shadows of Esteren. In particular, if the Players and Leader decide to use the premade Characters, they should prioritize Eoghan, Finn, Joris, and Adeliane, whose backgrounds were designed with the four main arcs in mind.

Main narrative arcs

Love, Ethics, Adoption, and Guilt are the four main arcs, inspired by classic iconography. Remember that:
- Each main narrative arc is connected by default to a premade Character from Book 1 – Universe. If a Player creates a brand new Character, they should feel free to draw from the relevant profile to design their own Character.
- Some arcs are related to a particular faction by default. However, this is mostly a suggestion for the sake of convenience; Players are free to have their Characters adhere to another faction if they so wish.
- The theme gives a general idea of the narrative arc's stakes.
- Each arc involves several narrative constraints, detailed in the "Prerequisites" section, which the Player will have to incorporate into their PC's background.

Once they have chosen their respective arcs, each Player can fill in the "Narrative Arc" section of their Character Sheet with the information related to the chosen arc. Concerning the theme, the Player will fill in the dedicated section once they have played the Focus relating to their Character's past.

Narrative arc of Love

This narrative arc is the central one of the Dearg campaign and should take priority in the distribution. The card shows Eoghan holding a gold ring and Céliane sitting next to a basket with two turtledoves. These symbols represent the hope of mutual love and a happy future.

- **Profile**: Eoghan (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 184).
- **Default faction**: None.
- **Theme**: This narrative arc is built around the universal theme of love. It depicts a tumultuous story between the PC and Céliane, a young Dàmàthair from Fearìl. The arc also portrays the relation between the PC and Mael Mac Govrian (see p. 93), tinged with friendship and romantic rivalry.
- **Prerequisites**: The PC has powerful feelings for Céliane, a young Dàmàthair from Fearìl. His relationship with Mael Mac Govrian is ambiguous, mixing friendship and rivalry. The PC can also be the son of Dearg's Ansailéir, Maorn, though this is optional.

Narrative arc of Ethics

The card associated with this narrative arc shows Finn holding a level in one hand and a leashed wolfhound in the other. This allegory represents morality and everything that regiments the actions of man. It is a common representation used by Magientists to picture their aspiration to use their science in just, balanced ways.

- **Profile**: Finn (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 190).
- **Default faction**: Magience.
- **Theme**: This narrative arc depicts the question of ethics through an ideological conflict.
- **Prerequisites**: A member of the PC's family died, struck by a disease that traditional Demorthèn medicine couldn't halt, an event which convinced them that only science could help mankind. Later, the PC left their native region to study in Reizh. Optionally, the PC will have been an Ionnthén.



Narrative arc of Guilt

Guilt is here personified by a kneeling young woman wearing a wreath of thorns, who is none other than Adeliane. Her face is pained. With one hand, she is beating her chest, while the other holds a stone, surrounded with brambles and engraved with a heart. In the background, a face can be seen: that of the boy whose disappearance she blames herself for.

- **Profile**: Adeliane (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 186).
- **Default faction**: Demorthèn.
- **Theme**: The focal point of this narrative arc is the PC's guilt, manifesting through recurring nightmares. In the background, questions about Demorthèn arts, dreams, and occultism are explored.
- **Prerequisites**: When they were younger, the PC took several children to the bank of a river to watch the nature spirits, C'maoghs. The trip quickly resulted in a tragedy when one of the children disappeared in the mist. Since then, the PC, haunted by the memory of the child, has become obsessed with solving the mystery surrounding this disappearance.



Narrative arc of Adoption

This card shows Firmin, wearing the frock of a monk of the Temple, holding baby Joris in his arms. Next to him lies a dying Blade knight who has just entrusted the child to him. On his left is depicted a white-tailed eagle, which is known for adopting the babies of other individuals of its kind.

- **Profile**: Joris (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 188).
- **Default faction**: Temple.
- **Theme**: This narrative arc develops the subject of adoption and filiation.
- **Prerequisites**: The PC was adopted by a man or woman who was part–secretly or not–of the clergy of the Temple. The story of his adoption is as follows: a wounded Blade knight left the PC in the care of his adoptive parent before dying from his wounds. By default, this foster parent will be Dearg's monk, Firmin.

Secondary narrative arcs

The secondary narrative arcs were made for PCs of Book 1 – Universe as much as for those of Book 0 – Prologue. They focus on Vengeance, Origins (Tarish ones, in this case), Regret, and Ambition.

Narrative arc of Vengeance

Vengeance is here personified as the Varigal Sìd, his face bloodless and contorted. His wound (an arrow in his side) symbolizes the injury that is the origin of his quest for vengeance. His burning eyes and unruly hair show his agitation. He is staring at his hand, holding a dagger whose hilt is sculpted into a bird's head.

- **Profile**: Sìd (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 182).
- **Default faction**: None.
- **Theme**: The theme of this narrative arc is the enactment of personal justice. It is based on the story of Sìd, who tracks down his wife's killers and whose Varigal vocation is related to this desire for vengeance.
- **Prerequisites**: The PC's spouse (or another relative) was murdered, and they only have one clue to find those responsible: a dagger–presumably the murder weapon–whose hilt is shaped like a bird's head.

Narrative arc of Origins

This card shows a bare-breasted woman, lying with her hand wrapped around a cornucopia. By her side are two toddlers, the twins Masha and Mirna.

- **Profile**: This narrative arc is related to Masha's profile (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 192) and also fits Mirna. This premade Character is an alternative to Masha, and her character sheet is available at www.esteren.org. The Characters are twins and share the same narrative arc.
- **Default faction**: None.
- **Theme**: This narrative arc is related to the Tarish origins of the PC and their desire to learn more about this culture.
- **Prerequisites**: At least one of the PC's parents is Tarish, but the PC never knew them, as in the story of the twins Masha and Mirna. The PC wishes to discover their culture and learn of their origins.



Narrative arc of Ambition

A beautiful young woman, here depicted as Arven, wears a green dress, symbolizing the hope driving ambitious people. In one hand, she holds a scepter, and in the other a crown, which she is confusedly trying to put on her head. She has wings representing her desire for ascension. Her blindfolded eyes show both blindness toward what she thinks she deserves and the lack of good judgment that her aspirations may lead her to display.

- **Profile**: Arven (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 22).
- **Default faction**: Knight (whether Hilderin, Bramble, or in the service of a lord).
- **Theme**: This narrative arc is related to ambition, the thirst for glory, and the quest for acknowledgment. More precisely, it is related to Arven's dream to be part of a great chivalric order.
- **Prerequisites**: The PC has done their military service with a Hilderin knight (preferably Argan, from the fortress of Smiorail) or, like Arven, was the apprentice of an independent knight. Moreover, a particular event (for Arven, the death of her parents) structured their ambitions and principles.

Narrative arc of Regret

Regret is here depicted as Liam. He is kneeling on a gravestone, his head turned toward the sky. Devastated, he holds a piece of cloth in one hand, and in the other a stone with which he is beating his chest.

- **Profile**: Liam (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 26).
- **Default faction**: None.
- **Theme**: This narrative arc features the themes of mourning and regret, and focuses on Liam's quest, investigating his brother's past following his tragic death in the scenario "Loch Varn" (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 34).
- **Prerequisites**: The PC must have played "Loch Varn" and be directly or indirectly responsible for the death of their brother, Terent. The PC suspected him of having become a brigand, but he turned out to be a Magientist agent serving a mysterious lodge. After this tragic event, the PC decided to learn more about their brother's employers, without really knowing whether they should aim to join them or bring them down.

Step 3
Developing the bonds with the other Characters

This third Step follows and develops the one described on p. 201 of Book 1 – Universe, "Common motivations." This is an important step, as it will determine the relationships between the PCs at the start of the campaign. To do so, the Players will discuss and define together the bonds their PCs share. The stronger they are, the greater the cohesion of the group will be. Moreover, such bonds will provide perfect material to create rich and involving gaming moments. Indeed, the PCs will travel and have many adventures together, and their interactions will be a strong part of the story. However, the bonds created during this step are not permanent: the relations between the PCs will doubtlessly evolve throughout the campaign, particularly in regard to the feelings they have for each other.

Here are a few typical bonds that the PCs could share. The premade Characters from Book 0 and 1 are good examples, since they include such bonds, and the Players can draw inspiration from them.

Feelings.
The PCs may have developed feelings of friendship, or even love. They will determine the context in which such feelings were fostered. Examples are the friendship between Eoghan and Sid, or the relationship between Masha and Joris.

Lineage.
The PCs can be from the same family. For example, Mirna and Masha are twins. It is left to the Players to determine the nature of their familial tie.

Childhood.
The PCs have spent all or part of their childhood together. They may have been raised by the same Dàmàthair, or they may have met during their military service. This is the case for Arven and Yldiane.

Mentor.
The PCs had the same mentor. There as well, the PCs will have to define the nature of the feelings their Characters have for each other. The story of Adeliane and Finn includes such a relationship.

Each Player writes down the name of each PC of the group on the fourth page of the Character Sheet. The following information should be added: when they met, the bonds and feelings they share (family, friendship, love, etc.), as well as any other relevant piece of information (like having a common mentor, for example).

Ally and Enemy.
Each narrative arc comes with a new Ally and a new Enemy for each PC, as they are described on p. 212 and 214 of Book 1 – Universe. These new Allies and Enemies come in addition to those that the Player possibly took earlier during the Character Creation process. Note that they neither give nor cost any Experience points.

These Allies and Enemies will be picked after the scenarios related to the narrative arcs have been played (see the "Focuses" chapter, p. 80). These four scenarios will be the perfect opportunity to discover and portray these Characters who will play an important part in the story of the PC.

If no Ally or Enemy comes up naturally, the inhabitants of Dearg are pertinent choices for such a Character, since it will strengthen the bonds of the PCs with this region. For example, the knight Argan can be an interesting Enemy, since he is an important Character in the campaign. In other cases, the Leader may keep this NPC secret and reveal it later, as in the case of the enemy of the Arc of Vengeance. Finally, the last possibility is to postpone this choice and wait until it comes up naturally during the campaign.

Step 4
Drive and Determination

This Step introduces a new trait: Drive. It is a given that the PC is very invested in their personal quest (represented by their narrative arc chosen during Step 2), but Drive shows how much of themselves they put into that purpose.

Drive is the fourth Aspect of the Character, in addition to Consciousness, Instinct, and Trauma. As defined in Book 1 – Universe, on p. 211, these Aspects represent the various facets of the PC's personality. Once determined, the score is written down in the dedicated space on the Character Sheet.
The higher the PC's Drive is, the harder it will be for them to step away from what matters to them, particularly when they feel that they may make an important difference. In that regard, it is related to Instinct and depends on the Character's Combativeness.
A PC with a high Drive will find it very hard to keep a cool head when facing something that has to do with their driving passion. However, having a low Drive does not mean that it is less important than for a PC with a high Drive, simply that they will be more easily able to hold themselves back and act cautiously. In any case, the personal quest defined by the narrative arc will remain a major preoccupation of the PC.

Drive: Passion + Determination

- Passion is the Fault related to the Way of Combativeness. It is determined at Character Creation and is equal to the Combativeness rating. The Faults are detailed on p. 234 of Book 1 – Universe.

- For each PC, Determination points are distributed through the Focus relating to the key moments of their past. Between 0 and 5 Determination points can be obtained. The rules for attributing these points are detailed in the chapter on Focuses (see "Earning Determination points," p. 81)

- For each Determination point earned, the PC will also earn Experience points or even special Advantages, which will represent their energy and passion for their personal quest (see "Advantages and Determination points" on the next page).

Drive ranges from 1 to 10, and follows the rules of Test rolls as described on p. 234 of Book 1 – Universe. As long as the actions of the PC go toward the accomplishment of their personal quest, no roll is necessary. However, if they try to ignore it, they will have to fight that which obsesses them, the same way they would struggle against their Faults (related to their Ways). On such occasions, the PC will have to overcome their Drive lest they pursue their quest without paying heed to the consequences.



Eoghan learns that Céliane is in danger. He would normally rush to her aid, whatever the risks, but he may have to choose between Céliane and another urgent matter, such as the survival of one of his companions. If Eoghan tries to get a grip on himself, the PC will have to succeed on a Test roll based on Drive for the Character not to give in to this powerful call.

Advantages and Determination points

Each Determination point earned brings a particular bonus. The bonuses stack.

- 1st Determination point = 10 Experience points;
- 2nd Determination point = 10 Experience points;
- 3rd Determination point = 10 Experience points;
- 4th Determination point = pick an Advantage from among those below;
- 5th Determination point = pick a second Advantage.

Multiple narrative arcs.
If the PC has several narrative arcs, they can obtain Determination points for each arc, but they can't obtain more than two Advantages, and will earn only half the Experience for each Determination point.

If a PC follows a single narrative arc and gets 5 Determination points, they will have earned a total of 30 Experience points and 2 Advantages. If the PC has two narrative arcs and gets 5 Determination points for one and 2 points for the other, they will have earned a total of 25 Experience points and 2 Advantages.

The Advantages

If the PC has earned enough Determination points, they can choose one or two Advantages from the following. They can also pick a single Advantage twice, to double the obtained bonus. This information must be written down on the Character Sheet, in the "Personal quest" section. Note that, unlike the Advantages listed in Book 1 – Universe, the Advantages below cannot be bought at creation, and can only be obtained by earning enough Determination points.

Tenacious
The intensity of the PC's personal quest grants them one additional Survival point. If this Advantage is picked twice, the PC becomes Dogged, and gets a second Survival point. These Advantages can stack with Survival Instinct and Survivor (see Book 1 –Universe, p. 214), which means a PC can have up to 7 Survival points. This is a truly exceptional case, and this should be reflected in how the PC is portrayed.

Talented
The PC's emotional investment in a particular field grants them a +1 bonus in a given Domain (for example, Finn could have a +1 in Magience). If this Advantage is doubled, the PC becomes Excellent and gets a +2 bonus in the same Domain.

Steadfast
The personal quest of the PC strengthens their mind, increasing their Mental Resistance by 1. Doubling this Advantage means the Character becomes Iron-Willed, resulting in a second increase of 1 in Mental Resistance.

Exalted
The personal quest of the PC improves their Exaltation score by 5 points. Choosing this advantage twice means the PC is Mystical and improves their Exaltation score by 5 more points. This also means that the narrative arc of the PC will be strongly tinged with faith or some other kind of belief.

Energetic
The personal quest of the PC strengthens their primordial energy, resulting in a +5 increase to their Rindath score. If this Advantage is taken a second time, they become Fiery, for an extra +5 increase.

Toughened
The ordeals borne by the PC through their personal quest have hardened them physically. This hardship-fostered resilience results in the addition of one point to the "Bad" category of their Health Condition chart. If this Advantage is doubled, the PC becomes Hard as Nails, and gets a second bonus point, this time in the "Critical" category.

Incorporating Preexisting PCs

The previous chapter, "Advanced Character Creation," introduced several steps to best make the PCs part of the story they will experience. The aim is to put the Players at the heart of the story by giving their alter egos deep-seated reasons to feel concerned by the events that will take place.
What happens if the Leader and Players have already started playing and the PCs have no connection with Dearg? It may seem artificial to add elements to the background of a PC who has already existed for some time.

Actually, what may seem like an insurmountable obstacle is not that hard to bypass. As explained in the previous chapter, playing a campaign where PCs are the center of the story comes with a few narrative constraints. The purpose here is to ease preexisting PCs into these prerequisites. Here are several tools and tips for adapting the steps of Advanced Character Creation to already existing PCs.

Step 1
Developing the ties with Dearg

If the Players already have Characters, it is very unlikely that they have any ties with Dearg. There are several possible solutions available to the Leader to solve this:

- **Undefined Origins.** The Leader is encouraged to review the background of preexisting PCs. If some Players remained vague about their origins, the Leader can suggest that the Character was in fact born in Dearg. One or several PCs may then wish to come back to their native village, or perhaps they receive a letter asking them to return as soon as possible?

- **Change the name.** It may be that the Characters are from a remote mountainous region that could incidentally be similar to Dearg. If this does not come as too drastic a change for the Characters, the Leader can give the Players the option of changing the name of their native place to Dearg. Conversely, Dearg can also be rechristened to use the name imagined by the Player in their story. Reacting to the Players' ideas is always a good means to draw them in.

- **Journey to Dearg.** It might be that in spite of all these efforts, the PCs have no connection to Dearg, and it is very difficult to picture them as being from this region. The Leader can then imagine a story that justifies them traveling there. Once the group has reached the Vale, the narrative arcs can assert themselves.

Step 2
Narrative arc

Normally, the origin of the narrative arcs lies in the Character's past, going back as far as their childhood. The four Focuses of the "Resurgences" chapter depict these highlights that will structure the involvement of each PC in the upcoming campaign. Hence, it may seem difficult to fit in the planned narrative arcs for preexisting Characters, but it is actually very feasible. Again, the Leader and Players should go through the various possibilities they have together. They can choose one of those suggested below, or mix them together to reach something everyone will be satisfied with:

- **Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's past.** This is the most straightforward solution. If it does not clash with the PC's concept or their story, the Player can merge one or several elements of a narrative arc into their Character's background.

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's present. Another simple but effective idea: the prerequisites listed in the narrative arcs can be played out in the PC's present.

Fast-forward. If the situation is really complicated, the Leader can suggest fast-forwarding to the start of the campaign. It is a very effective solution, albeit a radical one. The gaming session can start thus:

"Since your last adventure, one year has passed. Tonight, you are sitting at a table in the Red Dog Inn in Dearg, a small village in the north of Taol-Kaer. One year ago, most of you didn't even know about the existence of this place, but since then, much has changed... Tonight, it is time to reminisce about the highlights of the past year."

In this way, the Leader leaves enough time in the story of the PCs to incorporate the prerequisites of each narrative arc. The Focuses can be played as memories of the past year.

Adapting the narrative arcs

Now, here is how the previously detailed advice can be applied to the four main narrative arcs described on p. 56 to 58. Examples based on fast-forwarding are not provided, since this solution bypasses the problem completely and makes Advanced Character Creation part of the process.

Narrative arc of Love

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's past. A warrior from the south of Taol-Kaer might remember their military service spent in the border region of Fearìl and keep a passionate love for Céliane deep in their heart... while also remembering their meeting–and rivalry–with Mael Mac Govrian. They never told the other PCs of their feelings. They thought that their love for Céliane would burn out, but far from it: they ache to see her all the more.

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's present. For some reason or another, the PC comes to Dearg and meets Céliane. It is love at first sight, a rush of powerful emotions they had never felt before. They also acquaint themselves with Mael Mac Govrian, who quickly becomes their rival as he plans to marry her.

Narrative arc of Ethics

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's past. The PC never told their companions, but they studied Magience for a time at a school in Reizh. Likewise, the PC never spoke about the death of a relative of theirs that actually sparked their deep conviction that science is the only concrete way to improve mankind's lot.

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's present. The PC suffered the loss of a close relative, taken by a minor disease that the local healers were unable to cure. There is a bold way to incorporate this narrative arc: if the PC is currently a Demorthèn, they may themselves be unable to cure this dear person, even their Ogham proving powerless. Similarly to Finn's story, this tragedy may result in massively rejecting the Demorthèn philosophy and following the path of a Magientist instead. Obviously, this must be done with the Player's agreement and be fully justified to make sense, but it can make for memorable scenes.

Narrative arc of Adoption

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's past. The PC was simply adopted by a devout family of followers of the principles of the Creator.

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's present. One of the PCs may learn suddenly (by letter, from the revelation of a dying relative) that his parents in fact adopted him and that one of them is secretly a faithful of the Temple. If possible, the Leader should locate this adoptive family in Dearg, which would provide a very good reason for the PCs to come to the village. For example, the PC might come to the deathbed of his gravely ill parents who would then make this revelation.

Narrative arc of Guilt

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's past. In the course of events that they probably kept to themselves, the PC indirectly caused the death of a child in a situation similar to that described in the profile of Adeliane. There are several interesting ways to bring this narrative arc back to the PC's present. For example, they may have repressed this childhood memory and have nightmares they can never remember. However, the PC is prone to bouts of sleep talking, and their companions are starting to piece together their story. A few hypnosis sessions by a competent occultist (like the one passing by Dearg in the Focus "Coir: The River Child") should allow the PC to remember this terrible moment. Just the quest for their own buried memories may be fodder for a few thrilling scenarios. Another possibility is to tell the Player that their PC is having more and more nightmares connected to this tragic event, even though they seemed to be over it. Why the resurgence? This approach gives the plot a veneer of mystery.

Incorporate the narrative arc into the PC's present. The events described in Adeliane's story occur in the PC's present. A child, whose predispositions seem to indicate that they could become a great Demorthèn, asks the PC to take them to see the C'maoghs. The PC accepts, and the child disappears. Incorporating the arc this way will have all the more impact if the Leader takes the time to develop the relationship between the PC and the child.



Adapting and Managing Your Campaign

This part contains advice for the Leader on how to adapt the official campaign to their needs. It also includes tools to deal with the main difficulties they may meet in developing their campaign.

Adapting the campaign to your needs

It may be nothing new for seasoned Leaders, but it still bears reminding: the universe of Shadows of Esteren belongs to the Players who bring it to life, and each Leader is free to adapt the official content as much as they deem it necessary for it to fit the story they wish to tell.

Here are several examples that illustrate this principle:

Changing the story by adapting the narrative arcs.

The structure of the official campaign leaves a great margin of adaptation to imaginative Leaders. Indeed, this book describes the setting upon which future adventures are built. In this campaign, the setting is Dearg, and the scenarios included are intended to take place in this environment where the PCs will have various motivations and goals according to their narrative arcs. The Leader can use the game aids detailing the setting to imagine their own stories, adapted to new narrative arcs designed for their Players. Of course, some of the basic components can still be used as they are. For example, Fearìl will probably still be ravaged, and the Leader can therefore still use the scenario "Fearìl's Doom." However, the PCs may be involved in other ways, according to their respective narrative arcs. This will require some work on the part of the Leader, but it is entirely possible to transform the story by changing its perspective through new narrative arcs.

A source of inspiration.

For Leaders who wish to design their own scenarios, the campaign's chapters should be a big source of inspiration from which they can pick elements to build an original story. They can feature this or that Character, alter a location, or draw inspiration from a scenario to develop their own campaign. The different chapters provide many concrete examples of what it is possible to do.

Playing it in addition to another campaign.

In this case, the Leader will continue their own Campaign while having their group of Players create new Characters to play this new story as an alternative to the currently unfolding one. First, it can be handy to play two campaigns at the same time, in case of the sudden absence of a crucial PC for one of the two stories. Moreover, playing two campaigns helps change the mood of the game. The Leader can even introduce connections between the two stories. This will give the Players two different views of the world of Esteren and make for a more diverse gaming experience.



The PCs' background

The previous chapter brings Character Creation to the foreground and emphasizes the importance of defining clear narrative stakes for each PC. As was previously explained, putting the Character at the center of the story requires preparatory steps. It is in the Players' interest to focus on their Characters' development according to the suggested prerequisites. However, for several possible reasons, a Player may have a hard time coming up with a background for their Character:

- The Player is a beginner, and they have no idea how to do it. In spite of the other Players' advice, they cannot construct something they are happy with.
- The Player is new to the gaming group, and they do not have the time to invent a detailed background.
- The Player is experienced, but they have never been comfortable with detailing their Characters from the get-go, preferring to flesh them out as the game goes along.

The Leader should not be worried about such things, especially if they only apply to a minority of their Players. On the contrary, an incomplete or blank background is a good opportunity for the Leader to establish, during the first sessions, the plots and ties with other Characters that will be the frame of the PC's narrative arc. With this perspective, it is perfectly acceptable for some PCs to only have a limited background, or even none at all. Once the first session has been played, this leaves the Leader free to propose that the concerned Players follow one of the secondary narrative arcs, or even a main one that no one has picked yet. In the beginning, the presence of a PC in the group can be explained with a vague rationale, which will be expanded upon as the campaign goes on, with the collaboration of the other Players.

In the end, the Leader is encouraged to leave some in-game time to indecisive Players. After a few sessions, they can come back to these Players to discuss the historical and biographical details of their Characters, which may be done bit by bit over the course of several sessions. In that regard, the Focuses are an excellent means to design a PC's background in-game.

Incorporating a new PC with independent scenes

An independent scene is a narrative episode than can be inserted into most scenarios whenever necessary. There are two main types of independent scenes: general, and specifically related to the campaign. In both cases, they can be used to introduce a new PC to the campaign:

General independent scene. A bandit attack, a river bursting its banks, a storm at sea, etc. All these events may occur during a campaign. Once they have been prepared, they can be inserted as a basis for easier improvisation, the frame for a random or minor event. Independent scenes are meant to be meaningful, short, and intense due to how dangerous or atypical they are. They are a convenient way to introduce a new Character, since the need to help one another overcome a crisis creates strong bonds that can bring a group together.

Independent scene related to a campaign. In this case, the Leader prepares short, parallel episodes centered on one of their story's main NPCs, similar to the Focuses (see p. 80). The new PC will face this NPC by themselves. They can be the victim of an injustice, or witness a mysterious event. This approach can introduce a new piece of information tightly connected to the structural elements of the campaign, while shedding new light on the story, possibly acting as a clue.

A heterogeneous, accepting group

This matter was already detailed in Book 1 – Universe (p. 179 to 181), but here, it is explored from a new angle, adapted to a budding campaign.

Shadows of Esteren is a game featuring ideological conflicts: Demorthèn, adepts of the Temple, and Magientists each have a specific way of dealing with the reality of their world. A Leader may fear a confrontation between animistic, monotheistic, and rationalistic schools of thought.

However, as can be seen from the group of premade Characters of Book 1 – Universe, the presence of the three factions within a single group will provide material for great gaming moments. The four main narrative arcs even encourage the Players to each pick a faction among the Demorthèn, the adepts of the Temple, and the Magientists.

This implies that the PCs are moderate in their convictions. The Leader should remind the Players that a fanatical PC may create problems within the group and spoil the atmosphere among the participants. Verbal disputes may be gripping and remain memorable gaming moments, but frequent, violent confrontations between the PCs may quickly prove tiring for everyone. Also, the PCs will quickly notice that to survive, their best option is to cooperate.

Dealing with the death of a PC

In a campaign where great importance is given to the development of Character-focused plots through narrative arcs, the death of a PC can prove to be quite a problem. Indeed, if a PC suddenly dies, what becomes of the story that was unfolding with them at the center?

At the same time, in Shadows of Esteren, one of the game's major attributes is how difficult it is to survive. The Characters are not supermen, and a nasty wound can have disastrous consequences. If the Players feel that the Leader will spare the PCs no matter what risks they take, since they follow a narrative arc that is decisive for



the campaign, the horrific atmosphere of the game will soon suffer from it. For the danger to remain credible and the mood to stay intact, the PCs must be aware that death can happen at any time.
At first sight, such a difficulty might seem insurmountable, as these two requirements contradict one another: on the one hand, focusing the campaign on a narrative arc putting the PC at the heart of the story; on the other hand, a universe where simple survival is never a given.
Closer consideration reveals that things are more nuanced. First, the objective is not to destroy the PCs, but to make them feel that they live in a dangerous world where acting haphazardly can have dire consequences. This point is detailed in Book 1 – Universe, on p. 240.

Here is more food for thought that should allow the Leader to reconcile the possibility of the PCs dying with the ambition of building a campaign where they will be the focus of the story:

1. Technically, the system of Shadows of Esteren makes it possible to avoid sudden death. Unless they suffer too many damage points in one hit (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 239), the PC will not immediately die, but will be Dying, which leaves some time for their companions to save their life. Intelligently managing their Survival points can also give the PCs additional chances to make it out alive.

2. The Leader can replace an apparently unavoidable death with a handicap for the PC. This penalty can take several forms, from physical damage to narrative tight spots. Thus, the PC may have been saved by NPCs... and wake up in a jail, or in one of Smàrag's slave pens.

3. The Leader and the Players must keep in mind that the goal of the campaign is not the survival of the PCs as much as the resolution of the chosen narrative arc.

Though the first and second alternatives make it possible for the Leader to avoid deaths of a brutal or "accidental" nature (for example, when a Player gets abysmal die rolls), they should not make the Players forget that they are responsible for their actions and must bear the consequences of any carelessness.

What if... the whole group dies!

In spite of the various ways you can avoid the brutal death of the PCs, it may happen that their end is inevitable, or even that it serves as the crux of a dramatic scene. Worst-case scenario, the whole group may be wiped out, leaving no survivors. This may seem disastrous for the Leader managing the campaign, but as was previously pointed out, the stakes of this campaign rest not as much on the survival of the PCs as on the resolution of the narrative arcs chosen by the Players. Therefore, each player can create a new PC that will inherit the arc initially chosen. This may even result in very interesting narrative perspectives.

Here are several ideas to recycle the four main narrative arcs, should a Player have to create a new Character:

Narrative arc of Love. Any Character close to Céliane might take up Eoghan's quest: a brother or sister, a close friend, etc. The Leader may even give the Player a preexisting NPC that they can make their own. It may be Céliane's father, Baorìg, or her uncle Wylard, whose adventures are described in Book 1 – Universe (p. 10, 11, 13, 95, 138, and 173), as well as in the Focus about the narrative arc of Love.

Narrative arc of Ethics. The first possibility is to re-use Liam's narrative arc: the new Character can seek those who directly or indirectly caused the death of their brother. The Leader can then decide that it is the same organization that Finn fought. As with the narrative arc of Love, the new PC could also be a close friend of Finn's who will take up his quest.

Narrative arc of Adoption. The simplest solution is to invent a brother or sister for Joris. The siblings were separated at the time of the adoption, and the PC, who has so far lived in an orphanage or among monks, might follow the footsteps of their late sibling. Another solution would be for the Player to be a Sigire, curious about this adoption story and suspecting a vast plot reaching as far as the highest religious authorities of Gwidre.

Narrative arc of Guilt. There were several children on the trip to the lake... the new PC might be one of them, also haunted by nightmares showing the missing child. Now an adult, they hear about the young Demorthèn (in this case, Adeliane) who died brutally. Could it be a curse? Could the new PC be the next one in line? These questions might drive them to take up Adeliane's quest, in order to discover what happened to the child who vanished in the mist.

If all the PCs have been killed, piecing together a whole new group fitting the campaign will require more work from the Leader and the Players. To do so, they are invited to follow the Advanced Character Creation process detailed earlier in this book, which should now include a connection to one of their former PCs.

Campaign Chronicle

The experience and advancement system, as described in Book 1 – Universe, details three ways the PCs can obtain Experience points during the game: Confrontation, Progression of the Plot, and Interpretation of the PC (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 228).

The optional rule "Campaign Chronicle" adds a fourth way to earn XPs for the PCs. As with the other factors, the Campaign Chronicle grants between 1 and 5 XPs for each scenario resolved. There are two ways the Leader can use this optional rule:

In the first version, the additional XPs will only apply to one PC at a time for each scenario. The principle is simple: each of the Players, one after the other, will have the responsibility of writing down the tale of the scenario as it unfolded, from their Character's point of view. At the start of the next gaming session, the Leader will attribute between 1 and 5 Experience points to the writer of the Chronicle. Another Player is then charged with summarizing the new episode. Session after session, the Players will create a great fresco, which will cover the highlights of the campaign. This contribution will reinforce their commitment and will allow an absent Player to know about a scenario they missed without it delaying the start of a new session.

In the second version of this optional rule, the Leader can simply decide to attribute Campaign Chronicle XPs to every Player writing a report of the scenario. Thus, for very involved groups of Players, where everyone writes the diary of their own PC, the Leader may decide to attribute Campaign Chronicle XPs to every PC at the start of each scenario.

In our example, the group is made of three Players and one Leader. They all agree to use the optional Campaign Chronicle rule. Once the first scenario is over, one of the Players volunteers to write down a report of this story from their Character's point of view. At the next gaming session, the Leader attributes them bonus XPs, and a new scenario begins, for which a second Player writes the report. The remaining Player will then take care of the report of a third scenario. Once everyone has written a part of the Chronicle, the cycle resumes, starting again with the first Player, who will write the report of the fourth session. One after the other, each Player has the opportunity to participate and earn bonus XPs.

Evaluating the amount of Experience points

It may seem difficult to "rate" a Chronicle composed by a Player with the attribution of a certain amount of XPs. Actually, it is really no different from other factors of attribution such as Interpretation or Confrontation. It bears reminding the Players and Leader of a few simple principles:

A cooperative mindset

It is not a contest of who will write the most beautiful or the longest Chronicle. Everyone has their own talents and inspirations. Moreover, this is not a competition between the Players. Those who are more comfortable with writing Chronicles may assist those who struggle, if only because a PC's Experience improves their odds of survival, and may thus influence the group's fate.

Respect everyone's freedom

If a Player does not feel like taking part in writing the Chronicle, the Leader and their fellow Players should respect their choice. However, the Player will have to accept that they will not get any bonus XPs. Who knows? Maybe with time, they will also feel like trying their hand at it.

Equity

The Leader should discuss with the Players which distribution system would be the fairest and most balanced one to apply. For example, they may consider participation in the Chronicle to be automatically worth 5 points for those who write it, in order to encourage and reward the effort. Or they may agree that the basic reward is 3 points, with bonus points being attributed according to the involvement of the Player. Each group can adapt these factors as best fits their tastes.

Creating New Narrative Arcs

Once the Players have chosen a main narrative arc, they are free to design new secondary arcs with the Leader's approval in order to customize the campaign and make it unique. The effects on the game should be obvious: when Players can actively take part in the story, their involvement becomes all the stronger.

This optional rule for the narrative arcs system introduces four steps to design your own narrative arc and incorporate it into your PC's background. Once these steps have been carried out, the Leader can read the "Resurgences" chapter for advice on how to adapt the scenarios to their needs.

Why create new arcs?

There are various reasons why you might want to design your own narrative arcs. Here are a few possible ones:

A new creation step

This chapter can be considered a whole new creation step. This is for Leaders and Players who want to go the extra mile in order to customize their gaming experience. One after another, each Player will design their own, tailor-made narrative arc, which will be included in addition to the one they initially picked among the four main narrative arcs. This would also be suitable if the Leader has a large number of Players and would like to design new main narrative arcs so that each participant has one.

Adapting the campaign to your needs

It may be that the group already has an ongoing campaign, designed by the Leader, with its own stakes, goals, and protagonists. This chapter will allow a Leader who wishes to play the official campaign of Shadows of Esteren to incorporate and structure their own plots as narrative arcs. This process will present an opportunity to define and detail these stories, mainly through the Focuses–specific scenarios described in the next chapter.

Giving your Players the opportunity to be involved.

Players often have plenty of ideas for their Character's background, which can provide many interesting narrative hooks. However, it is not always easy for the Leader to incorporate these elements, and Players may feel frustrated that important parts of their PC are left largely unexplored. The system for creating narrative arcs is the perfect way to make use of their ideas and make them part of the campaign. However, as rewarding as it may prove for the Players, they should not lose sight of the fact that the narrative arcs system was designed to give every one of them some time to shine. If the same Player constantly hogs the spotlight, the others may get tired of it.



Step 1
Initial event

The first step to building one's narrative arc is to imagine an initial event that sparked the PC's sense of purpose. If the Leader's campaign is ongoing, or if the Player created their Character some time ago, this step should be all the easier, and the initial event will be included in the PC's background or past adventures.

Here are a few possible types of initial events:

- **1- A puzzle**. The PC was faced with an enigma that made a strong impact on them. It can be a concrete puzzle (the discovery of an old parchment), an unexplainable scene they witnessed (the manifestation of a ghost, or any other strange phenomenon), or a heavy secret from their past. The initial event will be the key moment when they encountered this puzzle for the first time.

- **2- Feelings**. The PC can have feelings for someone that guides their life. The initial event can focus on their initial meeting with this person, or on the moment when these feelings first appeared.

- **3- A disappearance**. Someone close to the PC disappears: a violent murder, vanishing without a trace, kidnapping, self-sacrifice to save the PC, etc. The initial event will be the moment the disappearance occurred.

- **4- An aspiration**. The PC has great moral standards, or may simply be very ambitious. There is something within them that guides their life–an ideal. It can be a life philosophy, revolutionary ideas, moral positions, or professional ambition. The initial event can depict what triggered this deep aspiration.

- **5- A mistake**. The PC made a mistake, and they are still paying the price. It can be an oversight that brought about a catastrophe, or a slight that earned them a sworn enemy. The initial event will portray this error.

Example 1: Lea has just created her PC, a young Demorthèn called Sylviane. With the other Players' agreement, Lea has chosen the narrative arc of Guilt, related to the profile of Adeliane, from which she drew inspiration to create her Character. Since Lea is a committed Player who likes to develop her PCs, the Leader suggests that she design a secondary narrative arc in addition to the main arc she has chosen. Lea is rather interested in the idea of her PC having a sister (as it is the case for Adeliane, who has a sister called Yldiane). After some discussion, Lea decides that the initial event of her secondary narrative arc will be the separation of Sylviane and her sister.

Example 2: William created a Magientist called Soenn a few months ago and regularly plays in the Shadows of Esteren campaign designed by his Leader, who decides to introduce the scenarios of Book 3 – Dearg into their campaign. The Leader proposes that William goes through Advanced Character Creation in order to incorporate one of the main narrative arcs into Soenn's story. Since William's PC already has his own story, the Leader uses the chapter "Incorporating Preexisting PCs," which fits the situation. William is most interested in the narrative arc of Ethics, related to the profile of Finn. He decides that Soenn never told anyone about his younger sister's death, or about how his training truly went (the prerequisites of this arc). William also wishes to incorporate a secondary arc that will tie in with the plot of the current campaign: Soenn suffers from partial amnesia, and seems to have enemies that hound him for a reason he cannot remember. The initial event of his secondary narrative arc quickly comes to William's mind, as he remembers a scenario where his PC woke up in a Magientist complex, locked up in a cell with no memory...



Step 2
Theme and name of the arc

Once the initial event of the narrative arc is broadly defined, the Player can detail the theme of their arc and give it a name. They should write down a few lines to provide a summary of the dramatic stakes of their story, as was done for the themes covered by each of the eight narrative arcs in the Advanced Character Creation chapter.

Example 1: Lea is now trying to define the theme of her arc: "It will be the story of a complicated relationship between two sisters, who were separated at a very early age." The Leader approves, and asks Lea, "Do you think the sisters know each other a little, or not at all? We could call your narrative arc 'Sisterhood'... unless your Character's sister took a radically different path from hers?" Lea, inspired, replies, "Sure, I like that idea! But instead of choosing different paths, they could both be Demorthèn... rivals!" The Leader concludes, "Alright, so we'll call it the arc of Sisterhood, based on the story of two sisters who became Demorthèn with very different convictions."

Example 2: Drawing from his PC's past adventures, William very easily defines the theme of his narrative arc: "Soenn's arc is based on his amnesia; he wants to understand what happened to him and, above all, why it happened to him. It will be the arc of Memory!"

Step 3
Ally and enemy

As was explained previously in the Advanced Character Creation chapter, each narrative arc comes with an ally and an enemy (see "Ally and Enemy," p. 72). If the PC has already been played for some time, they may already have met their ally and enemy. If they have not, the Leader has two options:

1- Letting the Player come up with them.
The Leader will simply let the Player imagine an ally and an enemy themselves for their narrative arc.

2- Discovering them in-game.
The Leader can introduce allies and enemies during the scenarios of the "Resurgences" chapter.

Example 1: "Lea, we have defined your narrative arc. You now need to imagine an ally and an enemy related to this arc. Any ideas?" After a few minutes of discussion, Lea cannot manage to find a story that she is happy with. The Leader therefore decides, "That's okay. If that's all right with you, we'll determine that later, during a particular scenario..."

Example 2: For William, this step is once again made easier by his PC's former adventures. He has no trouble taking two important Characters from his past who Soenn still interacts with. After talking about it for a moment with the Leader, he writes down his Character's ally and enemy.

Step 4
Defining an objective

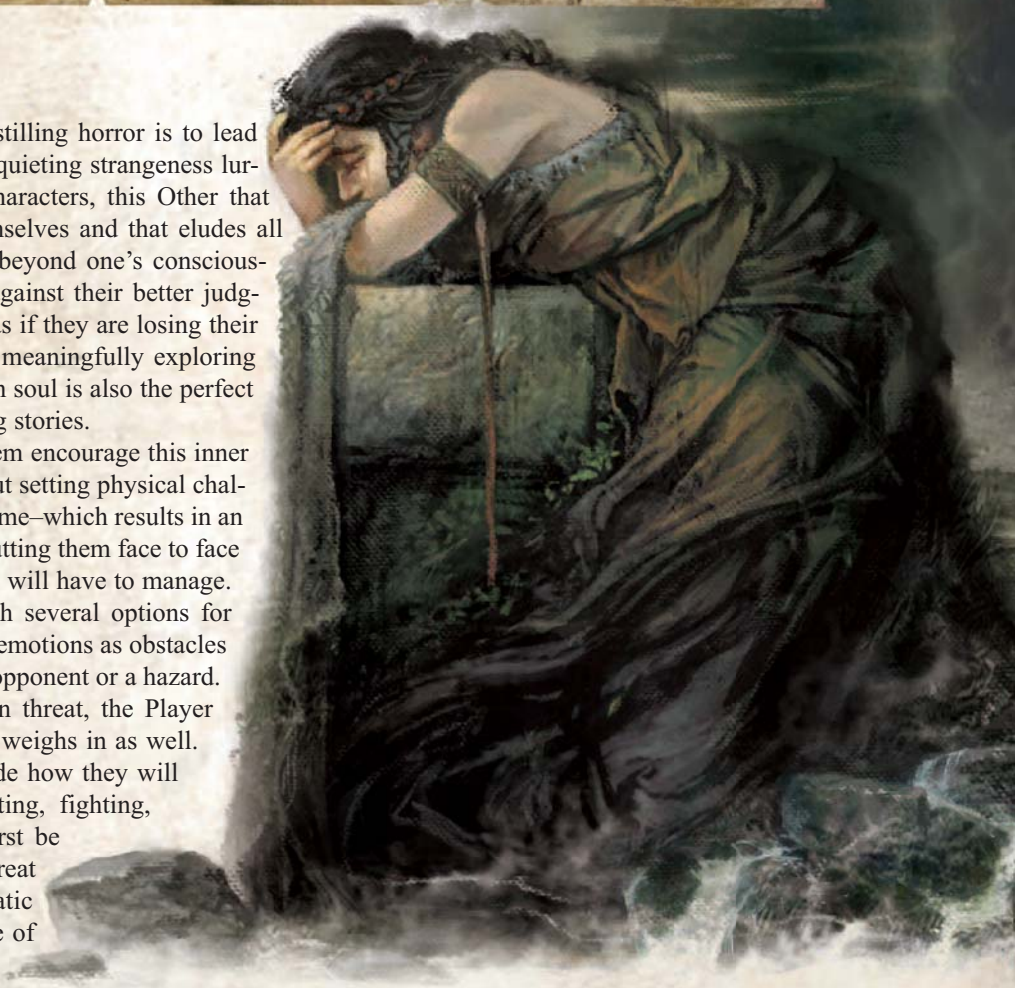
The last step is an important one: defining a goal for the narrative arc, a way to resolve it, at least partially. This step, implicitly defined in the other arcs, is an easy way to check whether the new narrative arc is viable plot-wise.

Example 1: "Let's try to imagine your objective now: what would Sylviane like to accomplish?" Lea thinks for a moment before answering: "She'd like to find her sister, who has gone missing! She's been hearing unsettling rumors about her..."

Example 2: For William, the objective of his PC is clear, since it is the one he has been pursuing for several months already: to understand what has happened to him, and hopefully even regain his memory!



Conscience Rules But Does Not Govern



One possible method of instilling horror is to lead the Players to feel the disquieting strangeness lurking deep inside their Characters, this Other that everyone has within themselves and that eludes all control. Desire, this power that goes beyond one's consciousness, can lead the Characters to act against their better judgment, possibly going as far as to feel as if they are losing their minds. In addition to being a way of meaningfully exploring one's dark side, this facet of the human soul is also the perfect material for building powerful, moving stories.

Shadows of Esteren's setting and system encourage this inner exploration. The game is not only about setting physical challenges that the Characters must overcome–which results in an action-oriented story–but also about putting them face to face with overwhelming emotions that they will have to manage. This chapter provides the Leader with several options for using the Characters' own psyche and emotions as obstacles for them to overcome, similarly to an opponent or a hazard. During the emergence of an unknown threat, the Player will not be in full control: the Leader weighs in as well. However, the Players are free to decide how they will deal with this adversity: by negotiating, fighting, fleeing, etc. This approach may at first be confusing to the Players, but it opens great opportunities to develop the dramatic strength of a story and the atmosphere of the campaign.

Who controls the Characters' emotions?

It is often said that you cannot control your emotions, and this is indeed one of the challenges presented to the Players of Shadows of Esteren. The objective is to confront the Characters with the part of themselves that they have no control over. The basic system of Shadows of Esteren was designed with this in mind. Indeed, the Players may manage their Characters' emotions most of the time, but the Leader is in charge of secretly keeping track of the PCs' Sanity, without the Players knowing the precise psychological condition of their Characters. Also, in the case of the Tests, the Leader can ask a Player to roll a die to determine the emergence of an emotion related to one of the five Ways. These aspects of the system are meant to make the Players feel that they are not entirely in control of their Characters, who may at times have a mind of their own. The Players' freedom and the dramatic stakes lie in the choices and decisions that they will make while their Characters are in the throes of emotions that unsettle them.

The narrative arcs system goes even further in this direction, mainly through Drive checks. The PCs' personal quest may overwhelm them and go beyond how the Players would want their Characters to act. For example, in the arc of Love, the emotions that the Character feels can result in actions taken in the sway of a strong sentiment. The same goes for Vengeance or Guilt.

Creating adversity

In a role-playing game, the Leader presents the Players with an adversity that they will have to overcome. Usually, this adversity takes the shape of the Characters' physical limits that are imposed upon the Players. For example, the Health Condition system will impose penalties according to the wounds received: the Players' control over their Characters will erode until the Characters pass out from their injuries, which will then deprive the Players of any influence they may have over the story.

In most role-playing games, the Players have absolute control over the emotions and subjective experience of their Characters–when this inner aspect is not absent altogether from the story's stakes. One of the objectives of Shadows of Esteren is to set emotions at the heart of the story and to make use of them to create adversity. The Characters have to navigate between contradictory feelings, and a challenge proposed to the Players is to take a stance regarding these conflicts, whether through Character interpretation or through the appropriate Resolution rolls (Tests, Drive checks, etc.) This is why, in Shadows of Esteren, the system gives the Leader some hold over the Characters' emotions.

This matter is a delicate one for the Leader to handle, considering that the Characters' emotions can sometimes overlap with those of the Players, and an overbearing approach can breed resentment. For this reason, it is important that the Leader and Players discuss this before playing. For the game to take place in an optimal environment and for everyone to have fun, all of the Players should be in agreement with this principle.

Horror and loss of control

The unavoidable rise of emotions, being both an irrepressible and intimate process, is a major horrific tool for the Leader. A scenario may very well feature no Feondas and focus instead on the inner turmoil of the Characters. Here, resolution rolls will not be used to play out a physical fight (through Attack rolls), but to solve a personal conflict (through Tests or Mental Resistance rolls, for example).

For Players and Leaders who love dramatic interpretations of these aspects, it is possible to portray this inner adversity while entirely forgoing Resolution rolls. Such rolls may, however, have a true narrative meaning and help sustain the atmosphere during the game: they may represent an ordeal, similar to combat. Will the Player pass the Test? Can the Characters keep themselves in check, or will they go beyond the point of no return?

Control: not too much, not too little

Though the fact that Players are not totally in control of their Characters' emotions gives way to a story with a much stronger dramatic tension, the Leader should obviously not dictate everything that the Characters are supposed to be feeling. In the same way that it is important that the Players retain some freedom of action, they must have some freedom of interpretation regarding their alter egos' feelings. When Players feel free to act as they wish and notice that their initiatives have an influence over the course of events, they are bound to be all the more involved in the story and in meaningfully portraying their Characters. The same goes for the emotions that their Characters feel. The Leader's job is to find a good balance between these concerns.

An agreement between the Players and the Leader

Players may find it off-putting if the Leader is too invasive in regards to deciding how their Characters should feel. To avoid this snag, the Leader and the Players should discuss this principle: Players are not entirely in control of their Characters' feelings, and the challenge will be in having to deal with their Characters' emotions, which may sometimes spiral out of the Players' grasp.

Some Players may feel little interest in this type of introspective conflict. A role-playing group is sometimes composed of Players with very different tastes. For example, Leaders should adjust how often Tests are used according to each Player's profile. Some prefer action or simply want to experience the story they are a part of, going along for the ride, like reading a book or watching a movie. Discussing this before the beginning of the game will let everyone involved express their preferences. The Leader should then be able to provide a gaming experience that everyone will feel comfortable with and enjoy.

Constructing a scene around an emotion

Using an emotion as a starting point, the Leader can create an interesting situation starting with a Test roll. Fear, sadness, anger, surprise, joy, and disgust are six major emotions from which many variants and mixtures can be derived.

If, in a given situation, a PC is subjected to a strong emotion, the Leader can explain to the Player what the Character is feeling. The Player then has a choice between following the Leader's suggestions (which means that the Character gives in to the emotion) and fighting the rising feelings in order to maintain control. The Leader can then ask for a Test roll to determine the PC's immediate behavior. Depending on how intense the scene is, the Leader can give the Test a bonus or a penalty, generally ranging from +2 to -2. Note that if the Test is related to the PC's narrative arc, it will likely be based on Drive.

The situations where a violent emotion can overcome a Character are always very brief moments, generally not lasting longer than a scene.

The chart below details many variants of the six major emotions. These should serve as a basis for the Leader to construct scenes in which the PCs will be faced with these emotions:

Variants of emotions

Fearful:

careful, pessimistic, worried, timid, wary, jumpy, intimidated, anguished, distressed, horrified, panicked, etc.

Associated Ways: Empathy, Reason



Sad:

disappointed, melancholic, nostalgic, sullen, moved, pensive, glum, discouraged, tormented, unsettled, dull, defeated, etc.

Associated Ways: Conviction, Empathy



Angry:

bitter, tense, suspicious, moody, touchy, hurt, slighted, grudging, vehement, exasperated, outraged, frustrated, revolted, fierce, raging, frenetic, etc.

Associated Ways: Combativeness, Creativity



Surprised:

hesitant, shaken, disoriented, confused, speechless, flabbergasted, stupefied, stunned, shocked, etc.

Associated Ways: Empathy, Reason



Joyful:

optimistic, entertained, charmed, dazzled, captivated, amazed, cheerful, euphoric, etc.

Associated Ways: Creativity, Empathy



Disgusted:

appalled, nauseated, repulsed, indignant, queasy, etc.

Associated Ways: Conviction, Empathy



For each category of emotion, two associated Ways are provided. The Player uses the higher of the two Ways involved in the Test, but the lower one can be used if the context justifies it. Usually, Test rolls only happen for major Ways (i.e. with a score of 4 or more), but in such cases, the Leader can ask for a Test roll regardless of the Way's score. The Character having a low score simply means that it will be easier to resist. Beside the dramatic tension resulting from the Test and its consequences, the purpose of such a system is for the Leader to encourage the Player to describe what the Character is feeling.

Focus and emotions

Focuses are scenarios with a particular structure, the purpose of which is to lead the Players to explore their Characters' minds and to bring emotions to the forefront of the game. Dearg's Focuses are special cases, since they take place in the PCs' past, which makes them even more different from scenarios with a standard structure.

Traditionally, the narrative tension of a role-playing game scenario rests upon suspense; it produces a feeling of uncertainty within the Player regarding the conclusion of a story. Such unpredictability is usually unpleasant, but in the context of a game, movie, or novel, it becomes a source of engrossment.

Within the Focuses of this book, this narrative tension based upon suspense is weakened, since the Players already know more or less how the story is going to resolve: Finn loses his sister and leaves for Reizh to study Magience; Eoghan falls in love with Céliane while Mael dies, etc. The key elements of the plot are already known. The narrative relevance is elsewhere; the purpose is not to discover the end of the story (which is already known) as much as to take a closer look at the path that led to it. In this regard, narrative tension stems from curiosity. The idea is to detail the story and the Characters' emotions, in order to give the stakes at hand their full, intimate meaning.

Rediscovering the Characters' past and psychology should greatly increase the Players' interest when a disrupting element intervenes and heightens the suspense. For example, Céliane's disappearance in the official campaign will evoke reactions that will be all the stronger since the Players have gone through the Gaol Focus, during which each Player became more familiar with her, or even grew attached to her. The results will not be the same if this disappearance comes out of the blue right at the beginning of the story, with Eoghan's Player having only a fuzzy idea of the PC's relationship with the young woman. However, this game mechanic will show its full potential only when the Leader constructs an original campaign with the collaboration of the Players, who are even encouraged to design their own narrative arcs.

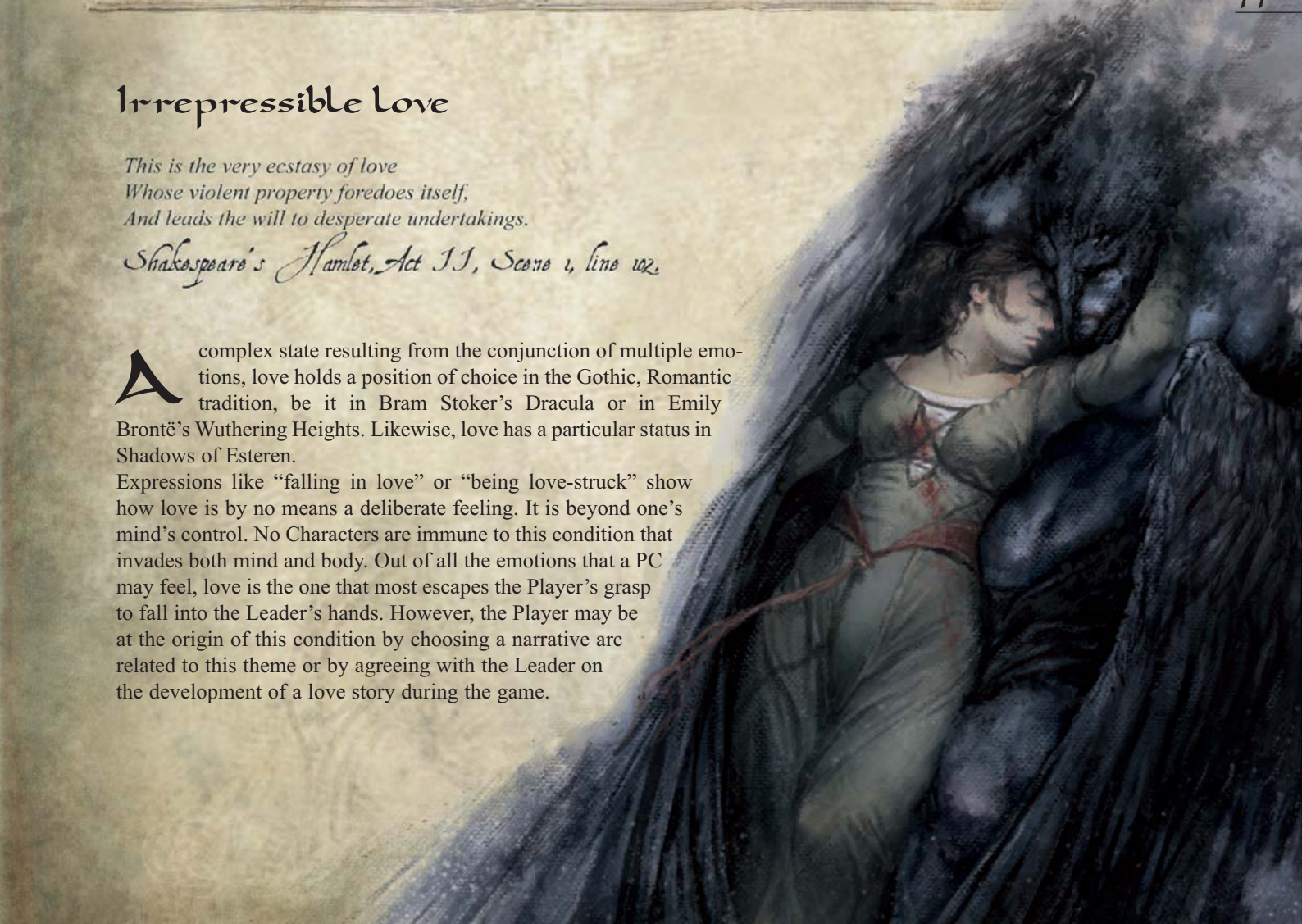
Irrepressible love

This is the very ecstasy of love
Whose violent property foredoes itself,
And leads the will to desperate undertakings.

Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act II, Scene 1, line 102.

A complex state resulting from the conjunction of multiple emotions, love holds a position of choice in the Gothic, Romantic tradition, be it in Bram Stoker's Dracula or in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights. Likewise, love has a particular status in Shadows of Esteren.

Expressions like "falling in love" or "being love-struck" show how love is by no means a deliberate feeling. It is beyond one's mind's control. No Characters are immune to this condition that invades both mind and body. Out of all the emotions that a PC may feel, love is the one that most escapes the Player's grasp to fall into the Leader's hands. However, the Player may be at the origin of this condition by choosing a narrative arc related to this theme or by agreeing with the Leader on the development of a love story during the game.



On the in-game use of love

The official campaign, Dearg, offers two ways to portray love for the PCs:

Romantic love.
This facet is explored through the eponymous narrative arc focused on Eoghan and Céliane's story. In this case, the Player chooses this arc themselves and knows what they are in for: the PC loves Céliane, and the scenarios will bear on this theme.

Gothic love.
This other facet explores the antagonistic side of love. It is a narrative device that the Leader introduces and that the Player has to face. The narrative arc of Adoption relies on such a mechanic: against his own will, the PC will be passionately infatuated with a young Sigire.

Optional rule: the Ecstasy of Love

In Shadows of Esteren, love can become a fearsome opponent: it can drive one to despair, to reckless endangerment, and to a foolish death. Love is colder than death, to quote one of Fassbinder's most famous films. However, the Esteren universe also has an element of hope, a light in the night. Love can be a force that drives the PCs to outdo themselves, to go beyond their limits. The Ecstasy of Love is an optional role that strengthens the impact of love on the game system. It provides the Leader with tools to create more adversity while also giving the PCs access to special abilities.

Prerequisites to use the Ecstasy of Love

The purpose here is to give love pride of place in role-playing game scenarios and to let the Players portray their Characters' reactions when faced with such violent feelings. This can make the game that much more intense, but it can also confuse the Players, or even make them uncomfortable. The Leader should never force a Player's hand. Role-playing games are first and foremost about sharing an experience that everyone should enjoy. The Leader's influence over the PCs must take place with the Players' understanding and permission. The same goes for this optional rule, and if the Players are not comfortable with its principles, the Leader should abstain from using it, at least for the time being. After all, Players may change their minds as their story unfolds!
In addition to this agreement between the Players and the Leader, this optional rule has another prerequisite: the PC must feel a powerful love for a person, an ideal, or even an object. This commitment should be so strong that the PC would go so far as to face death in its name. A PC who is not consumed by such a passion cannot be under the effects of the Ecstasy of Love.

Who and what can love apply to?

The previous paragraphs mainly focused on the theme of love between two people, since that is the one portrayed in the Dearg campaign. However, love can also be felt for an ideal, a divinity, or even something inanimate.

Love for a person.
It can be for a relative, a friend, or a significant other. One may also love a high-ranking dignitary or a symbolic representative, perhaps to the point of being ready to put one's life on the line for that person. It can also apply to a person missing or dead.

Divine love.
Believers of the Temple can live in the love of the One God to such an extent that this feeling might be as strong as that felt by two human beings who love one another.

Love for an ideal.
People can be guided by an ideal, a philosophy of life, or ethical values to which one dedicates one's life. Such people might be knights, Magientists, scholars, etc.

Love for a symbol.
A stranger variant, which some consider pathological, involves feeling love for an object, so much so that one may be ready to kill or suffer great harm to preserve it. It can be a holy item or a memento of a loved one. This also applies to certain Objects of Power that implant an unhealthy obsession in the owner's mind. Love for money or power can also be considered part of this category, as can ambition, the attachment to one's work or important projects.

The power of emotion

The Ecstasy of Love optional rule will let the Leader directly influence the PC's portrayal when it can be decided that the Character's feelings overpower the PC to the point of directing their behavior. When this occurs, the Player loses all control over the PC. In game terms, it is considered an automatic failure on a Test roll (or Drive roll, if the situation relates to the PC's narrative arc). The Leader can apply this rule at any time, provided it is justified by the story and serves its purposes. This loss of control of the Player over their Character, and of the PC over their emotions, only lasts a brief moment, generally a single action.

Beyond limits

When a Player portrays the Character's love with conviction, regardless of the danger, the Leader can award the PC one of these bonuses:

Ignore pain

If the PC is wounded (even to the point of Agony) but the object of their love needs their help, the Character can be granted the "ignore pain" bonus (see Book 1 – Universe, Survival Points, p. 217), which will last until the end of the current scene, without needing to spend Survival points. The PC can be given this bonus several times during a single game session.



Survival point

When a PC accomplishes a remarkable feat related to the Character's love, the Leader can award the Player a Survival point. If the PC is already at the maximum number of Survival points, the extra point must be used during the game session or be lost. Otherwise, Survival points obtained in this fashion are added to the Character's pool and are standard Survival points for all intents and purposes. The love that the PC feels gives them that extra push to make it through in the name of what they hold most dear.

Chapter 3
The Focuses

Beard introduces a new type of scenario: Focuses. Although the PCs are all involved in the same quest, each member of the party has their own history and motivations. The Focuses explore each PC's personal story. These particular scenarios follow a pattern different from a regular session: only one Player plays their Character, while the other Players play as important people in the PC's life, helping the Game Leader steer the story.

This chapter covers the function of these specific scenarios. It details their characteristics and describes how to use them during the game.

Characteristics of a Focus

Focuses are usually structured as acts and scenes like any other Shadows of Esteren scenario, but they also follow particular rules that differ from what the Players are used to.

Specific objectives

The first distinctive feature of the Focuses lies in their objectives, which differ from the standard goals of Shadows of Esteren's scenarios and canvases:

Exploring a narrative arc.
The primary objective of Focuses is to go into the details of the motivations, history, and relationships of an individual PC. The Focuses of a PC will most often be a way to explore their narrative arc (see the box below: "Focuses and narrative arc"). Focuses will portray the key moments of the PC's arc while leaving them room to set the course of their personal quest.

Fleshing out the PC's history.
A Focus is an opportunity to give the PC important information about their narrative arc and a possible way to resolve it, as well as to experience important moments of their story. A Focus may feature past events that are already part of the PC's backstory, giving the Focus the characteristics of a tragedy (see the box "Suspense and Tragedy," p. 84).

Earning Determination and Experience points.
Some Focuses will also determine how many Determination points the PC will earn, which will influence their Drive. The rules for attributing these points are provided below, in the box "Earning Determination points." Focuses are also an opportunity to earn Experience points, whose attribution follows particular guidelines detailed in "Earning Experience points" below.

The group has gone through the steps of the Advanced Character Creation system, and has gathered to play the first scenario related to the narrative arcs. The Leader explains to their Players: "Today, we are going to play a scenario that is a bit special. It won't be about solving a puzzle, investigating, or ridding a village of a Feond threat. It will instead focus on the personal quest of one of you." The Leader then proceeds to explain the three objectives defined above.

Focus and narrative arcs

Since the purpose of the Focuses is to develop the story and motivations of a particular PC, they generally go hand in hand with the narrative arcs. However, this is not necessarily the case. There are three different ways focuses can be used in game:

To introduce a narrative arc.
When a Player picks a narrative arc, this type of Focus introduces the main themes and Characters of this arc, while also determining how involved the PC will be in their own personal quest, in the form of Determination points that will define

the PC's Drive level (i.e. how dedicated they are to their narrative arc). Introductory Focuses generally explore the PC's past and the events that started their narrative arc.

To develop a PC's story.

At certain moments in the campaign, the Game Leader and Players may wish to pause the story to take stock of the evolution of one PC in particular. Such Focuses may flesh out the PC's past in the form of flashbacks, or shed light on events occurring simultaneously elsewhere.

To explore the story from a different perspective.

The Focus system can be used by the Leader to explore another aspect of the ongoing adventure, one in which the PCs are not directly involved. Dearg includes such a Focus in the scenario "The Prospectors."



Earning Determination points

The four scenarios of the "Resurgences" chapter belong to the first category: they introduce the four main narrative arcs. Through these scenarios, the PCs will get many opportunities to show how involved they are in their personal quest. Regardless of the PC's ideological choice, what matters here is the strength of their conviction.



Following the Focus devoted to the PC, the Leader, after discussing it with the Player, grants the PC between 1 and 5 Determination points. Note that this is not a grade: 5 is not "better" than 1. It just says something different about the Character. Earning Determination points is a specific feature of the introductory Focuses. Subsequent Focuses will not necessarily grant such points.

It is important that the Player has the opportunity to give their opinion about the amount of points they should earn, since these will influence the PC's Drive score and how the Character will be played for the remainder of the campaign. For example, if the Player feels very engaged in their narrative arc, they may ask to be granted 5 Determination points. However, they should not forget that such a high score cuts both ways, as explained in the section about Drive (see p. 61). The other Players of the group may also give their opinions. In the end, as with Experience points, the Leader gets the final say about this attribution.

Here is some advice on the distribution and evolution of these points:

- If the Player portrays their Character as driven and committed throughout their Focus, this can be reflected with maximum Determination points.

- Determination points can evolve. Players can lose them and earn new ones through the course of the campaign. Thus, a PC who did not get all 5 points during their Focus may earn Determination points later, during future scenarios or even other Focuses.

- In particular cases, the Leader may decide that it is possible to earn 1 or even 2 extra Determination points, possibly going beyond the normal maximum of 5. For example, the Leader may decide that a Strengthening related to mental troubles will yield 1 additional Determination point when the Character reaches the Syndrome and Madness stages.

Earning Experience points

Each Focus will also be an opportunity to earn Experience points, but the rules for their attribution differ from the usual system.

Experience points for the Lead.

Each Focus has the unique feature of awarding Determination points to the Lead (the PC whose narrative arc is being explored). These Determination points also come with Experience points, as described on p. 63. No additional Experience points are added to this total for the given Focus.

Experience points for the Supports and Extras.

The other Players, who will play as Supports and Extras during the Focus (see next page), will earn Experience points for their own PCs, even if the Character was not directly involved in the scenario. It is assumed that, at the time of the Focus, the PC had adventures of their own, which earned them XPs. The attribution system is the same as the one described on p. 228 of Book 1 – Universe, but the total is halved, rounded up. Thus, a Player acting as a Support during a Focus not directly related to their narrative arc can still earn between 2 and 8 XPs, or more, should the Leader decide to be generous.

Lead, Supports, and Extras

During a regular Shadows of Esteren game, each Player controls their own Character, whom they have previously created. During the Focus scenes, only one of the Players will be their usual alter ego (the Lead), while the other Players will take the roles of secondary characters (Supports and Extras).

Lead

The Lead is the PC whose story or narrative arc will be explored during the Focus. The Player controlling the lead will thus play their Character as usual.

Supports

Supports are NPCs who have some importance in the story of the PC, or who will be involved later in the campaign. These NPCs are described in the introduction of each official Focus. Support Sheets, which are meant to be used as Character Sheets during each Focus, have been specially designed for the Players and can be downloaded from www.esteren.org.

During a scenario related to a narrative arc, the Leader and the Players will distribute these story-centric Supports among themselves. This distribution can take place at any time before the beginning of the Focus and will require some preparation, which will be detailed later.

Extras

In addition to the Supports, there are also the roles of Extras to be distributed among the Players. There are several kinds:

1. **Followers**. This is the largest category of Extras. They have been dubbed followers because they will follow and supplement the role of a Support. For example, in one of the Focuses, one of the Supports can be Lord Wylard. One of the Players will be him, while the other Players (and maybe even the Leader) can be follower Extras, improvised on the spot, who will support his presence: a man at arms, a servant, his minstrel, etc.

2. **Premade Characters**. This encompasses all 13 premade Characters from Book 0 – Prologue and Book 1 – Universe. Depending on the composition of the PC group, one or several of these premades may not exist in the Leader's campaign. The others can be used as Extras. The insert "Using and adapting the premades for your campaign" details several possibilities.

3. **Inhabitants of the Vale of Dearg**. The last category of Extras are the inhabitants of the Vale of Dearg, whom the Players can embody on the spot to fit the current scene, such as during a village council, for example.

"In addition to these particular objectives, there is something else everyone should keep in mind: only one of you will play as your own PC today. They will be the Lead. The rest of you will be Supports and Extras, like in a movie. Today, the Lead will be Jeremy's PC, Crowl. The others will play as Characters who have had an impact on Crowl." The Leader goes over the available Supports, then adds: "Next time, another one of you will be the Lead, and so on..."

Using and adapting the premades to your campaign

The premades provided in Book 0 and Book 1 who are not directly used by the Players as PCs can still be used by the Leader as signature NPCs of the Vale of Dearg. However, depending on the composition of the group and the narrative arcs chosen, the Leader may decide to remove or modify one or more of the premade Characters. Here is an example using a group of 6 Players and their Characters. Note that these are all real people and are the Players of Nelyhann, the campaign's author.

Clovis has created a PC called Yrdàn and has chosen the narrative arc of Love. However, Yrdàn turns out to be very different from Eoghan: he is a wanderer, a native of a faraway land, skilled in the Oghamic arts. The Leader decides that the Character of Eoghan does not exist and that Maorn, Dearg's Ansailéir, only has three daughters. This way, Yrdàn can develop a unique relationship with the major Characters of the story, and symbolically take the role of Eoghan: a mentor-pupil relationship with Maorn, love with Céliane, and friendship with Mael.

Crowl, Jeremy's PC, is very similar to the premade Finn. He has chosen the arc of Ethics and is a former pupil of Loeg, who left Dearg to journey to Reizh following the tragic death of his little sister. All the key points of Finn's background are included in Crowl's past, and the Leader makes the same decision as for Yrdàn: in the group's campaign, Finn will not exist, and will be replaced with Crowl.

The same goes for the PCs of Jean-Pierre (Garrick) and Virginie (Snathaïd), who borrow many narrative elements from the stories of Joris and Adeliane.

Things are different for Romain's PC, Aoden, who borrows elements from Sìd's story while being of Tarish descent. With the Leader's agreement, and since the four main narrative arcs have been taken, the Player has chosen two secondary narrative arcs: Vengeance and Origins. The Leader decides that the twin sisters Mirna and Masha do exist, intending to use them as important NPCs in the development of Aoden's arc. The Leader also decides not to remove Sìd the Varigal, but takes away his thirst for vengeance, which Romain's PC inherits.

As for Aurélien's PC, Tuirenn, his story involves the Fortress of Smiorail, and he wishes to become a Hilderin knight. Aurélien naturally went for the narrative arc of Ambition. These choices make it easy for the Leader to still include Arven, since she also follows the arc of Ambition: she serves the Mac Lyrs of the nearby Vale of Melwan and wishes to become a knight. Who knows what bonds she could share with Tuirenn? What rivalry could emerge should the Mac Lyrs start to claim regency over the three vales, arguing that they are the last nobles of the region? Finally, this choice allows the Leader to seamlessly include a key NPC of the campaign: Hilderin knight Argan, the current regent of the Vale of Dearg who lives in the Fortress of Smiorail.

The other premades–Yldiane, Ean, Liam, Mòr, and Urvan–will remain as fleshed-out NPCs, whom the Leader can use to feed the momentum of a scenario, create relations with the PCs, and make available as Extras during the Focuses.

Principles and rules of the Focuses

Now that the characteristics of the Focuses have been detailed, this section will define the various rules and principles that the Leader must review with their Players before starting the game.

1. Isolating the Lead

Before the game starts, the Player who will embody their own PC must wait outside the room, giving time for the Leader and the other Players to confer.

"Jeremy, since your PC is the Lead today, you'll have to step outside so that the others and I can go through the details of your Focus."

2. Describing and distributing the Supports

Once the Player who will be the Lead is out of earshot, the Leader can start describing to the Players the roles they will assume during the game. If necessary, feel free to go through the various possible categories of secondary characters (Supports, follower Extras, premade Characters, etc.) and their characteristics.
Each Player will pick one or several Supports that they will play throughout the game. Playing them requires following a few detailed instructions (see the section below: "Key scenes and interpretation of the Supports"). The Leader does not have to distribute all the Supports among the Players, and may decide to keep some for themselves. Advice regarding this distribution is provided on p. 86, in the section "Distributing the Supports."

"Okay, let's see... Today, you will all play important NPCs in Crowl's story. I will describe these Supports, and you can decide which one you'd like to embody: an old Varigal called Mordàn; Magister Alana Naïghan; Primus Yasen; Eliaz, a physician; Inceptus Tomàs; and Kaereg, a politician." The Leader then goes on to provide additional details about each available Character according to the information provided in the Supports section of the scenario "Modhannan: A Better World." Virginie jokingly starts: "I like Alana, and since I'm a girl, I'd be more convincing than you!" After a few minutes of discussion, every Support is allocated: Clovis will be Varigal Mordàn; Jean-Pierre picked Tomàs; Aurélien went for the politician, and Romain for the physician. This leaves Primus Yasen, whom the Leader will play.



3. Key scenes and interpretation of the Supports

Now that the Supports have been distributed, the Leader provides details to each of the Players about the Character they have chosen. This information is gathered on the Support Sheets (downloadable at www.esteren.org) that the Leader can now hand out to the Players. They include a rundown of the Support's personality, their story, and most importantly, the Key scenes they will be part of. Several things must be taken into account:

- The Player taking on the role of the Support will have to adapt to a Character that is not theirs, and portray them as faithfully as possible. More to the point, they must try to play the Key scenes according to what is planned, like an actor might. In the middle of the game, the Leader should feel free to steer the Player by playing the part of a voice-over, providing cues about what the Character should be thinking or doing.

- The Players must remember that they will not embody their Support throughout the entire game, but only when they are involved. The same goes for the Extras.

- It is advised that each Player write down notes about the Supports everyone will play, so that during the game, they can portray them and react to them as convincingly as possible, most importantly during the Key scenes.

"Now that the Supports have been distributed, I will give you a rundown of each of them, so prepare to take notes. To begin with, here are special Character Sheets that will sum up the information concerning your Support." The Leader hands out the Support Sheets. "Virginie, we'll start with you. You'll be playing Alana Naïghan, right? She's quite the character! A very talented physician and a seductive woman who will go on to become the leader of the order of the Vitalist Magientists in the future." The Leader goes on with the description, telling Virginie about the Key scenes for her Character as they are detailed in the introduction of the Focus. Virginie jots down the bulk of the information, so that she can have a cheat sheet ready. "Alright! I have a question: when Alana meets Crowl for the first time, does she look down on him?" The Leader takes a look at Alana's description. "No, on the contrary. The boy piques her interest, but is she well-disposed toward him out of goodwill, or because she's already thinking about how she might use him? Only she knows!" Then, one after the other, each Player gets a rundown of their Support and the Key scenes they will appear in.

4. The Extras

During this fourth phase, the Leader will quickly go through the scenario's Extras with the Players, and remind them how this role works: the Players will improvise these Characters on the spot, and their purpose will be to enhance the presence of the involved Support, or to follow more specific instructions from the Leader. The purpose of an Extra is to help the Leader and the Support drive the point of a scene home without being of any particular individual importance. Most of the time, the Players will come up with such Characters on the fly.

"Okay, you all have your Support and everything there is to know about him or her! In addition to them, you will also play Extras of all kinds throughout the scenario. For example, today it may be Alana's entourage, Eliaz's assistants, etc. When you play an Extra, your goal is to enliven the scene by propping up the Support." Jean-Pierre asks for a concrete example. "Let's imagine the scene where Crowl will meet Alana in a tavern... Virginie will play Alana and Clovis will be Mordàn, since both Supports are involved in the scene. However, you Jean-Pierre, as well as Aurélien, Romain, and myself, will play as young Magientists, a sort of retinue tagging along with Alana. Some of them will sneer at Crowl, others will be interested... we'll improvise!"

5. Collaboration in the service of the Lead

Before the game starts, one important point of these particular scenarios should be emphasized:

Throughout each Focus, the Players will be the Leader's accomplices. The goal is to offer the Player who will be the center of attention the most memorable session possible. During the Focus, the Lead will be in the spotlight, and all the other participants, both Players and Leader, will work together setting up the best atmosphere possible to serve the story and the narrative arc of the PC involved.

Suspense and Tragedy

The motor of a typical role-playing session is suspense: as they progress through the story, the Players remain unsure of what will happen next, anticipating plot twists and looking out for danger. Just like spectators following a movie, they are eager to know what will come next and fear for their Characters.

With the aforementioned introductory Focuses, things are different. Since these scenarios explore the PCs past, they tell a story that is already part of the Characters' backgrounds and therefore cannot be changed. For example, in Eoghan's Focus, Mael will die, no matter what the PCs do. This also applies to Finn's, Adeliane's, and Joris's stories: Players who have read Book 1 – Universe will already be aware of decisive elements of their backstories.

As such, suspense cannot be the story's motor or the source of the Players' interest. Instead, the introductory Focuses draw from a different genre: tragedy. Since the Players may already know what their Characters are in for, what matters is not what is going to happen, but how. Experiencing the story becomes more important than the story itself or its conclusion. As a result, the Players and Leader can focus on the Characters, their feelings, and their development.

Asides in the kitchen

By convention, tabletop role-playing depicts the actions of a party of PCs, with the story of each individual PC being less important than that of the group as a whole. This is because there is (usually) only one Game Leader: should the GL detail each PC's actions one after the other, the other Players would get bored and the story would move at a snail's pace. This is why the game focuses on the resolution of a scenario where all the PCs are involved at the same time, setting aside the PCs' personal stories. However, it is a fact that role-players love their Characters, and sometimes go so far as to write a thorough backstory, going over the PC's personal history, dreams, ambitions, wounds, etc. And of course, a Player loves nothing more than to see said backstory come up during the game.

Sometimes, during a game, a Player may ask to speak with the Leader alone to explain their Character's specific actions or to develop their story... which may have nothing to do with the current scenario. Who has never experienced something like this? The Leader takes the Player aside to answer their request in another room; typically, the kitchen. They are both aware that they must keep things short, as the other Players are waiting. These particular moments can be very exciting for the Player: after all, this is about their PC, and the story they have designed for them! It is understandable that they are at least as interested in this as in the ongoing scenario, which may be entirely unrelated to the PC's backstory. Unfortunately, the classic tabletop role-playing style does not lend itself to such moments, which have to be handled quickly... when they are handled at all.

Such experiences have given birth to this system of narrative arcs and Focuses. The idea is simple: what if we could turn these rushed asides-in-the-kitchen into the focus of an entire session? That way, each Player could, in turn, develop a story of their own, in fitting conditions, without it turning into a drag for the other participants. Meanwhile, the other Players could experience a new gaming style, halfway between improvisational theater and acting as co-Game Leaders. For a time, the focus would be on one member of the party rather than on the group as a whole, in order to explore the Character's inner world and personal story more deeply.

Questions about the Focuses

This final part reviews the various matters that arose during the playtesting of the Shadows of Esteren campaign. This list is provided to help the Leader navigate these particular scenarios.

Opportunities and difficulties of the Focuses

Focuses involve concrete opportunities and difficulties compared to standard scenarios. By being aware of these idiosyncrasies, the Leader can handle them all the more efficiently.

Opportunities offered by the Focuses

1. **A PC at the heart of the story.** The Focus system puts a particular PC in the spotlight by focusing on elements of their story that concern only them. In a standard role-playing session, this would tend to get in the way of the scenario (since it would, for example, require multiple asides with the Leader), which no one would enjoy. The idea of the Focuses is to concentrate on these particular background elements and to give the narrative an opportunity to unfold in a grandiose style, which should be a source of enjoyment and satisfaction for everyone involved.

2. **Enriching the characterization of each PC.** Experience has shown that the Players as a group will be more interested in each individual Character, since the Focuses make it possible to learn more about a particular PC. These scenarios centered on a single PC provide information that will flesh them out and give them more depth, while developing the relationships between the Players.

3. **Giving the Players another outlook on the story.** By playing as Supports, the Players will get to see the story from another point of view. For example, they may get to defend a stance that their own PC fights against with all their strength. Such a change of perspective will surely benefit the story, showing the PCs that everyone–allies and enemies alike–has deep motivations and that there is no simple division between "good guys" and "bad guys."

4. **Playing wholly different Characters is a thrilling experience.** Whether as Supports or Extras, the Players will get to play a whole range of very different Characters who will sometimes aid the PC and sometimes oppose them. It makes for a refreshing experience, and offers many opportunities for great fun for everyone.

Difficulties of the Focuses

1. **A Player may not feel like playing a Character other than their own.** It may happen that a Player is reluctant to spend a complete game session playing Characters that are not theirs, because they are afraid of doing it wrong, for example. The Leader should reassure them by answering their questions and assuring them that should the need arise, they will directly assist them during the game.

2. **The Focus's success depends on the Players' commitment.** By entrusting the Players with the Supports of a Focus, the Game Leader shares the narration work with them. If a Player portrays a Support halfheartedly

or inappropriately, it may jeopardize the whole Focus. The Players must be aware of this, and the Leader should make sure that everyone understands what will be expected from their Support.

3. **Each Player will have to wait for their turn, and some may be impatient.** Indeed, in the case of large groups of five or six Players, it may seem like quite a chore for a Player to wait several sessions before getting some spotlight for their PC. That may be true, but the Leader should remind their Players that everyone will get their turn!

Distributing the Supports

Distributing the Supports is a decisive part of the Focuses' preparation. In particular, the Leader will have to decide which Supports they entrust to the Players, and which ones they would rather control. There are no precise guidelines to be provided in this regard, and the Leader should base their decision on what they know of their Players, who should all be aware that the quality of the story will depend, in part, on the quality of their interpretation. For example, in the Focus for the PC with the Arc of Adoption, the strength of the scene with inquisitor Arthis (see the Focus "Mac Thogail: The Legacy of the Rose") will mostly rest on whoever embodies him. If Arthis is played dully, without any real conviction, the verbal clash with the Lead will fall flat. Conversely, a bold Player who fully immerses themselves in the boisterous inquisitor's mind may surprise the other participants and give the scene its due dramatic scale.

Generally speaking, if the Players are beginners, the Leader should keep for themselves the interpretation of Supports that are decisive or difficult to portray, particularly at the beginning. However, if the Players are experienced (in particular if they are also used to being Game Leaders), the Leader should not hesitate to assign them major Supports, which may result in memorable scenes.

Even if an important Support is in the hands of a Player, the Leader still has some sway over them. If necessary, they should feel free to redirect the scene as a voice-over, an omniscient narrator that provides direct instructions to the Players by expressing the thoughts of one Character or another. Concrete examples are provided in the insert at the end of this chapter.



Above: Wylard Mac Readan, one of the Supports of the Focus "Gaol: Of Love and Fury"

On the difficulty of playing Extras on the fly

Extras also pose a challenge of their own. Indeed, for a Player, changing PCs in the middle of the session is something unusual that should refresh the gaming experience, but may also be difficult to handle, particularly for the first few times. This requires the Players to be very reactive, since they may be required to step in at any time. This concentration is a good thing, since it will help produce quality narration for the benefit of the PC at the center of the story.

However, there may be mishaps and humorous confusions: a Player improvising an Extra may mix things up, blurt out the wrong name... it may become downright comical, which is by no means a bad thing as long as it doesn't detract from the atmosphere of the game. Sudden bursts of laughter often go down in a campaign's history, and contribute to a friendly atmosphere. In the end, if a specific scene does not go as planned (such as a dramatic scene devolving into absurdity), the Leader may suggest a "second take," and simply start the scene over. But be wary of running gags!

It is not easy to portray an Extra on the fly, and Shadows of Esteren's campaign offers a unique challenge to the Players. It's okay if things don't work out from the get-go; after all, what matters most is for everyone to enjoy themselves. Once the Players and the Leader have become used to the Focuses, they will be able to create powerful, memorable scenes.

As with the Supports, the Leader should not hesitate to step in to help a Player with playing their Extra or to correct the evolution of a scene. Again, concrete examples are provided in the insert below.

Some examples...

To end this chapter, here are a few typical examples of scenes that will occur during a Focus.

The Leader as an Extra.

In the first example, drawn from the scenario "Modhannan: A Better World," the scene takes place at the Clock Inn and focuses on the meeting between the Lead and Alana Naïghan, the future head of the order of the Vitalists. In this scene, one of the Players is the Lead, another plays Alana as a Support, and a third is Varigal Mordàn. The other Players and the Leader are Extras; in this case, young Magientists, followers of Alana.

One of the themes of this dialog is the free access to the university, regardless of one's social class: the Extras may have diverging opinions on this matter, and the Leader will bring in polemics to heat up the debate. For example, the Leader, as one of the Magientists, can say to Alana's Player: "Lady Alana, without a doubt the university grants Reizhites access to knowledge... but letting in a young Talkéride? Just look at him! He probably does not even know how to read. What do you think?" Here, the Leader, like the other Extras, will be able to contribute to the scene and feed the discussion between Alana, Mordàn, and the Lead.

The Leader as a voice-over and prompter.

This time, we will take a scene from the scenario "Mac Thogail: The Legacy of the Rose," which involves inquisitors investigating the small monastery located in the Vale of Dearg. One of the Players is the Lead, and two others play as Supports: Firmin and Sigire Arthis. The other Players are Arthis's companions. The Leader doesn't play any Character in this scene, and will just describe what happens, acting only as the scene's voice-over. It is important that the Player playing Arthis be able to portray him as very stark, particularly during the interrogation of the monk Firmin. To really instill a sense of urgency and fear, the scene should be very gripping.

If the Leader decides that the scene is not sufficiently fast-paced, they can step in and describe to one Player or another what their Character's state of mind should be, in order to nudge the overall acting in the right direction. For example, if things drag on, they may say: "Arthis, you think it's now time to get to the point! After all, you have no time to waste here..." Likewise, if a Player lacks conviction in the interpretation of their role, the Leader may help them with a few directions: "Don't hold back, you can raise your voice–be mean!" A good method the Leader may use during such scenes is to remain standing and go from one Player to another, whispering cues to them to steer the scene as necessary. The Leader will have a more indirect role, but is still helping the Players optimize the scene they are playing.

The Leader as a Support.

The Leader may decide to play one or several Supports themselves. Sometimes, there is no other way, such as when there are insufficient Players to cover all of them. By playing a Support, the Leader will set the example and the pace. This may be a good idea for the Players' first Focus, so that they may slowly get used to carrying a scene forward, while the Leader plays a less and less important part, as in the previous example.



Part 2: Resurgences

Part Two introduces four Focuses, each of which deals with one of Dearg's four main Narrative Arcs: Love, Ethics, Adoption, and Guilt.

- Chapter 1: Gaol: Of Love and Fury
- Chapter 2: Modhannan: A Better World
- Chapter 3: Mac Thogail: The Legacy of the Rose
- Chapter 4: Coir: The River Child

Though they go into the PCs' past, these scenarios are not merely an introduction to the plot: they are well and truly part of the narrative. How the Characters have become who they are and why they are committed to the ideals they follow is equally as important—if not more—as the events of the campaign themselves. Thus, the heart of the story lies in the Characters and their motivations, their relationships with other people, and the *meaning of their quest* rather than in that quest itself.

Chapter 1
Gaol:
Of Love and Fury



· **Style:** Focus centered on the narrative arc of Love.

· **Setting:** Taol-Kaer, Vale of Dearg, and Dukedom of Salann Tìr.

Summary: This Focus will depict the PC's childhood in Dearg, his meeting of Céliane, then the year of military service he spent in the lands of Lord Wylard Mac Readan. His return to Dearg will be marked by the tragedy of a brutal death, but also by the hope of a better future.

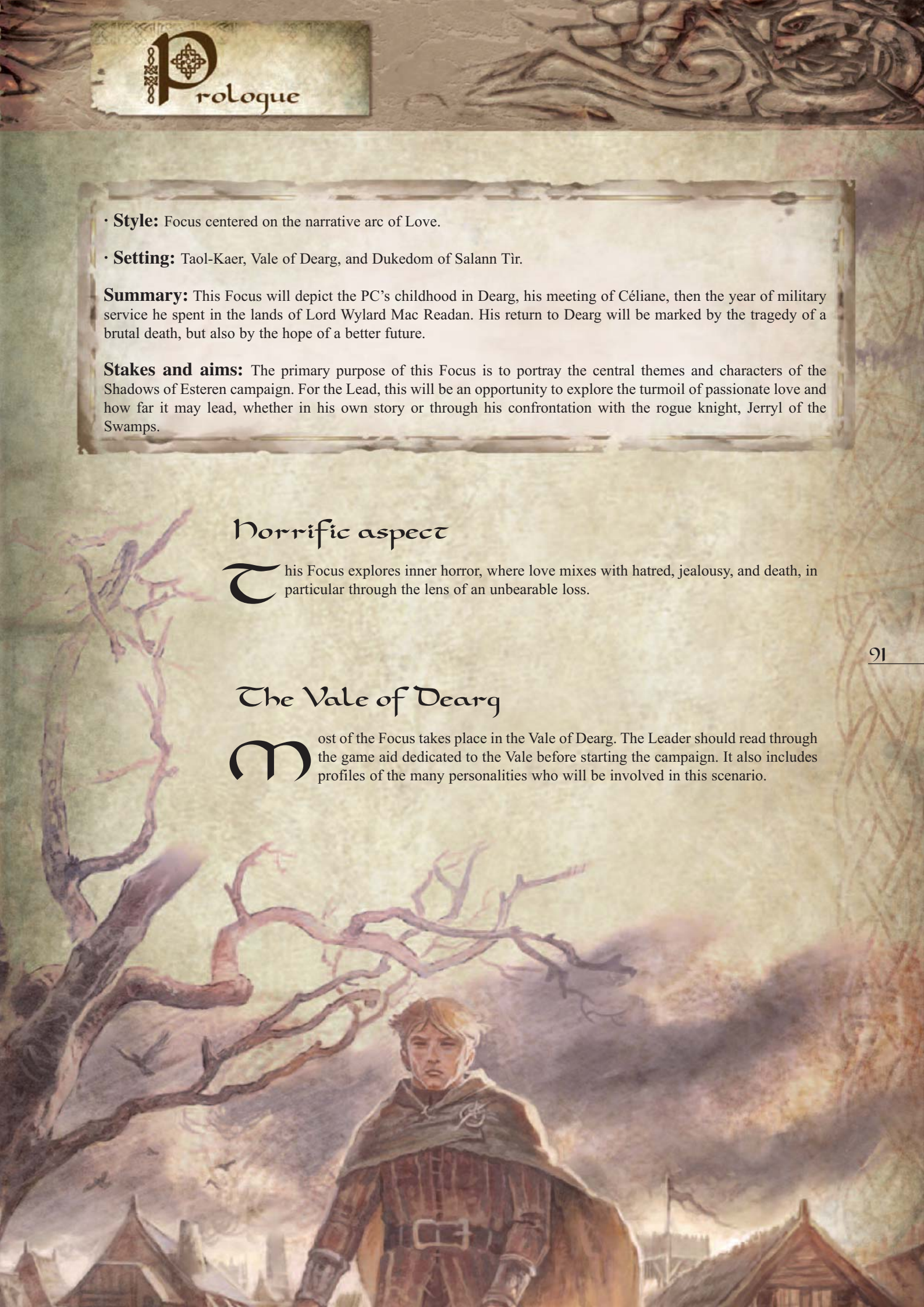
Stakes and aims: The primary purpose of this Focus is to portray the central themes and characters of the Shadows of Esteren campaign. For the Lead, this will be an opportunity to explore the turmoil of passionate love and how far it may lead, whether in his own story or through his confrontation with the rogue knight, Jerryl of the Swamps.

Horrific aspect

This Focus explores inner horror, where love mixes with hatred, jealousy, and death, in particular through the lens of an unbearable loss.

The Vale of Dearg

Most of the Focus takes place in the Vale of Dearg. The Leader should read through the game aid dedicated to the Vale before starting the campaign. It also includes profiles of the many personalities who will be involved in this scenario.



Portraying romanticism and tragedy

This scenario tells a tale of love and casts the Players in the leading roles. This is a particular quality that the Leader should not overlook: even in storytelling games such as Shadows of Esteren, where the interpretation of the Characters is paramount, playing a love story is uncommon.

This element will be further emphasized if the Lead is a fighter, as is the case for Eoghan, since it will clash with the classic forms of the genre. Commonly, medieval-fantasy universes entail heroism, awe-inspiring creatures, and epic quests where powerful warriors take up the struggle between good and evil. Though this classic approach may have its charms, the one chosen for Shadows of Esteren is fundamentally different. At certain key moments, in particular during the Focuses, the Dearg campaign aims to highlight this unique premise by exploring other themes.

For the experience to be enjoyable for everyone, the Leader should take some time to discuss these features with their Players and talk about the following points with them:

The Lead's part.

Obviously, the Player who has chosen the narrative arc of Love should not be surprised that this theme is at the center of the upcoming scenarios. Still, the Leader should take a moment to talk about it with the Player and warn them that the scenario will directly explore their Character's story with Céliane and that she may be played by another Player. Some Players may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed if such themes are depicted in play. If that is the case, the Leader should take this into account and modify the scenario accordingly. The Leader may pull the romance back, and focus on less intimate, more action-driven scenes, for example.

Playing Céliane.

This main Character of the campaign may be played by one of the Players during the Focus. This may feel awkward, and as with the Lead, the Leader should first discuss it with the Player involved. Experienced role-players or Players who already know each other well may have an easier time playing the Eoghan-Céliane duo. If no one feels comfortable enough playing Céliane, the Leader should take care of it.

Kicks and giggles.

A role-playing session is often marked by sudden bursts of laughter, and this is a good thing. After all, isn't having fun what matters most? Are the most memorable moments not often the most comical ones? Shadows of Esteren is no exception, but in a universe that is meant to be horrific and gothic, some skill in handling humor will be necessary to allow other emotions to emerge. It is all a matter of timing: a hilarious gag during a break can be welcomed to tone things down, but the same gag in the middle of a crucial scene will certainly be less fitting... Just imagine if, during the final scene of the Carmen opera, one of the protagonists suddenly blurted out a dirty joke! The Focus Gaol: Of Love and Fury has great dramatic potential that requires the Players to portray their Characters with conviction. If everyone plays their part, it can give rise to great intensity. Laughter may then give way to tears. Like other media such as dramatic acting or moviemaking, role-playing can explore a wide range of emotions. Portraying dramatic and tragic scenes doubtlessly requires some ease in one's ability to slip inside a Character's skin, like an actor might do, and jokes are often an attempt to subdue rising emotions of a more melancholic nature. In the end, there is no absolute right way to play a story: it may be riddled with more or less opportune moments of hilarity. The most important thing is that the Players and Leader are aware of one another's expectations: if the Leader has everything planned out for a very emotionally charged game and one or several of the Players can't help but crack jokes, the Leader may be disappointed. This is why the Leader is advised to talk it out with their Players before the beginning of the game so that the group can agree on their gaming style. Then, everyone can play their part.

Knowing your players and adopting a gaming style

Some Players may be consummate fans of Shadows of Esteren. They may have read and reread Book 1 – Universe, and may have played or read about other supplements in the series. For example, a dedicated fan will know from the beginning that Mael Mac Govrian is meant to die in a fire, since this event is clearly mentioned in the profile of Eoghan, which can be found in Book 1 – Universe (on p. 184). Likewise, the chapter "Tri-Kazel" (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 14 to 21) contains several decisive clues about the upcoming campaign. If the Leader is dealing with such a group, they can make the most of it. Omens, premonitions, or the theme of unavoidable tragedy are examples of classic narrative elements that may strengthen the gothic and tragic atmosphere of the Focus Of Love and Fury–if not of the whole campaign! The Leader can always leave a feeling of doubt about whether or not the Players will be able to interfere with this or that event (Mael's demise, for example), so that the actual occurrence of the ensuing tragedy becomes all the more striking.

However, the Players may also be newcomers to Esteren. If the Leader wishes to add more suspense to this Focus, one method is to limit the Players' access to some information. For example, they can keep Mael's eventual death a secret until the very last moment.

Supports

Before the game begins, the Player who is the Lead (i.e. who has chosen the narrative arc of Love) will go out of earshot, while the Leader introduces the Supports available for this scenario to the other Players. If the Leader and Players do not yet feel totally in command of the particular principles of the Focuses, they should read the chapter "The Focuses" again, particularly the part "Principles and rules of the Focuses," on p. 83.

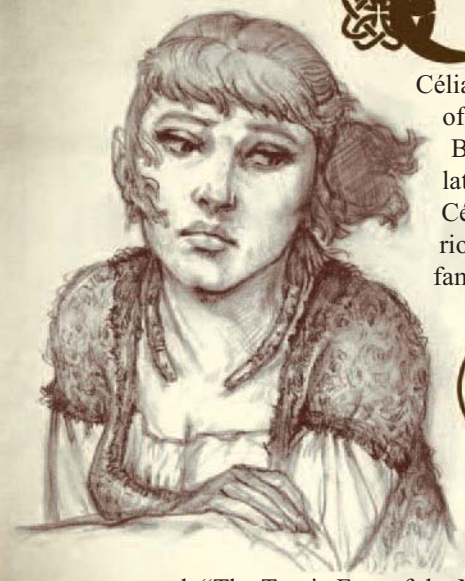
The profile of each Support includes information about their story, their personality, and the Key scenes they are involved in that the Leader will explain to the Players portraying them. The Support sheets summarize all of this information and are intended to be handed to the Players. The Leader can download the files for these sheets from the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org. The paragraphs below sum up this information for the Leader's reference during the game.

Another valuable game aid for the Leader is the relations diagram. This sheet sums up the bonds between the NPCs involved in the scenario and provides an overall vision of the various protagonists. The Leader can download a digital version of this relations diagram at the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org.

The Key scenes are particular moments when the Support will be involved in the Focus and bring elements that the Player will have to convey as faithfully as possible. All Players should therefore make sure to be familiar with the Support they will portray.

The ages of the Supports are not provided, since the Focus takes place at an indefinite time in the past, which may vary according to the story of the Support. General temporal indications are provided, but they are adjustable according to the story's needs.

Céliane



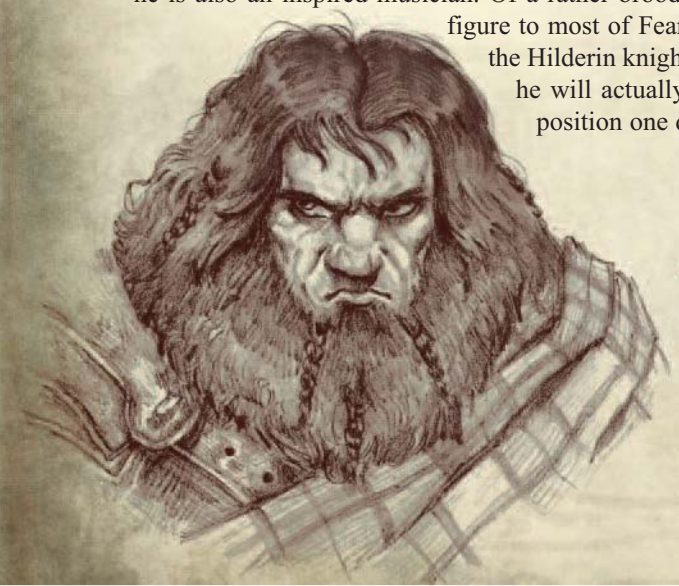
Céliane embodies solace and the yet unshaped romantic dreams of the PC. She is from the village of Fearìl where she intends to become a Dàmàthair and raise the children of her village (see Book 1 – Universe, The Dàmàthairs, p. 97). Her father Baorìg is Fearìl's Demorthèn, and her late mother was a Dàmàthair.

Céliane's heart is torn between the PC and the poetic and mysterious Mael Mac Govrian, one of the last heirs of the Vale's noble family.

Mael Mac Govrian



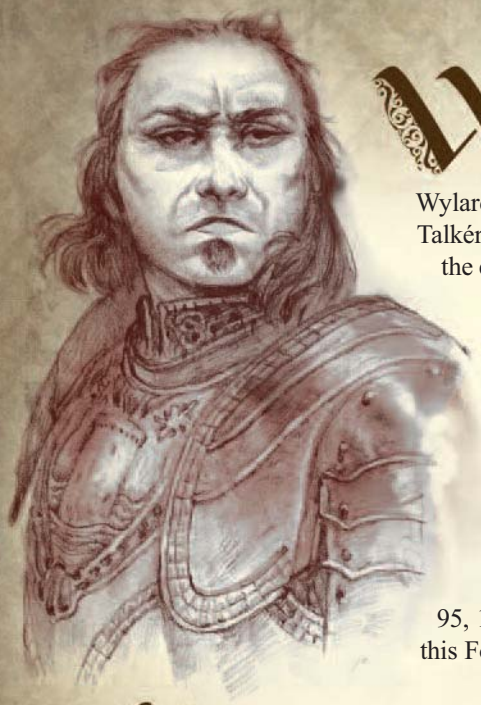
Mael Mac Govrian is an orphan, and the only relative he has left is his sister, Aline. The paragraph "The Tragic Fate of the Mac Govrians" (p. 17) provides information about the history of his family. He and the PC share a relationship of respectful rivalry, which later blossoms into friendship. Just like the PC, he is in love with Céliane. Although Mael intends to become a warrior, he is not only skilled in the use of arms: he is also an inspired musician. Of a rather brooding temper, Mael is a mysterious figure to most of Fearìl's inhabitants. With the weight of the Hilderin knights' regency, no one knows whether he will actually be able to ascend to his rightful position one day.



Ansailéir Maorn

A warrior's honor, the sense of duty, the judgment of society... Maorn is all these things made flesh. He is the current Ansailéir of Dearg and the father of the PC, to whom he gives a harsh education in order to shape him into the next Ansailéir.

Maorn's story and personality are detailed on p. 36.

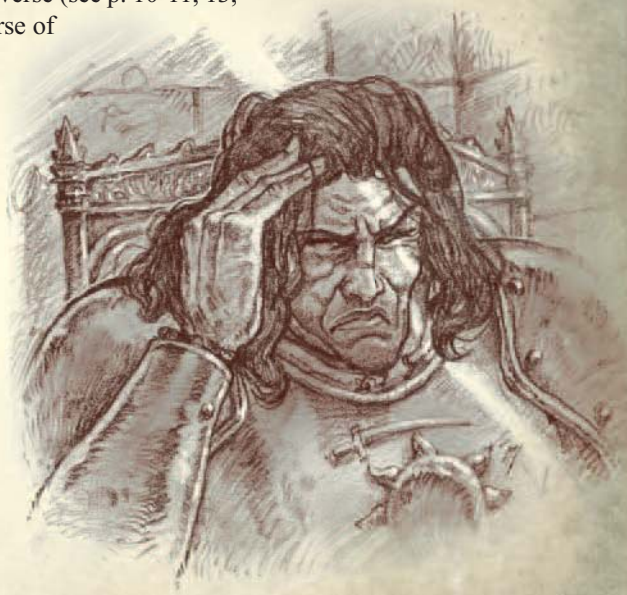


Wylard Mac Readan

Wylard Mac Readan is the brother of Demorthèn Baorìg of Fearìl, and Céliane's uncle. He is a Talkéride lord from the Dukedom of Salann Tìr where he owns land at the foot of the mountains, at the edge of the great Western Swamps. After the brutal death of his wife and children, Wylard went through a period of deep lethargy before experiencing a sudden burst of vigor. He decided to hatch a great campaign aimed at, to quote him, "purging the world of the Feond threat." This exalted mission borders on madness... But then again, maybe it is impossible to face such an immense peril without somewhat losing one's grip on reality.

For the PC, Wylard will be something of a mentor since he will supervise his military service. Being present during the tragedy that will befall Wylard's wife and children, the PC will also witness the consequences of losing a loved one, which will certainly remind him of the feelings he has for Céliane.

Wylard's story is covered in Book 1 – Universe (see p. 10-11, 13, 95, 138, and 173). It is also detailed in the course of this Focus.



Knight Argan

The current regent of the Vale of Dearg, a feared and hated man, the Hilderin knight Argan Mac Darag has quite the unsavory reputation and a story with its share of skeletons in the closet. An ambitious man, he does not flinch at orchestrating the murder of his enemies or anyone who might hinder his ascension.

Argan's story and personality are detailed on p. 40.



Jerryl of the Swamps

Jerryl was a Hilderin knight with a bright future ahead of him until his path met that of Princess Aïnlis. Struck by a ravenous passion, he became a rogue knight, gathering around him a gang of brigands called "the Iron Reeds," with the sole purpose of bringing down the castle of the Mac Tremens and ravishing Aïnlis. Jerryl receives the support of mysterious patrons from the city of Tuaille, which makes it possible for him to consider staging a large-scale attack. The secret society from Tuaille seeks to strike down the duke through Jerryl in order to destabilize the region.

Jerryl's story will put the Lead in front of another side of love: a devouring passion that can lead as far as felony. Conversely, Aïnlis represents the exact opposite: the resignation of an individual who sacrifices their freedom and liberty for the greater good.

The complete profile of this Character can be found on p. 154 of Book 2 – Travels.

Extras in Of Love and Fury

This Focus can involve many Extras. As explained in the chapter "The Focuses" (p. 80), such roles can be improvised on the spot by the Leader and Players. However, for certain scenes, the Leader should not hesitate to take the necessary Players aside to fill them in.

For example, in the Scene 5 of Act 2, Mael overhears a conversation between the page Doern and the knight Deaglàn. Before starting the scene, the Leader should take the two Players playing these Extras aside in order to inform them of what the subject of their discussion will be.

Chronology

The Acts and Scenes of this Focus are set in chronological order. They focus on key moments of the Lead's past. However, this sequence is flexible, and many other scenes can be inserted, considering that this Focus covers several years of the PC's life.

To prepare for the game, the Leader may want to refer to the game aid that includes a rundown of each scene, as well as a timeline providing an overall vision of the Focus's course. Digital versions of these game aids can be downloaded at the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org.

An example of chronology

Though Leaders can freely adapt the chronology, a concrete example of the sequence of events can help lay out the various steps more easily. The timeline offered below is as tightly packed as possible, in case the Leader wants to go through the whole Focus in a limited time. It also mentions any premade Characters or signature NPCs that may be involved.

- 899: Jerryl of the Swamps goes rogue.
- 899: Adeliane falls gravely ill before being mysteriously cured and hence starting her training as an Ionnthén with Demorthèn Loeg; Finn leaves for Reizh to become a Magientist.
- Winter 904 - Late Faoiltreach: Maorn begins training his son in the use of weapons. The Lead meets Mael (Act I, Scenes 1 and 2).
- Earrach Feis 905: Coming of age festival for all those who have turned 16 in Dearg and Fearìl, which includes Mael, the Lead, and Céliane.
- Summer 905 - Og-mhios: The bandits attack (Act I, Scenes 5 and 6).
- Summer 905 - Late Og-mhios: Mael and the Lead depart for their military service in Saltwaters (Act II, Scene 1).
- Spring 906 - Céitan: Death of Wylard's family (Act II, Scene 3).
- Spring 906 - Luchar: Attack against the Duke of Salann Tìr (Act II, Scene 4).
- Spring 906 - Lunasdal: Departure from Saltwaters and return to Dearg (Act II, Scene 5; Act III, Scene 1).
- Fall 906 - Sulthainn: The tax (Act III, Scene 2) after insufficient crops.
- Fall 906 - Damhar: Death and funeral of Mael (Act III, Scenes 4 through 6).
- Fall 907: Sìd, grievously wounded, reaches Dearg; epilogue of Gaol.

The Leader is free to alter the timeline to fit the needs of the campaign or the PCs' story. In any case, writing down such a timeline will help by providing an overall vision of the succession of the events.

Duration of the game

Of Love and Fury is a rather dense scenario whose duration may vary according to the pace the Leader wishes to set for their sessions. By playing the scenes one after the other, with a fast-paced narration, it is possible to go through it in a single session that will last between 6 and 10 hours. Conversely, the Leader can develop each Act, play out the journeys, and let the Players explore each aspect of the story in detail. This Focus may then turn into a small campaign spanning several gaming sessions.

Default Characters and dates

By default, the Focuses use locations and dates related to the narrative arcs. Thus, they will take place in Dearg, with its inhabitants, but also with the dates that tie to the premade Characters' backstories.. For example, in Of Love and Fury, the PC will have Maorn as a father and share the same family as Eoghan. Compared to Eoghan's story as described on p. 184 of Book 1 – Universe, only the time of Mael Mac Govrian's death was changed for the needs of the scenario: it takes place after the young men's military service instead of before.

The information given here is not absolute and unchangeable, and may be adapted according to the Leader's needs. The chapter "Adapting and Managing Your Campaign" p. 66 provides several tools to handle such adaptations. The only biographical elements that cannot be removed are listed in the prerequisites of the narrative arc of Love (see p. 57).

Adapting this scenario with another Lead

One of the assumptions of this Focus is that the PC is Maorn's son. Yet, this biographical detail is not a mandatory prerequisite for the narrative arc of Love. What happens if the PC is very different from Eoghan's profile?

The chapter "Adapting and Managing Your Campaign" (p. 66) provides some tips to resolve such an issue. Here is a concrete example with a PC created for the playtesting of the campaign's scenarios: Yrdàn. This Character is a fighter from a region far away from Dearg with an affinity for the Demorthèn arts; two things that make him very different from Eoghan. The only thing he shares with him are the two prerequisites of his narrative arc: his love for Céliane and a relationship of friendship and rivalry with Mael.

Here are some examples of how the scenario was adapted:

Maorn as a mentor.

Since Maorn is not Yrdàn's father, the closest thing he can be is a mentor. Yrdàn came to Dearg at a rather young age; he has been trying to fit in, and Maorn has taken it upon himself to supervise him. This relation could also be approached from a different angle: Yrdàn is a stranger who is a suitor for one of the Vale's girls, so he must prove himself worthy and Maorn is there to test him.

Eoghan's fate.

Since Yrdàn will have Eoghan's role, it remains to be decided what will become of him during the campaign. The box "Using and adapting the premades to your campaign" on p. 82 discusses the choice that was made: the Leader simply decided to remove Eoghan from his campaign entirely. Therefore, Maorn's children were limited to his three daughters.

Justifying the wedding with Céliane.

As a result of the PC created by the Player, the Leader will have to adapt the scenario. In Yrdàn's case, it may be decided that his proficiency with the Demorthèn arts convinces Fearìl's Demorthèn, who is Céliane's father to give him her hand. The Focus will show how Yrdàn distinguished himself and saved the young woman, which may become a decisive point in her father's decision. The fact that Eoghan doesn't exist removes the possibility of an arranged wedding with the son of Dearg's Ansailéir aiming at bringing the two villages closer.

The PC has already performed his military service.

Act 2 of the Focus depicts the military service of the Lead, but Yrdàn has already performed his duty by the time he reaches Dearg. Instead, it can be imagined that Lord Wylard requests the presence of the two young men (the PC and Mael) in his domain in order to have additional manpower or to judge their worth as a precursor to Céliane's wedding.

For this adaptation, the Leader should spend some time reviewing the Focus and designing adjustments wherever necessary. The Players should be invited to contribute by adapting their Characters' story as well. For example, if the Player has imagined that their PC came to Dearg recently, the Leader may suggest that he in fact came much earlier, which will make it easier to establish the master-pupil relationship with Maorn, the development of the relationship with Céliane, etc.

Act I: A Troubled Love

This Act goes back to the Lead's youth and explores his relationship with some of the most important people in his life: his father Maorn, his rival and friend Mael, and finally the one he loves, Céliane.

Scene 1: Earning a father's love

Support: Maorn.

Extras : The Lead's mother (Nennoga) and his three sisters (Tanwen, Deila, and Geilis, whose profiles can be found on p. 30).

Arcana – Cantar de Procella - 2 – Chant of the awakening

This deep, incantation-like song from Arcana will perfectly illustrate the pressure the Lead is under during this first scene.



The scenario opens with a breathtaking vision of the Vale of Dearg. The top of the firs bend under the powerful, howling wind sweeping the Vale. Beyond the forest, the mountains covered with everlasting snow tower in the distance... And then, the eye catches the village of Dearg, built on several levels of a small plateau, directly below a steeper slope.

The first scene takes place in front of the village hall. This morning, Maorn is training his son in close combat. The Lead is about fifteen. Since the scene takes place in the past, the Lead, being inexperienced, will only have half of his Close Combat rating, rounded down (i.e. 2 if his level is 5, or 3 if he has a Discipline at 6). Maorn's characteristics are available p. 36.

Ruthless training.

The Lead is pushed to his limits by his father, who is never satisfied with him. Both combatants fight with great staffs, the extremities of which are wrapped in thick cloth. Maorn does not hold back and urges his son to fight back and be more aggressive–which, in game terms, equates to increasing his Combativeness. At the end of the session, Maorn tells his son that he is going to spend a month under the orders of the Hilderins in Smiorail, in order to toughen him up. What his father doesn't tell him is that it is also a good way for the Ansailéir to know what happens there.

The Lead's mother and sisters dare not speak against the head of the family, but they try to support the Lead by bringing him food when he is alone, tending to his wounds, cheering him on, exhorting him to be patient, and reminding him of the values of the village and of Taol-Kaer.

Scene 2: Brothers in arms

Supports: Mael Mac Govrian, Argan. **Extras**: Hilderin knights, soldiers, Aline

This second scene focuses on the meeting between the Lead and Mael, and the beginning of their friendship. It takes place in the Fortress of Smiorail overlooking the village of Fearïl. The Lead has been sent there by Maorn to be trained by the Hilderins. The Lead will notice that he has a lot in common with Mael, both being isolated from their communities and ordered around by the Hilderins.

Here are a few important moments:

A conversation.

Mael and the Lead have taken the habit of meeting on the walkways of the fortress where they talk for hours on end, in particular about their difficult lives (biographical information about Mael is included in his Support sheet). During their last days at the fortress, Mael will tell the Lead that he is in love with a girl he'd rather not mention the name of: the walls have ears, and the Hilderins might try to use this information against him. He will only mention the color of her hair: golden blond. At this time in the story, the Lead does not know that Mael is talking about Céliane.

Training.

The Lead shares with Mael the training given by the Hilderins. He sees in Argan a man as harsh as his father.

Pitfall.

One day, Mael leaves for a hunting session, along with his sister, the Lead, and a few soldiers and knights. The PC gets into danger (sinking into a bog or swept by the current of a river) and Mael helps him out. The purpose is to establish the friendship that binds the two boys and the courage of Mael, who does not hesitate to put himself in danger to save the life of the Lead.



Scene 2 can be entirely narrated: the Leader simply tells the Players how the Lead and Mael met, their friendship, their conversations, etc. Conversely, the Leader may decide to detail these moments in-game, describing the training with the Hilderins, letting the Players act out the discussions between Mael and the Lead, etc. Though this second possibility can give more weight to these scenes with Mael, it will also be more time-consuming, and the Leader should expect it to take an hour, if not more. In particular, the box "Drowning and natural dangers" at the end of this scenario provides tools to simulate the moment the Lead gets bogged down or swept away in a river.

Scene 3: Earrach Feis

Supports: Celiane, Argan.

Extras: Inhabitants of Fearìl, Hilderin knights.

Delphine Bois - Of Men and Obscurities - 06 - Earrach Feis

Earrach Feis is a festival inherited from the Osag tradition. It celebrates the spring equinox and the return of warmer days. The villages of Melwan, Loch Varn, Dearg, and Fearìl are accustomed to organizing, one after the other, this great celebration that attracts not only many people from the four communities, but also a few peddlers and travelers. This date also marks the passing from childhood into adulthood for everyone growing out of the third age circle at the age of sixteen. Up to this day, young people bear the status of Pàisde, which means "child" in the ancient tongue. This makes Earrach Feis a very important moment for the whole community, with several contests acting as rites of passage.

Earrach Feis.

For the Lead, this event takes place with a sense of freedom, far from his father and his constant judgment. This is also when the PC meets Céliane, dances with her, competes with his rivals, and gets opportunities to shine. Céliane's attitude is ambiguous: she shows that she appreciates the PC a lot–which may feed his hopes–but at the same time, she seems hesitant, and even upset at times. This is because she already knows Mael at this moment in the story, and though she feels very attracted to him, her meeting with the PC troubles her a good deal.

Mael Mac Govrian is not present during the festival. Along with his sister, he has been in the capital of the dukedom since last month and should only return the following week.

Here are a few highlights of the festival:

The rite of Domhach.

This word means "wild" in the ancient tongue. During the month preceding Earrach Feis, the hunters of the community venture into the moor to capture wild Caernides and bring them back to the village. In a pen built for the occasion, which is considered sacred, each Pàisde will have to mount a wild Caernide bareback, and try to hold on for as long as possible. Remember that in Tri-Kazelian culture, Caernides are sacred, and their capture for domestication only takes place once a year, during Domhach, which makes this rite all the more important. It symbolizes one's confrontation with one's wild self through a sacred animal representing the spirit of the forest, Gobhar. Remaining astride a Caernide requires an Easy (8) Feats or Travel roll for each second, with a +1 to the Difficulty Threshold for each subsequent roll. Thus, being able to hold on for only 10 seconds is quite the achievement! The Lead will use the same Ways as his current self, but his Domains will be limited to 4. Holding on for 5 seconds or more is a feat that people will tip their hats to. Each Pàisde can use the Way they wish among Combativeness, Creativity, or Empathy, which will express their personality according to how they go at this contest. Certain Advantages can be used, such as Strong to grab with all of one's might, Intuitive to anticipate the animal's moves, Nimble to follow the thrashing and gracefully go with the flow, etc. Falling on the spot and losing one's mask (which happens on a natural 1 on the first roll) is always seen as a bad omen, which may be interpreted in various ways: the Pàisde will be weak and frail, they must beware of wolves, the forest denies them, etc. It may be that the PC fares poorly during this contest... the Leader may then arrange other opportunities for him to shine before Céliane, at other games and contests during the course of the festivities.

The dance.

Earrach Feis is also a festival during which the young people of the various communities meet, in preludes to possible future weddings. The vales around Dearg follow the custom of exogamy and favor weddings between people from different communities. The Lead dances with a young woman who will later turn out to be Céliane (she is wearing a mask for now, and the feathers and trinkets make it look like she has brown hair). There are several ways the PC might get closer to the young woman: a meddling boy that the PC may drive away, Céliane intensely looking at the PC, etc.

When Céliane takes off her mask, the PC will see that she is blond and will have a bad feeling. He will suddenly remember his conversation with Mael and have a hunch that she is the girl he is in love with.

The Cumadh.

After the evening following Earrach Feis has concluded with the Rite of Fire (see "The masks." on the next page), the Demorthèn of Fearìl takes the Pàisdes recently admitted into the adult community to a sacred place outside of the village. On this morning, the group goes to a small clearing where a towering megalith stands. Everyone, whether boy or girl, is dressed in the same way: a leather breastplate, a Philibeg (a tunic worn tight at the waist by a belt), as well as a great cloak with the colors of the clan of the Mac Govrians (green and yellow). The procession walks in a line, two by two. Of course, chance has it that the Lead and Céliane walk side by side... Once they reach the clearing, the Demorthèn introduces each member of the group to the spirits and implores them for protection all throughout their adult life. In the ancient tongue, Cumadh means "introduction," so this moment is also called the Rite of Introduction.

The masks.

Every adult-to-be wears a mask that symbolizes their status of Pàisde. At mid-afternoon, a bonfire is lit to celebrate the Rite of Fire, called Modh Aingeal, during which every Pàisde throws their mask into the flames. Symbolically, they make an offering of their childhood to Aingeal, the spirit of fire, in order to become adults. This rite is commonly practiced in the mountainous regions of the center of the peninsula, but it has many local variants.



Scene 4: Jealousy

Supports: Céliane, Mael, Maorn.

Extras: Ansailéir Arl, inhabitants of Dearg, other PCs (if suitable; see below).

This scene takes place in Dearg, at the beginning of the month of Og-mhios, when the air is warm, several weeks after the winter snows have thawed. Each year, at the same time, all the marriages arranged during the year are celebrated. The following week, the Demorthèn of the Vale leave for the yearly Tsioghair. This year, Dearg is going to celebrate a dozen weddings and welcomes families from the nearby villages: Melwan, Fearìl, Loch Varn, and even one from Terkhên, cousins of Ansailéir Arl.

A delegation from Fearìl is present since Lachina, one of the daughters of Ansailéir Arl, is going to marry Gireg, the son of master smith Fanch. It promises to be a happy wedding, as the betrothed love each other and have the blessing of their families. For this celebration, Demorthèn Baorìg, his daughter Céliane, and also Mael Mac Govrian and a few other inhabitants of Fearìl have come to witness the ceremonies.

This event gathers Céliane, Mael, and the Lead for the first time. Even though Céliane will not snub the Lead and will directly ask him for news, he cannot help but notice the bond between Mael and Céliane. The young man whispers words in the ear of the young Dàmàthair that make her laugh. Some inhabitants (Extras played by the Players) notice it with amusement. Later, Mael plays a few songs with his harp, singing of the legends of the Vale. The locals gather around him, and Céliane is visibly impressed.

Jealousy (see Céliane and Mael's sheets).

As he notices the bond between Mael and Céliane, the Lead will feel a burning jealousy. He will be saddened to see that Mael has Céliane's favor, and the Leader should take some time to explore the Character's feelings with the Player. The Lead may be asked to pass an Influence Test to keep his jealousy under control.



SETTING

If the Leader wishes to detail the wedding ceremonies, they can find information about them on p. 101 of Book 1 – Universe. This scene also puts the Lead face to face with a happiness that will appear to him as out of his reach. Since this scene will take place in Dearg, the other Players can also be their own PCs if the dates match: Joris, Finn, Adeliane, or the Tarish sisters may be present. This will be an excellent opportunity to create common memories and connections between the PCs.

Jokes during the wedding

Like in any big festival, some will make conjectures and bets on the next weddings. Extras may mention things that should jolt and annoy the Lead: "When are you going to find a pretty girl? Time flies, you know, don't dally!", "Follow Mael's example!", "Céliane's taken! Tough luck, she's the prettiest girl in the Vale. C'mon, you can have Adeliane; no one wants a jinx like her!" These jabs will aggravate the Lead, and the Leader may ask for a Test roll based on Passion. On a failure, his reaction may be scathing, if not downright violent.

Scene 5: A benevolent figure

Supports: Céliane, Mael, Maorn.

Extras: Black Feather bandits, Adeliane.

The day following the weddings, the guests stay in Dearg to get some rest and prepare for their trip back. This is also an opportunity to pleasantly spend time during mid-morning, as the couples gather in the village's sacred square, dressed in the traditional garb of the newlyweds: a white tunic held tight at the waist by a belt decorated with Ogham of Water, Earth, and Life.

Maorn and the Lead are not present. Earlier in the morning, Maorn instructed the Lead, as well as Feren, another one of the village's warriors, to escort Adeliane, the Ionnthén of Demorthèn Loeg. She must go into the wilderness to gather several ingredients for her master's upcoming journey to the Tsioghair, the yearly gathering of the Demorthèn of the whole peninsula.

It is entirely possible for the Ionnthén to correspond to one of the group's PCs, particularly the one who has chosen the narrative arc of Guilt. In this case, the Player may play their Character, replacing Adeliane.

The brigands.

On the village square, a hunter speaks of how he noticed a group of marauders lurking near the village earlier this morning. He urges the community to be careful, especially those who are to leave soon. Mael learns of the Lead's mission and will get a bad feeling about it. He will mention it to Maorn, but the Ansailéir will remain adamant, declaring that his son must be brave and perform his mission. Mael will then decide to go after his friend, and despite his objections, a visibly worried Céliane will come with him.

Mael's fears are justified: the Ionnthén and her two bodyguards are attacked by five Black Feathers. The brigands are aware of the local customs and have been keeping an eye on the village, waiting to catch unwary travelers come for the wedding in a vulnerable position. Despite their hesitation after one of them recognizes and points out Adeliane (laying hands on a Ionnthén violates the customs imposing a due respect to Demorthèn), they attack the young woman and her two guardians, dreading the wrath of their leader should they come back empty-handed. And after all, if they kill the Ionnthén, there will be no one to denounce them.

During the fight, the Leader should let the Lead prove a worthy fighter, but end up seriously injured.

The Bandits

- Attack: 8
- Damage: 2
- Defense: 8
- Health: 19
- Speed: 5

The intervention of Mael and Céliane turns the fight in the defenders' favor and drives away the brigands. The duo first shoot their bows before getting into close quarters. As a prospective Dàmàthair, Céliane has trained in the use of weapons and will not hesitate to meet her opponents in close combat. Very quickly, in the face of unexpected reinforcements, the bandits will retreat.

Soon, clouds gather above the vale, thunder rumbles through the sky, and a sudden downpour drenches the combatants. The group agrees to take shelter in a cave Adeliane knows. Céliane takes care of the wounded, while Mael ventures out to look for food or help. The Lead finds himself alone with Céliane while Adeliane and Feren keep watch at the cave's entrance. She tends to his wounds and proves very gentle, clearly worried about his health. The young Dàmàthair-to-be cheers the Lead up, congratulates him for his bravery, and assures him that he is already a man, no matter what his father may say. Céliane admits that she was very afraid and worried. In her eyes, the Lead can catch glimpses of emotions that trouble him.



Céliane was truly worried about the Lead and did not hesitate to risk her life for him. It is actually at this moment that the young woman realizes that she has feelings for both boys–of different natures, of course, but strong ones that she cannot ignore. Another aspect of this scene is to show Céliane as a benevolent, protective figure for the Lead, in contrast to his father's severity. Céliane is a positive reinforcement of what he is,

highlighting his courage. This will certainly make the Lead's feelings for her all the stronger, seeing how she watches over him and encourages him. The Leader, like a voice-over, may narrate and explain these elements as the scene moves forward from the Players' role-playing.

Scene 6: The Talkéride Lord

Supports: Wylard, Mael, Céliane, Maorn. **Extras**: Demorthèn Loeg, Adeliane, inhabitants of Dearg.

The day after the brigand attack, the small group is safely back in Dearg, and the Lead goes to rest. Demorthèn Loeg and Baorìg are getting ready for their journey to the Tsioghair, on which they will not take their Ionnthén, who are still too young and inexperienced.

Wylard's visit.

A small delegation reaches the village, led by Wylard Mac Readan, Lord of Saltwaters in the dukedom of Salann Tìr, and brother of Fearìl's Demorthèn, Baorìg. Wylard is back from a diplomatic trip to the capital of the dukedom of Dùlan where he met Duke Làn Mac Torrach as a representative of Salann Tìr. Apart from suspicious troop movements from the Gwidrite Lord Mac Snòr, of the nearby Vale of Thoir, Wylard has no significant information to report to his brother.

Wylard and his men are invited to spend the night in Dearg. A feast is organized in the village hall where Maorn, the Lead, Céliane, Mael, the Demorthèn and their Ionnthén, as well as other inhabitants of Dearg are present. This banquet is an opportunity for the subject of the future of Baorìg's daughter to come up. Wylard urges a sensible marriage. After all, since Dearg and the neighboring vales are under the control of the Hilderins, they are in a situation similar to the dukedom of Salann Tìr, where a governor makes sure that the subjects of the King remain loyal. In such conditions, strong alliances are necessary to keep royal power from encroaching on local interests.

Baorìg publicly mentions the most serious contenders: Mael, last heir of the Mac Govrians, as well as the Lead, son of Ansailéir Maorn. Wylard agrees, since in both cases it would strengthen Fearìl. With Mael, the village would be led by a couple combining the prestige of nobility with the authority of the Demorthèn through his daughter, which would be a way to associate a temporal power with a spiritual one; with the Lead, the wedding would unite Dearg and Fearìl more closely, which would form a tighter resistance against exterior threats as well as against the pressure of the Hilderins. Finally, Baorìg mentions that his daughter is very appreciative of both boys, which is an important consideration for him. To decide between them, Wylard offers to take them to his domain of Saltwaters so that they can perform their military service. This way, he will be able to assess them and provide an honest opinion on who would be the best suitor.

Act 2: Military Service

This act covers the military service of the Lead and Mael Mac Govrian, which lasts about a year. In spite of their rivalry over Céliane, this experience will seal their friendship by leading them to support each other through the various ordeals that await them. The Lead will also be confronted with another facet of love, embodied by the rogue knight Jerryl of the Swamps. Finally, this act depicts crucial moments in the life of Wylard Mac Readan.

The journey to Saltwaters

Depending on how much time they want to dedicate to this focus, the Leader can fast-forward to the Lead reaching the destination or, conversely, play each traveling day until he reaches the doors of the castle of the Mac Readans. Several short scenarios can be played during the journey. In that case, the Lead will travel alongside Mael Mac Govrian and Wylard Mac Readan, as well as a small retinue of faithful knights, who can be used as Extras by the Players.

The political situation in Salann Tìr

Though the dukedom of Salann Tìr is officially faithful to the crown, the King still decided to send a governor to "aid the duke in making the best decisions." The fact is that Salann Tìr is a strategic territory of great importance to the king of Taol-Kaer since it is located between several problematic regions: the unstable dukedom of Tulg, the Lands of Dèas that have always kept a certain independence, and the grudging dukedom of Tuaille, suspected of fostering cabals and schemes. Should he lose his authority over this region, the whole of the western territories might slip away from him.

Athelstan Mac Tremen.

The old duke of Salann Tìr, a widower who recently remarried, is a rather kind, though reserved, man. His allegiance to the King is genuine, but his lack of assertiveness risks fostering an uprising. His family owns the domain of Sàl, which literally means "Salt."

Governor Telaseg.

Sent by the crown, Telaseg is an intelligent man devoted to the cause of his King. He has proven to be rather subtle with the duke, letting him take care of the day-to-day business and feigning aloofness. In truth, his political influence over the region is considerable, in particular because he has most of the armed forces of the dukedom under his command. Telaseg sees the Iron Reeds as a real concern, suspecting that there must be outside influence at work to upset the region.

Princess Ainlis.

This young woman is a relative of the King of Taol-Kaer, and bears the title of princess, which is always an asset in the game of diplomatic dealings and political alliances. In this domain, sense must always dominate sensibility, and thus she was wed to the old duke to strengthen ties between the domain of Sàl and Osta-Baille. This marriage of convenience has proven to hold few charms, but the duke is a kind man, which makes her situation more comfortable than that of others who share a similar fate.

The Iron Reeds.

Led by the rogue knight Jerryl of the Swamps, this band of brigands is starting to grow to a frightening size. Its reputation is even stretching outside of the dukedom's borders and has been attracting criminals on the run to the bogs. Governor Telaseg is worried about this escalation, and his fears are well-founded. The brigands are indirectly financed by secret patrons from Tuaille who hope that Jerryl and his men will reach their goal: seizing the castle of the Mac Tremens and bringing down the duke.



Scene 1: The domain of Saltwaters

Supports: Wylard, Mael.

Extras: Locals of the domain of Saltwaters.

The ancestral land of the Mac Readans is located between Louarn and Tùrsal, with the Mòr Roimh at its back and the great Western Swamps in front of it. It is a land of salt and bogs, snowy and frosty when winter comes. In spite of these harsh conditions, the Mac Readans have been able to thrive from the trade of salt, in particular thanks to the proximity of the path leading to Deanaidh in the south.

The first scene is an opportunity for the PCs to discover the domain and become acquainted with the prominent locals, who may be played as Extras by the Players:

Edel Mac Readan:
A charismatic woman, and a crafty trader who administers the trade of salt. She is a major player in the fortune of the Mac Readans, having notably concluded advantageous deals with the merchants of Deanaidh.

Maoriss and Padriga:
The son and daughter of the lordly couple, each close to 10 years old. Maoriss seeks to follow in his father's footsteps and is always looking for some training session he may take part in. Padriga dreams of great journeys and is a bit too interested in Magience for her mother's tastes.

Page Doern:
The family's faithful servant, Doern acts as steward as well as a messenger, secretary, and page. He has already been left in charge of administering Saltwaters in the absence of its rulers several times.

Damsel Geleis:
Wylard's niece, this orphan of 15 was taken under her uncle's wing some 10 years ago, and he has been like a father to her ever since. Geleis is a soft-spoken but quick-witted girl who has been efficiently assisting Edel Mac Readan in the managing of the salt trade. She is also Céliane's cousin, and bears an uncanny resemblance to her.

Knight Deaglán:
Along with Doern, he is one of Wylard's most trusted advisers. He leads the small garrison of the domain and takes care of the training sessions when Wylard is not available to do so. A striking physical characteristic of Deaglán's is that he bears a scar that mars his lip. He is a principled man, staunchly loyal to the Mac Readans. Originally a commoner, he was taken in by Wylard's father, who trained him personally before securing a noble title for him, making him part of the knighthood of Taol-Kaer.

The castle and surrounding habitations house a small community made up of the garrison's soldiers, the servants, and the followers of the Mac Readans. All through the year, young people of the surrounding lands come to perform their military service. At the Leader's discretion, Mael and the Lead may be the only two going through military service at the castle, or they may be sharing this experience with other young people.



Daily life in the domain of Saltwaters

As with the journey to the castle of the Mac Readans, the Leader may decide to fast-forward through the PCs settling in and spending their first weeks in the castle, and get directly to the action with Scene 2 – The Iron Reeds. Conversely, they may decide to play out the daily life of a young person going through military service:

Martial training.
Supervised by Wylard or Deaglán. The training is harsh, with young recruits facing more experienced soldiers, and being introduced to the wielding of new weapons and the wearing of heavier armor (which may justify the PCs having access to various Disciplines or Fighting Arts).

Mounts and stables.
The recruits have to clean the stables and tend to the Caernides and the few horses.

Messenger.
The PCs travel with Doern and an escort to deliver messages to nearby towns (Louard, Llewellen, or Deanaidh).

Patrolling.
The recruits accompany soldiers on a patrol around the castle and farther into the domain of Saltwaters, all the way up to the salt marshes. The objective is to dissuade bandits, drive away wild animals, and potentially prevent a Feondas attack.

Hunting.
The PCs may also be part of hunting and fishing parties in the swamps to bring food back to the castle.

Scene 2: The Iron Reeds

Supports: Mael. **Extras**: Page Doern, knight Deaglán, soldiers.

Lord Wylard has a visit from Salann Tìr's governor, Telaseg. He has come to communicate his worries concerning the expansion of the Iron Reeds, and his intuition that there is some kind of scheme being wrought against the duke. He urges Wylard to start an investigation in his lands and to gather intelligence about the brigands. If even the domain of the duke is threatened, what will happen to that of one of his vassals, supposedly less powerful and less defended? Is there reason to fear that Jerryl could become a rebellious lord, with pretensions to the rank of duke, or even of king? Who knows what might result from a single man's boundless ambition? Even if he ends up defeated, falling to Hilderin troops, the whole dukedom will suffer the depredations of war in the meantime...

Wylard decides to send his page Doern as well as the knight Deaglán to investigate. They will be escorted by a few soldiers, in addition to Mael and the Lead. The small expedition should number as many members as there are Players.

The investigation will yield information about the story of the rogue knight, Jerryl of the Swamps, who leads the troop of bandits (see p. 94 of this book, as well as p. 154 of Book 2 – Travels). Namely, the PCs might discover that Jerryl's love for Aïnlis is obviously one-sided. They may also dig up some clues hinting that some soldiers of the ducal army are corrupt and working for Jerryl.

The Leader can develop this scene to the point of devoting an entire session to it, with the PCs helping villagers repel a group of Iron Reeds, uncovering a bribing or blackmailing scheme, etc. In this case, the Leader is advised to take time to prepare a plot and the various steps of the investigation in advance. This will tighten the PCs' bonds with all the protagonists, in particular with Mael Mac Govrian. However, the Leader may decide instead to expeditiously narrate the investigation and its result to the Players, and focus only on the Key scene below. In that case, this scene can be rather short. Doing so can keep tensions going through the session, with one major event straight after another.

An unexpected encounter.

This scene occurs at the end of the PCs' investigation. They now know the story of the rogue knight, his burning love for Aïnlis, and his ambition to conquer the dukedom. The party has now ventured far into the lands of Salann Tìr and finds shelter in Samphires, a travelers' inn on the road to Tùrsal. When they enter, the PCs notice that the common room is pretty crowded; there are about twenty men, wearing leather armor and carrying weapons. The innkeeper mentions to the PCs that there will be rooms available since the men will leave soon. He sits the PCs at one of the tables and brings them food: some stew and chunks of rye bread. Very quickly, the Lead notices that the man sitting next to him is none other than Jerryl of the Swamps, and that all the armed men are members of the Iron Reeds. The rogue knight is not looking for a fight. If the tension rises among the PCs, the bandits' numbers should dissuade them from attempting anything. Jerryl and his men have made a stop at Samphires to get some food and will pay for what they have eaten. They will then march into the swamps, leaving no trace behind. This unexpected encounter will be a rare opportunity to talk with the knight, whom one of the Players should play as a Support.

Scene 3: A grim discovery



Supports: Mael, Wylard. **Extras**: Page Doern, knight Deaglán, soldiers, Lady Geleis.



This scene directly follows the previous one. As the party sent to investigate the Iron Reeds is on their way back to the domain of Saltwaters, they make a horrid discovery. On the side of the road, a cart has been upturned, part of its frame sunk in the bogs. The first thing everyone notices is the pennants of the domain of Saltwaters that hang limply from what remains of the wreckage of the vehicle. Page Doern is the first one to understand what they are seeing: Edel, Wylard's wife, along with her two children, had recently gone to visit her father, Raibert Mac Iseanor, who inhabits a nearby domain. The escort that accompanied them should have guaranteed their safety, but there is no one left alive. Men and animals alike have been slaughtered, the bodies battered and sometimes cut in two. The features of Edel and her children are twisted in horror. Even the Iron Reeds would never have perpetrated such wanton destruction. In fact, the victims have been left with all of their belongings. Evidently, this is the work of Feondas! Being subjected to such an awful sight and understanding the repercussions this may have results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check.

Very quickly, the page Doern decides that they had better not show the bodies' condition to Lord Wylard; the shock would be too great. The corpses are gathered and stowed for the return, and the grim procession resumes their journey back to the castle of Saltwaters.

This event displays another terrible facet of love: the loss of a loved one. How would the Lead react should this happen to him? What if he came to lose Céliane and his children along with her? The Leader may directly ask this question to the Players playing the Lead and Mael Mac Govrian.



Dire news.

One of the Players (Doern or the knight Deaglán) has the heavy duty of announcing to the lord the death of his wife and children. A great weight will suddenly fall on the domain as Wylard remains stunned by this impossible turn of events.



Graeme Revell – The Crow: City Of Angels – Original Score Album – 11 – Dias De Las Muertes

A somber, tragic song that will heighten the Key scene "A desperate act."



A desperate act.

The next day, the funeral takes place. The lord's retainers have prevented him from seeing the bodies, too mangled for their sight to be bearable. Crushed under the pain, Wylard offers no resistance. However, two days later, as if in a frenzy, he goes to dig up the bodies of his wife and children with his bare hands to hold them. The other PCs notice it the next morning. This scene should involve all the Players, who will be the Lead, the Supports, and members of Wylard's staff as Extras. The Leader will act as the narrator here and can put this scene into perspective with the Lead's love for Céliane. What is he feeling?

Scene 4: The rogue knight

Supports: Mael, Wylard, Jerryl of the Swamps. **Extras**: Page Doern, knight Deaglán, soldiers, Lady Geleis.

This scene starts at dawn, in the heart of the castle of the Mac Readans, in the throne room. The Lord is there, with Doern and his niece Geleis by his side. It is a few weeks after the death of Wylard's family. The Lord suffers from a debilitating fatigue, a lethargy that leaves him silent and haggard most of the time. His pallid complexion, unkempt beard, sunken eyes, and the wrinkles wrought on his pain-filled face give him the appearance of an old man even though he was a strong warrior mere weeks ago.

The doors of the throne room open with a loud crash, letting in a wounded messenger supported by a grim-looking Deaglán. The news quickly spreads: with a few dozen men behind him, the rogue knight Jerryl has staged a decisive attack against the castle of Duke Mac Tremen. Worse still, they have entered the inner court and threaten to bring down the last defenses. Wylard's help is needed, and soon, a small troop of 30 men, led by Deaglán and including Mael and the Lead, leaves at a full gallop for the lands of Duke Mac Tremen.

What happened?

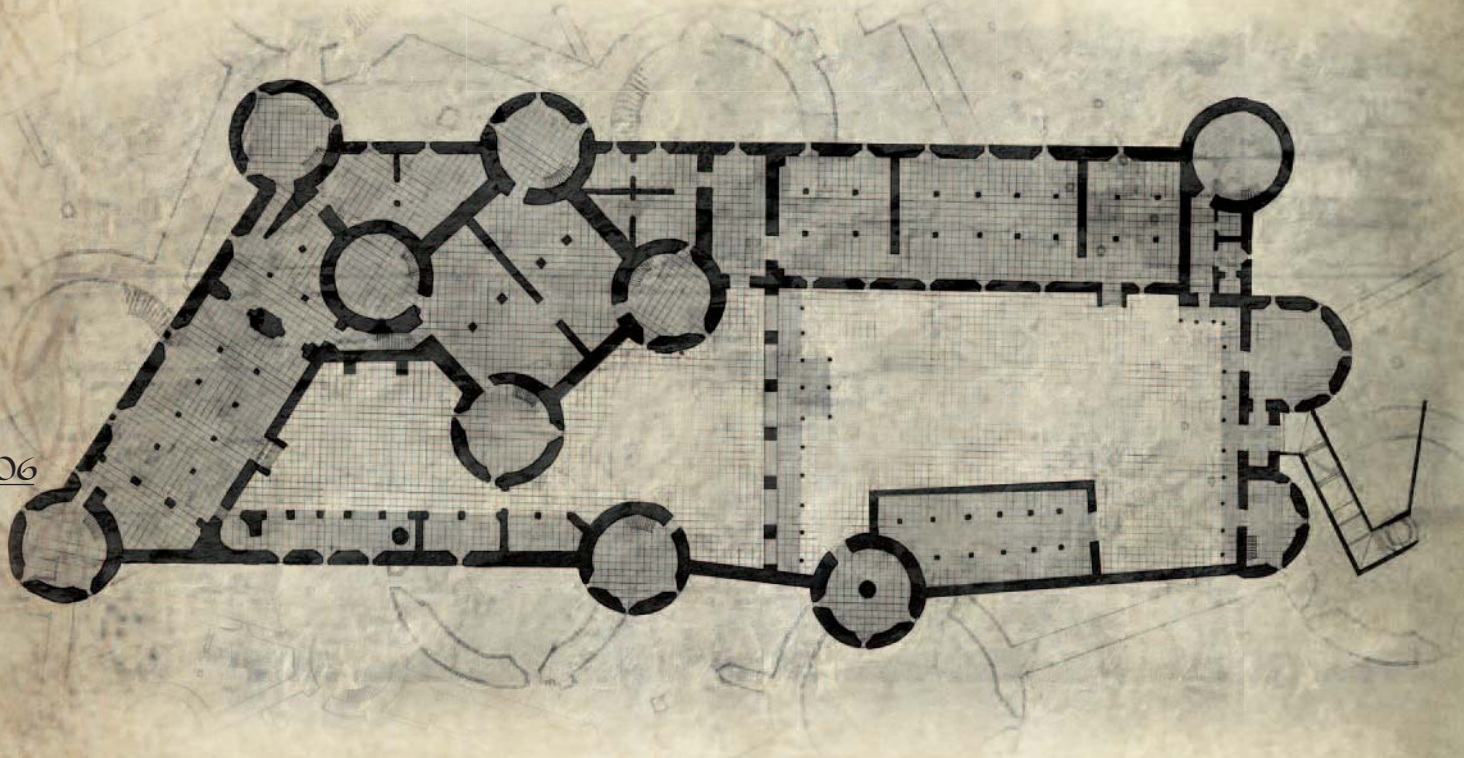
The castle of the Mac Tremens is built atop a hillock overlooking the swamps, and Jerryl was only able to storm it with the complicity of traitors who had infiltrated the ranks of the Duke's army. They arranged for the drawbridge to be down, which allowed Jerryl's troops–some 40 men–to sneak into the building under cover of darkness.

The Iron Reeds

- Attack: 10
- Defense: 10
- Speed: 5
- Potential: 2
- Damage: 2
- Health: 19

The situation at the PCs' arrival.

Sàl's inhabitants, though taken by surprise, were quick to react, and a very heated close-quarters battle quickly erupted in the main courtyard, the parapets, and even inside the buildings, with many victims on both sides. However, Jerryl had the numbers and the tactical advantage, which gave him the upper hand. The last defenders retreated into the keep with Duke Athelstan Mac Tremen, his wife Aïnlis, and governor Telaseg. When Deaglán's troop arrives, the bandits have just battered down the keep's doors with a ram. Some of them, including Jerryl, rush inside while most of the assailants remain to face the reinforcements. Though many of them are dead or injured, or busy fighting elsewhere in the citadel, the bandits still outnumber the castle's men.



Confrontation.

On the first floor of the keep, 15 soldiers, led by Jerryl, spear in hand, face half a dozen soldiers and archers spread in a semicircle to protect the Duke. A clearly panicked governor Telaseg has come forward with Princess Aïnlis, whom he holds tightly by the arm, a knife to her throat. If Jerryl does not surrender immediately, Telaseg will kill Aïnlis! The soldiers and the Duke are appalled, but since they are clearly about to be slaughtered, no one protests.

Soldiers and bandits are keeping a tight grip on their weapons as the Lead and Mael are the first to barge into the keep. The tension keeps rising, until Telaseg throws Aïnlis at Jerryl, who screams at his men not to move, whereas Telaseg orders the bowmen to shoot. Jerryl is seriously struck several times, but his armor saves him, which is not the case for several of his men who are shot down. Unfortunately, Aïnlis was struck by an arrow as well. A fight in close quarters begins, amidst which the PCs fight fiercely, toe-to-toe with their opponents.

As the fight seems to shift in the defenders' favor, the remaining Iron Reeds suddenly swarm in as reinforcements, offering Jerryl and one of his faithful lieutenants a desperate opportunity to run out of the keep, dragging the seriously injured Aïnlis with them.

The Lead and Mael manage to defeat their opponents and see Jerryl, Aïnlis, and the lieutenant heading for the drawbridge, while in the court, the battle between the brigands and Wylard's men is ending. In the end, the Lead and Mael will catch up with the two fugitives and their captive at the drawbridge. Apart from the PCs, there is no one to stop them from vanishing into the Western Swamps. Aïnlis has become very pale; if she is still alive, she requires urgent health care. Jerryl urges the PCs to let them go. The

Lead will have to make a grave decision. He can let the rogue knight go, or fight him. Despite his Bad Health Condition (Jerryl has no more than between 5 and 9 Health points left) and a -2 penalty to all rolls (and to Defense and Speed as well), Jerryl is still a fearsome foe. His lieutenant has the same characteristics as any other Iron Reed (see the previous page).



Jerryl will lecture the PC on the theme of love. How far would he be willing to go for his own beloved? Jerryl's exhortations will certainly remind the PC of his own story and feelings: "If there is only one thing, one being who fills your whole soul, who gives your life meaning, do you think it's fair to give up on her, to submit?" This goes even further, and although Jerryl obviously does not know about it, his words are almost prophetic concerning how the wedding of Mael and Céliane is decided: "The nobility don't care about women; they're just objects to be exchanged to seal an agreement, just like cattle! These people have water instead of blood. All they care about is gain… they feel nothing. They have never lived–they know nothing about what it means! Living is not being a slave to stupid conventions; it's loving and being ready to risk everything! Letting a selfish, manipulative king make a young woman unhappy by forcing her to marry an old man? All these people do is destroy lives and souls to become more powerful! Let us be free!"

Jerryl asserts that Aïnlis is unhappy here, that he only wishes to leave with her and never come back to this region, that he did all this for her... The unclear part about Jerryl's story pertains to the fact that Aïnlis never expressed the wish to leave with him–in truth, she is afraid of him. This information may have been previously obtained by the PCs during their investigation, and may be used to give the brigand second thoughts (see Scene 2 – The Iron Reeds). The PCs may try to convince Jerryl that his love is one-sided. Aïnlis will regain consciousness at the height of this scene, confirming that the rogue knight scares her and that she does not love him. Livid, Jerryl will then try to disappear into the swampy mists... unless the PCs stop him!



The fate of Jerryl of the Swamps

This Focus may result in Jerryl's death. However, should the Leader intend to make use of this signature NPC again in the future, they can for example have other members of the Iron Reeds emerge from the swamps to cut off the PCs' path and allow Jerryl to escape.

If he survives, this leaves the Leader with several possibilities depending on how the previous Key scene, "Confrontation," went. The rogue knight may experience this as a shattering epiphany, the revelation of how mistaken he was for all these years. Jerryl may seek redemption in the faith of the Temple, looking for ways to come to terms with his guilt and torments. He will seek asylum in a monastery, nurturing a deep-seated grudge or gratefulness toward the Lead and Mael. Perhaps he will appear in another of their adventures?

Another possibility is for Jerryl to lick his wounds and hatch a plot of terrible vengeance against the PCs that crushed his dreams. Conversely, Jerryl may become a precious ally, remaining thankful to the people who opened his eyes.

Victory over the Iron Reeds and reward

The bravery of the Lead and Mael may have had a considerable influence in repelling the Iron Reeds. They may have saved Princess Aïnlis, or even rid the world of a dangerous brigand... Their actions and heroism may earn them an official reward, delivered by the Duke himself during a ceremony taking place in his castle. The Leader has several options to choose from, which may be adapted according to the situation: a high-quality battleaxe that belonged to an ancestor of the Mac Tremens (Exceptional quality weapon with a +1 bonus to Damage and a value of 5Fd); a letter of recommendation describing the bravery of the Lead, which may be of great use should he have to deal with other lords; a monetary reward for a total value of 500Ed, etc.

Scene 5: An important message

Supports: Mael, Wylard.

Extras: Page Doern, knight Deaglán, soldiers, Lady Geleis.

This scene takes place a few weeks after Jerryl's assault. The military service of the Lead and Mael will end soon, and the weeks go by slowly.

In the castle of the domain of Saltwaters, Wylard Mac Readan is still wracked by an intense fatigue, and his health continues to dwindle. He seems to be getting older far faster than a normal man... His niece, Geleis, and his page, Doern, endeavor to maintain the trade of salt and administer the domain as they can. The atmosphere is gloomy, and despite the rout of the Iron Reeds, everyone feels that they are not out of the woods yet. The dukedom has been weakened, and a new attack could bring it down. The clan of the Mac Readans itself might disappear should something happen to Geleis.

Intrigue

An important conversation.

One evening, Mael overhears a conversation between page Doern and knight Deaglán. For them, the situation is worrying, and they must find a way to bolster the domain. Of course, a wedding would be a good solution, but currently, any negotiations would find them at a crushing disadvantage. Their idea is to call for Wylard's brother Baorìg, Fearìl's Demorthèn, to come to Saltwaters to defend the interests of the Mac Readans.

Wylard is in no condition to negotiate with other lords or emissaries of Taol-Kaer. Soon, advantage will be taken of his weakness, and the domain will lose its sovereignty. Moreover, Baorìg has a daughter who could be married to an influential personality of the region in order to strengthen the Mac Readans' alliances and their autonomy.

They decide that since the Lead and Mael are going back to Fearìl soon, they will entrust a message to them, authored by Doern and signed by Wylard, where the lord asks his brother to return to the land of his ancestors, along with his daughter. Mael then notices that he was not the only eavesdropper; nearby, he sees Lady Geleis who scuttles away into the shadows of the corridors.

Rivalry.

Geleis looks very unfavorably upon the arrival of Céliane, this other niece whom she sees as a rival. She cannot oppose Doern directly, but she will privately seek out the Lead to tell him about the page's project and the content of the letter. She will try to convince him that it is a bad idea: "What will Fearìl become without Baorìg? Wylard will recover sooner or later, this is unnecessary." Geleis also brings up Céliane's inexperience. She dishes out every argument she can come up with, and chance has it that some may tug at the Lead's heartstrings: "My cousin wants to become a Dàmàthair. If she comes here, she will never be able to fulfill her dream. And she certainly already has a life in Fearìl, she may even have a betrothed or a sweetheart…"

The Lead must pass an Influence Test lest his reaction show his feelings for Céliane. Geleis will then notice his embarrassment, and will be quick to make use of this newfound leverage: "It would be unfair to tear her away from her life. It would be like destroying two souls, wouldn't it? My adoptive mother is dead, I know how fragile existence is: too much to let go of someone you love and regret it until old age or harm puts an end to such bitter oblivion..."

Geleis then shares her plan: Doern will prepare a message and entrust it to the PCs without them knowing its content. All they will have to do will be to "lose" it on their way. This will delay Doern's plan and will give Wylard the necessary time to recover.

Dilemma.

Soon, it will be time for Mael and the Lead to go back to their villages. Page Doern then hands them the fateful message that they are to deliver to Fearìl. What will they decide? Deliver the message, or get rid of it?

The way back home.

After almost a year of military service, the PCs will now return home. They will be part of a small trading convoy that they will escort to Dearg. It is time to say goodbye to their hosts...



Mael will learn things by overhearing a conversation while the Lead will hear about them from Geleis. To heighten the atmosphere and the feeling of intrigue, the Leader can separate the Players for this scene. During the first part involving Mael, Deorn, Deaglán and Geleis, the Player playing the Lead will have to step out of the room, and will not know what will be said. Then, the other Players will leave while Geleis and the Lead talk privately... will Mael and the Lead share what they know, or will they keep it to themselves?

Act 3: Back to Dearg

The third act begins with the return of the Lead and Mael to Dearg and the reunion with Céliane, then progressively slips toward tragedy and the brutal death of Mael. Once more, depending on how long the Leader intends this phase to take, they may play the whole journey between Salann Tìr and Dearg, or fast-forward and begin the act at Dearg's doors.

Scene 1: Bitter reunion

Supports: Maorn, Céliane, Mael.

Extras: Dearg's inhabitants.

Jure Peternel – Dearg – 4 – Bitter Friendship

When the Lead and Mael are back in Dearg, they have the pleasant surprise of stumbling upon Céliane. She first seems not to believe her eyes, as she often doubted she would ever see the two boys again. A full year has gone by, and the three of them have changed. Even though her features have kept a hint of childish plumpness, Céliane has become a young woman.

After a moment of hesitation, Céliane will drop what she was doing to jump in Mael's arms. Then, she will give the Lead a tender hug, but he cannot help but notice the subtle, yet unequivocal nuances between how she behaves with him and with Mael.

Then, they will merrily reunite with the other inhabitants of Dearg.

A private conversation.

Soon, it will be time to talk about the message entrusted by Doern to the PCs. Actually, whatever they have done during their journey to Dearg, the Lead will overhear a conversation between Mael and Céliane. He tells Céliane about everything and encourages her to leave with her father for Saltwaters, the land of her ancestors. Her uncle needs her, and Mael's opinion is that Céliane will fare much better there than in Fearìl, which is a border region where the Hilderins are as much a menace as they are guardians. He himself wishes he could have such an opportunity. Céliane replies that there is no way she could leave him, because she loves him, to which Mael answers that he will do anything to be with her, wherever she might go.

As Mael and Céliane get closer and are about to kiss, the Lead may want to step in. However, this would reveal that he has been eavesdropping on them for some time, which is rather low. To get a grip on himself, he must pass a Passion Test, with possibly a bonus to Passion if he and Mael had previously agreed not to talk about the message, which will add the bitter taste of betrayal to this painful scene.

In the end, whatever he does, the Lead will have no choice but to let Mael and Céliane leave for Fearìl together while he remains in Dearg with his father Maorn, which will certainly make his disappointment all the more stinging.

Later, the Lead will get news of Fearìl through one of the locals staying at Dearg. The news of Baorìg's possible departure is the talk of the village. Baorìg seems uncertain, torn between his responsibilities as a Demorthèn and his duty to lend help to his brother and defend the land of his ancestors. Finally, after a few weeks of indecision and contradictory rumors, the news reaches the Lead: Baorìg refuses to abandon his community and leave for Salann Tìr. Céliane will therefore stay in Fearìl.

Scene 2: The Tax

Supports: Céliane, Mael, Argan. **Extras**: Inhabitants of Fearìl, knight Lugdan.



In this scene, the Lead will be in Fearìl, having escorted a small convoy of wares from the copper embossers, and he cannot resist seeing Céliane on his way. The young Dàmàthair tells him of a worrisome situation: the Hilderins are demanding a significant new contribution of provisions from the villagers, claiming that a new contingent is soon to arrive for their military service, which will result in many more mouths to feed. But winter promises to be harsh, and the crops have been disappointing. Ansailéir Arl does not dare speak up against Argan and his knights, fearing possible retaliation. As for Mael, he is said to have already negotiated as much as he could with the knight to protect the village's interests, but the quantities required remain substantial.

Argan comes to take the provisions, accompanied by some of his men, including his right-hand man, the knight Lugdan. The Lead may attempt to negotiate the quantities required once more. With a Standard (11)

Natural Environment (Agriculture) roll, he will be able to convincingly explain that the crops have not been productive enough this season, and that the inhabitants may find themselves short for the winter. However, this is not reason enough for Argan to relent, since he also faces the same complications. A Complicated (14) Relation (Diplomacy or Persuasion) roll will embolden the villagers, who will gather around and lend support to the Lead's case. If he proves persuasive, one way or another, Argan may lower his demands. This becomes an opportunity to shine in front of Céliane.

Scene 3: Wylard's quest

Supports: Céliane, Mael, Maorn, Wylard, Argan.

Extras: The banquet's guests, the Hilderin knights, page Doern.

Some time has elapsed since the return of Mael and the Lead to the Vale of Dearg. This morning, the sensational arrival of Lord Wylard of Saltwaters, accompanied by a delegation of his best men, including the page Doern, takes everyone by surprise. This scene can take place soon after "The Tax" in Fearìl, or in Dearg. Mael, Céliane, and the Lead are there. Wylard seems in excellent physical condition, but his eyes shine with a newfound energy that inspires both fear and awe. Obviously, Wylard is not exactly himself anymore.

The meal.

Wylard asks to be received at the Fortress of Smiorail, along with all the major figures of the Vale. He has two important announcements to share with everyone. First, he has started a great campaign against Feondas with the objective of gathering as much knowledge from the three kingdoms as possible to put an end to this endemic evil. Thus, he has taken up the dream of the Three Brothers to unite once more the lords of the peninsula around a common quest: the eradication of the Feond threat. How many more generations of men will allow monsters to slaughter their kin? Argan will remind Wylard of the tragic fate of the Feond hunter Dràc, in Tulg Naomh. Because of his rash actions, the city suffered many evils, and the Feond threat is still strong. For having stoked the monsters' wrath, he was banished, exiled, hated by all.



From left to right: Baorìg, Argan, Mael, Wylard, and Céliane.

An alliance proposal

Wylard's second announcement takes everyone aback: in front of the whole gathering, Wylard offers Mael the hand of his niece, Geleis. This marriage will have several advantages:

First, the alliance between Smiorail and the domain of Saltwaters will considerably strengthen the autonomy of the Vale of Dearg and its resistance to the influence of the Hilderins. Even though Wylard does not explicitly mention this argument, everyone is aware of it, and Argan takes this possibility very poorly.

The other major advantage of this union is the strategic location of the Mac Govrians and of Smiorail, which is their property. Being located close to the heart of the Three Kingdoms, as is the now infamous Aelwyd Saogh (see p. 27 and 29 of Book 1 – Universe), Smiorail would offer Wylard the ideal fall-back position for his great expedition.

There is a third advantage that Wylard also keeps quiet about, except to his brother Baorìg: the Mac Govrians are a struggling line; they would never threaten the Mac Readans. On the contrary, Mael may allow the clan of the Mac Readans to rise from their ashes by giving them Mac Govrian descendants. Later, in private, Wylard also discusses Céliane's future. She is also a Mac Readan, and her father would be wise to plan a wedding with a family with a good name, in order to secure even more support in this game of alliances.

A difficult decision.

Mael will be taken aback by Wylard's proposal, all the more so since he will be requested to answer by the end of the evening. To accept would mean securing the assets to cast away the regency of the Hilderins while offering the people of the Vale greater prospects for their future. However, it would also mean never wedding Céliane, and maybe walking away from her forever... Mael has to choose between the greater good and his own aspirations. The matter is made all the more urgent by the fact that Fearìl's Ansailéir has obviously given up on opposing the Hilderins, preferring to see their presence as a safeguard for the Vale. At the end of the meal, with the guests as his witnesses, Mael informs Wylard that he accepts his proposal. In doing so, he is giving up on Céliane, an unanticipated event for the Lead. However, ambiguity remains, as Céliane looks very affected by this announcement. How will the Lead react? Wylard is elated and invites Mael to come to Saltwaters, escorted by a few of his retainers, including page Doern, to whom he entrusts the responsibility of organizing the wedding as quickly as possible. Wylard intends to go on toward Tulg-Naomh, where Doern and the others may join him later.



This banquet scene is important, since it gathers several central protagonists of the campaign in the same location. If necessary, the Leader can take some time with the Players–excluding the one playing the Lead, who will have to step out during that time–to review the key points of this scene.

Scene 4: Grim intuition

Supports: Mael. **Extras**: None.

Now that the alliance with the Mac Readans has been sealed, Mael will soon have to leave for Salann Tìr. The leaders of the communities, in particular Maorn and Baorìg, forbid anyone from accompanying him, arguing that the Vale needs its active members. It has been agreed that Wylard's men will escort Mael to the land of the Mac Readans. As for Mael's sister, Aline Mac Govrian, she will remain in Fearìl to act as an administrator and link between Saltwaters and Smiorail.

Renunciation.

Mael and the Lead meet on the day after the meal in Smiorail. They walk for some time in the wilderness, some distance away from the Fortress whose massive shape stands out against the white walls of the mountain. This is a privileged moment between two friends. Mael acts oddly, talking about feelings of foreboding, as if his journey were about to go wrong. "Should anything happen to me..." and "Take care of Céliane during my absence, she is what I hold dearest in this world." This is also when he assures the Lead of the strength of his friendship. From his point of view, Céliane loves them both. Mael has accepted that he is going to marry a princess to restore the independence of his lands. He is the heir of the Mac Govrians; it is his fate. He trusts the Lead and is content to know that Céliane will be protected and happy.



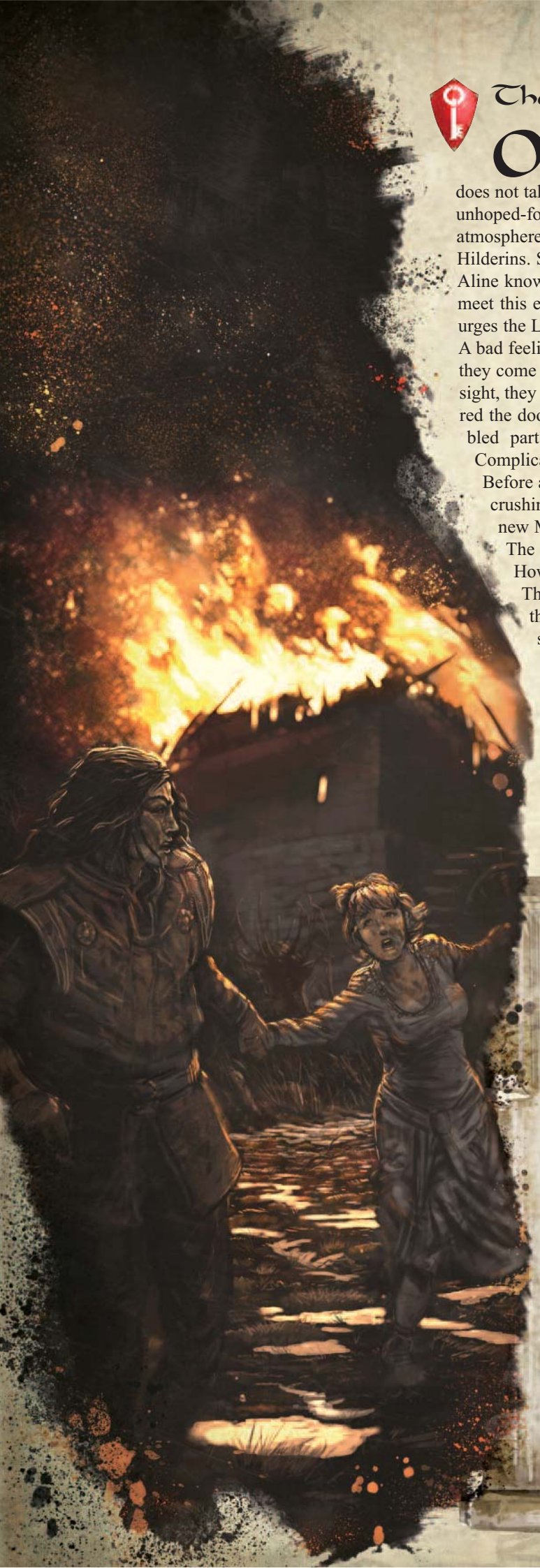
This is the last time the Lead will talk with a living Mael. The Leader may comment on the scene as it unfolds. Mael becomes a tragic, gothic figure here, announcing his own fate as if it were predestined. The aim is to make him appear under a dignified light, and worthy of respect.

Scene 5: The fire

Supports: Mael, Céliane. **Extras** : Aline.

In Dearg, the news of Mael Mac Govrian's departure for Salann Tìr provides fodder for every conversation. Some think they will never see him around here again. Some celebrate his wedding, which opens up the possibility of buffering themselves against the overbearing Hilderins.

The Lead travels to Fearìl, along with his father Maorn who is to meet Ansailéir Arl to discuss the situation. There is a rumor there: even though Mael has promised the Lead that he would forget about Céliane, it is said that the couple has been seen several times outside of the village. Some villagers even say that Mael and Céliane plan to elope.



The mill.

One evening, Mael's sister, Aline Mac Govrian, goes to the Lead. She suspects that her brother wants to run away, and according to her, the Lead is the only one who can reason with him. Aline does not take kindly to Céliane, who distracts her brother from his duty: the unhoped-for alliance with the Mac Readans. Aline speaks of the gloomy atmosphere in Smiorail and the increasingly unbearable regency of the Hilderins. She describes Argan as a moody, erratic, and violent man.

Aline knows from a reliable source that Céliane and Mael have planned to meet this evening in a mill outside of the village. Night is falling, and she urges the Lead to come with her.

A bad feeling gnaws at the Lead's stomach, and the orange glow he sees as they come closer to the place makes him fear the worst. Once the mill is in sight, they see it is in flames. Aline rushes inside once she has hastily unbarred the door. Céliane stands near Mael, whose leg is pinned under a crumbled part of the frame. This spectacle requires the Lead to pass a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check in order to keep his head. Before anyone can react, a burning beam and fiery debris falls on Aline, crushing her and killing her instantly. This horrifying scene calls for a new Mental Resistance check, this time a Difficult (17) one.

The clock is ticking, everyone must get out of the mill immediately. However, Céliane refuses to leave Mael, even though he is doomed. This is a tragic scene. The Lead manages to pull Céliane away from the flames, leaving behind the mill as it partially collapses on itself, sentencing Mael to death for good. Once they are outside, the survivors can only stand powerless and breathless before the inferno. Far away, the Lead catches sight of the silhouette of a man, black against the clear night sky lit by a nearly full moon, just as the unknown individual fades into the night... If the PC goes after the mysterious person, all he will find is a crow's feather. The weather is cold, and the ground is lightly covered by a fine layer of snow that has partially melted during the afternoon. It is starting to snow again, which forever covers any possible tracks that might have been followed.

Optional Rule: Braving a fire

Despite the perils of a fire, the PCs may want to try to do something. They will have to bear the heat and smoke while avoiding harm from the flames...

- **Smoke & heat**: The Characters must pass a Complicated (14) Stamina check each round or take a stacking -1 penalty on all actions.
- **Flames & debris**: There are many obstacles (fire, overturned furniture, crumbling stairs, stuck door, etc.), which require a few Feats rolls (11 to 17) to be overcome. Each failure results in 2 damage points from the fire.

The following precautions each decrease the Difficulty of the Stamina checks by 1: putting a damp cloth on one's face, dunking oneself in water before going in, wearing protective clothing (leather, for example). An axe is a very useful tool to slice, smash, and slash through whatever impedes the rescuer's progress. Carrying an unconscious body or helping a wounded person results in a -2 penalty to every action that requires freedom of movement.

What happened

After having kept a tight grip on the Vale for many years, Argan has no intent of surrendering the power to the last heirs of the Mac Govrians. In theory, Mael, as the oldest surviving member, should have taken up his duties as soon as he became an adult, but Argan kept finding excuses to delay this transition. Only the extremely gullible actually believe in Argan's reasons, but since he had only been coming up with legal loopholes to further his ends, no one suspected that he was actually capable of much worse.

Wylard's unexpected intervention and proposal of military service gave Argan another year. Since Mael's return, the knight's latest delaying stratagem had consisted of drawing a complete inventory of Smiorail's goods, and an equally exhaustive report about the business dealings since the beginning of the Hilderin regency. This earned Argan a few additional months, but he was now scraping the bottom of the barrel. The wedding with Geleis would give him a few more weeks, as he could stress that the alliance of the two noble families must be duly reported to the kingdom's high authorities, that the wedding must be properly enacted, etc. However, that would only be stalling. Argan was about to irredeemably lose the sway he had over the Vale, and he could not accept it. In addition, the alliance with the Mac Readans would likely speed up things, which would make for even fewer delays.

Thus, Argan decided to nip this change in the bud. To do so, he called upon Rajen's gang, the Black Feathers, as assassins. Being well informed of the relationship between Céliane and Mael, Argan had a false invitation delivered to the lovers to have them meet in a mill outside of the village. His goal was to make Mael and Céliane's deaths look like an accident.

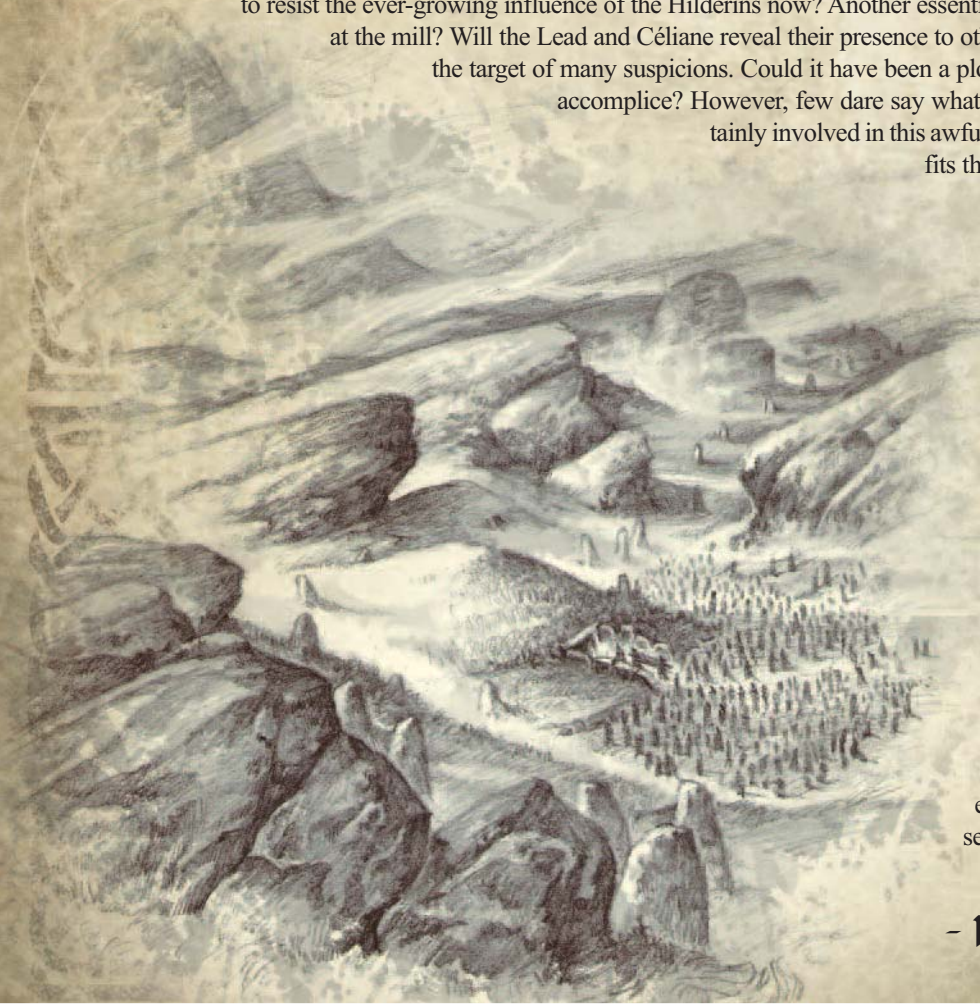
Aline's intervention was not part of Argan's plan. After all, he could have wedded her and become the power behind the throne of the young Mac Govrian. However, in the end, he is fine with how things went, since he won't have to share any of his power. However, the survival of Céliane and the Lead is more concerning... All the more so considering they saw Rajen walking away from the burning mill.

In the scenario "The Marauders," the PCs might have the opportunity to discover that the Black Feathers are responsible for the fire. They may also discover the secret alliance between the bandits and the Hilderins. The Leader may find additional information on the subject in the game aid about the Black Feathers, as well as in the profiles of Argan and Rajen.

Scene 6: The cairn of the ancestors

Supports: Céliane, Maorn, Argan. **Extras**: Inhabitants of Dearg and Fearìl.

With Mael and Aline Mac Govrian's brutal deaths, the whole Vale is in shock and worried about their future. Who will be able to resist the ever-growing influence of the Hilderins now? Another essential question boggles the locals: what happened at the mill? Will the Lead and Céliane reveal their presence to others? If they do, the Lead will immediately be the target of many suspicions. Could it have been a ploy to get rid of his rival? Could Céliane be his accomplice? However, few dare say what they really think, that the "Hildeous" are certainly involved in this awful business. After all, Argan is the one that benefits the most from it...



A few days after the fatal fire, a funeral is organized at Dearg's Tumulus. Mael and Aline will be interred within the cairn of their ancestors. Several dozen inhabitants of Fearìl and Dearg have gathered. Of note, Demorthèn Loeg and Baorìg, and the two Ansailéirs, Arl and Maorn. Mael and Aline are buried according to the peninsular tradition, with a mask of braided ropes covering their faces. Their scorched bodies, wrapped in white sheets, are laid at the bottom of a pit covered with sand so that the deceased's spiritual energy, the Rindath, may peacefully flow into the depths of earth. In accordance with the local custom, crow sculptures are left all around the corpses so that the birds can help the souls of the dead join the spiritual flow. At the end of the ceremony, a heavy slab is moved to seal the tomb.

Céliane's despair.

Céliane looks clearly distraught at Mael's sudden passing. Her mind has been deeply upset by the latest events. Naturally, she finds comfort with the Lead and gets closer to him. For example, she can huddle against him amidst her tears during the funeral. This sight will obviously be met with a few comments from the villagers. Everyone knew about the relationship between Mael and Céliane, and her becoming closer with the Lead seems inappropriate. These reproaches will be very painful to hear for Céliane, as they will bring her back to the shameful, conflicting love she has always borne for the two boys.



Outburst.

Argan's presence makes the scene all the more tense. Some are not afraid of holding him directly responsible for Mael's death. With his men, he remains at a respectable distance, but keeps a close eye on the ceremony, his cold features betraying no emotion. Soon, an inhabitant of Dearg (for example, Gireg, son of the smith Fanch, see Act 1, Scene 4: Jealousy) calls him out and denounces the Hilderins for being present. Their hypocrisy is unbearable, since Mael's death means all the more power for them. Soon, another local will voice the suspicion that Argan is complicit in the mill's burning. Ansailéir Maorn will then step in to put an end to the outburst, reminding everyone of the sacred nature of the ceremony. As for the pigeon keeper Harald, he will openly lament Mael's disappearance while making it known to everyone around that he heard that the Lead and Céliane were at the location of the tragedy during the fire... If they had decided not to tell of their presence, such an announcement may cause an uproar and put them in an uncomfortable situation.

Optional scene: Unbearable pain

Jure Peternel – Dearg – 8 – Requiem

This theme will be used to illustrate the end of the campaign. For this scene, the Leader should only play the track's first five minutes, foreshadowing the grim events to come.

Supports: Céliane. **Extras**: Inhabitants of Dearg.

Tri-Kazel is a dangerous land, and everyone has lost loved ones. Some get over it, others fall apart. Love is like a sickness of the mind, sometimes elating, sometimes unbearably painful.
By using this optional scene, the Leader can stress the psychological evolution of Céliane following the ghastly death of Mael. This scene should be used if the Leader believes that the atmosphere is suitable and the Player playing the Lead was particularly involved in the scenario that just unfolded.
The day after the burial, Céliane is nowhere to be found, and the Lead will feel morally responsible for finding her, both because of the promise he made to Mael and because he loves her. A hunter from Dearg witnessed someone going out of the village and walking toward the forest, a little less than an hour ago. The hunter offers him some additional help: with something that belonged to Céliane, his hunting dog can track her. The PC must be quick, and he can't take the time to assemble an expedition. The hunter will warn the members of Fearìl's community while the Lead goes after his love...

Emergency rescue.

After a nerve-wracking search (with one or several Travel (Orientation) rolls), the Lead finds Céliane as he is going upstream of the Red River. The young woman has walked into the turbulent water and keeps moving onward. She does not answer his calls, and soon, the powerful current sucks her down. The Lead will have to dive in to save her. Once more, the Leader can play this scene narratively, without using the game mechanics, or instead use the box "Drowning and natural dangers" to simulate the rescue attempt. Should he fail, when everything seems lost, other inhabitants of Dearg and Fearìl, who left soon after the Lead, will save Céliane and the Lead from drowning.

Once alone with the Lead, Céliane will confess the reasons that drove her to attempt to end her life. Céliane feels responsible and blames herself for not having been able to save Mael, but also for having caused Aline's death. Doesn't she wish to become a Dàmàthair, someone who looks over the community and protects its members? It is certainly because of her that Mael arranged that final rendezvous that turned out to be fatal. The recent maligning from the community, who suspect that she may have played some part in the death of the last Mac Govrian heirs, or who blame her for getting closer to the Lead, have driven her to the depths of despair and shame.



This scene will also be when Céliane expresses her feelings for the Lead for the first time. Indeed, though she was in love with Mael, she also felt attracted to the Lead, and felt guilty from the start for loving two men. This situation always seemed unworthy of the Dàmàthair she strove to be, and dishonoring for her father, Fearìl's Demorthèn. Such a declaration may be complicated to portray for Players who are shy or aren't used to this type of scene. The Leader may then narrate the rest of the scene, which will conclude the scenario, with a still shocked Céliane huddling against the Lead for comfort...

Drowning and natural dangers

Keeping one's breath and drowning are covered in Book 1 – Universe (p. 240). However, before a Character reaches the stage of struggling to keep conscious underwater, many things can happen.

Apparent safety.

Appraising natural dangers requires passing a Natural Environment (Orientation or Survival) or Travel (Orientation) check ranging from Easy (8) to Very Difficult (20) according to the peril's rarity and treacherousness. For example, a traveler might believe that a waterway is peaceful whereas beneath its still surface, the river's current is very strong in the middle, possibly concealing whirlpools capable of pulling down a careless swimmer. Similarly, a very humid area covered with leaves might make travelers unaware that they are reaching a boggy zone, until they've stumbled into a water hole, their legs stuck, sucked into the peat. At best, they will remain stuck; at worst, they will be slowly but surely pulled under, as if by quicksand.

Struggling against the elements.

The Characters may get caught in the natural trap. Maybe they didn't see it coming, or maybe they overestimated their abilities and made a stupid bet. Maybe they simply dove in to save an endangered person. Whatever the case, they are now in a tight spot, and will have to think fast! Now, it all depends on the Feats (Swimming) Domain to keep their head above the water. The Difficulty should be at least Standard (11), and can be as high as Very Difficult (20) for desperate situations. The Leader decides how many checks the Characters must pass in order to reach a safe spot where they can catch their breath. It should be between 1 and 3, depending on how great the danger is. Helping someone else brings at least a +2 modifier to the Difficulty, depending on the victim's behavior. A drowning person can easily start flailing around in panic and drag their rescuer down into the depths with them...



Epilogue

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

Time goes by and soothes the pains. The Leader can describe a scene taking place some time after Mael's death: Céliane and the Lead take a walk together at the end of a pleasant day and reminisce over these difficult times. Far away stands the burnt mill from which a few crows fly away with raucous cries. Since that grim day, things have changed, and the young couple is now planning their wedding for the next year. The betrothed have the blessings of both Baorìg and Maorn, who see this as a way to still make a stand against the influence of the Hilderins over the Vale. Some speak of Gwidrite troop movements close to the border, which would justify the reinforcement of the knights' presence and authority in this strategic region. Still, some speak of much stranger things...

As time has gone by, things have gotten harsher. Actual threat or not, some prisoners have never returned from the Fortress of Smiorail. The wildest rumors run in the Vale: Argan sometimes disappears for extended periods, sometimes leaving the impression of a hasty departure or even of a sudden death before suddenly coming back. The coldness of his features sometimes shows a torment that can only cause fear to those who frequent his presence.

In spite of these many dark patches, the young couple embodies hope for a better future.

The Dàmàthair.

The Focus ends with a scene in Fearìl where Céliane, now a Dàmàthair, teaches the children basic knowledge of the peninsula of Tri-Kazel. Actually, this scene is exactly the same as the one on p. 14 of Book 1 – Universe. If the Players are prepared, one of them can play Céliane, and the others the children as Extras. The Leader can read out this part:

"The children had gathered around Céliane. The young woman was watching them affectionately as they played and laughed heartily. Ranging between six and ten years old, they were part of the second age circle. They were Fearìl's future. 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 Baorìg, her father, that she had noticed on a previous evening?"

Determination and Experience points

The Focus will earn the Lead 15 Experience points, as well as between 0 and 5 Determination points, depending on how much the PC was involved in the relationship with Céliane and Mael. The Leader can find additional information about the assignment of Determination and Experience points for the Focuses on p. 63 ("Advantages and Determination points") and 81 ("Earning Determination points" and "Earning Experience points").

Experience points can also be attributed to the other Players for their PCs, even though they were not part of this scenario. The attribution system is the same as the one described on p. 228 of Book 1 – Universe.

Chapter 2
Modhannan: A Better World



Newspaper headline: "More bodies disappear from the morgue"

Prologue

· **Style:** Focus centered on the narrative arc of Ethics · **Setting:** Reizh, university of Baldh-Ruoch

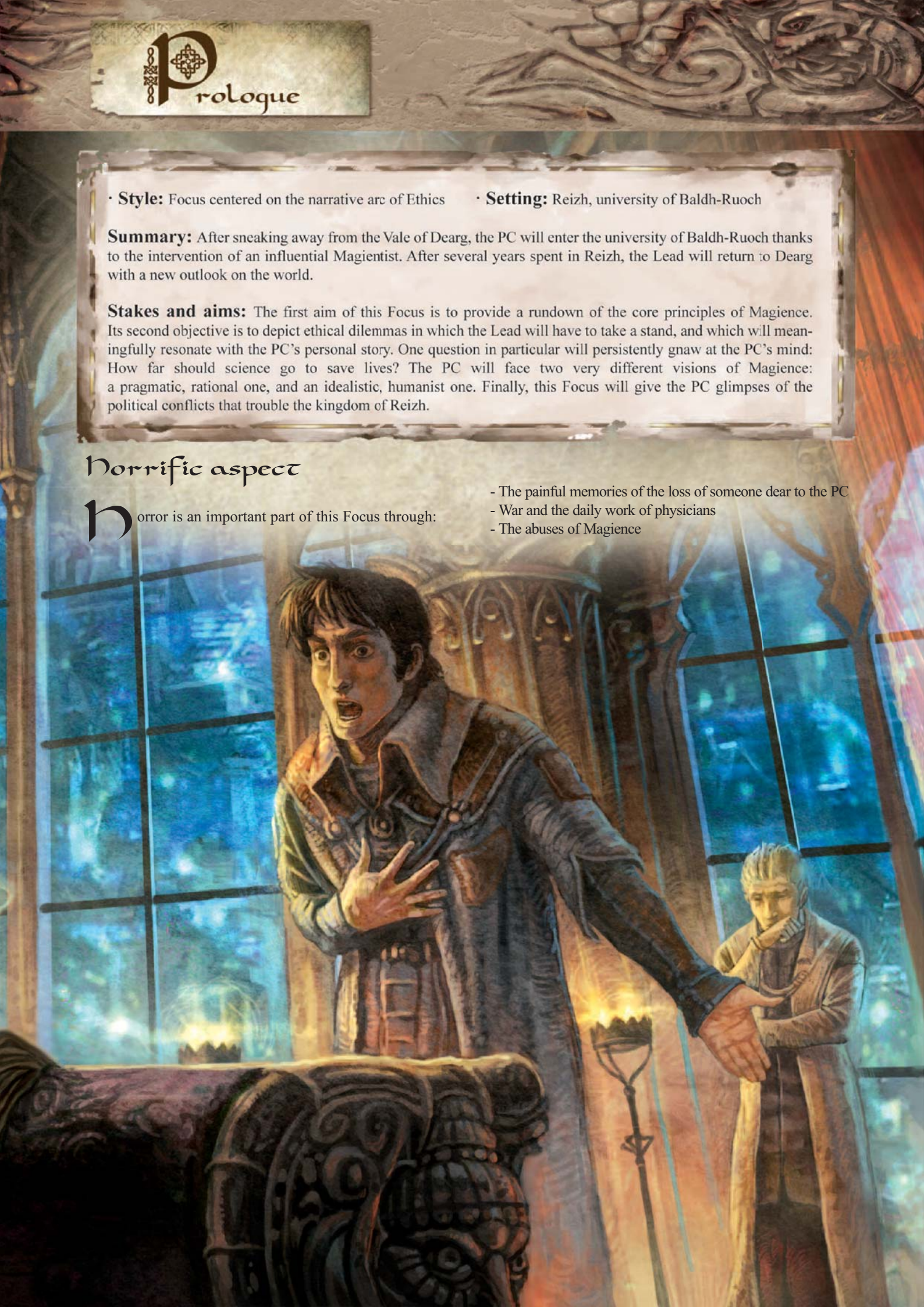
Summary: After sneaking away from the Vale of Dearg, the PC will enter the university of Baldh-Ruoch thanks to the intervention of an influential Magientist. After several years spent in Reizh, the Lead will return to Dearg with a new outlook on the world.

Stakes and aims: The first aim of this Focus is to provide a rundown of the core principles of Magience. Its second objective is to depict ethical dilemmas in which the Lead will have to take a stand, and which will meaningfully resonate with the PC's personal story. One question in particular will persistently gnaw at the PC's mind: How far should science go to save lives? The PC will face two very different visions of Magience: a pragmatic, rational one, and an idealistic, humanist one. Finally, this Focus will give the PC glimpses of the political conflicts that trouble the kingdom of Reizh.

Horrific aspect

Horror is an important part of this Focus through:

- The painful memories of the loss of someone dear to the PC
- War and the daily work of physicians
- The abuses of Magience



Reizh and Magience

This Focus features the kingdom of Reizh and the Magientist order. For the PCs, it may be the first time they will play in this land. If needed, the Leader is advised to refresh their memory with the chapters "Reizh" (p. 79) and "Magientists" (p. 156) from Book 1 – Universe. Both provide ample information to help Leaders in their descriptions: the tense Reizhite political situation (p. 80), the city of Baldh-Ruoch (p. 84), the organization of the Magientist order (p. 159), a description of a Reizhite inn (p. 81), etc.

Like the protagonists of Book 1 – Universe, the PCs may learn of these details from locals or travelers. One of the Supports in this Focus is Mordàn, the narrator of the chapter dedicated to Magientists (p. 156). As with his pupil Khalmen, he can tell the PC everything he knows of Reizh and Magientists as they journey together to Baldh-Ruoch. This scenario will also be an opportunity to discover new aspects of the kingdom of Reizh, such as the Assembly of Representatives, which is described in Act 4: Baldh-Ruoch's Political Scene

Ethics, Magience, and politics

Through this Focus, the PC will become aware that matters of ethics concerning Magience are intricately connected to how Reizhite society is organized. The kingdom of Reizh is feudal, and all men are not considered equals. This notion of social class influences how some Magientists view their science and its ethical boundaries. For the most radical ones, there is no difference between organic Flux of human or animal origin, and they do not flinch at treating humans like cattle if it can serve greater causes. Though such beliefs are rejected by most Magientists and are banned by the order's Code of Ethics, some still think that, following feudal law, it would make sense for some humans to be used for the good of those of nobler birth, through various means including the use of Flux drawn from their bodies. On the opposite end of the spectrum, advocates of progressive, humanist ideologies promote a Magientist ethic that respects life and considers all men equal before Magience, whatever their social origin.



Another way of thinking

The Players should keep in mind that in a world like Esteren, the feudal system is the norm, and the organization of society is built on inequality between men. Though progressivism does exist in Reizh and is tolerated by the authorities, only a minority promotes the end of feudalism and the advent of a true Parliament. These radicals are under threat of violent repression from royal power, which punishes with death those who voice intentions of revolution or regicide.

In the Focus Modhannan, Primus Yasen and Inceptus Tòmas embody two different visions of Magience: the first feudal and conservative, the latter humanist and progressive, possibly even revolutionary. This affects several aspects:

Beneficiaries of Magience.
The points of view between conservatives and humanists differ since conservatives believe that the beneficiaries of Magience should first be the upper strata of society. According to the humanists, Magience should benefit everyone, without regard for social origin.

Access to the university.
In principle, the Magientist university is open to any inhabitant of Reizh. There is an entrance exam that every aspirant can take, and brilliant pupils should be able to enter the school, as modest as their origins may be. In reality, things are much more complex and mainly depend on the directors and Primus at the head of the universities. For Primus Yasen, access to Magience should be restricted to the Reizhite elite. In no case should it be made available to potential political enemies. In that regard, the Primus is personally opposed to foreign students–such as the PC pursuing the arc of Ethics–being taught advanced Magience. Who knows what they could do with such secrets?

Pragmatism, rationality, and emotions.
According to the standard Magientist training, emotions must take a step back when exercising Magience, since they might disturb the concentration of the practitioner. For example, a Vitalist in the middle of an operation must be able to focus on their work without feeling any inner disturbance. For the staunchest advocates of the feudal mindset, this justifies the belief that one should feel nothing when using the body of a low-class human–even a living one–to save someone who is more worthy. Though the supporters of this way of thinking are a small minority, they tarnish the image of Magience and badly hurt the reputation of the field.

The Leader can make use of these elements through the Focus to show the Lead the ideological and ethical stakes that shake Magience and, on a larger scale, the kingdom of Reizh.

What the Magientist Code of Ethics says

The practice of Magience in Reizh is strictly regulated, perhaps even more than anywhere else in Tri-Kazel, except for the regions of Gwidre where the Sigires of the Temple keep a watchful eye. This is for several reasons. First, Magience, which is widely used in Reizhite cities, has a mixed reputation with the population. This is engendered by scandals–most of the time blown out of proportion, if not entirely fabricated–that feed rumors and fill newspaper articles. This situation is in part the consequence of a certain proximity between Magience and political power. High-ranking Magientists, particularly the members of the Council, are influential personalities with real political sway. Therefore, Magientists are attacked by opponents who try to give them bad press, but also by other leading figures, and everything is fair game. The pressure on King Bronchaerd to regulate Magience, allegedly to "reassure the good people of Reizh," is great, and he has given in several times to the demands of the adversaries of this science to better control its practice.

This led to the adoption of a Magientist Code of Ethics, which is said to be inspired by the Continental Magientist Code. The Code notably dictates that Magience cannot be practiced without obtaining a diploma granted by one of the universities or schools approved by royal authority. The title of Magientist is protected, and any usurpation is harshly punished. The Code also holds that "Magientist science must serve all inhabitants of Reizh and not be restricted to one class of people." This article of the Code is the basis of many ideological disputes that still shake Baldh-Ruoch's Assembly of Representatives. Initially, it was added to the Code to avoid Magientists keeping their secrets solely to themselves, at a time when the fear that this organization might grow out of control was at its highest. In theory, this article gives the representatives of the crown complete access to all Magientist premises. This article is also used by progressives to defend the idea that Magience should not only benefit the fortunate and the noble, but everyone.

Another important article, added following many scandals, says that "Magientists perform their duty with respect toward human life and dignity. This respect does not cease after death. Flux can only be extracted from a human being who has given full consent." This article is a great victory for the opponents of Magience who have long condemned the alleged abuses of some Vitalists, who were said to draw blood from corpses, and even from living human beings to extract organic Flux. In reality, things are much more complex, since feudal law implies a hierarchy among men, and it is suspected that such extractions are encouraged and financed by some influential noble families who hide such machinations with liberal bribery and political intrigue. This article is often quoted during debates within the Magientist order itself, where conservatives and progressives fight bitterly over such matters.

Supports

Before the game begins, the Player who is the Lead (i.e. who has chosen the narrative arc of Ethics) will go out of earshot, while the Leader introduces the Supports available for this scenario to the other Players. If the Leader and Players do not yet feel totally in command of the particular principles of the Focuses, they should read the chapter "The Focuses" again, in particular the part "Principles and rules of the Focuses," on p. 83.

The profile of each Support includes information about their story, their personality, and the Key scenes they are involved in that the Leader will explain to the Players portraying them. The Support sheets summarize all of this information and are intended to be handed to the Players. The Leader can download the files for these sheets on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org. The paragraphs below sum up this information for the Leader's reference during the game.

The Key scenes are particular moments when the Support will be involved in the Focus and bring elements that the Player will have to convey as faithfully as possible. All Players should therefore make sure to be familiar with the Support they will portray.

The ages of the Supports are not provided, since the Focus takes place at an indefinite time in the past, which may vary according to the story of the Support. General temporal indications are provided, but they are adjustable according to the story's needs.



Varigal Mordàn

Mordàn is a seasoned Varigal. On his way to Baldh-Ruoch after an expedition that led him to Tulg-Naomh, he passes through Dearg. He will be the one to spark the Lead's interest in Magience and will agree to take the PC to the Reizhite capital.

Mordàn is rather kind and protective. He feels empathy and pity for the PC. Even though he remains respectful of traditional rites, his travels have convinced him that Magientist science is a boon for mankind, and he finds it a waste that some populations cannot benefit from it.

Magister Alana Naïghan



At the beginning of the Focus, Alana Naïghan is a young Primus of thirty years, very involved in the political life of Reizh. The scenario will be the opportunity to follow her exceptional ascension to the head of the Vitalist school, her attainment of the status of Magister, and her access to the Council of Baldh-Ruoch, which is unheard of at her age.

Alana Naïghan supports the idea of a Magience that is accessible to everyone and promotes its popularization. On a political level, she has declared herself to be a follower of the humanist, progressive trend that campaigns for an increase of the prerogatives of Baldh-Ruoch's Assembly of Representatives, following the model of the Continental Parliament. She keeps a moderate stance and is quick to remind anyone of her loyalty to the king. Lady Alana–as she has been dubbed–has a whiff of scandal about her, and some hold it that her humanist involvement is but a facade for boundless ambition. Others say that she has acquaintances with the revolutionary movements and that her ambitions go far beyond the position of Magister at the Council...



Politician Ronan Kaereg

Kaereg is an influential politician, one of the spearheads of the progressivist trend, who will obtain a seat as royal advisor in 906. A man said to be a master in the art of compromise, moderate in his aims, he plays the part of mediator between the royal authorities and the demands of the Assembly of Representatives.

Kaereg dreams of a parliamentary monarchy where the king would keep his role, but remains very careful in how he defends his ideas. He proves much more defensive and combative toward the Magientists who every day encroach a little more into the circles of power. In his opinion, they have no reason to be part of the political life, and their overwhelming presence in the Assembly indicates their true colors. Even though he is aware of the benefits of this science, Kaereg has no qualms about using the fear that Magientists inspire, and is quick to blame them. He is convinced that Magientist lodges could unsettle the kingdom, spurring on the revolutionary movements before finally taking control of them.

Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen



Tòmas is an important Character of this Focus, and he will be involved in most of the scenes. A young Inceptus from a family of nobles but with progressivist, revolutionary ideas, he will develop a friendship with the Lead. To him, the PC is the living example of his principles: equal opportunity should be offered to everyone, whatever their social origins.

Tòmas is an idealistic young man, frank and cheerful, fascinated with the Continent and the idea of a government where men would be equals and the people would hold the power. He is aware that such extremist ideas would earn him the death penalty, and thus keeps them to himself. Passionate about political matters, he is an outspoken supporter of the ideas of Ronan Kaereg, which has earned him the enmity of a good part of his family. Secretly, he is part of a small revolutionary group that dreams of the fall of the monarchy in Reizh.



Primus Yasen

A stern, conservative Magientist, Yasen leads the Vitalist section of the university of Baldh-Ruoch in which the PC takes classes. He is an efficient, experienced physician and the director of a small, private clinic in the upper districts of the Reizhite capital.

Yasen is a cold, rational man. He believes that only the elite deserve access to the mysteries of Magience, and he has a very poor opinion of pupils from foreign lands and low classes. Therefore, he does not like the Lead and does not understand why this country bumpkin got the support of Alana Naïghan. Through the years, Yasen will develop some measure of respect for the PC, acknowledging the Inceptus as a hard worker capable of self-sacrifice that some others would do well to emulate.

Primus Eliaz



A devoted, competent Magientist, Eliaz leads the medical outpost based in the new town of Promise, located on the mountainous front, where a violent guerrilla war targeting Magientist facilities has been going on for months. He is a rather humanist man in his perception of Magience.

He cares little about the social origins of his pupils and only judges them based on their qualities and dedication.

Chronology

The acts and scenes of this Focus are presented in chronological order. They spotlight the key moments of the Lead's past. However, how exactly they will proceed is left to the Leader, who may also fit many additional scenes in between, since this Focus extends over the seven years of an Inceptus's training. For example, between Scene 2 "Welcome to the university" and Scene 4 "Summoned by the Primus," depending on the initiatives of the Players, the Leader can improvise new Scenes or describe the daily life of the university, the classes, the exams to advance to the following year, etc. At the appropriate moment, the Leader can move on to the next Scene in order to pick up the pace and move on with the scenario.

Duration of the game

If the Leader sticks to the Scenes detailed in this scenario and keeps a good pace, this Focus may take a single game session to play through. If the Leader decides to dedicate more time to each scene, and includes intermediary phases (such as journeys), the Focus may stretch out over several gaming sessions, and even become a small campaign in its own right. In that case, the GL should be careful not to create an imbalance in how they manage the Focuses dedicated to the other narrative arcs.

To prepare for the game, the Leader should refer to the game aid that includes a rundown of each scene as well as a timeline providing an overall vision of the Focus's course. Digital versions of these game aids can be downloaded on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org.

An example of chronology

Here is an example of chronology, listing all the major events of this Focus. These are highlights that Leaders are obviously free to adapt according to how they would prefer to run the scenario:

- 899: Ionna dies, and the Lead departs for Reizh.
- Fall 900: The Lead reaches Baldh-Ruoch and enters the university.
- Summer 903 : The third year of training of the Lead ends. The Lead is summoned by Yasen and appointed to a small hospital in Candlewood.
- 904: Fourth year of training in Candlewood (Act 3).
- 905: Fifth year of training. The Lead meets Kaereg at the Assembly, where an assassination attempt against the politician takes place.
- Late 905: Revolutionaries are executed on the city square (Act 4).
- 906: Kaereg earns the position of royal advisor.
- 907: Last year of training at the Bleuzenn Clinic (Act 4, Scene 2).
- Summer 907: End of the Lead's studies, and the return to Dearg.
- Winter 907: Present time. The Dearg campaign begins.

Default Characters and dates

By default, the Focuses use locations and dates related to the narrative arcs. Thus, they will take place in Dearg, with its inhabitants, but also with the dates that tie to the premade Characters' backstories. Thus, when the Lead's lost one is mentioned, it will be the Lead's sister, and the tragedy will have taken place when the Lead was about twelve, to match Finn's story.

The information given here is not absolute and unchangeable, and it may be adapted according to the Leader's needs. The chapter "Adapting and Managing your Campaign" (p. 66) provides several tools to handle such adaptations.

Obtaining a Magientist diploma

By default, the PC's years of training will follow one after the other until they obtain their Magientist diploma. The Focus covers the seven years of training as an Inceptus and is meant to end with the Lead earning the title of Scientör. It is possible that this Focus does not result in the Lead becoming a Scientör– the PC may even be expelled from the order of the Magientists. This should not depend on the PC's academic results, but rather on ethical, ideological matters (see Act 4: Baldh-Ruoch's Political Scene), or on the Player's choice to not become a Magientist (see the following paragraph).

What if the Lead is not to become a Magientist?

Playing narrative arcs implies a few conditions listed in the "Prerequisites" section of each arc. For the Ethics arc, the prerequisites are the following: "A member of the PC's family died, struck by a disease that traditional Demorthèn medicine couldn't halt, an event that convinced them that only science can help mankind. Later, the PC left their native region to study in Reizh. Optionally, the PC will have been an Ionnthén."

The default assumption for the Focus "Modhannan: A Better World" is that the PC will be a Magientist, but this is not an obligation. If the Player has another profession in mind for their Character, the Leader can adapt the scenario accordingly:

Another diploma.
The PC may choose a profession similar to that of Magientist, such as that of Physician or Occultist. There will be very little to change: they will simply change paths during their studies. They may even go so far as to switch schools.

Another profession.
The PC may also choose another profession completely unrelated to that of Magientist. The Focus may then end with the Lead fleeing the Reizhite capital. They may also simply drop out. The Leader can play the Focus as it is described, fitting in additional scenes that will depict how the PC worked toward their final profession while remaining related to the narrative arc of Ethics. The PC's studies may result in Magience being their Secondary Domain, their Primary Domain being that of the chosen profession (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 203).

Act I: Ideological turmoil

This act takes place about eight years in the past, in the village of Dearg. The Lead is still young, being 12 years old. The purpose of this first act is to portray the event that convinced the PC to turn toward Magience, journeying to Reizh with Varigal Mordàn.

Scene 1: The burial

Supports: Varigal Mordàn.

Extras: Inhabitants of Dearg (the premade Characters of Book 1 – Universe, the dealer Zaïg, master smith Fanch, Dàmàthair Glen, apprentice bard Aïnlis, etc.)



Robyn Miller – Riven: The Sequel to Myst – II – Moeity prison

A dark, quiet song that will immediately set a somber atmosphere for the burial scene.

The action starts at Dearg's Tumulus, outside of the village, for the burial of Ionna, the little sister of the Lead (or another person the Lead was close to, depending to the Character's story). The young girl was taken by a nasty influenza, and neither the local Demorthèn nor the PC were able to do anything to save her. Inhabitants of Dearg have gathered to mourn over the grave of the deceased, whose face is covered with a mask of braided rope. In accordance with custom, she has been laid in a pit whose bottom is carpeted with sand and ground rock. After a few mystical words from the Demorthèn about natural laws, a heavy slab of granite is moved to cover the hole.
Finally, the Lead is handed the copper bracelet forged by the Embossers, which had been given to the PC's sister on her birth.

A heavy atmosphere

This introductory scene is very important. The Leader should portray the surroundings carefully and in detail: Dearg's Tumulus (see p. 19), the mist, a fine chilling rain, the gloomy faces of Dearg's inhabitants, the body whose face is hidden by the rope mask, etc. Above all, the Leader should focus on the emotional turmoil of the Lead and describe to the Player how they feel. Indeed, they held their little sister very dear (in the case of Finn, she was his last living relative), and the pain unleashed by this brutal passing is dreadful. A decisive element is Demorthèn Loeg's powerlessness to cure the girl. This realization leaves the Lead stupefied, and they will be deeply hurt by their mentor's words about the laws of nature.
According to traditional belief, man's abilities are limited, and they must accept death as being part of life. This ordeal should teach them humility by setting them face-to-face with the power of natural laws. Obviously, the Lead feels very differently. After all, what use is there in spending years learning about traditional knowledge, potentially becoming a Demorthèn, if you cannot even cure a simple flu? The Leader can pose this question directly to the Player.

Scene 2: Mordàn's tale

Supports: Varigal Mordàn. **Extras**: Brewer Tadh, Inhabitants of Dearg.

This scene covers a key moment in the history of the PC, which is also one of the prerequisites of the narrative arc of Ethics: the departure for Reizh.

A simple conversation (see Mordàn's sheet)

A short time later, the Lead will meet Varigal Mordàn. The scene takes place in the Red Dog Inn. Brewer Tadh is busy feeding kindling into the fireplace. The PC is devastated, still under the shock of their sister's passing. Mordàn heard about the PC's story and the death of Ionna from a nasty influenza. He will talk to the PC and explain the existence of Magience and the possibilities offered by this science.

The PC's departure for Reizh with the Varigal will be hasty business and take place on the following morning. Suddenly abandoning everything one has ever known is no simple business. The Leader should ask the Player about the PC's feelings. During the night, the PC mulls over their memories, and a discussion during which Demorthèn Loeg taught them about natural cycles comes back to them. According to the traditional belief, the essential energy that makes up a being's unity, Rindath, disperses upon death to become part of the cycles of existence again. Demorthèn are not here to throw this order into disarray, and they must accept the brevity of existence. Up to this time, the PC probably adhered to this vision, but the sudden death of their sister has brought this way of life into question. The PC is now aware that there are other philosophies, such as that of the Magientists, who strive to improve mankind's living conditions.



The journey to Reizh

The Leader can take some time to describe to the Player the journey toward Reizh with the Varigal. As suggested in the introduction of this Focus, these scenes will be an opportunity for Mordàn to teach the Lead (as well as all of the Players) basic information about the Magientists and the kingdom of Reizh. If the Player portraying Mordàn is not very eloquent or does not know about this faction and this kingdom very well, the Leader should feel free to directly take the narration in hand: "During your journey, the Varigal tells you about Reizh and Magientists. For example, it is said that…" Likewise, if the Lead asks the Varigal questions that the Player is not sure how to answer, the Leader can step in and reply for them. If things get too detailed or complicated, feel free to handwave the answer with something like "I dunno, kid... you're asking an awful lot of questions, but don't worry, you'll find out the answers by yourself soon enough..."

If the Leader wishes to extend the scene, they are advised to introduce Extras who will join the duo so that the other Players can also participate: a few travelers, a merchant with bodyguards, a squadron of knights or soldiers, etc.

Act 2: The university of Baldh-Ruoch

The PC reaches the Reizhite capital with Varigal Mordàn. This act highlights the decisive moment when the PC obtains a letter of recommendation permitting enrollment at the university. It shows the Lead's first steps in the famous establishment, the meeting with Tòmas, and the abrasive relationship with Primus Yasen.

Scene 1: The letter of recommendation

Supports: Varigal Mordàn, Primus Alana Naïghan. **Extras**: Alana's entourage.

The arrival at Baldh-Ruoch

The Lead's first sighting of the capital of Reizh should be a memorable moment: the lights glimmering in the night, the impossibly high city towering on the two huge, rocky peaks, the din of the River Oëss spurting from the mountain and continually feeding a manmade basin below the city, etc. For the Lead, particularly if they are from a rural land, it is a shock to discover such a marvel of human industry, all the more so with the added wonder of Magientist technology. P. 84 of Book 1 – Universe includes an illustration of the Reizhite capital.

The Clock (see Alana and Mordàn's sheets)

When they reach Baldh-Ruoch, Mordàn will take the PC to the Clock, a high-class inn whose proprietor he knows. The Clock's entrance is guarded by two armed mercenaries who will let Mordàn in once he has told them his name. Inside, the two travelers' muddy clothes are in stark contrast to the tasteful decor. The main room is overlooked by a balcony, and the beams and the stairs' handrails are artfully chiseled. Four alcoves producing puffs of tobacco smoke are lit with small Nebulars that give off pale colors–and whose daily maintenance costs a good handful of azure Daols! But nothing is too beautiful for the wealthy traveling merchants who spend a few nights in Baldh-Ruoch. The owner of the establishment, Premel, comes to greet his old friend and offers him, as well as the PC, seats. Per their usual arrangement, he provides the Varigal with food and lodging in exchange for a few tales from his latest travels.

From one of the alcoves, the two travelers hear laughter and shouts. Quickly, they can make out a group of people that Mordàn immediately identifies as Magientists. What is more, he recognizes the young and alluring Primus Alana Naïghan, famed through the capital for her beauty as much as for her exceptional talent in surgery.

Mordàn encourages the PC to introduce themselves to the up-and-coming Magientist: this is a dream opportunity to be in the good graces of a personality who is said to have such a great future ahead of her. Alana will be touched by the story of the child and will personally support the PC's application by writing them a letter of recommendation to enter the Magientist university of Baldh-Ruoch.

Portraying Alana's followers

During this scene, three Players should play as the Lead and two Supports (Mordàn and Alana). The other Players, as well as the Leader, can play some of Alana Naïghan's followers as Extras. The Leader can set the tone by using flowery language and gestures, which should contrast with Mordàn and his young traveling companion's more austere attitudes. P. 67 provides some advice on how to play this scene.



Scene 2: Welcome to the university

Supports: Primus Yasen, Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen. **Extras**: The university's Inceptus.

A few days later, in the much more humble inn in which they now sojourn with Mordàn, the PC will receive a letter informing them that they have been accepted into the university. This is very good news, all the more so since the Varigal is about to hit the road again, and it would have very quickly become difficult for the PC to provide for themselves in this huge city about which they know close to nothing. It is time for them to gather their few belongings, bid Mordàn farewell, and pass through the gate of the great university of Baldh-Ruoch. The Leader can find a depiction of it on p. 162 of Book 1 – Universe.

First steps in the university
(see Yasen's sheet)

During the first days at the university, the PC will be summoned by Primus Yasen so that they may introduce themselves and be told about the university's policies. This will be a rather trying moment, since Yasen will show thinly-veiled distrust for the PC.

Meeting Tòmas
(see Tòmas's sheet)

When the Lead gets into the university, they are isolated, and Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen will be the first person to initiate meaningful conversation with them, asking them where they are from. Tòmas will prove considerate and welcoming, offering to show his new friend around the city during their off days.

A feeling of loneliness

The Leader can describe to the Player portraying the Lead the feeling of loneliness that weighs heavy upon their Character, particularly when parting ways with Mordàn. The Varigal was the PC's last connection to their native community. Standing in front of the cyclopean university, with its gothic architecture and eerie lights, should be an awe-inspiring experience. A crowd of pupils and teachers dressed in unfamiliar clothes mill about, entering and exiting the building. The PC will be stopped by the Magientist militia, who will check the precious letter of admission while the PC suffers the heavy stares, comments, and sneers of the other pupils. This scene of integration into the university can last as long as the Leader considers it necessary. When the time seems right, the Leader should cue in the Support Tòmas Mac Tehen, whose sympathy will be a relief to the PC.

Scene 3: The Magientist teachings

Supports: Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen. **Extras**: The university's Inceptus.

This scene starts during a Vitalism class, during which the pupils have to dissect large insects found in the sewers of the Reizhite capital. In the case of the premade Character Finn, this class is where his phobia of insects originates. The creatures are still alive and squirm around; the operation is nerve-wracking, and the Leader may ask for a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll. A failure results in nausea, nervousness, or vertigo. This class is an opportunity for the teacher, a Scientör called Rivelin, to remind the students of a few important principles of Magience: organic Flux can be obtained from living or dead matter, but Flux from living matter is of much better quality (Book 1 – Universe, p. 262). The vermin swarming in the sewers are an interesting source of Flux, and the Magientist refineries work in collaboration with the rodent control and insect extermination guilds of the capital.
The teacher may also mention the existence of the slaughterhouses built near the great factory of Baldh-Ruoch whose double purpose is to provide the city with both Flux and meat: the carcasses, offal, and sometimes blood are collected to be refined while the meat is sold at the markets. The teacher will be careful to stress a central ethical principle of Magience: "Magientists perform their duty with respect toward human life and dignity. This respect does not cease after death. Flux can only be extracted from a human being who has given full consent." Contravening such a principle will lead not only to expulsion from the order, but also most certainly to prison.

The years pass...

This Focus follows the seven years of an Inceptus's training. Going into the details of such a period will lengthen the scenario, and may even turn it into a small campaign. It is up to the Leader to settle on how much time they wish to dedicate to this Focus. The Players' interest and the general atmosphere are good indicators: if everyone is having fun, there is no reason not to keep things going! Since the first part of the Shadows of Esteren campaign proper takes place solely in Taol-Kaer, this Focus tied to Reizh is an opportunity to depict a very different atmosphere. It will be the Lead's time in the limelight before the spotlight switches to the other narrative arcs.

Whatever pace the Leader sets, they can fast-forward from scene to scene, keeping to the major moments of a Magientist's training. They can describe the end of each year and the exam leading to the following year, the various classes that will provide many opportunities to introduce or remind the Players of the core principles of Magience (the various types of Flux, the ethical principles, the different schools, how extraction and refining works, and so on), etc. The conclusion of the Focus (last scenes of Act 4) should coincide with the end of the Inceptus's training.

Scene 4: Summoned by the Primus

Supports: Primus Yasen. **Extras**: Bullies.

This scene takes place during the third or fourth year of the Lead's studies and will directly lead to their assignment for their year of training in the field, a crucial moment of every Inceptus's career.

Shortly after a class, outside of an amphitheater or in the inner courtyard of the university, the Lead is cornered by a few students. They don't like the PC for several reasons: for their foreign origin, for their success in their studies, and for being backed by Alana Naïghan. Indeed, each year-end exam results in the eviction of the students with the poorest performances, and the Extras who harass the PC are feeling threatened. The stakes at hand stoke the jealousy and competition between the Inceptus. The small group has stolen a prized possession of the PC: the copper bracelet that belonged to their late sister. They will taunt the Lead about their "taste in jewelry," and quickly, the situation will degenerate into a scuffle.



Convocation from the Primus (see Yasen's sheet)

Following this incident, the Lead is summoned by the Primus, who will scold them and remind them of the principles that befit a Magientist worthy of their name. He will also inform the Lead of their assignment for their year of training in the field: a medical outpost in the region of Candlewood, where bloody skirmishes between the Flux-seekers and the locals are known to take place.
Soon after, Tòmas will learn that he is to join the same medical outpost as the Lead. Such an assignment will be met with mockery by the enemies of the PC and Tòmas, who will see it as a sanction. Indeed, the location is infamous for being dangerous, and the months to be spent there promise to be hard, whereas the other students will remain in the heart of the capital, serving private establishments with secure and comfortable accommodations.

Act 3: The Unruly of Candlewood

This third act is focused on the year of training in the field that each Inceptus goes through as part of their program. For the PC and Tòmas Mac Tehen, it will take place in a small field hospital located in a troubled region, Candlewood. This training will bring about the Lead's first ethical dilemma.

Scene 1: The medical outpost

Supports: Primus Eliaz, Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen.

Extras: Eliaz's assistants, wounded people.

The journey to Candlewood

The Leader can take the time to describe the journey from the capital to the border region of Candlewood. Tòmas and the Lead travel as part of a convoy transporting young soldiers sent to this troubled area for their military duty, workers relieving others who have been operating for several weeks, and a large amount of foodstuffs.

The journey is an opportunity for the Characters to get acquainted with each other, with the soldiers and workers as Extras. Suddenly being back in the middle of untamed nature will certainly arouse mixed feelings from the Lead: the pleasure of being once again surrounded by vast expanses mingled with the disorientation of leaving the buzzing activity of the capital.
The road leading to Candlewood quickly becomes a bumpy trail, and after several days of traveling up to the foothills of the Mòr Roimh, the convoy comes within sight of the small fort housing the field hospital where the Lead and Tòmas will spend the year. Here is a summary of the factions in place and current situation:

Candlewood. This great forest, which covers a portion of the western area of the kingdom of Reizh, is considered sacred by the Demorthèn (see p. 24 of Book 1 – Universe and p. 14 of Book 2 – Travels). For a few years, rumors of proliferating Feondas have been spread by the locals and Varigals, but the Magientists continue to harvest its wood, which is plentiful in vegetal Flux.

Promise. The Magientists have installed a modestly-sized extraction facility in order to produce crude Flux, which is then carried to the capital to be refined. The plant was built on the slopes of the Mòr Roimh's foothills, facing the forest of Candlewood, which stretches as far as the eye can see, even in clear weather. The main resources harvested by the facility are the trees of the forest, plentiful in vegetal energy, and recently, a deposit of fossil Flux discovered in a neighboring valley. Though the infrastructure as a whole has remained under the direct control of the Botanist school (led by Vardeheim, Magister and member of the Magientist Council of Baldh-Ruoch), the Mineralist school is known to have taken an interest in the facility and to have financed most of the new installations that will be used to extract the fossil Flux.

With the increase in activity related to the discovery of new deposits, several buildings were erected around the plant, giving it more and more the appearance of a small village that the locals have named "Promise." With the increase in attacks from the clans, the habitations have been reinforced, a palisade has been built, and the facility is beginning to take on the appearance of an Inguard. The medical outpost is located inside the walls. A total of more than 100 people work here year round, divided as follows: about 30 workers, who are employed for a few weeks on average before being relieved by new ones; about as many Magientist technicians (15 assistants, 10 Scientörs, and 3 Primus, including Eliaz) and men at arms, and 10 people in charge of the stewardship and maintenance of a large vegetable garden.

The Unruly. It is common knowledge that the mountains of the Mòr Roimh shelter traditionalist clans who reject the authority of King Bronchaerd. They are said to be led by three fundamentalist Demorthèn (see Book 1 p. 87). Some call this land "Little Dèas," referring to the Osag lands in southern Taol-Kaer. The establishment of Magientist infrastructure, even of a small scale, has sparked conflict, and violent battles now take place throughout the region.

The mines and the fossil Flux deposits. Initially, the mines were manned by locals who extracted iron ore. One day, they stumbled upon several pieces of crystallized fossil Flux. The Magientists of the extraction facility learned of it and told the Council. The Mineralist school then bought the mines from the locals for a hefty amount of Daols. This deal aroused the ire of many of the region's clans, and the Magientists' incursion into the mountains was the last straw for these independent people. The most violent of the ensuing raids have taken place near the mines. The situation has gradually worsened, and the clans are beginning to lead a full-scale guerrilla war against the Magientists and their workers. They face not only the king's soldiers, but also reinforcements from the private militia of the Magientist order. These troops escort the workers and add to the population of the newly founded Promise.



Safely behind walls.

During this scene, the Leader will describe the setting and introduce the new Characters, such as the Support Eliaz, who will explain the mission to the Lead and Tòmas: they will be helping to tend to the wounds of the victims of the raids. The Leader should make the PCs feel that they are lucky to be sheltered behind the palisades protecting Promise. They can describe the fear in the eyes of the workers and soldiers leaving for the mines, where the fossil Flux deposit is being harvested. They can also play out the arrival of wounded men in need of medical care. This will be an opportunity to test the Inceptus' abilities. The Leader should emphasize the harshness of these scenes, through which the PCs will witness suffering and death.
These first scenes will also touch on the ethical and political stakes of Flux extraction: the capital Baldh-Ruoch is in constant need of more energy to power its infrastructure. Running water, Nebulars, medical establishments, Artifacts that improve daily life... all these technological advancements need to be fueled.

Scene 2: A murderous raid

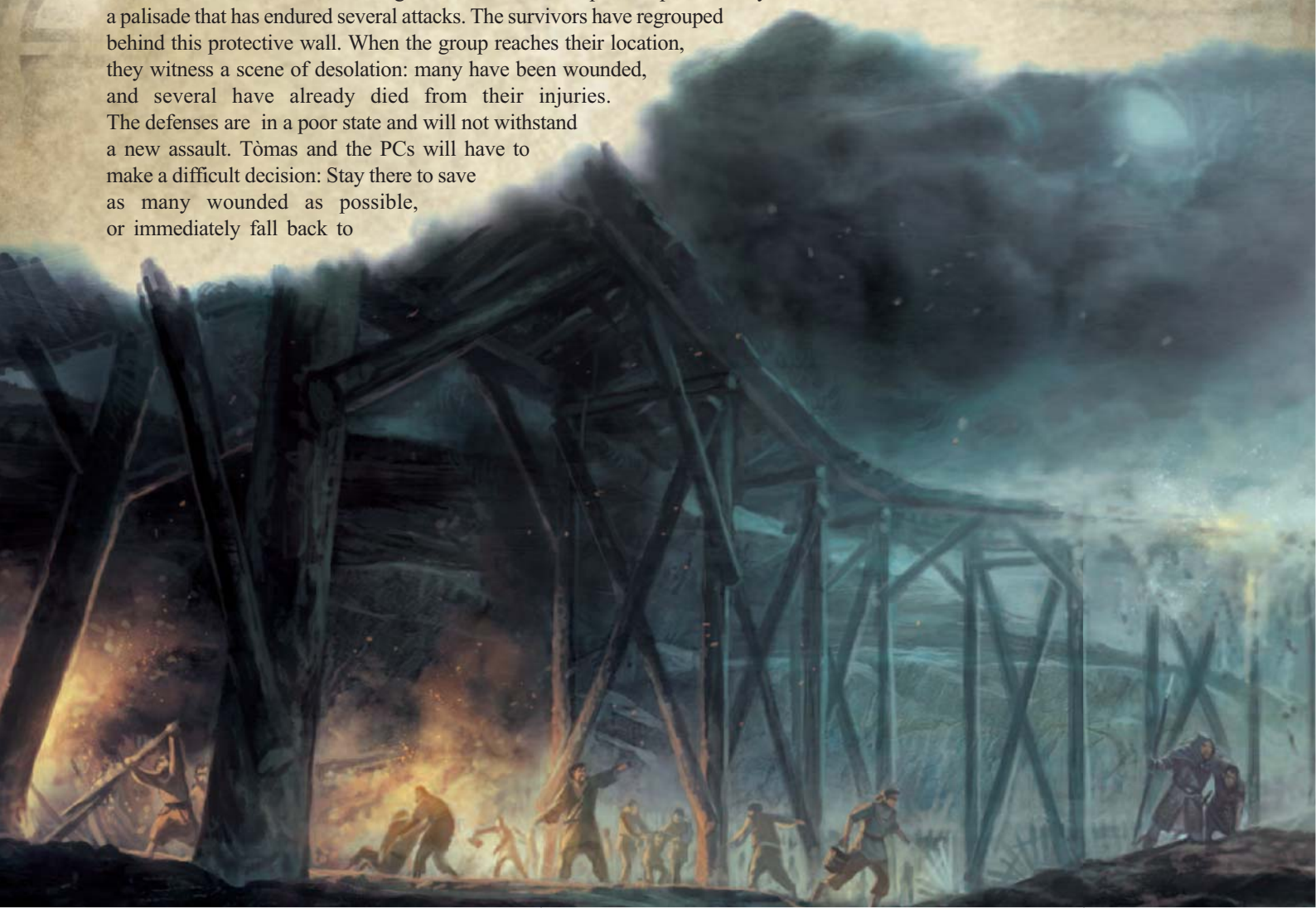
Supports: Primus Eliaz, Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen. **Extras**: The wounded, the workers.

The PC and Tòmas have now been working at the camp for several months. One day, in the late morning, Promise sees the return of a dozen people who were part of the convoy of workers who had left that morning for the mines where the fossil Flux deposit is being harvested. Their members, soldiers and miners, are wounded and in a panic. The convoy suffered a violent attack on the way to the mines, led by a group of several dozen wild warriors with painted faces. They were quickly overwhelmed, and those who have managed to flee are begging Primus Eliaz to send reinforcements and medics there.

Medical emergency

The Primus decides to send the Lead and Tòmas to the front lines, along with a few assistants and an escort of a dozen soldiers. Eliaz entrusts the two Inceptus with several doses of Tonic, which will suffice to save those in critical condition (see Book 1, p. 268). The trip to the mines will be nerve-wracking, the slightest noise bringing to mind the fear of an ambush.

The entrance to the mines leading to the fossil Flux deposit is protected by a palisade that has endured several attacks. The survivors have regrouped behind this protective wall. When the group reaches their location, they witness a scene of desolation: many have been wounded, and several have already died from their injuries. The defenses are in a poor state and will not withstand a new assault. Tòmas and the PCs will have to make a difficult decision: Stay there to save as many wounded as possible, or immediately fall back to



Promise with the survivors? Depending on how the operations go and the strategy of the PCs, the Leader can ask for rolls in Mental Resistance, Faults, and of course Magience for the medical care. The PCs have a total of about 20 wounded to tend to.

Once the team is back in Promise, this new wave of wounded will put the medical outpost in a delicate situation. Several of the patients require intensive health care, and they are running out of Tonics. At some point during this long night, the PCs will discover that the dead bodies are being taken to a remote part of the extraction plant to be treated and transformed into crude organic Flux. The realization may shock the Inceptus, but any scandal will be stopped by Primus Eliaz who will summon the PCs and show them letters signed by most of the soldiers and workers stationed in Promise. They clearly stipulate that they give their bodies to Magience in case of death, in exchange for a bonus of two azure Daols, the purpose being to produce Tonics that can save lives.

Scene 3: Flux from prisoners

Supports: Primus Eliaz, Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen. **Extras**: The wounded, the workers.

Soon after the murderous raid described in the previous scene, Promise is struck by another attack. The assault is fierce, as the assailants wish to drive away the Magientists once and for all. The fighters are from the clans of the mountains of the Mòr Roimh, and they are many. They bash the palisades with a ram, and manage to smash open the doors. Total chaos erupts inside Promise, but in the end, after a hard struggle, the soldiers manage to drive their opponents back, though not without heavy losses. The warriors retreat, leaving behind them a few of their own who are quickly taken prisoners.

The medical outpost is overwhelmed by the influx of wounded combatants; above all, it lacks medicine. The only way to save additional lives would be to perform emergency blood extractions on the living, resulting in the most concentrated, high quality, and easily refined organic Flux available (see “Raw Material,” p. 262 of Book 1 – Universe). Two pints of blood drawn from a living being produces as much Flux as 100 pounds of dead organic matter. With his back to the wall, Primus Eliaz summons the Lead and asks them and other Magientists to start drawing massive amounts of blood from the living prisoners to produce organic Flux in order to make Tonics (see p. 268, Book 1 – Universe). Meanwhile, the rest of the team will tend to the wounded. The PC understands that the quantity of blood required will obviously kill the prisoners. There is an urgent need for Tonics, and without the miraculous medicine, many of the wounded will die. If the PC refuses to follow such orders, Eliaz will warn the PC about disobeying a superior and will argue that the Magientist Code of Ethics does not apply during wartime. Although he will not show it, having to resort to such extreme methods upsets him greatly.



Will the Lead follow the order? Performing the bloodletting to renew the supplies of organic Flux may give the PC the satisfaction of having helped save many patients who would have otherwise met their end. However, doing so will confront the PC with a nightmarish ordeal that will last the whole night: the Lead will have to deal with prisoners who will plead and cry for mercy. The Magientist instruments of extraction, although designed to inflict as little pain as possible, look awfully like tools from a factory or from the lair of a torturer. The Leader should make sure to emphasize these details and to ask the Lead to make Mental Resistance rolls, as well as Test rolls based on Guilt. Beyond these ethical matters, the Lead will face the compassion they may feel toward the captives who, although they are Reizhites, are mountain people just like the PC...

If the Lead remains adamant against resorting to such methods, they will have to rely solely on their skills in medicine. Time is of the essence, and of the dozens wounded, about 20 of them are between life and death and require emergency care: without a successful Difficult (17) Magience (Medicine) check, they will perish. The Player portraying Tòmas may also attempt to save the patients; in that case, give him the same skills as the Lead in Magience. Passing the check means that the patient is safe, whereas a failure results in death within the following hours or days.

Following these events, Primus Eliaz will not write a report mentioning the Lead's insubordination, and will actually commend them in private for the strength of their convictions and their respect of Magientist ethics.

An ethical conundrum

This scene confronts the PC with a difficult choice: disregard Magientist ethics to save dying people, or refuse to commit such inhumane acts and doom several people to death. The Leader should leave the Player free to make their own decision in that regard, while stressing the dramatic aspect by reminding them of the arguments that may justify either decision.

The atmosphere may be made all the more intense by insisting on the urgency of tending to all the wounded, the nervous and emotional tension as the patients make it out of danger or die. For example, with each Medicine roll, one patient may live or die. Depending on the choices of the Players, the aftermath of this scene, which will take them to the end of their training in Candlewood, may vary greatly. If the Leader wishes to keep a quick pace, they may end the training episode after this scene and skip to the following act.

Act 4: Baldh-Ruoch's Political Scene

After a harrowing year spent in the region of Candlewood, the Lead is back in the Reizhite capital. This final act will depict the power games that take place in the kingdom's capital while confronting the Lead with ethical and ideological dilemmas.

Scene 1: Tragedy at the Assembly

Supports: Politician Ronan Kaereg, Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen, Magister Alana Naïghan.

Extras: Members of the Assembly of Representatives.

Once back in Baldh-Ruoch, the Lead resumes their final years of training. As part of their studies, the PC is to witness a session of the Assembly of Representatives. The insert "Reizh, a changing kingdom" sums up information about the political life of the kingdom that the Leader can share with the Players, which will help prepare them for this scene.



Reizh, a changing kingdom

The presence of the PCs at the Assembly of Baldh-Ruoch will give the Leader the opportunity to provide the Player with information about the life of the kingdom and the turmoil it is going through. Reizh is a kingdom facing many difficulties: King Bronchaerd, his power waning in the provinces due to conflicts with vindictive lords, rules the capital with an iron fist. Some describe him as a rather indolent man, influenced by a team of advisors who are quick to violently repress any budding dissident ideology. P. 80 of Book 1 – Universe provides an overview of the political situation of the kingdom and gives an idea of how the people of the hinterlands view the King.

The Assembly of Representatives

The semicircular amphitheater where the Assembly takes place can house several hundred people. The speaker stands on a podium below with the High Bailiff beside them, while an impressive squad of soldiers in ornate heavy armor is in charge of security. Behind the podium, an immense tapestry bearing the royal coat of arms dominates the amphitheater, symbolizing the presence of the King.

In the capital, everyone knows of this institution, which is the catalyst of many passionate debates. Its official purpose is to hear the grievances of the people every week, and for them to be compiled in a great tome that the King is supposed to read on a regular basis. The Assembly is also the time for the nobles and influential people in general to suggest their projects in the hope of being lent "the King's attentive ear," as the expression goes. A session can last a whole morning, but they are often cut short by the High Bailiff as soon as things get heated.

In theory, the book of grievances is supposed to be taken into account for royal decisions, but some say this is just a masquerade mimicking the Continental Parliaments. The Assembly is highly criticized by the royalists, who consider its existence to be a weakness for which the King will pay dearly. Although many progressives feel unhappy that it has so little influence on the royal decisions, they still defend its existence. The Magientists, whose importance as part of the political scene is ever-growing, are obviously involved in the establishment of the Assembly, inspired by how such things are said to work in their faraway land of origin.

The ideological currents

Reizh's political life is steered by many ideological currents, including clandestine ones. Here are a few:

The royalists. Faithful to the crown, they are King Bronchaerd's entourage. Most are from the capital. They strive to weed out any dissidence, so that the royal power may recover its influence everywhere in Reizh.

The progressives. This current gathers intellectuals, wealthy individuals, and well-off merchants who wish for the responsibilities of the Assembly of Representatives to be expanded, and for the King to agree to give it actual legislative power. They are careful and moderate in their demands for a parliamentary monarchy, not wanting to attract the ire of the King. They do not challenge the regime–at least not publicly–and praise the King, believing that the kingdom must keep a strong representative to lead it.

The Magientists. As the years have gone by, the Magientists have become a political caste in their own right. Their convictions tend to be progressive, aiming to have their science be given due recognition and to ease its development. An important part of their influence is due to their financial power: the order now owns countless mines and runs a trade of Flux cartridges of colossal proportions through the whole kingdom.

The revolutionaries. It is widely known that several revolutionary groups exist throughout Reizh and work to overthrow the King, if not the entire monarchy. Some rumors speak of lords from the hinterlands actively fostering revolts. Other groups, whose cohesion and means of financing remain unclear, dream of a radical change of regime, and of the advent of a democratic system where the people would enjoy direct power. Such ideologies have no place in the Assembly, and advocating them is punishable by imprisonment, or even by death.

Cut and thrust

Today, Magister Alana Naïghan is expected to introduce her new project for a public hospital. This will probably be the first time the Lead will see the Magientist again since they met at the Clock (see Scene 2 of Act 2). Since then, her

ascension has been spectacular, and this day she stands in front of the Assembly as the director of the Vitalist school and member of the Magientist Council of Baldh-Ruoch. The Lead and Tòmas are seated right next to the politician Ronan Kaereg, known for having a strong temper and for being fiercely opposed to Magientist projects. The two friends will have a few minutes to get acquainted with the man. He will prove rather kindly and will encourage the Inceptus, praising the young Talkéride who has come from afar in search of knowledge. He knows that the PC entered the university thanks to Alana Naïghan, and he will warn them about the manipulative Magister. According to Kaereg, there is nothing she does without some scheme in mind...

The public hospital project

Alana Naïghan will introduce her hospital project to the Assembly for the first time while asking for funds to build another Flux refinery. The Leader can find her arguments on p. 43 of Book 1 – Universe, which takes place during a subsequent scene where Alana defends her project once more, this time before the Royal Council. Again, she faces Kaereg, who has been nominated royal advisor in the meantime. Even though the context is different, the same arguments can be used as a basis for this key scene.

A spirited speaker

Kaereg is present when Alana Naïghan speaks to the Assembly about her public hospital project, and he will fiercely oppose her. Once more, the discussion on p. 43 of Book 1 shows the politician's stance.

A heated debate

In addition to the Lead, this scene will involve three Supports. The atmosphere should be intense! If there are other Players, they can play as members of the Assembly who will support either of the speakers. If not, the Leader will voice these interruptions. The outcome of the debate should depend on the oratory skills of the Players portraying Kaereg and Naïghan. After all, it will be the most compelling of the two who will earn the favor of the amphitheater, even though the King's ultimate decision will be the true defining factor for the future of the project.



As the session of the Assembly draws to a close, the crowd leaves the building in compact ranks. The two Inceptus will not be far away from Kaereg and will catch a glimpse of Alana Naïghan, dazzling in her magnificent, black ceremonial dress. The Lead will suddenly see a man draw a weapon, but it will be too late: the politician Kaereg will fall to the ground after suffering a stab wound. This is the chance for the Lead to shine by saving him. Kaereg is in Agony and requires emergency care (Difficult (17) Magience (Medicine) check). If the Lead fails, Tòmas may try as well, and in the worst case another physician or Magientist may conveniently step in to save the politician. Around the PCs, the crowd is abuzz with questions about who orchestrated this assassination attempt. There is mention of the royalists before soldiers move everyone away.

If the Lead or Tòmas saved Kaereg's life, they will quickly receive news from him, along with a reward of 10 frost Daols and an invitation from the politician to not hesitate to contact him should they need anything. This is the perfect moment to give the Lead their Ally for this Focus, as explained on p. 61.

Optional scene: Secret meeting between revolutionaries

Supports: Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen. **Extras**: The revolutionaries, the soldiers, Inceptus Privela.

This scene can be inserted anytime during the last act, or even during an earlier one, if suitable. The days following the assassination attempt may be particularly fitting, as the event is on the lips of all the Inceptus who share hypotheses about the instigators of such a crime.

The secret meeting

Little by little, as the friendship between Tòmas and the Lead grows stronger, the young aristocrat will tell the PC about his revolutionary ideas and the existence of a small group he is part of. Through the Focus, Tòmas

may mention things like “I have to tell you about something one day...” or “We could do better!” etc. Then, for this key scene, he invites the PC to attend one of these meetings, which takes place in the back room of a warehouse. Going to such a meeting implies that the Lead will join the group’s ranks...

A dangerous commitment

The scene will be all the more meaningful if the Lead’s Player is aware that they are free to react however they deem fitting. As Tòmas’s Player presents his arguments, the Leader may enhance the dilemma by stressing the risks of such a commitment being discovered: never obtaining a diploma, or being sentenced to prison, or even to death, as Primus Yasen may have mentioned.

The revolutionaries. This small group of about 10 people is made up of cultured young people who are all from the upper classes and wish to radically change the world. They are supported by a few powerful individuals, whose identities are all a mystery. Speculations are aplenty in that regard, but this shows one thing for sure: they are not the only ones to wish for such a revolution and to believe that King Bronchaerd will not peacefully let go of some of his power, as the progressives hope. A new regime, based on the existence of a Parliament, following the Continental model, will have to happen through necessary violence, and the various groups are waiting for a signal to leap into action.

The Lead is free to accept Tòmas’s invitation or not. If they do, they will meet the small group who will tell the PC about their ideals. However, the secret meeting gets out of hand when a troop of royal soldiers break through the doors of the warehouse and rush upstairs to reach the meeting room. There is a hidden back door, but most of the young plotters will be apprehended... The tension will be dreadful as the Lead, Tòmas, and another Inceptus called Privela manage to sneak out and then run as fast as their feet can carry them through the streets of Baldh-Ruoch.

A few days after the meeting...

If the Lead had refused to attend it, the Leader can skip directly to this scene. One of Baldh-Ruoch’s large public squares is teeming with observers. The PC, Tòmas, and Privela are part of the crowd. The people have gathered to witness an execution, and a dignitary announces the sentence for the group of revolutionaries who were caught plotting regicide. Tòmas and Privela stare in horror as the prisoners, under the crowd’s jeers, are led one by one onto the platform where an executioner decapitates them with an ax. The scene is one of extreme violence; terror can be seen on the revolutionaries’ faces, some of whom bear the marks of several days of torture. The Lead will probably feel sick, and this scene should be a brutal reminder that the monarchic regime has no tolerance for any challenge to its absolute power. Tòmas will be traumatized, but this will strengthen his convictions. As for the Lead, what lessons they take from this is up to them.



Scene 2: The sick child

Supports: Primus Yasen, Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen.

Extras: A poor family, Yasen’s assistants.

This is the last year of training for the Lead and Tòmas, and they will be working in the field once more, this time at the Bleuzenn Clinic, owned by Primus Yasen, who also performs as a surgeon there. The contrast with their experience on Candlewood’s front is staggering. Here, they enjoy incomparably better working conditions and take care of minor pathologies for the wealthy of the capital. This may bring a new perspective on Alana Naïghan’s project of building a public hospital.

A matter of priority

One evening, a sick young girl is hurriedly brought in by her penniless parents. Yasen tells the Lead to take care of her, making it clear that the family will not be asked to pay, which will present a more humane aspect to the seemingly cold-hearted Primus.

A quick examination will show that the young girl is feverish and very pale. Though the Lead will first believe they are dealing with a simple flu, they will probably quickly notice (Complicated (14) Magience (Medicine) roll) that her condition is much more serious. If Tòmas is around, he can help with the diagnosis. The child actually suffers from an advanced form of appendicitis, which puts her in great danger. Without an emergency operation, she will likely die. Being in such a situation, with the responsibility of saving a young girl, will distress the Lead. Indeed, this scene will bring to mind the death of the Lead's sister, years ago, which the Lead was powerless to prevent at the time. Today, they have the tools and knowledge that may give them the means to save the girl. However, the Demorthèn's words echo in the Lead's head: "This is the cycle of life and death, none can oppose it. Some die, others live, that is how it is." Passing an Influence-based Test will be necessary to overcome the memories that beset them and avoid a one-point penalty to any following rolls during this scene. The Leader should not hesitate to describe to the Player the inner turmoil that their Character feels.



However, as the Lead is getting ready to operate on the child, Yasen sends one of his assistants in to get the PC as quickly as possible (if the PC, once aware of the seriousness of the young girl's illness, went for reinforcements, they will come face to face with the assistant). Mac Utar, a noble of the city who funds the clinic, has just arrived in critical condition, and requires the attention of the whole medical team. Should he die, it would be a hard blow on the clinic's financial support, which would be quite detrimental to its future. If the PC refuses to abandon the girl, Yasen will not belabor the point, as this is an emergency and Mac Utar must be tended to right away. However, Yasen will not fail to send a report to the disciplinary board about his assistant's misconduct.

If the Lead decides to attempt to save the girl, an operation will be performed that will require passing two out of three Complicated (14) Magience (Medicine) checks to be successful. The roll is based on the adult PC's Magience score, minus one point. Tòmas may help during the operation, granting an additional Magience check that his Player will roll for.

Whatever decision the PC takes, and even if they decide to help Yasen, there is nothing that can be done for the dying noble. If the Lead disobeyed the Primus's orders, Yasen will hold the Lead and Tòmas responsible for the nobleman's death and will tell them they will have to explain themselves before the disciplinary board. Disobeying a superior and indirectly causing the death of a patient can lead to heavy sanctions.



Optional Scene: The disciplinary board

Supports: Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen.

Extras: The members of the board.

This optional scene will only take place if, during the previous scene, the Lead decided to cure the young girl instead of the noble.

Some days after the death of Mac Utar, the Lead as well as Tòmas (if he was present during Scene 2: The sick child) are summoned by the disciplinary board. They have a few days to prepare their defense.

The hearing of Tòmas and the PC takes place in a large room in front of a board of a dozen high-ranking Magientists, most of whom are elderly. The disciplinary board basically works like a tribunal: the accused come to the stand to hear the Council's indictment and sentence. Then, they can defend themselves and justify their actions. Finally, the magistrate, after conferring with the other members of the Council, announces the final decision.

The charges the PC and Tòmas face are serious. In the Magientist order, disobeying one's superior is no minor offense to begin with, but when it is an Inceptus going against the command of a higher-ranking Magientist, the affront is all the greater. Worse still, this lack of discipline indirectly led to the death of a patient. For this reason, the indictment ends with the proposition to expel the two Inceptus from the university and to bar them from entering the Magientist order–permanently.

The only way for the Inceptus to avoid such a sanction is to mention that they saved the young patient brought to the clinic the same evening. The accused will have to be convincing. The Council will take into account this new element–which had so far been left unmentioned–and will not expel them. Still, the Inceptus will be reprimanded for their disobedience, and the magistrate will lecture them about abiding by the principles of the Magientist school from now on. However, if the Lead and Tòmas decided to disobey and did not manage to save the young girl, they will have to take responsibility for their actions. The only solution for them would then be to prove that there was no hope for Mac Utar anyway, and that no medical aid could have saved him that evening... but this will require a complex investigation.

Scene 3: Flux traffic

Supports: Inceptus Tòmas Mac Tehen. **Extras**: Privela's friends.

This evening, the Lead and Tòmas are invited to the rich family house of an Inceptus named Privela. This talented young woman is from a family of wealthy commoners, and the two friends know her well, since she was part of the revolutionary group that was put to the axe (see Act 4, Optional Scene: Secret meeting between revolutionaries).

This scene takes place during the last weeks of classes. Summer is approaching, the sky is clear, and the air is pleasant. The great city of Baldh-Ruoch offers a dazzling sight of colors and lights.

The evening goes well, but the Lead and Tòmas will notice that Privela looks worried. Quickly, she will take the two Inceptus aside and tell them about her problem: a few days ago, a few fellow revolutionaries came to ask for her help. They were wounded and had with them a supply of Flux of questionable origin. Privela, even though she had broken all ties with the dissidents of the capital, could not bring herself to leave her former companions at the mercy of the royal guard. Thus, she agreed to hide the aforementioned supply in the basement of her house. The revolutionaries were supposed to come back for it, but she recently learned that some of them were captured. The others must be hidden, and are unlikely to show themselves anytime soon...

During this scene, the Leader will play Privela and tell the Players about what she knows. So that all of the Players might be involved, the Leader may let them play as Extras, friends of Privela who know about the situation and are equally concerned about what to do. Here is what Privela can inform the PC and Tòmas about:

- The organic Flux is drawn from bandits and vagabonds who lurk in the streets of Baldh-Ruoch's lower districts. Such a practice of taking blood against one's will obviously goes against the Magientist Code of Ethics.
- It is said that Magientist establishments are running out of organic Flux, particularly the hospitals and other health facilities of the capital. This may have to do with the news that the Baldhian newspapers write about every now and then: the city's morgues are abnormally empty, and cases of graverobbing have been rampant. Still, many inhabitants do agree to give their body to science in exchange for a few Daols, which makes for a hefty inflow of raw material.
- One of the slaughterhouses on the town's outskirts is said to house a laboratory where blood is drawn from living humans to be refined into organic Flux. Privela can point out the location of said slaughterhouse.
- One of the soldiers guarding the place is supposedly the source of this information, which reached the ears of a group of revolutionaries that Privela, as well as Tòmas, used to know.
- The last piece of information is the most important one: Primus Yasen is involved in these dealings, and could even be the leader of the clandestine laboratory.
- Privela can show the Flux supply: 12 jars are stored in a reinforced crate, which makes 360 doses of organic Flux, for a total value of more than 300 azure Daols.

Major stakes

The purpose of this last scene is to leave the Lead free to choose what to do; Privela will agree to follow their recommendation. To make the most of this scene, the Leader should take the time to detail how complex the situation is. What will they do with the Flux? Considering the quantities involved and the suspicious origin, it would likely attract some attention. Selling it on the black market would be both unethical and risky, but entrusting it to the authorities might result in trouble.

The matter is complex, as the Flux apparently supplies some of the town's health facilities. Organic Flux is the base for the production of a great many Tonics that save lives every day. Should the life of someone dear to them depend upon this Flux, what would they do? Do these stakes justify such practices of extraction?

Once more, the Lead has a conundrum to answer and will have to make a decision. Depending on the Lead's choice, the conclusion of the Focus will be very different. Ethical matters are at the forefront, and it is a good way for the PC to make a stand: will they help the Magientist authorities to sweep the case under the rug, or will they contribute to bringing this scandal to light?

Here are a few possibilities for the end of the scenario, depending on the plans of the Players. During these final moments, the Leader will have to give hints and cues to the Supports and Extras on the fly, like a voice-over, as explained on p. 87. These elements have not been included on the Support sheets in order to preserve some suspense for the end of this Focus and leave the Players the pleasure of contributing to its resolution.

Telling Primus Yasen.

Confronting the Primus directly will turn explosive. Yasen will deny it all, and he will have the PC taken away before raising the alarm and erasing all evidence inside the slaughterhouse. At the discretion of the Leader, the PC may even be the target of an assassination attempt, barely a few days later.

Telling Alana Naïghan.

Alana will prove flabbergasted and shocked by this revelation, all the more so considering this sordid case is very detrimental to Magience and might discredit all of the order's projects. The PCs may harbor doubts about the Magister's sincerity, but they won't be able to know more. She will thank the Lead for warning her and will ask them to keep it all a secret. Her intention is to take care of this all without any outside interference, and to erase any evidence at the slaughterhouse. She assures the PC that the culprits will be punished. Indeed, a few days later, the Lead and Tòmas will learn that Yasen has been suspended for obscure administrative reasons, and that the slaughterhouse has been closed for "maintenance work."

Telling politician Kaereg.

This solution is certainly the only one that will bring the scandal to light, since Kaereg, now a member of the Royal Council, has the means to bring the affair to the highest authorities before the Magientists have the time to erase the evidence. P. 118-119 illustrate this decisive meeting between the Lead, Tòmas, and Kaereg. The politician will receive the Inceptus in his mansion and will lend them an attentive ear, being delighted to oblige the young person who saved his life (see Act 4, Scene 1: Tragedy at the Assembly). The revelations will stupefy Kaereg, who will grab the PC by the arm, telling them that they finally have the means to bring down the Magientists. The day after, in the early morning, Kaereg will be seen by the King himself to bring proof of the Magientists' misdoings. Primus Yasen will be judged by the disciplinary board and expelled from the Magientist order, in addition to getting 20 years of imprisonment for the crimes he committed. Magister Alana Naïghan will narrowly escape the same sentence, managing to prove that she knew nothing of the trafficking that had been organized by the previous Magister... who incidentally has just died that very day. The disciplinary board will still reprimand her, since, as the director of the Vitalist school, she is also responsible for the actions of her Primus. The whole case, which the newspapers will title "The Slaughterhouse Scandal," will be a harsh blow to the Magientists, particularly the Vitalists, whose influence will be reduced.

Inva Mulla – The Fifth Element – 14 – Lucia Di Lammermoor



In order to end this act with a bang, the Leader can narrate the last scene in a dramatic fashion, with powerful music playing. For example, when the Lead reveals the information about the Flux trafficking and the names of the people involved to Kaereg, the Leader can take the rest of the scene in hand, announce a fading to black, then describe the sumptuous halls of the royal residence of Baldh-Ruoch, the meeting between Kaereg and the King... then, short images of the judgment of Yasen and Alana Naïghan before the disciplinary board, Yasen's imprisonment, the newspapers' headlines, etc.

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

The Focus ends with the Lead being awarded a Scientör diploma and returning to Dearg. Depending on how Act 4 went, this return may be more or less hasty. Concluding this Focus with the Lead and the Varigal Mordàn meeting again and returning to Taol-Kaer can make for a nice final scene.

The Leader should make sure to once more describe the brutal transition between the noisy, teeming atmosphere of the Reizhite capital and that of untamed nature. After all these years and training, the Lead will certainly return to their native land with a new outlook on the world...

Determination and Experience points

The Focus will earn the Lead 15 Experience points, as well as between 0 and 5 Determination points. How many they will earn will depend on the position the PC adopted regarding matters of ethics, and how they defended their point of view. The Leader can find additional information about the assignment of Determination and Experience points for the Focuses on p. 81.

Experience points can also be attributed to the other Players for their PCs, even though they were not part of this scenario. The attribution system is the same as the one described on p. 228 of Book 1 – Universe, but the total will be halved, rounded up.



Chapter 3

Mac Thogail: The Legacy of the Rose

Prologue

· **Style:** Focus centered on the narrative arc of Adoption.

· **Setting:** Taol-Kaer, Vale of Dearg; Gwidre, Ard-Amrach.

Summary: This Focus starts in the Vale of Dearg, in Alestor's Monastery, where the PC, no more than a child, will face the first mysteries surrounding his adoption. Later, he will cross Gwidre to Ard-Amrach in a journey of self-discovery that will cause him to be confronted with temptation and will lead him to reflect about Soustraine's Ordinances. Finally, he will come to a major revelation about his story and will have to make a decisive choice during the Acceptation ceremony.

Stakes and aims: The first objective of this Focus is to provide the PC with clues regarding his adoption, particularly his ambiguous relationship with his sister. The second objective is to depict his religious education and to portray his decision to become part of the clergy–or refusing to do so.

Horrific aspect

This Focus explores the Lead's past. In addition to ordeals that marked his life, he will experience emotions beyond his control that may gradually lead him down the path of incestuous love. Since the narrative arc of Adoption is connected to the Temple faction, the theme of struggling against corruption and taboos is at the core of the scenario.





Emotions in The Legacy of the Rose

Though this Focus lets the PC make major choices that will influence the remainder of his story–starting with him becoming part of the clergy of the Temple–he will be more passive concerning other aspects, in particular the emotions and feelings that may arise within him. This subject is covered in the chapter "Conscience rules but does not govern," p. 74. In this Focus, meeting Lusia will trigger passionate emotions from the Lead. The Leader will be in charge of describing to the Players what their Character can't help but feel. It will then be up to the Player to decide what the PC will do: if his actions go against his emotions, it will then be interesting for the Player to describe the Character's inner conflict. The Leader can ask for a Test to simulate this struggle.

If the Leader feels that the Player portraying the Lead is not comfortable with such notions, they may discuss it beforehand, mainly concerning the subjects developed in "Conscience rules but does not govern."

Rewarding the interpretation of the Player

Page 229 of Book 1 – Universe covers how the Leader may decide to increase the amount of Experience points attributed. For example, a decisive fight may reasonably grant bonus XPs for the "Confrontation" factor. In the case of this Focus, a Player who is able to brilliantly portray the dilemmas introduced by the Leader through the emotions that the Character can't help but feel should be granted bonus XPs in the "Interpretation of the PC" factor. Indeed, the Player should be rewarded for helping set the atmosphere and increasing the overall involvement and enjoyment.

The White Rose

This Focus will set the PC on the trail of the White Rose, a religious sect branded as heretics by the Temple, and thus doomed to the same fate as sorcerers. Its members believe in the teachings of the Book of Rosàg, which confers a different interpretation of the Writings of Soustraine on which the religion of the Temple is based. Rosàg is said to have been an influential member of the Temple before he turned away from the official dogma and founded his own theological current. Here are the major amendments made to the dogma as detailed in the Book of Rosàg:

- The prophet Soustraine imparted to men the Miracle of Reincarnation, which has been erased from the current teachings.

- In the current texts, the One is referred to as "He," which implies the Creator is a male deity. According to the Book of Rosàg, the One revealed Her name and face to Soustraine: She is called Innis Tile, and is a female entity.

- There is an original version of the Writings of Soustraine, which makes the current version a revision of that text. The Book of Rosàg refers to it as the First Writings, the genuine founding texts of the Temple that bear out Rosàg's affirmations.

For the theologians of the Temple, the First Writings are nothing but a hoax, and Rosàg a heretic like many others. Scene 3 of Act II will have the Lead discover this information.
Little is known about the founder of the White Rose. This religion is banned by the authorities of Gwidre, but tolerated by those of the other kingdoms. There is a small chapel dedicated to the cult of the White Rose in Osta-Baille. It is said to be under the protection of the King ever since its members helped Taol-Kaer during the War of the Temple.
Though the followers of Innis Tile observe the Six Ordinances, they follow a less strict interpretation of them than the religion of the Temple and attract an ever-growing community of faithful.

Supports

Before the game begins, the Player who is the Lead (i.e. who has chosen the narrative arc of Adoption) will go out of earshot, while the Leader introduces the Supports available for this scenario to the other Players. If the Leader and Players do not yet feel totally in command of the particular principles of the Focuses, they should read the chapter "The Focuses" again, particularly the part "Principles and rules of the Focuses," on p. 83.

The profile of each Support includes information about their story, their personality, and the Key scenes they are involved in that the Leader will explain to the Players portraying them. The Support sheets summarize all of this information and are intended to be handed to the Players. The Leader can download the files for these sheets on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org. The paragraphs below sum up this information for the Leader's reference during the game.

Another valuable game aid for the Leader is the relations diagram. This sheet sums up the bonds between the NPCs involved in the scenario and provides an overall vision of the various protagonists. The Leader can download a digital version of this relations diagram on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org.

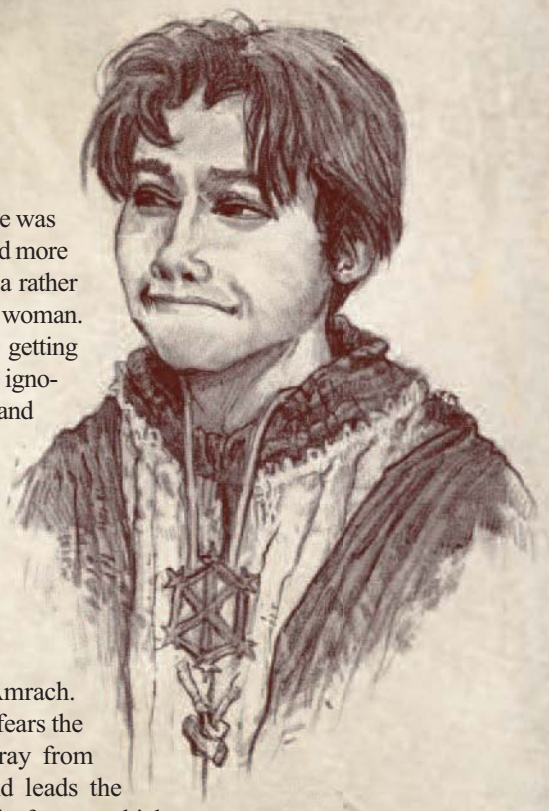
The Key scenes are particular moments when the Support will be involved in the Focus and bring elements that the Player will have to convey as faithfully as possible. All Players should therefore make sure to be familiar with the Support they will portray.
The ages of the Supports are not provided, since the Focus takes place at an indefinite time in the past, which may vary according to the story of the Support. General temporal indications are provided, but they are adjustable according to the story's needs.



Monk Firmin

A simple, benevolent man who belongs to the order of the Lavanians, the monk Firmin is not only a devout believer, but also a humanist. In his eyes, all humans are equally granted the One's love, and Soustraine's revelations are bulwarks against temptation and evil. According to him, anyone can certainly be saved even if they do not adhere to the faith of the Temple, even though it will prove more difficult and uncertain. The feud regarding the heresy of the White Rose (see Act I, Scene 6) saddens him deeply, but he does not wish to take a side. Firmin is an important Support, since he will accompany the Lead throughout the scenario.

Ronan



Zaïg's grandson and the PC quickly made friends with each other. At an early age, he was given a religious education by his grandmother. As he grew up, Ronan grew more and more interested in Magience, even though he still believed in the One. This makes him a rather unique individual, just like his grandmother, an eccentric, open-minded, curious woman. Ronan is in love with Maëlys and has a naive, romantic fantasy he hopes to fulfill: getting married to her in the chapel of Alestor's Monastery before traveling to Reizh. He is ignorant of the deep-seated incompatibilities between the Magientists and the Temple, and nurtures a utopian dream of tolerance between the factions.



Sigire Dand

Dand is a Sigire from the capital of Ard-Amrach. He staunchly believes in the Creator and fears the eternal torment awaiting those who stray from the Ordinances. This means that Dand leads the missions he is given with unbreakable fervor, which may make him seem devoid of compassion.



Brother Caernic

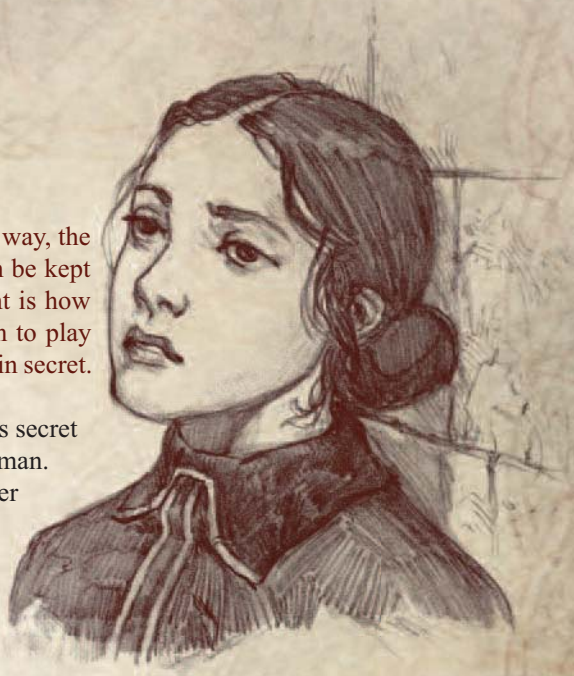
More widely known by the grim moniker of Brother Carrion (see his profile on p. 144 of Book 2 – Travels), he is one of the most infamous figures of the mountains of southwestern Gwidre. He has survived all fights, battling sorcerers, wild beasts, and Feondas, while tirelessly carrying on his struggle against heresy. An ice-cold man, he speaks in a monotone, and his stare unsettles even those who only have trifles to feel guilty about. He has saved the life of Lusia, who literally worships him, believing that since he is an Elect, anything in him that may frighten is only the reflection of the dark side of the human soul.



The Tarish Masha

In Joris's original story (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 188 and 192), Masha's character plays a particular role, and their relationship can evolve in many ways. If another one of the Players has taken Masha as their Character (whether as is or by only keeping the core elements of her background for their own PC's narrative arc), that PC should definitely be included in the Focus as a Support. Masha may accompany the Lead throughout the scenario, traveling with him toward the Gwidrite capital. A romantic relationship between the two Characters will certainly make the dramatic impact of the ambiguous relationship between the Lead and the Sigire Lusia all the stronger (see Act III, Scene 2). Masha is a nonbeliever full of doubts, which makes her an appropriate figure for pointing out the weaknesses of the dogma during the pilgrimage. Inspiration can be drawn from the Holy Ordinances (Act II, Scene 1) to give her the role of an adversary, both morally and psychologically. She forces the Lead to take a stand regarding his religion, strengthening his faith or weakening it.

Sigire Lusia



By default, the Leader should play Lusia, the sixth Support. This way, the revelation regarding the kinship between the Lead and Lusia can be kept a surprise for all the Players. Another aspect to take into account is how difficult it can be to play a Character such as Lusia. Should a Player wish to play Lusia, the Leader should tell them about the secret of her kinship with Joris in secret.

Lusia is the Lead's hidden sister, two years his elder. During this Focus, this secret will be revealed to the PC. Lusia is a self-conscious, tormented young woman. Just like the Lead, she was narrowly saved, but she wasn't as lucky as her brother: her adoptive parents died a few years after she was taken in. Lusia was captured and sold to a tyrannical Gwidrite lord. Reduced to slavery, she owes her salvation to the intervention of a squad of Sigires led by Brother Daernic, who had come to deal with the depraved noble known for his excesses. Being only 12 at the time, Lusia was adopted by the Temple. She has since finished her novitiate, and was recently ordained as a Sigire.

Extras in The Legacy of the Rose

This Focus can involve many Extras. As explained in the chapter "The Focuses" (p. 80), such roles can be improvised on the spot by the Leader and Players. However, for certain scenes, the Leader should not hesitate to take the Players aside to fill them in.

Chronology

The Acts and Scenes of this Focus are set in chronological order. They focus on key moments of the Lead's past. However, this sequence is flexible, and many other scenes can be inserted, considering this Focus covers several years of the PC's life.

To prepare for the game, the Leader may refer to the game aid that includes a rundown of each scene as well as a timeline providing an overall vision of the Focus's course. Digital versions of these game aids can be downloaded on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org.

The setting of the story

The first part of the Focus takes place in the Vale of Dearg. Before getting started, the Leader should make sure they are familiar with the chapter "The Vale and its Surroundings" (p. 16), which details this location. The chapter also includes the description of several personalities who will be involved during the scenario. For the two following acts, all the relevant information is provided throughout the scenario.

Duration of the game

The Legacy of the Rose is a rather dense scenario, whose duration may vary depending on the pace the Leader wishes to set for the game sessions. By playing the scenes one after the other, with a fast-paced narration, it is possible to go through it in a single session, though it will require some fast-forwarding between the different scenes. If the Leader wishes to have the PCs develop relationships with the story's other protagonists, to play out the journeys (particularly the one to Gwidre), and to react and improvise on the Players' ideas, each act may last a whole game session, if not more.

Default Characters and dates

By default, the Focuses use locations and dates related to the official narrative arcs (detailed on p. 57-58) and premade Characters (provided in Book 1 - Universe). In The Legacy of the Rose, Firmin will be the adoptive father of the PC, who was entrusted to the monk by a dying Blade knight. The Player and Leader are free to draw inspiration from and adapt all the other elements related to Joris, whose profile can be found on p. 188 of Book 1 – Universe. For example, the existence of the ambiguous relationship with Masha is left to their discretion. By default, the PC will set out to enter the order of the clerics in order to become a theologian, but in that regard as well, it is possible for the Lead to have a different vocation. However, this will require the Leader to adapt the scenario accordingly, following the Player's expectations.

An example of chronology

- 885: Lusia, the Lead's elder sister, is born.
- 887: The Lead is born. Lusia and her brother's parents are attacked by mysterious assailants. Teorg, the Lead's father, runs away with the boy to save him, and makes it to Firmin's monastery, where he succumbs to his wounds. Firmin, understanding that the knight was a faithful of the White Rose, hides his armor and keeps his sword and pendant.
- 891: Lusia loses her adoptive family. She is captured and reduced to slavery by a Gwidrite lord.
- 892: The Lead is given a sword by Firmin (Act I, Scene 6) without being told of its origin.
- 897: Lusia is saved by Brother Daernic and starts her novitiate.
- 902: Adeliane falls severely ill, is mysteriously cured, and becomes Loeg's Ionnthén. Finn leaves for Reizh to become a Magientist.
- Spring, Earrach Feis 903: The Lead reaches adulthood. Daernic (whose profile is included on p. 144 of Book 2 – Travels) is sent by his superiors to the mountains to accomplish a "mission of importance."
- Years 903 and 904: The Lead performs his military duty in the town of Terkhên. Lusia finishes her novitiate and enters the order of the Sigires.
- Summer 904: The Duke of Tulg dies.
- Fall 904: Sigires arrive in the monastery where Firmin and the Lead live (Act I, Scenes 1 and 2). The Lead and Lusia meet.
- Spring, Earrach Feis 905: Mael, Céliane, and Eoghan reach adulthood (see Gaol: Of Love and Fury, p. 90).
- Spring, Céitean 905: The crisis of conscience of two parents, Padraig and Ebliu (Act I, Scenes 3 and 4).
- Summer, Og-mhios 905: Journey to Ard-Amrach (Acts II and III).
- Fall, Sulthaim 906: The harvest is poor in the Vale of Dearg, in spite of which the Hilderin knight Argan levies significant taxes.
- Fall, Damhar 906: Death and funeral of Mael Mac Govrian and his sister Aline, the last heirs of the Fortress of Smiorail, which officially becomes the responsibility of the Hilderin knight Argan.
- Summer, Og-mhios 907: After studying for a few months in the capital and possibly going on a pilgrimage to Fionnfuar, the Lead goes back to Dearg.
- Winter 907: Present time. The Dearg campaign begins.

Playing in the present

Part of the Focus can take place in the present if the Lead has not yet been solemnly sworn in as a clergyman of the Temple. In this case, several PCs can take the place of the Supports throughout Acts II and III. The events are the same as in the example of chronology provided above, with a few exceptions:

- 904 to 907: The Lead lives and studies in Dearg.
- 906: The Sigires come (Act I, Scene 2).
- Spring 907: Journey to Ard Amrach.
- Fall 907: Return to Dearg.

In the case where the Lead is from a faction other than the Temple, 905-907 can be a period when he learns a new trade.

Adapting the Focus for a different Lead

This basic premise of this Focus is that the PC was adopted by Firmin, in the Vale of Dearg. However, depending on his background, he may have been taken under the wing of someone living in a different kingdom. According to the Leader's needs and the Player's choices, such biographical data may be adapted. The chapter "Adapting and Managing Your Campaign" (p. 66) provides several tools to do so.

Here are a few more precise examples of how the scenario may be adapted:

Choosing another order of the Temple:
Even though Firmin is a monk, the Lead may obviously aim to be part of another order. The insert "The path of the Ordinances" (Act II, Scene 1) offers indications to help choose the most appropriate order for the Lead in accordance with his attitude during the journey that will take him to Ard-Amrach.

The PC comes from afar:
Those who have raised the Lead in the faith tell him that Firmin entrusted him to them many years ago. Meeting him will thus be the first step on the quest for the Lead's origins. The events of Act I will take place during the Lead's stay at Alestor's Monastery.

What if the Lead is not a member of the clergy?

All the non-optional background elements are described in the list of prerequisites for the narrative arc of Adoption: the PC was adopted by a man or woman who was part–secretly or not–of the clergy of the Temple. The story of his origin is as follows: a wounded Blade knight left the PC in the care of his adoptive parent before dying from his wounds. If the PC is from Dearg, he was adopted by the monk Firmin.

For the Player who has chosen the arc of Adoption, it is entirely possible to play a PC who is not a priest, and who can even belong to a different faction. In that case, this will require going back over his religious education to see how things evolved for him. The story of the Lead implies that he has at least one point in Prayer, which will represent the basics he was taught, even if he ended up choosing a different profession.

Here are two possible reasons the PC may have chosen a faction other than the Temple:

Rejection:
In the care of of his adoptive father, Firmin, the Lead was certainly given attentive, gentle care. However, the events of Act I, followed by the revelations of Act III, have thoroughly convinced him of the hypocrisy and deceptiveness of religion. He may still appreciate Firmin today, but simply as someone humane, generous, even-minded, and constant. These qualities are within the individual himself and certainly do not result from a blind observance of the dogma. An even more radical option may involve an overwhelming rejection of the Temple and its principles, going as far as to include Firmin. The Player and the Leader are advised to discuss this to decide where the PC stands regarding the Temple and the religious education he was given.

Maturity:
The Lead has come to terms with religion. During his naive, idealistic youth, he believed that it could be his vocation, inspired as he was by the admirable example of Firmin, who had adopted him. For the child he was, being adopted meant finding love and comfort amidst the mystery of his birth... and for his still budding sense of identity, loving his mentor back meant endeavoring to resemble him, which seemed to go without saying. After all the adventures of this Focus, the Lead has gotten a better grip on who he is and what he wants. He has become less dependent on the models that he used to follow blindly, and has decided to seek his own path.

His religious education may still influence his sense of morality, but he refuses to let his actions be influenced by dogma or by his role models, as righteous as they might be.

His true quest is learning the story of his adoption, the identity of this dying Blade knight, and other aspects that, in many respects, remain shrouded in mystery.

During this act, the Lead will discover troubling information about his past and will have a life-changing encounter with Lusia, whom he does not know is his sister.

The Temple in the Vale of Dearg

The situation of the Temple in the Dearg region is a delicate one. For many, the memory of the War of the Temple is still very fresh, all the more so since this border region suffered greatly during this troubled period. Representatives of the Temple are seen with suspicion, if not mistrust. Showing one's faith in the One is little appreciated, but the ones who attract aggression and reproach the most are the converts: they embody the fear of seeing the religion of the Temple spreading across the whole region and replacing the traditional beliefs. Of course, some of the locals are more tolerant than others, but it remains that the condition of the faithful of the Temple is complicated in the Vale of Dearg and its surroundings.
In that regard, the case of the monk Firmin is rather unusual, as he has managed to be accepted by most of the community of Dearg. His discreet, helpful disposition certainly helped his integration, even though some of the locals are still suspicious of him, looking very unfavorably upon the interest that some of the village's young people have taken in the religion of the Temple.

The Lead's childhood

When the Focus begins, the PC has already performed his military duty and is no longer a child, but what has happened since his birth? Some of this Focus's scenes portray major events in his childhood. Apart from that, like Joris (whose story is detailed on p. 188 of Book 1 – Universe), the PC grew up in Alestor's Monastery, brought up by his adoptive father to respect the precepts of the Temple. Even though he often shared moments with the other children of Dearg when he traveled to the village accompanying his father, the PC was often alone. Was this solitude an ordeal for him, or did it suit his character? The Player may define such elements in the PC's background.

Ties with the locals

Here are a few possible ties the PC may have with some of Dearg's inhabitants:

The dealer Zaïg.

When Firmin had to be absent for several weeks, Zaïg used to take care of the PC. The old woman had her part in sparking the boy's passion for books and ancient scrolls. She still shares her latest discoveries with him and shows him the theological trinkets that end up in her shop. The Leader will find additional information about Zaïg and her shop on p. 34.

Ronan

Zaïg's grandson, a boy with a unique personality who shared many moments with the PC during their childhood and became his friend. Ronan is one of the Supports of this Focus; information about him may be found in the dedicated section at the beginning of this Focus.

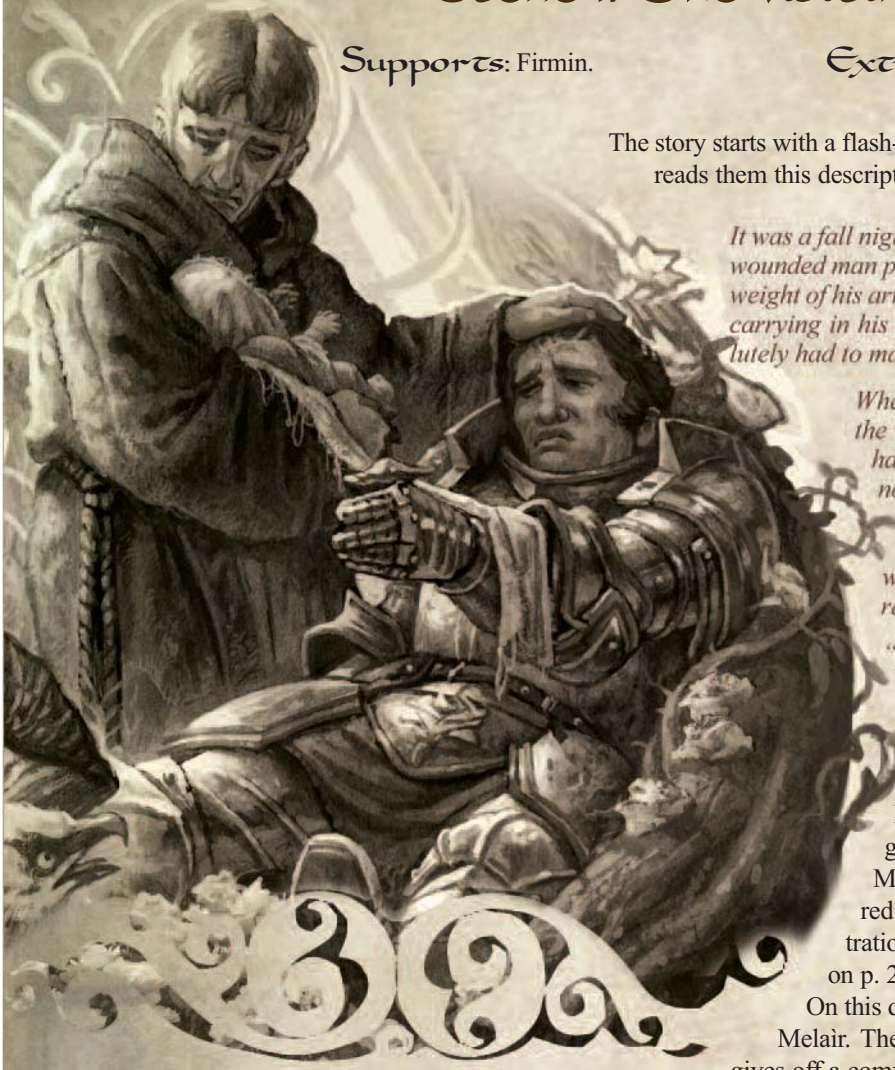
Herven

Ronan's younger brother, raised by his grandmother as well. His education taught him about faith in the One, but as he grows up, he will develop a passion for occultism, which will most unfortunately be his doom. Though Herven also spent a lot of time with the PC when they were children, the two boys had less in common. Rather, Herven will tend to get closer to Alban Elarig, the heir of Dearg's mines with an ambiguous reputation, as well as Maella, a young shepherdess from Dearg. Herven meets a tragic fate in the scenario "Red Fall" of Book 0 – Prologue. If the Leader plans to play this story, this Focus will be the perfect opportunity to introduce in advance its main Characters.

Since this first act will take place on the outskirts of Dearg, it may be possible for the other Players to have their PCs involved; just like Joris may meet Eoghan, Adeliane, or the Tarish sisters, the Lead may meet the other PCs.

Scene 1: The visiting Varigal

Supports: Firmin. **Extras**: None



The story starts with a flash-back. The Leader describes this scene to the Players, or reads them this description

It was a fall night. The sky was dark, and an icy drizzle was falling. The wounded man plodded along the path leading to the monastery, but the weight of his armor was becoming overwhelming. He held on, however, carrying in his arms a small child wrapped in white linens. He absolutely had to make it to the holy place.

When he reached the door, he slammed against it, gathered the last of his strength, and knocked with his steel-clad hand. However, even this was more than his body could now take. Weakened by blood loss, the knight felt his legs buckle, and he fell, still holding the child in his arms as securely as he could. He was breathing his last when a monk appeared in front of him. The armored man rattled:

"Brother, take care of this child as if he were your own." With a final effort, the knight handed the baby to the monk, who swore to raise him and protect him like a father would.

Fast-forward 17 years: the Lead has grown under the guidance of his adoptive father. They live in Alestor's Monastery, a crumbling building that Firmin partly restored at the cost of much effort. The Leader may find an illustration and complementary information about the Monastery on p. 24.

On this day, the monk and his son are visited by a Varigal called Melaìr. The scene takes place in the refectory, where a fireplace gives off a comforting heat. The Lead is present and helps Firmin with the cooking. The Varigal speaks of his journey from Ard-Amrach that will lead him to Osta-Baille, but will remain evasive about the motives for his journey. However, he will mention a rumor, allegedly backed up by an incriminating document, which has been causing unrest in the Gwidrite capital these last weeks: Hierophant Anthénor, the spiritual leader of the order of the Temple, is said to have a hidden son! The illegitimate boy would be between 15 and 20 years old today. The scandal is all the greater that Anthénor is known for having sworn to abide by the Six Vows: Frugality, Abstinence, Anonymity, Temperance, Abstention, and Obedience (see The Monastery of Tuath, p. 12), even though his status of supreme leader of the Temple in Tri-Kazel currently exempts him from the Vows of Anonymity and Obedience.

The rumor of the hidden son.

The Player portraying the Varigal must make sure to mention this rumor during this initial scene. It is very likely that, at some point, the Lead will presume that he is the hidden son of the Hierophant... and that's the point! This is actually a red herring whose objective is to stoke the Player's curiosity and to feed the mystery surrounding the Lead's adoption.

Scene 2: The Sigires

Supports: Firmin, Dand, Lusia. **Extras**: Fellow Sigires and Blade knights.

Arcana – The Last Embrace- 2 – Hymn of absolute deceit

A solemn piece with martial undertones that will powerfully illustrate the arrival of the Sigires.

Tracking down the heretic (see Firmin and Dand's sheets).

This scene takes place right after the first one. As night starts to fall and the Varigal has gone to his bedroom, the small bell at the entrance of the Monastery rings, and Firmin goes to the entrance to see who is there. There are about a dozen visitors, some dressed in black, others wearing heavy armor and white clothes with red trimming. Undeniably, this is a squad of Sigires and Blades of the Temple! The Lead sees Firmin run to him to urge him to warn the Varigal of the group's presence.

When the Lead tells Melaìr, the Varigal turns pale, hurriedly gathers his belongings, and flees through the window, asking the PC not to tell anyone he was there.

As he makes his way back to the refectory, the PC can hear shouting. Once there, he will see there are four Sigires, and as many Blade knights. The Sigire leading the operation asks Firmin if he housed a Varigal lately, the description of whom matches Melaìr. The Sigire mentions testimonies from the village of Dearg indicating that the Varigal has been here in the past. He also tells Firmin that the man is a heretic, affiliated with the sect of the White Rose.

Two important scenes will take place during this episode:

A heated altercation. The Sigire Dand wonders whether Firmin is trying to cover for the fugitive. Could the monk himself be a member of the sect? Dand relies on his intuition, the testimonies he has gathered, as well as on the bad reputation of this Talkéride border region. Firmin will admit he did house a Varigal, but will deny having met him before, as he will deny being part of the White Rose. Unfortunately for the monk, two pieces of evidence will support the inquisitor's suspicions: a pendant of the White Rose, found in the Varigal's bedroom (which Melaìr lost in his haste), and a copy of the Book of Rosàg in Firmin's bedroom (which he got from Zaïg). Once he has burned the book in the fireplace, the Sigire will attempt to scare the monk into confessing, reminding him of the fate of heretics, but Firmin will stick to his story. The Lead, kept in another room, will hear shouting. A Blade knight watches him, but if he fails a Passion Test with a 3 point increase to the Threshold (see Book 1 – Universe p. 234), he won't be able to remain idle and will attempt to dash through.

A troubling encounter. At the most opportune moment, preferably when things are intense and chaotic (for example, if the Lead struggles and tries to rush to the aid of his adoptive father), the Lead will come face to face with one of the Sigires, a girl of his age he previously heard the name of: Lusia. Meeting her gaze will feel like being thunderstruck: he will be subjugated by her in a way he had so far never experienced. Apparently, what seems to be love at first sight is mutual, since the young woman will also appear deeply troubled.



In the end, the Sigires will notice footprints outside the monastery, the trail starting from the window of the Varigal's bedroom. After a warning from Dand to Firmin that this is not the end of this case, the squad will immediately go after the fugitive. The Monastery will then become quiet again, contrasting with all the hustling and shouting that just took place.



The encounter between the Lead and the young Sigire (who is none other than his sister, something he obviously cannot know) is a decisive moment. However, the Leader should take care not to draw the attention of the PC to this "love at first sight" too much. It should seamlessly be part of the intensity of the scene, melding with the interrogation and the mystery of the White Rose. A savvy Player may quickly suspect that the Sigire is an important part of the story, or even that the PC has a connection with her. Therefore, the Leader's depiction of the events must remain subtle in order to maintain suspense. A means to do so would be to suggest the possibility of a love at first sight through the advice (or sermons) of Firmin concerning love and sexuality. This subject is explored later during Scene 4: A forbidden dream.

Religious and border law

Legally, the Temple only has freedom of action within Gwidrite territory, but the Sigires regularly infringe upon the principle. They argue that they have "pursuing rights" over identified criminals who have fled abroad. This is normally only possible in border regions that have such an agreement with Gwidre. On this matter, the policies of the Talkéride authorities fluctuate wildly. In the Vale of Dearg, the tendency is to implicitly tolerate the intervention of the authorities of the Temple on the very strict condition that they only deal with believers in the One.

Scene 3: A family's distress

Support: Firmin. **Extras**: Padraig, Ebliu.

A few weeks after the scene with the Sigires, a man and a pregnant woman knock at the door of Alestor's Monastery. The PC and Firmin recognize them as millers who own a fortified farm, some distance west of the Goaters'. The couple seems very worried. Ebliu is pregnant and mentions that her lower stomach feels very painful. Usually, women give birth among their family, but Ebliu seems to be going through complications. However, the millers are not known to be followers of the Temple, and it is rather surprising of them to come to Firmin rather than ask for Dearg's Demorthèn.

The Leader may give the role of Ebliu to another Player while they play Padraig, who will explain the situation.



A complicated birth (see Firmin's sheet).

Firmin lets the couple in and settles Ebliu in a small room usually devoted to herbalism and to the brewing of medicines, but which is occasionally used as an infirmary. Quickly, Padraig and his wife get to the reason for their presence: they are of modest means, and they already have to survive on meager portions to leave enough for their five children. They will assuredly not be able to care for a sixth one. Padraig explains that since last year, they have been living under the threat of the Black Feathers, bandits to whom they must give a large portion of their crops without hope of help from the Hilderins or the inhabitants of the Vale. The millers ask the monk for help, especially considering this new pregnancy has taken its toll on Ebliu, and Firmin is said to be skilled as a healer. They would like to entrust their child to him, and beg him either to personally take care of it, or to give it to Dearg's Dàmàthairs as an abandoned child. The parents are sincere and desperate; they truly think this is the best option, and Firmin seems to be receptive to their arguments.

The birth is imminent, and the Lead is going to assist Firmin and Padraig. This scene will deeply move the PC, as it will hit disturbingly close to his own condition as an adopted child. In that regard, what happened to his true parents? Many questions are bouncing around the PC's head, such that he will have to pass an Influence Test with a 2 point increase to the Threshold lest he lose his concentration. If he succeeds, the Lead keeps a cool head: he remains focused on his task and skillfully aids Firmin with the delivery. The child will then be born in good conditions. If he fails, he is overwhelmed by his emotions and by questions about his adoption: the birth turns out to be much more precarious than expected, and the PC's distraction results in additional complications. In the end, the child is born, but the Lead must pass a Complicated (14) Magience (Medicine) or Science (Medicine) check or the mother will die. The newborn is a boy, who is given the name Keran.

Key scene: Keran's fate (see Firmin's sheet).

The next morning is the time to discuss the baby's future. Firmin seems disposed to support the parents in their decision and to respect their choice: if they would rather entrust Keran to the Dàmàthairs, he promises to keep their identities a secret. It is not about lying, but about upholding a secret one was entrusted with. This discussion will certainly trouble the Lead once more. After all, was the Blade knight who took him to the door of the Monastery actually his father? Did Firmin tell him the entire truth about this story or, as with Padraig and Ebliu, did he follow recommendations he was given about the version he should tell? These questions may result in another Influence Test. How will the Lead react?

Yet, with the night to sleep on it, the parents seem less sure of themselves... do they truly wish to abandon their child? Firmin proposes that they take some time to think it through and gives the Lead the task of taking care of them through the day. In the end, there are several possibilities:

The parents keep the child.
The parents are worried about being able to support this new child. The perfect long-term solution would be convincing the Hilderin knights or the inhabitants of Dearg to intervene (see the insert "Tracking down the Black Feathers?"). It will take two Complicated (14) Relation (Persuasion) rolls to convince the parents to keep their child. If the Player provides a particularly eloquent argument, the Leader may dispense with any die rolls.

Firmin becomes the adoptive father.
Firmin is rather reluctant about this idea. He is past his prime, and who will take care of the child's education should he disappear? The PC may volunteer to be his co-guardian, promising to take after Firmin should anything happen to him. This argument may convince the monk (Standard (11) Relation (Persuasion) roll).

The child is given to the Dàmàthairs.
Another solution is to entrust Keran to Dearg's Dàmàthairs, not mentioning the identity of the parents. Indeed, Padraig and Ebliu are worried about the reaction of Dearg's inhabitants, with whom they have a rather uneasy relationship.

Tracking down the Black Feathers?

Moved by the story of Padraig and Ebliu, the Lead may seek to neutralize the threat posed by the Black Feathers gang, in some way or another. It is not intended for the PCs to tackle this threat this early into the campaign; rather, the purpose of this Focus's scene is to prepare the PCs for a subsequent encounter with the bandits in order to make it more intense.

The Hilderins' response. The Lead may attempt to arrange a meeting with the Hilderins to tell them about Padraig's family's problems. Argan will let him know that he has received no complaints about the bandits, which must mean that they have left the Vale. A search would take time, not to mention that the Hilderins are here to defend the Pass of Lantrecht leading to Gwidre and must remain focused on this task.

The council of Dearg's response. Maorn will hear the Lead's grievances, but like Argan, he will answer that he has received no complaints and that the bandits have most likely left. A few questions to the locals will let the PC understand that the villagers have little love for this family, who does not take part in Dearg's community life and has always proven distant when extra hands were required.

In the end, the best the PC will be able to get is a few promises that "the matter will be taken care of," but no one will actually make any efforts to strike at the Black Feathers.

Scene 4: A forbidden dream

Supports: Firmin, Dand, Lusia.

Extras: None

Arcana – Inner Pale Sun – 8 – Closure

This soft, mysterious piece may be Lusia's theme.

A forbidden dream
(see Firmin and Dand's sheets).

Firmin and Dand's sheets will provide the Players with advice for the portrayal of their Supports during this scene. An energetic interpretation when their Characters barge in will increase the intensity of the scene.
When the PC wakes up, he is clearly troubled. He had fallen asleep on a book, which precisely dealt with love... Firmin is at the doorstep, a smile on his honest face: "My boy, I'm back. It is late, you should go to bed."



The beginning of this scene is a dream, but the Leader should play it like it is a real event. The Lead will only become aware that he was sleeping when he awakens.

This is early evening, and the sun has set. The monk Firmin is absent: he had to go to Fearìl for the day, and he should be back any minute. The Lead is in a small room of the Monastery, a scriptorium furnished by Firmin where the monk has stored his treasures: a few parchments and two prayer books, including a copy of the Writings of Soustraine. The Lead is busy reading when he hears footsteps, then makes out a shape in the doorway. This actually comes as no surprise, as this meeting was planned, and he was expecting her. The Leader can explain to the Lead that he is very happy to see her, after a long wait. Actually, he has a hard time focusing on his readings as he can't help but think about her.
Removing her hood, the young woman reveals her face. It is Lusia, the young woman he met for the first time when the Sigires came to the Monastery. The Lead is seemingly hypnotized by the young woman's gaze, fascinated by the beauty of her face. Lusia comes to the PC and says, "I missed you so much, I keep thinking about you, day and night..." Lusia will then kiss the Lead, caress him, and whisper in his ear: "Soustraine allows us to love each other. I never want us to be apart..."

According to the reaction of the Player, this scene can go two ways:

A sensual dream. The Player may decide that their Character is letting go, carried by the sensuality and excitation of the moment. These are his first kisses with Lusia, and they light a fire inside his body. This is when Firmin barges into the room, his face contorted with anger: he berates the Lead, chiding him for betraying the precepts. Heavy footsteps then come closer, and the Sigire Dand enters the room with a booming, "Heretic! Your time has come!" The Lead then wakes up with a start, both intoxicated by his dream encounter with Lusia and terrified by the intervention of Firmin and Dand.

The weight of virtue. The Player may describe their Character stepping back, or pushing Lusia back in some way or another. The Leader may then agree that the PC cannot find it in himself to just go with the flow, possibly drawing inspiration from the insert on the next page titled "Love and sexuality in the Temple." The Leader may also describe what the PC feels and has no control over: he feels very attracted by Lusia, thinks of her day and night, more and more. What will the Lead decide? Part of him is dying to let himself go in Lusia's arms, but if he wishes to do so, he will have to go beyond his moral reservations, which can be represented by a Guilt Test. If the PC succeeds, the Leader can go on with the previous paragraph, "A sensual dream." If he fails, he just feels too uneasy and suddenly wakes up, disturbed and fascinated by the dream he just had.

Scene 5: A troubled heart

Supports: Firmin, Ronan, Masha, Lusia. **Extras**: Maëlys.

This scene takes place soon after the previous one. The Lead regularly experiences new dreams where he meets Lusia. He constantly thinks about the young woman, deeply infatuated with her. Sometimes, he imagines going after her and crossing the whole peninsula in a romantic, epic quest.



The Leader may explain this and ask the opinion of the concerned Player.
Will the Lead confide in somebody, or will he keep his feelings to himself? This scene goes over several possible discussions between the PC and one or several NPCs, which will allow him to explore what he feels:

A stroll with Masha. Masha is a young woman with Tarish blood from Dearg. She is a pretty, rather reserved young girl, easily drawn to contemplation (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 192). Masha is very popular in Dearg, but she only feels at ease with the Lead. The two of them have been friends for some time now, but the Lead sometimes wonders whether their feelings have not reached another stage, particularly for Masha. As far as he is concerned, there is no mistake: what he feels for Masha and Lusia is very different. The mere mention of Lusia troubles him, and he is obsessed with the memory of her stare. His feelings for Masha do not put him in such turmoil. Of course, he feels deep affection for her, and is by no means indifferent to her natural beauty... but this cannot compare with his passion for Lusia, which binds his soul and invades his dreams. Masha regularly visits the young adept, and they both take strolls around the Monastery, most often remaining silent and meditative. Masha will notice the Lead's trouble, and if he decides to tell her about what he feels for Lusia, she will appear clearly upset and will not want to pursue the subject further.

Ronan and Maëlys. This young couple believes in the One and they often come to the Monastery to pray (see "Alestor's Monastery" on p. 24). Progressively, Ronan and the Lead have bonded. While Maëlys is busy helping Firmin tend to the garden, Ronan and the PC are by themselves. Ronan will notice that his friend is troubled, and will urge him to tell him about his secret, proving all the more earnest as he suspects it may be about a girl. Even if the PC remains silent, Ronan will praise the strength and beauty of love, taking his relationship with Maëlys as an example. Obviously, this is no bed of roses, and Ronan speaks of the intimidation and pressure he suffers from the other inhabitants of Dearg. However, according to him, nothing can stop true love, and he will tell the Lead about his plans to leave Dearg if that is what it must come to, so that he and Maëlys can live their love in peace. Ronan will encourage the Lead to listen to his heart... which is not easy for the PC, since what he feels is as confusing as it is powerful.

Firmin's sermon. The Lead's adoptive father has noticed that his son's mind has been elsewhere these last few months. This will come as no surprise to the monk. He is aware of the passions that young men are prone to, particularly as the time of their commitment as clergymen of the Temple approaches. The young Tarish's increasingly frequent visits have not escaped Firmin's attention either, and he suspects that she has feelings for the PC. While they are busy with a task for the Monastery (repairs, balm-making, gardening, etc.), Firmin will bring up the subject of sexuality and how it is perceived by the Temple (see the following insert: "Love and sexuality in the Temple"). He warns the PC against passions that may prove destructive, lead him away from the Ordinances, and even leave him prey to demons. Firmin will mention how his son has seemed preoccupied lately and will ask him whether he wishes to unburden his heart. Whether the Lead answers or not, his father will advise him to seek to appease his turmoil through prayer. Kindly, he will reassure his son, explaining that, with time, these emotions that gnaw at him will die down. However, should he experience true love one day, then he should invest all of himself in that relationship, which would be a gift from the One.

A troubled heart

(see Firmin, Masha, and Ronan's sheets).

Firmin's, Masha's and Ronan's sheets will provide the Players with the necessary information to know how they should act during this scene.

Love and sexuality in the Temple

The Temple of the One allows clergymen who have not taken a Vow of abstinence to marry before the Creator, but it is very critical of extramarital relations. This is seen as an offense against the principle of restraint, set out in the Ordinances. In fact, most marriages occur between members of the clergy, more specifically of the same order. The vast majority of them are motivated by political or practical considerations, in which personal feelings are of little significance. Sexual activity is not, strictly speaking, forbidden to those who have not taken a Vow of abstinence, but it is tacitly discouraged, in accordance with the principle of restraint.

Extract from the Monastery of Tuath, p. 13.

What if the Lead wants to pursue Lusia?

As mentioned in this scenario's prologue, even though a distinctive feature of emotions is to be beyond control, it is important to take the Players' initiatives into account and to let them exert some measure of influence over the course of the story.
Scene 5 focuses on what the PC feels for Lusia, on his obsession that he cannot help but be consumed by, and how it manifests in his dreams. Firmin and Ronan have very different advice to provide to the PC. What will he decide? Ronan's words may

make a strong impression on the Lead, so much so that he may decide to suddenly leave everything behind to go after Lusia. The PC may slip away from the Monastery (Players love escapes!), or plan a secret journey with Ronan and Maëlys. Everything is possible, and the Leader should not discourage such developments. This may not be initially planned for the scenario, but it is important to go with the flow. By creatively reacting to the initiatives of the Players, the Leader will make them feel all the more involved in a story where they will truly have the leading roles: perfect for a thrilling adventure!

A life-changing decision

Letting the Players' initiatives be part of the story does not mean paving the way for them. On the contrary, the Leader may use such opportunities to confront them with major moral dilemmas. What matters is for the Players to feel free, but the resulting scene will be all the more gripping if the Leader manages to make it complex by posing a true challenge to the Players.
Should the PC want to leave his life behind to find Lusia, borne by his devouring passion, the Leader should stress the effects and consequences of such a decision:

Leaving his father. The Lead knows that his departure will deeply affect his adoptive father, who has done everything for him so far. Can he bear hurting him?

Forsaking the Temple. Leaving the Monastery also means putting a sudden end to his training as an adept, and therefore jeopardizing his becoming part of the clergy of the Temple. What will become of the PC? Of course, he may resume his training at a later time, after getting pardoned by the holy church, but it's a long shot...

Keep in mind that for the Player's decision to be truly important, they must feel that these arguments are not mentioned to dissuade them from carrying out their play. They remain free to do whatever they wish, but they must also bear the consequences. To help decide what the Character should do, the Leader can propose that the Player roll a Guilt Test. A failure won't mean that the Lead will forget about his plans, but it will put him under the pressure of crushing feelings of remorse and malaise that may become unbearable.
If the present Lead is from a faction other than the Temple, the decision he then took might be what led him to sever his ties and abandon his training. He may also have given up his vocation later on, shocked by the discoveries he made (Act III).

Adapting the remainder of the story

The freedom the Players have requires the Leader to be able to adapt and improvise. Here is a concrete example, based on the possibility of a hasty departure of the PC going after Lusia:

Lusia's trail.
First, the Leader will have to imagine a scene where the PC finds an initial clue that can put him on Lusia's trail. After all, to begin with, he has no idea where she may have gone. For example, old Zaïg may know that the Sigires were from Ard-Amrach. This will take the PC to the Gwidrite capital, and therefore to Act II and III of the scenario.

Scene 6
This scene is very important for the rest of the Focus. If the PC decides to leave on a whim, the Leader may simply go with: "Tonight, you have decided to leave. However, there is another scene that marked your childhood in the Monastery. This is a very important memory for you..." The Leader may then play out Scene 6 as a flash-back, then get back to the PC's departure.

Adapting Acts II and III.
It will probably be necessary to adapt several scenes of the following acts. For example, the Lead's traveling companions may be introduced in a different fashion. Maybe the PC will get himself hired as a mercenary?

In Act III, the PC will witness the ceremonies of Acceptation: will he turn his back on the Temple for good, or will he ask for forgiveness?



Leaders who do not feel able to come up with such changes on the fly may ask their Players to stop the session, so that they have time to prepare what comes next.

The Leader should not feel uneasy about making such a decision. Indeed, most often, stopping the game after an important choice has been made will act like a cliffhanger, heightening the suspense and the Players' interest in the story.

Scene 6: A mysterious inheritance

Supports: Firmin. **Extras**: None



Although this scene ends Act I, it actually goes even farther back in the Lead's past, well before the Sigires' visit and his encounter with Lusia, to when he was five years old and discovered a new, important element of his story. The first part, "The context," covers descriptive information that the Leader may go through with the Players to set the scenery. The scene proper starts with "The discovery."

The context

When the scene begins, the Lead is stuffing his belongings into a large bag. He is getting ready for a long journey, the kind he has never undertaken so far. This voyage will take him into the heart of the Gwidrite kingdom, for a great pilgrimage to the capital of Ard-Amrach. Firmin has decided that now is an opportune time for such a journey. For the monk, it will also be an opportunity to meet with his Lavanian brothers in Expiation and to go to the capital's Prima Cathedra to contemplate and purify himself. Finally, it will be an opportunity for his son to go through the ceremony of Acceptation, which will symbolize his officially becoming part of the clergy before the Hierophant himself. Firmin is aware of the dangers of such a long trip, but also knows of the doubts that beset the Lead. He hopes that such a journey of self-discovery will strengthen his son's faith and bring him an epiphany. Masha, who has managed to convince the monk to take her along, will accompany the two pilgrims.

Even though the possessions of the Lead are limited, getting his luggage ready confronts him with all sorts of memories surrounding the items that he used as a child. From the large trunk he has been using to store all of his personal belongings, the Lead takes out a sheathed longsword whose pommel is the Temple's six-pointed snowflake. Holding the weapon in his hands takes him back to an episode that has left its mark on him as a child; a memory that he seldom thinks about, but which may spring back at the slightest stimulus, as clear as if he had lived it yesterday.

A dangerous secret

Until the Lead was five years old, the monk Firmin kept the armor of the knight Teorg, the very man who had entrusted the baby to him several years before. He kept it safely hidden in the basement of the Monastery.

Firmin is a rather open-minded man who feels no hatred toward those whose faith diverges from the orthodoxy of the Writings of Soustraine. However, after a few years of keeping Teorg's armor, Firmin became afraid upon hearing several testimonies, including that of a group of Vectors passing by the Monastery. The ecclesiastics warned him of the increased intransigence of the Temple's Sigire authorities, and of the fate of the "heretics," with Expiation as a striking example.

Firmin grew increasingly fearful of the consequences of Teorg's armor being found and decided to get rid of it... but how? He first thought about having it smelted by Dearg's smith, Fanch, selling it to the dealer Zaïg, or gifting it to a traveling fighter. However, the monk is no fool, and he was quick to conclude that all of these possibilities were much too risky. Firmin decided to take the matter into his own hands and to cast the armor into a chasm an hour's walk away from the Monastery.

The discovery (see Firmin's sheet).



The Lead is five years old and in bed, in the same room of Alestor's Monastery that he still sleeps in today, more than 10 years later. It is night already, and he should be sleeping, but he just can't fall asleep. If, like Joris, the Lead has chosen the Disadvantage Poor Health, now is a good time to mention the illness that weakened him when he was a child. His attention is drawn by the distinctive snorting and stamping of a Caernide. Looking through his bedroom's small window, the Lead sees a human shape covered in a large, hooded cloak. A nearby lantern lights the individual, who is struggling to load the animal with large bags. The PC cannot identify him, but it is in fact Firmin, currently in the process of getting rid of the armor that could get them into a world of trouble (see the previous paragraph: A dangerous secret). What will the PC do? Will he go see what is happening? Or will he stay in his bedroom? Once more, the Leader should clearly leave the Player the choice, explaining how curious but also how fearful he feels as a little boy of five about to walk through a great, dark monastery. Several things may occur and be uncovered:

The basement. The PC notices that the trapdoor leading to the Monastery's basement is open. It is dark; the light of his candle wavers and threatens to go out amidst dancing shadows. In a corner,

bags have been pushed away. Someone has been dragging something... And soon, this someone will be back for what is left... Metal pieces? Armor parts. If the Lead hides, he will see the mysterious person take the remaining bags, load the Caernide, and leave for an unknown destination.

Firmin's room. It is empty. A comfortable though bare cell, it is tidy, and the bed has not been disturbed, as if Firmin had not gone to sleep this night.

Going up to the unknown person. The Lead recognizes Firmin. The monk will show him the armor and explain the risks without revealing that it belonged to Teorg, presumably the Lead's father. No one must ever know about it, lest both Firmin and the Lead's lives be endangered. The White Rose is taboo, and they must never speak of it to anyone. Firmin swears the PC to secrecy. The day after, Firmin comes to the PC and hands him a sword without telling him more. It is only much later that Firmin will tell the truth about what happened this evening and reveal his intentions (see "The gardens of Ard-Amrach," p. 171-172).

Staying in his bedroom. It is also possible that the Lead decides to stay put out of fear. In this case, Firmin will still give him the sword on the next day, without mentioning its origin. As with the version above, Firmin will not reveal what he knows before Act III, Scene 1.

Act 2: The Pilgrims' Way



This act covers the Lead's journey. Along with Firmin and Masha, he will travel to the Gwidrite capital of Ard-Amrach, so that the he may take part in the ceremony of Acceptation. This act may pose some difficulties to the Leader if the Lead is intent on becoming part of the Temple. Indeed, the Leader will have to show the doubts of the young believer, who may give up on his vocation before reaching his destination, while equally emphasizing the charms of this faction. Why do so many people embrace it? The Temple is a community, a new family that stands ready to adopt believers no matter where they come from, aiming at an ideal of peace and harmony while offering the hope of a blissful eternity. The celebration of beauty and purity can be seen in every step of the journey: in the pure white mountain peaks, in the delicate, colorful flowerbeds along the way, as well as in the architectural wonders of the monasteries and cathedrals, artistic marvels to please one's aesthetics and elevate the soul.

Scene 1: Onward to Expiation

Supports: the monk Firmin, Masha.

Extras: Pilgrims, merchants, traditionalist hunters.

The path ahead

The Pilgrims' Way is a famous road that goes from Expiation to Ard-Amrach, with many sanctuaries, monasteries, and chapels along the way, every one of them well-defended and magnificent thanks to the donations of the faithful. The group of travelers has a long journey ahead of them, with possibly many stops along the way. A relative chronology is provided, which takes into account rest and prayer times, in addition to the slow going of Firmin, who is now an old man:

- Féaril (Day 1),
- Pass of Lantrecht (Day 2),
- Vale of Thoir and Monastery of Tuath (Day 4),
- Caigimn (Day 7),
- Expiation (Day 15),
- Rhingal (Day 50),
- Ard-Amrach (Day 52).

The canvases, bestiary, and descriptions of locations provided in Book 2 – Travels can provide additional adventures on the way.

The importance of the Ordinances

It is common for novices to go on a pilgrimage before sealing their Acceptation. The stops every evening are an opportunity for discussion and reflection.

Introspection

The Extras can be used to question the Lead about his motivations, for example: "Why the long face? I met someone who'd become a monk after some silly love affair turned sour… Is that your case, too? You've got your whole life ahead of you, y'know. You shouldn't make a one-way choice like that on a whim or for bad reasons." What does he truly want? What does he hope for, and what does he fear? (see the insert "A journey of self-discovery")

Rumors

The pilgrims and merchants exchange news. Many speak of the sickness of the Hierophant, who is said to be dying, which leaves many worried about succession. Some mention the story of a rumored hidden son, but this is met with a curt retort, "For starters, this is a slanderous insult against the most holy Hierophant Anthénor. Also, the succession is decided with an election, so this is not even relevant. And you'd better forget about this tale once we've reached Expiation!"

Taunting

Soon after they have left, not far from the border, the travelers chance upon a party of hunters. After several hours spent tracking down a deer just to see it slip from their grasp, they are in a foul mood, and they are not above venting their anger on the pilgrims. They push them around and taunt them with rhetorical questions related to identity and to their loyalty to the community. "Who're you?" "What? Gwidrites? Oh, I see, filthy, traitorous converts! If you don't like Taol-Kaer, just leave for good!" "No, wait, we could do them a favor: they want to join their One God, so we could speed things up!" They target the Lead in particular, which results in a Passion Test. The pilgrims and assorted travelers are not fighters, and most of them are frightened, hoping that someone will be able to placate the hunters and make them leave. A Complicated (14) Relation (Diplomacy) roll can defuse the situation, but an inspired, soothing speech from the Player about how different does not mean dangerous can also solve the problem.

The hunters

- Attack: 10
- Defense: 10
- Speed : 5
- Potential: 2
- Damage: 2
- Health points: 19



This journey will also make it evident to the Lead that Lusia has still not left his mind. Of course, several months after encountering her in Alestor's Monastery, he does not think about her as much, but sometimes, when he starts daydreaming, the hypnotic memory of Lusia comes back, along with the senseless hope of seeing her again one day.

Holy places

During their pilgrimage, the PC and his fellow travelers will make many stops in holy places: small monasteries and chapels, but also roadside inns used to housing those who travel on the Pilgrims' Way.
The Leader may propose that the Players spend the night in the Monastery of Tuath in the Vale of Thoir, not far from the Talkéride border. If they want to, they may even play the scenario "Vengeful Words," included in the supplement "The Monastery of Tuath."

A journey of self-discovery

The way to Ard-Amrach can be played out as an illuminating experience for the Lead. Such a journey can become a metaphor of life itself, with the ordeals and encounters becoming a condensed version of several years of existence, and distance fulfilling the same symbolic function as duration.
As it is, Act II explores some of the aspects of a journey of self-discovery, but not all of them. The Leader can easily lengthen this act (for example with the canvases provided in Book 2 – Travels), all the more to show that a voyage going through the wilder lands of Tri-Kazel is no ordinary undertaking. The longer and more intense the journey will be, the more of a relief reaching Ard-Amrach will feel like.

Here are the themes that can be developed through this journey:

Love and friendship. Meeting other people, learning about love and sexuality, or making fast friends can be the highlights of a journey. For each theme, there is a darker side, which lends itself to engaging narrative stakes, all the more so when confronted with the religious principles the Lead was taught as regards to passion, jealousy, lust, treason, etc.

Facing one's fears. The journey can be the moment of truth when confronting an intimate, deep-seated fear. To make its appearance all the more striking, the Leader can ask the Player to express what their Character's fears are through a discussion with a traveling companion, for example during Act II, Scene 1. The Leader can then use these elements to concoct a situation that will explore his fears, whether directly or metaphorically.

Figures of temptation. Traveling is an opportunity to meet new faces, some of whom will try to influence the Lead, to lead him away from the precepts of religion. If the PC is not to become a member of the clergy (see the Prologue of this Focus, "What if the Lead is not a member of the clergy?"), the Leader can stress the importance of these particular moments in order to depict how the PC progressively turned away from the church of the Temple.

Exemplars. Such figures will provide a dazzling illustration of what respecting the precepts of the Temple can result in. These figures can inspire the Lead through the moral admiration they arouse. They may embody bravery and the strength of faith (such as during Scene 2 with Brother Carrion), or a tragic fate in the service of a cause greater than one's own life (see Book 2 – Travels, the story of Saint Albérich, p. 13).

The path of the Ordinances

The Lead's pilgrimage is a progression through which he must become aware of who he truly is, deep down, and what he truly wants. Out of his familiar environment, he is confronted with his own faith and with his desire for Lusia, whom he will meet again by chance in Expiation, a city led by the Sigires. These optional scenes explore the Six Ordinances and the relationships between the Characters. In addition to the Support Sheets, the Leader can hand out to the Players a sheet summing up the Six Ordinances, which will give them fodder to feed the dialog with the Player portraying the Lead.



In addition to the scenes detailed through this act, the Leader can draw from the Holy Ordinances to design moral ordeals, but also to choose the Miracle they may give to the Lead–provided the Player has taken such a Discipline–according to how he behaves and the Ordinances he shows the most conviction toward. Some Vows (see the Monastery of Tuath, p. 12) may be particularly appropriate according to how involved he is in fulfilling one or several Ordinances in particular. The atmosphere of the journey will be very different depending on whether the Lead is more inclined to contemplation or to being an upright defender of the dogma. Even though Firmin, who has raised him, is a monk, the Lead is free to enter another order for his Acceptation.

You shall follow the path of the One God only:

Throughout the journey, Masha, a nonbeliever, will try to sow doubt in the Lead's mind. Since she is deeply aware of the subject of one's origin, she will speak about personal identity. Could the Lead have only chosen to take holy orders to follow in his adoptive father's footsteps? What if the Lead's parents were actually persecuted by the Temple like so many others; isn't he going to betray his own family? Isn't taking orders forsaking all individuality? A uniform, vows... what will remain of the Lead once he has become a perfect adherent to the dogma? Another aspect bringing into question the depth of the Lead's involvement can be to ask him about the White Rose, this heretical path that supposedly leads straight to Limbo.

In any case, a Lead staunchly committed to following the path of the One God without erring can earn the Miracle Castigation or Divine Wrath, possibly manifesting them during Act II, Scene 4. He may choose to follow the Vow of Abstention to not accept any responsibility, payment, or reward outside of the Temple. Blades, Sigires, and Vectors are the ones most likely to follow such a path.

You shall heed the sacred words of the Creator:

The One, through the mouth of His prophet Soustraine, warned the people of the terrible threat they are exposed to. He safeguards them, but can only do so for those who heed His warnings. The holy texts, the saints' lives, the words of the Elect, and certain visions are the manifestations of the Creator. By extension, the religious laws are also part of His message (see the box "Religious offenses"). Most often, when one is charged with a "breach of the Ordinances," it is because the person has broken one of these rules. Meeting Brother Daernic will bring the Lead face to face with a figure wholly devoted to his cause, a disquieting example, committed to a ruthless fight against Evil in all its forms. For a sincere adept, such an encounter will lead to some soul-searching: Is he truly always open to listening to the holy message? Does he obey the commands he is given, entirely and of his own free will? His integrity may earn him the Miracle Circle of Protection or Vision of Limbo, which may become apparent during Act II, Scene 4. The most fitting Vow would be the one of Obedience. This path is often taken by the Sigires, sometimes by the Blades.

You shall impart the Truth to any person you meet:

Any lie is absolutely forbidden. The Truth of the Creator is also a mission whose purpose is to save souls from Limbo. The Tarish Masha is a skeptic; she does not believe in anything and is prone to melancholy. If the Lead, during the journey, manages to persuade her that the path of the One can give her life meaning and fit her pursuit of beauty, that it is possible to be "adopted" by a community of believers without casting aside one's identity and origins, then the most fitting Miracle would be Litany or Might of Faith. Someone stepping aside to let Truth shine may follow a Vow of Anonymity, embracing a new identity, a new life, strong symbols of a new adoption. This path is typically that of the monks and Sigires.

You shall master your passions and be moderate in every thing:

On his way to Expiation, the Lead will meet Talkéride hunters who will bully the pilgrims, calling them traitors to the cause of their own kingdom. An enduring, collected Elect may acquire the Miracle Holy Vigor or Divine Cold. He may also swear a Vow of Temperance consisting in never acting under the impulse of a desire or an emotion, but always weighing the pros and cons beforehand. The priests approve of this attitude and encourage it.

You shall be humble and thank the Creator for the gifts you are granted:

The gifts of the One are many. They include the beauty of nature, of art, of life, and also of the soul through friendship and compassion. Being aware of what you have, being able to clearly separate true needs from petty, fleeting desires, and seeking what is essential are ways of thanking the Creator. Humility consists of remembering the fate of mankind. Born in pain, fragile and destitute, men draw their strength from identifying their talents and limits. Each one can find a role to fulfill in an interdependent, concordant community. During the journey, the Leader can describe natural wonders whose beauty inspires Masha's art. Will the Lead be sensitive to it? Will he be inclined to contemplation? How will he behave toward sick, aging, or wounded pilgrims? Can he forgive and take the risk of giving a second chance? This mindset can result in being granted the Miracle Miraculous Healing or Resurrection, and in possibly embracing a Vow of Frugality. Such beliefs are most devoutly followed by the monks and clerics.

You shall show your faith through prayer and self-reflection for the glory of the One God:

The pilgrims' pace is set by the six daily prayers. The Albines are recited at dawn, to rejoice over the day and the creation of the world; Unicine then comes, right before the activities of the day begin, giving thanks to the almighty One for His benevolence; prior to lunch, the Lumines celebrate the perfection of the world's beauty; toward the end of afternoon, the Sextines recall the union of the community of believers; in the evening, before supper, the Vespérines urge prudence and moderation; finally, before going to sleep, the Estellines entrust sleep to the stars and the moon, watchers of dreams. The daily observances are particularly grand in holy towns such as Expiation, which are places of purity and sanctity, or along the steps of the Pilgrims' Way, during which one can be borne by the whole crowd's burning faith (an Influence Test can be made to check whether the Character feels touched by the divine grace). The Miracles granted to the most ardent pilgrims are Purification and Canticle. A believer who devotes one's life to celebration cannot be distracted from one's work by earthly love and takes a Vow of Abstinence. The priests who guide the communities and lead the service often aim for such a path, as do the monks, Sigires, and Blades.

Religious offenses

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

Extract from the presentation of Expiation in Book 2 – Travels.

Scene 2: Expiation

Supports: Firmin, Masha. **Extras**: Pilgrims, Sigires.

When they reach Expiation along with the other pilgrims, the travelers are awestruck by the magnificence of the place and slowly mingle with the crowd (see the description below, "A holy town"). The constant activity of this great city offers a contrast with the previous steps of the journey, which were more given to contemplation. It is a beautiful, luminous spring day, rather warm for the season, which adds to the feeling of well-being.

Lost in the crowd.

Carried onward by the moving crowd of pilgrims, the Lead is subjected to an Influence Test with a +2 to the Threshold. If he resists, he is simply lost in the town. However, if he loses, he goes through a mystical experience during which he is still lost, disoriented, but feels in his innermost being the clarity and beauty of the One's work as well as that of the community's life. In a daze, the Lead is filled with a self-emptying love, an emotion distinct from what he feels for Lusia or Masha, and which may represent for him the path of faith, that of a quest for the sublime and the transcendental.
For whoever has been filled by the influence of the holy town, the memories of the architectural details, the white flowers, the devout atmosphere, and the hymns will be a few of the many remembrances the believer can cling to in order to remind himself of their ideals, to focus and fight the temptation of passions.

When evening comes, the group of travelers meet at the Elderberry Inn for a well-deserved respite. Firmin proposes that they take a few days to rest before going on toward the capital. He invites the Lead to come with him on the morrow to visit one of the libraries of Expiation, located in Saint Alar's Priory.



This first scene in the city of Expiation is very open and will depend on the Players' plans. Leaders can draw information from the paragraphs below for their descriptions, and can ask the Players to describe how the Characters spend their time.

A holy town

Expiation is a two-faced city with an ambiguous reputation: filled with life and in full expansion, it is also for some the symbol of the Sigires and of the Temple's intransigence. The famous Pilgrims' Way connects it to Ard-Amrach, the capital, but major roadworks are being undertaken to build other routes toward Caiginn in Taol-Kaer and Leacach in Reizh.

The city itself is an ever-growing architectural feat, a true wonder with its massive, impregnable walls, its majestic towers, vast courts, and paved roads. Everything was built with a rigorous geometric management of space based on the number 6, in honor of the One. There are plenty of merchants, either passing through or well-established, as well as housing services and souvenir shops. Another landmark is the Citadel of the Sigires, a cathedral-prison feared by many, but considered by others to be one of the jewels of Gwidre.

The Pilgrims' Way

Two great roads cross Gwidre, and they both also have a religious relevance: the Pilgrims' Way, between Expiation and Arm-Amrach, and the Holy Way, between the capital and Fionnfuar. People come to Expiation from afar to cleanse themselves of their sins before going on toward Ard-Amrach to receive a blessing, swear an oath, or solemnly take holy orders.

Custom has it that pilgrims in Expiation buy a coat and a scarf of white cloth, which they are to keep and adorn all throughout their journey–if not their whole life–adding embroidery for each location they visit. For the Lead, these clothes may mean many things, related both to his progress in faith and to the events he experienced on the way with Masha, Firmin, and Lusia.

Pilgrimage takes place in spring and summer, when the weather conditions are at their most favorable. Traditionally, the pilgrimage going from Expiation to the capital starts at the spring of Lightrock, a little distance away from the city. The water that flows from it is remarkably clear, symbolizing the purity of the soul. The custom is to splash oneself with this water blessed by the One, but some whose faith is intense go as far as diving into the icy torrent.

After Lightrock, the pilgrim then follows the holy path located in Expiation six times, visiting six of the town's great monuments. Others who want to show their fervor increase the duration of these rituals, sometimes making them last as long as six days. The pilgrims then start their long journey toward the capital, taking shelter for the night in a place of worship as often as possible. The pilgrims are housed and fed free of charge along the way, but it is customary to leave a donation depending on one's means.

Scene 3: Saint Alar's Priory

Supports: Lusia, Firmin, Dand. **Extras**: Monks of Lavan

Firmin is part of the order of the monks and was trained by the Lavanians, who are known to be tolerant and peaceful. Saint Alar's Priory houses a small community of this order, which offers a picture of Expiation far different from its reputation as the sinister lair of inquisitors that its detractors make it out to be. For Firmin, the visit to the Priory is an important step in the Lead's pilgrimage, since it may seal his desire to enter the order of the monks.

Like several other religious buildings, it is located in the heart of the town of Expiation, and contributes to the town's unique atmosphere. The Priory's function and double gate already mark it as a place of importance, but the edifice's beauty becomes apparent when one enters a small court where trees and flowerbeds decorate the walls of several buildings inhabited by the community. After passing through the porch, one reaches the cloister, its arcades going round a small, well-maintained garden. There is a striking feeling of quietude, as if the Priory were removed from the rest of the town and its activity.

A lesson about Miracles (see Firmin's sheet).

During their stroll through the cloister, Firmin will take this opportunity to tell the Lead about the Miracles that the Elect can perform. These powers express the magnificence of the Creator and involve a great responsibility for those who wield them. They imply a staunch faith and a strict adherence to the Ordinances. If the Lead's future is not to become a member of the clergy, Firmin will raise the subject, having noticed the PC's lack of enthusiasm or fervor. He will not prove harsh with the Lead, but will ask him to search his soul before making any decision.

Revelation about the White Rose.

Now, Firmin wishes to speak privately with some of his peers and proposes that the Lead explores the Priory's library in the meantime. The room is filled with a soft light; it is a restful place, perfect for studying or meditating. Through the window, one can see the cloister and its flowery garden. When the Lead browses through the books gathered in the library, his eye is drawn to a book about heresies, that of the White Rose in particular. This is the moment for the Leader to provide the Player with the information summed up in the paragraph "The White Rose," p. 146.

An unexpected encounter

(see Lusia's sheet).

Arcana – Inner Pale Sun – 8 – Closure

As he is reading through a book, the Lead starts dozing off, possibly due to the fatigue from the journey and the feeling of serenity in this quiet place. He dreams of Lusia, whom he sees in the cloister's small garden, bathed in a blinding light. In the description, the Leader should clearly tell the Player that the PC is dreaming. Soon, he is woken up by footsteps: someone has entered the room,

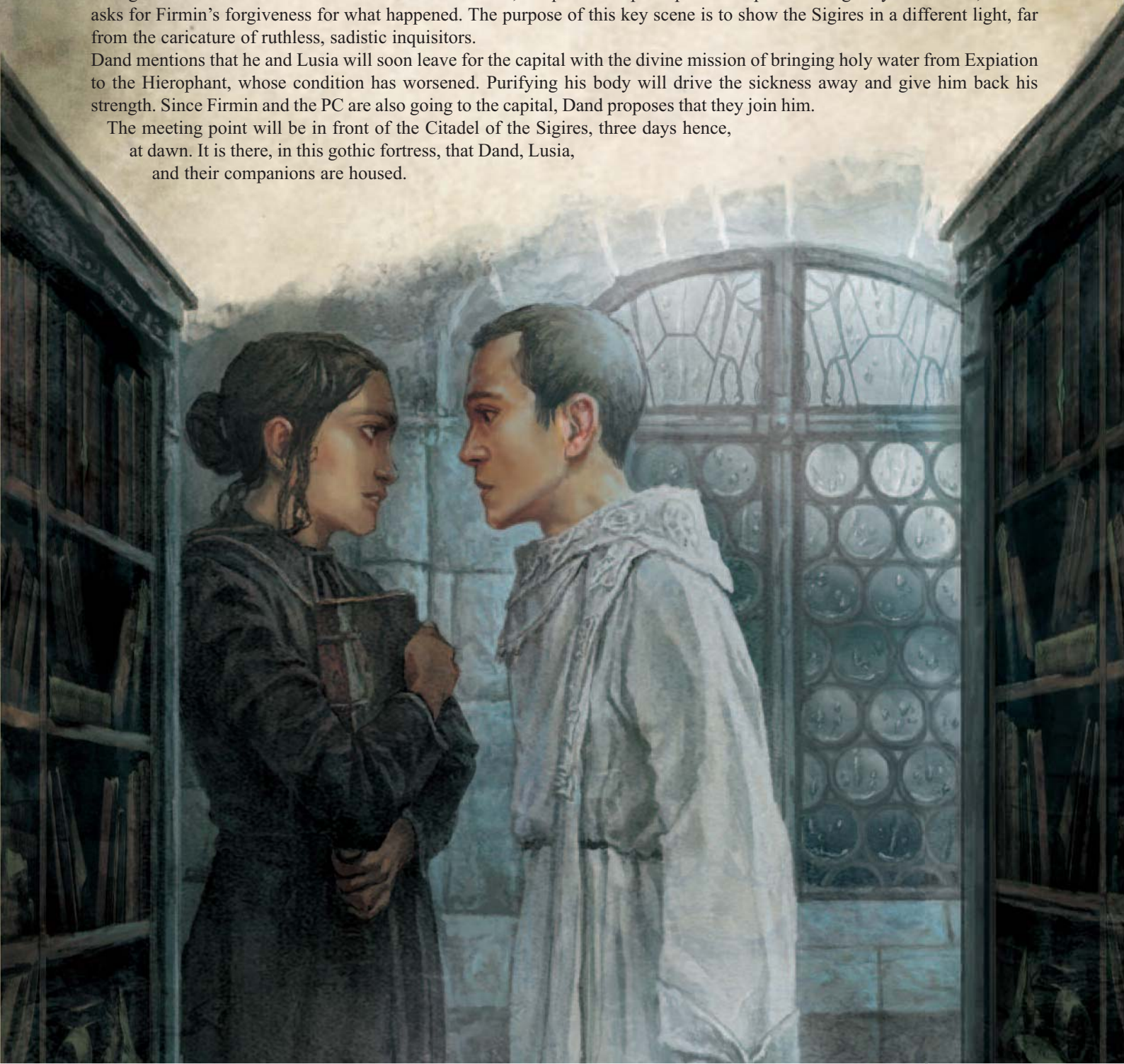
and the Lead can see a figure moving between the shelves. Outside, the sky is now laden with storm clouds, and the air has become heavy. The Lead will then notice that the person present is none other than Lusia! The coincidence is staggering, but it is truly her, and he is not dreaming. The young woman will first be nonplussed, as surprised as the Lead. She also has never stopped thinking about him during all this time. A Complicated (14) Perception (Observation) or Relation (Charm) roll will let the PC notice details of Lusia's body language: her dilated pupils, the way she tilts her head or touches her hair, etc. The Lead's emotions and desire are also palpable: his heart is beating madly, and he feels a prickling on his fingertips. If he succeeded on the previous check, he will understand that Lusia feels the same passion that he does. What will they tell each other? What will they do? Lusia, visibly troubled, will not take the initiative, and if the Lead comes nearer, she will remain still, her eyes drilling into him. The Leader may intervene during this key scene to sustain the atmosphere by describing this passionate, romantic tension. However, this moment frozen in time is interrupted when the Lead sees through the small window the Sigire Dand in the cloister's garden below, conversing with Firmin.

The Sigire's apologies (see Dand's sheet).

Lusia and the Lead meet with Firmin and Dand on the ground floor. The monk is wary, sorely recalling his encounter with Dand. The Sigire seems rather well-disposed, expressing how sorry he is to have used violence against the monk in Dearg. He explains that his impulsiveness was due to his fear of seeing corruption and heresy grow stronger on the borders and fester in Gwidre. However, he quotes the principle of temperance taught by Soustraine, and he asks for Firmin's forgiveness for what happened. The purpose of this key scene is to show the Sigires in a different light, far from the caricature of ruthless, sadistic inquisitors.

Dand mentions that he and Lusia will soon leave for the capital with the divine mission of bringing holy water from Expiation to the Hierophant, whose condition has worsened. Purifying his body will drive the sickness away and give him back his strength. Since Firmin and the PC are also going to the capital, Dand proposes that they join him.

The meeting point will be in front of the Citadel of the Sigires, three days hence, at dawn. It is there, in this gothic fortress, that Dand, Lusia, and their companions are housed.



Optional Scene: At The Elderberry

Supports: Lusia, Firmin, Dand, Masha. **Extras**: Sigires, Blade knights.

For three days, the stay in Expiation is dedicated to contemplation and meditation. The Lead's meeting with Lusia leaves him troubled. Even if he attempts to meet her again, she is nowhere to be found. This interlude is a good time to portray a few topics involving the Ordinances (see "The path of the Ordinances," at the beginning of Act II), to explore the relationship between the Lead and Masha, to let the Players improvise scenes, etc. When the Leader considers it appropriate, they can move on with the meeting with the Sigires.



Even if the Lead has no religious aspirations, it will be obvious that if he wishes to see Lusia again, he has no choice: he must come with her on this journey.

The Leader may also point out that such a devout woman will certainly agree to an intimate relationship only within the context of a religious marriage. Is the Lead ready to make such a commitment, driven by a desire that borders on obsession? As soon as he lets himself go, his gaze inevitably goes toward her, and his entire body screams and begs to simply touch her fingers, feel her skin...

Scene 4: The Citadel of the Sigires

Supports: Lusia, Firmin, Dand, Masha, Brother Daernic. **Extras**: Sigires, Blade knights.

Three days have come and gone, and the Lead, Firmin, and Masha meet with the Sigires and their escort in front of the citadel. In addition to Dand and Lusia, the group is composed of six Blade knights: Gabig the youngest; Baeleg, a strong, silent man; Karanteg, whose features betray Osag origins; Fingar, a soft-spoken man; Madon, the eldest and leader; and Ujane, the only woman of the bunch.

The holy water and the idol.

Lusia is in high spirits, she is proud to have been tasked to go to Ard-Amrach with Dand and bring the holy water to the Hierophant. The presence of the Lead troubles her, but she acts like everything is alright (a Complicated (14) Perception (Observation) or Relation (Charm) roll will make her unease apparent).

Another man is part of the group: Lusia introduces the party to her idol, Brother Daernic, more commonly known under the moniker "Brother Carrion" (see Book 2 – Travels, p. 144). The Lead has heard frightening rumors about him, his merciless nature, and what may be akin to murderous insanity. Nevertheless, it is thanks to him that Lusia is free and alive. More remarkable still, he is an Elect. The young Sigire's admiration for him is great, and she fervently wishes to become like this living image of the Creator's message. He was passing through Expiation to gather provisions before continuing with his mission. He will travel for a few days with the holy water bearers, which, according to Lusia, is a great honor.

Scene 5: Onward to Ard-Amrach

Supports: Lusia, Firmin, Dand, Masha, Brother Daernic. **Extras**: Blade knights.

Traveling with Brother Daernic (see Brother Daernic's sheet).

Grim, talking in a monotone with as few words as possible, the Sigire is particularly frightening for anyone with anything on their conscience. His mere proximity results in a Guilt test, which occurs every time the Lead lets his eyes rest on Lusia when she prays beside Brother Daernic or when she comes back from a quick wash. However, Brother Daernic might surprise the travelers when he reveals that he believes the Lead has something peculiar about him, as if the One's eye were on him... Every night, the Lead is beset by dreams that range from erotic to horrifying or blissful, and which seem to test him and probe at his soul.

Masha remains aside, suffering silently, afraid as she is of the Sigire who sometimes stares overlong at her, as if about to hurt her. Firmin is not comfortable and tries to keep up appearances. Even Dand and the Blades seem to find the presence of Brother Carrion disquieting. How will the Lead behave? Will he care about his companions from Dearg, or will he be too happy to have opportunities to be with Lusia? Is he ready to forget about his roots in the hope of a more pleasant future?

Scene 6: The sorcerers

Supports: Lusia, Dand, Brother Daernic. **Extras**: Blade knights.

The sorcerers (see Daernic's, Dand's, and Lusia's sheets).

One evening, after the prayers of Estellines, Daernic grabs his bag to leave without a word. If someone asks him about it, he briefly explains that he must accomplish his mission, what the One has chosen him for. Lusia volunteers to accompany him, and the Lead will probably be tempted to do so as well, in order to be by her side. If the Player does not spontaneously express it, the Leader may explain that he suffers from having her be away from him: who knows what could happen to her? The Sigire Dand will join the group, as well as all the other Player-controlled Characters, with the exception of Firmin and Masha, who will stay at the camp.
Daernic explains the mission to those who have decided to follow him: an abandoned cabin two hour's walk into the forest is used by a sect of demon-worshiping sorcerers practicing unholy rites. The group's task will be to put an end to their heathen activities.

- Attack: 10
- Defense : 8
- Speed: 5
- Potential: 2
- Damage: 2
- Health: 19

There are six sorcerers. If the Leader wishes to give a more supernatural turn to the scene, one of them may be gifted with occult powers (see p. 172 (Eberict's profile) and 178-179 (Mysterious Powers) of Book 2 – Travels).

Delphine Bois – Of Men and Obscurities – 7 – Different Paths

This track will help the Leader set a heavy atmosphere as the PCs, along with Daernic, creep closer to the sorcerers' hideout.



This part will be an opportunity for the Leader to introduce a more action-oriented gaming phase. Depending on the Leader's and the Players' tastes, this may result in full combat or be entirely pushed aside, with Daernic refusing to be accompanied. Each Player should portray a Character during this phase. Those who have no Support to play in this scene can take on the roles of sorcerers. The Leader will take the concerned Players aside to explain the situation to them and imagine a situation together. With a gripping description of the decrepit house and the chanting sorcerers dressed in strange tunics, the Leader can give this part a memorable atmosphere. A tense musical accompaniment will also help. The fight against the sorcerers may be the time when the Lead will summon a Miracle (see the Optional scene: "Summoning a Miracle").
Once the sorcerers have been defeated, Daernic will leave the group with a laconic "May the Creator protect you" as his only goodbye...



Optional scene: Summoning a Miracle



At the Leader's discretion, it is possible to use this Focus to depict the Lead awakening to a Miracle. In the end, it all depends on the atmosphere the Leader wishes to set for the campaign (see "Creating a Magic-user PC," Book 1 – Universe, p. 246). If the Leader intends to depict a Miracle, the Player may choose it (see "How Clerical Magic Works," Book 1 – Universe, p. 256). The Leader will then get to incorporate into the Focus an intense, dramatic scene during which the Miracle will take place.

There are 12 Miracles, which can be interpreted as expressions of the Six Ordinances (see "The path of the Ordinances"). Some are obviously battle-oriented, while others have more social applications. Since the choice depends on the Lead's personality and on the context, it is not possible to provide one premade scene.

However, here are a few possibilities:

A desperate fight.
Bandits, or even possibly dark creatures (such as a swarm of Mealtag, blood-drinking Feond bats, see Book 2 – Travels, p. 187) attack the travelers on their way to Expiation. The situation quickly becomes desperate... Until the Lead, his mind bursting with inner light and unable to explain what drives him to act, manages to destroy them (Divine Cold) or repel them (Circle of Protection).

The accident.
The travelers experience a serious accident due to bad weather. A Support takes a nasty fall and in agony, they tell the Lead that their time has come. When everything seems lost, the Lead's prayer to the One is granted, and the dying person is saved (Miraculous Healing or Resurrection).

The sorcerers.
The encounter with the sorcerers, in the last scene of Act II, may feature the Lead fighting with a miraculous power, whether to directly wound (Castigation) or to psychologically wrack (Vision of Limbo).

A village under threat.
The travelers make a stop in a small, isolated mountain village. The inhabitants are desperate because their provisions are contaminated by a strange rot. Famine looms... The Lead can then step in as a savior, the Creator's cleansing light in the darkness, when he summons a Miracle of Purification on the food.

Act 3: Ard-Amrach

This act will feature the Lead arriving at the Gwidrite capital and therefore reaching the conclusion of his journey. He should now be aware of his feelings regarding faith and his relationship with Lusia. The Leader should make sure to remind the Player that they are free to take whatever stance they wish on both of these subjects.

Scene 1: Entering the Gwidrite capital

Supports: Firmin, Lusia, Masha, Dand. **Extras**: Pilgrims, Sigires.

Arcana – Inner Pale Sun – 3 – Icons

After nearly two months of journeying, as the travelers get closer to the capital, they receive an increasingly warmer welcome, since many put their hopes on the holy water of Expiation to hasten the Hierophant's recovery. It is said that a young man who claimed to be his hidden son was arrested and interrogated a few days ago. Rumor has it that he and his allies were found both insane and guilty of scheming to upset the entire kingdom. Tales of the charges they were found guilty of, as well as the few elements the travelers may learn about, are each more extravagant than the last. At least, this is the end of the mystery, and no

one will presume in the future that the Lead is the son of the highest figure of the Temple. How does the Lead feel upon learning this? Does he still foster doubts?

The first glimpse of the capital is a shock: Ard-Amrach is a massive, majestic city whose white walls soar so high that they seem to support the clouds. The Leader can show the illustration on p. 144-145 to the Players and use p. 75 of Book 1 – Universe to deliver a description of the city. It is now time for the group to split, as only the members of the clergy can go to the district of the Holy March where the Acceptation will take place.

As Masha parts ways with the group, her face shows bottomless melancholy when she watches Lusia and the Lead walk away. This situation is rather symptomatic of an elite that chooses its members, "adopting" them while rejecting others, whether they are lowly unordained believers or despicable apostates and pagans.

This raises painful questions for the Lead: If unbelievers are doomed to Limbo regardless of their qualities, is the One truly merciful? Is it enough for one to lead an honest life to be saved, even if one knows nothing of the Holy Ordinances? Does the PC's ignorance concerning his own story doom him to damnation?

The Leader can strengthen his descriptions and portrayal by directly asking these questions to the Lead, like an echo of the Character's own reflections as the time to take clerical orders approaches.



The gardens of Ard-Amrach

(see Firmin's sheet).

On the heights of a garden of the Temple, Firmin and the Lead are taking a stroll. Together, they speak of past events, and this brings them back to the PC's childhood memories (Act I, Scene 6): "For a long time I was afraid I would bring you misfortune if I told you everything I know. But now, I must speak."

Firmin then reveals two very important things:

- Teorg, the knight who entrusted the Lead to Firmin, wore a suit of armor of the White Rose. The sword Firmin gave to the Lead when he was a child belonged to him. Thus, the Lead's father was a member of the White Rose, and Firmin warns the PC against the dangers to which those who are affiliated with this faction expose themselves.

- Firmin gives the Lead a hollow pendant engraved with rose petals whose empty center shows the shape of the Temple's holy symbol. On the back, the words "Forever my brother" are engraved.

  This object was among Teorg's possessions, but there was no clue as to the sentence's meaning. Deep down, Firmin feels empathy for the Lead and wishes to support him in his quest to understand his story. However, once more, he warns him and urges him to be careful.



Scene 2: Revelations

Supports: Lusia. **Extras**: None

Firmin and the Lead are housed in a small, soberly elegant monastery, in the district of the Holy March. They will get to meet other adepts: Neilina, Vaodez, Bedwyr, Aloys, Wenefred, and Diboana (see Act III, Scene 3: The Acceptation). Lusia has been busy escorting the holy water from Expiation to the heart of the district of the Holy March. A rumor has since spread through the city: as soon as the Hierophant drank the precious liquid, his face became calm, his pain subsided, and he uttered a blessing.

He is now considered to be out of danger, and everywhere, the Sigires of Expiation are praised as guardians of the spring, gift of the One. This context of excitement and rejoicing precedes a great ceremony of Acceptation that the Lead is to take part in, so that he may enter the order of his choice. If the Hierophant has recovered, he might even lead the celebration himself, giving his blessing to the newly ordained.

Fascination and repulsion

(see Lusia's sheet).

Arcana – Inner Pale Sun – 8 – Closure

On the eve of the ceremony of Acceptation, the Lead has a visit from Lusia. She seems troubled and has several things she wants to talk about:

1. She goes back to their journey with Brother Daernic during which she noticed how uneasy the Lead and his adoptive father were. She will now tell him about her story: her capture when she was a child, the time she spent as a slave, and then Daernic, who came like her only hope amidst this eternal night. Finally, she entered the clergy of the Temple, her new family.

2. The other subject she raises is about the ceremony of Acceptation that will take place tomorrow: she asks the Lead about his choice. Actually, Lusia wants to know whether there is any future for them together; for that, the only way would be for the Lead to also take orders. As a Sigire, she cannot share her life with a layman.

3. Finally, Lusia reveals her feelings: she is attracted to the Lead, and has been obsessed with him ever since they met. However, she also feels an ever-growing uneasiness. What could it mean?



The Lead is moved, and he can hardly keep a straight face as his heart is beating madly. Along with this excitation toward Lusia, he feels a vague anxiety. Is it due to the upcoming Acceptation? Actually, unbeknownst to him, it is the pendant given by Firmin that troubles him, unconsciously taking him back to the secret bond he shares with Lusia. The Leader should take care to tell the Player about these emotions in detail. These feelings swell inside the Lead, out of his control, representing true adversity. How will the Lead react? The Leader should leave the PC's reaction to his Player, once the Player has been made aware of the stakes of this inner struggle.

The continuation of the events will mainly depend on the Lead's reaction: whether he kisses Lusia or pushes her back, he will suddenly have a revelation. Indeed, Lusia wears a pendant of the Temple, but the snowflake-shaped symbol is peculiar, and the Lead now understands why: it is actually the perfect pairing to his own pendant. The snowflake and the PC's hollow pendant fit perfectly. Behind the snowflake is engraved "Forever my sister."

If the Lead has, in one way or another, consummated this incestuous relationship, he must make a Very Difficult (20) Mental Resistance check. If he was able to keep his distance, listening to the part of him that urged him not to do anything, the check will only be Complicated (14).

Lusia appears horrified, all the more so considering her status of Sigire makes the situation they are in even worse for her.

After remaining frozen for some time, Lusia bursts into tears and tells the Lead about something she had kept hidden out of shame, but which now makes sense: she has some memories of her mother, who was a Magientist.

She also remembers a small baby, a little boy that her father hurriedly carried away one day while she ran with her mother in another direction...With her parents gone, she was adopted by a second family, who also met their end before she fell into the clutches of the corrupt lord. Beyond the shock of this revelation, the Lead may have a thought for how lucky he was to be entrusted to Firmin's care, and how his life, as harsh as it may have been, was a happy one in comparison to that of his apparent sister...



Once they are past the initial shock, Lusia and the lead will now face each other in a wholly different context. The Lead may find in his sister a devoted ally, unless the Leader or the Player decide to make her a sworn enemy (see "Ally and Enemy," p. 61).



Inscription on the Hexcelsis: "Forever my sister"

Breaking the bonds

The Lead may have already been fostering doubts about his vocation, feeling the need to disobey, to free himself from the intellectual bindings that the dogma kept him in... Once he has reached Ard-Amrach, the young adept is now unable to back down from one of the most important choices of his life. For a Character who has chosen the arc of Adoption but does not want to be part of the Temple, now is the time to detail how he turned away from a religious vocation:

Fleeing:

Unable to bear the pressure but also to confront Firmin or anyone else about it, the Lead packs up at night. His plan may be confused, chancy, resting on the hope of finding his own way, one he would choose himself. He may also be giving in to a childhood dream he had so far been pushing back. The default chronology provided in the Prologue suggests a space of two years between the events of Mac Thogail and the present, so that the Lead may conceivably have had the time to train in his chosen profession. The Leader can complete the Focus by setting new scenes to portray the Lead learning about this new trade.

Renouncing:

The Lead has had plenty of time to reflect on the Pilgrims' Way, and even though he did not find the One, he has come to terms with his aspirations. He knows that those who love him and have been with him along the way, Masha and Firmin in particular, will respect his choice. He may tell them about his decisions during their final dinner in the capital or nearby, when Firmin or Masha asks him, "So, are you still set on your choice?" A bolder variant would consist in refusing to take his vows during the ceremony of Acceptation itself, like a groom saying "No" before the altar, which would cause quite a scandal. This situation would result in an uproar and would make him the target of infamy, but it is not illegal, unlike committing apostasy once ordained.

Apostasy:

The Lead went through the motions out of goodwill and went through the Acceptation, but soon after, he abandoned his religious responsibilities and left the order. If he is identified in Gwidre as a defrocked ecclesiastic, he may be sentenced as a blasphemer and an apostate, someone who was imparted with the truth of the One yet turned toward the enemy, the demon.



Scene 3: The Acceptation

Supports: The Hierophant Anthénor, Firmin.

Extras: Other adepts (Neilina, Vaodez, Bedwyr, Aloys, Wenefred, Diboana), other ordained, members of the Temple.

The ceremony of the Acceptation is intended to take place in the Prima Cathedra, the first church of Tri-Kazel, built in 747 (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 32). After more than a century of additional works, it was turned into an immense cathedral.
The Acceptation can be compared to a mystical wedding or to a holy adoption that binds the ordained to the One, to the community of believers, and to the religious of the Temple at the same time. It usually takes place after a novitiate of seven years, the young adept being backed by an ecclesiastic of the Temple–in this case, Firmin.

During the days prior to the Acceptation, the ecclesiastics-to-be prepare themselves, training to sing canticles and hymns in a choir, rehearsing the ceremony so that everything may be perfect. The atmosphere is abuzz with joy and nervousness.

During this time, a sociable Lead can make acquaintances. If he puts his heart into it, and goes the extra mile in the future to maintain a correspondence, he may make contacts, and even possibly friends who will be able to support him... though they may also expect help in return:

- Neilina. Future cleric. Plans to work in Farl. Very serious, though rather awkward.
- Vaodez. Future monk. Aspires to build establishments like the Corvus Abbey.
- Bedwyr. Future Sigire. Has the profile of an intellectual. Always sports a smirk.
- Aloys. Future Vector. Has made friends with Neilina. He intends to go to the region of Baldh Ruoch. Being a man of science himself, he is certain he will be able to convert the materialistic Magientists.
- Wenefred. Future priestess. She cannot help but laugh and giggle constantly, which makes it hard to picture her as living a temperate life. She hasn't really thought about her assignment, leaving it to chance.
- Diboana. A minor noble whose family is a vassal of Lord Mac Snòr (see the book "The Monastery of Tuath"). She intends to become a Blade knight.

The Lead being invested in maintaining a network of acquaintances is a matter of practicality, but also a way of understanding the strength of the Temple, the six orders being united for the same cause, with different specialties.

Preparing for the ceremony (see Firmin's sheet).

Firmin explains to the Lead how the ceremony of the Acceptation will go, so that he may know how to behave and what to say, particularly during the Oath.

The ceremony

Arcana - Inner Pale Sun - 2 - Lovelorn

By default, the Hierophant Anthénor will be played by the Leader.
Purified, clad in white, the adepts stand in the nave while long celebrations take place, lasting several hours and culminating in mid-afternoon, at the hour of Sixtine, with a ceremony presided over by the Hierophant himself. For the newly ordained, this results in a powerful, very intense feeling of well-being, of communion. Everything looks more beautiful and more luminous, as if the One Himself was resting His benevolent gaze on His messengers. That the Acceptation takes place in the heart of the Prima Cathedra makes the emotions felt by the adepts all the more intense. Standing as still as statues, Blade knights watch from the choir's sides. Anthénor's appearance is an almost surreal moment: his immaculate white ceremonial garb seems to gleam with gold and silver from the light shed through the stained glass, while his features show bottomless mystery.

The Sixtine ceremony takes place in the choir of the Prima Cathedra, where long pieces of white cloth have been hung, forming many arches with the ever-present number six. The ceremony goes through three major parts:

1. The Introduction.

The ceremony starts with a ritual speech made by Anthénor. The Hierophant stands in the chancel while all the adepts are still in the nave. The voice of the spiritual leader of the Temple rings in the Prima Cathedra: "On this day, let your hearts be filled with joy, for you will accept and be accepted. Some will accept, others will be accepted. In the wake of Soustraine, all will leave their footsteps and will become the heirs of his holy word. For it is his revelation from which we all inherit. For it is his truth of which we all are the messengers. On this day, among us, before our eyes, and in our hearts, Acceptation takes place. Adepts, here you are now before us, on the cusp of your religious maturity. Soustraine was the first to see the truth of this world, and now, it will be your duty to spread the bright truth of his vision. Today, every one of you will join one of the six orders of our holy Temple.

"Never forget that the six branches of the order are joined at their hearts. Each of you will be entrusted to an order that will assign them their missions, and each will accomplish their task differently. However, you have all received the Acceptation, and all serve the same divine mission."

2. The Oath.

Every adept, one after the other, kneels before a small altar where a marble tablet engraved with the Six Ordinances has been set. The Hierophant then asks each novice a hallowed question, which becomes a litany repeated to each of the adepts all through the ceremony:
"Young adept, your training is now over. On this stone consecrated by Soustraine's Ordinances, do you agree to devote your existence to the glory of the One?"
The adept then answers, "Yes, I accept as I am accepted." Anthénor then asks, "You will leave the heart of the Temple to join one of its branches. Which order do you wish to enter?" Following the adept's reply, the Hierophant concludes, "Thus it shall be!"

3. The Vows.

Once the Oath has been made, the ordained gets up and takes the vows they have decided to make theirs. If they decide not to take any, they simply come back among the assembly. They may make this choice later in life, but most prefer to show the strength and purity of their commitment at that moment. Rules-wise, a Vow grants a +2 in Exaltation but also entails additional constraints that the Character must abide by (see The Monastery of Tuath, p. 12). Should the Lead take a Vow of Anonymity, his name can be Geal, referring to the white color of snow and to his adoption.
Once all the adepts have come before Anthénor, the assembly then intones the Six Ordinances, and the ceremony of the Acceptation ends with all the bells of the cathedral ringing.

The Elect. If the Lead has performed a Miracle during the Focus, he will be the only new ordained to also be an Elect. Once the ceremony has ended, the Lead is approached by the head of the order he has decided to enter (the Leader will find his or her name in p. 154 of Book 1 – Universe, in the paragraph "The Hierophants"). The one who is now his leader will congratulate the young ordained, "The Elect are the eyes, the voice, and the hands of the One. He has placed His trust in you, and the community of the believers needs you to guide and protect it. I will follow your progress with attention. Welcome among us!"



Epilogue

It is fall. The Lead has come back to the monastery of his adoptive father, Firmin, after a long journey from the Gwidrite capital to Dearg. The Vale offers a breathtaking sight, its trees covered with foliage of gold and blood. A cold wind and an ice-blue sky hint at a harsh winter that will test everyone's mind and body. The One expects constancy and moderation, and His Elect must show the way to the others in these hard times.

All around, much work has been done. The Vale is lively, and many take advantage of the last sunny days to go out, wondering at the beauties of nature. Though this world may not be perfect and is the cause of much pain, its beauty is a message of hope that elevates the soul, soothes it, and bolsters it.

The Lead meets with the inhabitants of Dearg. How will he be welcomed? How will the others judge his choice, whether he took orders or turned away from the Temple? In addition to coming to terms with his religious commitment, his great voyage through Gwidre let him see Lusia again and understand the reasons for his obsession toward her. However, many mysteries remain, in particular concerning the identity of his parents: apparently, one of them was a knight of the White Rose, while the other was a Magientist...

Determination and Experience points

This Focus will earn the Lead 15 Experience points, as well as between 0 and 5 Determination points. How many he earns should depend on how deeply he was involved in his relationship with Lusia, Firmin, and Masha.
P. 81 provides more details on how to attribute these points, and their effects are detailed at the end of the Advanced Character Creation chapter, p. 61 to 63.

Experience points can also be attributed to the other Players for their PCs, even though they were not part of this scenario. The attribution system is the same as the one described on p. 228 of Book 1 – Universe.



Chapter 4
Coir:
The River Child

Prologue

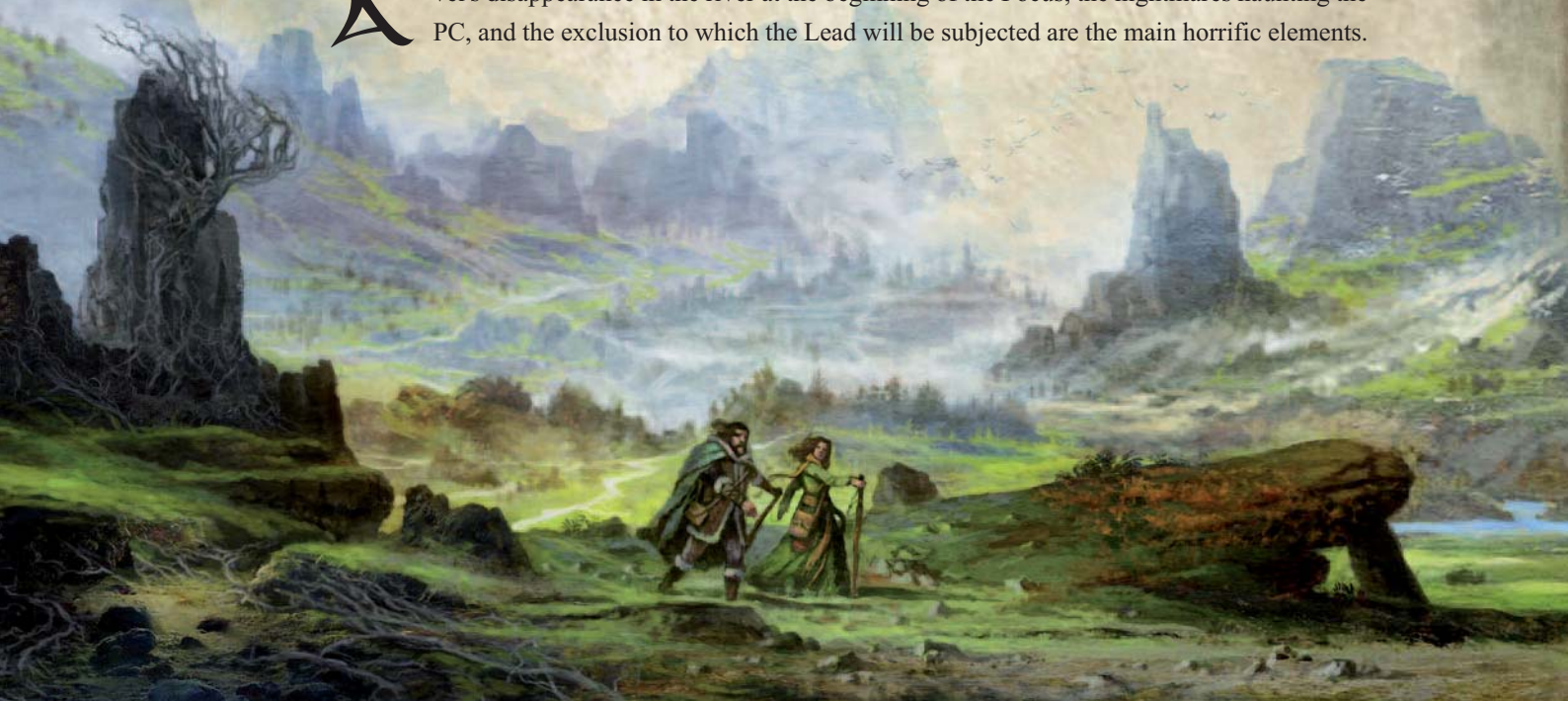
· **Style:** Focus centered on the narrative arc of Guilt · **Setting:** Taol-Kaer.

Summary: The story of the Lead is marked by the disappearance of a friend, Avel, on the bank of Melwan's Black River. Following this tragedy, the Lead has to leave their native village to go live in Dearg, where terrifying nightmares will plague their childhood. They will be taught the ways of the Demorthèn and will have to decide whether to embrace this path or forsake it. Finally, a visit to Melwan will have the Lead face a Feond, an encounter that will reveal more about the evil that haunts them.

Stakes and aims: This Focus introduces information and clues regarding the burden that has been weighing on the Lead's shoulders since Avel's disappearance. It will also let the PC decide what their vocation should be.

Horrific aspect

Avel's disappearance in the river at the beginning of the Focus, the nightmares haunting the PC, and the exclusion to which the Lead will be subjected are the main horrific elements.



Portraying guilt freely

One of the objectives of this Focus is to confront the PC with the theme of Guilt. How will the Player react to the situations introduced and portray the Character? This narrative arc is a rather complex one to portray since guilt is primarily an inner feeling, as opposed to other arcs, whose dramatic tension and dilemmas lie more in external concerns. For example, the narrative arc of Ethics features conundrums that force the PC to make a concrete decision: to save his wounded comrades in arms, will the PC stoop to the unethical treatment of prisoners?

With Guilt, matters are more abstract, since the question is not how the PC will react as much as what the Character will feel in a given situation. This is the dramatic stake of this Focus. Guilt appears as an actual adversary (just like a foe to fight or a puzzle to solve) that threatens the Lead and toward which the PC will have to take a stance.

Here is an example: at the beginning of "The River Child," Avel disappears, and the Lead stands accused of his demise. The PC may feel sad and guilty, or, on the contrary, wholeheartedly deny the accusations, deciding that they are not the one responsible, and thus don't have anything to feel guilty for. The Leader must feel free to ask the Player directly about the Character's stance, detailing the various options. The Leader should encourage this freedom of interpretation and let the Player describe what the PC feels. This will certainly encourage the Player to be more involved in the narrative arc, and will make for a more friendly atmosphere among the participants.

What if the PC does not feel guilty?

If the Player decides that the PC feels no guilt, it might seem that the whole purpose of the arc crumbles.
That isn't the case at all! The Leader has two narrative devices to put the PC face to face with the narrative arc:

Nightmares.

The nightmares and visions of the missing child that beset the PC can be interpreted as the return of something repressed. Consciously rejecting an emotion does not mean that it didn't leave an active mark in the subconscious. This can be the source of dreams or even somatic symptoms. In addition to this possibility, the world of Esteren includes many supernatural elements that may bring about haunting phenomena.

Social pressure.

Even if, rationally and objectively, the PC knows they have done nothing wrong, they will have to permanently endure disapproval from loved ones and society in general, which is very taxing for one's morale. A PC with high Empathy and a Conviction oriented toward the common good will suffer all the more from such pressure. Even if the PC refuses to call this feeling "Guilt," they will still be judged "guilty," and will have to bear the burden of their infamy. Revolting against a sense of injustice and seeking to clear one's name by proving one's innocence can thus be valid motives for going through the arc of Guilt.



Haunting as an allegory for Guilt

The feeling of being possessed and the nightmares that the PC is experiencing mainly symbolize the theme of Guilt and the threat facing the PC. In the classical sense, Guilt is that small voice that blames us, and the nightmarish manifestations the Character suffers play the role of this finger-pointer. In this regard as well, the Player will have to take a stance regarding the nightmares and the strange feelings that beset the Character: will the PC accept them powerlessly, or instead fight them? Will the PC embrace guilt, or deny these accusing voices? Whatever the case, the Lead will have to find a way to deal with this torment–and thus solve the narrative arc–if they don't want to sink deeper and deeper into madness.
This Focus is about symbolically depicting an inner fight and an encounter with this disquieting strangeness that lurks on the fringe of consciousness. The PC may push away all feelings of Guilt, but something deep in the Character is trying to make itself known, to surface. The NPCs the Lead will meet throughout the Focus will provide many possibilities in how to relate to and understand these manifestations.



When preparing the Focus, the Leader is advised to keep these few principles in mind. It might also be good to talk about it with the Players beforehand, in particular with the one who has chosen the arc of Guilt.

This box sums up the central information and themes of this Focus, some of which will be detailed later. The main purpose of detailing these variants is to give the Leader efficient tools to heighten the atmosphere during the game. Doubt and the unknown are certainly some of the most powerful devices in that regard. For this reason, the Leader is advised to maintain these feelings all through the campaign up to the point when the PC finally discovers the truth.

On the various interpretations of nightmares

During this Focus, the PC will experience strange events and will feel haunted by "their" ghost, Avel. Each faction has a different way of interpreting such manifestations. The Focus will be an opportunity to cover each one of them in relation to the Lead's experiences. Here is a list of the various interpretations:

Demorthèn.
For the Demorthèn, dreams and nightmares can be considered messages. They can be signs sent by the spirits to question the initiate in a metaphorical way. The Demorthèn do not believe in life after death, but instead in the redistribution of life energy–what they call Rindath–through the great cycles of existence. Some believe that the existence of ghosts is due to Rindath not properly following these cycles. Avel's energy, for some reason, went astray.

Alienists.
For these physicians of the mind, the manifestations suffered by the PC are the psychic aftermath of the traumatic experience of the child's disappearance. Only appropriate care can cure these symptoms. The solution would be, first, for the PC to step outside of the environment that encloses them in the role of a culprit, then to follow proper therapy.

Temple.
For the adepts of the Temple, the PC's visions are fed by a feeling of guilt. They are reminders of the error the PC has made and can be alleviated through prayer and penance. It may also be that the PC is possessed by a demon, in which case an exorcism through a Miracle of Purification might be necessary. In the PC's case, it would turn out that no Elect can call upon a sufficiently strong Stanza... could it mean that the One refuses to offer an easy way out to the PC? Maybe He would accede to lift this burden from the PC's shoulders only after proof of sincere redemption...

Occultists.
For the advocates of these theories, the PC is in a struggle with the child's ghost, and may even be in contact with the world of the dead. The usual practice to solve this type of problem consists in understanding what the spirit wants in order to placate it. Some occultists may also believe that the symptoms have a traumatic origin, which would make their position similar to an alienist's.

Magientists.
Magientists would be inclined to follow the alienist theory, but some would consider the possibility of fossil Flux intoxication. The fact is that various elements seem to indicate that there might be significant amounts of this substance in the region of Dearg and Melwan.

The child's fate

What happened to the child is another dramatic device that the Leader can use. After all, although Avel disappeared, no one ever found his body. Though seeking the meaning of the manifestations that haunt the Lead is the major plot point of the narrative arc of Guilt, finding out the truth can also be an important motivation for the PC, who may hope that shedding light on the case will help in getting rid of the persistent nightmares and voices. Additionally, the Lead may also hope to make amends by helping Avel's parents accept their son's passing, since they are having a hard time coping with grief as long as there remains even the slightest hope. Succeeding in that regard would show everyone that the PC is worthy of being trusted and respected again.
There are several theories:

The child drowned in the river.

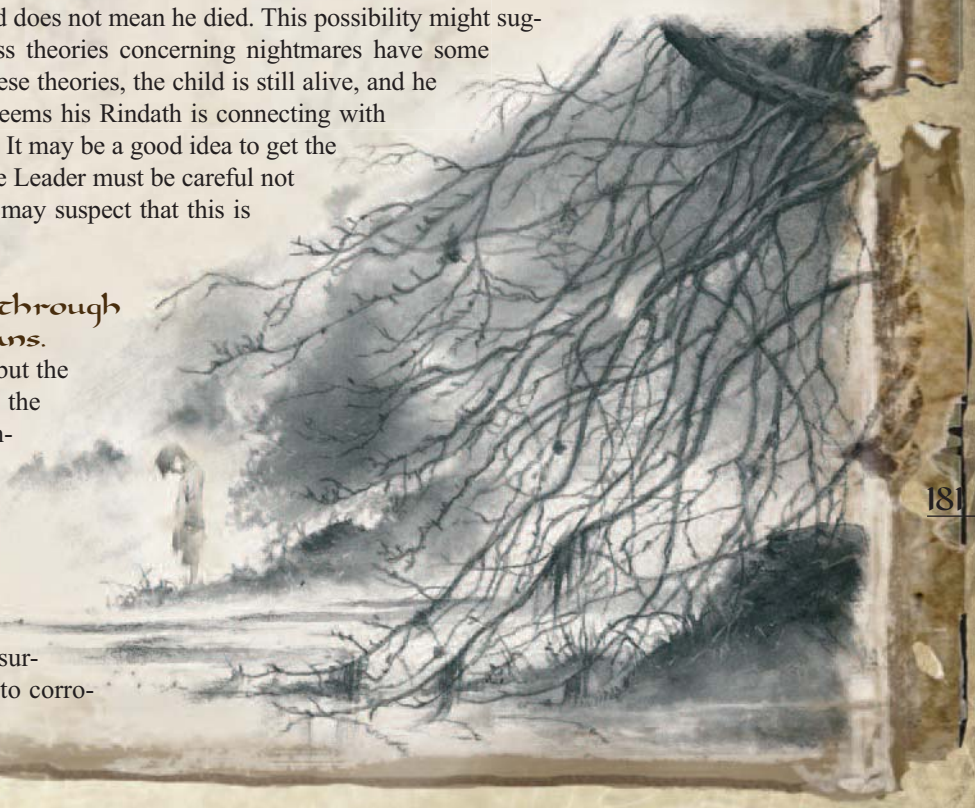
This is the most sensible version concerning what happened to poor Avel. To prove this theory would require recovering his body. For that purpose, the telltale necklace that he wears (see Act 1, Scene 1: Childhood memories, p. 189) will be the clue that will leave no doubt concerning the identity of any corpse that the Lead may discover. But in the end, whatever the PC does throughout the Focus, Avel's body will remain nowhere to be found.

The child is still alive.

The fact that the child disappeared does not mean he died. This possibility might suggest that some supposedly baseless theories concerning nightmares have some inkling of truth. According to these theories, the child is still alive, and he is calling to the PC for help. It seems his Rindath is connecting with the PC's to send signals of distress... It may be a good idea to get the PC interested in this hypothesis, but the Leader must be careful not to be too heavy-handed, or the Player may suspect that this is actually a red herring.

The child disappeared through some supernatural means.

This theory is even more far-fetched, but the Leader may want to encourage it if the campaign is meant to have a more fantastic atmosphere. The child did not die, but was engulfed by some supernatural mist or wandered through a portal into another world. Now stuck there, the child is calling for the PC. That the body was never found and that a child would be unlikely to have survived alone in the forest would seem to corroborate this idea.



Ghosts and occult powers

Some may diagnose the manifestations besetting the PC as the consequences of mental trauma. However, the truth is that Avel has become a ghost haunting the PC and calling for the Character's help. He does not mean harm (as opposed to Verzal's ghost in Loch Varn, who has become a destructive entity, see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 38), but has two faces, being at the same time a protective spirit and a harrowing presence. Avel's ghost may in turn support and harass the PC. Doubt should persist as to whether this twofold ghost is one and the same–and more specifically, Avel. This duality is a way to keep the PC uncertain regarding the nature of the phenomena the Character is exposed to.

Throughout the official campaign (and starting with this Focus), the PC will become aware that it is possible to call upon Avel's influence to manifest two particular powers. The nature of each is wholly ambiguous, and it may let the PC think that they are actually a Morcail (if the Lead is a Demorthèn) or that they have made a pact with the demons of Limbo (if the Lead is an adept of the Temple).
Any PC who has chosen the narrative arc of Guilt can make use of these powers, regardless of their career. If the Character is not a spell caster, Repel Feondas will be the only supernatural ability available to them. As described below, they can (and will most likely need to) fuel this power by Drawing from Ghost Energy. If this has not already been done, it will be useful to take note of the PC's score in Rindath (or Exaltation, if the PC's faith belongs to the One God), the calculation of which is detailed in the chapter “Character Creation” of Book 1 – Universe, p. 218.

Draw from Ghost Energy.

This power works like the Optional Rule "Drawing from Vital Energy," detailed on p. 250 of Book 1 – Universe. However, the difference is that the PC does not draw from their own energy, but from that of Avel's ghost. Once per game session, the PC can use up to 10 points of ghost energy, which will be substituted for the energy required for the PC's powers, whether Rindath or Exaltation. No roll is needed; the PC simply needs to call the ghost to their side as they prepare to summon a power. This aside, the process takes place as per usual. To keep track of this power's use, the Player can keep a token in front of them (a small object, a playing card, etc.) that they will remove from the table or flip once the power has been used.

Repel Feondas.

The other power Avel can lend the PC makes it possible to repel Feondas. It is a very powerful manifestation, which works exactly like a Circle of Protection Miracle (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 259) of the fifth Stanza: Feondas cannot approach the PC within a radius of 1,000 yards for at least an entire day (see the Summoning Chart on p. 257 of Book 1 – Universe). Summoning this power costs 20 Rindath points, and the PC can Draw from Ghost Energy to trigger the power. No Sigil Rann roll is required, but the PC's concentration can be disrupted before the effect is unleashed (Summoning time: 5. See Book 1 – Universe, "Being Disturbed During an Invocation," p. 250). Drèins, the Feondas pack leaders, are not affected by this power in the same way. Passing a Very Difficult (20) Stamina check makes them entirely immune to any effects. On a failure, this power neutralizes the Drèin for 1D10 Rounds, during which it writhes and twitches in pain, as if under the effect of an invisible force. It cannot attack and suffers a 5 point penalty to Defense.



SETTING

Keeping the Player in doubt

Even when there remains little room for uncertainty concerning the narrative arc's supernatural dimension, the Leader should try to keep the Player in doubt. This will help nurture a horrific, mysterious atmosphere. For this purpose, the Leader will be assisted by the other Players who will portray the Supports who advocate for each different theory.

Madness and mystical powers.

Throughout the Focus, it may become increasingly clear that the PC is capable of calling upon Avel's spirit to summon powerful manifestations. For a reasonable alienist, this will only represent secondary effects of the PC's mental pathology. Thus, similarly to a person prone to Hallucinations who has reached Madness, the PC has developed faculties that they believe to be mystical when they are actually the manifestation of an increasingly invasive mental disorder. To support this theory, the Leader can have the beginning of an adapted treatment (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 280) coincide with the temporary neutralization of the Lead's "powers." This may convince the PC and their companions of the psychopathological origin of these manifestations. To give this possibility its full weight, it is important to maintain doubt regarding the reliability of the diagnosis. The Leader is advised to keep secret the sheet keeping track of each PC's Sanity. Only a professional examination will allow the Player to know more about the Lead's mental state. And even then, nothing guarantees that the diagnosis performed is correct. Moreover, several experts can contradict each other!

The art of the Liadh.

For the Demorthèn, such powers might be interpreted as a manifestation of Liadh, the art that makes it possible to call upon the power of the spirits without need for the Oghamic stones. But couldn't these uncanny abilities also come from the use of the Oradh, the Morcail's tainted art? These fallen Demorthèn are said to let themselves be guided by their emotions, and to wantonly draw from spiritual energy to achieve their aims (see the last Scene of the Focus, p. 207).

Using Sanity

In this particular Focus, Sanity can play a very important part. As explained above, involving the possibility of madness can keep the Players uncertain regarding the exact nature of what the Lead is feeling or experiencing. In the case of Adeliane, her Latent Disorder is Hallucination. Therefore, as the scenario progresses, the Player should feel more and more in doubt regarding the reliability of the Character's perceptions.

If the Lead has been given a different Latent Disorder by the Player, the Leader should take it into account and give it some relevance throughout the Focus, which will probably require a few adjustments. This will certainly heighten the mystery and intensity of the scenes that the Players will experience.



Metamorphosis checks

Calling upon Avel's ghost is not without danger, something the PC might only realize much too late…

Metamorphosis is an optional rule that the Leader can implement if they wish to give a supernatural twist to the corruption that threatens the Lead. This transformation can be handled in a purely narrative way, with its evolution at the Leader's discretion. Alternately, the following rule can be used: every time the PC calls upon either of Avel's powers, the Leader will ask him to make a Complicated (14) Metamorphosis check based on Mental Resistance. On a failure, the PC takes two temporary Trauma points. Rolling a 1 on the D10 results in particularly dire consequences: in addition to the usual Permanent Trauma point and Scarring (see p. 271 of Book 1 – Universe), the PC permanently loses one point of Rindath. Instead of recording the Permanent Trauma point as a filled box, the Leader crosses it, indicating that the PC is affected by Metamorphosis. If the PC reaches the Madness state, in addition to the normal effects (see p. 273 of Book 1 – Universe), they will start to transform and develop inhuman aptitudes. Having been affected by Metamorphosis only once is enough for this to happen.

The rules concerning Metamorphosis and its consequences on the PC are detailed in Volume 2 of Dearg.



When the Leader applies this rule for the first time, he should ask the Player to make a Metamorphosis check with a suitably mysterious air, without explaining what the roll entails and what the risks are for the PC. However, should the Player roll a 1, the Leader will let them know that they have permanently lost one point of Rindath.

An incurable illness: anniversary and nightmares

Avel's haunting comes with another effect: as fall begins and the anniversary of his disappearance nears, the Lead's nightmares intensify, and the PC comes down with a fever. These symptoms exhaust the Lead and, most worryingly, they get worse with every year. During the year of the Focus, the PC suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls for 2D10 days, centered on the anniversary of Avel's disappearance. If an even number, for example 12, is rolled, the Leader can adjudicate that the Lead will be sick for 12 days as follows: 6 before the anniversary, 1 during the anniversary, and 5 after the anniversary. During the 24 hours of the anniversary, the Lead is at their worst, usually bedridden with a high fever inflicting a -5 penalty to all rolls. As the days go by, the affliction subsides, but every year, it comes back.

Once the PC has reached adulthood, the penalty rises to -2, still for a duration of 2D10 days. To represent this penalty and keep it in mind, the Player can leave a token in front of them, such as a pebble or a playing card.

Imbibing analgesics combined with passing a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check can negate these penalties. In this case, the Lead is safe as long as the treatment is administered. Only a daily treatment can protect the PC for the whole duration of the mysterious illness... but beware of addiction! This can occur depending on the medicine used (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 243). Moreover, the doses must be tailored to the Character, which will require a Complicated (14) Magience (Medicine), Science (Medicine), or Demorthèn Mysteries (Traditional Medicine) roll. On a failure, the treatment is ineffective or triggers undesired effects.

Supports

Before the game begins, the Player who is the Lead (i.e., who has chosen the narrative arc of Guilt) will go out of earshot, while the Leader introduces the Supports available for this scenario to the other Players. If the Leader and Players do not yet feel totally in command of the particular principles of the Focuses, they should read the chapter "The Focuses" again, in particular the part "Principles and rules of the Focuses," on p. 83.

The profile of each Support includes information about their story, their personality, and the Key scenes they are involved in that the Leader will explain to the Players portraying them. The Support sheets summarize all of this information and are intended to be handed to the Players. The Leader can download the files for these sheets on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org. The paragraphs below sum up this information for the Leader's reference during the game.

Another valuable game aid for the Leader is the relations diagram. This sheet sums up the bonds between the NPCs involved in the scenario and provides an overall vision of the various protagonists. The Leader can download a digital version of this relations diagram on the Shadows of Esteren portal: www.esteren.org.

The Key scenes are particular moments when the Support will be involved in the Focus and bring elements that the Player will have to convey as faithfully as possible. All Players should therefore make sure to be familiar with the Support they will portray.



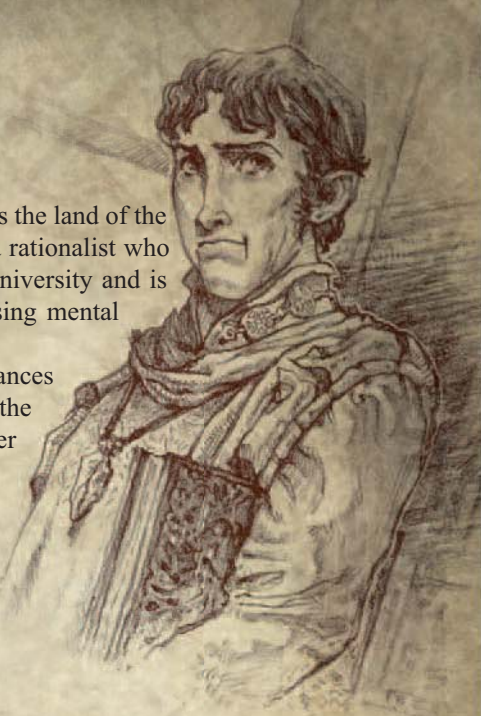
Wailen, Melwan's Demorthèn

Wailen is a mystic who always answers evasively and has little involvement with the village's daily life. She spends most of her time in her house, a sparsely furnished shack located near the sacred circle of Giuthas. Wailen is the mother of several children, whose father has remained unknown to Melwan's people. This has given rise to many rumors: passing traveler, secret lover in Melwan, and even creatures from the forests. She is the grandmother of Adeliane (the Character to whom the narrative arc of Guilt is dedicated by default) and of the Varigal Yldiane. The locals hold the Demorthèn in high esteem, and they know better than to question her authority. She has found in Mòr a new Ionnthén.
Wailen is a rather important Support who is mainly involved in the first act.

Monk Firmin

A simple, benevolent man who belongs to the order of the Lavanians, the monk Firmin is not only a devout believer, but also a humanist. In his eyes, all humans are equitably granted the One's love, and Soustraine's revelations are bulwarks against temptation and evil. According to him, anyone can certainly be saved even if they do not adhere to the faith of the Temple, although it will prove more difficult and uncertain. Throughout this Focus, Firmin has a significant part only once, during Act 3, Scene 2. For this reason, it is advised that the Player who chooses Firmin take on an additional Support.



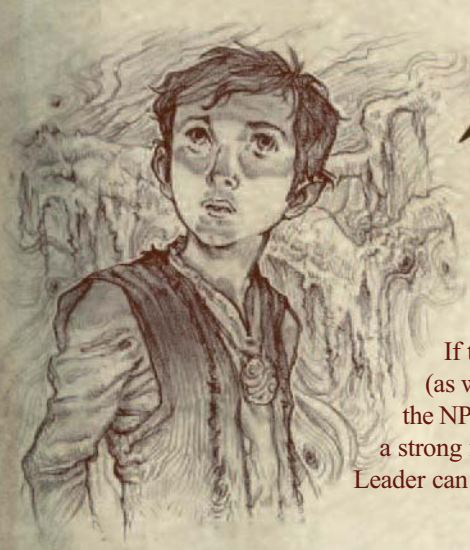


Feust, the alienist

Feust is an alienist from Tulg Naomh, the capital of the Dukedom of Tulg, which comprises the land of the Mac Govrians, including Dearg. Alienists can be of several schools of thought; Feust is a rationalist who follows Ernst Zigger's theories. He has graduated from studies in medicine at a Reizhite university and is equally learned about traditional therapeutic methods and new medications capable of easing mental troubles (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 280).

Feust is a humanist, sensitive to other people's suffering. He believes deeply in scientific advances and refutes anything that seems supernatural or defies reason. Feust was called to Dearg by the knight Argan, as the Vale's regent worries about his degrading health condition (see "The Inner Enemy" on p. 40). This is a secret assignment he will not speak of, primarily out of respect for his patient's privacy. In addition to this task, Feust will show interest in Dearg's inhabitants and hear of the Lead's plight. As he comes and goes between Dearg and Tulg Naomh, Feust will follow the Lead, and even though he will say nothing of it, this baffling case will shake his convictions.

Feust is an important Support, but he will only see play from Scene 4 of Act 2 and onwards



Avel, the river child

Avel is a child from Melwan who disappears right at the start of the scenario. Thereafter, he will mainly appear as a specter that triggers visions and haunts the Lead's nightmares. He will be in turn harrowing and protective. To maintain this confusion, Avel's ghost can be alternately played by two Players. It is one of the most important Supports.

If the Player with the arc of Guilt has decided to create a male Character rather than a female one (as with Adeliane), Avel can be a girl, Avèle, instead. Indeed, the relationship between the Lead and the NPC will be all the more gripping if it involves a budding love between the two children. However, a strong friendship between the two children, regardless of their gender, can be equally interesting. The Leader can ask the Player's opinion on the subject to orient this decision.



Alban Elarig

Alban Elarig is the heir to Dearg's mines. He is a young man fascinated with occultism ever since he discovered an old book that used to belong to his late grandfather. This passion, which is the source of violent arguments with his father (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 71 and 72), will naturally make the young man interested in the Lead's enigmatic case. Alban will only come in during one or two scenes of the third act.



Loeg, Dearg's Demorthèn

Dearg's elder, Loeg has been through the War of the Temple. His story is detailed in his profile, included on p. 38. He is the one to whom Wailen, Melwan's Demorthèn, will entrust the Lead when the child has to leave their native village. Loeg's role in this Focus will be all the more important if the Lead intends to become a Demorthèn. From the start of Act 2, Loeg makes frequent appearances.

Optional Support: Yldiane



In the original story, Yldiane is the younger sister of Adeliane, the Character whom the narrative arc of Guilt is, by default, dedicated to. She is an orphan who lost her parents at a very young age and was separated from her sister when she was not even 10 years old. Yldiane was raised by her grandmother, Wailen. As Melwan's Demorthèn, she thought about training Yldiane as her Ionnthén, but she was unsuccessful. As soon as she passed the third age circle, barely 15 and now considered an adult, Yldiane left Melwan to become a Varigal. She was taught by her mentor, Jarn, and traveled to Reizh before she came back to her native region, several years later. In this Focus, this Support is optional and only makes sense if the Lead has a sister as well. The Leader can adapt this Character to fit the Lead's background. Yldiane only has a role in the first act, when she is still a child.

Optional Support: Finn



In Adeliane's story, the Ionnthén spent part of her training in Dearg with Finn before he left the Vale to journey to Reizh following the abrupt death of his little sister. Finn's story is connected to the narrative arc of Ethics, and the associated Focus, “Modhannan: A Better World” includes sequences that can intersect with “Coir: The River Child.” If this relationship between the two Characters is kept, the PC who has picked the arc of Ethics can have a part in this scenario, in particular during Scenes 1 and 2 of Act 2.

Chronology

The Acts and Scenes of this Focus are set in chronological order. They focus on key moments of the Lead’s past. However, this sequence is flexible, and many other scenes can be inserted. In particular, the Leader may insert the Vestiges scenario during Act 2 or 3 of the Focus.

Duration of the game

If the Leader sticks to the Scenes detailed in this scenario and keeps a good pace, this Focus may take a single game session to play through. As with the Focus dedicated to the narrative arc of Ethics, the Leader can spend much more time on “Coir: The River Child,” spreading it out over several sessions, possibly to the point of making it a mini-campaign. This option can be all the more relevant if all the Players involved have the opportunity to play their own Characters in addition to the Supports.

Default Characters and dates

By default, the Focuses use locations and dates related to the narrative arcs. Thus, they will take place in Dearg, with its inhabitants, but also with the dates matching the stories of the premade characters. Avel's disappearance is meant to take place when the Lead is about seven, as in Adeliane's story.

Here is the default chronology

- 887: Joris is born and adopted by the monk Firmin.
- 890: the Lead is born.
- 892: Argan settles in the Fortress of Smiorail.
- 897: Argan asks Loeg to cure his troubles, but to no avail.
- Fall 897: the Lead is seven and lives in Melwan; Avel dies (Act 1, Scene 1); Sieg the trapper, the Lead's father, dies (Act 1, Optional scene: Everything falls apart).
- Winter 897-898: Eana the Dàmàthair, the Lead's mother, dies (Act 1, Optional scene: Everything falls apart).
- 898: the Lead arrives in Dearg (Act 2, Scene 1); the alienist Feust reaches the Vale of Dearg, sent for by Argan, who seeks a cure to his illness.
- Fall 898: the Lead's yearly fever occurs for the first time (Act 2, Scene 4).
- 899: Iona, Finn's sister, dies; Finn leaves to Reizh to study Magience (Act 2, Optional scene: Finn's departure).
- Earrach Feis 903: Joris reaches adulthood.
- Summer 903: Joris leaves for his military service.
- Summer 904: the Duke of Tulg dies.
- Summer 904, Og-mios: Joris is back from his military service.
- Earrach Feis 905: Mael Mac Govrian, Céliane, and Eoghan reach adulthood.
- Summer 905, Og-mios: brigands attack a small group including the Lead, Eoghan, Céliane, and Mael (see p. 100).
- Summer 905, Og-mios: (optional) an exorcism ritual is attempted on the Lead, without results (Act 3, Optional scene: The exorcism).
- Summer 905, late Og-mios: Mael and Eoghan leave for their military service.
- Earrach Feis 906: the Lead, Alban, Maella, and Herven reach adulthood; soon after, Alban goes to the Lead, offering to organize a spiritualism session (Act 3, Scene 1).
- Summer 906, early Og-mios: Mael and Eoghan are back from their military service; the Lead's military service begins.
- Fall, Sulthainn 906: crops are bad, but the Hilderin knight Argan still levies additional taxes.
- Fall 906, Damhar: Mael and Aline Mac Govrian's funeral takes place.
- Fall 906, Dudlachd: Sìd reaches Dearg in critical condition.
- Summer 907, Og-mios: the Lead is back from military service.
- Summer 907, mi-Luchar: the Lead goes to Melwan and sees the Black River again (Act 3, Scene 4).
- Summer 907: Finn and Joris are back in Dearg.
- Winter 907: present time; the Dearg campaign begins.

Once more, the information given here is not absolute, and the Leader should not hesitate to adapt it. The chapter "Adapting and Managing your Campaign" (p. 66) provides several tools to handle this.

What if the Lead is not to become a Demorthèn?

Initially, the narrative arc of Guilt is dedicated to Adeliane, who intends to become a Demorthèn. If the Player who has chosen this arc also has a Ionnthén or Demorthèn Character, this will make this Focus all the simpler, since many scenes are about the Demorthèn and their myths. If this isn't the case, this is not an issue, since being a Demorthèn is not a prerequisite for this narrative arc. There can be two cases:

The PC is a Ionnthén who will progressively stray away from the path of the Demorthèn

The Player may decide that the PC was trained to become a Demorthèn but turned away from this calling to embrace another career, i.e. the Character's current profession. The Focus can be the opportunity to depict this evolution. The Leader should talk about it with the Player in order to adapt the Focus accordingly. Regarding the Lead's relationships with the people of Dearg, this decision will be a hard blow for Loeg, who lost his last two Ionnthén when they abandoned the role he had trained them for. He is an old man, and he will experience these events as personal failures that may make him even more bitter, or even result in deep-seated resentment toward his former pupils. Who knows if, deep down, he does not think of them as traitors? Even as the Vale of Dearg is in the midst of its darkest hours, he may become their enemy and take steps against them...

The PC is not a Ionnthén

The Player may have planned that, from the start, the Character chose another path than that of a Demorthèn. However, the encounter with C'maoghs in Act 1 will still take place. Likewise, the Lead will face the various avatars of guilt, whether they take the shape of crushing regret or nightmares and visions induced by Avel. In this version, Wailen and Loeg won't be present as mentors, but rather as adoptive figures. The Leader should adapt the Focus to include the PC's progression in the profession chosen by the Player. The Leader can create one or several additional Supports (the Lead's mentor, for example), or use an existing figure from Melwan (see the next page) or Dearg (see the chapter "The Vale and its Surroundings," p.16).

The first act takes place in the village of Melwan when the Lead is still a child. The purpose of this act is to play out the tragic event that starts the PC's narrative arc and to begin exploring the theme of guilt.

The Vale of Melwan

Most of this game aid is a reproduction of the one published in Book 0 – Prologue (p. 58 and 59). Since the first act of this scenario takes place in the Vale of Melwan, this game aid is provided so that the Leader can have a quick reference available. The information provided here follows the assumption that the act takes place ten years in the past, which means in the year 897 after the Oath.

Melwan is a little village in the dukedom of Tulg, located close to the border between the kingdoms of Taol Kaer and Gwidre. On one side, the road that crosses the valley passes 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 ties, notably regarding mining efforts. On the other side, the road heads toward the dukedom of Dùlan and goes deep into the Mòr Roimh, the mountain range that crosses the peninsula of Tri Kazel.

Melwan is inhabited by little more than 200 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.

In addition to the Supports, here are a few of the Vale's personalities, each one of which can be used as an Extra:

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 that produces most of the flour consumed in Melwan.

Ergor the hermit.

Ergor is a hermit living an hour away from the village. He doesn't worship the spirits of nature but "speaks to higher entities." He sometimes comes to the village in order to ramble about dark, horrific prophecies, although no one takes him seriously. He has even become the favorite victim of the community's children. Others just pity him, taking him for a poor, madness-stricken old man.

The Mac Lyrs.

The Mac Lyr family comes from the clan that used to live in this vale. Feudalism made its members mighty warriors, but as ages went by, they lost some of their clout. Manec Mac Lyr is the current lord, but his mother, Maoda Mac Lyr, has considerable political influence over the Vale. In particular, she is responsible for building bridges with Reizh's science and Gwidre's religion, which isn't to the taste of the local Demorthèn, Wailen.

Eana the Dàmàthair.

At the time of the Focus, Eana, the Lead's mother, is the oldest of the four Dàmàthairs, and sits for them on the council. Among its 200 inhabitants, Melwan includes more than 50 children under 10, who are cared for by these women.

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 the mentor of Liam, who spends a lot of time marveling at Venec's curios.

Neala the apprentice bard.

The young girl's dream is to become a bard. Should she reach her goal, she intends to sit on the village's council, as tradition dictates. However, this would require finding a mentor or traveling to the city to earn her peers' acknowledgment. At the time of the Focus, she is still a child, being at most 10 or 11 years old. She helps her parents breed Calyres and tends to a dozen of the animals on a daily basis.

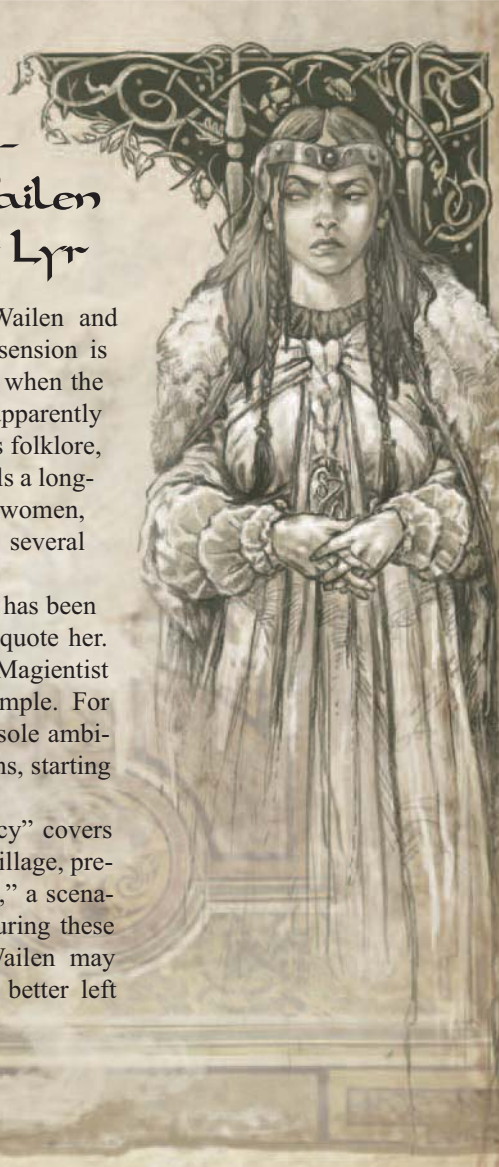
Nar the blacksmith.

At almost 60 years old, Nar still retains broad shoulders, formed by years of service in the Hilderin knights' 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 his work as a smith and training the young ones in the use of weapons.

Maltaria the innkeeper.

A woman of character, and an outstanding figure in Melwan. At the time of the Focus, she runs the Old Chestnut inn with her husband, Illeg. It is a well-known place of rest for passing Varigals.





The conflict between Demorthèn Wailen and Maoda Mac Lyr

It is no secret in Melwan that Wailen and Maoda hate each other. Their dissension is decades-old, dating back to a time when the two women were still young girls. This apparently harmless feud, which is part of Melwan's folklore, could be taken with a smile, but it conceals a long-lasting blood feud between the two women, which has led to the disappearance of several members of their families.

For more than 20 years, Maoda Mac Lyr has been working on "modernizing Melwan," to quote her. She has attracted representatives of Magientist science and of the religion of the Temple. For Wailen, there is no doubt that Maoda's sole ambition is to undermine the ancient traditions, starting with the influence of the Demorthèn.

The video game "The Mac Lyrs' Legacy" covers Yldiane's investigation into her native village, preceding the events described in "Poison," a scenario included in Book 0 – Prologue. During these events, the very granddaughter of Wailen may unearth secrets that might have been better left undisturbed...

Scene 1: Childhood memories

Supports: Avel, Wailen.
Extras: Yldiane, Fenella or Mig (both are about the Lead's age).

As the game begins, the Leader describes the scene: the PC remembers Melwan when they were a child–precisely seven years old, if the Character's story follows that of Adeliane. The Lead is giving a special necklace as a gift to another child of the village, Avel. The mood is light-hearted, innocent. The necklace will be a reoccurring element of the campaign, so it is important that the Leader describes this scene to the Player.

This initial scene is a good opportunity to depict the village of Melwan and to initiate the system of Supports and Extras. One of the Players will play Avel during this scene, while another will play Wailen. If the Player portraying the Demorthèn has good knowledge of the Demorthèn and their rites, this scene may even include an improvised lesson with the Lead, who is Wailen's young Ionnthén. If the Player portraying the Lead has decided to keep Yldiane as the PC's sister, another Player can play her.

Dangerous curiosity

In this Key scene, which is a direct follow-up to the one described above, Avel, Fenella, and Mig go to the Lead. They beg the PC to take them along the river to see the C'maoghs. Either Fenella or Mig will be played by one of the Players while the other child will remain under the control of the Leader. The Leader can give the following information to the Extra on the fly: both children are in awe of the Lead, who is said to have seen C'maoghs close to Melwan's Black River. At this point, Wailen comes in and reminds everyone that all children are absolutely forbidden to leave the village–with the exception of her Ionnthén–and that witnessing the apparition of C'maoghs is something sacred, it is neither a show nor a game!



The Leader can flesh out the first scenes with bits of their own creation, with the game aid “The Vale of Melwan” to draw inspiration from. Taking the time to give life to Melwan's inhabitants will heighten the dramatic strength of the next scenes. The Leader can go as far as to dedicate a whole game session to it, centered on a mini-story (as a Canvas, for example).

Scene 2: The C'maoghs

Supports: Avel.

Extras: The two other children coming with the PC and Avel: Fenella and Mig.

Armand Amar - Home OST - 2 - Home Part 2

A track with a majestic, mystical atmosphere, suited to the apparition of the C'maoghs. Once the small group has noticed Avel's disappearance, the Leader can switch to a radically different atmosphere with industrial tones, such as a track from Silent Hill's OST.

To introduce the scene, the Leader describes their environment to the Players. They are on the bank of Melwan's Black River. The trees are stifling most of the light, and the atmosphere near the river is almost surreal. The children are gathered here, some distance away from the village, after they have convinced the Lead to take them here. The PC is a gifted Ionnthén, very in tune with the environment, and apparently already able to initiate contact with the C'maoghs. Driven by a mixture of carelessness and fascination, the children want to partake in this experience of watching the spirits of nature with the Lead. In the end, the PC gave in. The Lead is already having second thoughts about this whole venture, but is still happy to share it with Avel.



Something grand is about to take place, everyone can feel it. However, the children are also scared to be alone here, without adults. They know it is forbidden! If necessary, the Leader should take some time to give indications regarding each Character's state of mind and ask the Players for their own interpretation in that regard.
A fascinating spectacle takes place before the group's eyes: spheres of wavering light seem to appear on the dark surface of the river. Soon, the will-o'-the-wisps come closer to the children. This is an incredible moment: everyone can see with their own eyes the C'maoghs, whose shifting glow gives the scene an otherworldly feeling. The children feel an energy passing through them and surrounding them... But suddenly, the C'maoghs vanish and a misty darkness spreads over the river's banks as the unmistakable splash of something falling into the water can be heard. The roiling mist reduces the visibility and gives the river an eerie aspect. There is only the steady gurgle of the water to break the ambient silence.

Avel's disappearance

Very quickly, the party notices that Avel is no longer among them. What happened? Could the sound they heard have been Avel falling into the river? Of course, it may simply have been a branch or a pebble hitting the water... A quick search will not turn up anything, but the children will see that the current of the Black River is rather strong.

Then, the Lead hears calls for help, as if Avel were near, somewhere amidst the fog. The other children hear nothing, but the Lead can hear the shouting continue. But Avel is still nowhere to be found, and his voice echoes strangely, getting more and more distant and phantasmal until it fades for good.

What happened? The Leader can ask the following questions through the Extra they control: Did Avel fall into the river? Has he been carried away and drowned? Was he swept away by the mist... or by the spirits?
The children should quickly come to the decision that there is nothing left to do but go back to Melwan. Following the Black River, they quickly come into sight of the bridge leading to the Mac Lyrs' castle and then to Nar's smithy.



Keeping the narrative arc of Guilt going

Obviously, all the children present have been scarred by this experience. For the Lead, this is the start of the narrative arc, but the scene has left a mark on Fenella and Mig as well. They will grow up and lead their own lives... but similarly to the Lead, they may never manage to lay this tragedy to rest.
As explained on p. 68 of the chapter dedicated to narrative arcs, if the PC dies before the arc is resolved, the Player can come up with a new Character who will carry the arc forward. Fenella and Mig are very convenient choices to pursue this quest and understand what happened to young Avel. Additionally, the Leader may involve these NPCs in other scenarios. For example, during the "Vengeful Words" scenario (see the supplement The Monastery of Tuath), the Lead may meet Fenella or Mig later in the Monastery of Tuath where they came to receive care–possibly of a psychological nature.

Scene 3: Back from the river

Supports: Wailen. **Extras**: Avel's father, inhabitants of Melwan, Fenella and Mig.

The children go back to Melwan and each go their own way, still under the shock of Avel's disappearance.

Wailen's reaction

Wailen notices how disturbed her Ionnthén looks and asks what happened. Quickly, she understands the gravity of the situation, which will certainly be made even worse when Maoda Mac Lyr uses this tragedy against the Demorthèn. Wailen lectures the Lead about how children are explicitly forbidden to leave the village. However, she also urges the PC to leave out any supernatural elements (the C'maoghs' apparition, but above all Avel's voice in the mist) and tries to be reassuring: this is not the Lead's fault, the PC has nothing to be blamed for, it was an accident.

Soon, someone knocks loudly at the door of Wailen's house: Avel's father. He is beside himself with anger and vents his fury at the Lead. He demands that his son be brought back, roaring as Wailen does her best to calm him down. The father will prove aggressive, and the scene may go downhill. This is a fragment of Adeliane's story as it is described on p. 186 of Book 1 – Universe: "When she came back to the village, Adeliane was violently blamed, and only the intervention of her grandmother Wailen prevented a new tragedy."



Portraying the Extras

For each Extra, the Leader can give the Player a few indications on the fly. For example, to the one playing the father of the missing child, the Leader can tell: "You're very angry. Your child is missing, and you've heard it's the Ionnthén, whom you more or less see as a witch, who is responsible! You want to know what happened and have your son back!"

As the scene proceeds, the Leader can give new elements to the Players to guide their interpretation. For example, in this scene, it is important to stress the Lead's responsibility, which should result in a feeling of guilt. If the Extra's Player seems to be holding back, the Leader can intervene with: "The father is very angry! He spares the Ionnthén nothing. To him, it is because of this wretch that his child is gone, and he will stop at nothing to make her talk..."



The Lead's guilt

These first scenes get into the thick of the subject and will require the Player to take a stance concerning what is happening. The paragraph "Portraying guilt freely," in the introduction of this Focus, provides advice so that the Leader can help the Player portray the Character as freely as possible (see p. 179).

Optional scene: Everything falls apart

Supports: Wailen, Yldiane. **Extras**: Maoda Mac Lyr, the Lead's parents.



This optional scene focuses on the death of several members of the Lead's family. It will mostly hold meaning if the Player has decided to stick to Adeliane's story since it covers a difficult part of her and her sister's lives: the death of their father Sieg, a seasoned trapper, and their mother Eana, a Dàmàthair. The Leader may also decide to use this optional scene in order to make the game tenser and darker, adding additional weight to the PC's guilt. However, the Leader must take care not to overdo things, which might spoil the intended effect.

As no trace of Avel can yet be found, the accusations against the Lead escalate. It is demanded of Demorthèn Wailen and the Ionnthén's parents that they find the child. The Lead's father, along with a few other locals, go to search the surroundings of the Black River. However, things only get worse when the Lead's father is bitten by a venomous snake, whose poison ultimately proves fatal.

If the Leader wishes, this scene can be played out, with the Players taking the role of the Lead's father and the rest of the search party. Directly portraying the death of the Lead's father can make it all the more poignant.

This sudden loss will be hard on the Lead's whole family, in particular on the widow, who will be devastated by the death of her husband. Eana will cope with this turn of events very poorly. She is worried about her future and that of her children, and struggles under the crushing grief. The Lead will often see the mother in tears, staying at home when she should be doing her Dàmàthair duties. The Mac Lyrs, in particular Maoda Mac Lyr, will take advantage of this weakness to malign Eana, since she is the daughter of her rival, Wailen. Thus, Maoda muses aloud whether it would not be better for Eana to be stripped of her Dàmàthair status and replaced.

Unfortunately, things will keep getting worse: during the next months, a harsh winter falls on the Vale, and Eana catches a nasty flu that saps her already waning strength. Wailen does not possess the appropriate Ogham to cure her, and her skills are powerless to save her daughter. There is nothing that the Lead can do except watch their mother die, while the regent Maoda Mac Lyr does nothing with her resources to attempt to save her.

Wailen then takes Yldiane and the Lead under her wing, and they share her home. This is a very difficult ordeal for both children, and the PC will not be able to repress the insidious thought that Avel's disappearance is what started this dreadful series of misfortunes...

Scene 4: A soothing communion with nature

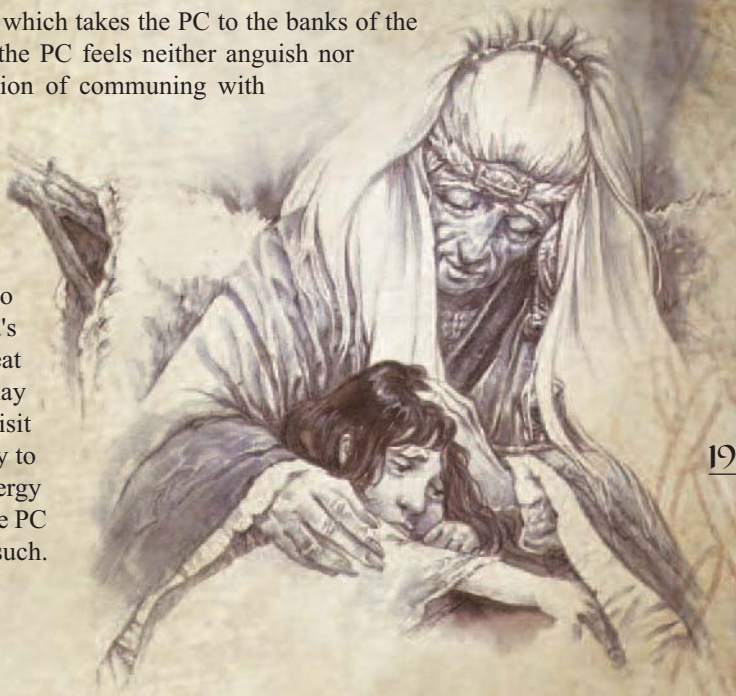
Supports: Wailen.

Extras: None.

Armand Amar – Home OST – 13 – Whales

The first scenes of this Focus depict a cascade of grim events that will ultimately result in the Lead being expelled from their native village. The purpose of this scene is to release some of the pressure and create a welcome interlude before the end of the act, which will put the PC back in a hard place. It will be all the more striking as the contrast to the tense mood of the previous scenes is strong. Switching between atmospheres is a very useful way for the Leader to avoid overdoing it and saturating the game with a single style.

The Lead is taking a stroll alone not far away from Melwan, which takes the PC to the banks of the Black River, where Avel was tragically spirited away. Yet, the PC feels neither anguish nor guilt, but rather a sensation of well-being, and an impression of communing with nature.



Wailen's teaching

Wailen then joins her Ionnthén and seeks to comfort the PC, asserting how the Lead's undeniable talents will make them a great Demorthèn. However, the path is long, and the ordeals of life may be hard to overcome. This is the time Wailen chooses to revisit Avel's or the Lead's parents' passing. She takes this opportunity to explain how Demorthèn perceive death: one's spiritual energy flows back into the perpetual cycles to feed new existences. The PC must not fear this event, which is part of life, but accept it as such.

Scene 5: A horrible nightmare

Supports: Avel.

Extras: Children of Melwan (the premade Characters of Book 0 – Prologue when they were children: Liam, Mòr, Arven, Yldiane, etc.)

The Lead, as well as several other children of the village, are near Nar's smithy, close to the Black River. Above the small workshop looms the massive bridge that connects the village to the Mac Lyrs' castle. This scene is actually a nightmare, but the Lead won't notice it until the end.

Avel's blame

Suddenly, all the children present see Avel standing some distance away. The Leader may ask the Lead's Player to make a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check in front of this unsettling vision. Avel then comes closer to the group and starts blaming the Lead for having abandoned him. Rather than anger, he shows great sadness. Avel is now right in front of the Lead, and the atmosphere gradually grows more disquieting. The river's waters seem to shake, clouds gather in the sky... Avel grabs the Lead by the arm as he goes on with his lament. Soon, the scene becomes plainly supernatural and horrific as water and seaweed seem to pour from the child's mouth, while his face whitens and his eyes blacken. This is when the Lead wakes up with a start. The Leader may stress the guilt of having abandoned Avel and ask the Player about the Lead's own feelings: does this situation sadden the Character? Are they annoyed by these nightmares because they believe they have done nothing wrong?

One last element ends this scene: once the Lead is awake for good and starts getting up, the PC notices with a shocked gasp that their arm shows a bruise on the exact spot where Avel clutched it in the nightmare... But maybe the PC simply bumped into something during the previous days? A Ionnthén's training involves plenty of physical activity, after all. In the end, there is no certainty, and the Leader should use this last detail to instill a feeling of disquiet and doubt in the PC's mind.

Scene 6: A difficult decision

Supports: Wailen, Yldiane. **Extras**: Inhabitants of Melwan, Avel's father.

This scene occurs some time after Avel's disappearance. Tensions still run high in the village, and Maoda Mac Lyr will take advantage of the situation to take a low blow at her sworn enemy, Wailen, by having her disciple expelled.

The Ionnthén's expulsion

Tonight, people gather in Melwan's hall to hear the decision made by the Mac Lyrs following Avel's disappearance. The council is presided over by Demorthèn Wailen, the knight Aessan, who is escorted by half a dozen soldiers, and Dàmàthair Maiwenn, who has just been promoted following the passing of Eana, the Lead's mother.
The parents of the missing child are disconsolate and demand retribution as their son is obviously all but lost. Aessan reminds Wailen of her responsibility concerning the actions of her Ionnthén, who has broken an important law of the village. The matter sparks a fiery row among the small assembly. Several of Melwan's inhabitants will clearly express their positions, which will show a divided village. The Leader can let the Players portray arguing inhabitants on the fly.
Knight Aessan steps in and asks for silence. He takes out a scroll and announces the Mac Lyrs' decision to the assembly: Wailen's pupil must leave Melwan, as the child "endangers the community." Additionally, and until further notice, the Demorthèn is forbidden from taking another Ionnthén. It is up to Wailen to decide where her Ionnthén will live henceforth. As much as Wailen may oppose it, the Mac Lyrs' decision is irrevocable, and rests on their interpretation of the right to administer justice "for the good of the community." Yldiane is present and is crushed by this news, unless the Player who portrays her would rather show her as indignant and rebellious.

After two bleak weeks, Wailen tells the Lead that the nearby village of Dearg will be the PC's new home, and that her friend, the Demorthèn Loeg, will continue the PC's training. After painful farewells, it is time for a short but taxing trip to Dearg.

Optional scene: the trip to Dearg

This optional scene depicts the trip to Dearg.
Wailen decides to entrust the Lead to a convoy of the Scarlet passing through Melwan. This small guild from Tulg Naomh specializes in transportation and escorting in the dukedom of Tulg. Its founder is a native of Dearg, and his men regularly travel the paths of this region. This guild will be detailed in an upcoming book of the Esteren series, and this optional scene is an opportunity for the Players to get a first glimpse of NPCs that they will meet again much later. To make this acquaintance more memorable and create bonds, one of the guards can take pity on the Lead and give the PC a trinket like a small toy or a doll.

To reach Dearg, one must go through the pass leading to Neart's stronghold. At the time of this Focus, it is simply an abandoned Inguard, but later, it will be rehabilitated by a Magientist named Talacien (see the "Poison" scenario in Book 0 – Prologue). If the Players have already played the Prologue scenarios, the Leader can draw their attention to this.

Getting to Dearg will only take three days. If the Leader wants to make the trip more eventful, or simply make the scenario more action and horror-oriented, the convoy may encounter brigands, or witness the manifestations of strange creatures during the night. Considering the Lead's early age, there will not be much the PC can do except be a powerless, frightened witness to these events.

This act depicts the Lead's arrival in Dearg and them getting accustomed to their adoptive village under the wing of their new mentor, Loeg. Even if the Lead is not to become a Demorthèn, Loeg will still be the one to tutor the PC. Act 2 focuses on the first two years of the Lead's presence in Dearg. This period is pivotal, since the PC will make the acquaintance of their rival and friend Finn, and will suffer the aftermath of Avel's death.

Scene 1: Welcome to Dearg

Supports: Demorthèn Loeg.

Extras: Inhabitants of Dearg: Finn, Joris, Glen, the Tarish twins Masha and Mirna, Firmin.

The Lead reached the village a few days ago, escorted by a convoy of the Scarlet. These uncommon circumstances will make the locals curious, but also worried. The PC's origins and story could not be kept secret, and they are met with both pity and suspicion. What if the child truly bore the evil eye?
Unlike most of Dearg's children, the Lead is not raised by the Dàmàthair, but placed under the charge of the local Demorthèn. Finn, Loeg's other Ionnthén, is in a similar situation, as is Joris, who has been raised from birth by the monk Firmin in Alestor's Monastery. But even though the Lead isn't an isolated case, there is still a strong feeling of loneliness.

One morning, the Lead is watching a group of children and their Dàmàthair, Glen (see p. 32). Some of the children (Extras played by the other Players) start to approach the Lead, but Glen (who will also be played as an Extra) calls them back and orders them to keep their distance. This scene highlights the Lead's exclusion. Loeg can then explain that it is the Dàmàthairs' duty to protect children, and that they don't want to take any risks. After all, the PC is known to have taken children outside of the village, which led to a most tragic event.

Still, little by little, the Lead will get acquainted with the other inhabitants. In particular, the Tarish twins will tend to reach out to the new child and welcome them, since the girls are victims of the locals' mistrust themselves.

This scene will also depict the PC meeting Finn, Loeg's Ionnthén, with whom the Lead will spend plenty of time.

Finally, the Leader can include Joris in this scene. Firmin's adoptive son does not live in the village, but in Alestor's Monastery, further down the Vale. Not being aware of the rumors about the new child, the boy will candidly welcome the Lead. In this scene, the monk Firmin has come to the village of Dearg for groceries, taking his adoptive son with him. As he is killing time at Zaïg's shop, Joris notices the twins and the Lead, and slips out to join them. Finn can also be part of the group. In the end, Firmin will find his adoptive son and will give him a lecture.

The PC's childhood

The first scene starts out sad, stressing the loneliness and rejection that the Lead is the victim of. However, the atmosphere will probably get lighter once the Extras come in. Indeed, the Players are portraying children, which should make for fun moments. As in the first act, the Leader should try to shift the mood throughout the scene in order to make for a richer narrative.

If applicable, this scene and others throughout the Focus will be opportunities for the other Players to bring in their own Characters as children. For example, the PC with the narrative arc of Adoption can be Firmin's child. Of course, elements of the story may have been modified to suit the Player's aspirations, in which case the Leader should not hesitate to adapt the Focus in accordance with these adjustments.

Depending on the Players' inspiration and the participants' mood, this act can last up to several sessions or be kept short. It is up to the Players and Leader to decide how interested they are in the PCs' childhood, and therefore how much time they want to dedicate to it.



Vestiges

Optionally this scenario can be played when the PCs are still children. If it makes sense with the Characters' backgrounds that they all were in Dearg as children, the Leader can include this scenario in the Focus. This possibility will thus feature a bonding experience, while cutting the Focus in half. If the Character of one of the Players cannot conceivably be part of this scenario (likely because the PC's story does not include a childhood in Dearg), the Leader should probably keep this scenario for later, once the PCs have grown up and the whole group is reunited.

Scene 2: The Ionnthén's training

Supports: Demorthèn Loeg. **Extras**: Finn, Avel (optional).

Today, Finn and the Lead are training under the demanding eye of their mentor, the Demorthèn Loeg. Usually, a Demorthèn only has one pupil, but having multiple, as in this case, is by no means unheard of. If the PC with the arc of Ethics was Loeg's pupil as child, it will be a great opportunity for the Player to play their Character and can only make the scene all the better.

The day's exercise takes place outside of the village, on the banks of Dearg's river. The Demorthèn has chosen a rather steep location where the river snakes and sometimes falls in small cascades. The purpose of this session is to initiate the Ionnthén in the art of the Sigil Rann, the use of Oghamic stones.



The Light Ogham

The old mentor owns a Light Ogham, which his pupils will have to use to dive into the cold waters and come back with a copper torc. The test takes place close to a small waterfall, where the water is clouded with silt. Without the Light Ogham, finding the torc will be nigh impossible, since the visibility underwater is very low (Very Difficult (20) Perception (Acute Senses) roll). Diving into the river will be an ordeal for the Lead: passing a Standard (11) Mental Resistance check will be necessary lest the PC refuse to go in, frozen in place by the memories of Avel's disappearance. Such a weakness will be met with taunts from Finn.
Thanks to the Light Ogham, the Ionnthén can create a luminous halo, which will be very useful to find the torc. Doing this requires a successful Standard (11) Demorthèn Mysteries check. The result will be a short-lasting, dim light around the Ogham, which will suffice to find the torc. For the purpose of this skill check, the Lead is considered to have a score of 2 in Demorthèn Mysteries (in addition to the PC's Empathy) whereas Finn only has 1 in Demorthèn Mysteries and an Empathy of 3, which means he must roll 7 or better to pass the test. Each Character can roll twice before having to swim back up.
Once the Lead is deep into the river, another Demorthèn Mysteries check must be made. If the roll reaches 11 or higher, in addition to the light, the PC will feel the presence of the C'maoghs. Though unable to actually see them, the Lead will hazily recognize the sensation felt a few years ago on the banks of Melwan's Black River. However, the feeling, though familiar, will be different, softer, as if it came from another kind of being, perhaps a different C'maogh?



Optional scene: A spectral apparition

By using this option, the Leader will give an even more supernatural twist to this scene by bringing in what the Lead will believe to be Avel's ghost.



At the bottom of the river

After a moment, the reassuring presence of the C'maoghs and the light coming from the Ogham fade, and the atmosphere at the bottom of the river becomes oppressive. As the Lead tries to swim back to the surface, it will feel like something is dragging them down, and they will see that their ankle is caught in a bundle of water weeds. But suddenly, they will have a fleeting vision of Avel holding them from deep below! They will then hear a voice accusing them of letting him rot at the bottom of the Black River, urging them to join him in the kingdom of the dead. To get free, the Lead will have to cut or rip the weeds before they start suffocating. This scene will result in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check.

Following the test, Finn will taunt the Lead, particularly if he failed at finding the torc. The Leader can give suggestions on the fly to the Player portraying Finn, for example how the Ionnthén will unabashedly mock the Lead and their fear of water. The Lead will have to pass a Passion Test to keep their cool, and a failure may result in a brawl. Of course, Loeg will quickly step in to separate his pupils.

Loeg's teaching

Later, once Loeg is alone with the Lead, he returns to what happened earlier. Depending on how the test went, he will either congratulate or lecture the PC. This will also be an opportunity for the Lead to share what they felt at the bottom of the river, in the presence of the C'maoghs, particularly how the sensations were different from what they felt when Avel disappeared. The Demorthèn will then deliver his interpretation: indeed, there exist C'maoghs that are very different from each other because, according to Demorthèn teachings, the C'maoghs are incarnations of the spirits of nature. And some are forces connected to life, others to death. It may be that during the tragic encounter on the Black River, the Lead met a C'maogh related to a spirit of destruction, which led to the child's demise... However, Loeg will be careful about this theory, since it is also known that C'maoghs do not interfere with the affairs of humans of their own volition. Finally, Loeg mentions the alleged existence of corrupted C'maoghs, turned mad by Morcail or by the use of Oradh (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 147). As for the Lead, only experience and time will make them able to more accurately understand what this earlier encounter with the C'maoghs was about.



Optional scene: Obtaining the Oghamic stones

If the Leader wishes it, the scenario can be lengthened by portraying how the PC acquired each Ogham in their possession. This will also be an opportunity to develop the Lead's relationship with Finn. However, the Leader must take care that the other Players are not left hanging. Thus, the acquisition of the Oghamic stones should involve Supports or Extras, or even the other Players' own Characters.

For each stone, the Leader can imagine a specific scene, like the previous one about the Light Ogham. Here are a few suggestions covering the Oghamic stones owned by Adeliane:

Calm Water. Loeg wants the PC to try to quiet a tumultuous waterfall. As the Lead does so, they will be able to cross it without being swept away, which will take the Character into a cavern where a few ancient wall paintings can still be deciphered. The Demorthèn will take this opportunity to speak of the Aergewin and the huge Feondas that roamed the surface of Esteren at the time (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 26).



Tracking. The PC accompanies a group of foragers, and one member of the expedition disappears. The Leader can play this episode as tense, in the middle of the forest, bathed in a disquieting darkness. With the Ogham, the Lead will be able to find the missing individual. A quick examination will show that the person ate forbidden fruits, which triggered a sort of hallucinatory state. Afterward, Loeg will remind the PC of the dangers of nature: even the most appetizing plants can hide great danger, for example, deadly Feondas like the Nimhs Cuirs (see Book 2 – Travels, p. 188).



Calyre. For this test, the Lead must accompany a young shepherd and try to follow his Calyres into the mountain, sometimes scrambling along narrow ridges or leaping from one ledge to another. This can quickly become dangerous, to such an extent that the PC will need the power of the Ogham to progress, lest they expose themselves to excessive danger. During this test, the Lead can save a young Calyre, fight a wild animal (such as an eagle), or befriend the shepherd, Nemed.



Healing. The Lead may try to rescue a wounded living being–but not a sick one, as this would require the Cure Ogham. This may be an inhabitant of Dearg or an animal.



Optional scene: Finn's departure

Robyn Miller – Riven : The Sequel to Myst – II – Moeity prison

It may be interesting to play through the death of Finn's sister and his subsequent departure for Reizh, but this time, from the point of view of this Focus's Lead. Using Robyn Miller's music will stress this bridging between the two scenarios, particularly if the same tracks were played during the arc of Ethics (see p. 125-126).

Scene 3: A grim anniversary

Supports: Avel, Wailen, Loeg, Yldiane. **Extras**: The Lead's parents.

Several years have come and gone. This scene takes place as the anniversary of Avel's death draws near, the boy having disappeared at the beginning of the fall of 898. The Lead felt the need to come back to the location of the tragedy to spend time in contemplation. The Character is walking alone along the banks of the Nuarranta, the Black River. The atmosphere is ghostly: trees fade into the mist, it is cold, and the dampness sticks to the Lead's clothes.

Elend – Winds devouring men – 6 – Winds devouring men

This music will be all the more expressive if it was previously used by the Leader in the scenario "Poison" (included in Book 0 – Prologue), since the phenomenon at hand is similar to what the PCs may have experienced during that scenario.

The apparition from the river

Soon, the Lead feels an inner pressure, an unpleasant sensation that turns into distress as a glow seems to appear from the depths of the river. Suddenly, bubbles burst at the surface of the water, and the Lead is stunned before a horrible sight: Avel rises from the Nuarranta, his hair plastered to his face, his eyes black. He advances toward the Lead, uttering accusations, claiming that they abandoned him.

Then, enter Wailen. Her countenance is grim, her voice is cold. She asks the Lead what is happening to them... then starts haranguing the PC as well, accusing them not only of having caused the death of their own parents, but also the disappearance of their younger sister, who decided to run away from Melwan, hounded by this dark tragedy that had been weighing on her shoulders for years. Finally, Wailen blames the Lead for having abandoned her, depriving her of a Ionnthén and dooming Melwan to a bleak future at the mercy of the Mac Lyrs.

Depending on the number of Players present, it is then the turn of the Lead's parents and Yldiane (or another NPC, if the Player has designed another sibling for the Lead) to join this funeral procession and torment the PC.

A voice then makes itself heard inside the Lead's mind, a hissing whisper that says: "I can help you... Just say the word..." Unwillingly, the PC hears themselves accept the invitation. Suddenly, a huge serpent with silvery scales rises from the river. Majestic and dreadful at the same time, its maw opens and it swallows Avel, as well as the other protagonists harassing the Lead, before disappearing again into the dark waters...

Finally, the Lead wakes up in bed, drenched in sweat. They feel feverish and hurt. As every year since Avel's disappearance, they feel increasingly sick as the anniversary of the tragedy approaches. The PC's master, Loeg, stands close by with a bowl of hot herbal tea and a few pieces of bread. He brings them to his pupil, obviously concerned with the Lead's health.



Scene 4: Fighting the intangible

Supports: Feust, Loeg. **Extras**: Inhabitants of Melwan.

Delphine Bois – Of Men and Obscurities – 16 – Dreams

This scene begins in the earliest years of the 10th century. The exact year has no importance; the Lead should simply be around 12 or 13 years of age. For more chronological details, the Leader can refer to the related section on p. 186-187. Loeg is well aware of the illness that weakens his Ionnthén. He is deeply concerned over the fact that his herbal remedies seem powerless to cure the fevers that have been recurring regularly for several years. For the whole duration of this scene, the Lead suffers a
-1 penalty to all rolls, which the Player can represent by keeping a token on their Character sheet.

The Ionnthén's illness

Loeg is worried about his Ionnthén's future. The illness's persistence and its repeating nature might prove a serious danger in the long term. Indeed, Demorthèn face many ordeals throughout their existence, and contact with the spirits of nature requires a strong, healthy mind. The temptation of turning Morcail is never far, and the Lead's state of weakness might lure them toward the dark side of the ancestral arts. As the years pass and the Ionnthén's training is nearing its end, Loeg will take a moment to explain the situation. His point of view is simple: after all these years, the Lead must cast away this burden and grow out of it in order to fully dedicate themselves to the Demorthèn arts and to the mastery of the Sigil Rann.

This scene will show the Player that the illness the Character suffers from is cyclical: as the anniversary of Avel's disappearance nears, the nightmares intensify and a fever sets in. The insert "An incurable illness: anniversary and nightmares"(p. 183-184) provides more details regarding the effects of this recurring illness.

Remember what was mentioned in this Focus's Prologue: "The question is not how the PC will react as much as what the Character will feel in a given situation. This is the dramatic stake of this Focus. Guilt appears as an actual adversary (just like a foe to fight or a puzzle to solve) that threatens the Lead and regarding which the PC will have to take a stance." As the Lead suffers from an intangible illness, how will the Player decide to portray the Character? Will they brood, wracked by guilt? Will they rage against the illness that gnaws at them? Will they feel a form of strange elation in the face of this mysterious phenomenon?

The alienist theory

Some time later, the Lead hears of an alienist named Feust. This specialist in mental disorders hailing from Tulg Naomh is said to be in Dearg for a few days. According to the locals, since 898, the alienist has been sent by the duchess of Tulg Naomh to the Fortress of Smiorail several times each year, and the alleged reasons are as wild as they are numerous: a conspiracy, the sending of secret messages (the alienist is said to actually be a spy), and so on. The rumors actually hold some inkling of truth: Feust comes at the direct demand of the Hilderin knight Argan, who desperately seeks a way to rid himself of the pains he suffers from. But of course, no one knows about this except for Loeg, who suspects the true reason for the alienist's presence (see "The Inner Enemy" on p. 40). Feust knows about the Lead's case, but so far, Loeg has always prevented the two from meeting. However, after several years, Loeg relents, as he feels in over his head.
Meeting the alienist will be an opportunity for the Lead to discover a new point of view about their illness. Feust will urge the Lead to get some distance from the magical theories concerning possessions and other haunting phenomena. He will share his interpretation: inner traumas result in various scars, which may explain the phenomena the Lead suffers from. One's mind, just like one's body, can be healed. He will ask the Lead what Loeg's advice is, and, as opposed to the Demorthèn, he will counsel against forgetting the traumatic event. Instead, the Lead must mourn Avel, accepting his passing and relieving their conscience. To begin with, the PC should try to obtain the parents' forgiveness. If nothing is done in that regard, the traumatic symptoms will

likely persist, and may even worsen. However, desperately trying to understand what occurred on that day may lock the Lead into an endless obsession, and searching for Avel's body seems to be a much too dangerous quest. The Lead should try to make peace with their past, not try to get to the bottom of the case at any cost.





If the alienist is given the time to do so, he may attempt a diagnosis (see Book 1 – Universe, "Diagnosis," p. 279). He will ask the Lead questions about their story, taking notes, asking them to clarify what they feel, whether they had any particular impressions, etc.

Feust's diagnosis will be that the Lead is affected by a Syndrome of False Perceptions (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 276). He will readily share his opinions with the Lead and urge them to take their illness seriously, warning them to not ignore it. Moved by the Ionnthén's distress, he will give them two doses of analgesics to use in case of crisis (see "An intangible illness: anniversary and nightmares" on p. 183-184).

Act 3: Different paths

The third act introduces other theories about the Lead's illness and the mystery of Avel's passing. For an overview of these various conceptions, the Leader may refer to "On the various interpretations of nightmares" on p. 180. These indications will give the Player food for thought to understand what is happening to their Character, but they will also help the Leader (with the support of the Players portraying the Supports and Extras) to maintain doubt, as described in the paragraph "Keeping the Player in doubt" on p. 182-183.

A different profession

It may be that the Player who chose the narrative arc of Guilt has designed a Character who is not to become a Demorthèn. This possibility is also covered on p. 187, in "What if the Lead is not to become a Demorthèn?" The different theories presented throughout the Focus (alienist, occultist, religious, or Magientist) are many opportunities for the PC to embrace a new path. If the Player has chosen a wholly unrelated career (such as that of knight), the Leader can adapt the scenario accordingly.

Earrach Feis and military service

The scenario's third act coincides with the Lead entering adulthood. If the Leader wishes to develop this particular moment of the PC's life, inspiration can be drawn from the game aid on Earrach Feis detailed on p. 98-99. As with Finn's departure to Reizh, it is possible for the stories of the various Focuses to intersect. The same goes for the military service: it is not intended to be part of this Focus, but the Leader is free to decide otherwise, particularly if it is an important part of the Lead's background as imagined by the Player. For example, the service taking place at the Fortress of Smiorail is the perfect opportunity to feature Argan, who will play a major part in the rest of the campaign.

Scene 1: Spiritualism session

Supports: Alban. **Extras**: Maella, Herven, and other young people of Dearg.

More years have passed, and the Lead is now 16, which means the PC is now considered an adult by the community. One day, they are approached by Alban Elarig. This young, gangly man is the heir to Dearg's mines, which his family owns. Much to his father's despair, Alban is much more interested in scholarly pursuits than in mining. More information on Dearg's mines and on the Elarigs is provided on p. 22. Alban has discovered an old, esoteric book in the family house's attic, and has become fascinated with this discipline. Remembering what has been happening to the Lead, he decides to come to them to learn more and offer to organize a spiritualism session.

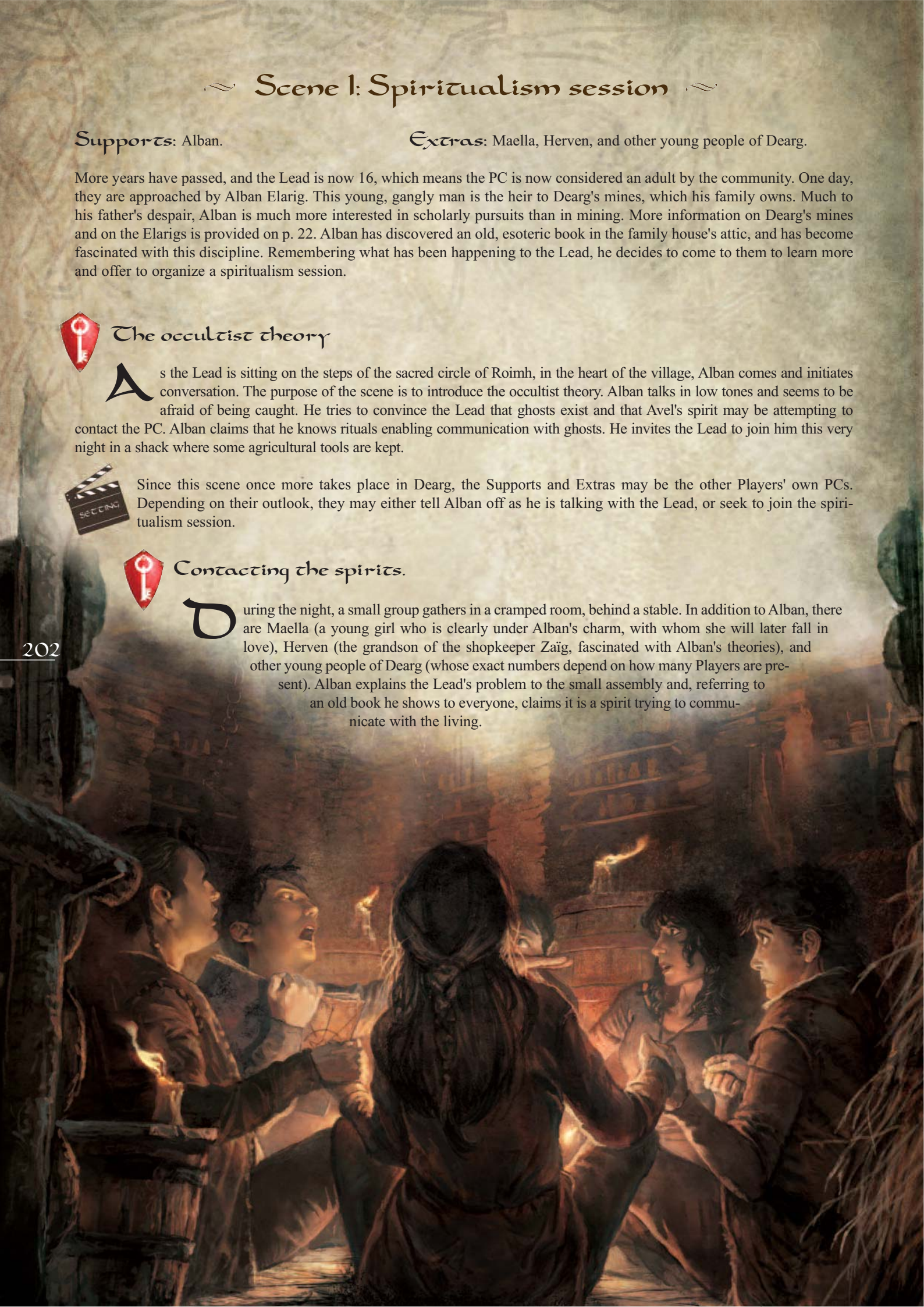
The occultist theory

As the Lead is sitting on the steps of the sacred circle of Roimh, in the heart of the village, Alban comes and initiates conversation. The purpose of the scene is to introduce the occultist theory. Alban talks in low tones and seems to be afraid of being caught. He tries to convince the Lead that ghosts exist and that Avel's spirit may be attempting to contact the PC. Alban claims that he knows rituals enabling communication with ghosts. He invites the Lead to join him this very night in a shack where some agricultural tools are kept.

Since this scene once more takes place in Dearg, the Supports and Extras may be the other Players' own PCs. Depending on their outlook, they may either tell Alban off as he is talking with the Lead, or seek to join the spiritualism session.

Contacting the spirits.

During the night, a small group gathers in a cramped room, behind a stable. In addition to Alban, there are Maella (a young girl who is clearly under Alban's charm, with whom she will later fall in love), Herven (the grandson of the shopkeeper Zaïg, fascinated with Alban's theories), and other young people of Dearg (whose exact numbers depend on how many Players are present). Alban explains the Lead's problem to the small assembly and, referring to an old book he shows to everyone, claims it is a spirit trying to communicate with the living.



Candles are lit, a circle is drawn on the floor. Alban intones a few elaborate sentences, animated by a fervor that captivates the small audience. As he calls forth the spirit, the candles are snuffed out, bringing darkness into the small room. The Lead feels a gust of freezing air and starts to feel queasy. Alban calls in the dark: “Spirit of Avel, come forth!” Then, he painstakingly lights the candles again, and everyone can see that a strange symbol has been scrawled in the middle of the circle. One of the children immediately accuses Alban of having drawn it himself, which the young man denies. Although he cannot manage to make sense of the sign, he considers it proof that the spirit is present. Actually, it is a random scribble resulting from the earlier confusion, which an attentive observer may attest with a Complicated (14) Perception (Alertness) roll. However, Avel's spirit is not far away, and he is actually attempting to answer Alban's calls.

The session proceeds with Alban laying a pebble, onto which an arrow has been carved, within the circle. He asks another question, “Avel, are you here to get revenge?” to which there is no answer. When Alban asks whether Avel is here to help them, the pebble quivers and turns to point at the Lead. Between a few stifled cries, Alban is once more accused of having rigged the session. The apprentice occultist claims he has done nothing. He explains that according to his readings, there are two types of ghosts: the vengeful and the friendly. The latter can behave as guardians or bring help. Alban does not have the time to elaborate on this, as noises and echoing voices rouse the sudden fear that he and his companions might be caught by villagers, and since they are now adults, they would be expected to answer for their actions as such. Everything is packed in a hurry, and the small gathering scatters in the night. If the Lead tries to meet Alban again, it will not be possible, as he will have been sent to another vale for his military service.

Red Fall

In Book 0 – Prologue, the scenario “Red Fall” depicts Alban. His passion for occultism and his abusive relationship with his father lead him to irreparable acts. If the PCs have not played this scenario yet, this scene can be a convenient preamble as it will introduce the Elarigs. If the scenario has already been played, this part of the Focus will still be an interesting retrospective.

Optional scene: the Magientist Talacien

Alban Elarig or another Character can give the Lead the idea to visit the Magientist who has recently settled in Neart's Stronghold, which guards the pass connecting the Vale of Dearg to the Vale of Melwan. The PC may be motivated by the desire to learn more about their peculiar affliction. At the time of this scene, repairs are still in progress at the former Inguard, so that Talacien and his men can use it as a field laboratory.

Talacien hails from the Reizhite capital, Baldh-Ruoch. He was sent by his university to this region of Taol-Kaer, officially with the purpose of studying the soils around Melwan, unofficially to investigate the heart of the mountain. It was thanks to the active support of Maoda Mac Lyr, Melwan's regent, that he was able to obtain a royal edict authorizing him to carry out such research. Despite a cold, distant demeanor, Talacien is a humanist who sincerely believes that Magience can improve mankind's living conditions.

One of Talacien's main objectives is to confirm whether the soil of this land is rich in energy, and gathering testimonies of poisonings is often the most efficient way to establish the presence of fossil Flux. If directly asked about his objectives, Talacien will remain evasive about his mission, lest he betray a professional secret that he must respect.

If the Lead asks the Magientist for advice about their condition, he will take the time to listen to the PC and give his opinion, even though matters of the mind are not his specialty. Talacien shares the alienists' opinion, attributing the PC's problems to scars resulting from their childhood trauma. He warns them against supernaturally-oriented theories, since they might just be blinders against the truth. As the conversation ends, Talacien may bring in a new element, asking the PC if they could not have suffered from Flux intoxication, particularly from what the Demorthèn call “Nimheil.” Indeed, fossil Flux can result in personality disorders or hallucinations. Studies have shown that its effects are diverse and unpredictable. Fossil Flux can be deadly, but in non-lethal amounts, in certain circumstances, an exposed person can develop uncanny abilities.

Scene 2: A prayer for Expiation

Supports: Firmin. **Extras**: Joris, Ronan, Maëlys.

This scene will allow the Leader to show the Player portraying the Lead how the faithful of the Temple perceive what is happening to the PC. It can be introduced in various manners, such as:

- Joris (or the PC following the arc of Adoption) can propose that the Lead meet his adoptive father, Firmin, and ask him for counsel.
- The Lead may have made friends with Maëlys (a farmer's daughter, in love with Ronan, see p. 24). She will try to convince the Lead to pay a visit to the monk Firmin.

The Leader can use the game aid about Alestor's Monastery (also included on p. 24) and draw elements from the Focus "Mac Thogail: The Legacy of the Rose" to flesh out this scene.



Finding peace

Firmin lends a careful ear to the Lead's tale and quickly goes over how the adepts of the Temple perceive such phenomena. The PC's visions and suffering are fed by the Character's own guilt. Prayer and penance can be a good way to get rid of these persistent reminders. The monk gingerly mentions the possibility of a possession by a demon of Limbo that only an exorcism could end. He urges the Lead to be careful and to not hesitate to come back to him, even if the PC ends up embracing another path, such as that of a Demorthèn. Against the influence of Limbo, only the One can bring succor.



If the Lead's future profession is one of the six orders of the Temple, this scene is a very good time to introduce this choice. In this case, the Leader can decide that finding faith and drawing solace from prayer neutralizes the negative effects of the anniversary of Avel's disappearance. As a result, the PC's -1 penalty subsides, the same as if the PC follows a medical treatment.

Optional scene: The exorcism

If the Leader wishes to give this Focus a more horrific and supernatural flavor, Joris and Firmin can attempt to carry out an exorcism. Note that choosing this option will go against maintaining doubt regarding the true nature of the phenomena affecting the Lead.

The monk is not comfortable with such practices, which are usually the purview of priests and Sigires. His adoptive son, Joris, has noticed he owns a book on the subject, and will speak to the Lead about it. Of course, Firmin will have to be convinced to take part in the ritual.

After meeting the Lead, Firmin's nights are troubled by several strange dreams. This persuades him that the PC's case may be more worrying than he suspected. For Firmin, this is a serious matter, since if the PC is possessed by a demon of Limbo, things may gradually get out of control: what would happen should the demon get the upper hand?

During the exorcism, Firmin will call upon the One to drive out the demon that poisons the PC's soul. The scene can unfold quite spectacularly. In fact, Avel's spirit will attempt to resist the monk's intervention by manifesting in some way or another. It will not appear directly, but may attempt to possess the Lead and attack Firmin. If the Leader wishes to add another helping of horrific effects, the Lead's face and body can twitch, bend, and contort in impossible ways. The classic horror movie "The Exorcist," directed by William Friedkin, is an obvious source of inspiration. It would make sense for this scene to be all the more important if the arc of Guilt is meant to have strong religious overtones, in particular if the Lead is to become a faithful of the Temple.

Even if the symptoms seem to abate, come the next anniversary of Avel's disappearance, the Lead will realize with horror that the illness they suffer from has not disappeared.

Optional scene: A journey to Expiation

Instead of an exorcism, another possibility consists of having the Lead accompany Firmin and Joris on their journey toward the town of Expiation. This takes place in 905, which can fit into this Focus's chronology. This implies that the Players haven't been through "Mac Thogail: The Legacy of the Rose" yet, and that the Leader proceed with Act 2 of that Focus dedicated to the arc of Adoption. A few adaptations will be necessary, but this can prove interesting, particularly if the Lead of the arc of Guilt is to join one of the orders of the Temple.

Scene 3: The beast

Supports: Loeg and/or Feust and/or Wailen, Avel.

Extras: Galleg (a trapper from Dearg), members of the Lead's escort.

This scene covers the Lead's journey back to their native village, Melwan. The purpose is to confront the Lead with a Feond and give the PC the opportunity to understand that the ghost that haunts them can also be a protector.

Depending on the direction the Lead's Player has chosen, this scene's starting point will be different. It can also vary in accordance with the supernatural or psychological atmosphere that the Leader wishes to set for the game.

A journey of self-discovery. If the Lead is to become a Demorthèn and the Leader wishes to give the end of the Focus a supernatural turn, the PC undertakes the journey toward Melwan by order of Loeg, who wishes to test his pupil. Indeed, the Demorthèn is worried about his Ionnthén's fragile health, which he sees as the result of an inner fight against the dark facet of the sacred powers: the path of the Morcail. The master and pupil can be escorted by several trappers from Dearg, including Galleg, an NPC that the PCs will meet again during the last act of the campaign. Feust being part of the journey is a possibility, but Loeg may oppose it. Whoever is with them, the Demorthèn goes alone with his pupil to the bank of the Black River to perform a rite of initiation.

A cathartic test. Feust the alienist may be at the origin of the journey to Melwan. This fits particularly well if the Leader prefers to stress the psychological aspect of the Focus. As the Lead's condition shows no sign of improvement, his purpose is to have the PC face their fear directly in the hope of obtaining a cathartic effect. The fact is that the Lead's case remains a mystery to Feust, and he is starting to run out of ideas to cure them...

Another way of thinking. If the Player has chosen a profession other than Demorthèn for the PC, the Lead's new mentor can be the reason for the journey to Melwan. For example, if the Lead wishes to become a knight, they may wish to enroll at the Mac Lyrs', under the tutelage of the Knight Aessan rather than be under the questionable influence of the Hilderin Argan and his aides. If they wish to become a scholar, getting access to the Mac Lyrs' library would be a good starting point. The possibilities are many, and the Leader is advised to prepare some plot point related to the Player's chosen profession. In this case, Feust will still be willing to accompany the PC in order to help them recover from the illness that affects them (see "A cathartic test" above).

Whichever version the Leader proceeds with, the Lead and their traveling companions are heading toward Melwan. As the small group crosses the pass leading to their destination and goes down into the vale, they face a terrifying encounter.

Delphine Bois – Of Men and Obscurities – 17 – The Loss

To instill a disquieting mood, playing fitting music, like this piece from Delphine Bois' album, can be particularly effective.

Here are a few atmospheric notes that the Leader can feed into the description of the setting: the party is following a path through the forest that leads to Melwan. The sky is low, and the thick foliage contributes to diminishing the pale sunlight. Despite being late afternoon, a damp mist lingers and seeps into the travelers' very bones. The earth has turned muddier and muddier, sticking to the Characters' boots. Aside from the wind whistling through the branches, there is complete silence. Anyone experienced in natural environments will be quick to notice this anomaly and point out that such a silence does not bode well. As the group progresses, the soil gets more and more sodden, becoming boggy in places. A Varigal or any Character who knows the region will be most surprised: bogs do not pop out of nowhere, which nevertheless seems to be the case here.

A frightening discovery

In a ditch near the road, one of the travelers catches sight of a sort of chitinous corpse, half buried in the soft ground. The remains look like crab shells emptied from the inside, of a downright horrific size. A closer inspection will reveal that the shell fragments must have been joined together to form a sort of monstrous centipede. If the Players have been through the scenario "Loch Varn" included in Book 0 – Prologue, the Leader is advised to read the insert "Loch Varn's mutant insects" presented on the next page.
A more thorough analysis will confirm that these are the remains of some unknown species of giant insect. The Characters can gather a few samples. Someone learned in Occultism or Demorthèn Mysteries will be able to deduce that it was probably not a Feond, since they are known to decompose almost instantly upon death, which isn't the case for the gigantic carcass.

Loch Varn's mutant insects



If the Players have been through the scenario Loch Varn (of Book 0 – Prologue), the centipede-like remains will certainly remind them of the giant insects they encountered in that scenario.

Actually, this scene of the Focus will most likely predate the events of Loch Varn. This will suggest a possible link between the scenarios of Book 0 and what seems to be transpiring in Dearg.

This may lead the Players to ask themselves questions: what connection is there between the presence of a bog, a giant insect, and a Feond?

The Feond's attack

Before the PCs can reflect on the chitinous remains any further, one of them hears creaking noises from the forest. The source is nearby, but the low light and fog seriously hamper visibility. Then, a blood-curdling howl like that of no known species tears through the tense silence right before a beast appears and rushes toward the PCs. The mere sight of the monster results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check. Each Player is free to portray their Character's reaction in accordance with the check's result, whether they failed or passed it.

The creature looks remotely like a boar. It is a hulking abomination with tusks sticking out of its misshapen snout. Its eyes show a strange gleam, while its body, whose skin seems to quiver unhealthily, looks like a mixture of earth, rotten flesh, and knotty bark. The Leader can find the characteristics of this Feond on p. 222.

The Lead will be the target of the first assault, which will send the PC flying several yards backward. Wounded, barely conscious, the Lead will then have a vision...

A spectral protector

The dazed PC confusedly sees the ghostly shape of Avel close to them. Avel whispers that he can help the Lead drive the Feond back, and that all they need to do is call him. For the Player, this last sentence should be eerily reminiscent of the vision the Lead had during the key scene "The apparition from the river" (see Act 2, Scene 3: A grim anniversary).

If the PC decides to call upon the ghost, this will trigger the power Repel Feondas (see p. 182). As the beast rushes the Lead again, they briefly catch an uncertain sight of Avel, his features contorted, his mouth gaping, howling toward the Feond. The creature freezes, stopping abruptly, its composite body distorted by an invisible force. With a horrible growl, the monster turns back and disappears into the forest.

Driving the Feond back by calling upon Avel is not without a price. The Leader must ask the Player to make an Influence Test, without explaining the reason (see "Metamorphosis checks" on p. 183).

What if the PC refuses Avel's help?

If the Player does not wish to call upon Avel's powers, the Leader should not force them. On the contrary, the Player must feel free to make the decision they wish, and the Leader should stress this if necessary.

If the Player refuses, the Feond will be defeated by the party. If the Leader wants to add a touch of horror, one of the Extras may be killed, with the exception of Galleg, who is meant to return later during the campaign.

Optional scene: Portraying the Lead's power

If the Lead summons the power Repel Feondas, the scene's witnesses will have legitimate questions about what just happened.

If Loeg is here, he will at first remain nonplussed. He will stay silent for several hours before having a talk with his Ionnthén. He will ask the Lead questions and will urge them to be as precise as possible regarding the experience. If the Lead mentions Avel, Loeg will remind the PC of the Demorthèn's understanding of such phenomena: the dreams, nightmares, and visions that the PC witnesses may be metaphorical messages sent by the C'maoghs to test the initiate. Loeg is actually wondering whether the Lead unwittingly made use of the art of the Liadh, which consists of a direct connection

with the spirits of nature, without need for Oghamic stones. If this is the case, his pupil has a very rare gift. However, his suspicion is that the Lead's obsession with Avel confuses and corrupts the connection with the C'maoghs. Being thus influenced by one's own emotions can be dangerous and lead straight to the path of the Morcail and their defiled art, the Oradh.
If the alienist Feust is here, he did not see the precise moment when the Feond stopped dead in its tracks. His opinion will be rather reserved: "I do not understand what occurred, but believing in a supernatural explanation would be forsaking our ability to unveil the mysteries of this world. The nature of Feondas may be more complex than we usually believe..." He will attempt to comfort the Lead while asking the other members of the party not to fill the PC's mind with this ghost nonsense.



By giving each Player information about how their Character perceives the events and the manifestations of which the Lead is the focus, the Leader will fuel the interactions between the PCs and help foster the pleasure of mulling over various theories. After all, all they have to work with are hypotheses to understand what is happening to the Lead. The persistence of this mystery is a very efficient tool to keep the Players interested in the arc.

Scene 4: Back to the Black River

Supports: Loeg and/or Feust and/or Wailen, Avel

Extras: Galleg (a trapper from Dearg), members of the Lead's escort, inhabitants of Melwan.

Following Adeliane's backstory (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 186), it is said that on a year she fell seriously ill (Disadvantage: Aftermath), her mentor decided to bring her back to the Black River, where she had seen the C'moaghs and where Avel disappeared. This scene can actually be very different depending on the reason the Lead goes to Melwan. It will be more supernatural if Loeg led the PC, and more psychological if Feust did (see the previous scene: "A journey of self-discovery" and "A cathartic test").

The Demorthèn initiation

Loeg grows increasingly afraid that his pupil might not be strong enough to bear the responsibilities of the Demorthèn and will be instead lured to the path of the Morcail. However, he also wonders if the Lead does not have a unique gift that could open them to the sacred knowledge of the Liadh. To test this possibility, Loeg intends to have the Ionnthén face their demons to see how the PC will react. Deep inside, the Demorthèn is considering the possibility of killing his pupil if he feels that the Lead may give in and yield to the temptation of the Oradh. It is an extreme recourse, but one that he must not balk at if needed.
On the banks of the Black River, the Lead will feel faint. Loeg will order the PC to summon the C'maoghs by using the art of the Sigil Rann. This will be an opportunity for the Lead to use the Oghamic stones they got at the start of their career. The PC will have to pass at least a Standard (11) check to trigger a power (in accordance with the Summoning Chart presented on p. 246 of Book 1 – Universe). The Lead suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls, as if under the effect of the fever related to the anniversary of Avel's death (see the Prologue of this Focus, "An incurable illness: anniversary and nightmares").

Throughout this taxing ordeal, the Lead will hear voices inside their head. During this key scene, Avel will appear and will tell the PC about their mentor's intention: to kill the Lead. The ghost seems panicked and wants to protect the PC. Avel urges the PC to defend themselves and to attack Loeg. If the Players portraying the Supports are into it, the ensuing scene can be very intense. It may even lead to a fight between the mentor and his pupil. The Leader can give the Player portraying Loeg his Character sheet (included on p. 38). Loeg may use the third Circle of the Wound power to put the Lead out of harm's way. Despite his initial resolution, Loeg will not find it in himself to kill his pupil. Depending on how the scene goes, the Leader may wish to stress the dramatic tension by bringing in Wailen. She could have been warned by Feust and come with him, which will make all the more sense if, as in Adeliane's story, she is the PC's grandmother: she will certainly want to save her grandchild. It may also be that the PC gets the drop on Loeg and ends up in a position to actually kill him. The Leader should also prevent this (once more with Feust or Wailen's intervention, for example), since the Demorthèn is meant to play an important part in the remainder of the campaign. Depending on how the scene unfolds, Loeg may become an enemy of the Lead (see "Ally and Enemy," in the "Advanced Character Creation" chapter, p. 61).



A cathartic test

In the other version of this epilogue-like moment, the return to the Black River is organized by Feust. As they come back to this place, the Lead will be overwhelmed with very strong emotions. A great sadness will overcome the PC. There will be no supernatural manifestation, which will steel Feust's initial conviction that what the Lead suffers from is psychological trauma.

Feust tries to comfort the Lead by explaining that the PC's suffering is related to a grief that they cannot seem to cope with. Finding Avel's body would certainly be a great relief, both for the Lead and for the parents of the missing child. However, given how little success the search party had in the past, this probably won't be possible. The Lead needs to come to terms with the disappearance.

A new profession for the Lead

The Lead may have come back to Melwan for another reason, particularly if the Player wants their PC to follow a path other than that of the Demorthèn (see “Another way of thinking,” p. 205). This fifth scene may be used as an epilogue as the Lead meets their new mentor. If lengthening the Focus is not a problem, the Leader may even add one or several specific scenes related to this new profession.

Ryuchi Sakamoto – Gohatto OST– 21 – Gohatto (Piano Version)

The Focus reaches its conclusion as the Lead goes back to Dearg. The Leader should take the time to describe an overhead view of the vertiginous landscapes of this high mountain region. Far away, a small group of travelers can be seen, trudging along a rocky path, surrounded by a forest of conifers sometimes sparse, sometimes so dense it forms a dark, compact mass. Then, there is the unclear sight of the scaly, gleaming body of a giant snake, slithering through the forest, sometimes disappearing only to reappear some distance away, its smooth back reflecting the pale light of day.

As the reptile inexorably gets closer to the path on which the travelers are walking, the Focus ends on a scene showing the Lead waking up with a start close to a campfire. Dearg is not very far now, and the Lead's companions tell them to get ready...

Determination points and Experience

This Focus earns the Lead between 0 and 5 Determination points, depending on how concerned the PC felt about Avel's story as well as how the Player portrayed their guilt and the nightmarish visions (see p. 81 for more information).

The other Players also get Experience points for their PCs, even if they were not present during the scenario. The attribution system is the same as the one described on p. 228 of Book 1 – Universe.



Part 3:
Scourge

This chapter marks the moment the PCs start playing together after each of them has gone through their own Focus. The scenario “Vestiges” will bring them back to Dearg's daily life while introducing the first key elements of the campaign. Things will then quickly escalate, and the Vale will find itself threatened by an unfathomable danger...

- Chapter 1: Winter Paths
- Chapter 2: Ravages

Chapter 1
Winter Paths



« We'll talk about all that next time children, it's time to go home!"
The children had stopped listening to her, and they ran away laughing. No more schooling for today! Céliane affectionately watched them go. Despite the daily hardships, they remained as carefree and outgoing as ever.
Some distance away, her father Baorìg stood near the village well. The young woman joined him, suddenly feeling tense. "They found dead birds near Melwan's well. It was Nimheil, poison. Many people have been taken by this scourge."
Céliane kept silent. Since the beginning of fall, her father had been fearful of something. He had an intuition, the feeling that an imminent threat was hanging over the community of Fearìl. These last weeks, bad news had been arriving from the neighboring villages. Before Melwan, Loch Varn had endured dire trouble. And more recently, in Dearg, one of the members of the Elarig family had gone insane, apparently because of Nimheil as well...



Vestiges

Prologue

· **Style:** survival, exploration. · **Setting:** the Vale of Dearg. · **Season :** any

Summary: Caught by surprise by bad weather, threatened by a pack of wolves, the PCs are forced to take shelter in an underground network of tunnels. Finding a way out will be no simple task: the Characters will have to make their way through the bowels of Dearg's mountains, which seem to be haunted by monstrous reptilian creatures. In the end, the PCs reach a large room that looks like a sanctuary. One of the walls has crumbled and leads to an exit.

Stakes and aims: This scenario will be the true starting point of the official campaign, Dearg. After several Focuses that have shone a light on each of them individually, the PCs will be reunited for this scenario.



Grim déjà vu

This scenario will be a callback to the narrative arc of Guilt (that of Adeliane). The PC will feel emotions similar to those they had on the bank of the river, when they took the children to see the C'maoghs and one of them disappeared. This feeling of déjà vu will probably unsettle the PC, all the more so since they have the foreboding sense that the spirits of nature have an omen to deliver to mankind. If the PC's intuition is right, then even more than they can imagine, too much curiosity toward these phenomena may once more endanger their companions.

Horrific aspect

Horror plays an important part in this first scenario, taking the following shapes:
- being chased by a beast during the first scene;
- one of the PCs will be faced with what seems to be a grim repetition of a tragedy they previously experienced;
- a tense trek through dangerous caves, possibly inhabited by Feondas;
- visions and hallucinations triggered by something unfathomable.

Beginning the story: how old are the PCs?

As the game begins, the Leader quickly fills the Players in on the context. There are two possibilities between which the Leader can choose, depending on what best suits their inspiration and the Players' tastes:

The PCs are children. If all of the PCs have grown up together and have been living in Dearg from their early years, the Leader can have the Players play this scenario when their Characters are still children or adolescents. This option will stress the eerie feeling of déjà vu for the PC following the arc of Guilt: once more, the Lead will be in the middle of the wilderness with a group of children who are pursuing the enigmatic, thrilling goal of witnessing C'maoghs. The other Characters are fascinated with the PC's ability to feel the presence of spirits and have convinced the Lead to take them to this incredible manifestation. They have not yet reached the third age circle, so obviously, the whole venture is strictly forbidden by the community. For a while, the PC vehemently rejected this idea, but in the end, they gave in, feeling irresistibly attracted to the source of their visions, so strong and real to them.

As dusk settled and the evening mist started to rise, the PCs slipped out of the village to go to the cavern where the C'maoghs are supposed to hide. The expedition quickly takes a turn for the worse when they get lost in the forest and are caught unprepared by heavy rain. As the Characters struggle through this misadventure, guilt will again surge up inside the PC, who will fear a new tragedy.

The PCs are adults. This version is to be used if the PCs have never been together through the course of their childhood. The main stake is still to emphasize the emotions of the PC following the arc of Guilt. Even after many years, the Character will feel the same sort of fascination as when they felt pulled toward the C'maoghs' river. When this scenario begins, all of the PCs are at Matian's farm, which is located two hours away from Dearg (see p. 23). They have spent the last two days assisting and escorting one of their companions (preferably a Demorthèn), who has been busy gathering medicinal herbs before the cold kills the plants. The reason for the urgency is that accidental exposure has ruined some of the village's winter supplies. Restocking is therefore a vital matter.



Here are two suggestions to help create an engrossing atmosphere from the start of the session:

Lighting. The Leader and Players can dim the lights or use candles for more immersion into the story.

Music. Use music to set a mood matching the scenario's. It can be a gloomy, heavy song, which will suit the dramatic tone of this story focused on the emotions of the arc of Guilt's Lead. Here are two examples:

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

David Darling – Cello
12 – In November

Act I: Hounded

Summary: Lost in the middle of the forest, the PCs are relentlessly pelted by rain and stalked by an undefinable creature. As the situation becomes critical, they find a crevice in the mountain's foothills, in which they take shelter. However, their stroke of luck turns into yet another ordeal as they now trudge through a dangerous maze…

Scene 1: A shadow in the forest

The scenario's initial scene begins in the thick of things: the PCs running through the forest with a creature hot on their heels. Due to the sloping, uneven ground littered with dead branches and rocks, they are at risk of losing their footing. Each PC must pass a Standard (11) Feats (Running) check. Success means that the PC maintains a good pace. A failure means that the PC stumbles, potentially hurting themselves. Soon, the PCs' surroundings become silent, save for the steady patter of the rain. It seems that their pursuer has given up.

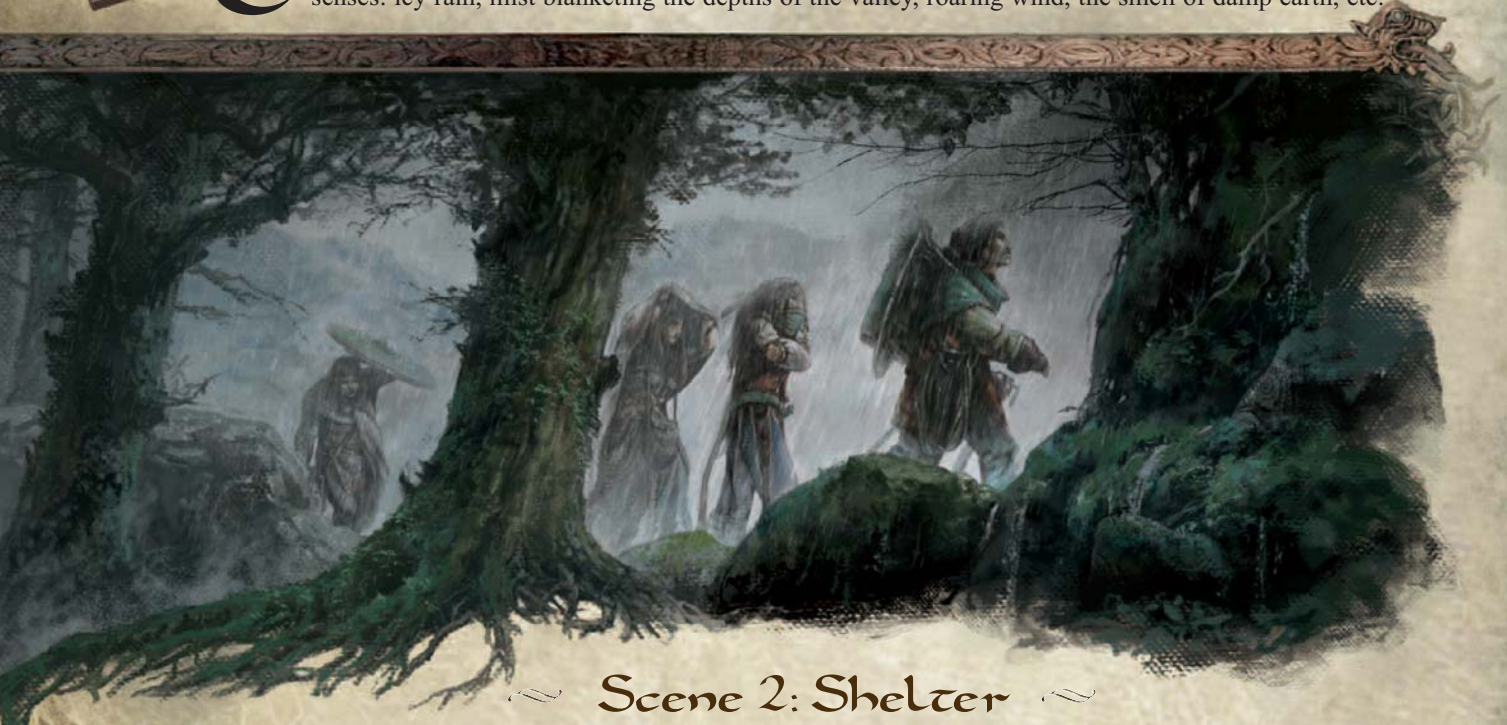
If the Leader has elected to play this scenario with the PCs as children, here is a possible description of the scene:

It's getting closer. You are running as fast as you can. Your feet churn through the muddy ground, branches whip at your faces, and you come close to falling several times... The cold air burns through your lungs every time you breathe, and the weak light inside the forest makes it impossible to see beyond a few dozen yards. You knew you should never have gone... Children are forbidden from going outside of the village. But you wanted to know more, see the C'maoghs with your own eyes, fascinated as you were with the stories about them. However, you got lost in the forest, and quickly took notice of several signs that left you worried: unusual silence, the seemingly motionless nature around you, and then the half-seen movements on the edges of your vision... Suddenly, you heard it trample down the forest slopes, barreling through the foliage and anything else in its path. Or maybe there were several of them? Regardless, you only exchanged a glance with your comrades and instinctively decided to run.
Unfortunately, your pursuer seems to be gaining ground. Deafened by the mad beating of your heart pulsing through your skull, you can hear no crying or howling behind you. They may be brigands, animals... or worse, Feondas, the monstrous beasts that haunt the woods of your land!

Finally, you dart out of the forest into the mountain's foothills. You fearfully look back, but nothing comes out of the woods. Whatever was chasing you has given up... unless it is waiting for a better moment to lunge at you?

Atmosphere

The Leader is advised to take some time to describe the environment and weather through the PCs' five senses: icy rain, mist blanketing the depths of the valley, roaring wind, the smell of damp earth, etc.



Scene 2: Shelter

As the PCs emerge from the forest, the rain intensifies. The only shelter seems to be a small plateau accessible through a narrow path. Unfortunately, between the bad weather and the mist covering the valley, orientation is all but impossible. This makes traveling most inadvisable, as any misstep could be fatal. As night starts falling, it becomes apparent that the PCs will have no choice but to set up camp in the heavy rain.

A feeling of guilt

The Leader can focus the narration on the feelings of the PC who has chosen the arc of Guilt. Elation gives way to fear as the situation keeps growing worse.

Scene 3: The wolves

As evening begins, the group will have to face another threat: famished wolves approach their camp and encircle the PCs, preventing any escape.
They slowly edge closer to the PCs, baring their teeth with obvious murderous intent. A PC passing a Complicated (14) Natural

Environment (Fauna and Flora) check will understand that the wolves are defending their territory, but that such aggressiveness is still abnormal, particularly in the middle of a thunderstorm. The wolves' howling will attract even more of them, which the PCs will hear approaching. The PCs are faced with a number of wolves equal to their own, but a Complicated (14) Perception (Alertness) will let them know that about twice as many are answering their packmates' calls and are making their way toward the plateau. After cutting off any possible retreat, the animals will attack. Fending them off with fire will only delay the inevitable.

Wolves

- Attack: 10.
- Defense: 10.
- Speed: 8.
- Potential: 2.
- Damage: 2.
- Health points: 15/10/5/3

During the fight, as the situation is becoming desperate, a rockslide occurs. With a prolonged, deafening crash, huge rocks fall down, tearing branches and mounds of earth along their path before smashing into the promontory where the PCs are standing, triggering a landslide. Spooked by this event, the wolves will scatter for a while. Meanwhile, each PC must make a Luck roll. Whoever rolls the lowest is swept away in the middle of the confusion. The Character is only stunned (1 Health point lost), but of course, the other PCs will only learn about it after a few minutes of suspense! The search to find the PC will also reveal a gap in the mountainside. Enlarged by the landslide, it seems to lead into a cave, which will be a welcome shelter as it seems like the wolves are ready to return, more determined and in greater numbers. The PCs must hurry if they want to get to the hollow before a new assault begins.

Storytelling the scene

The purpose of this scene is to threaten the PCs with a danger that will leave them no choice but to run away. Their only way out will take them to the continuation of the scenario, as the gap opens to a precipice from which the PCs will fall into the cold waters of an underground lake

Act 2: The bowels of the earth

Drenched, shivering, wandering through a maze of tunnels and natural caverns, the PCs try to find an exit. In the end, they will come upon what looks like an ancient tomb, one of the walls of which has crumbled, leading to an exit.

Scene 1: The underground lake

Anyone walking into the crevice falls down, as it opens into a very narrow ledge hanging over an underground lake. Fortunately, the water will break the PCs' fall. Jumping into the lake seems to be the only way to lose the wolves, but it will be impossible to climb back up, as another landslide will plug the fissure. Now, there seems to be nothing to do but to follow the small underground river trickling into the lake.



Underground

The air is stale and cold. The only noises are those of droplets falling to the ground, mixed with the PCs' breathing and footsteps. The walls are speckled with moss and pale mushrooms, as well as tufts of phosphorescent lichen that faintly demarcate branching paths and obstacles. If the PCs tear the lichen away to use it as a source of light, it will lose its glow within moments. Every now and then, the PCs will progress through near-total darkness.

Cold and disease

Being in the icy depths of the mountain with drenched clothes means that the PCs run the risk of catching a nasty fever. The Virulence is Mild (Complicated (14) Stamina check to resist it), the progression Short (1D10 hours), and it inflicts 2 Disease points every day for five days. Additionally, at the Leader's discretion, the PCs can suffer Cold damage (see the optional rule about hypothermia and Cold damage presented in the chapter "A Hostile Season," p. 48).

Flashbacks

The Leader can tell the PC following the narrative arc of Guilt that their Character is getting feelings reminiscent of the infamous night during which the child disappeared. These perceptions are strange; it is as if the PC could feel the vibrations of the mountain. The Leader can describe these sensations as a mixture of tense anxiety and fascination.

Scene 2: In the depths

The path the group follows quickly intersects with others, resulting in a sort of natural labyrinth. Very narrow crevices and passages will sometimes force the PCs to unload their gear and squeeze through. They will have to keep track of their progress in some fashion, or rely on Luck rolls to determine if they take the right path. Here are a few elements that the Leader can insert into this scene:

Slippery ground.
There are very steep slopes and slippery ground, due to the dampness, moss, or an underground streamlet. Feats rolls may be required to avoid a bad fall for 1 Damage point.

Bats.
The PCs reach a cavern whose ceiling is covered with a swarm of bats. They are inoffensive, but the sight and sound of them swarming out in a cacophonous screeching and beating of wings may cause the PCs to panic. If the Leader wishes for the encounter to be more supernatural and horrific, the bats may instead be Mealtags (see Book 2 – Travels, p. 187).

The pit.
A freezing draft rises from the depths, carrying disquieting noises. Passage is only possible via a narrow ledge, and falling may result in a broken limb or even in death. A Standard (11) Feats (Acrobatics) check is required, a failure resulting in 1D10 Damage points.

The underground river.
The PCs see glowing eyes in the dark and hear snake-like hisses. It is only fearful aquatic lizards that will be quick to skitter away. The PCs can catch sight of one of them, slithering along a wall, staring at the PCs before slipping into the water. If the PCs have played the scenario "Poison" from Book 0 – Prologue, such a seemingly innocent encounter may fill them with apprehension.

The mutant creatures

If the Leader decides to use this supernatural option, some of the amphibians living in the depths have been contaminated by fossil Flux, and their morphology has changed. The phenomenon is the same as the one described in "Loch Varn" for centipedes (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 52), as well as in "Poison" for reptiles (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 69). The Leader can even play on the repetition of certain scenes, in particular the discovery of sloughs.

Mutant lizards

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

The lizards have grown into oddly-shaped creatures, becoming cruel, carnivorous predators. The Leader might not necessarily have them attack; they can simply be used to heighten the tension and sense of danger. One of the PCs may glimpse a grotesque shape, which will probably lead the other PCs either not to believe it or, conversely, to panic at the mere mention of the monster.

Maintaining the atmosphere

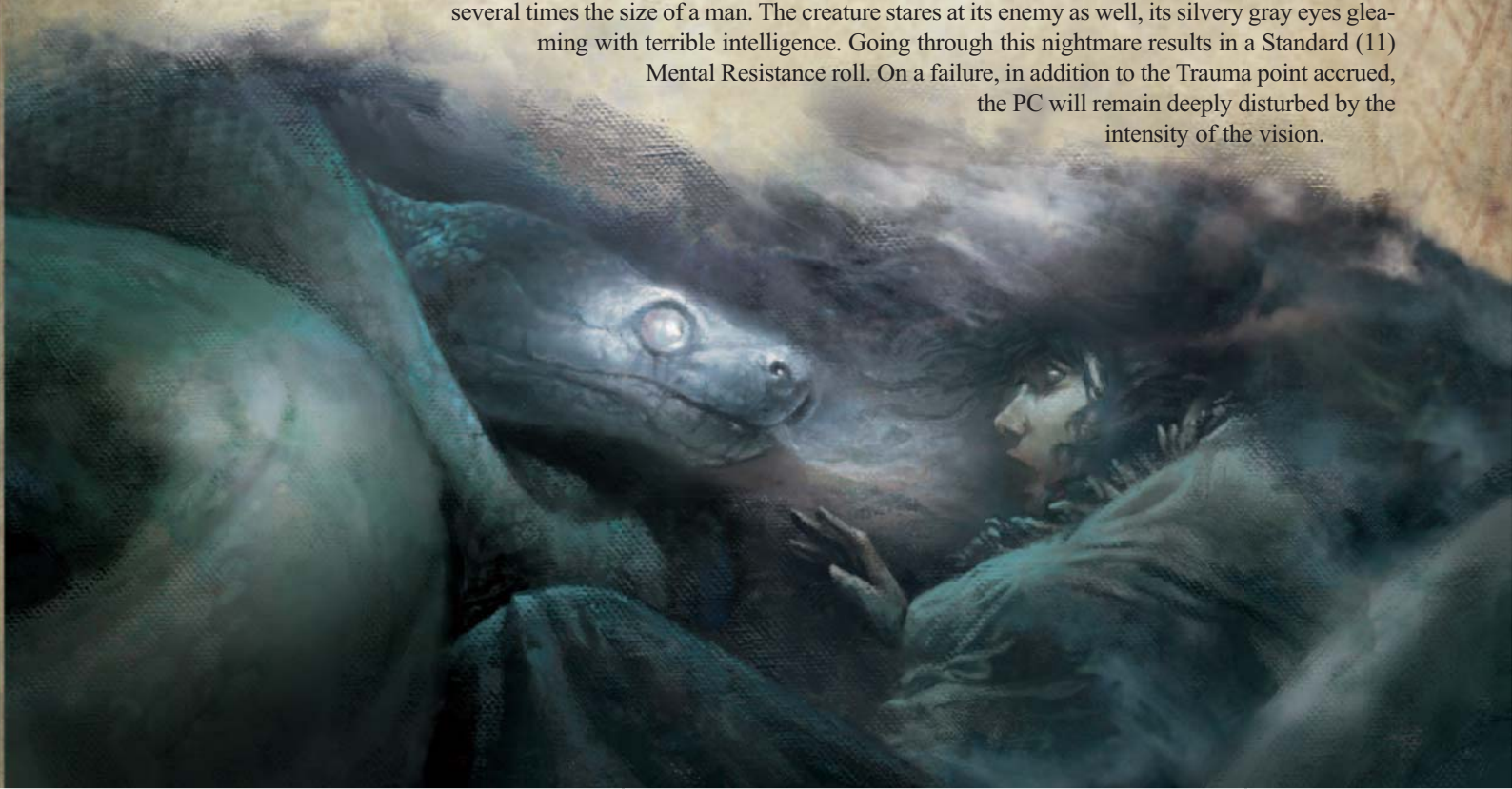
The scene "In the depths" can last several hours or be kept short. It should last as long as the PCs go along with it. The Leader can make use of the various possibilities described previously, alternate between quiet spells and tense moments, and must not hesitate to react to the PCs' ideas and actions. When the Players' interest starts flagging, the Leader can proceed to Scenes 3 and 4.

Scene 3: The vision

Elend – Winds devouring men – 6 – Winds devouring men

As the group is resting (or at any other time the Leader deems appropriate), the PC with the highest score in Empathy or the one with the narrative arc of Guilt dozes off and receives a terrifying vision.

The PC is running through an endless tunnel, chased by an unknown creature. Finally, the PC ends up cornered, a towering shadow looming above them. Raising their eyes, the PC finds themselves face to face with the maw of a reptilian monster several times the size of a man. The creature stares at its enemy as well, its silvery gray eyes gleaming with terrible intelligence. Going through this nightmare results in a Standard (11) Mental Resistance roll. On a failure, in addition to the Trauma point accrued, the PC will remain deeply disturbed by the intensity of the vision.



Nightmare or reality

The Leader can play on this ambiguity: has the PC fallen asleep? Is it a dream or reality? The Leader does not have to immediately tell the Player that their Character is experiencing a vision or a nightmare. If the Leader believes it can work, they can even take the illusion as far as to involve the other PCs in the scene, as a seemingly direct continuation of the previous one. This way, the Leader can foster the uncertainty regarding the actuality of the scene, and even play it as real… until the PC wakes up from their trance with a scream.

Scene 4: The sanctuary

The PCs are attracted by a glimmer ahead that seems to suggest that an exit is near. They will find a fissure two yards deep, leading into a dome-like cavern about ten yards in diameter. The walls have been smoothed and adorned with paintings. In the center, a simple stone slab stands. The room is littered with debris, and morning light filters from a small corridor.

There are three very important elements in this room, which the Leader will describe to the Players. The Leader should take some time to set the atmosphere, so that the scene sticks in the Players' minds.

The stone slab and the round mark.

Due to its shape and arrangement, it may seem like this room is a tomb. Actually, except for a round mark the size of a fist on the slab, there is no inscription or distinctive symbol of any sort. However, the Leader must make sure to mention the presence of the round mark.

The fresco.

A fresco is painted on the wall. It depicts ancient scenes where men and women fight immense creatures. In all likelihood, it is a representation of the Aergewin. It includes a drawing of a giant reptile, and the PC who had the vision during Scene 3 will find it has an eerie resemblance to the creature they "met." The PC following the arc of Guilt will also find it disturbingly familiar (see "The apparition from the river" on p. 199). Moreover, details in the fresco's style seem to indicate that this work of art from bygone times is not as ancient as it may appear. It is at most only a century or two old. This will be harder to spot for children (Complicated (14) Craft (Painting or any other appropriate specialty) or Erudition (History) check).



If the PCs have played the scenario "Red Fall" from Book 0 – Prologue, the representation of the reptile will be all the more disquieting in that the occultist book Memory of the World (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 73) seems to mention it.



The talisman of the Rose.

A PC who believes in the One or has chosen the narrative arc of Adoption will chance upon (stumbling upon it or discovering it under a piece of debris) a Hexcelsis, the six-pronged symbol of the Temple. However, there is something peculiar about this one: it is engraved with a rose, which means it must have belonged to a follower of the White Rose, the dissident order of the Temple hunted by the Sigires (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 153).

A small corridor goes out of the sanctuary, leading to a partly crumbled stone door a few steps away. This is where the glow comes from: a ray of morning sunlight shines on the ruins, filling the party with a soothing feeling of deliverance.

Act 3: Back to the surface

As they step outside, the PCs can see that the storm is over. However, a chilling mist still clings to the valley, hampering visibility. The group's journey through the bowels of the mountain has taken them several hours away from Dearg. Far away, they can see a plume of smoke, a welcome sight considering that the weather is still chancy.

The beast

If the Leader feels that the atmosphere is suitable for an action scene, the end of the scenario can feature the return of the beast that had been chasing the PCs at the beginning of the adventure. The nature of this threat is at the Leader's discretion. However, it would be more interesting for it not to actually be a Feond, unless the Leader and Players wish for supernatural elements to be at the forefront of the game.

Walking toward the source of the smoke, the PCs will reach a fortified farm. They will be welcomed by Matian and his small family and will finally be able to get some rest. Preferably, the Players should get acquainted and remain on good terms with the Matians, since they will be involved in an upcoming scenario. More information about this family is provided on p. 23. If this scenario takes place during the PCs' childhood, the Leader must not forget that the Matians will be younger, too. For example, the twins, Edel and Erein, will probably still be young girls. After a good night's sleep, it will be time for the PCs to go back to the village.

Epilogue

The epilogue will be an opportunity for the Leader to provide information about how visions are perceived depending on one's beliefs (see the insert below).

If the PCs have played the scenario as children, they will get a stern lecture for having snuck out of the village, which is strictly forbidden. The Character following the narrative arc of Guilt will have a conversation with the Demorthèn, Loeg, who is worried about their development. For him, this incident is serious, but it is also proof of the PC's potential. If the PC does not want to die young, they must learn to control themselves and to resist such impulses.

In the end, despite the scolding, the villagers will be happy to see the PCs alive. For the party, this episode will remain a significant shared memory, one that sealed their fate.

Visions according to different beliefs

The Demorthèn believe that visions are sent by the primordial spirits or the C'maoghs to guide mortals. How and why the PC was given such an omen will certainly be a source of wonder, particularly if the Character is not a Demorthèn.

For the Temple, visions are either divine messages or pernicious suggestions from evil spirits. In the PC's case, there is nothing that would conclusively indicate their source.

The Magientists have divergent opinions regarding these phenomena: some interpret them as hallucinations or the result of autosuggestion, some as "psychic residue" of obscure origin. Magience, while accepting the existence of the supernatural, has no unanimous explanation regarding its inner workings. Magientists are adamant, however, that the interpretation of the Demorthèn or other religious groups must be erroneous. The proponents of occultism may consider it a genuinely supernatural phenomenon, maybe the manifestation of a spirit attempting to communicate with mortals.

Cutag grod
The Feond boar

- Attack: 12
- Damage: 3
- Defense: 8
- Protection: 4
- Speed: 6
- Potential: 2
- Stamina: 10
- Health: 40/30/20/10
- Perception: 10
- Stealth: 4
- Feats: 12

Charge. For its first attack, circumstances allowing, the Feond charges its opponents. Its Damage is doubled (6) for this initial attack.

Poisoning. On a natural 10, the attack of a Feond boar successfully poisons its target. The venom's Virulence is Mild (Complicated (14) Stamina check), and it inflicts 2 Poison points every hour for up to 5 hours.

Terror. Seeing a Feond boar for the first time is a dreadful experience that immediately results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check. On a success, the Character is permanently immune to the effects of the Feond boar's Terror.

A creature of impressive size that looks like a nightmarish warthog, the Feond boar is known in Osag myths and legends under the name “Cutag Grod,” which literally means “putrid horn.” This refers to the beast's tusks, which can release a deadly venom in addition to running its enemies through. Its body is a disturbing fusion of bark, earth, and organic matter, resulting in both a sturdy shell and a hideous appearance.
The Feond boar is a solitary creature, born in the heart of bogs. It attacks any human it meets on sight and feeds on their flesh, which seems to contribute to the composition of its own body.

The boar god

My research had put me on the trail of a wild Osag clan, living in the deepest parts of the Western Swamps, south of the Castle of the Reeds. They were said to worship a sort of monstrous deity. The expedition came close to a tragic end, and I only owe my survival to my guide. We learned, at our own expense, that strangers are very quickly considered enemies and sacrificed to a putrid boar-like creature, from which the members of the clan believe they draw mystical powers.





Wolf

- Attack: 10
- Damage: 2
- Defense: 10
- Protection: 0
- Speed: 8
- Potential: 2
- Stamina: 9
- Health: 15/10/5/3
- Perception: 10
- Stealth: 8
- Feats: 8

"Through the years you have spent with me, I have told you about many dangers you may be exposed to outside of the village's fortified walls. Like any wild animal, the wolf is a menace, so pay attention to what Mordàn is going to tell you and commit it to memory. Many of you will one day venture afield or take livestock to graze, and the advice you will be given today will prove very precious."

There were about fifteen youngsters, all of them on the brink of adulthood. Mordàn suddenly wished he had prepared better for this lecture. Dàmàthair Glen had requested his help two days ago, and since he had no urgent work ahead of him, he had accepted. Now that he stood in front of his audience, he did not know where to begin. He glanced around as he walked toward the front row. With most of the adults busy in the fields or away on business, the small square was deserted, and the children were sitting in a semicircle on stone posts. The weather was warm and clear, and with the cloudless sky, one could see the spires of the Fortress of Smiorail on the other side of the Vale.



Knowing and identifying a wolf

“So, to begin with, a wolf isn’t a fox, or a dog, or even a lynx, for the densest of you.”
There were chuckles, and a girl teased the boy next to her with a nudge,
“He’s talking about you, Renan!”
Mordàn paid no mind and went on,
“Wolves live both on plains and in mountains, in each of the three kingdoms. Their fur can be white, gray, tawny, or ruddy, with a thick undercoat. Their head is rather large, their chest is narrow, their legs are long, with large paws, and their tail stands straight. On all fours, they can slip between your legs without needing to crouch. When upright on their hind legs, they are roughly as tall as an adult man; just the right size to lay their paws on someone’s torso and catch the person’s throat. Between 60 and 100 pounds of muscle, claw, and fang, that’s what a wolf is.”

Some were aghast; a girl was rubbing her throat. Mordàn had their full attention now.



The dangerousness of the wolf

"Wolves are fearsome foes. Fortunately, we aren't their favored prey; otherwise, we certainly would have cause to worry. Their long, pointed teeth are made to keep a tight grip on their prey and tear flesh. Their powerful jaws can crush the toughest bones. When wolves track prey, driven by hunger or by the desire to kill, they can run as fast as a Caernide, and in a single night, they can cover as many as 40 miles. Nothing can stop them: they are protected against extreme cold, their strong claws enable them to cross slippery ground with ease, and they are excellent swimmers that are not afraid to dive into the icy current of a river.
What's more, their senses are much sharper than ours. They can see in the dark as clearly as in the middle of the day, their sense of smell is matchless, and thanks to their acute hearing, they can communicate with their pack over a distance of several miles."
The children stirred. Amidst the hum of hushed conversations, a boy asked,
"But, Varigal Mordàn, does that mean we don't stand a chance?"
"None… At least for someone who isn't prepared to encounter a wolf, which soon won't be your case anymore!"
The silence fell anew.

Pack hierarchy

"Though the characteristics of wolves could have made them monsters as dangerous and bloodthirsty as Feondas, reality is much different. Their packs have a very developed social structure, and whoever is lucky enough to observe such a group for some time will quickly notice how similar wolves are to us. In a pack, there's a leader: he's the dominant male. Along with its mate, they are the only ones to make pups, which all the other pack members will take care of, teaching them and protecting them. An adult will stop at nothing to save a pup."
"Just like Glen with us," one of the younger boys spoke up.
"Just so. You see, wolves do as humans with their young. They care for them, watch them, and see to their needs."

Communication

"Members of a pack communicate much like we do: they express themselves through growls, whines, or barks, as well as with gestures and facial expressions. Their howls are both rallying cries and warnings to nearby packs that could be tempted to enter a territory that is not theirs."

Diet

"A few words on their feeding habits, now. Do you know what wolves eat?"
"I do!" said a young woman. "They eat our livestock, and sometimes, they eat the shepherds, too!"
"Wrong!" the Varigal replied. "Wolves do kill humans sometimes, but they rarely eat them. Wolves mostly eat the meat of herbivores. They can swallow several pounds in one meal, and then go without food for more than a week. Sometimes, they vary their diet with rodents, cubs, reptiles, or even carrion. They have also been known to eat overripe fruits. Those who live near streams are also able to change their feeding habits depending on the season and eat oily fish like salmon, when they swim upstream to spawn."

Relationship with man

"But still, Varigal Mordàn, why are we always told to be careful of wolves?"

Mordàn couldn't help but show a thin smile as he watched the pretty girl who had just asked the question. Doubtless, this piece of advice was from the young woman's father. After a moment of hesitation, he chose not to mention the double entendre and went on with his explanation.
"Wolves have a very poor reputation, indeed. When they attack livestock, they can slaughter many heads if the animals do not run away, even if one would be more than enough to feed the pack. As a result, wolves are associated with violence, the cruelty of nature, and since their behavior is similar to ours, they are often put in a grim light. They are a representation of man's darker side. However, in most cases, the first reaction of a wolf meeting a human is to run away. Afterward, if the human is alone, in a position of weakness, and the wolves have numerical superiority, then and only then will an attack take place."

"Then you only need to show them that you're the strongest for them to go away?"
"Basically, yes. Well, not go away, but at least decide not to attack. But putting on a show of strength isn't always easy when you're passing water on a tree, when you've just sprained your ankle, or when one of your feet is stuck in a mud patch. Shouting is not enough; the wolves have to understand that you're a serious opponent who will not go down easily."
"But if we've done nothing to them, why would they attack us?"
The boy who had just spoken was obviously not looking forward to such an encounter. Throughout the lecture, he had kept an attentive ear and a worried face.

"'Done nothing,' 'done nothing,' what an easy thing to say. Man has always hunted wolves, and great campaigns of eradication have been undertaken since the time of the Oath. Wolves have been able to survive up to today because they are clever and swift. Among the Osag, killing a wolf and wearing its pelt is a sign of bravery. Every dukedom has its certified wolf hunters, and they are tasked with ensuring that there is no overpopulation of wolves and with exterminating any that come too close to inhabited places."

Symbolism

"But in the end, wolves remain as revered as they are feared. You must all have seen many images of a wolf depicted in a symbolic manner. The wolf is both the symbol of the warrior and that of the guardian. When only its head is represented, fangs bared, it is a call to shed blood. But when it is presented in its entirety, on a sign or engraved on a door or wall, it instead means protection. Finally, howling under the

moon, it is a guide. Traditionally, its howling is said to help the moon slip away from the clouds, so that it can light the path of nocturnal travelers."

As he spoke, Mordàn showed his audience his Carath, whose iron-shod extremity was engraved with a sitting wolf, its head bent back and its mouth open toward the lunar disc.

Wolf Brother

In extraordinary cases, a man and a wolf can develop such a strong bond as to be considered magical by some. Legend has it that such a friendship first occurred in the history of an Osag clan known by the name of Bràthair Faol, which literally means "wolf brothers." As opposed to other groups, who hunt wolves or fight them to prove their mettle, the members of the Bràthair Faol worshiped this animal, and their Demorthèn lived among them. Today still, a man and a wolf can develop such a bond, provided the following conditions are met:

- The relationship between the man and the wolf must be highlighted by a particular event (such as one saving the other);
- Lending each other help, possibly going as far as to risk one's life;
- The man must regard the wolf as a living being in its own right, and not feel superior to it or see it as one's pet.

Once such a bond has been created, the following rules come into effect:

Connection. The wolf and the PC can feel from a distance whenever their companion is in danger. Intuitively, each will be able to find the other to help them. Not answering such a call breaks the connection.

Combativeness. The PC's Combativeness increases by 1, and their Reason decreases by 1. Should one of these two scores reach an extreme (Combativeness above 5 or Reason at 0), this means the PC is susceptible to Wolf Frenzy.

Wolf Knowledge. The PC is considered to have a score of 10 in the Wolf Knowledge Discipline (related to Natural Environment). In particular, this means the Character can interpret the behavior of wolves and understand what they express.

At their creation, a Character can be given the Wolf Brother Advantage for 40 points. This Advantage can also be obtained later, and even be the focus of a scenario. Obviously, a woman can develop such a bond as well, in which case she will be called a "Wolf Sister." If the wolf dies, the PC can develop a connection with another wolf after observing a period of mourning. The standard duration of this period is 1D10 months, and bonding with a new wolf companion is subject to the same prerequisites as before. Note that possessing this Advantage does not mean that the PC will not be attacked by other wolves. The Character's closeness with their wolf companion might actually earn them the enmity of other packs, as well as that of certain clans.

Wolf Frenzy

Developing such a strong connection with a wolf can influence the PC's personality. If their Combativeness has reached 6 or their Reason has fallen to 0, certain events might trigger a Wolf Frenzy:

1. Someone attacks a friend, anyone who is dear to the PC, or the wolf with which they have developed a special bond;
2. Someone taunts, insults, or harasses them;
3. The PC is in the middle of a fierce combat at close quarters.

In the first and second case, the PC must pass a Passion Test or attack (most likely with their bare hands) whoever constitutes a source of danger or aggravation.

In the third case, the PC may become enraged. The PC may decide to unleash their wrath or attempt to resist it by passing a Passion Test. When enraged, the PC has a +2 bonus to all attacks and suffers no wound penalties. However, they will not cease fighting until they have struck down their opponent, even at the cost of their own life. Reasoning with them will be impossible, and anyone trying to restrain them will be considered an enemy and savagely attacked in the same fashion.

Chapter 2
Ravages

Even though he was wearing his thickest furs, Loeg was chilled to the bone. With labored, tottering steps, the old man crossed the village toward the hall, struggling against the snowflake-speckled wind. The days when he was a young man who could spend weeks on end in the wild were far away now! Even though summer—which had been dry and lukewarm—was just over, the sky was heavy and milky, as if in the middle of winter. Was this another omen? Were the Demorthèn's grim predictions about to come true?



Back to the Present

The fourth part of Dearg brings the Characters back into the action. There is a strong disconnect from the previous scenarios: instead of reminiscing, the Characters will have to brave a brutal present. Events will accelerate until they reach a climax where the theme of each major narrative arc will be brought to the forefront. Game aids are included to provide the Leader with guidance on how to handle this sudden change of pace.

The Importance of the Weather

This fourth part's first scenario takes place in early fall. As the story begins, the region is suffering from a spell of unusually cold weather, and a snowstorm rises. At the end of the scenario, the sky clears up and the weather turns gentler. For the campaign to play out as planned, it is vital that this lull occurs, as it will allow the protagonists to travel. Over the course of the campaign's last chapter, things will change again, with the weather getting progressively colder as the story reaches its conclusion.



The Refugees

· **Style:** Isolation, investigation · **Setting:** Dearg · **Season:** Early fall

Summary: Following heavy snowfalls, refugees arrive from the nearby village of Fearìl with contradictory testimonies, speaking of massacres and hordes of Feondas. A trio of these refugees turn out to be suffering from an unknown illness that threatens to lead to an epidemic. Will Dearg share Fearìl's fate?

Stakes and aims: This scenario starts the fourth part of the campaign and abruptly puts the Characters in dire straits. "The Refugees" offers the PCs an opportunity to defend their community and some of the NPCs they have met in the course of the previous chapters. The more the PCs connected with the Vale's inhabitants during the Focuses, the more the Players will feel invested in the story.

Before playing "The Refugees," the Leader is advised to read the game aid about the Black Feathers, as the bandits may play a part in this adventure.

Connections with the Narrative Arcs

Céliane's disappearance.

Céliane is one of this scenario's major sources of dramatic tension: her native village has reportedly been the victim of a savage assault and her fate remains unknown. This will be an excellent way for the Leader to create a tense mood, in particular for the Player who follows the narrative arc of Love.

Firmin the monk.

What will Joris (or whoever follows the arc of Adoption) do if Firmin, his adoptive father, is in danger? Won't he also be tempted to leave Dearg and run to his aid? As a matter of fact, Firmin has been spending more and more time in Fearìl to visit a scribe called Lachlan, and sometimes stays there overnight. It may be that, as misfortune had it, Firmin was actually visiting his friend when disaster struck… Alternatively, if the PC themselves are a member of the Temple, they know that they are in pagan lands. Performing acts of bravery and showing devotion toward people in danger would encourage the locals to turn toward the true faith.

Fearìl's fate.

What will Finn's (or whoever follows the arc of Ethics) stance be toward Fearìl? Will they coldly consider the village a lost cause and turn their back on it, to better focus their efforts on Dearg, which can still be saved? What about the infection? Will they be willing to sacrifice the infected (which means the refugees, but also Dearg's sacred tree) to give a better chance to the village as a whole? Such dilemmas call back to the arc of Ethics's Focus, "Modhannan," during which the Lead had to choose whether they should sacrifice war prisoners to save patients.

Guilt.

Not knowing about Fearìl's fate may spur Adeliane (or whoever follows the arc of Guilt) into action, motivated by a survivor syndrome that weighs heavily on her conscience. Or will she try to cast all doubt aside by accusing Fearìl's inhabitants of having sown their own destruction through some act of disrespect or profanation that earned them the wrath of the spirits?

Prologue

"The Refugees" is intended to be played following the four introductory Focuses and the three scenarios included in Book 0 – Prologue. That way, having developed ties with the Vale of Dearg, the PCs will naturally feel involved. And through their respective narrative arcs, they will have additional motivation to be part of this scenario.

Freezing Fall

"The Refugees" takes place in early fall. This is important, contextually and chronologically speaking.

Throughout this scenario, the weather will be unusually cold and at least one snowstorm will occur. Though it does not reach the intensity of the heavy winter snows that bury roads and lands under a whole foot of snow, this unseasonable cold can prove enough to kill unwary Characters. Humans can be powerless before the forces of nature, and climate plays a very important part in this campaign, to the point of being a full-fledged antagonist. As the meteorological conditions improve, the ensuing scenarios can take place.

Chronology of the Events

Here is a summary of how "The Refugees" is meant to play out:

Day 1
Sunrise: The council gathers.
Evening: Galleg reaches Dearg.

Day 2
Morning: Three other refugees reach Dearg.

Day 3 +
The situation in Dearg worsens and the snowstorm does not abate.

- On the first day, at sunrise, Dearg's council gathers in the village hall. Reports have come of flickering lights and wisps of smoke from the other side of the Vale. The council fears that something has happened in Fearìl or that the nearby Fortress of Smiorail has been attacked. That morning, a violent snowstorm occurs and the weather is abnormally frigid.

- In the evening of the same day, a wounded refugee named Galleg reaches Dearg's gate. His tale starts a commotion in the community. In truth, he is half-mad and suffers from hallucinations that make him see strange, alien shapes.

- The following morning, three other refugees make it to the village: three children who were training to become warriors in Fearìl. They tried to fight the assailing "horde," to no avail. Their version of the attack is different from Galleg's and it portrays him as a traitor.

- Incidents occur in Dearg. The three children from Fearìl accuse Galleg and brand him as a coward.

- Things get sourer: the food stock is poisoned, the centennial tree in the center of the village becomes diseased, and an enraged dog attacks the inhabitants.

- Another snowstorm rages. The village is isolated. Whoever tries to leave is exposed to the full force of the blizzard. The Rage of the three children grows worse. At the peak of their madness, the young survivors set fires, spreading chaos and death.



Handling the Pace of the Scenario

Since this scenario takes place in a restricted locale, the Leader must be very careful about pacing the events in order to keep the tension going until the final scene. Here are some tips and advice in that regard:

Create pressure.

Since the three children from Fearìl are among the scenario's central characters, the Leader must take care to portray their evolution. When they arrive, they should inspire respect as survivors of what seems to have been a massacre. They should also inspire pity as children who have suffered from extreme violence and have lost those they held dear. As things progress—and all the while portraying their courage and how they are primarily victims—the Leader should make the young survivors' violence and aggressiveness increasingly apparent as the Rage they have been infected with shows through. Ideally, this should tip off the Players while not making the scenario's conclusion too obvious. As for Galleg, his crime will not necessarily be confirmed in the course of the story, but the signs of his madness will become more and more obvious, making the whole affair all the more confusing and disquieting.

Play with the Players' apprehensions.

The contradiction between the various testimonies and the confusion among the PCs, between irrational fears and true danger, are important dramatic tools for this scenario. To make the most of this, the Leader can instill alarming hints into their descriptions. For example, as Galleg is reporting how crows attacked the village, the Leader can offhandedly mention to one of the Players that they can see several crows on the roofs, or that they just caught a glimpse of indistinct shapes moving on the edge of the forest. Does that point to an imminent attack or to the Character's overactive imagination? Peppering the scenario with such hints and suggestions should contribute to creating an atmosphere heavy with doubt and suspicion.

Crank up the tension.

This scenario includes many scenes and possible incidents, but the Leader should not feel the need to include them all. Instead, they can be used as optional sequences as befits the circumstances. For example, let us say the Players have noticed that the village's sacred tree is sick. However, not knowing what to make of it, they remain at a loss, which spoils the tension. In that case, the Leader can use the Scene "Poisoned Grain" (p. 244) to bring some action.

Hectic pace and interludes.

To keep the suspense going and intensify the stressful atmosphere in the village, the game should be fast-paced, keeping the PCs on their toes. In this fashion, the scenario should last a handful of hours. However, the Leader should also take the Players' initiatives into account and adjust the progression of the scenario accordingly. Lulls can actually be conducive to a good pace. Such interludes will be special breaks during which the Players can brainstorm and make plans. With a less intense pace, "The Refugees" can take as long as two complete sessions.

Ties with the Vale and its Denizens

The stronger the ties between the PCs, the Vale's denizens, and the region itself are, the more intense the campaign's climax will prove to be (see Advanced Character Creation, Step 1: Ties to the native or adoptive land, p. 55). Here are several suggestions to develop such ties before playing "The Refugees":

Play the Scenarios of Book 0 – Prologue

"The Refugees" is a key scenario, starting a chain of events that will ultimately lead to the end of the campaign. Although they are not prerequisites to starting the official campaign, the three adventures included in Book 0 – Prologue provide hints about what is transpiring in the Vale of Dearg. They can thus contribute to setting the foundations of the ensuing story. If the Leader has not run these scenarios yet and the group has enough time available to play them before "The Refugees," now is the moment.

Déjà vu

The events in "The Refugees" can echo those of "Poison," from Book 0 – Prologue. Even if the Leader has not used the modular scene where Melwan is attacked by frenzied creatures, it can still be included as a nightmare, carrier of grim, eldritch remembrances. This could fit the PC following the arc of Guilt in particular, tormenting the Character during their sleep.

Daily Life in the Vale of Dearg

The game aids included in the first chapter of Dearg (which describes the eponymous village and Vale, as well as their surroundings) are meant to lay the groundwork for the events that will lead to the end of the campaign. Through improvised daily-life scenes, the Leader can reinforce the PCs' ties with the region, making them more willing to stand their ground in its defense. Being attached to one's native land is a more powerful dramatic tool than it might seem, and the Leader is advised to take the time to cement such a connection.

Sandbox

Exploring Dearg is also very suitable for a sandbox playing style: once the Players have been through the more linear Focuses, the Leader can offer them a much freer playstyle. This way, the Players can decide what they want to do, and it is up to the Leader to come up with stories based on their initiatives. Maybe the Characters will want to clean Dearg's tumulus of its Deadly Weavers, or the Red Lake of its Black Eels? Or they may show interest in old Zaïg or Master Tadh. By spending one or several sessions on mini-adventures of that nature, the PCs will develop bonds with Dearg and its inhabitants. See the chapter "The Vale and its Surroundings" (p. 16) for more information and scenario hooks.

Improvisation

The parameters of several scenes are for the Leader to decide. For example, at the end of Act 1, several of Dearg's inhabitants will suggest holding a gathering. Who are they? Another example is when the PCs interrogate Galleg, with the when, where, and how of this sequence being deliberately vague: the details are left to the Leader's discretion.

If they feel comfortable with improvising, the Leader can decide who is involved in these scenes and how they occur on the fly. In that regard, the technical sheet summing up the scenario (available at esteren.org) can be used as a game aid. For example, if the PCs have developed bonds with Zaïr the antique dealer, one of the Dàmàthairs, or Aïnlis the musician, bringing these personalities to the forefront will serve the dramatic tension and overall interest of the game. Another example: if the party has grown attached to Firmin the monk, the Leader can adapt "The Refugees" so that the events take place in Alestor's Monastery instead of Dearg itself. By adapting the plot according to the Players' initiatives and the group's favored style, the Leader can truly make their story one-of-a-kind.

If the Leader is a beginner or is not good at improvising, they are advised to make preparations. To that effect, they can read through the scenario and take notes about their choices and ideas.

Act I: Sense and Mercy

A Harsh Life

Before getting to the scenario proper, the Leader should take some time to set the atmosphere in Dearg. The following points in particular should be made apparent:

Freezing fall.

This year, the whole northern part of Taol-Kaer has been hit by a nasty cold front, giving the impression that summer has given way to winter in a matter of days. During the introductory Scene, a raging snowstorm will occur, forcing the locals to hole up.

The threat of famine.

Last year's crops were meager and this year's harvest turned out no better, leaving precious little food for the coming winter. General rationing is in order. Usually, at the end of fall, every cellar is filled with sausages and hams from butchered pigs. Currently, the larders are only partly filled. Some locals own the odd barrel of beer or earthenware bottle filled with spirits made from herbs and roots that they keep jealously. Sheds on stilts built to store sacks of grain stand desperately half-empty. The risk of a deadly famine weighs heavily on everyone's mind. Such a possibility persists all through winter and even during early spring, when grain must be kept aside for the next sowing period lest next year's situation be even worse. In such conditions, giving away food means starving oneself.

Marauding brigands.

In the last year, things have been getting worse, and the latest months have taxed the resources and morale of Dearg's inhabitants, who have endured repeated attacks from the Black Feathers on top of their usual hardships. The brigands have murdered at least three people: two shepherds and a miner. They have attacked a few isolated farms, stolen cattle, and hijacked caravans. Since the Hilderins have proven unable to deal with the bandits, the locals have taken it upon themselves to keep a tighter watch and shore up their defenses. Tension is palpable throughout the village, and strangers are regarded with suspicion and mistrust.

Scene 1: Dearg's Council

As the scenario begins, the sun has barely started to rise over Dearg. The PCs, along with other members of the community, have gathered in the local village hall. They are surrounded by familiar faces: Loeg the Demorthèn; Master Fanch, the blacksmith; some of the Dàmàthairs; Meog Elarig, the owner of the mines and his lank son, Alban (presuming he survived the scenario "Red Fall" from Book 0); and Tadh the innkeeper. Zaïg, the old antique dealer, is also present, counting prayer beads between her gnarled fingers.

This introductory Scene should include the following information. The Leader can read this description aloud or adapt it as they wish: "Yet one more morning with the wind blowing through the Vale, heavy clouds, and freezing weather. After a dry summer, fall has come, and with it a staggering drop in temperature. It has yet to snow, but today's clouded sky looks like it might bring just that. As the reunion starts, the wind picks up and snowflakes begin pouring down, announcing an incoming snowstorm. The village hall's shutters are kept tightly closed and a few logs are added to the fireplace as the wind blows harder and harder, shaking the building. The crowded room makes it difficult to see and move around."



Alternative Introduction: Nightmare

Elend – Winds devouring men – 6 – Winds devouring men

This option starts off "The Refugees" with a frightening dream. The dreamer will be the PC who had visions of the reptilian creature in the scenario "Vestiges" (see "The Vision" on p. 219), or the PC with the highest Empathy, or an occultist PC (see the chapter "Visions and Occult Arts," p. 38 of the supplement Occultism). Without telling the PCs that this is a dream sequence, the Leader can start by describing the room the dreamer is sleeping in. Then the door opens a crack with snake-like hissing noises filtering through. Very quickly, the scene takes a turn for the nightmarish: looking through the window, the PCs can see the body of a huge snake slithering through the door of the building they are sleeping in. Then the PC is startled awake by someone knocking on their door. Another party member has come to tell them that Dearg's council is gathering at the village hall…

Lights in the Night

A pair of young hunters named Orm and Jarin were on watch duty on the village's palisade last night. They believe they saw lights in the direction of the neighboring community of Fearìl, on the other side of the Vale. Due to the persistent winds, they could not be immediately sure, but when dawn came, they were able to confirm that wisps of black smoke were rising from around Fearìl. This can only mean one thing: fire. And nobody with a lick of sense would deliberately light a fire at such a late hour.

Discussions

The council discusses the following topics:

The location of the fire. Some among the gathered inhabitants put it down to a bonfire that the people of Fearìl could have lit, while others fear that the village itself may have been burning. Some bring up the possibility of a fire starting in the Fortress of Smiorail—which watches over the Gwidrite border—then spreading due to the dry wind that has been blowing through the Vale for several days.

The causes of the fire. Theories abound. Such a fire may be the result of an attack. It might mean that brigands like the Black Feathers have become bolder with the approach of winter, or something more sinister still… some kind of destructive scourge come to sow death through the valley. This indirect mention of Feondas spreads fear among the locals. Another possibility is that the Fortress of Smiorail has been attacked, most likely by Gwidrite armies invading Taol-Kaer. It may be that such invaders took advantage of the last days of summer to cross the pass before the cold front hit the Vale.

Solidarity and mercy. Suggestions are put forward and debated, which brings the community's leading personalities to the forefront. Several of Dearg's inhabitants have relatives in Fearìl. In the name of solidarity and mercy, they advocate sending some of the community's hunters as scouts as soon as the weather clears. Such people will be able to move quickly and fend for themselves if needed. However, this proposition faces the rebuke of the majority, who point out the dangers of such a venture in the current meteorological conditions. To them, the storm they are currently under is a warning they would be foolish to ignore. The scouts would be sent to their doom. According to them, there is no point in taking senseless risks: the safest option would be to wait and watch out for any other signs. Others even argue for arming everyone, intensifying the watches, and getting ready to face whatever started the fire in Fearìl.

Loeg's hunch. As debates go in circles, old Demorthèn Loeg moves forward and silences the audience with a gesture. The dancing lights from the fireplace give Loeg's wrinkled features a grave, almost grim countenance. The Demorthèn then shares his intuition with the council. Orm and Jarin's testimony comes as no surprise to him: lately, he could feel a looming threat during his meditations. Dearg is going to experience a very harsh winter; the spirits of nature are restless.

The chief's edict. Ansailéir Maorn then concludes the meeting, announcing that the watches will be intensified as soon as the snowstorm lets up. He asks everyone else to go about their business as usual. Considering the current weather conditions, all members of the community are strictly forbidden from leaving the village. Next morning, the council will reappraise the situation.

Risking a Reckless Rescue

Jure Peternel – Dearg – 2 – Eoghan

That this scenario is meant to take place solely within the village of Dearg does not mean that the Leader should nip in the bud any attempt to undertake an expedition to Fearìl. On the contrary, such a possibility will give depth to the moral dilemma that is among this scenario's core dramatic components. This concerns the PC who follows the narrative arc of Love in particular, as he is to marry Céliane, daughter of Fearìl's Demorthèn, next spring. The PC who follows the narrative arc of Adoption may also be worried about Firmin. The Leader can even ask both of them to make a Drive Test. Other more careful or rational PCs may attempt to convince their companions to give up on such a foolhardy mission.

Several elements can be brought forward to stress this dilemma:

Maorn's stance.
The Ansailéir understands how Céliane's future husband feels driven to immediately leave for Fearìl in order to make sure that his betrothed is safe. However, as has been pointed out, such an expedition would be needlessly risky and would put its members in mortal danger. Whoever would spearhead such a mad project would have to bear the responsibility of these deaths. The Ansailéir is adamant: they must indeed go and see what happened, but not before the storm clears.

Badren's project.
Badren is a young miner who works for the Elarigs. His sister is married to a man of Fearìl. Desperate for news, he intends to go there despite the Ansailéir's ban and the Demorthèn's warning.

The voice of a Demorthèn.
In a community like Dearg's, the opinions of a Demorthèn are heeded and their oracles are feared. As such, most of the locals follow Loeg's instructions and any defiance of them would be very poorly regarded.

The dangers of winter.
Through the testimony of a seasoned hunter, the Leader can remind the party of the dangers of traveling in the middle of a snowstorm. Venturing into the wild is already dangerous in itself and, with a storm raging, the PCs would be lucky to survive at all (see the game aid "A Hostile Season" on p. 48). Powerful winds carry fresh snow with them, resulting in a blizzard that obscures vision and makes progress all but impossible.

Vestiges.
If the party has previously been through the scenario "Vestiges," memories of this traumatizing experience will certainly remind the PCs of the dangers and consequences of a storm. This can be showcased through flashbacks or through the intervention of some locals who remember their adventure.

What if the PCs go through with it?

No matter how ill-conceived and extreme such an idea may be, it is possible that the PCs decide to undertake the trip to Fearìl. They will need to do so unnoticed, because the villagers will not let them leave. Opposing the Ansailéir's and the Demorthèn's authority can lead to very tense scenes, particularly considering Maorn and Loeg may respectively be the father and mentor of two of the PCs.

The Leader should not worry about such an initiative derailing the plot, since there will be several opportunities to put the story back on track. Letting the PCs do as they see fit will give them a feeling of freedom and autonomy, which is very important for their immersion.

If the expedition does take place, here are several ways it can play out:

Evolution of the weather.
Leaving in the middle of the snowstorm is downright suicidal. The game aid "A Hostile Season" (p. 48) provides rules and advice about traveling in the cold and snow. The weather is currently very unstable in the Vale. The storm that started this morning may take days to die down… only to come back in full force. To simulate such chancy climactic conditions, the Leader can periodically make or ask for Luck checks. A result of 1, 2, or 3 means that the storm picks up, forcing the Characters to find shelter or turn back.

Alestor's Monastery.

The PCs may pass by the monastery to take shelter or ascertain Firmin's situation. Or the snowstorm may force them to hunker down there. Maybe the aging monk will know more about the situation? If the Leader feels that the PCs are determined to go to Fearìl, "The Refugees" may take place in the snowbound monastery. Galleg will take refuge in the monastery and the plot can progress as intended from there. Scene 3 "Threefold Grievances and Grudges" will have to be adapted as well, with the three boys reaching the monastery instead of Dearg. The Leader can then, through Firmin, ask the PCs to go back to the village with the children so that they can be cared for and protected, since the monastery's resources and supplies are too limited to house so many people in decent conditions.

The Marauders.

The Leader can also have the scenario branch out into "The Marauders" (see p. 47). On their way, the party will encounter a young boy pleading for help as his family has been attacked by the Black Feathers. Once this mini-scenario has been played out and the PCs find themselves with a whole family on their hands, they will have a good reason to go back to Dearg. The Leader can then carry on with "The Refugees."

Vestiges.

If this scenario has not been played yet, the expedition to Fearìl can be a very good opportunity. The PCs will progress at random through the blizzard, then underground, then will ultimately and ironically find themselves back in Dearg.



Using the Focus Mechanics to Handle a Splitting Party

Some of the PCs may decide to go to Fearìl come hell or high water, with others picking the more reasonable option of staying in the village. This presents obvious problems, but can actually work out splendidly: the Leader can keep playing "The Refugees" with any PCs staying in Dearg while giving the rest of the party freedom to roam.

Considering the party will probably remain split for hours, it would not do for some of the Players to remain idle during that time. A simple solution is having the Players of inactive PCs play as Supports, just like during Focuses. Since they have been through the first chapter of Dearg and its introductory Focuses, the Players should be familiar with them.

Example: Let us take a party of four Players. Two of them, including the PC following the narrative arc of Love, decide to leave Dearg and set course for Fearìl, disregarding Maorn's ban and Loeg's warnings. The Leader considers the situation and suggests the other two Players play as Badren, the miner whose sister lives in Fearìl, and Sìd, the pregenerated Character from Book 1. The game can proceed with this ad hoc party until the PCs reach Fearìl or decide to go back to Dearg.
From that point, the focus can shift back to the two PCs who have remained in Dearg, resuming from the moment the two other PCs left for Fearìl. This time, the Fearìl-goers will play as Supports, with Dearg's inhabitants offering plenty of possible roles.

Scene 2: A Man Alone, Haggard and Starving

The council comes to an end in the late morning. The rest of the day proceeds slowly, testing the nerves of the members of the community. As the storm lets up every now and then, the PCs can see an unnervingly large number of crows flying through the sky or perched on the roofs. As night falls, a refugee from Fearìl, a hunter named Galleg, reaches the village's gate. He is exhausted, chilled to the bone, and has visibly suffered burns and contusions. He claims to have spent the whole night in the forest.



Galleg's speech and behavior reflect his poor mental condition (he suffers from the Hallucination disorder). He is obviously confused and sometimes contradicts himself. Regardless, a PC who is proficient in the Relation Skill will be able to ascertain that Galleg is sincere and seems to have truly been through what he is telling them. The Leader's portrayal of Galleg as traumatized and anguished should stress the phantasmagorical nature of his tale: breathless voice, wide eyes, and sudden silences during which he seems to be seeing things that others cannot.

Here is what Galleg can tell everyone:

The fire.
On the night of the attack, a fire started. Where? How? He does not know, everything happened too fast. Then wolves invaded the village. Huge wolves, Feondas! Crows swarmed the watchtowers. Despite the weapons and fire, the animals fearlessly attacked the humans…

The attack.
The battle was dreadful: even from far away, one could hear the cries of the wounded. Galleg claims he did not directly take part in the fighting because he was following orders from Arl, the Ansailéir. He cannot remember the exact nature of said orders. He remembers Arl and a few warriors attempted a last-ditch counterattack, but their ensuing screams left no doubt concerning their fate…

The flight.
Every village has emergency escape tunnels. Galleg was with a group of survivors and young children under the protection of Ferga, a Dàmàthair. Amidst the crying and shouting, everyone ran for their lives. Galleg is pessimistic: according to him, he was the only one to make it. He kept going for most of the night. Disoriented as he was, it took him several hours to cross the half-dozen miles between Fearìl and Dearg.

If pumped for information, Galleg can provide details about the days preceding the attack:

Crows and wolves.
For several days, murders of creepy crows had been flying about Fearìl. They looked like they were watching the inhabitants come and go. There was also an abnormally high number of wolves lurking around, on the outskirts of the woods.

Gone without a trace.
A group of armed villagers had left to gather wood around the village, never to return. Hunters were sent to find them, but came back empty-handed.

Scene 3: Threefold Grievances and Grudges

The morning after, three boys (aged 10, 11, and 13) equipped with spears, bows, and knives reach the village. They are named Lìrs, Kavan, and Codros, and are from Fearìl, which they fled like Galleg. They are wounded, but have tended to most of their injuries themselves. Their faces are grim, but despite what they have been through they look very determined and show neither sadness nor fear. Their courage is met with admiration and sympathy. Under the supervision of Dàmàthair Glen, the young bard Aïnlis takes care of them.

According to the trio, Fearìl was first attacked by brigands who set fire to a few houses. It was only then that wild beasts attacked, probably starved by the harsh winter. This version is wrong, but the three boys are convinced that this is what happened. If asked why they did not run toward the Fortress of Smiorail, they will answer that their assailants actually came from that direction.

If a character skilled in medicine (Standard (11) Science (Medicine) or Demorthèn Mysteries (Traditional Medicine)) inspects the boys' wounds, they will notice that Lìrs's (the youngest, who got his arm bitten by a wolf) are infected and show small, mold-like fungal growths. The PC has never seen anything like it, and even Loeg will be puzzled. These are actually the signs of a particular Feond affliction (see the dedicated game aid, "Fearìl Rage," p. 248). What the PCs do not know is that the boys have been contaminated. Lìrs is the only one to suffer from a visible fungal infection, but Kavan and Codros are bearers of the Rage as well.



What Truly Transpired in Fearil

The village was attacked by wolf-like and crow-like Feondas led by a fearsome creature: the Prince. Ansailéir Arl's warriors noticed that the creatures feared fire. At a crucial juncture, when the Dàmàthairs' house was besieged by the monstrous wolves, Arl ordered each fighter to hold a precise position in order to protect the inhabitants and keep the beasts in the same spot. He entrusted Galleg with the task of fetching oil and combustibles in order to burn the abominations. Scared out of his wits, the hunter pretended to obey, only to bolt into the underground passageway in the Dàmàthairs' house that led outside the village. Fearing that the wolves might go after him, he blocked the way behind him, thereby dooming the villagers, including the three boys (Lìrs, Kavan, and Codros) and Ferga, a Dàmàthair. The trio only survived due to the intervention of the terrible Crow Mantle, who spared them to make them bearers of the Rage.

The Nature of the Fearil Rage

The three young survivors have been infected with a particular form of Feond-borne affliction. Lìrs was bitten by a wolf while the other two were pecked by crows. The effects of the Rage are complex, random, and unforeseeable. It basically exacerbates one's hatred, destructive impulses, and aggressiveness in general. Unknowingly, Lìrs, Kavan, and Codros have become agents of the propagation of the Rage and contribute to spreading death and destruction through the Vale. Additionally, the Rage's effects on their minds has confused their memories, hence them claiming that Fearìl was initially attacked by brigands. The game aid "Fearil Rage" (p. 248) details the technical aspects of this disease.

Scene 4: Coward!

As soon as the three survivors see Galleg, they howl in rage and attempt to lunge at him. If they are questioned about this outburst of wrath, they will explain that Ansailéir Arl, as well as many warriors (including Kavan's father and Codros's older brother) died because of the hunter. According to them, he fled at a pivotal point of the battle, and his cowardice caused the deaths of the fighters who had planned to destroy the enraged beasts with fire. The three boys managed to flee, but everyone else died for sure. Lìrs, Kavan, and Codros want to see Galleg pay for his cowardice in the most painful way possible. They will confirm that there were a great many beasts, but maintain that the initial attackers were bandits who must have opened the gates and let the creatures in.

Galleg denies this version with the utmost energy, claiming that he only fled when it was obvious everything was lost—that is, after Arl died. He did flee, but he is in no way responsible for the debacle. In fact, his mind has completely repressed the truth.

In the end, it is not clear who is responsible for what, but with three against one, the popular opinion is heavily against Galleg. However, until more can be learned about the attack and the death of Arl and his warriors, it is decided that the hunter and the boys will be kept in different houses lest they kill each other.



An Oppressive Atmosphere

Here are three aspects the GL can make use of to establish a heavy atmosphere throughout the first Act:

Mistrust toward strangers.
When the survivors from Fearìl come in, the Leader should take a moment to highlight the locals' fear and suspicion: what if those "refugees" were accomplices of the Black Feathers? Some of the inhabitants do not view these newcomers with a welcoming eye, and tension will increase as one incident after another occurs within the village. Fortunately, a few of Dearg's residents will be able to identify the boys and confirm that they are indeed from Fearil.

Crows and wolves.
As the scenario progresses, the GL should make more and more references to the presence of crows and wolves, to a disquieting degree. A PC sees a crow through the window, and during watch duty, a Character hears growls, sees strange shadows near a house, or catches glimpses of numerous moving figures on the outskirts of the forest…

Foreboding weather.

For several days, the weather has remained unseasonably cold, and there is another snowstorm in the air. The roads are currently usable and the snow layer is pretty thin, but being caught in a blizzard mid-journey could be fatal. In the middle of such violent winds, one cannot see past 10 yards, if that. Due to its altitude, the village of Dearg is particularly exposed to such foul weather. As such, most of the locals hole up in their homes. In such conditions, the atmosphere is nerve-wracking. It sounds like the walls, roof, and shutters are battered by otherworldly roars. Inside, only the fireplace's embers give out a pale light, and the stretching shadows dance on the walls. Fear is omnipresent, and in the village hall, people endlessly rehash the same topics. Sometimes, the howling winds only last a few moments before stopping without warning, giving way to a sudden silence that is almost painful on the ears…

Scene 5: Galleg's Madness

On the evening of the three boys' arrival, the hunter seeks peace on the village's palisades. It seems he has adopted a runt from the Elarigs' kennels. It must be noted that Galleg did not steal it, but rescued it; the Elarigs usually get rid of sickly or stunted specimens, abandoning them or killing them outright.

Galleg is proving more and more agitated, claiming that Dearg will be next. After what has happened in Fearìl, the hunter is a broken man, the victim of hallucinations where he sees the causes of his village's destruction in the darkness: twisted crows, monstrous wolves, growing fires… When he speaks, Galleg seems absorbed in his own inner world, his gaze vacant, his eyes glowing, and his brow drenched with sweat. He suffers from bouts of terror, calling for help, raising the alarm in the middle of the night, reporting the disappearance of a sentry when the person has simply walked away, etc. He is very much the proverbial "boy who cries wolf," and after a few unpleasant false alarms he is considered insane, which some interpret as a symptom of his guilt.

Getting Galleg to confess.

There are several ways to make Galleg talk. Brute force and intimidation will be of no help: Galleg is traumatized and has repressed part of the events. The only way to get him to dig through his memories and open up will be to prove empathetic and reassuring. If a PC behaves fittingly, the Leader can ask for a Complicated (14) Relation (Persuasion) check. On a success, Galleg remembers important moments. Hypnosis can also be used to stimulate Galleg's memory, leading to a Complicated (14) Occultism (Hypnosis) check. However, in order to convince him to cooperate and sit through such a session, the PCs will also have to be persuasive (Complicated (14) Relation (Persuasion) check).



Optional Scene: Dearg's Council

This optional scene can be played at any moment of the scenario, but the later the better. Several of Dearg's inhabitants propose holding a council to resolve the conflict between Galleg and the three boys before one of them snaps and blood is spilled. The PCs can obviously attend and share what they have learned. Despite the persistent doubts regarding the veracity of the four persons' testimonies, it is finally decided that Galleg will be banished from the village. If Galleg confessed, it will be very hard to change the council's mind in that regard. Afterward, the three boys will try to sneak out of the village to murder Galleg.



Throughout the first Act, Galleg will appear as a traitor and a coward who caused the death of many people and contributed to the doom of his own village. However, there are extenuating circumstances: before the horror of the situation, he snapped, and the experience has scarred him. He ran away in terror (see "Fleeing" on p. 271 of Book 1 – Universe). And what about those who are so prompt to condemn him today? What would they have done in his place? Could they have acted otherwise? Taken from the right angle, this can turn into a gripping moral dilemma. Under the weight of emotion, the decision of the community may even appear to be cruel and excessive.

Act 2: Spreading Contamination

The second Act includes several Scenes that the Leader can use to heighten the pressure before getting to the scenario's third and final Act. It is up to the Leader to decide in which order these Scenes will occur and how quickly they will follow each other.

Choice of Genre

There are two ways the second Act can play out:

Suspense

By investigating, the Characters can find out about the three boys' destructive impulses. They may, for example, discover that the boys have intentionally contaminated the supplies, which will provide clues regarding the Rage the trio suffers from. What will Dearg's residents' reaction be toward such behavior? The Dàmàthairs will be quick to remind everyone what the children have been through and to ask the community to show clemency.

Horror

The Leader may decide to have the Act proceed in a more horrific, nightmarish manner. Catching the boys will be very difficult, if not downright impossible. The events of this Act will go down as strange, arbitrary phenomena, and will reinforce the frightful atmosphere in Dearg. Truth will come out in the third Act by means of a testimonial or clue that will finally set the Players on the track of the three refugees, leading to a chaotic and deadly final fight.

Scene 1: Boundless Violence

The weather is foul. It is very cold, and a hissing wind blows. The sentries report having seen beasts prowl about the village. Lìrs, Kavan, and Codros prove callous, thirsting for violence and fights. They dream of enacting bloody vengeance upon Galleg. They incite other children their age to fight them as "training" in preparation for the inevitable attack upon the village. Those who accept are at risk of getting seriously wounded since the trio does not hold back and relishes violence. On the other hand, the children's rage may seem explainable considering all the horrors they have just been through. One "training session" gets out of hand and Dàmàthair Glen steps in to calm down the trio, to no avail: the three children prove unbelievably strong. The PCs or other locals must intervene to keep things under control.

Scene 2: The Rotting Tree

The centennial oak in the village square is the victim of a fungal rot that spreads from the base of its trunk. This started when one of the three young refugees urinated on the tree. This rot is a secondary effect of the Rage on plants and, in certain cases, infected humans or animals. There is no danger of contamination and contact with the fungus is not dangerous, but if it is allowed to spread it may choke its host. The PCs may suspect that there is a connection between this contamination and the trio, but at this stage of the scenario they have no proof and the children will deny everything. Other explanations related to Demorthèn myths will probably hold more sway. Is this an omen of an impending Feond attack? Is the land of Dearg itself turning on its inhabitants? How will a traditional believer interpret such a phenomenon?

Loeg's attempts to deal with the rot will prove fruitless. The only way to halt the spreading would be through fire—or frost, which will happen when winter sets in, if the Leader has ruled that the infection is vulnerable to cold. Such a pragmatic solution may be advocated by a rational PC, which will result in a heated debate: the old Demorthèn refuses to see the sacred tree touched by wicked flames (which are traditionally associated with the spirit of destruction, Aingeal) and persists in attempting to call upon spirits related to life and plants to heal it. This should lead PCs of a traditional bent to doubt. The Demorthèn is proving stubborn and is clearly powerless (it would take a Remedy Ogham to fix the infection), while more rational solutions seem to hold promise, even though they disregard the sacred nature of the tree. Note that if the PC possessed by Avel's ghost (see the Focus "Coir: The River Child," in particular the part "Ghosts and occult powers," p. 181) uses the Repel Feondas power, no effect in particular will be achieved.

Scene 3: The Enraged Dog

Pad, the dog that Galleg adopted, will be picked as a choice victim by the vindictive boys. Under the cover of night, they grab it and bite it. In the morning, the unfortunate animal is consumed by the Rage, which will lead it to act in an abnormal, violent fashion. One of the PCs may get attacked during a walk through the village. If bitten, they may catch the same Rage that the trio has been infected with. It is possible to save the dog by overpowering it, isolating it, and hoping that it will survive the illness (see the "Fearil Rage" game aid on p. 248). Afterward, the dog will be exhausted, but it will recover in a few of days. If the PCs manage to save Pad, it will become a faithful friend and will not hesitate to risk its life to help them.

Pad, Enraged stray dog

Attack: 10. Defense: 10. Speed: 6.
Potential: 2. Damage: 2. Health Points: 15.
Special attack: Contamination (Fearil Rage). On a successful attack, Pad's opponent gets infected with the Fearìl Rage unless the victim passes a Difficult (17) Stamina check. The Difficulty is downgraded to Standard (11) if the wound is quickly washed.

Immunity to Health penalties. No matter how badly infected with the Rage it is or how many Health points it loses, Pad does not suffer from penalties.

Scene 4: Poisoned Grain

As the sun starts to set, terrible news circulates: the grain silos are affected by a strange rot that spreads at a worrying pace. Though there is no risk of the fungal infection affecting humans and animals, the stocks' edibility is threatened, since eating contaminated food results in acute vomiting. This is a critical issue: the communal stocks' purpose is to make it through winter, and this disaster could lead to famine in less than a month. This infection was caused by the three boys, who spat on the stocks in contempt toward those who have been spared their suffering. Maorn had been careful enough to intensify the watch on the village's key locations, including the grain silos, but the trio managed to sneak through unnoticed.

To curb the contamination, it will be necessary to sort through the grain and burn the infected portion. This represents a long, tiresome task, and there is always a risk of the rot not being entirely dealt with and starting again. A more extreme solution would be to burn down the silo, though this would mean destroying a quarter of the village's grain stocks. Analyzing the rot (Complicated (14) Science (Botany) check) will reveal similarities between it and Lìrs's infected arm wound.

Infectious Dread

With this optional scene, the GL can develop the psychological impact that this risk of contamination may have on the PCs. As the situation becomes more dire and chaotic, some of the PCs may have nightmares. The PCs following the arc of Love and Adoption, for example, may suffer visions of an infected Céliane and Firmin.



Living Rot

It is likely that the PCs will think of analyzing samples of the fungal growths on Lìrs's arm, or a piece of rotting wood from the sacred tree, or infected grain. A proper analysis (Complicated (14) Science (Botany or Medicine) check) will reveal that the three substances are of an unknown but similar nature.

Through this optional scene, the Leader can give a supernatural aspect to the PCs' research on this Feond substance. The GL may decide that it is alive, to a degree suitable to the atmosphere they wish to create:

- A close-up of the substance (with a magnifying glass, for example) shows that it twitches, as if it were moving imperceptibly.
- If a PC leaves samples in a test tube, the tube will get gradually fuller, as if the substance were growing.
- A PC might notice that a container in which they left samples has been pried open or broken, and is now empty. Sabotage? Or did the rot grow uncontrollably and crawled out of the container by itself?
- The Leader can decide that the fungus is capable of growing flowers that, unlike the rot, can transmit the Rage. However, should the GL decide so, they must be aware that this will certainly lead to a wide-scale epidemic.

Act 3: Thirst for Destruction

It is in this third Arc that all hell breaks loose in Dearg. Due to its nature, this Act will probably be more intense and quicker than the others.

What if... the Ragers have been Quarantined or Killed?

At this stage of the scenario, the boys from Fearìl may have been quarantined. Ansailéir Maorn may have decided to have them locked up in one of the woodsheds and watched by two sentries. As the third Act begins, the PCs learn that the trio has run away. What happened to their guards is up to the Leader. Tracking the boys will be impossible, since their tracks quickly mix with the locals'. The trio may have left Dearg, but they might also have hidden somewhere in the village.
It may also be that the three refugees have been killed or neutralized. In that case, the Leader can use the modular scene "The Infection Spreads" described in Scene 2, so that contaminated residents of Dearg will take the place of the boys in the chaos of the scenario's final Act.

Scene 1: The Fire

Guillaume & Cyrille Aufaure – RISE – 8 – The hunt

In the middle of the night, several fires are started in Dearg, including one in the hall that traditionally houses the council and is fortunately empty at this hour. With the fire, panic spreads through the village and the locals are instantly reminded of what happened to Fearìl.

At this moment in the scenario, the GL should take the time to describe the ambient panic, so that the PCs, too, believe that they are about to be assaulted. Some yell about Feondas attacking, while others swear they have seen strange birds flying through the sky. One of the PCs can catch sight of a massive, wolf-like shape through the fire and smoke… though it will be nothing more than a shadow.

What the Leader should focus on is fostering doubt regarding what is truly happening, right until the last second: Who started the fire? The three boys? Galleg? Feondas? The PCs may decide to split, in which case the Leader can switch the perspective between the two parties and heighten the suspense. For example, one group may see Galleg leap out of the flames (if he was banished sooner during the scenario, his return will prove all the more striking)… and the scene cuts there, without the PCs knowing whether the hunter is friend or foe. Then the GL switches to another group for a sequence where the three boys are involved this time.

A Grim Confrontation

If this fits the kind of atmosphere that the Leader is after, the trio's guilt can be revealed in a brutal, horrific fashion. When the PCs get into the house where the Fearìl boys are kept, they find the body of the Dàmàthair charged with their care. Outside, the fire rages in Dearg. The three children show themselves and gloat, leaving no doubt as to their guilt. They may even unabashedly confess if the PCs question them. The Leader can then start the final fight right then and there or have the Ragers run away if the confrontation is not supposed to happen yet.

Scene 2: Murderous Rage

The three young warriors have completely succumbed to the illness they are the victims of. They have sunk into a murderous rage and fight everyone they meet tooth and nail (literally), which also bears the risk of spreading the Rage they bear. The village is the prey of mayhem: in the dark of the night, the only lights come from a few braziers and burning houses. The thick smoke hampers vision and the air is filled with screams and yells.

Finally, the Fearìl trio will confront one or several of the PCs with murder in their eyes. If the PCs have split, the Leader should make use of this situation to create pressure. The Ragers wield makeshift torches, their faces are very pale, and they have a crazed look.

The conclusion of the story will depend on the PCs' choices. Here are a few possibilities:

- **Fight.**
  The PCs confront the boys, weapons in hand. To make this fight more dramatic, the Leader can have it take place close to a burning grain silo that seems about to crash down.

- **Reinforcements.**
  The PCs can try to shout or run around looking for help, which will trigger a Luck check: on a result of 7 or more, two villagers (or other PCs) will join them on the next Round.

- **Flight.**
  Maybe the PCs fear the enraged boys, or maybe they are not fighters. If they flee, the Ragers will not chase them, but they will seek to kill everyone they meet, randomly entering houses.

Lirs, Kavan, and Codros

Attack: 11. **Defense**: 11. **Speed**: 8. **Potential** : 3. **Damage**: 3. **Health Points**: 24.

- **Special attack: Contamination (Fearìl Rage).** On a successful attack (provided it was inflicted with natural weapons, for example by biting or raking with their nails), the Rager's opponent gets infected with the Fearìl Rage unless the victim passes a Difficult (17) Stamina check. The Difficulty is downgraded to Standard (11) if the wound is quickly washed.

- **Immunity to Health penalties.** No matter how badly infected with the Rage they are or how many Health points they lose, a Rager does not suffer from penalties.



The three survivors (aged 10, 11, and 13) look very alike except for a few details, such as how they fight. In combat, they always use an Offensive Attitude, which brings their Attack to 14 and their Defense to 8. The Rage gives them inhuman physical abilities, hence their 24 Health points, their high Attack, and their immunity to pain despite their young age and the wounds they suffered on their journey from Fearìl to Dearg. There is no way to quench their murderous determination and they have no particular weaknesses: they are not especially susceptible to fire, fossil Flux, or even Avel's ghost. However, the healing powers of a PC who has become an Oracle (see the game aid "Fearìl Rage," p. 248) will prove effective, which may be the only way to stop the boys without killing them.

If the Leader wishes to heighten the violence and confusion of the final Scene, he can make use of the option below.

The Infection Spreads

Locals have caught the disease when tending to the sick children or by getting bitten by an infected animal (a rat, for example). Who exactly has become infected is up to the Leader, but they should preferably be acquaintances of the PCs to give this Scene a tragic twist. As the three boys wreak havoc in their destructive madness, other inhabitants can show symptoms of the Rage and even become Ragers as well, echoing one of the possible endings of "Poison" (from Book 0 – Prologue). What to do with the infected then? Should they be put out of their misery to prevent any propagation? Should they be locked up in order to allow them the time to get back to their senses? The latter solution is rather risky, but it might at least leave the unfortunate souls a chance. Such a dilemma will be particularly relevant to the PC following the arc of Ethics.

Epilogue

Guillaume & Cyrille Aufaure – RISE – 2 – Save me

Once the trio has been dealt with, Dearg becomes eerily quiet. The chaos has claimed a few victims. If Lìrs, Kavan, and Codros have not been killed during the night, they may survive the Rage. However, their testimony regarding the attack on Fearìl will be muddled and inconclusive, even with the use of hypnosis; due to the confusion and darkness, they had no clear idea of what was happening. When Lìrs was bitten by a big wolf, they all ran for their lives. The only distinct memory they have is of a strong, damp, moldy smell. Is this an actual memory or a constructed one resulting from the confusion they have suffered from? Ultimately, what transpired in the neighboring village will remain shrouded in mystery.

If Galleg was banished, he can be found dead near the village or wandering in the outskirts of the forest. In retrospect, his fate might fill the PCs (in particular the one following the arc of Guilt) and some of the villagers with remorse and second thoughts.

In the end, the ever-threatening snowstorm finally gives way to milder weather. The time has come to put together an expedition to Fearìl…

Experience

The PCs will earn between 1 and 5 Experience points for the Progression of the Plot, depending on how much they contributed to weathering the crisis and what they discovered about the illness the trio was suffering from.

The Interpretation of the PC criterion will be based in particular on how invested each Player was in the council's debates, as well as in interacting with Dearg's residents and Fearìl's refugees. Generally speaking, whoever has portrayed their Character with conviction and has contributed to creating an interesting atmosphere at the table should be rewarded with Experience points.

Finally, the Players will get Experience points in Confrontation for aptly tackling the scenario's major conflicts: negotiating with the council, handling Galleg's case, and neutralizing the three Ragers. If the PCs have managed to avoid the death of Galleg, Pad, or the three boys, this can be rewarded with Experience points.
Reminder: For the attribution of Experience points, see the chapter "Experience and Advancement," p. 228 of Book 1 – Universe.

Fearìl Rage

The Fearìl Rage is an illness carried by certain types of Feondas, like the wolves and crows that attacked Fearìl. In other regions, it is called "Fungal Rage" or "Feond Rage." In the present campaign, a prominent aspect of the Fearìl Rage is its contagious nature: if allowed to spread unchecked, it could result in a veritable epidemic. The Rage and its effects feature heavily in the scenarios "The Refugees" and "Fearìl's Ruins."

Contamination

The Rage spreads by direct contact with an infected creature (from a bite, for example) or through contaminated fluids or excretions. Aside from humans, it only infects carnivores and scavengers. Resisting the illness is a Difficult (17) Stamina check. On a failure, the victim contracts the Rage (see below). On a natural 1, the patient is afflicted by a severe, deadly variant: fungal patches grow on their body, particularly on exposed wounds and mucous membranes. Patches of the same kind appear on contaminated plants. The fungus does not carry the Rage, but it can smother the plant it grows on. Moreover, just sneezing, spitting, bleeding, or urinating on a plant is enough to contaminate it.

Incubation Time

Short (1D10 hours)

Effects

The Rage exacerbates one's hatred, thirst for destruction, and aggressiveness in general, but has otherwise no influence on one's mental abilities. In the course of 1D10 days, the patient becomes increasingly irritable, ill-tempered, and inclined to violence. Then, they go through a murderous crisis during which they cannot be reasoned with, driven by an impulse to kill anyone and destroy anything within reach. The crisis lasts for 1D10 hours, during which the victim gains a +5 bonus to both Attack and Health. Additionally, during that time, they do not suffer from penalties resulting from wounds or from the Rage. As the crisis comes to an end, the patient must make a Difficult (17) Stamina check. On a failure, they go into a seizure and die. On a success, they only lose consciousness and thereafter suffer from extreme fatigue (-5 penalty to all rolls) for 1D10 days. The victim is then cured of the Rage and permanently immune to it. Enduring the final stage of the illness results in 1 Permanent Trauma point and 1 Hardening point.

Treatment

From the moment the victim is infected, there is a 1D10 hours incubation period during which the illness can be neutralized by cauterizing the wound or making use of the appropriate power (Remedy Ogham of the second Circle or Miraculous Healing of the second Stanza). Once the incubation is over, only magic powers can halt the progression of the illness and thus prevent the crisis and possible death of the patient (fourth Circle/Stanza). Since the illness has yet to be studied, there currently exists no Magientist remedy. A Magientist could search for a cure, but how long would that take? However, in the region of Dearg, someone called the Oracle has developed the power to cure the Fearìl Rage (see Jana's profile on p. 259).

Ragers

Due to the circumstances of the campaign and how the Fearìl Rage propagates, the PCs may encounter enraged animals or humans on several occasions, in particular in the course of "The Refugees" and "Fearìl's Ruins." Such encounters can be used to create or heighten tension, show the possible consequences of an epidemic, or provide a red herring as to the true origin of the illness that is spreading in the Vale of Dearg. Said origins will only become apparent in the scenario "Fearìl's Ruins," once the PCs have discovered what truly transpired in the village. To create a human or animal Rager, make the following modifications to the initial statistics:

- +5 to Attack and Health.
- Immunity to penalties resulting from Health lost due to wounds or the Rage.
- Ability to infect enemies with the Fearìl Rage when attacking with natural weapons (see "Contamination").

For animals, the profiles included in Book 2 – Travels (p. 183) can be used.

Feond Plague

How dangerous the Fearìl Rage should be is entirely at the Leader's discretion. However, it will always be too virulent for the PCs or the inhabitants of Dearg to curb by themselves. Depending on the option picked, the Rage could become a doomsday plague that will spread horror throughout the whole peninsula.

Mild variant.
The Leader may decide that the Rage is vulnerable to cold. In this case, it will not spread beyond the Vale and will disappear on its own after the Fearìl disaster. Winter, the season of death, will be the locals' solace, as the freezing temperatures will make short work of the infection.

Malignant variant.
In this variant, the Fearìl Rage will be much more resilient and virulent, quickly spreading all over Tri-Kazel. This option is covered in the campaign's epilogue.

The Leader does not need to make this decision from the start of the campaign. The mere prospect of a wide-scale epidemic should have enough of an impact on the PCs.

Becoming an Oracle

With this option, being infected with the Fearìl Rage and surviving it with a critical success on the final Stamina check will result in astounding and paradoxical effects. In addition to making it through alive, the Character develops several special powers that they will intuit one after the other.

Spiritual connection.
The Character develops a weak spiritual connection with Feondas and becomes able to sense their presence (see "Clairvoyance" below). This faculty is a sort of anomaly, a peculiar side effect of being infected with the Rage. Another unexpected effect of the connection is that the Character is virtually invisible to the creatures, provided he or she stays out of their way and meditates at least three hours a day. Anyone within a 10-yard radius of the PC is also under this effect.

Clairvoyance.
This extrasensory perception develops concurrently with the spiritual connection between the Character and Feondas. They can feel the presence of Feondas on a regional scale, in the form of a vague feeling of oppression that grows sharper as they get nearer. The Character will also feel a strong corruption from around Fearìl. They may be able to pinpoint its source as the bog that the Feondas are emerging from, but this will require them to be relatively close (the Epilogue of "The Refugees" provides a hint). Finally, though they will not be able to explain it, they will also have a connection with Céliane and will be able to sense that she is still alive.

Healing.
Once per day, the Character can cure the Fearìl Rage. They need to lay their hands on an infected being for five minutes. The beneficiary must then pass a Standard (11) Stamina check. On a success, the effects of the Rage fade within the following hour. The Oracle can even attempt to calm down a Rager in the middle of a crisis by speaking to them (Complicated (14) Relation (Discipline as appropriate) check), thereafter allowing them to use their healing powers.

If the group favors a more high-fantasy approach, the Leader can decide that one infected PC will automatically become an Oracle… provided they can survive the effects of the Rage. Such powers might fit spiritual PCs in particular, such as a Demorthèn or a follower of the Temple, granting them a mystical presence among their community. Depending on the beliefs and ideology of the witnesses, a demonstration of such powers might be met with fascination, admiration, fear, or rejection.



Fearìl's Ruins

· **Style:** Ghastly discovery, suspense, supernatural

· **Setting:** Region of Fearìl

· **Season:** Early fall

Summary of the Scenario: The PCs form a scouting party and leave Dearg for Fearìl. Once there, they see that the village is deserted and that the Fortress of Smiorail stands abandoned. Fearìl has suffered a massive Feond raid and Céliane is missing, along with many other residents. Every night, there is a risk that the creatures will return to spread death and destruction anew. Dearg may be next… And meanwhile, the Feond Rage keeps spreading.
A group of refugees have holed up inside a house protected by a vector of the Temple, and other survivors have scattered into the forest. As they follow Céliane's trail and uncover some of the secrets of Argan the knight, the PCs will discover where the creatures seem to be coming from: a putrid bog dominated by a Feond Tree, the Mòr Craos.
Little by little, the PCs will discover that many of Fearìl's inhabitants were able to escape and have since remained hidden, sometimes far away from the village. By following various clues, the Characters will be able to find Céliane. However, although she is safe and sound, she seems to be stuck in a lethargic sleep that nothing can wake her from.

Stakes and Aims: In the course of this scenario, the PCs will be able to better understand what happened in Fearìl and gather intelligence about the Feond threat. They will also get to learn more about Argan. The Characters will have to race against the clock in order to obtain enough information about the Feondas to have a chance of protecting Dearg. In addition, they will have to find Céliane, who plays a key part in the ongoing events, and rescue survivors whose help can later prove vital. If they botch things or prove too slow, Dearg may share Fearìl's fate.

Prologue

The Characters' Motivations

At this stage of the campaign, the PCs have several reasons for being involved in the events of this chapter.

The chief motivation of the Character following the narrative arc of Love will be to find Céliane. The Leader should take some time to ask the concerned Player about their Character's emotions: what are they feeling? With the fate of their beloved still unknown, how do they feel about this expedition? The more the Player is invested in their Character's psychological dimension, the easier it will be for the Leader to create an intense mood. Through supplemental scenes, they can focus on the PC's thoughts, fears, and distress.

Naturally, this does not solely apply to the PC following the arc of Love. By depicting the inner torment springing from each PC's past and motivations, the Leader can underline the relevance of each narrative arc and make every Player feel all the more immersed.



Here are a few examples:

- The Character following the narrative arc of Ethics may feel particularly concerned by the risk of a Feond Rage epidemic. Should the victims be put out of their misery to keep the illness from spreading, for the sake of the greater good?
- The events and encounters in Fearìl will certainly lead the Character following the arc of Adoption to think back to their own history and to the teachings of their mentor, Firmin. Could the Vale of Dearg be cursed, forsaken by the One because of a fault committed in the past? And what of these Oracles who claim to be able to oppose the Feondas with their powers? Are they Elect or heathens?
- For some reason or another, the Character following the arc of Guilt might get it into their head that they are responsible for the current calamity. After all, are they not possessed of powers condemned by the Demorthèn? Could it be that they brought about the spirits' wrath?

Horrific Aspect

Horror is a major part of this scenario, in particular through the following elements: the scale of Fearìl's desolation, the dark side of Argan, the uncertainty regarding Céliane's fate, the looming threat of another Feond attack, and the permanent danger of being contaminated with the Feond Rage. Confusion and madness will also be two increasingly prevalent themes.

Preparing a Horrific Revelation



In the course of the present scenario, the PCs will come into direct confrontation with the Feondas. The best way to introduce such encounters is to first create a growing feeling of suspense, thus fostering a sense of mystery but also setting things up for a stark contrast:

Mystery.

One of the central pillars of horror is the unknown. For as long as possible (ideally until the PCs' expedition into the infested bog in the third Act), the Leader should leave several possible explanations in the air as to what happened in Fearìl: a sudden attack of people infected with the Rage from an unknown source? Brigands? Marauders? … Or Feondas? Of course, some NPCs (like the vector of the Temple barricaded inside a house with a party of survivors) will bring up Feondas, and the Players themselves may be convinced that the monsters are at work. Nevertheless, the Leader can easily keep the uncertainty going, for example through the misleading testimony of a survivor who will speak of an initial assault by brigands before scavengers came and feasted upon the bodies. It is indeed a fact that the Black Feathers raided the village soon after the Feondas attacked, and a few confused survivors may have mistakenly reconstructed the events of the first night. Likewise, the presence of Ragers may act as a red herring: the Players may believe that they are dealing with an epidemic similar to Melwan's (see the scenario "Poison" from Book 0 – Prologue), caused by the presence of a fossil Flux vein or deliberately triggered by the bandits in order to weaken the village's defenses before attacking. Simply by never making it clear whether Feondas are actually present, the Leader can create an atmosphere of mystery that will definitely serve the horrific mood at the table.

Contrast.

This scenario starts off in a quiet, desolate environment before the Players come face to face with the horror and violence of the Feond encounter. This morbid stillness can be expressed via several elements: the journey to Fearìl through an immaculate landscape; the discovery of a deserted, eerily silent, partly snow-covered village; a huge abandoned fortress, reminiscent of a hollowed-out husk… A few incidents will upset this apparent quietness before all hell breaks loose during the confrontation with the creatures. Note that contrast and surprise can be used to evoke positive emotions as well as negative ones. For example, at the end of the scenario, after all they have been through, the PCs will be reminded that all is not lost and that many have survived, bringing them solace.



Chronology

One of the goals of the PCs will be to understand what transpired in the village of Fearìl. "The Refugees" brought them testimonies, but they are partial and hardly coherent.

Everything starts in the fall following Mael's death: a bog starts taking shape close to the village of Fearìl and progressively turns into a Feond nest. As they progress through "Fearìl's Ruins," the PCs may understand that the same phenomenon is occurring in the nearby vale of Loch Varn—something they were probably already aware of if they have played the scenarios of Book 0 – Prologue. The appearance of these nests is connected to the rise of the Dreìn called the Crow Prince. They birth creatures whose objective is to rid the region of all human presence.

Everything accelerates with the Feondas' attack on Fearìl. Here is a detailed chronology to give the Leader a clear vision of the events:



A few days before the attack

Argan departs.

Argan suddenly decides to journey to the Vale of Thoir, land of the Gwidrite lord Mac Snòr. He leaves with an escort of two Hilderin knights and six soldiers, leaving the fortress all but empty (see p. 21 for a description of the Fortress of Smiorail). His comrades in arms suspect that something is wrong, but Argan pretends that the trip is of a political nature, since Mac Snòr's lands are right next to the Talkéride border. The true reason for this hasty departure is that the knight has been feeling increasingly uneasy as the illness that plagues him has seemingly gotten worse with every passing day. Argan can indistinctly feel the presence of the Prince—in his nightmares in particular—and the imminence of the Feond attacks. The inner struggle he has grappled with for years has reduced him to a state of exhaustion that borders on lunacy, and he has pinned his last hopes on Mac Snòr.

Day of the attack (Day 1)

Fire in Fearil.

It is on this day that the first Feondas attack occurs. In an attempt to repel the beasts, the villagers use fire, and amidst the chaos of fighting the community's main stock of dry wood catches fire soon after nightfall. The fire starts spreading to the closest buildings, but is quickly extinguished. However, it has been seen from Dearg. About fifteen villagers, including Céliane, make it out of the village and run to the Fortress of Smiorail for protection. Galleg the hunter flees toward Dearg. Behind him he blocks the tunnel in the Dàmàthairs' house that leads out of the village, dooming many other villagers, including Dàmàthair Ferga.

The day after the first attack (Day 2)

Second Feond attack.

A group of survivors leave the village and hide in the forest. The party is led by Dàmàthair Jana, hereafter called the Oracle, who has acquired the ability to sense the presence of Feondas.

Galeg reaches Dearg.

After an arduous trek through the Vale in the middle of a snowstorm, Galleg reaches Dearg. He is exhausted and traumatized by what he has just experienced, compounded by the fact that his cowardice resulted in many deaths.

Two days after the first attack (Day 3)

A trio of refugees reaches Dearg.

Unfortunately, these three boys from Fearìl have been infected with a strange illness by the Feondas.

Evan's rash decision.

In Fearìl, a young hunter named Evan decides to leave for Smiorail by himself in order to find his little brother, Nep.

The Black Feathers attack Fearil.

Soon after Evan has left, Fearìl is attacked by the Black Feathers gang, led by their leader Rajen. As misfortune would have it, on their way, they cross paths with Sorven, a man from Fearìl sent to warn Dearg, and murder him. Argan's agreement with the Black Feathers stated that the latter were supposed to leave Fearìl alone, but Rajen has gotten tired of his grudging "partnership" with the knight. Since the Vale of Dearg no longer holds any interest to him, he raids the village, intent on leaving this region once and for all. His men are frightened of going to a place where Feondas may be lurking, but they obey their leader.

The Black Feathers attack Smiorail.

Not satisfied with only Fearìl, the twenty brigands and their leader sneak into the Fortress that stands all but abandoned. They pose as survivors from the village and take the soldiers by surprise. Only Dallan, a soldier, and Varek, the castellan, make it out and run for Fearìl.

Third Feond attack.

That very evening, the already hard-pressed village faces another horde of Feondas. With the first cases of Feond Rage breaking out, the situation is more dire than ever: in addition to the monsters, the survivors have to deal with Ragers who infect their supplies and can lose control of themselves at any moment.

Fourth day (Day 4)

"The Refugees" reaches its Epilogue.

It should be on this day that "The Refugees" ends, with the PCs neutralizing the three Ragers. The scenario may have lasted one or two extra days, in which case the residents of Fearìl have been holding out against Feondas and Ragers during that time. Whatever happens, the survivors included in this scenario should always be alive when the PCs get there.

Fourth Feond Attack: assault on Smiorail.

For the fourth night in a row, the Feond horde rises, this time to attack the Fortress. As the Black Feathers are debating what to do with the villagers kept prisoner inside the Fortress, the monsters, led by the Prince, overrun the citadel. Once predators, the bandits become prey. Of all the people at the brigands' camp, only three are spared by Crow Mantle: Mara is left on the spot in a catatonic state, while Céliane and Néiline are taken away by the Drèin. Two Black Feathers, Rajen and Algwich, have managed to remain hidden and avoid death. The villagers—who have been kept imprisoned inside the barracks—and the bastion's prisoners are also spared, but with no one to help them, they may starve to death.

Some time later (Day 5, "Fearil's Ruins" begins)

The PCs reach Fearìl.

On the PCs' arrival, there are only two groups of survivors left in the village. One has taken shelter inside the village hall while the other is barricaded inside a house under the protection of a vector of the Temple. All the other survivors have run away to some place or another.

Deceptive calm.

No Feondas will attack this night. Unfortunately, this respite will be short-lived.

In addition, here is a summary of the scenario's main events from the moment the PCs get to Fearìl:

Death and desolation.

The PCs find a deserted village bearing the scars of recent attacks. The place is littered with bodies and the few remaining survivors have holed up inside two houses. The macabre calm hanging over Fearìl makes it seem like there has been a massacre, but most of the inhabitants have actually been able to save themselves by hiding or running away.

Mysterious assailants.
The PCs find the bodies of several brigands. The corpses of certain villagers and animals show that Ragers have also wreaked havoc in Fearìl. Other, subtler signs indicate that Feondas have also been at work.

After Céliane.
The young woman is nowhere to be found, but the PCs will be able to learn that on the evening of the first attack on the village, she left with the children she was in charge of as a Dàmàthair. Dallan the soldier will mention having seen her back in Smiorail.

A seemingly empty fortress.
Searching through the Fortress will uncover Argan's grisly secrets. The PCs will also meet a dying hunter from Fearìl who will tell them about another group of survivors hidden in the forest.

The Oracle.
The aforementioned group is led by a woman they call "the Oracle." She is able to cure the Fearìl Rage and knows things about Céliane and the boggy nest that the Feondas are emerging from.

The Feond nest.
The Characters can pinpoint the location of the Feond breeding ground and—hopefully—neutralize it.

Find Céliane.
Céliane has been taken away by the Prince. The PCs can find her in an ancient sanctuary in Fearìl's highlands.



A Race against Time

From the moment the PCs reach Fearìl, the surviving villagers, holed up inside the village or hidden in the surrounding forest, are threatened. Every night, Feondas may rise and launch another assault. The creatures can instinctively feel the presence of humans and will hunt them down to the last. They will keep attacking until spring comes or until all the humans in the Vale have been eradicated. The Players must not delay. To communicate this feeling of urgency, the Leader can make use of testimonies from the survivors to let them know that things will keep getting worse and that they must put an end to the problem as quickly as possible.

The Survivors

In the course of this scenario, the Characters will meet several survivors. In total, there are four main parties: two in Fearìl, one in the Fortress of Smiorail, and one in the forest. Each group includes personalities who play an important part in this scenario. Other, smaller parties are hidden underground or outside the village, but the PCs are not supposed to meet them. Though the seemingly empty village might lead the Players to fear the worst, the situation is not completely desperate. Of the two hundred residents of the village, fifty were lost to the attacks. The others have hunkered down, waiting for the dust to settle. They are in danger, but if the PCs think and act fast, they may spare them a grim fate.

Two main parties are hidden in Fearìl: one in the village hall (see Act 1, Scene 4, p. 265), the other in a barricaded house (see Act 1, Scene 5, p. 268).



Dàmàthair Madenn

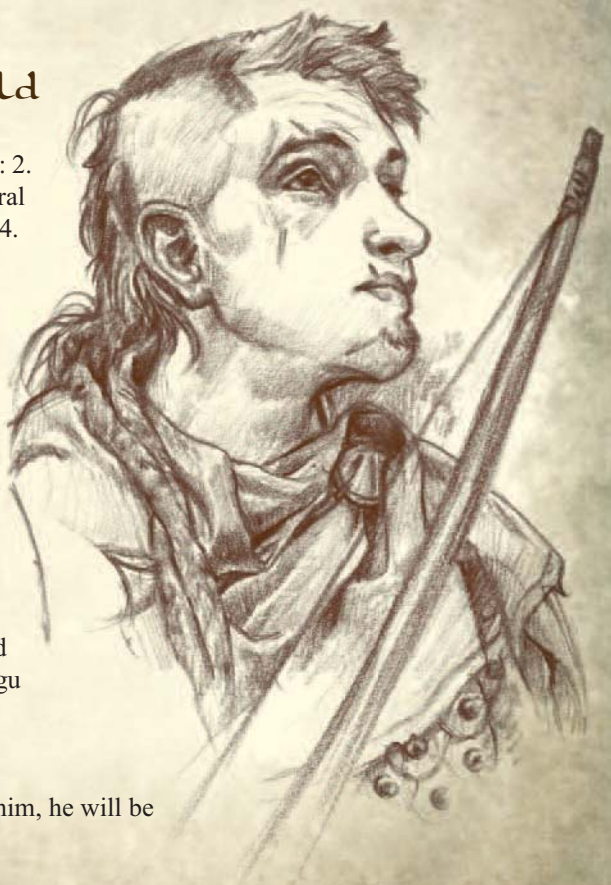
Female, Dàmàthair of Fearìl, 35 years old

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 2. Empathy: 4. Reason: 2. Conviction: 3
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 7), Craft: 5, Demorthèn Mysteries: 2, Erudition: 5 (Geography: 6, Herbalism: 6), Feats: 3, Natural Environment: 5, Relation: 4.
- **Character Traits**: Courageous/Emotional.
- **Sanity**: Balance (Elation).
- **Combat**: Attack: 9 (Swords: 11). Defense: 11. Speed: 8. Potential: 2. Damage: 2.
- **Health**: 19.

Madenn is one of Fearìl's Dàmàthairs. In addition to being an accomplished warrior, she is among the community's most erudite residents. She presents herself as resolute but, deep down, she is a sensitive person. She does her best to keep her emotions in check, though this is not without effort. When the village was attacked, she followed Jana's orders and ran for the Ansailéir's house along with about forty survivors, including thirty children. Even in the middle of such an extreme situation, Madenn's bravery shone through, inspiring those under her protection with admiration and hope. Madenn is getting the group ready to leave, waiting for the right moment to move out. At the beginning of the scenario, Madenn does not know where her fellow Dàmàthairs, Céliane and Jana, are. She is also unaware that Ferga died in one of the secret tunnels leading outside the village, trapped with several other inhabitants due to Galleg's cowardice.

Evan the Hunter

Male, hunter of Fearìl, 20 years old



- **Ways**: Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 5. Reason: 1. Conviction: 2.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 4, Demorthèn Mysteries: 1, Feats: 3, Natural Environment: 4, Perception: 3, Shooting and Throwing: 5, Stealth: 4, Travel: 4.
- **Character Traits**: Feisty/Stubborn.
- **Sanity**: Symptom of Absent-mindedness (Mental Confusion).
- **Combat**: Attack: 8. Defense: 12. Speed: 9. Potential: 2. Damage: 2.
- **Health**: 19 (Current: 0).

Evan is a local of Fearìl. He was appreciated for his bravery and was expected to become an excellent hunter who would dutifully contribute to the subsistence of his community. Evan was happy with his ordinary life, but everything was ruined when the Feondas attacked his village. He survived the initial attack and took shelter in the Ansailéir's house protected by Dàmàthair Madenn. However, worried about his little brother Nep, who had fled with Céliane, Evan disobeyed Madenn's instructions and left for Smiorail to look for him. Exploring the Fortress, Evan met another survivor, Jagu, a member of the party protected by Jana, the Oracle. Shortly after, they were beset by the Black Feathers and Jagu was forced to leave him at death's door.



When the PCs find Evan, he is between life and death. If they save him, he will be eternally grateful.



Jaber the Vector

Male, vector of the Temple, 43 years old

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 1. Reason: 2. Conviction: 5
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5, Craft: 1, Demorthèn Mysteries: 1, Erudition: 5 (Doctrine of the Temple: 6), Magience: 1, Natural Environment: 3, Perception: 4, Prayer 5 (Contemplation: 6), Relation: 5 (Persuasion: 6). Travel: 5.
- **Character Traits**: Pugnacious/Rigid.
- **Sanity**: Balance (Mysticism).
- **Combat**: Attack: 9. Defense: 10. Speed: 5. Potential: 2. Damage: 1.
- **Health**: 19.

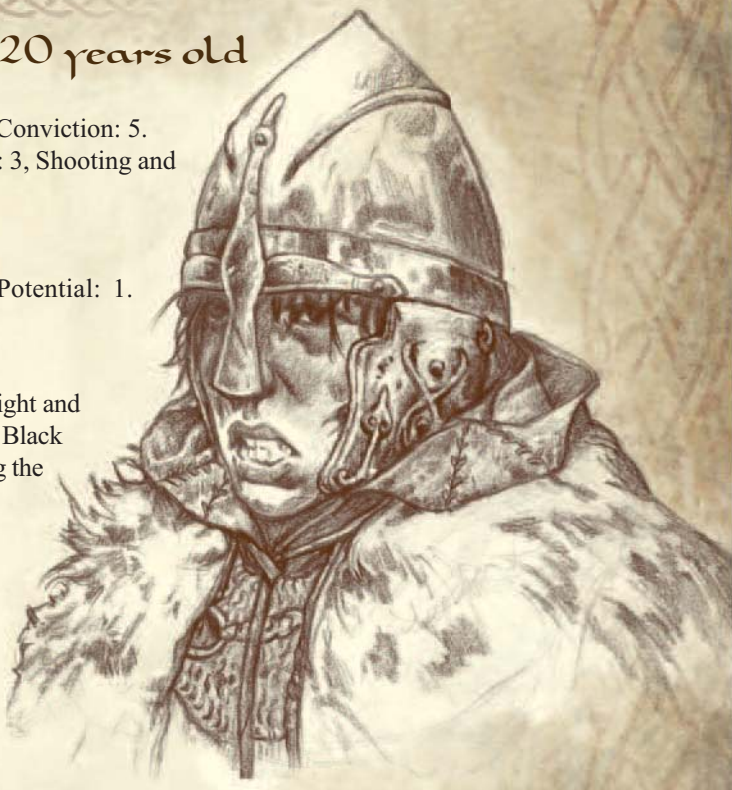
A missionary of the One, Jaber has been doing the traditional duty of the vectors of the Temple for years, traveling the peninsula and spreading the faith. Along with a young adept named Urvan (see Book 0 – Prologue, p. 30), his last mission took him to the region of Dearg. After visiting Saint Nyline's Chapel (see the scenario "Loch Varn," from Book 0 – Prologue), Jaber and Urvan went to Fearìl to meet with their brother, Ygain, another vector of the Temple. Ygain has been in Fearìl since last spring and has endeavored to convince Argan and the local authorities to rehabilitate the faith in the One in this region.

Jaber is a Character who will take a growing importance in the campaign. In the aftermath of Fearil's destruction, he will become the priest of a new religion. At the beginning of the scenario, he is in Fearìl, barricaded inside a small house with a few survivors whom he sees as his duty to protect.

Dallan the Soldier

Male, soldier of Smiorail, 20 years old

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 4. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 2. Reason: 3. Conviction: 5.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5, Craft: 2, Erudition: 1, Feats: 3. Relation: 3, Shooting and Throwing: 4. Travel: 3.
- **Character Traits**: Upstanding/Naive.
- **Sanity**: Balance (Paranoia).
- **Combat**: Attack: 9. Defense: 11 (Protection: 2). Speed: 6. Potential: 1. Damage: 2.
- **Health**: 19.



Dallan serves under Smiorail's Hilderins. He dreams of becoming a knight and admires his leader, Argan. Amidst the chaos of the Feond attacks and the Black Feathers' raid on Smiorail, Dallan has run away and taken refuge among the survivors of Fearìl protected by vector Jaber.

Dallan is a good man, always willing to do the right thing. He will ask the PCs to rescue the inhabitants of Fearìl who are being kept as prisoners by the bandits in Smiorail, and will offer to come with them to atone for how he shamefully ran away. However, as upstanding as he may be, Dallan has a persistent flaw: regardless of proof or testimonies, he will refuse to face the truth and will deny the obvious concerning his idol, Argan.

The PCs will meet these Characters in the course of Act 2.



Mara the Survivor

Female, farmgirl of Fearil, 22 years old

- **Ways**: Combativeness: 3. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 5. Reason: 2. Conviction: 4.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 3, Craft: 4, Feats: 2, Natural Environment: 5. Perception: 3.
- **Character Traits**: Brave/Absent-minded.
- **Sanity**: Syndrome of False Perceptions (Hallucination).
- **Combat**: Attack: 6. Defense: 12. Speed: 8. Potential: 1. Damage: 1.
- **Health**: 19.

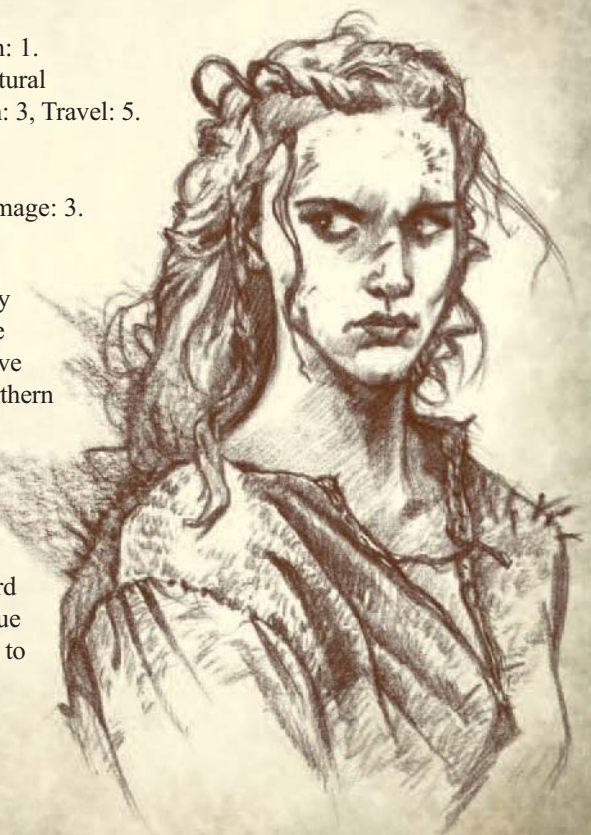
Mara is a farmgirl from Fearìl. When the Feondas attacked, she fled toward Smiorail along with many other survivors. When the bandits invaded the Fortress, she was captured and taken to the keep with Céliane and Néiline. Then the Feondas arrived and slaughtered the brigands. Céliane and Néiline were taken by the Prince, while Mara was left unharmed.

Mara was witness to the Feondas' assault. Traumatized and still under the spell of the Putrid Wolves, she will remain mute until she goes through a hypnosis session performed by a skilled practitioner.

Abbie the Mercenary

Female, Reizhite, 25 years old

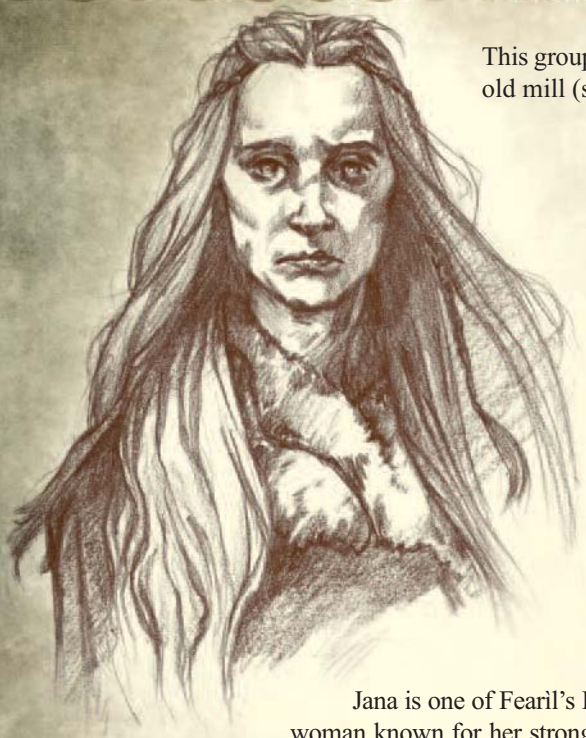
- **Ways**: Combativeness: 5. Creativity: 3. Empathy: 2. Reason: 4. Conviction: 1.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5 (Swords: 7), Erudition: 3, Feats: 4, Magience: 1, Natural Environment: 3, Perception: 2, Relation: 3, Shooting and Throwing: 3, Stealth: 3, Travel: 5.
- **Character Traits**: Combative/Individualistic.
- **Sanity**: Aggressive Symptom (Frenzy).
- **Combat**: Attack: 10 (Swords: 12). Defense: 15. Speed: 7. Potential: 2. Damage: 3.
- **Health**: 19 (12).



Abbie is a self-assured, independent woman who has been working as a mercenary for several years. Sometimes, she thinks about retiring from her career, well aware of the dangers of her profession, but the time has not come yet. She refuses to live as a pauper like her family, eking out a miserable living from a plot of land in northern Reizh. Abbie has been saving up with the purpose of retiring comfortably, maybe in one of the cities she has crossed on her many journeys. Unfortunately, her latest mission went south: her convoy was attacked on its way through the Vale of Dearg, and the Black Feathers handed her off to the local lord, Argan.

Abbie has been left to rot in the prisons of Smiorail. She has seen and heard many things, and her testimony will give the PCs an idea of Argan's true character. As self-interested as she may be, she will be principled enough to make it up to her rescuers.

Survivors of the Forest



This group has run into the forest and taken refuge inside a natural cave, not far from Fearìl's old mill (see Act 3, Scene 2, p. 283).

Jana the Oracle

Female, Dàmàthair of Fearil, 41 years old

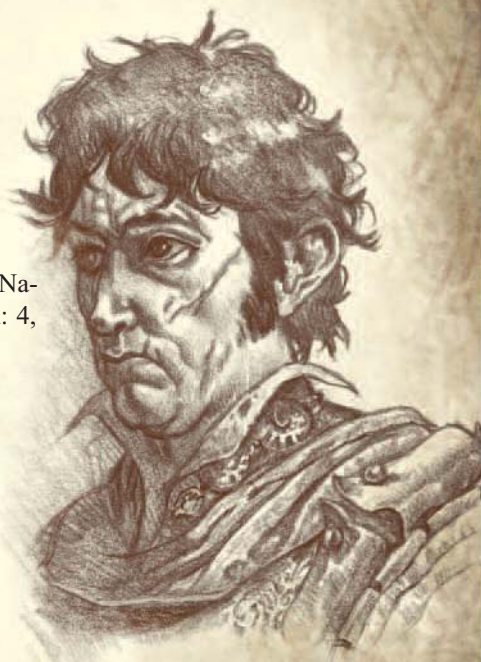
- **Ways**: Combativeness: 5 (2). Creativity: 4. Empathy: 3 (4). Reason: 1. Conviction: 2 (4).
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 5, Craft: 4, Erudition: 5 (History: 6, Languages: 7), Natural Environment: 3, Demorthèn Mysteries: 3, Feats: 2, Relation: 5 (Persuasion: 6).
- **Character Traits**: Optimistic/Prideful.
- **Sanity**: Symptom of Illusion (Hallucination).
- **Combat**: Attack: 7. Defense: 14. Speed: 6. Potential: 2. Damage: 2.
- **Health**: 19.

Jana is one of Fearìl's Dàmàthairs, the senior of Madenn, Ferga, and Céliane. A respected and charismatic woman known for her strong temperament, she is one of the pillars of the community. When the initial Feond attack took place, Jana immediately understood how dire the situation was. She acted with exemplary bravery, covering the survivors' retreat and throwing herself between her people and the monsters. She was the one to order Madenn to barricade herself and her charges inside the village hall, and Céliane and Ferga to leave the village with as many survivors as possible. Ultimately, Jana herself left Fearìl through one of the tunnels, taking about twenty villagers with her.

Infected by the Fearìl Rage, Jana miraculously recovered from the crisis phase of the disease. When she came back to her senses, she rapidly became aware that she had been gifted with peculiar abilities (see p. 249). Going through a mystical phase, the Dàmàthair was initially frightened by the intuitions that came to her, warning her of the proximity of Feondas. Thanks to this gift, the community of survivors gathered around her have been able to avoid the Feondas, but for how long? Her followers quickly took to calling her the Oracle, and some see her as the successor of Fearìl's Demorthèn, Baorìg (Céliane's father), who disappeared during the initial Feond assault. The events Jana has been through have deeply changed her: laconic and contemplative, she seems to have lost her previous combativeness and has become much more empathetic and spiritually inclined than she used to be (this has influenced her Ways, as shown by the scores in parentheses). Jana worries about the fate of the other three Dàmàthairs (Madenn, Céliane, and Ferga) and that of Fearìl's inhabitants in general. She has been getting used to her newfound powers and is waiting for the right time to act.

Doctor Feust

Male, Talkéride, 34 years old

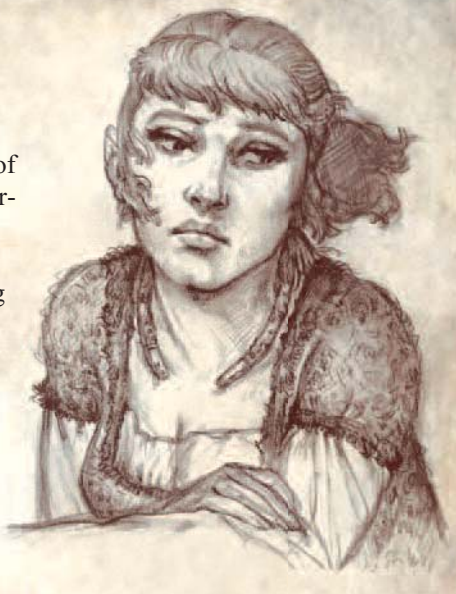


- **Ways**: Combativeness: 2. Creativity: 1. Empathy: 4. Reason: 3. Conviction: 5.
- **Skills**: Close Combat: 2, Erudition: 5 (Doctrine of the Temple: 6, Magientist Principles: 6), Natural Environment: 3, Occultism: 5 (Hypnosis: 6), Perception: 5 (Observation: 6), Relation: 4, Science: 5 (Medicine: 6, Mind Treatment: 7), Travel: 3.
- **Character Traits**: Loyal/Fearful.
- **Sanity**: Symptom of Morosity (Melancholy).
- **Combat**: Attack: 4. Defense: 13. Speed: 6. Potential: 1. Damage: 1.
- **Health**: 19.

Born in Tulg Naomh, Feust is an alienist trained in Reizh. He is a humanist, sensitive to the pain of others. Called to be Argan's personal physician, he came to the Vale of Dearg, which is how he met Adeliane. Moved by the girl's suffering, Feust has vowed to do everything in his power to find a cure for her mysterious illness.

Feust was present in the Focus "Coir: the River Child." In light of the scourge eating the Vale alive and the inexplicable manifestations his patients are suffering from, he is starting to question his initial convictions and is beginning to accept the existence of the supernatural. With this evolution comes a certain pessimism regarding his fate and that of those around him. When the initial assault on Fearìl occurred, Feust was in the village and followed Dàmàthair Jana. The PCs will meet him in the cave where the survivors have taken refuge. Being skilled in hypnosis, Feust will be able to return Mara's forgotten memories to her.

Céliane



Although she is not directly part of the scenario, Céliane is a key Character of the story, as well as one of the main motivators of the PC following the narrative arc of Love. This insert sums up what happened to her.

Céliane is Fearìl's youngest and least experienced Dàmàthair. She was terrified during the initial attack, but she still did her best to assume her responsibilities: following Jana's orders, she left Fearìl with other survivors, including five children she was in charge of, and ran to Smiorail. As they reached the Fortress, one of the children (Nep, Evan's little brother) got lost. Two days after the initial assault, Céliane and her followers were taken prisoner by the Black Feathers who raided the Fortress. Along with two other women, she was dragged to the brigands' camp, but was saved at the last moment by the unpredictable and bloody intervention of a horde of Feondas led by a half-man half-crow Drèin. The creature took Céliane to an ancient sanctuary in the highlands. The young woman has fallen into a strange, catatonic sleep, and it is in this state that the PCs will find her at the end of the scenario.

Jumping at Shadows

The scenario "Fearìl's Ruins" involves the PCs directly fighting supernatural creatures. Still, right up to the last moment, the Leader can keep things teasingly uncertain, mainly through the Characters' psychological dimensions. Reports of supernatural events can be attributed to the survivors' fear or madness. After all, in such critical, chaotic moments, how can one be certain of what one saw? A phenomenon of mass hallucination or mass hysteria (see p. 42 of The Black Moon Handbook) can be a plausible explanation. Amidst such extreme tensions, it is common for refugees to find comfort in beliefs or myths, or to let themselves be fooled by the illusions produced by their own minds.

Map of Fearil and the Surrounding Area

The map below is intended for the Leader, in order to help them locate the scenario's key locations.

Tunnels

Most Tri-Kazelian communities have tunnels leading outside their village, so that they can flee in case of major peril. The existence of these tunnels and where they lead to are secrets that each community keeps jealously. Fearìl has three such tunnels, which Jana, Ferga, and Céliane took. However, due to Galleg's betrayal, Ferga was trapped inside the one she was in.

1. Shelters
2. Mael's hideout
3. Shepherd shelters
4. Dearg's mines
5. Neart's Stronghold
6. Alestor's Monastery
7. The Matians' farm
8. Burnt mill
9. Red Lake

Hideouts of the Black Feathers

1. Natural cave
2. Aldwin's fortified farm
3. Abandoned Inguard

Tunnel


Toward Gwidre
River Kreizhdour
Val of Thoir
Pass of Lantrecht
Smiorail
Feond bog
Toward Tulg Naomh
Fearil
Red River (turbulent)
Dearg
Poorly maintained roads
Toward Melwan
Toward Loch Varn



Now that the snowstorm has abated, the council of Dearg decides to send a scouting party to Fearil. Information about the village can be found on p. 25.

A Vision of Ashes

Elend – Winds devouring men – 6 – Winds devouring men

This optional scene provides an alternative introduction to the scenario. It depicts a nightmare where childhood memories are intermixed with images of death and destruction, clearly reminiscent of the end of time as prophesied by the Demorthèn myths: Saoghal-Dheir. Such a scene will be particularly fitting if the Leader wishes to emphasize the horrific and supernatural dimensions of the story. By default, this dream will be experienced by the PC following the arc of Guilt or Adoption. It will echo the vision they had in the scenario "Vestiges" (see p. 219). If the Leader wishes to stress the eeriness of this dream, both PCs may experience it simultaneously.

The dream takes place at a time when the PCs were children. They are playing games close to a Tarish wagon, not far from Dearg's main square. Mirna (or her sister Masha) is taking the PC inside the colorful caravan, where they meet an old woman who offers to tell them their fortune. The cards reveal pictures that fill the fortune-teller with fear: a cawing crow, a skull, and a broken tower. The point of view zooms in on the elder's eyes where a great city is reflected: the capital of Taol-Kaer, Osta-Baille. The second part of the dream takes a turn for the horrific. In front of the capital, the PC is witness to an awe-inspiring, gut-wrenching spectacle. In order to optimize the narration, the Leader can have this moment coincide with the proposed song's tonal shift (at 2:20). As if slowly falling from the heavily clouded sky, a gargantuan creature reveals itself and starts inhaling the city. Tiles fly away, then bricks. Entire districts are ripped apart and carried upward, vacuumed by the entity from another time. From the PC's distance, it is as if the pieces of Osta-Baille were but grains of sand carried into an evil whirlwind. Soon, the entire landscape loses its color, and the mountains buffeted by the world-ending winds erode. All that remains is ashes and desolation. The point of view shifts to the pupil of a human eye reflecting the view of a moon-like world. Then the eye suddenly becomes that of a reptile. The dreamer feels oppressed and horrified, and wakes up with a start.

Repercussions of the Vision

If the Leader wishes to focus on the PCs' psychology, they can expand on the previously described optional scene according to the following angles:

- **On the various interpretations of nightmares.** How does the PC interpret this nightmare? The insert "On the various interpretations of nightmares" (p. 221) provides information that the Leader can pass on to the Player.

- **The curse (arc of Adoption).** Is this nightmare related to the plague that the Vale of Dearg is the victim of? Is there a curse at work, and if there is, what does it signify? Is it a test of the One that the PC must pass, or a sanction related to a wrong they committed in the past? The purpose is not only to have the Player reflect on their Character's faith (and possibly their powers as an Elect), but also to remind them of their story. The PC might imagine that they have been chosen by the One to fight an evil whose origin lies in their past, or that they have been witness to the wrath of the One, triggered by an unknown event.

- **Ghostly influence (arc of Guilt).** Why is the PC having such nightmares? Is there a connection with the ghost of Avel? The Leader can ask the Player these questions and have them share their thoughts on the subject.

Building Empathy toward Argan

Creating empathy toward Argan, who is initially depicted as a tyrannical brute, is a possibility ripe with dramatic potential. The optional scene "A Vision of Ashes" can be an opportunity to introduce this idea.

If a PC seemingly suffers from the same illness that consumes Argan, the Player will be inclined to see what the knight is going through from a new perspective. To lay the groundwork for doubt and empathy, the Leader can insert leads and clues suggesting a similarity between the initial troubles of the Hilderin knight and those currently experienced by the PC.

- The Leader can set the Player on this train of thought by asking something along the lines of "What if your Character was suffering from the same visions as Argan?" The purpose is to upset the PC's convictions by shedding a new light on what the Vale and its denizens are going through.

- Feeling like one's Character is on the same downward spiral as an antagonist suffering from severe psychic troubles can be a way to stress the anguish and horror of the experience. "What if I end up like him?" This gnawing question can instill a feeling of urgency, with the PC wanting to find a cure before it is too late.

Scene 1: Onward to Fearil

Provided the PCs have properly geared up and are moving at a good pace, it will take them at least a day to cross the Vale and get to Fearil from Dearg. They have been provided with a cart filled with provisions pulled by a Caernide. The party will travel through an immaculately white landscape in eerie silence. Halfway there, they will stumble upon the body of a hunter that they will be able to identify as Sorven, a resident of Fearil. He has been shot with several arrows. Later, they will learn that Sorven had been sent by Fearil's survivors to go to Dearg and ask for help (see p. 265). Unfortunately, he crossed paths with the Black Feathers and they killed him on the spot.

Scene 2: Reaching the Village

As they reach the outskirts of the village, the PCs will notice that the palisades are standing and the gates are shut (they have been closed by the survivors). From this vantage, they can see no sign of life. The recent snowstorms have draped the village in a white shroud.

Getting into the village.

As the PCs come out of the forest they can see the village of Fearìl with towering mountains and Smiorail's black shape as a backdrop. Walking up to the palisades means exposing oneself, which could be dangerous. Nothing will actually happen, but the Leader can keep the Players on their toes by letting them fear an ambush. Crossing the hundred yards between the edge of the forest and the gates will seem to take forever. Fearìl has two entrances: one leading to the forest and the track crossing the Vale, and another on the opposite side, facing the Fortress.

Snowbound bodies.

As the party progresses, their cart will bump into something half-buried under the snow that looks and feels like a rock. However, they will quickly realize with horror that it is actually a body, frozen solid. There are several other corpses around, including a blond woman lying face down. This will let the PCs fear that Céliane is dead, but closer inspection will quickly dispel that suspicion.

The tunnel.

The PCs may remember that Galleg mentioned having fled through a tunnel he then closed and blocked behind him (see the scenario "The Refugees"). Provided they have managed to get the exit's exact location from the hunter, a thorough search will allow the party to discover a large rock standing over the tunnel. Pushing aside the boulder will reveal a trapdoor. As the PCs open it, an awful smell of putrefaction wafts out. Going into the tunnel and walking among the many corpses results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check. The bodies bear deep wounds caused by the Putrid Wolves. However, even a success on a Complicated (14) Natural Environment (Fauna and Flora) check will only reveal that the bites have been caused by large wolves. The tunnel leads inside Fearìl, into one of the Dàmàthairs' houses.

Scene 3: Death and Desolation

Once they are inside the village, the PCs face a scene of desolation. Several adjoining houses have burned, their walls and roofs partially collapsed. The aftermath of death and violence is everywhere in this grim tableau covered by an immaculate layer of snow. The macabre stillness is only broken by the cawing crows. In a deserted street, next to the PCs, a few of the birds are pecking at a body pierced with several arrows. If the PCs have met members of the Black Feathers in the past, they may identify the dead man as one. He was shot dead by survivors when the Black Feathers raided the village, two days after the Feondas attacked.



Progressing through the village, the PCs will be able to discover the following:

Dead bandits.
The party can find several bodies identifiable as members of the Black Feathers. Though most of them have been covered by snow, some have been partly uncovered by strong winds. The PCs can notice them with a successful Complicated (14) Perception (Awareness) check. The majority bear wounds caused by melee weapons or arrows. Others show fatal claw and bite marks, or have been pecked to death. Passing a Complicated (14) Science (Medicine) check will establish that their deaths are recent. These bodies might let the PCs believe that Fearìl has been raided by the bandits. As for the bites, they may have been caused by Ragers or by scavengers that came after the attack. At any rate, the PCs will find no remains of the giant wolves that Galleg and the three boys mentioned. However, Characters who know about the characteristics of Feondas (Demorthèn and Magientists in particular) may hypothesize that any killed monster quickly rotted away, as always happens when a Feond dies. Others may be surprised that the Black Feathers dared to attack a village of two hundred inhabitants, most of whom are combat-capable.

Unaccounted for.
The bodies of several villagers can also be found, showing the same types of wounds. A closer examination (Complicated (14) Perception (Observation) check) will reveal that those who bear bite marks or signs of pecking (and have thus been killed by Ragers, Feondas, or scavengers) outnumber those who have been killed with weapons. The reason is that most of the villagers were killed by Feondas. However, at this stage of the PCs' discoveries, it will be difficult for them to deduce anything conclusive. After all, such wounds may have been inflicted by human and animal victims of the Rage epidemic that is plaguing the region, or caused postmortem by scavengers. Thorough investigations and inquiries would make things clearer, but it is unlikely that they have the time and means to do so. As they cross the village, the party may make a Complicated (14, due to the snow that covers most of the village) Perception (Awareness) check to notice that there are relatively few bodies compared to the estimated population of Fearìl. Does this mean that many of the residents have managed to run away and hide somewhere? Pessimistic Characters might suggest that they have simply been eaten whole by whatever monstrous beasts that attacked them.

Rot piles.
When it dies, a Putrid Wolf breaks up into a heap of rotting mud and plant matter. Four or five such piles lie in the village, one for each of the Wolves the villagers destroyed. In a rural location like Fearìl, such remains are indistinguishable from ordinary heaps of mud, earth, or dung, but their locations—for example, in front of a house's broken door—might draw the party's attention. However, with the snow covering everything, it will be a challenge to find them. Only a PC specifically looking for such remains will be able to find them with a successful Very difficult (20) Perception (Awareness) check. The Leader is advised to keep the Difficulty Threshold secret.

Once they deem that the PCs have spent enough time walking around the village, the Leader can proceed with the next Scene.



Scene 4: The Village Hall

The PCs will eventually notice a sign of activity: wisps of smoke start drifting from the chimney of the village hall, a massive house whose doors and windows have been boarded up. This building houses a large group of survivors protected by Dàmàthair Madenn: about thirty children, ten adults, and five elders. Depending on the PCs' past experiences and background, and at the Leader's discretion, they may know some of the survivors. By default, this Scene can feature the following Characters: Old Noster (a former carpenter); Old Elmyd (the village's elder, who fought in the War of the Temple); Nuzeg, Rhisiart, and Tegid (lumberjacks); Jud, Tebi, and Pamm (children); Tegwen (a warrior); and Deneza (a tanner).

The survivors are huddled together around the fireplace, where a meal is cooking. The PCs can learn the following from them:

A messenger to Dearg.
The survivors sent one of their own to seek help, a hunter by the name of Sorven. This is the first thing they will ask the PCs about: did he reach them? Why isn't he with them? Unfortunately, there is no doubt as to his fate (see Act 1, Scene 1: "Onward to Fearìl," p. 263).

An assault shrouded in mystery.

Among the survivors, no one is really sure what transpired on the first day of the attack. Everyone has their own theory: a sudden outbreak of Rage, some curse, brigands, Feondas, frenzied scavengers… One of the survivors, still shaken up, speaks of how they saw a hulking wolf exuding a brackish smell. However, this testimony is far from reliable: the witness was known for being a composed person, but has become agitated since the first attack. Moreover, the described creature might simply be one of the enraged animals that have been roaming the region for some time. Dàmàthair Madenn, the leader of this party, is still not sure what to think regarding what Fearìl has been through and will refrain from making assumptions.

Baorìg's advice.

Regarding the Feondas, everyone agrees that they should follow the directives of their Demorthèn, Baorìg (Céliane's father): they must stay safe and wait for the chaotic spirits of nature to quiet down. However, Baorìg is nowhere to be found and the village hall survivors have no idea what happened to him. The last time he was seen was during the initial attack. The fate of his daughter is equally uncertain. As a Dàmàthair, her duty was to guide as many of the inhabitants as possible toward the tunnels and safe houses. Like her father, she has not been seen since the first attack.

Murderous rage.

The survivors have noticed that certain animals and people have been the victims of a strange illness: their behavior became aggressive and vicious, culminating in a demented, extremely violent fit of rage. Some believe that this was caused by the wrath of the spirits, while others argue that it must be an epidemic. Some even theorize that the village has been poisoned by the Black Feathers to leave Fearìl ripe for the picking, basing their suspicions on inaccurate rumors regarding what happened in Melwan (see the scenario Poison, from Book 0 – Prologue). The PCs' arrival and their testimony about what transpired in Dearg will fuel their speculations. The Dàmàthair will quickly ask for silence and for everyone to stay calm. The current threat, regardless of its nature, is insidiously spreading mistrust among the community. Since no one really understands how the mysterious, frightening Rage works or how it spreads, everyone fears that they may have unknowingly been infected. The possibility of this fragile refuge being attacked from the inside weighs heavily on the survivors' minds.

The scavengers.

This is what the survivors have taken to calling the beasts that prowl the village every night. Some believe that they are animal Ragers, while others are certain that they are Feondas. No one knows their true nature for certain, but all have heard their blood-curdling howls echo through the night and fear that they may be the next victims.

Dwindling supplies.

The survivors inside the village hall were not prepared for a siege on the eve of winter. The supplies they initially had were limited. They have already sneaked out during the day on several occasions to bring food back from nearby houses. However, they are afraid that it may have been contaminated by victims of the Feond Rage, making it unfit for consumption (see Act 2, Scene 4 of "The Refugees," p. 244). This may bring the PCs to consider the consequences of a sudden influx of refugees in Dearg, which might overtax the already hard-pressed village.

Other survivors.

Another party, led by Dàmàthair Jana, left the village during the initial attack, but Madenn is not sure where they might have taken refuge. Her best guess would be a cave on one of the mountainous slopes. Shepherds use them during summer and, in case of attack, they serve both as shelters and as gathering points. For the time being, Madenn will not share this information, since it might compromise the safety of Jana and the other survivors. The latest events have left her frayed and wary, and she is not sure she can trust the PCs. She does not know what happened to Céliane and Ferga, but she supposes that at least one of them would have attempted to rally Smiorail. A few witnesses will confirm that they saw a group leave toward the Fortress.

Evan's rash decision.

In defiance of Madenn's instructions, this young hunter decided to leave for Smiorail by himself to find his little brother, Nep.

Moving out.

Dàmàthair Madenn is considering leaving for Dearg with all the survivors. Due to the presence of children and elders, the party would take at least a day and a half to make it to Dearg. So far Madenn has been reluctant to risk the journey, since no one knew how the village was faring. If the PCs tell them that the village is safe, the Dàmàthair will make plans to leave as soon as possible.



An Infected Child

Via this optional scene, the Leader can depict how fear born from ignorance can lead to unfortunate decisions. Conversely, through the use of knowledge and reason, one can act wisely.

This scene takes place in the village hall protected by Madenn and is related to the narrative arc of Ethics in particular. The PCs notice that one of the survivors, Jud, a child of barely ten, is sick. They may suspect that he has caught the Fearìl Rage (see p. 248-249 for more information on this disease). Soon, he will go through the crisis phase, during which he will probably attack and bite other people, spreading the infection.

The PCs may spot the signs of the Rage on the child. In that case, what will they advocate? Should Jud be kept safe inside the hall, even though he poses a great risk to the other inhabitants? For the PC following the arc of Ethics, this will certainly be a throwback to their days in Reizh (see “Modhannan: A Better World,” p. 118).

In such a mystical context, where everyone dreads the wrath of fearsome spirits of nature, some might suggest ritually leaving the child’s fate to the spirits, which would effectively mean casting him out of the house and leaving him to his own devices. The PC following the arc of Ethics can play an important part and suggest less extreme solutions. Thanks to his scientific knowledge, he will be able to provide instructions to avoid contamination, in particular concerning the disposal of feces and bodily fluids.

Escorting the Survivors to Dearg

The PCs may take it upon themselves to see the survivors safely to Dearg. According to the Dàmàthair, they only need an escort as far as the river; the rest of the way should be clear.
If the PCs insist on accompanying them until Dearg despite the risk of letting other people die in the meantime—including Céliane—here are two suggestions on how to put things back on track:

Separating the PCs from the survivors.
As the refugees are crossing the bridge, they are attacked and the PCs must stay behind to allow the survivors to flee. In the course of the combat the bridge may even be destroyed, leaving them no choice but to go back to Fearìl. Depending on the atmosphere the Leader is going for, the threat could range from a band of roving Ragers or Feondas to a simple false alarm creating a panic reaction (a flight of crows, a strange cry, etc.)

Splitting the party.
The PC following the narrative arc of Love must make a Drive Test at +2. On a failure, they will absolutely refuse to leave Fearìl until they have found out more about Céliane. This may lead the PCs to split into two groups. In this case, just like in "The Refugees," the Supports mechanic can allow the Leader to alternatively manage each party without leaving some of the Players inactive. Be aware that this will make the scenario significantly longer and will require improvising.

Scene 5: A Sanctuary of the Temple

As they explore the village, the PCs will discover a house on which six-pointed symbols have been painted. They will easily be recognizable as Hexcelses, symbols of the Temple. This house is that of vector Ygain, who has been living in Fearìl since last spring. It currently houses a dozen survivors, including vector Jaber and his adept, Urvan. Against all odds, it is a place of calm and contemplation; the shutters have been reinforced and barred, and in the candlelit room, the PCs can see grave, tired faces. An unending murmur of prayers contributes to the refuge's mystical atmosphere. The PCs can learn the following from the survivors:

Vector Jaber.
Jaber was sent into northern Taol-Kaer to visit the places of worship dedicated to the One that have been left empty since the War of the Temple. His mission is to take note of each holy place then report back to the religious authorities of Ard-Amrach. He is escorted by a young adept named Urvan. After a visit to Saint Nyline's Chapel in the Vale of Loch Varn (see the scenario "Loch Varn" of Book 0 – Prologue), Jaber and Urvan went to Alestor's Monastery in Dearg. Then they stopped by the village of Fearìl to take a few days' rest as well as speak with vector Ygain and the Hilderin knights of Smiorail. Caught in the middle of the Feond attack, Jaber and Urvan ran to the sturdy house of Ygain, who has been missing since the assault. Since his body has yet to be found, some hope that he is still alive.

The holy symbols.
Large Hexcelses have been drawn on the house's outer walls to ward the building. As devout as he may be, Jaber is not an Elect and therefore cannot perform Miracles (warding a place would require a Circle of Protection of the fifth Stanza). However, this place was spared when the beasts came back last night, which rekindled its occupants' hope. Fervor has spread among the survivors, and most of them have taken to praying. Jaber seems particularly exalted: he can feel it in his heart of hearts, the Creator is with them and protects them!

The survivors.
There are ten of them: an old man (Venter), two children (a girl named Ninnog and her little brother, Nolo), a woman (Ninenn, a hunter and potter and the mother of two girls who disappeared amidst the chaos of the attack: Deryn and Dil), and four men (Dewi, a merchant, and Fenz, Tarieg, and Gab, lumberjacks). There are also two other men: Dallan the soldier, dressed in a tabard showing the colors of Smiorail, and Varek, Smiorail's castellan. Dallan and Varek can tell the PCs the following: the Fortress was attacked by a group of Black Feathers when it was at its weakest. It happened that a few days before Fearìl was attacked, Argan, along with six soldiers and two Hilderin knights (including Roderic, whom Argan wants to keep an eye on and who will be a key witness in the scenario "Seeking the Divine," included in Volume 2 of Dearg), left for the nearby Vale of Thoir. The remaining Hilderin knight, four soldiers, and castellan were ordered to hold the fort. Following the first attack on Fearìl, a group of survivors took refuge in Smiorail. Two days later, the Fortress was treacherously attacked by the Black Feathers, and Dallan and Varek were the only ones to make it out. The soldier will tell the PCs that the people from Fearìl are still in Smiorail, and that they may still be alive despite the presence of the bandits.

News of Céliane.

Dallan is certain that he saw someone matching Céliane's description among the survivors in the Fortress. If the Character who follows the arc of Love hears of it, they must immediately make a Drive Test. On a failure, they will insist on leaving immediately for Smiorail. The castellan can provide the PCs with a map of the bastion (see Act 2: "The Fortress of Smiorail," p. 270). As for the young soldier, tormented by guilt and yearning to make amends, he will offer to come with the PCs and guide them through the Fortress. In case the party splits up, other NPCs may wish to join so that they can be played as Supports for an expedition to Smiorail while another group remains in the village to investigate.

Information about the attack on Fearil.

If the PCs ask the survivors about what happened, they will get confused answers. In the end, no one can say for sure what assaulted them on that night: Raiders? Enraged beasts? Feondas? For the vector, the situation is clear: Fearil is beset by demons, perhaps awakened by acts of sorcery. Jaber claims that he can feel their presence surrounding the village. His objective is clear: when help comes—which will happen, he can feel it—he will seek the origin of the evil and will purge it with the holy powers granted by the Creator. For now, only prayers can protect the survivors from the scourge that comes back every night… Not knowing what to think, most of the survivors have adhered to his vision, while the rest have remained silent.

If the party includes a follower of the Temple (probably the PC following the arc of Adoption), the vector urges them to find the source of the evil. He mentions how the prophet Soustraine was able to wipe away all demonic taint with the Miracle of Purification.

Jaber is destined to play a major role in the final part of the campaign, becoming the representative of a figure called "the Prophet." For that reason, he should preferably survive. If he happens to die, however, the Leader can use Ygain as a replacement and have the vector either emerge from a hideout or come back from the forest with a small party of survivors, for example.



The Other Survivors

A few additional groups of survivors are scattered about the village's ruins. Some are hidden inside cellars, while others have run into the forest or to one of the nearby fortified farms. However, some of the village's leading personalities remain nowhere to be found: Demorthèn Baorìg (Céliane's father), vector Ygain, and Dàmàthair Jana (see Act 3, Scene 2: "The Oracle," p. 283). As time passes, any hope of seeing them again dwindles. As for the Ansailéir, Arl, he died during the first attack, if the refugees that made it to Dearg are to be believed.

The Feond Threat

After nightfall, Fearìl may be the target of another assault. It is likely that by this time, the PCs have already left for Smiorail, since it is where Céliane seems to be. Moreover, Dallan, ashamed that he fled when the Black Feathers attacked and worried about the survivors, will urge them to go there and help those who have remained imprisoned.

If the PCs stay in Fearìl, the Leader should avoid directly confronting the PCs with the monsters for the time being, in order to keep their nature uncertain. However, they may hear guttural howls coming from the nearby forest. Even if no attack occurs, this night will remind the PCs that time is of the essence and that each passing minute could bring a new massacre.

Eoghan's Nightmares

If the Leader deems it fitting, some of the PCs may suffer from nightmares in the course of the scenario. The most obvious choice would be Céliane's future husband (the PC following the arc of Love), but it can also be a Character with high Empathy or trained in Visionary Arts (see p. 38-39 of the supplement Occultism).

A boggy forest.

In this first nightmare, the dreamer stands in the middle of a dense forest in the dead of night. Far away, Céliane is screaming for help. The PC starts running toward her cries, but the ground becomes muddy and branches hinder their progress. As the mud starts turning into impassable quicksand, the dreamer is filled with a crushing feeling of powerlessness.

Child games.

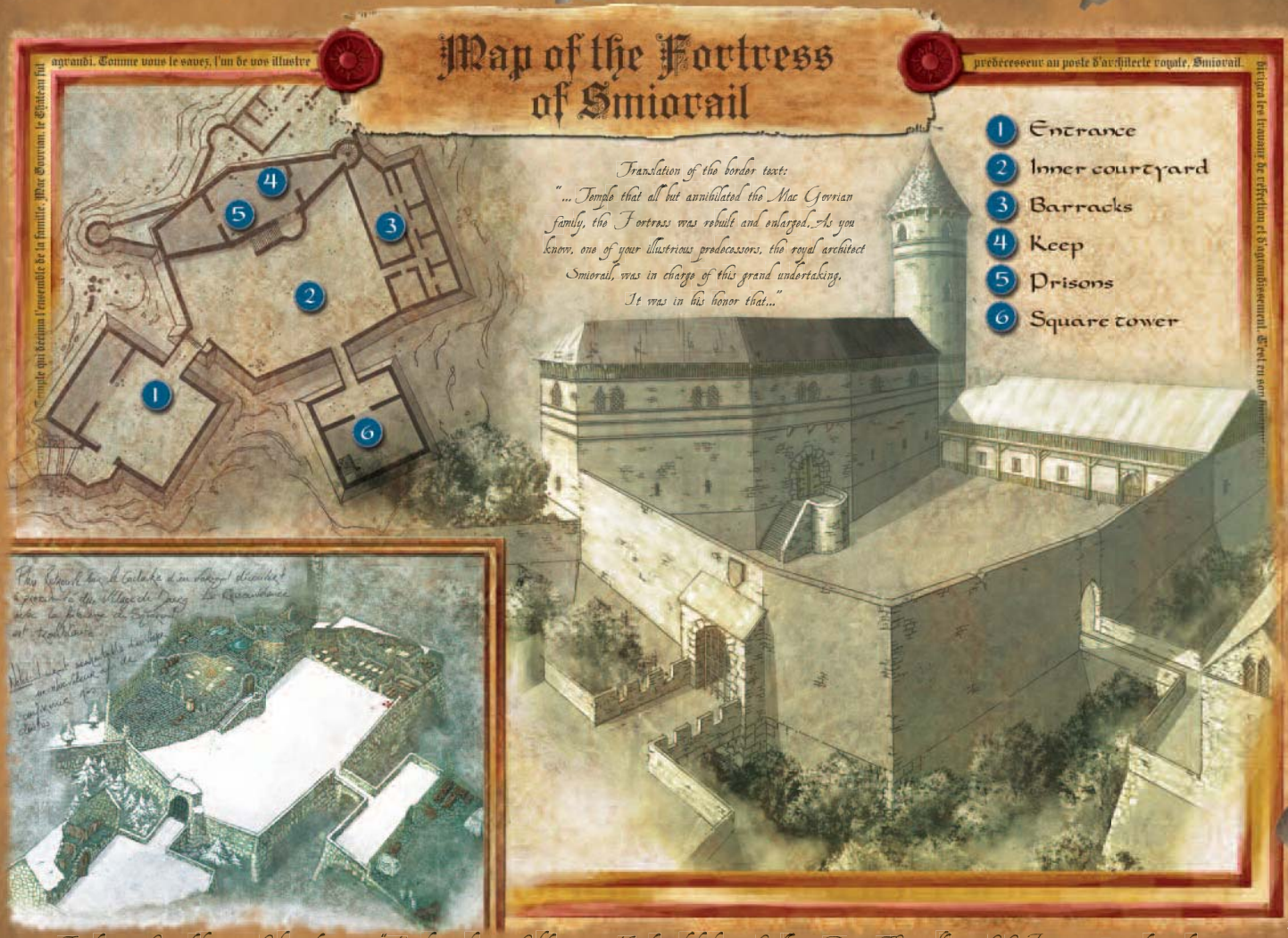
This second dream depicts Mael Mac Govrian and Céliane as children. The beginning of the dream is very joyful and colorful, with the duo playing in a flowery garden. Then the focus shifts to a crow staring at the children with hungry eyes. Tension rises to the point of becoming unbearable. Suddenly, the bird's beak opens, revealing sharp fangs, and it lets out a shrill, human-like cry. The dreamer wakes up drenched in cold sweat to the faraway cawing of crows…

These nightmares are partly due to the presence of the Prince in the region. According to the Demorthèn, dreams often have a premonitory aspect, and are thus sometimes feared. It is said that a sleeper can get lost in their dreams and never come back—a belief shared by certain occultist schools of thought. Proponents of the One and of Magience, however, have widely differing explanations. Followers of the Temple associate nightmare-related disorders with cases of demonic possession, while Magientists have theories about fossil Flux and its influence on sleep and dreams.

Act 2: The Fortress of Smiorail

The Fortress is not too far from the village. On their way, the PCs will notice the snow-covered bodies of people struck down as they were fleeing Fearìl. They bear nasty bites similar to those found on the villagers trapped in the tunnel blocked by Galleg.

The Scenes that compose this Act can be played in any order, depending on where the Players choose to go.



Translation of the penciled note on the bottom left corner: "Map discovered among the belongings of a Varigal found dead near the village of Dearg. The resemblance with the Fortress of Smiorail is puzzling. Note: Sending an observer in order to confirm our suspicions seems advisable."

Russell Shaw – Dungeon Keeper – 2 – A Green And Pleasant Land

As the PCs explore Smiorail, the Leader is advised to give particular care to their descriptions, which should reflect the heavy atmosphere hanging over the Fortress. Not only was it just the theater of an attack, it is also in a state of obvious neglect. By itself, this decrepit bastion is painful proof of how little the mighty of Taol-Kaer care about this remote region…

Disuse.
Only a small part of Smiorail is used and maintained by the soldiers it houses. The rest of the complex has been neglected for a long time. Weeds grow in abundance in the inner courtyards, parts of the roofs have collapsed, and the walls are covered with creepers. It is a fitting image of the fantasy trope of the abandoned castle. To optimize the mood, the Leader can play appropriately haunting music to accompany their descriptions.

Unnervingly quiet.
An oppressive silence hangs over the Fortress. The only sounds breaking this grim stillness are the wind howling through the deserted courtyards and the cawing of a few crows perched on the faded walls. To reflect this, the Leader can whisper through some of their descriptions. This disturbing sense of emptiness will clash with the ensuing events, during the course of which the Characters will be thrown into horror.

Snow shroud.
The recent snowfalls have covered the place with a thin white sheet. The cold masks all smells, reinforcing the impression of stepping into a lifeless, forsaken husk. The strong, sweeping winds have uncovered the odd building section or item, but an immaculate white blanket has fallen over most of the Fortress.

The Leader can find additional information concerning the Fortress on p. 21.

Scene 1: First Impressions

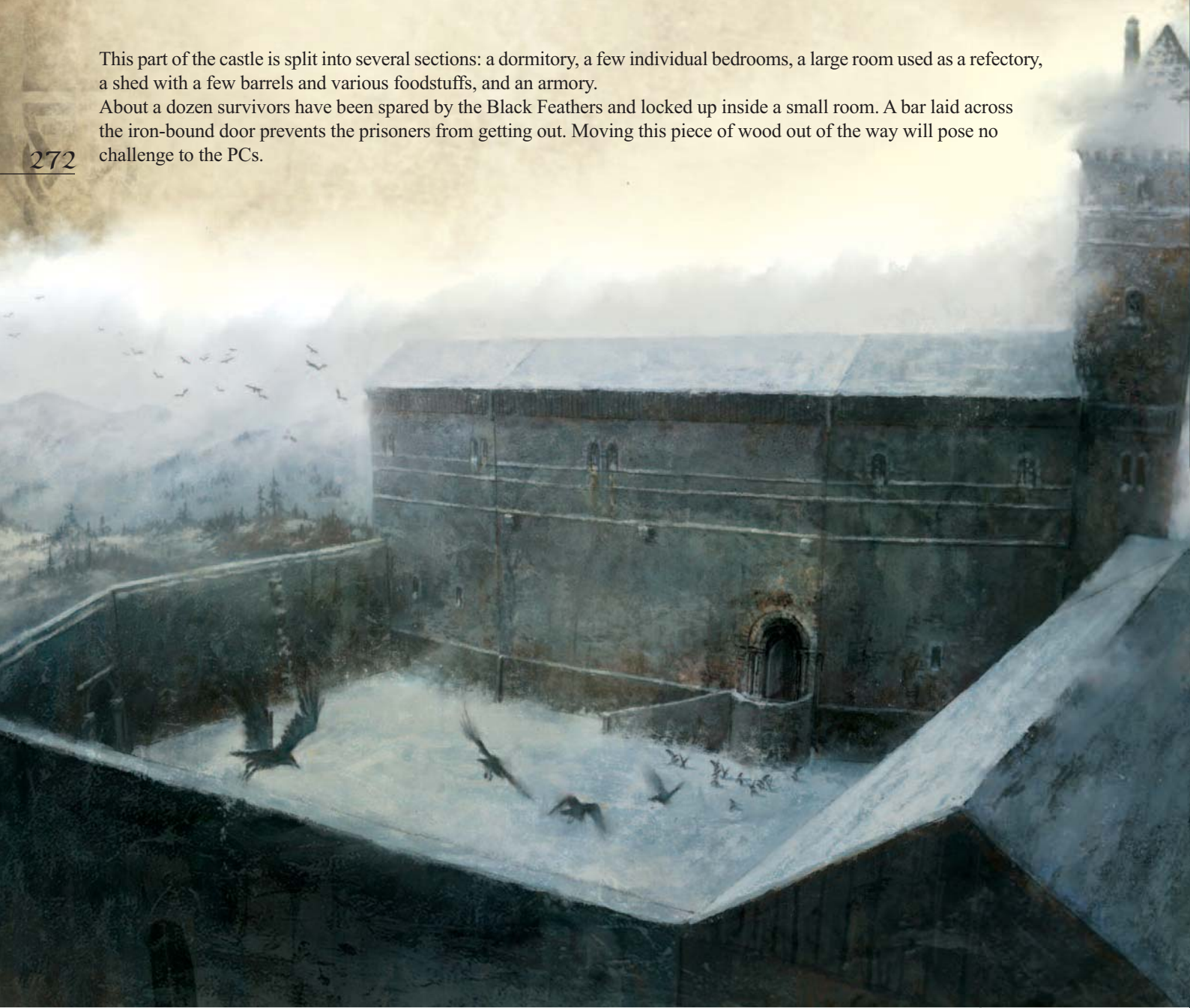
As the party reaches the Fortress, they will see that the drawbridge has been lowered. Once inside, they may notice furtive figures on the parapets with a successful Complicated (14) Perception (Awareness) check. These are the two remaining Black Feathers, Rajen and Algwich, who prefer to steer clear of the newcomers. Further in, the PCs can find the bodies of three soldiers and a Hilderin knight (the one Argan left). If he is present, Dallan will look increasingly upset. A quick examination will show that the men were killed with melee weapons.

Scene 2: The Main Courtyard

The main courtyard is connected to the locations used by the soldiers. An imposing staircase leads to the keep's double doors, which are currently half-open. On their threshold lies the body of a bandit. Despite the snow, it is evident that he has literally been torn apart, a sight that results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check, except for Characters who are used to gore (fighters, for example). The courtyard also leads to the barracks and to the square tower. In a corner, the PCs can find three bodies: those of refugees from Fearìl who were killed when they put up a fight against the brigands.

Scene 3: The Barracks

This part of the castle is split into several sections: a dormitory, a few individual bedrooms, a large room used as a refectory, a shed with a few barrels and various foodstuffs, and an armory.
About a dozen survivors have been spared by the Black Feathers and locked up inside a small room. A bar laid across the iron-bound door prevents the prisoners from getting out. Moving this piece of wood out of the way will pose no challenge to the PCs.



The prisoners.

They are exhausted and dehydrated. However, it should be noted that they are all uninfected; since they have not been in direct contact with Feondas or Ragers, they have not caught the Feond Rage. They will call for help as soon as they hear the Characters. There are nine prisoners, including four children who were under the responsibility of Dàmàthair Céliane (a fifth one, Nep, went missing amidst the confusion of the flight from Fearìl). Some of them are relatives of the survivors who have remained in the village: Deryn and Dil are Ninenn's daughters (who is currently inside the house protected by Jaber) while Kanna is Nuzeg's wife (a lumberjack that the PCs may remember from the village hall). There is also Jud's father, Palez, who will ask the PCs about his son as soon as possible. In the current stark circumstances, these reunions will be glimmers of hope. The ex-prisoners can tell the party about the awful screaming they heard last night, when the brigands were slaughtered by the Feondas. They will tell the PCs that Céliane was indeed with them, but that she was taken to the keep by the bandits, along with two other women. There is little doubt as to their fate…



Scene 4: The Keep

Most of the keep has fallen into disuse. The bandits had set up camp on the ground floor, which is now a scene of carnage. The place is littered with a dozen bodies, ripped apart and partly devoured. Just like in Scene 2, such a horrific sight results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check.

A survivor.

The PCs will find a young woman curled up in a corner of the room. She is all but naked, huddled under a blood-soaked blanket, but is amazingly unhurt. Her large eyes are blank, and she will initially be unresponsive. A diagnosis of her mental condition (see "Healing and Curing Mental Disorders" on p. 279 of Book 1 – Universe) will reveal that she suffers from a disorder similar to the Empty Fortress. The Leader can have the PCs make a Complicated (14) Relation check to see if they recognize her, in which case a success will let them know that she is a farmgirl from Fearìl called Mara. She is mute, and the only way to get answers out of her will be through the use of hypnosis (see "Mara's Testimony" on the next page).

She saw a horde of putrid wolf-like Feondas, led by a tall humanoid made up of a swarm of crows, rampage through the makeshift camp and kill everyone. Mara was subjected to the enthralling gaze of a particular type of Feond. According to some legends, she has been "bewolfed" (see the Putrid Wolves' profile on p. 292). The young woman was spared by the Prince because she was right next to Céliane at the time of the attack, when she and another girl called Néiline were carried away by the Feond.

Argan's apartments.
They are located on the upper floor and have already been rifled through. All valuables have been appropriated by Rajen. However, a thorough search will turn up the keys to the prison and the square tower. The PCs will also find a more unusual item hidden inside a small secret stash: a marble slab engraved with the Mac Govrians' heraldry along with a coded motto. This object is part of a puzzle that leads to Argan's secret quarters (see Scene 8: "The Puzzle," p. 279). In a corner of the room, the PCs may also notice a stone gargoyle the size of a forearm, similar to the ones that decorate the Fortress's highest balustrades. This sculpture is actually linked to the motto included on the slab and is the key to a secret room Argan has been using (see Scene 9: "The Secret Room," p. 280).

The rest of the keep's floors have been sealed off. In a room next to the ground floor's main room, a stairway leads to the prisons.

Mara's Testimony

Mara saw the Feondas and her testimony could reveal much to the PCs, but she has been the victim of a Putrid Wolf's mesmerizing gaze, which has left her in a daze. There are two ways Mara can recover: wait a month for the bewolfment to subside—she will have no memory of the scene, however—or use hypnosis on her. To properly perform hypnosis, a Character must have the Hypnosis Discipline (from the Occultism Domain) and pass a Complicated (14) check. If they fail, they cannot try again, but another Character can. Even if no PC is skilled in hypnosis, or if their attempts fail, there is still a way: Feust the alienist, Argan's doctor. He was seen just before the initial attack on Fearìl, and may still be alive somewhere. In fact, Feust did survive, running into the forest along with a group of survivors, where the PCs can find him during Act 3. He will be able to hypnotize Mara. Until the PCs find Feust, Mara will follow the party for fear of being left alone, dogging their footsteps with pleading eyes.
With a successful hypnosis session, Mara will relive the events that left her stupefied before snapping back to reality: the evil faces of the brigands and their leader Rajen as they were about to rape her, the sudden irruption of Feondas smashing the door open, the ensuing slaughter… Another successful Complicated (14) Hypnosis check will be required to get the rest of the story out of her and learn of the presence of the half-man, half-crow humanoid that led the Feondas. Mara saw the creature as it walked up to her, Céliane, and Néiline. According to her, the Feond took Céliane and Néiline in its arms, walked out of the keep, and flew away.

Keeping the Players in Doubt

Mara's recollections seem to leave no doubt as to the presence of Feondas in the region. However, the Leader may want to keep their Players in the dark, even at this point of the story. Here are three suggestions in that regard:



A nightmare-like vision.

Mara's testimony is not an objective report. It is, in many regards, exaggerated and phantasmagorical: the keep's double doors crash open, letting in ash-like snow; innumerable crows swarm into the building, flying in dancing patterns; the flagstones crack and split, letting out boggy roots that take the shape of huge wolves… On that last point, the PCs will see that the floor is actually more or less intact, regardless of what Mara says. She will stick to her version nevertheless, and is clearly being honest.

Twisted remembrances.

The Leader can inform the PC who performed the hypnosis (or the one with the highest score in Empathy or Science) that Mara's testimony may be influenced by hallucinations born from severe trauma. A Character skilled in diagnosing mental troubles (see "Healing and Curing Mental Disorders" on p. 279 of Book 1 – Universe) will be able to establish that Mara's sanity is very damaged (she currently suffers from a Syndrome of False Perceptions). It is thus likely that her recollections are distorted due to the hallucinations that she suffers from. The Leader can portray Mara accordingly, showing quirks and oddities of behavior and speech that will cast doubt on how reliable her memory is.



Ragers mistaken for monsters.
If needed, the Leader may remind the party that animal and human Ragers have been rampaging throughout the region, in Dearg and Fearìl in particular. This points to a wide-scale epidemic, and the presence of more Ragers in Fearìl seems to indicate that the village is at its epicenter. Even at this stage of the scenario, the Feondas' actions may be mistaken for Ragers wreaking havoc.



Through her Eyes

If the PCs (or Feust the alienist) successfully perform a hypnosis session, this optional scene can be used. Instead of describing the events to the Players or narrating them through Mara, the Leader can have the PCs directly experience them, as if they were looking through the young woman's eyes. They will see what she saw, and feel her fear and horror. This will give a striking, supernatural twist to this scene. The Leader should focus on describing the place and Characters (the bandits' camp, the malevolent expressions of Rajen and his thugs) as much as Mara's emotions (terror when the bandits threaten her, then awe and dread when the Feondas attack). Note that this is also the first time that the PCs will be face to face with the monsters they have been hearing about since "The Refugees." Now is the moment to depict the Feond wolves' bodies in detail. Another major component of this scene is the intervention of the half-man half-crow Prince, which should also be described with precision, in particular how its composite body of crows can gather and disperse into a fearful murder. Still, the most striking feature of the creature are its eyes, disturbingly human-like in their intensity. Experiencing Mara's distress and terror in this fashion results in a Difficult (17) Mental Resistance check.



Graeme Revell – The Crow: City of Angels – Original Score Album – 12 – The Campanile

Fitting music will emphasize the exceptional character of Mara's tale. The track "The Campanile" starts slow and somber before picking up. The Leader can play it as they narrate the vision and the Feondas barging into the Black Feathers' camp. For a more contemplative atmosphere, "Temple of Pain," from the same album, can be used.



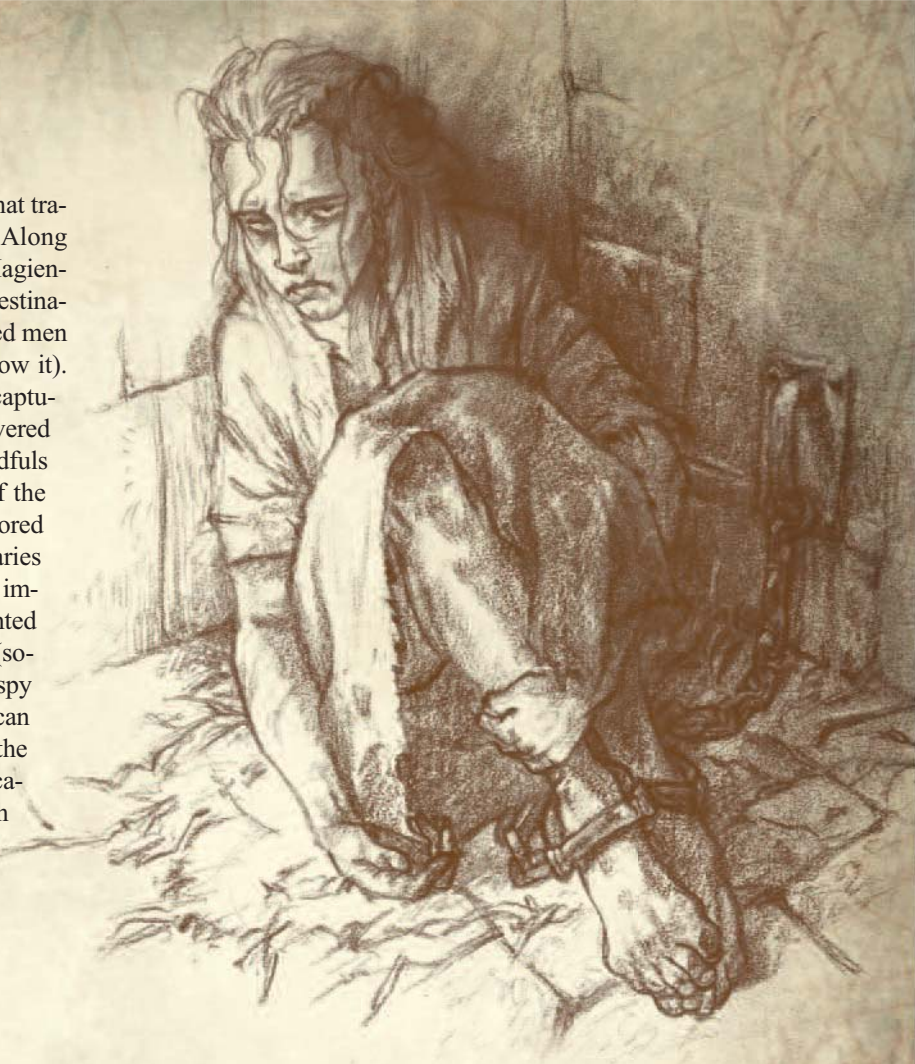
Jure Peternel – Dearg – 6 – Crow Mantle

This track from the original soundtrack "Dearg" can also be used if the Leader wishes to go for a more epic mood.

Scene 5: The Prisons

A stairway goes down to the basement, leading to a small room with a heavy iron-bound door. Without the keys (which are in Argan's apartments), the PCs will have to resort to forcing the door open (Heroic (25) Feats check), battering it down (Complicated (14) Feats check), or picking its lock (Complicated (14) Craft (Locksmithing) check). Behind the door are the cells, spread on either side of a narrow corridor. Only two of them are occupied.

Meraz the convict.
A man in his forties from Tulg Naomh. He had been working in Fearìl as an overseer for twenty years before he was convicted of murder two months prior to the present events. His imprisonment has clearly taken a toll on his sanity. If he is questioned about his story, Meraz will deny his guilt, claiming that the whole thing was revenge gone wrong. While he waits for the council to pronounce judgment regarding his case, he is kept here. Meraz is scrawny, with a filthy beard and scruffy hair. He will beg the PCs for food and drink. If he is not given water, he will die within a day or two. Meraz suspects that something abnormal has been taking place and will be reluctant to set foot outside. After all, he is safe here… Actually, Marez could be of great help to the PCs in Act 3 of this scenario, particularly if the party does not include a Magientist. Indeed, he has been trained in Magience in Tulg Naomh, and would be able to get the Fire hose working in order to fight the Feond menace.



Abbie the Reizhite mercenary.

This Reizhite mercenary was part of a convoy that traveled through the Vale of Dearg last summer. Along with a few other warriors, she was escorting a Magientist named Raffer. They never made it to their destination, as they were ambushed by a group of armed men (the Black Feathers, though Abbie does not know it). Abbie and Uthyr—another mercenary—were captured; everyone else was killed. Rajen's men delivered the prisoners to Argan in exchange for a few handfuls of Daols. The Hilderin also purchased some of the Magientist's tools from the Black Feathers and stored them in the square tower. Officially, the mercenaries are suspected of being Reizhite spies, hence their imprisonment. Abbie has no idea why Raffer wanted to go to the Vale of Dearg. If the PCs free her (something Dallan will not agree with, expecting a spy from Reizh to betray them sooner or later) she can join the party and help them through the rest of the campaign. However, her equipment was confiscated and she is in bad shape, with only 12 Health points left. She is not hurt per se, but she has suffered from her incarceration.

(Abbie's profile is included on p. 258.)

If Abbie is shown the corpses of the bandits inside the keep or at the threshold, she can identify some of them as belonging to the ambushers. This should clue in the PCs to a collusion between Argan and the Black Feathers. If the bandits did indeed attack Abbie's convoy, how did she end up in a jail in Smiorail? Dallan will maintain that Abbie must be lying, refusing to face the truth and recognize that his leader is corrupt.

The fate of other prisoners.

Uthyr was in the cell next to Abbie's. She will tell the PCs how, one night, Argan stormed into the prison. His eyes were mad, as if he were possessed, and he took Uthyr away… Dallan knows that, sometime later, the disemboweled body of the Reizhite was found close to the village. However, he denies Abbie's version. Obviously, Uthyr simply escaped and was subsequently killed by wild beasts or Black Feathers! What would Argan want to do with a prisoner? Once again, the soldier will vehemently deny any accusation toward his mentor, and may even prove aggressive. Meraz, who has been kept imprisoned for longer than Abbie, will affirm that Uthyr was not the first: other prisoners were taken away, never to be seen again… If the PCs have played the scenario "Vengeful Words," this may remind them of what happened in the Monastery of Tuath and lead them to wonder about the connection between Argan and the Gwidrite lord Mac Snòr.

Scene 6: The Square Tower

The square tower is accessible through the main courtyard, but the PCs will need the keys from Argan's apartments to get inside. Only the tower's ground floor is still in use, serving as a storage room. The upper floors have partly crumbled and have since been sealed off. The room contains plenty of very diverse supplies, part of which Argan bought from the Black Feathers. Only Argan and one of his closest lieutenants had access to it. Some of the items listed below can be found in the "Prices and Equipment" chapter of Book 1 – Universe (p. 219).

Weapons and armor.

Spears, swords, and shields are stored inside several crates. There is also a superior quality suit of chain mail (Protection: 4).

Fire hose.
It is kept under a dusty sheet and consists of a wheeled tank connected to a flexible hose. The Fire hose is a Magientist artifact used in Reizhite cities to fight fires. Thanks to a Flux-powered engine, it can shoot water at high pressure. The technical sheet for this artifact is included below.

Flux cartridges.
A box containing twelve standard cartridges filled with mineral Flux can be found on a shelf. These can be used to power the Fire hose. There is also another box containing three standard cartridges of organic Flux.

Metal canisters.
Three canisters have been stashed in a corner. Two of them are empty, but the last one is filled with a special fossil Flux-based mixture, according to the tag marked with the emblem of the Ashen Yard's Magientists. Identifying the emblem requires passing a Complicated (14) Erudition (Magientist Principles) or Magience check, while understanding the instructions on the tag requires passing a Complicated (14) Magience (Artifact Use) check. The tag describes a very efficient, but also very polluting herbicide. The Fire hose can be plugged into the canisters. Used against plant-based Feondas, the herbicide inflicts 2D10 Damage every Round. It can also neutralize the bog nest and kill the Putrid Wolves gestating inside, but will be ineffective against mature Wolves. This mixture is so complex that no PC can guess its composition or reproduce it. The only way to learn more about this devastating plant-killing substance would be to track its inventors to the Ashen Yard. See p. 30 of Book 2 – Travels for more information about the Ashen Yard.

Ballista.
A ballista is kept under a tarpaulin. This wheeled military engine is seven feet across and can shoot deadly giant bolts. It is used with the Shooting and Throwing Domain (Discipline: Ballista), has a Damage of 7, and takes two Rounds to reload.



Fire Hose

Type of Flux: Mineral
Consumption: 1 charge/minute
Tank: 20 charges
Resistance: 7 (5)
Vulnerability: Impact, Lightning
Handling: 0

This artifact shoots high-pressure liquid stored in canisters loaded via the back of the vehicle. It is very power-hungry, consuming one charge of Flux for every minute of activity. Up to twenty standard cartridges can be plugged into it, or a Flux carboy can be inserted behind. The initial Resistance of the artifact is 7, but the one found by the PCs has been slightly damaged.

Used against the Feond Tree and loaded with Ashen Yard herbicide, the Fire hose inflicts 2D10 Damage every Round. It can also be used to sterilize the bog nest that births the Putrid Wolves.

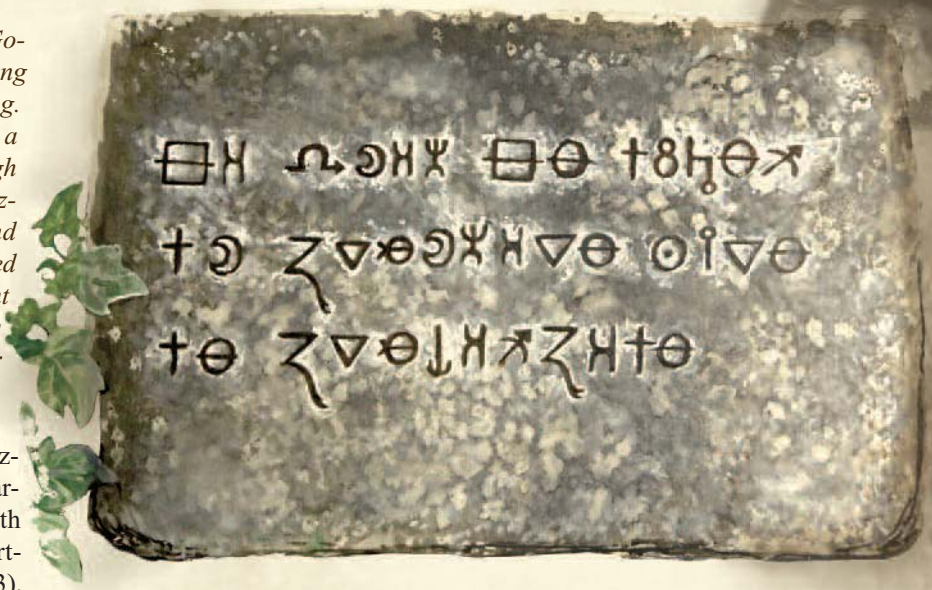
Scene 7: Evan

As the PCs are exploring the Fortress, whenever the Leader deems it most appropriate, the PCs will stumble upon a dying man of some twenty years: Evan, a hunter from Fearìl. He had just reunited with his little brother, Nep (see "Evan's rash decision," p. 266), when they were attacked by Black Feathers. The ensuing fight left Evan grievously wounded, and after giving him first aid, Jagu had to leave him behind. His condition has since worsened and he is now dying; saving him will require passing a Difficult (17) Demorthèn Mysteries (Traditional Medicine), Magience (Medicine), Natural Environment (First Aid), or Science (Medicine) check. Between two wheezing breaths, Evan can give the party the following critical information:

Before he encountered the bandits, Evan met another man from Fearìl named Jagu, who had been sent by his own party of survivors to scout the Fortress of Smiorail and check on the situation there. Jagu's group have settled in a cave hidden in the heart of the forest. The two men managed to fend off the brigands, but Evan was incapacitated during the fight. Therefore, he asked Jagu to take his little brother to their hideout. Jagu gave him a brief description of where it was located (in the mountain northwest of there) and promised to come back for him as soon as Nep would be safe. If the PCs wait, true to his word, Jagu will come back to the Fortress the next day (see Act 3, Scene 1: "Waiting," p. 282).

Scene 8: The Puzzle

The slab with the heraldry of the Mac Govrians and the coded motto had been hung above the fireplace of the central building. Several years ago, in the middle of a gloomy winter, Argan read it and, through trial and error, managed to solve the puzzle. He has since removed the slab and hidden it in his apartments. He considered destroying it several times, but never went through with it, both out of superstitious fear and just in case it might have other uses.



Argan's secret room is guarded by a puzzle. To solve it, the PCs will need the marble slab and the gargoyle miniature, both of which can be found in Argan's apartments (see Scene 4: "The Keep," p. 273). If the PCs do not try to solve the puzzle or have been unable to find its components by themselves, Varek or Dallan can help them. They know about the slab, which had always stood above the central fireplace. Argan took it down, and rumor has it that he has been trying to solve its puzzle. Varek and Dallan can mention these objects and encourage the PCs to unlock their mysteries.

By passing a Standard (11) Science (Cryptography) (a PC must have at least one point in this Skill to use it) or Difficult (17) Erudition (Languages) check, the PCs can decipher the coded message engraved on the marble slab below the heraldry of the Mac Govrians: "From the loggia, the creature contemplates the setting sun."

A loggia is an architectural feature usually built on the upper levels of a building (generally a tower), which consists of a covered exterior gallery supported by columns or arches. The map provided by Varek actually mentions a "Loggia" on top of one of the towers. If the PCs go there, they will see that each column has a cavity in which a gargoyle miniature stands. Four of the cavities are empty, including the one facing west, where the sun sets. If the gargoyle found in Argan's quarters (see Scene 4: "The Keep," p. 273) is put inside the correct column, there is an audible click. A thorough investigation (or a Complicated (14) Perception (Observation) roll) will reveal that one of the flagstones has come out. It can be removed, leading to a secret room.

Scene 9: The Secret Room

The secret passage revealed by solving the puzzle opens into a narrow descending stairway that leads to a small, square room. Argan has been using this place mainly to stash some of the letters and documents about the illness that plagues him. The room is sparsely furnished: a wooden table used as a desk, some half-melted candles, a few barrels and crates, and a simple bed. A quick search will turn up several jars containing herbs. Passing a Complicated (14) Erudition (Herbalism), Natural Environment (Herbalism), or Science (Medicine or Mental Phenomena) check will let the PCs know that these are strong mixtures of painkillers. Here is a list of everything the PCs can find:

- A letter from Lias Fern, a soldier of the castle of Tulg Naomh, a faithful accomplice and former comrade in arms of Argan. He is writing to him about the intrigues at the court of Duchess Cortessa Mac Lichorl.
- A letter from Harald, Dearg's pigeon keeper. It is not signed, but PCs who have already seen his handwriting will be able to recognize it if they pass a Complicated (14) Erudition or Perception check.
- A letter from a scribe who lives in the Vale of Breac, near Dearg.
- Two letters from the Gwidrite lord Mac Snòr.
- A letter from Feust the alienist.
- A blank notebook whose first pages have been ripped off. It has a value of one frost Daol.
- A box containing several Daols strung on a leather cord: one frost and nine azures.
- Fossil Flux in its natural state: an Amber crystal (worth two azure Daols). It was found in Dearg's mines.
- Twenty doses of medicines that can be used as painkillers to ease a crisis (see "Potions and Medicines" on p. 280 of Book 1 – Universe).

Reproductions of the letters can be found below. The Leader can download them at www.esteren.org.



Letter from Mac Snòr

Knight Argan,

I write to you as a friend and offer you my help.
I have heard about the ordeals you have been enduring and the illness that affects you. I cannot but strongly urge you not to put your trust in Demorthèn and apothecaries of all kinds. What is happening to you is to be taken seriously, but is not as bad as you seem to currently believe.
We are the vassals of a different king, but we both live in remote regions that the lords of our capitals do not concern themselves with. Above all, I believe that we are neighbors and that we could support each other in good faith for our mutual benefit.
Should my proposition be of any interest to you, I invite you to visit me at the castle of Thòl.
I hope to see you soon,

Irvan Mac Snòr



My dear friend,

Good news! I think I have found the person you need. You will probably not be happy about it, but I know that so far, Magientist remedies and Demorthèn potions have been of no help. The man is a Reizhite specialist and the personal doctor of the Duchess. His name is Feust, and if you agree, he should be able to visit you in a few weeks.

I strongly advise you to give him some of your time. Even if he proves of no help, he will still be a source of news from Tulg Naomh, don't you agree?

Speaking of the city, Mac Torrach's behavior has become rather strange... During his meals, I have seen him stop eating and get lost in thought more than once. Maybe the illness in Tulg Naomh has gotten to him too? I suspect that the bard has something to do with it and I will continue to investigate the matter. However, I do not think it has anything to do with the problems you have, since I have heard no one complain of headaches like those you have described.

L. F.

Letter from Lias Fern

Master,

My deepest apologies, but the Elarigs have refused to answer any of my questions. I was unable to get anything out of them. With their kennels close to the mines, I cannot investigate. Alban is still obsessed with books. Considering his character and how tense his relationship with his father is, it is very unlikely that he will take up the family business. I will try to approach him and learn whatever I can from him.

I must also let you know that I have noticed an altercation between Talacien, the Magientist settled in the nearby Vale of Melwan, and the Elarigs' men who guard the mines. The Daedemorthys and his two Reizhite sellswords were sent packing. Talacien will certainly be back in earnest, as he has a royal decree that authorizes him to proceed with his research. I will do what I can to learn more.

Letter of Harald the pigeon keeper

Sir Argan,

I thank you for your letter. Here in Breac, we have never encountered a phenomenon quite like the one you describe. However, a Varigal who journeyed in Gwidre told me about a story similar to yours. According to him, a small Gwidrite village named Beag Coille disappeared following the emergence of a bog in the vale. To answer your question, yes, Gwidrites tend to attribute such phenomena to evil entities, but as a Talkéride, I do not share this interpretation. Most likely, what you are dealing with is a manifestation of Gluta, the swamp spirit. I have discussed the subject with our Demorthèn and he has confirmed this hypothesis. Among Demorthèn, this spirit is known to be perfidious and to foster the propagation of Feondas, similar to the spirits Aingeal and Sníomh. Gluta's activity follows the cycle of seasons: the bog must have taken shape in the course of fall, and once it has fully developed, it will probably remain until the end of winter. Thus, the only possible solution is to keep the residents of your vale protected until spring comes. However, I will transmit your request to the Lord of Breac.

Sédarn

Letter from the scribe in Breac

Dear Friend,

I can see you are of two minds and I am not blaming you! I myself wandered in the dark for long years. I have studied several ancient manuscripts, all banned by the church of the Temple, that attest to my claims. Through the ages, many Elect like you and I were persecuted. My friend, let me tell you again that with no doubt, we are not the only ones in this situation! You are not ill, and the pain you feel is on par with the intensity of the holy powers you are the receptacle of. You have been chosen to fight a prophetic peril that threatens both of our kingdoms.

Please, come to Thòl so that I can guide you through this initiatory trial.

I will be looking forward to your visit,

Irvan Mac Snòr

Letter from Mac Snòr

Sire,

I am writing to you to inform you that I will visit you next month. Colleagues from Reizh have told me about major breakthroughs in the treatment of your condition. Rest assured we will overcome the illness you are suffering from.

Until my next visit, I encourage you to take good care of yourself.

Yours sincerely,

Doctor Feust

Letter from Feust the alienist

Extending the PCs' Exploration of the Fortress

If the Leader so wishes and the Players have enough time available, the exploration of the Fortress can be extended. The previously described Scenes concern key moments that suffice to keep the plot going and focus on the core of the story. However, just investigating Smiorail can take an entire gaming session. In that case, the Leader should make plans and prepare challenges for the PCs (traps, monsters, puzzles), as well as rewards (Daols, equipment, extra information about Argan or the history of the region, etc.) Here are a few suggestions:

A Lair of Weavers. The basement of the Fortress has been left unused for a long time. Part of the underground area has become home to a colony of Deadly Weavers (see "The Lair of the Weavers," p. 19).

Smiorail's archives. Documents can be found here, such as registers and letters referring to the past of Smiorail and the region: local legends about the spirit Roimh, the growth of Dearg under the impetus of the Elarigs, the project led by the architect Smiorail after the War of the Temple (see "History of the Vale," p. 16), etc. The archives can also provide information about Argan's assignment in Smiorail, fifteen years ago (see Argan's profile on p. 40).

Occult ceremonies. Deep in the bowels of Smiorail, Argan has performed ceremonies to mysterious entities. An eye has been drawn on a wall, in front of which lies a body surrounded by a few dusty candles. The corpse has been left there for months and is now completely desiccated, gnawed to the bone by vermin. The only remaining clue is an armlet of corroded metal with engravings typical of Reizh. The victim was one of Smiorail's prisoners, whom Argan dragged there and strangled while under the influence of strange visions that commanded him to perform a sacrifice. He is not actually aware of this, having done so over the course of multiple acute sleepwalking episodes. Even hypnosis would only bring back muddled, dreamlike images.

Act 3: One Thin Hope

The PCs will meet another party of survivors led by a woman called the Oracle. She will give them critical information about Céliane and the place the Feondas seem to be coming from.

Scene 1: Waiting

The PCs have very little to go by to find the refuge of the Oracle. According to Evan (see Act 2, Scene 7, p. 279), it stands northwest of Fearìl. Based on such vague indications, finding and following tracks left by the survivors in the middle of the wilds will require passing a Very Difficult (20) Natural Environment (Tracking) check. If the PCs just chance it, there is a small possibility (8 or more on a Luck roll) that they will find signs of the survivors.

The safest option is to wait for Jagu to return; he promised Evan he would come back, and so he will. After an unquiet, restless night, the PCs will meet Jagu, who will take them to the cave where the Oracle and her party of survivors are hidden.



The period during which the PCs are waiting for Jagu inside the deserted Fortress is a phase ripe for a heavy, horrific atmosphere. The Players will certainly expect to be attacked by monsters, and the Leader can play with that. Silent crows perch here and there and seem to watch them. Every now and then, the Vale is filled with the haunting, inhuman sound of faraway howling. The PCs may also have nightmares (see p. 270, "Eoghan's Nightmares"). However, this moment of relative respite is also an opportunity for the PCs to look back on what they have been through, exchange theories, and make plans.

What if the PCs Decide not to Wait for Jagu?

The PCs may decide not to wait for Jagu in the Fortress, which the Leader should not discourage. On the contrary, they can even remind the Players that the clock is ticking and that the danger seems to be ever-growing… Whether the party decides to go back to Fearìl (where the situation may have drastically changed in the meantime), travel back to Dearg, or explore another area, the Leader can have them meet another of the Oracle's survivors: Giulia, a strapping, experienced huntress in her thirties who will take them to the hideout. If she is asked about the Oracle, Giulia will tell them that she is Dàmàthair Jana, who was infected with the Feond Rage but survived it and has even developed mystical powers.

Attacked by Feond Crows

Optionally, as the PCs are looking for the Oracle's party (probably guided by Jagu or Giulia), the Leader can include an attack by Feond crows. This scene can add an element of horrific suspense to the game by getting one of the PCs contaminated with the Fearìl Rage. In addition, Jagu or Giulia may be killed by the swarm without getting a chance to tell the Characters that the Oracle has the power to cure the Fearìl Rage.



Feond Crows

These creatures are part of the Drèin named Crow Mantle and look like ordinary crows. Their Feond nature only becomes apparent upon their death, when they quickly rot away into a pile of indeterminate matter. If the Characters have been thorough in their investigation of Fearìl, they may notice that these piles are similar to those they have found in the village (see Act 1, Scene 3, "Rot piles," p. 265).

Attack: 6. Defense: 12. Speed: 9.
Potential: 1. Damage: 1. Health points: 5
Special attack: Contamination (Fearil Rage). On a successful attack, a Feond Crow infects its opponent with the Fearìl Rage unless the victim passes a Complicated (14) Stamina check.
Special attack: Blinding. On a critical success (natural 10 twice), in addition to the standard effects (5 extra Damage points), a crow will gouge one of its opponent's eyes.

Avel the Ghost

This attack can be an opportunity for the Leader to bring in Avel, the ghost attached to the Character following the narrative arc of Guilt. Avel is able to repel Feondas, but this can have severe consequences for the PC (see "Metamorphosis checks," p. 183) which will only become apparent at the end of the campaign. Using this scene is recommended if the Leader wishes for the campaign to be strongly supernatural.

Scene 2: The Oracle

When the first Feond attack occurred, Dàmàthair Jana fled the village through one of the escape tunnels. Along with about twenty survivors, she hid in a natural cave not far from Fearìl's old mill; the very one where Aline and Mael Mac Govrian died.

The Oracle's Cave

Two villagers keep watch at the cave's mouth. Inside, there are about twenty people, including a dozen children, gathered around a campfire. Symbols and drawings inspired by Demorthèn myths have been drawn on the walls. The fire's orange glow, the dancing shadows on the walls, the bedraggled shapes of the survivors, and the mystical atmosphere combine to make the encampment look like a scene from the foregone Aergewin. The PCs are given food and water and are asked to speak in hushed voices. One of the survivors tells them about how they ran away and about the strange powers Jana has developed. The Dàmà-thair is seen as the natural successor of Baorìg, the missing Demorthèn. To her followers, she is their last hope.

Doctor Feust

Feust the alienist is among the survivors. If the PCs have brought Mara with them, Feust can hypnotize her and obtain her testimony (see Act 2, Scene 4, "Mara's testimony," p. 274). Mara's tale itself will leave the refugees in awe, but they will react in particular to Céliane and Néiline being carried away by crows. When this is mentioned, one of them will shout "The Oracle told us!" Indeed, Jana had dreams where she saw Céliane being carried off into the sky.

Jana the Oracle

Jana treats the PCs with benevolence and attention, even if her gaze sometimes turns blank, absorbed by perceptions that escape others. Her speech is tinged with mysticism and references to the Aergewin. She believes she was chosen by the C'maoghs to protect her community from the Feondas' wrath stoked by destructive spirits. Jana can tell the PCs about three important things:

- **Feond nest.**
  Jana has been able to intuit its location (see Act 3, Scene 3: "Finding the Feond Lair," p. 286). To stop the Feondas from coming back every night, this putrid nest must be destroyed, but she feels that such a task is impossible. She was able to go there, and she saw a large bog dominated by an immense tree. How could mere humans neutralize an entire area like that? She suggests that the best course of action would be to trust the Demorthèn teachings and stay in the cave until next spring, praying for the spirits of nature to spare them. If the PCs intend to go to the bog nevertheless, they will need a flat-bottomed boat.



Céliane's Fate.
The Oracle has the sense that Céliane and Néiline are still alive. But where are they? Mara's testimony will provide the PCs with a clue: when the Feondas came and slaughtered the bandits, she saw the half-man half-crow creature carry the two women away. Kadec, one of Jana's followers, can tell the Characters that on the same day (that is, four days after the initial attack on Fearìl), he saw a murder of crows fly away from Smiorail and into the sky, toward the Pass of Lantrecht. Later, the Character following the narrative arc of Love will remember this testimony and instinctively think back to a place where they used to go with their friend Mael Mac Govrian when they were younger (see Scene 5: "The Ancient Sanctuary," p. 289).

The monster from the north.
Jana can vaguely feel the approach of a great threat coming from the north, beyond the Fortress of Smiorail. Jana seems troubled, speaking of awful nightmares. She is far from suspecting it, but this foreboding feeling is related to the return of Argan after his visit to Mac Snòr.

Remember that if a PC became an Oracle in the course of "The Refugees" (see "Becoming an Oracle," p. 249), they may have already received a less precise version of this information, in which case Jana's revelations will confirm their intuition and provide additional details.

Jana's Powers

During the retreat, Jana was bitten by one of the creatures and infected with the Feond Rage. The incubation was very fast and the symptoms were quick to appear. Just like the three boys the PCs dealt with in Dearg (see "The Refugees"), she went through a fit of murderous rage on the very next day, which her fellow survivors fortunately managed to contain. After a night of delirious fever, Jana recovered. This experience has transformed the Dàmàthair and gifted her with several peculiar abilities: in addition to being immune to the Fearìl Rage, Jana has developed a spiritual connection with the Feondas that enables her to feel their presence, as well as the bog they are coming from. In addition, strangely enough, this faculty allows her to feel that Céliane is still alive. She is also capable of hiding her presence as well as that of her fellow survivors from the Feondas, as long as she meditates on a daily basis. Finally, she can cure the Fearìl Rage simply by laying her hands on the infected creature (see p. 249 for a detailed list of an Oracle's powers). Jana has been using her powers to protect her followers from the Feondas and cure prospective Ragers.

The Dilemma

When they learn about Céliane's whereabouts, it will be hard for the Character following the narrative arc of Love to remain focused. They will be dying to go after the one they love, no matter the risks for them or other people. The Leader can require the Player to pass a Drive Test to keep their Character's emotions in check. After all, the more they wait, the more Céliane is in danger! But neutralizing the lair of the Feondas is an emergency: any minute, the creatures may undertake another deadly assault. Dearg may even be next. The Leader can remind the Players of what is at stake, which will certainly lead to passionate debates between the protagonists. The PCs have several alternatives:

Neutralize the Feond nest.
The following Scene goes through the various ways the PCs can pull off such a feat.

Rescue Céliane.
Scene 5 covers the PCs going after Céliane.

Split.
The PCs may decide to split in order to take care of both matters simultaneously. Once more, so that inactive Players do not end up on the sidelines, they can take on the roles of NPCs: Dallan the soldier, Feust the alienist, Jagu the hunter, etc.



Scene 3: Finding the Feond Lair

Thanks to the spiritual connection between herself and the Feondas, Dàmàthair Jana was able to find what she believes is the Feondas' lair. Along with one of her followers, she went there and discovered a boggy area that had grown around a towering tree, the sight of which filled her with abject terror. This bog is very new, and actually did not exist a mere few months ago; anyone who knows the Vale well can vouch for that fact. It was born from a mysterious process, and is the lair from which Feondas emerge every night to wreak havoc on the Vale's communities.

Jana warns the PCs that they will certainly need a flat-bottomed boat to venture into the bog. The water is freezing and deep in places. Without a flat-bottomed boat, the PCs would be in dire straits should they face Feondas.

Following one's Convictions

If the PCs do not act quickly, the Feondas will keep attacking the survivors of Fearìl every night until they are all dead, after which they will move on to Dearg. By the time spring comes, there may be no survivors left. Faced with such a threat, the PCs may react differently depending on their abilities and philosophies. The Leader can take each Player aside to discuss the subject with them.

Here is a list of the main possibilities:

- **Wait for the dust to settle.**
  According to Demorthèn traditions, Feondas are the wild expression of chaotic natural spirits. If they adhere to such a point of view, the PCs might decide to go back to Dearg with the survivors and hunker down. Traveling to the village with the survivors will take longer than doing it by themselves, since there are children and probably sick or wounded people among the refugees. Reaching Dearg will take a day and a half, maybe even two. Spending the night in the wild will be a stressful time, during which the party may be attacked. Thereafter, Dearg will be regularly assaulted by Feondas, at best until the end of the campaign (with the possible death of the Prince), at worst until spring. Similarly to Jana, Dearg's council might end up ordering the villagers to take shelter inside natural caves until the wrath of the spirits passes, just like in the legendary time of the Aergewin.

The Magientist artifact.

If they have searched the Fortress, the PCs may have found the Fire hose stored there, and decide to use it against the Feondas. They must first plug the machine into the canister filled with Magientist herbicide and power it with cartridges of mineral Flux. By hosing the central tree with the substance, the PCs will eradicate the Feondas (that is, the Tree as well as the Putrid Wolves gestating inside the bog), but they will also pollute the area, which will become contaminated land—"Tarmhor-tìr" in the ancient tongue. For a period ranging from a few weeks to several months depending on how much herbicide is employed (or even dozens of years if the location is polluted with pure fossil Flux), nothing will grow in this area, which will remain a sterile bog. It will even become dangerous for living beings, since the water will be poisonous. This question should be relevant to the Character following the narrative arc of Ethics in particular. A successful Complicated (14) Magience (Flux Knowledge) check can provide the PCs with information in that regard. Note that the substance will have no effect on most Feondas, including the Crows, the Prince, or mature Putrid Wolves. However, it will be harmful to other plant-based Feondas.

Purge the Feond nest.

An adept of the Temple able to perform Miracles (an Elect) can call upon their powers to purify the area. A Miracle of Purification of the second Stanza (Complicated (14) Prayer (Miracles) check) will be necessary. However, this will require the Elect to be within five yards of the Feond Tree, which means that they will have to be protected from the attacks of roots and branches that will attempt to strike them down and drown them.

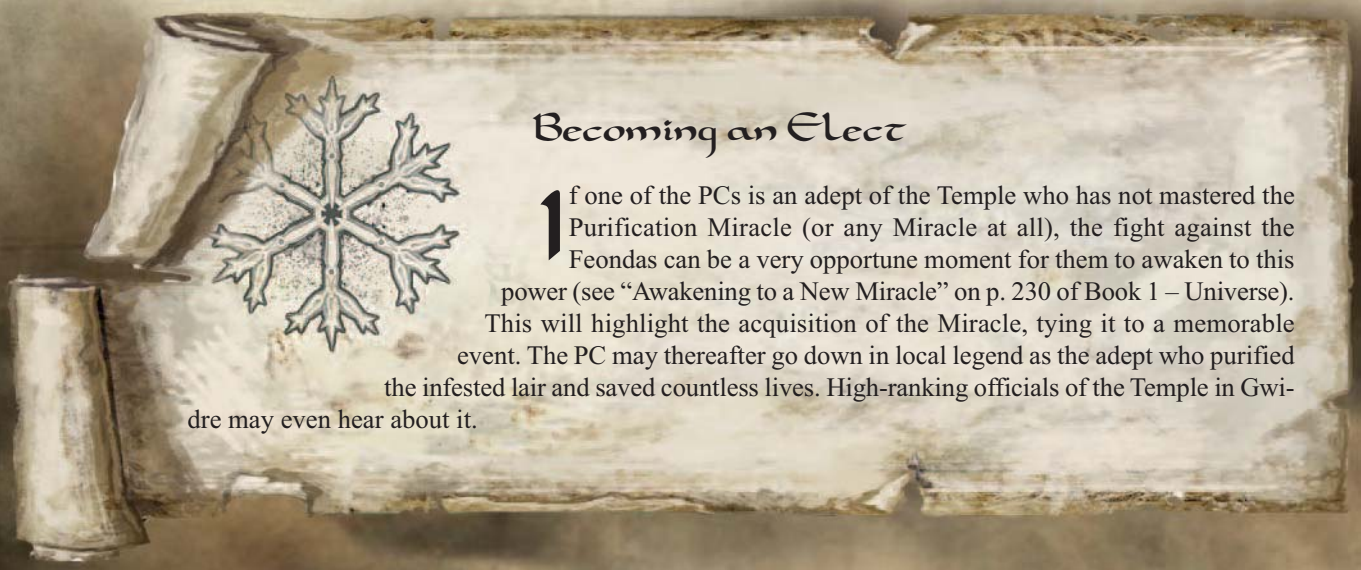
Fight the Feondas head-on.

The PCs may also attempt to strike down the Feond Tree the old-fashioned way, using axes, fire, and other weapons. In that case, they have a tough fight ahead of them: the Tree will bring everything it has to bear against them, and Wolves might emerge from the bog to join the fray.

Repel the Feondas.

The Character following the narrative arc of Guilt can call upon Avel's ghost to repel Wolves emerging from the bog during the fight against the Tree. Using this power is not without danger for the PC (see "Metamorphosis checks," p. 183), but can save the party from certain death. The Tree itself will not be affected, however.

This will be an opportunity for the Players to portray their Characters' convictions. The Leader can suggest and advocate certain solutions through some of the NPCs: vector Jaber will urge any Elect to attempt to purify the area; Meraz the prisoner will recommend using Magience, etc.



Becoming an Elect

If one of the PCs is an adept of the Temple who has not mastered the Purification Miracle (or any Miracle at all), the fight against the Feondas can be a very opportune moment for them to awaken to this power (see "Awakening to a New Miracle" on p. 230 of Book 1 – Universe). This will highlight the acquisition of the Miracle, tying it to a memorable event. The PC may thereafter go down in local legend as the adept who purified the infested lair and saved countless lives. High-ranking officials of the Temple in Gwidre may even hear about it.

Scene 4: The Bog

The bog the Feondas are emerging from is about two hours away from Jana's encampment. The PCs will be advised to go there during the daytime, when the Putrid Wolves are dormant deep within the bog, only waking up at sundown. Venturing there after sunset would be madness. Even a single Wolf is a powerful enemy; going against a whole pack would spell the party's doom. However, the PCs can be told (or reminded) that fire is an efficient weapon against the beasts.

The Fear of the Unknown

To maintain an atmosphere of suspense and fear, the Leader is advised to keep the Players uncertain regarding whether or not the Wolves are asleep. As the PCs venture into the bog, they can see eddies in the muddy water, as if "something" was biding its time, getting ready to pounce. To increase the tension, the Leader should focus on evocative descriptions and on instilling a feeling of urgency. Will the PCs manage to neutralize the bog and the Feond Tree before the Wolves emerge?

Rising Pressure

In order to optimize the atmosphere, as the Characters go deeper into the Feond bog, the Leader should have the pressure rise to a crescendo. At first, they can feel the earth getting soft and sticky. Then they are surrounded by water no matter where they go, rising up to their calves. The undergrowth is unnervingly quiet. Finally, they will see the massive Tree at the center of a brackish pond. As they get closer to the Tree, the water gets chillier and deeper, becoming too high to walk through in a ten-yard radius around the muddy hillock the vegetal Feond is rooted in. In addition, the cold can quickly prove dangerous (see the game aid "A Hostile Season" on p. 48).

Things will be much easier if the PCs have brought a flat-bottomed boat. If they have not thought of it, the Leader can have them make a Luck check and decide that, on a high enough result, other people have come here and left their boat. Perhaps because they were planning to come back later, or perhaps for another reason…

The Leader can go through this Scene in several ways. Here are two examples:

Silence and fury.
This low-fantasy approach will hold off any supernatural event until the last moment. The twisted Tree stands in front of the PCs, motionless. The bog is shrouded in foreboding silence. As the Characters are getting ready to neutralize the Feond lair (whether they are using Magientist artifacts, powers of the One, etc.), the Tree can suddenly animate: roots shoot at the PCs, seeking to drag them toward its trunk that splits into a hungry gaping maw. An oppressive, quiet music will be best-suited. For example, the Leader can use the same track as for the nightmares ("Winds Devouring Men"), calling the Players back to those unreal scenes that are now coming true.

Supernatural assault.
In total contrast with the rest of the scenario, permeated by a sense of grim stillness, this Scene is a ripe opportunity to unleash supernatural chaos. Trouble starts as soon as the PCs venture into the bog: eddies appear at the surface of the water, an NPC that was with them disappears… As the roots strike at the party and the Tree reveals its monstrous nature, Crows suddenly attack. All hell breaks loose. To keep up the pace, the Leader can use a dynamic track, like "Crow Mantle," from the album "Dearg."

Factors and Suggestions

For such a major battle against the heart of the Feond threat, the Leader is advised to include striking descriptions and additional elements. Here are a few possibilities:

Plant-killing weapons.
The PCs may have the clever idea of coating their weapons with the herbicide found in the Fortress's storeroom, in which case they will get a +2 bonus to Damage. Note that this only applies to plant-based Feondas—in this case, the Tree.

Eerie eddies.
Something seems to be moving underwater. The Leader should insist on such occurrences and make them increasingly threatening as the party goes deeper into the bog. The Characters may see an unclear shape drift on the surface before slinking back under. The eddies seem to indicate that something enormous is swimming around; something that gives out a horrendous smell. These are actually the Putrid Wolves preparing to attack the intruders!

Gone without a trace.
If the PCs are accompanied by Dallan (or another NPC), he can suddenly be grabbed by a root and pulled into the muddy waters, never to be seen again. To intensify the Players' fear, the Leader can go through the events in such a way that the PCs do not notice anything before it is too late. They just hear a stifled whimper followed by gurgling noise, then see that Dallan is gone. This can occur as the party is progressing through the bog.

The roots.
A root grabs the ankle of one of the PCs and attempts to drag them into the water and drown them. To escape its grasp, the PC must pass a Difficult (17) Feats check or 5 Damage points must be inflicted to the root (taking into account its Defense and Protection). As the PCs are crossing the bog, they may feel something slither close to their legs or whip at them. The Tree will make full use of its environment.

Technical difficulties.
If the PCs use the Fire hose against the Tree, it may attack its wielder or directly target the artifact, damaging it or ejecting the Flux cartridges that power it. In the heat of the battle, the PCs will have to pass a Difficult (17) Magience (Artifact Repair) check to jury-rig the machine. The roots could also wrap around the contraption's wheels and drag it toward the water. Even if the Fire hose is damaged beyond repair or lost, the party still has the last resort option of carrying the herbicide canisters to the Feond Tree, though they will be hard-pressed to do so without a boat.

Murder!
A swarm of Crows suddenly fly in and attack the PCs.

The feondas

The PCs will face up to three different species of Feondas: the Crows, the Wolves, and the Tree. There are several ways the party can fight these monsters (see Scene 3, "Following one's Convictions," p. 286). Regardless of the strategy chosen by the PCs, their goal will be to strike down the Tree before the Wolves emerge from the bog, which will be no easy task as the Tree is a daunting opponent all by itself. It is unmoving, but its mere presence inspires fear; the Characters cannot help but feel that this motionless tree is watching them.
The Tree keeps the bog together and nurtures the Putrid Wolves that emerge every night. Only the Tree's destruction can prevent Feondas from appearing on the following nights. To kill it, its Health points must be reduced to zero. As it suffers Damage, its Health Condition worsens (branches fall, it creaks loudly, etc.), with the usual penalties. If the PCs succeed, it will suffer the same fate as all Feondas, crumbling apart and rotting away. The bog will then shrink down over the course of the winter, leaving a luxuriant forest clearing behind it… unless the party has used herbicide or fossil Flux in massive amounts, in which case the place will remain sterile and tainted for several weeks, months, or years, depending on how much of the substance they used.
The statistics of the crows can be found in the section "Attacked by Feond Crows," p. 283. The Putrid Wolves and the Feond Tree have dedicated profiles in the present book (p. 292 and 294 respectively).

Scene 5: The Ancient Sanctuary

Based on the testimonies of Kadec and Mara (see Scene 2, "Céliane's Fate," p. 285), the PCs can get a vague idea of where Céliane and Néiline have been taken: somewhere uphill from Smiorail, in the area of the Pass of Lantrecht that leads to Gwidre. However, this encompasses a lot of ground: it would take weeks to comb through the region and find the two women.

A vision of the past.
The past of the Character following the narrative arc of Love holds an important clue. Mention of Smiorail and the Pass of Lantrecht will remind them of a place where they and Mael enjoyed spending time. This dates back to when they were serving at the Fortress (see "Gaol: Of Love and Fury," Act 1, Scene 2: "Brothers in arms," p. 97). Mael had taken them several times to this place that, according to him, was an ancient Demorthèn sanctuary. There are several ways the Leader can bring up this memory. For example, they can have the Player make a Complicated (14) Erudition (Geography) check, or show them the location in a dream. Even if the Erudition check is a failure, the Leader can tell the PC that they have the nagging feeling that they are missing something.

The following night, the Character can dream of a childhood memory taking place at the Demorthèn sanctuary, which soon turns into a nightmare. Mael and the PC climb up to the promontory, enjoying the majesty of the place. But the atmosphere soon becomes heavy. A buzzing noise grows until it becomes deafening. An evil-looking crow perches on the old altar, revealing rows of sharp teeth.

The Character will have no trouble finding their way to this promontory, which offers a splendid vista of the Vale and its surroundings. The rocky walls have been dug into, forming a manmade cave inside of which signs of an ancient Demorthèn cult can be spotted. The granite surface still shows hints of engravings, but their meaning is now lost to time. In the center, a large horizontal slab suggests an altar or a tomb. This will remind the PCs of what they saw at the conclusion of the scenario "Vestiges" (see Act 2, Scene 4: "The Sanctuary," p. 220).
Perhaps to their surprise, the party will see that Céliane and Néiline are indeed there. Céliane has been laid on the stone slab, and although she is wrapped in thick furs, her face is very pale, almost blue. She appears to be deeply asleep. Néiline is at her bedside, taking care of her. She is also dressed in furs and wears a headdress of branches fashioned like a deer's antlers. The

PCs' arrival startles Néiline, as if she were afraid of them. A crow stands near her, and both are staring at the PCs. If they come closer, it will take flight and leave the cave. If the Characters attack it, use the statistics of an ordinary crow (see the chapter "Bestiary" on p. 182 of Book 2 – Travels). Catching or killing it will have no effect on the rest of the campaign.

The party will quickly notice that Néiline's behavior is abnormal. She seems to be muttering strange incantations. If the PCs approach Céliane, she will force herself in their way and drop to her knees, her eyes wide, repeating endlessly "He chose us! He came for us!" Has what she experienced made her go insane? Who—or what—is she referring to? What is the meaning of her behavior? The PCs will not have much time to think about it, because they will be attacked by a Feond. Néiline will keep babbling, paying it no attention.

The Guardian

Graeme Revell – The Crow: City of Angels – Original Score Album – 12 – The campanile

For the party, things will not be as easy as just carrying Céliane away. A Putrid Wolf watches over the sanctuary. It will enter the cave when the PCs start to walk toward Céliane. The statistics of Putrid Wolves are included in the bestiary. The creature will fight to the death to stop the party from taking Céliane.

Néiline

Attack: 7. Defense: 10. Protection: 0. Speed: 6.
Potential: 2. Damage: 1. Health Points : 19.

Néiline is not herself; she behaves like a fanatic. To complicate the fight, the Leader may have her take out a knife and attack the PCs. The recent events have driven her completely mad (Mystical Delusion), but she will slowly recover if she is spared and cared for.



Epilogue

Once they have found and (hopefully) taken Céliane and Néiline with them safe and sound, the party can either go back to the Oracle's encampment or directly to Dearg. If they pass by Fearìl they will meet Dàmàthair Madenn and her followers readying to leave the devastated village and take refuge in Dearg—provided they are still alive and have not done so already.

Céliane will remain unconscious. A successful Difficult (17) Science (Medicine or Mind Treatment) check (which may be performed by Feust the alienist) will establish that her condition is not a coma nor ordinary sleep, but a sort of strange, baffling lethargy. Céliane will imperatively need competent people to care for her body and watch over her day and night. Taking her back to Dearg seems like the wisest solution. As for Néiline, she will eventually come to her senses, but she will remain under the shock of what she endured and will remember nothing except a few disjointed memories. She has no idea of what transpired in the sanctuary, and even a hypnosis session will reveal nothing more than what Mara knows.

Back to Dearg, the party—as well as the many survivors they probably brought back with them—are welcomed with much joy and relief. The tale of their adventures will be met with admiration, and news of the bog's eradication will bring hope back to the community. However, their troubles are far from over. How are they going to survive the upcoming winter? In addition, though the threat posed by the bog's Feondas has been dealt with, the Feond Rage is still a problem, and may lead to a full-blown epidemic. Worst of all, the Prince is still there, somewhere in the Vale. With the destruction of the bog, it has lost part of its forces, and the recent rescue of Céliane by the PCs fixes its attention. For the time being, these two setbacks divert it from its primary purpose; the total extermination of the Vale's human population… But how long will this last?

The scenario ends with an unexpected revelation. Once Céliane has been left in the care of Dearg's Dàmàthairs, one of them, Glen, will make a stunning announcement: the young woman is pregnant.

Experience Points

"Fearìl's Ruins" is a scenario that can take several sessions. The Leader can distribute Experience points accordingly, possibly going beyond the ordinary 15 XPs. Here are several factors the awarding of Experience points can be based upon for this particular scenario:

Confrontation.
Players who have contributed to solving the puzzle of Act 2, Scene 8 should be rewarded with 1 or 2 extra XPs. Particularly brave or cunning action against the Feondas should also be worth several XPs (5 or even more, at the Leader's discretion and depending on how many fights the party has been through).

Progression of the Plot.
In addition to the usual reward, the Leader can choose to grant a bonus of 1 XP to all Players for every major NPC they have saved: Mara, Evan, Abbie, Meraz, Néiline, etc. Such Characters may even become allies or friends of the PCs and accompany them in their next adventures.

Interpretation.
This scenario offers several opportunities for the Players to portray their Characters with intensity and conviction, particularly in regard to their narrative arcs. Bonus XPs can be granted accordingly.

Faol gròd
Putrid Wolves of Fearìl

- Attack: 12
- Damage: 3
- Defense: 12
- Protection: 2
- Speed: 7
- Potential: 2
- Stamina: 10
- Health: 20/15/10/5
- Perception: 10
- Stealth: 3
- Feats: 12

Bewolfment

The Faol Gròd's otherworldly stare can put its victims under its spell. At the beginning of every Round, anyone fighting the Wolf must make a Luck check: a result of 1 or less means that the Character has locked eyes with the Faol Gròd and must pass a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check not to be "bewolfed." If the Character passes the check, they are permanently immune to the stare of this particular Wolf. Otherwise, they fall prostrate and remain completely helpless: their Defense falls to 0 and they cannot act. If they survive, this state of total apathy wears off at the end of the fight, but they will experience lingering effects similar to those of the "Empty Fortress" disorder (see the Madness stage "Empty Fortress" on p. 279 of Book 1 – Universe). The victim will retain no memory of what happened when they were "bewolfed," unless they go through Hypnosis sessions. Getting a complete testimony requires the hypnotist to pass two Complicated (14) Occultism (Hypnosis) checks. This is not without risk, since the hypnotist will relive the events they went through, which may lead to Mental Resistance checks and possibly Trauma points.

Rage

The Faol Gròd's bite can infect its victim with a particular Feond illness called the Fearìl Rage (see p. 248).

Fire

Putrid Wolves fear fire and cannot cross flames. Against burning attacks, their Protection drops to 0.

These Feondas look like large wolves made of mud, branches, and a conglomerate of vegetal and organic matter. Their composite bodies exude a sort of brackish liquid and give off a rancid smell of rotted plants. This is how they earned their old name: Faol Gròd, meaning "rotting wolf" or "putrid wolf" in the ancient tongue. Their black eyes gleam with an azure glow that reveals their Feond nature. Sightings of these creatures have been reported in various regions of the peninsula. It seems that their particular abilities can vary from one "species" to another, with the Rage being specific to those from Fearìl. However, they all share certain similarities, the chief one being that they are all born in the depths of a bog. Every night, they venture out to hunt human beings. As many as a dozen wolves can be born from such a nest, and if a member of the pack is killed a new one will emerge in 1D10 days. Such nests can be destroyed with a special fossil Flux-based Magientist herbicide (see "Ashen Yard herbicide" on p. 294) or with a Purification Miracle of the second Stanza. The Magientist solution results in dangerous pollution, but the Miracle does not.

Putrid Wolves are nocturnal predators who hunt in packs. They leap to the attack without fear and fight to the bitter end. Their bite can also transmit the Fearìl Rage. In addition, fighting a Wolf in close combat involves another, perhaps more terrible risk: ending up mesmerized and defenseless.

This letter never reached knight Argan. The Varigal who carried it disappeared somewhere in the region of the Vale of Thoir…

Lord Argan,

Since I received your latest reports, I have been looking into this bog-related anomaly that you have written to me about. It happens that we have had a visit from Scientör Raffer, a Reizhite Magientist who claims to be an authority on Feondas. As you read these words, he should be on his way to meet you and show you one of his inventions. He has confirmed that the phenomenon you have described has occurred in other regions of the peninsula. He has actually researched it thoroughly. According to him, such areas appear in the space of a few months, and no logical explanation for their manifestation has been found so far.
He conceded that he was facing a mystery, but one he is committed to solving.
The spontaneous formation of a bog could be the sign of a forthcoming emergence of Feondas. To the Scientör's knowledge, such a swamp remains fecund all through the fall, then decreases in activity during winter, and finally disappears on its own in the spring.
One of your previous letters mentioned a similar phenomenon in the nearby vale of Loch Varn.
I believe you are right to be cautious.

Yours sincerely,
Sédarn



Mòr Craos
Feond Tree of Fearìl

- Attack: 12 (can attack up to five opponents every Round: four times with its Animated roots and branches and once with its Gaping maw)
- Damage: 1 (5 direct Damage with its Gaping maw)
- Defense: 4 (12 for its roots and branches)
- Protection: 8 (2 for its roots and branches when attacked with a chopping weapon)
- Speed: 8
- Potential: 0
- Stamina: 12
- Health: 60/40/20/10
- Perception: 12
- Stealth: N/A
- Feats : 15

Animated roots and branches

(Defense: 12; Protection: 8 (2 against chopping weapons); Health: 5): The Feond Tree defends and attacks with its roots and branches. It can attack up to four opponents every Round in a 10-yard radius, but cannot target the same enemy twice. It usually makes use of its roots for surprise effect: its network of roots is as dense as its branches', spreading in every direction through the ground. Attacking the Tree's appendages will destroy them but will not affect its Health. In the course of a fight, the Mòr Craos can animate up to ten roots or branches, and once they are all destroyed, it cannot attack with them. Its appendages regenerate in 1D10 days.

Entanglement

Instead of using one of its roots or branches to attack, the Feond Tree can grab a foe. The Attack score is the same (12), but the maneuver deals no Damage: instead, it either ensnares the target (the victim cannot move and suffers a -5 penalty to all actions) or flings it (for 1D10 direct Damage). However, once it has grabbed a victim, the Mòr Craos's favored tactic is to drag its prey toward its maw (which takes two Rounds) and devour it (5 direct Damage on each subsequent Round). To escape the Entanglement, either the victim must pass a Difficult (17) Feats check (one attempt every Round) or the appendage must be destroyed.

Gaping maw

The Feond Tree is a carnivore. Once it has grabbed hold of a victim, it pulls it to its trunk which opens into a gaping maw filled with sharp teeth. Seeing a Mòr Craos's monstrous mouth for the first time results in a Complicated (14) Mental Resistance check. If there is prey within reach of its maw, the Feond Tree can bite it for 5 direct Damage in addition to its four attacks with roots and branches.

Ashen Yard herbicide

The Feond Tree is particularly vulnerable to a Magientist fossil Flux-based substance, some of which can be found in the Fortress of Smiorail (see Act 2, Scene 6 of the scenario "Fearìl's Ruins"). Hosing the Feond Tree with this mixture inflicts 2D10 Damage every Round. Spilling the substance at the base of its trunk will achieve the same result. Hosing a Mòr Craos with pure fossil Flux will have no effect except to make it all the more agitated.

In Tri-Kazelian folklore, there are many tales of trees that are alive or exhibit extraordinary properties, like the Fall Tree in Reizh, or Calhtair's Wood, to name a few. However, some of these tales are but a misleading rendition of a grim reality: Feondas often take the shape of trees. In olden days, Feondas of the same species as the Tree of Fearìl were called Mòr Craos, which means "big mouth" in the ancient tongue. The one standing in Fearìl is also the heart of the Feondas nest the Putrid Wolves are emerging from. Based on the bog that surrounds this tree, Demorthèn would be inclined to say that it is inhabited by the swamp spirit Gluta. For adepts of the Temple, however, such a monstrosity can only be the work of the devil.

When idle, Mòr Craos looks like a beech tree with a knotted trunk and gnarly branches. The opening of its toothy maw is a horrific revelation of its true nature. Another difference compared to a normal tree is how fast it grows. It can reach adult size in only a few months and can regenerate any lost appendages in 1D10 days. In contrast with its uncanny vigor, the Tree's life cycle is rather short: it only remains alive for a few years before rotting away into nothingness, like all Feondas, starting with its branches falling off and its trunk becoming brittle.

Mòr Craos specimens can be found all over the peninsula. However, these creatures are blessedly solitary. Currently, how they grow so fast and why they suddenly spring up where they do remains a mystery.



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