

THE

SAGA

April 2023



Magic Issue

ABR

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A SagaBorn Roleplaying Game Compatible Product

Systems of Power

When we make stories, we tend to think of a bad guy. A big bad who is causing all the problems that the heroes must stop. As I look to build deeper games, I have found that the problem comes from a deeper place. The real big bad is the system that allowed them to rise to power and cause problems.

Often people want a simple solution. They want a black-and-white answer, do this because it is good. Stop this because it is bad. In the real world this is a dangerous mindset as we almost never have situations that are all or nothing. In a game, I could see an argument for it. A game can be escapism, and if that's what the table wants, then go for it. In the next iteration of SagaBorn, I am looking at ways to put a system like this in place, so people can play the game the way they want to. But that's another discussion.

This discussion is about systems of power that can be used in your stories to build a more complex world for the players to enjoy. A big bad king who abuses his subjects is pretty commonplace, but what about a monarch that is stuck being out on the throne because the nobility needs not a leader but a scapegoat? Yes, the spoiled king can be a bad guy, but isn't it the system that allows him and others to hold the peasantry in their place the real baddie?

I have been thinking about this as I have described the magic using groups of the Dark Return for this issue. Magic would definitely create a power system that would be abused. Some of those systems and their consequences could be pretty heinous. As long as those abusive systems are not glorified, they could and should be included in a campaign.

“But what if we want to play a bad campaign?” Well, ok, you can do that. After my years of playing, I have realized I have no desire to play in or indulge in other people’s dark fantasies. If people want to, then that’s fine; I’m just not interested in spending my time doing that.

For me, the dark power systems are made to be used as the antagonists in the story of their overthrow. This doesn’t mean that the power systems are all bad. Or all good. But it can lead the players to a great storytelling place where they can navigate a complex world.

An example is in my current campaigns; the Uthgard Kingdom is marching to war to recapture their old empire. They are not hordes of evil screaming orcs led by a king who holds the blood demon sword. That would be too easy. Instead, it is a kingdom ruled by a throne propped up by the clergy and bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Arts (magicians).

As a game designer, I see this as a fun background power system for the world and players to struggle with. Do they chafe under the strict laws and regulations of the Ministry when it comes to magic? Do they hate to see the city-states of the freelands slowly get gobbled up under a colonizer? Does the use of ravaging magic by the Uthgard army devastate a player-loved region?

Much like a multinational corporation, a power system like this is a hydra with more than one head, with many stories to tell. The question is, which story do your players want to tell with it?



**VINTAGE AND CONTEMPORARY
ROLEPLAYING**

I am always looking for a place where my work fits. At first, SagaBorn was a 3.5 clone with bits of my world slapped on. The system grew, carved our indie niche, and thrived. As time went on, I saw reviews, comments, and comparisons, always marking my game and art as retro or old school. As this started to happen, the OSR (Old School Revival) hit full swing, and I thought my work would really fit in under that title.

But last week, I was talking to some folks, and I mentioned that my games were OSR style. One person asked what that meant, and another replied, “old white guy games.” And while I may be an old white guy, I don’t want my games to be viewed like that. I want my games to be accessible and representative of all. With a retro vibe.

I was then joking in a discord that I wish there were a vintage game category that didn’t come with the baggage. I jokingly came up with a logo... And I think I like it.

So how do you sum up the idea of a fun retro feel but letting everyone know the game is forward-thinking and doing its best to move away from old harmful tropes? Put it in the logo! Vintage for having the retro feel, exploration and discovery, long campaigns, cool art, and fewer rules more rulings. Contemporary means we don’t deal with any of that old crusty stuff; no gender stereotypes, alignment BS, punishing players, etc. Roleplaying because... Well, you better get that part.

I want to make a good label for my work that lets others know exactly what they are getting into!



SAGABORN INKLINGS

RENOWN

Renown is a measure of a character's reputation in the world. Great acts or deeds add to a character's Renown, becoming part of the character's Saga. Depending on the deed, the renown gained could be viewed as fame or infamy, and the exact repercussions or bonuses may depend on those the hero is interacting with. Regardless of type, characters with high renown are respected by those they encounter. They may be able to command higher prices for their services or be granted special privileges. In addition, certain skill checks may be more successful than those of lesser-known characters.

Renown	Standing within the World
1	People you have met remember you.
2-3	In your social circles, people discuss your deeds.
4-5	Locals have heard stories about you.
6-7	People familiar with you tell stories about you.
8-9	Your stories have started to filter throughout the lands surrounding your adventures.
10-11	Bard and minstrels carry news of you throughout the lands.
11-12	Songs are written about you.
13-15	You carry sway over the masses.
16-19	Kings and Queens fear your power.
20+	You are legend.

USING RENOWN

When dealing with non-player characters, a character may use their Renown to add to Persuasion skills. You may add 1/2 your Renown (rounded up) to any Persuasion skill check. The SG will decide if the Renown gives a bonus or a negative to the roll based on what the character's past deeds were.

Example

Deed

Pherilyn fought the Tinyfoot goblins, evicting them from their cavernous lair. +1 Renown

Renown as Fame

When shopping in the nearby town, his deeds have made the roads safer, so he uses his Renown as a bonus in Persuasion checks and may even receive a discount on goods.

Renown as Infamy

Years later, Pherilyn encounters the goblins again, and their chief Ma One-Toe remembers Pherilyn. His Renown would count as a disadvantage with any interactions with the goblin tribe.

RECOGNIZING RENOWN

To find out if the character's renown proceeds them, roll a d20. If the result is their Renown or lower, they and their deeds are known to those who made the check.

The character may wish to hide their identity or deeds. Or they may try and exaggerate tales about themselves to seem more important. How Renown is used can vary widely but should come down to a decision between the player and the SG, and should make the game more fun for the players.

DOWNTIME

Many of the Codex Dominum SagaBorn books (Strongholds, Allies, Horror, etc.) revolve around downtime and characters. Downtime in SagaBorn is measured in weeks. Crafting, recovering, and training all fall under this time schedule.

When downtime happens, it can seem overwhelming or like a big empty, and you may wonder where to begin. Here are things to explore during downtime.

- Build new rooms for your stronghold.
- Research. You can research people, places, spells, or objects.
- Recover and rest to lose Horror or Corruption.
- Crafting
- Learn New Spells
- Train a hireling
- Roll on the downtime chart.

Build new rooms for your stronghold

Rooms take a while to be constructed, so during downtime, make sure you start to build. Rooms give bonuses, help recover quicker, or allow crafting. Having as many rooms available during downtime is always best.

Research

The lands offer mysteries and artifacts; spending time in your stronghold can unlock the mysteries of these items or solve problems lingering from the last quest.

Recover

If you gained Horror or Corruption in your last adventures, downtime is the cure. With certain stronghold rooms, you can recover from these ailments even faster.

Craft

Using downtime to prepare for your next adventure is always smart. Craft poisons or alchemical ammunition. Imbue items or tattoos with spells. Sometimes those hard-to-find items are more easily crafted at home.

Learn New Spells

Spells take time to decode from spellbooks or scrolls. At a timeframe of 2 days per spell mana, downtime is the perfect time for this.

Train a hireling

Hirelings are great for helping to accomplish tasks around your home. If you spend a week helping train them, you can cut the cost of advancement in half.

Roll on the downtime chart

Don't have anything pressing during your return home? Roll a d10 and compare to the downtime chart to find out what you did during your week off.

Hirelings

Many things that players can do can be assigned to hirelings. Many hirelings have specialties, and their downtime activities should revolve around them. The benefit of hirelings is that you can assign each of them a job per week. They can research a spell while you craft magic items. A spy can run a reconnaissance mission to bring back news of a foe. Commoners can run your business to make extra coin for your stronghold. The limits are only as far as you and the Story Guide want to take them.

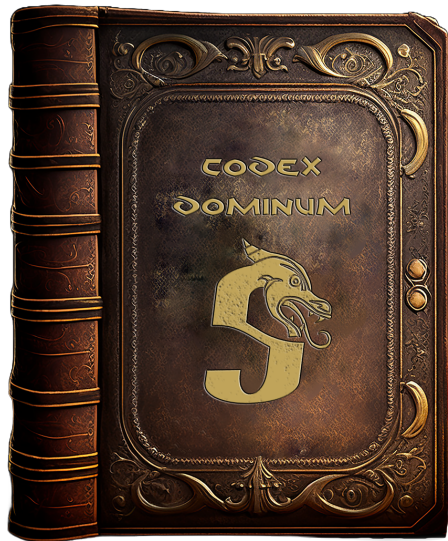
DOWNTIME CHART

D10	Activity
1	Carousing: you spent the week in merriment, visiting taverns and gambling halls, and lost gold equal to your level x 10 gp
2-4	You spent the week training and gained an extra Saga Point at the start of your next adventure.
5-7	Side job: gain gold equal to your level x 5 gp
8-9	Side job: gain gold equal to your level x 10 gp
10	Side job: gain gold equal to your level x 20 gp

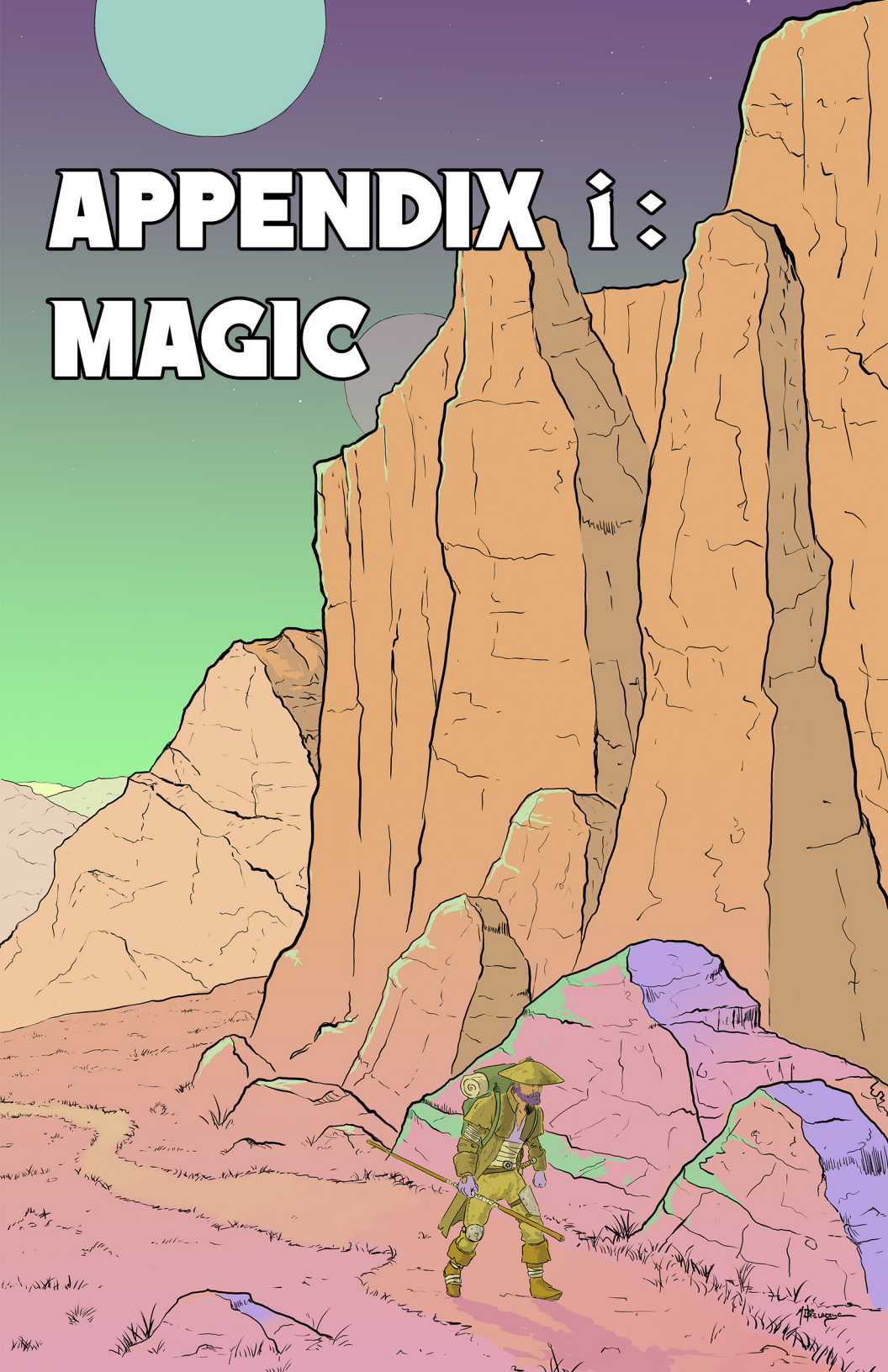
GET MORE FROM YOUR GAME

The Codex Dominum, Master Book of Stories, contains all the knowledge needed for a Gamemaster to run the best tabletop games for their players.

A free resource at:
SAGABORN.COM



APPENDIX i: MAGIC



It's time for that discussion of imagination again, the Appendix i of our creativity, where Dane and Mike discuss the things that made them the creatives they are.

Mike:

Ok, a big question this month. Magic. What are your favorite magics from your favorite fictions. This is an expansive topic, but I think it will be fun to see the cross-section of what comes up and how it is represented in our work. So, right off the cuff, what is one of the first types or styles of magic that comes to your mind when I ask what your favorite magic systems are?

Dane:

Honestly, horror stories come to mind before fantasy. I prefer magic that's mysterious. I like when it's dangerous to the caster because they're tapping into forces they can't possibly understand.

When we first texted about writing this article, I immediately thought of Pumpkinhead, of all things. An odd choice, but it's a simple story about exactly what I love in depictions of magic. SPOILERS AHEAD: A man suffers a terrible tragedy—the accidental death of his son—at the hands of a group of out-of-control youths. He wants revenge, so he seeks out a local witch who can summon a demonic creature to exact that revenge. The creature will hunt and kill every person in the group responsible. First, its flesh must be dug from a remote grave.

But now comes the horror. The man sees through the creature's eyes as it murders these desperate, terrified people. He realizes he's the monster. And in the end, he literally becomes the monster, and it's his body that is returned to the grave, continuing a seemingly ancient cycle.

It's a story about a man who was given great power for a moment to carry out his darkest impulses without having any understanding of how that power works and losing his soul in the process. Those are my favorite magic systems.

I enjoy fantasy magic systems—the kinds with rules, limits, costs, and most likely, finger-wiggling—in gaming, but less so in fiction. Brandon Sanderson is probably the master of those sorts of systems, and he plots a story like no one else. But I can't say I find the magic as compelling. Interesting, but I don't feel it in the same way.

Mike:

I have always loved fantasy but was never attracted to magic or wizards. They were a cool companion, but I just didn't feel that connection like I did with Faramir or, going on a deep dive here, Menion Leah. I'll just leave that one for people to look up. So if I liked Han Solo more than Luke, why was I attracted to fantasy? Maybe it was the normal juxtaposed against the mystical. Lord of the Rings did that so well. But the magic seemed so... Ungrounded. Later as I did my research on Tolkien and discovered that Gandalf's magic was angelic, it really didn't excite me.

The first magic system that really grabbed me, which should come as no surprise, was Dark Sun. The magic had a cost that I understood. It also was a reflection of the real world and its events that my young mind was just waking up to. So no wonder thirty years later, I have fiction and a game that revolves around volatile and damaging magic.

I find it so disappointing that WoTC-HasBro just stated that Dark Sun was too problematic to bring back. As a teenager, I learned so much by looking at the destruction the Sorcerer Kings did in pursuit of power, helping me see the power systems and oppression in the real world. I guess, in the end, it's better. Better for a small indie company to tackle real subjects instead of letting a board of directors try and profit from it. Maybe they can't do it because it's too close to home, a Dragon-King shrouding itself in its temple, doing all it can to try and amass power...

But back to magic. I don't know if Dark Sun is my favorite magic

system, but it is probably the one that most influenced my magic system design. All energy must come from somewhere.

Dane:

I think that's part of the appeal for me—it's best when there's a true cost. I think all fantasy writers talk about the necessity for magic to cost something, but I don't think that's strong enough. I like when it costs something meaningful. It could advance the caster's age, taking years off their life. It could require ritual human sacrifice (this variety would hopefully never be used by the heroes). It could require negotiating with an adversarial interdimensional or supernatural being whose own will affects the magic and is likely to find some way to turn the magic against you. Or, in the case of *SagaBorn*, the energy must come from somewhere, and sometimes it comes from the people or creatures around the caster or the caster's own body. And the more the caster ravages, the weaker and more decrepit-looking the body becomes. It creates an atmosphere of danger and consequences for magic use.

Maybe that's what I really like in magic systems: the feeling it gives me. A complicated magic system with rules and inner consistency can stimulate my mind and entertain me for a while, but it doesn't stick with me like the magic that feels mysterious and dangerous or makes me feel some sort of primal emotion. In fantasy, magic is the largest deviation from our own reality, so it should feel significant and consequential.

Mike:

As I developed the system of magic for *SagaBorn*, I thought more and more about science. Almost as if the more the world leaned into magic, the worse science works. That's why the world is in a holding pattern with technology. Their technology is magic, and they keep finding ways to gunk it up, delaying real progress. You know, like our world.

So let's talk about specific systems. I am going to list out some of my favorite magic from games or fiction, and you can respond.

The magic of names. These days everyone thinks of naming magic as Rothfuss magic. But to me, the power of true names will also be held by Ged and Earthsea. I don't use true names much in my magic, but I have always loved it. To be honest, I have few clear memories of the exact magic system from those books (which is sad seeing how many times I read them when I was younger), but I am sure I could find some of Le Guin's magic that has crept into my writing.

Then we have the magic system from Midkemia, by Raymond E Feist. I'll be honest, as much as I loved those books in our teen years, I am not sure if they would hold up well as an adult. But I should give it a shot! The lasting impression I had from those books was the strange old man who whispered to Pug, "There is no magic." In fact, I think I ripped off that complete line in the magic section of the SagaBorn book. It is so good. I have always loved the anti-establishment wizards.

Next, we have Krynn. The division of magic in Dragonlance has always been so exciting. I modeled Eredar in my own writing after that style of magic. Take the feel of Dragonlance, mix in some Wheel of Time and my experience with college and boom, you have the perfect academic wizards. And, of course, we borrowed a



A Silencer of Eredar

bit of that basic idea and pushed it until it became something with more than a hint of sinister behind it.

I am sure you can think of more that has influenced both of us, but I think one of the main takeaways is that magic shouldn't be simple. It shouldn't feel like a game. It should be varied. It should abide by rules and then break those rules. If it is a primal driving force and a major power in the world, it would be multifaceted and used for so many different parts of life.

Dane:

When you say, “it should abide by rules and then break those rules,” I agree. Without some sort of system to learn, there is no magic, but it also seems to me that the entire point of magic is to break the rules. It's a way of circumventing the natural order. What goes up must come down, but when magic is involved, maybe not. I think that's another reason I prefer my magic to be a bit more unpredictable.

The Riftwar Saga gets a lot of grief because in the first book, called “Magician: Apprentice,” there's very little magic, and it isn't explained well. But what I enjoyed was that Pug, the apprentice, seemed to have great potential, but the magic just wasn't working well for him. It was unpredictable and dangerous. In book 2, it turned out there was another sort of magic—something much more powerful and alien to this world. Until the Riftwar, the greater path was unknown in Midkemia except to Macros the Black, who I believe was feared by other magicians. So there wasn't just a single system with a single set of rules, and there's an implication that they've only scratched the surface of what's possible. That adds some mystery to it.

A Wizard of Earthsea is the perfect example of what I love in a magic system. Again, it's unpredictable and dangerous. When Ged gets cocky, he summons a demonic being that will never stop chasing him and is tied to him. And I do enjoy that magic is controlled using the Old Speech, which is the “true names” for

things. (Side note: I've seen Rothfuss say that Le Guin was one of his major inspirations.) Dragons felt otherworldly in Earthsea because they spoke the Old Speech, meaning their language and even thoughts were magical in some way, and they're able to twist the truth but can't lie. That's interesting. Those are some of my all-time favorite fantasy novels.

Another one I'd add here is Michael Moorcock's Elric of Melniboné. Magic here is full of consequences and mystery. You have a sorcerer whose body is so weak that he requires drugs to stay alive. He makes a deal with a demon (who he'll now owe) to get a magic, sentient sword that will take the place of those drugs and help him to accomplish his ambitious goal of transforming Melniboné according to his higher ideals. But the sword has a mind of its own and does terrible things. Every power he has comes with some sort of negotiation or devil's bargain.

Mike:

So I think we can agree that with magic, there must be rules, but they are mysterious. It's not that everything is possible; the extraordinary is possible, but always with consequences. It should be dark and always just out of complete control. It should involve time, a strong mind, and a deft hand. It should just be, magic.



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FROM THE READERS

Question: What is your favorite magic system from game or fiction?

We asked our readers* to talk about their favorite type of magic.

*Note: some requested the use of pseudonyms, we did not get replies from infamous mages.

ROLEMASTER

I enjoy the idea that I can cast spells from a school (list) of magic that is higher than my current level. In Rolemaster, this would be you can cast spells up to twice your current level. They have spells that go up to and some past level 50, but you don't have to get to level 50 in order to cast those spells. You get access to multiple lists as either a full or semi-caster. Spell level also comes into play with casting time. low-level spells can be cast as a single action, while higher-level spells take time unless you speed cast (an optional rule). - Skull Dixon

MAGE

I enjoy how Freeform it is. - Guy Edward Larke

AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER

Straightforward and very consistent, with clear limitations and disadvantages/weaknesses for all. - Uncle Iroh

D&D MAGIC / VANCIAN

It works just perfectly as player resource in a game. It allows for dozens and dozens of colourful spells without the PC wizard having them available all the time a thus being able to have an instant answer to every problem. - Bigby

PUMPKINHEAD

An old witch raises the body of Pumpkinhead to get revenge on someone who has wronged you. But the cost is that you now become Pumpkinhead. - Ed Harley

JRPGs

I love the fact that spells cost a certain amount of mana to be able to use. The weaker the spell, the less mana consumed. You're not limited to how many times you can use a spell. Resting and taking potions help to restore mana is more handy then just resting, but to that point, I appreciate having limitations though. - Eric Telfor



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to life.



DARK RETURN

INTO THE WORLD

MAGIC INSTITUTIONS

EREDAR

- Arcane Sciences
- Non-governing
- Absolutely opposed to ravaging
- Different studies and research-driven
- Feel a call to protect the world
- Battle magics studies and expanded

Eredar has always approached magic like an academic science. All things must abide by rules and get controlled by those who know the rules. Their school of magic was once the pinnacle of magical learning until the Aradan War. The tower was overtaken by Uthgard, and the remaining mages fled deeper into Aradan. When the Dark Return occurred, the tower actively began recruiting those with the gift. During this time, they also began a strict view against the use of ravaging magics, forming teams of mages and archeons to wander the lands, Silencing those who have used these forbidden magics.

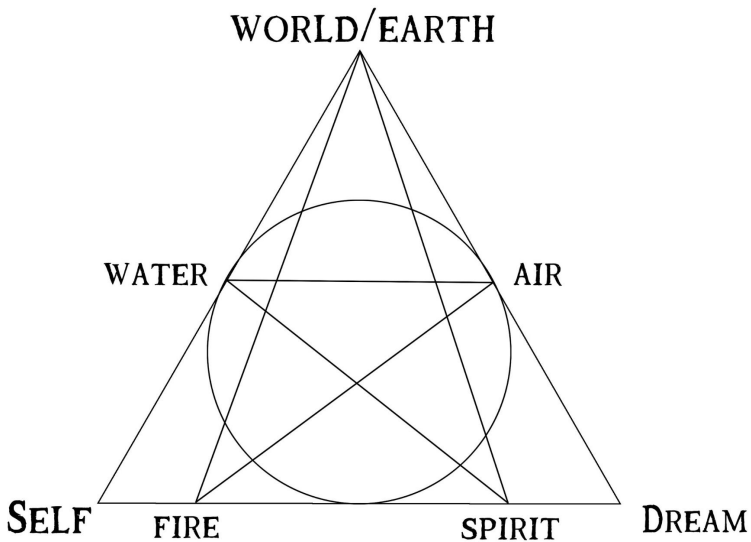
Eredar has no want to govern or hold power as a nation, though their lands and the surrounding communities are closely tied together. Eredar does not govern these lands, but they heavily influence the politics. As the main source of income and the main creator of public works, the surrounding communities are much like a pet that is fed well and given shelter, they have a very strong loyalty to the tower and its wizards.

DRUIDS

- The Art
- Non-governing, but often advise
- Opposed to ravaging
- Opposed to violence
- Look to find balance
- Great interest in the source of magic

The Druids are an independent group of magic users who are focused on protecting the peoples, creatures, and lands of the world. They view magic as an art form that is meant to bring us closer to the world around us. They see mana as a living energy that not only brings power but is intricately entwined with life itself. They do not use their influence or magic to govern others, but they have long acted as advisors to many of those who do rule. They do not use preemptive violence, nor do they support those that do. They also see ravaging magic as evil and destructive, though they do not resort to savage practices like Silencing.

They seek a balance in the world; their greatest goal is a utopian existence where the peoples and animals live with the world around them in harmony.



MINISTRY OF THE ARTS

- Magic as a power system
- Governing
- Consolidate power
- Develop new magics and uncover past magics
- License, control, and regulate magics
- Magic is meant to be used, as are resources
- Connection to church and religious beliefs

The Ministry of the Arts is a powerful group of magic users based in Uthgard. Unlike the Druids or Eredar, the Ministry not only advises the governing body, but they are also a large part of it. The Ministry is part wizard council, part school of magic, part church, and part military body. Each division has its own leadership and goals, but it is watched over by the High Council and answers to the Unelesia Church and the Uthgard King.

The Ministry controls magic in all regions of Uthgard. If you are a magic user who is not part of the Ministry, you must be licensed, surveyed, and taxed for your usage. Any magic user circumventing these laws is harshly punished, as well as any who use magics not approved for public use by the Ministry.

Ravaging magic is viewed as a necessary evil in warcraft, but public use of ravaging magic is frowned upon. While not every infraction would raise their awareness, larger uses of ravaging are also severely punished.

WIZARDS OF ISH

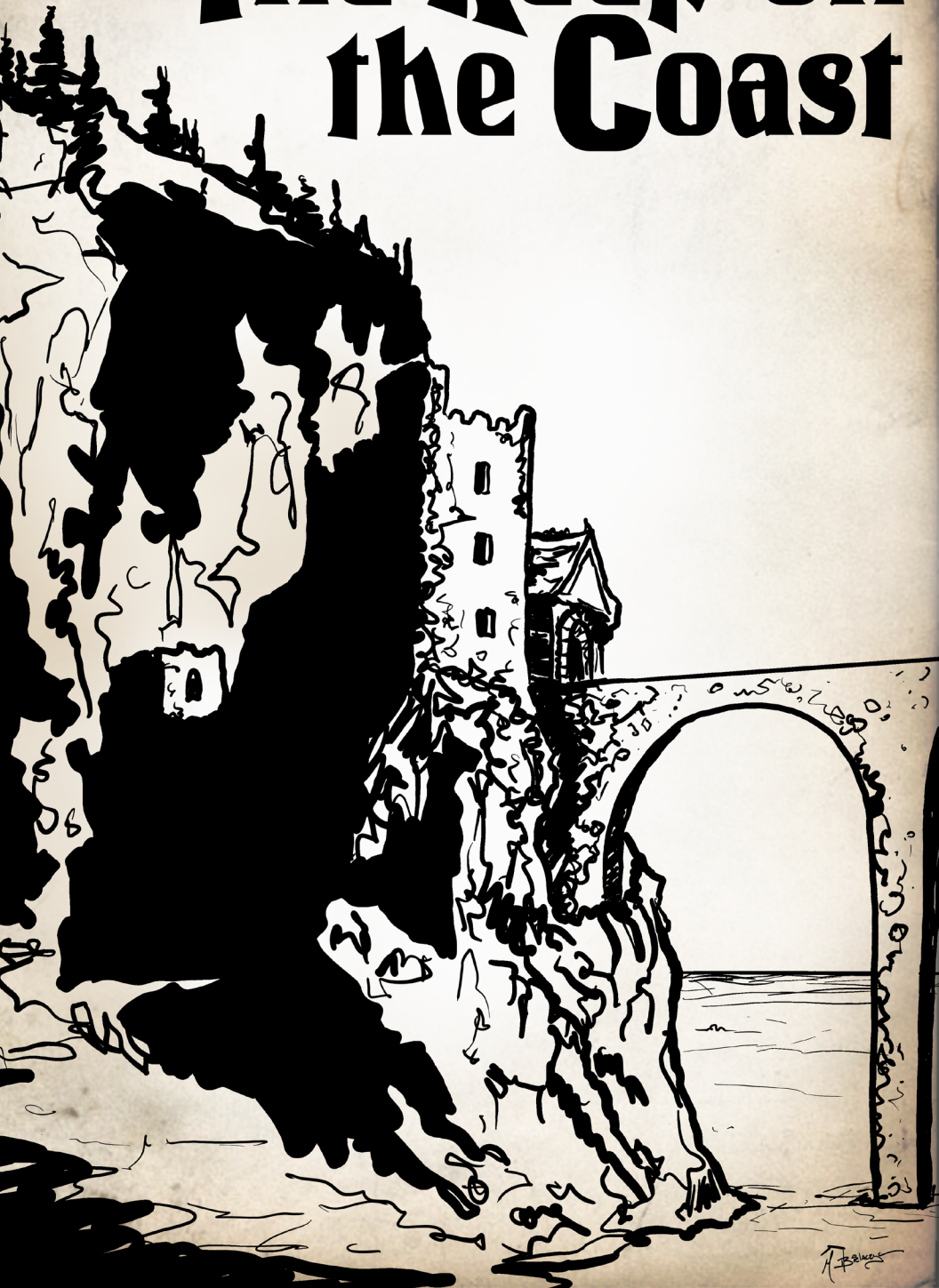
- Divine gift
- Governing
- Power and money, as well as hubris, they believe they are the divine
- Use of the devout and heretics to power magic
- Keep magic limited to their use

While the Wizards of Ish are from the faraway lands to the South, their reach is long. The Wizards, who call themselves the Najur, are an integral part of the Ishian Empire. Their institution is both religious and political. While the religion worships Tanthu-Ra, a sun god, the Grand Priest of the Najur is seen as a direct conduit to the holy. While it would be heresy to say so within Ish, the Grand Priest actually wields more power than the Emperor. This closeness to god, as well as their religious beliefs, are why they are called Najur, which means servant.

Magic is viewed as a divine gift to the Najur, bestowed on those who have served god well in past lives. Those who have the gift but are not born of the higher sects often volunteer to be servants under the Najur. They do not cast their own spells; instead, they offer their masters their mana, giving the wizards vast reservoirs of magical energy. Laws are strict in Ish, so those who find themselves imprisoned can often be assigned to military service or thralldom under a Najur. There are no magics that are taboo under the powerful hand of the Empire.



The Keep on the Coast



A. Baker

by Michael Bielaczyc

The stone was cold against Aledyn's cheek. A heavyweight held him down, but he could feel his limbs still. That was a good sign. He dared not move in the pitch-black darkness of whatever forgotten dungeon he had fallen into. He listened and heard no sound coming from above. Had the cursed creature grown bored and left? He knew that was wishful thinking. He moved a finger, just slightly, which made a tiny scraping noise on the debris that covered him. In the void above, he heard the quiet shuffle of a predator, little more than a wisp of sound as something crouched above and moved into a better position. Even though the stone was cold against his skin, sweat beaded up and ran down his nose.

What had brought him to this long-forgotten castle on the cliffs of a nameless shore? A rumor, nothing more. A brief passage in a journal referencing a library of ancient knowledge. And a book that was translated from an ancient Eldar tome about the Navirim. The journal was purchased in a curiosity shop in Harun, the merchant promising the secrets of the universe, but instead, it was little more than gibberish and folk tales. Save for the one entry discussing a visit to a shoreline keep, the old library containing the tomes that sent the journaler into madness. The search had led Aledyn out of Harun and the haughty nation of Tiren, through the Freelands, and finally along the shores of the wastelands, the ocean forever on the left.

The castle was hidden in a deep crevice among the cliffs of the shoreline. The old stone was cracked and shifted, the foundations crumbling on a cliff that itself was slowly eroding into the waves below. An old stone bridge littered in bones stretched over three graceful arches, still supporting a path from above to the large gateway below. Nothing ominous about this, just a stroll down the old road to pick up a book. He had then strolled down the walkway, his stride more confident than his mind.

A sound from above broke the silence, bringing him back from

his reverie. It was still up there. But what was it doing? Listening? Taunting? His heartbeat started to rise, and he swallowed the growing panic. This wasn't where he would meet his end. In a forgotten castle, on a forgotten shore, by some hell beast summoned by a dead warlock. Well, putting it that way, it did seem to make sense. The thought almost brought a chuckle, but more importantly, it shook him out of the growing panic. The creature, whatever it was, had burst out of the shadows in the darkest part of the rooms above. It had given chase as Aledyn ran from room to room, but the fading light had given no hint of it beyond a massive maw of teeth and long furry limbs. And then the floor gave out; he tumbled into the dark. Then he woke here, pinned under rubble.

A light filtered down from above as if a cloud had moved aside and let a bit of moonlight come dance among the ruins. He heard a hiss from above. *So, you don't like the light do you, you bastard.* Aledyn moved his left hand in a small pattern and quietly whispered a few words. The moonlight seemed to gather into a small wisp that danced on the tip of his finger. Another hiss from above. It was little more than a small trick apprentices used to impress others in local pubs, but it could be turned and molded by a more deft hand. He whispered another word, and the wisp shot up into the space above. The beast started to hiss a third time, and then it turned into a screech as the wisp blossomed into a light as bright as daylight at noon. The blinding light made Aledyn close his eyes, and the scream above grew louder and then trailed off as it fled down an unknown hallway above.

Not knowing how much time he had, Aledyn quickly changed his focus to another spell. He flexed his hand as he spoke arcane words. A ghostly image of his hand, pale blue and enlarged, appeared above the rubble. He reached down and grabbed a handful of the debris, and tried to lift it. It was heavier than he had hoped, and the spell began to falter. He closed his eyes, concentrating on the energy as he drew more from himself. The giant hand became brighter and lifted the fallen timbers and stones enough for Aledyn to squirm out from under.

As soon as he was out, he let go of the spell. The gray rubble crashed to the tiled floor. He began to move down the dimly light hall at a quick walk. He reached into a pouch and withdrew a small crystal, he whispered a few words into the quartz and it began to glow. Not very bright, but enough to see. He didn't know when the beast would return and he wanted to conserve his magic for when it did.

He was looking for a sturdy door. One he could reinforce and hide behind until dawn. His only hope was that the creature was as adverse to day as it was to light. The walls of the hall were once decorated with paintings and tapestries, but the fabric had long since decayed, leaving an empty gallery of wooden supports hanging on moldy walls. Many of the doors were in similar states of decay.

He began to run down the hallways, starting to resolve himself to the fact that the whole building was crumbling and would not provide a safe haven for the night. That was until he came across a pristine oak door filling an ornate door frame, as perfect as it had been the day it was built. Guessing it was probably locked, he gave it a push, and surprisingly it swung open without as much as a squeak. He jumped inside and started to close the door. For a brief moment, he paused, thinking this was too lucky a find, but he rolled the dice and pushed it fully shut. He reached up and grabbed a large timber; it swung down on a hinge and barred the sturdy door shut.

Aledyn paused a moment, breathing heavily as he faced the door. He had read enough adventure tales back in Bordon. He just knew the beast sat behind him, its large mouth hanging open, ready to swallow him screaming. In a quick movement, Aledyn turned, pulling loose his amarnium short sword and lifting his lighted crystal high in the air, the glow from it flaring brighter.

And he found himself in the library.

“No shite.” he lowered the sword and light but kept them at the

ready for now.

The round room was lined with oaken shelves covered in webs but unweathered as if time had not touched it. Lifting his lighted crystal, rune work became evident along the top of the wall. He couldn't make out the spell, but assumed it was a ward against the cool shoreline air, a perfect spell to keep a library in good shape.

Lucky chance number two, he thought as he started looking around the room. The small light from the crystal wasn't enough to see the ancient tomes in any detail. The center of the room had a large round table, a lantern shuttered in the center of it. There was little chance that any oil still sat in its basin, but he lifted the shutter anyways. A small blue flame danced along the top of a copper rod. Through his amazement, he looked closer and also saw runes along the copper. The old Aradan kingdom was known for its great magics, but in this small enchantment, Aledyn found the greatest relief. He turned the key on the side of the base, the copper rod lengthening and grew brighter. And there is luck number three. He shook his head, trying not to think his luck might run out soon.

As the light brightened the room, some small creature scurried across the floor and into the large fireplace between two bookshelves. As it scurried up, it knocked down loose branches and leaves which clattered to the stone floor. Moonlight danced down on the debris, filtering down through the large chimney.

Aledyn turned back to the bookshelves. The journal in Harun had said the eldar tome was blue with gold letters on the spine. As he browsed, he realized the books were written in ancient Aradan. Ah, there it is. Not as bad of luck as it could be, but still. Aledyn was never adept at picking up new languages, and Aradan had always been his worst. *But first, blue tome, gold letters.* Something in the air made him move quickly, scanning the preserved books as he made his way around the circular room. When he neared the fireplace, he finally caught sight of a gleam from gold embossed letters. He pulled the tome down and flipped through. He scanned for anything he might recognize. Some strange circular charts

resembled the pattern the druids liked to use for ritual markings. He kept flipping and, in the third chapter, saw a familiar word over and over. Navirim. The other universe. The home of demons and dreams.

Before he could study more, there was a loud bang at the door. A short silence and then a snort of air from under the door frame. Another pause. A huge crash, and the giant oaken door shuddered. First, he grabbed his shoulder bag and pulled out a wide square oilcloth. Quickly wrapping the book and tying it off with straps, he shoved it deep into the bag and pulled it closed. Another crash and shudder, the crossbar cracking.

Aledyn scanned the room; he saw no easy escape route or place to hide. Was this it? The last stand? Another crash and the door buckled, debris flying into the room. The table turned on its side, the magic lantern falling over and spilling its fiery copper rod unto the old carpet underneath. The rug caught fire in a woosh; the room illuminated brighter than it had been in centuries.

The beast that clawed into the doorway was a thing of nightmares. A wide serpentine mouth opened and closed with ragged breaths, the air slightly whistling between hundreds of yellowed pointed teeth. The angular head had two sets of eyes, one set forward looking, almost human-like in its gaze. The second set had slitted irises like snake's eyes and set to either side of the wide scaled head. A bulbous white body lurched into the room on spider-like limbs, long spiky hair brushing the broken wood as it came into the room. A long tail whipped behind it, crashing into the stone of the hallway behind. It turned its eyes towards the mage, the mouth changing into a sinister grin.

Aledyn reached for his magic, but with the fear and his earlier expenditure, he found no answer. He backed up as the creature inched forward, its body tensing like a spring. Aledyn tripped a little as he moved backward, his heel catching on the edge of the fireplace. He looked down to see the light streaming down from the chimney. Well, I guess now I am the scurrying vermin. He dropped

and rolled back into the large fireplace and looked up. A bit of relief hit as he saw a moderately large space leading up to the sky. The smoke from the fire was starting to fill the space, and he heard a clatter as the monster leapt.

Aledyn jumped and caught hold of some bricks, pulling himself up just as the creature's face crashed into the void of the fireplace. It looked up and snarled, but its large body made it awkward for it to turn. Aledyn began to climb, the old rough rocks made finding hand and foot holds easy, but the stones caught and tore his clothes and skin. Below he heard the creature moving as it squirmed to pursue. Aledyn climbed faster.

After what seemed like hours but was probably mere minutes, Aledyn pulled himself from the chimney and collapsed on the tiled rooftop, the morning sun beaming down on him. The creature could be heard still clawing its way up the chimney. Aledyn scrambled to his feet, making his way toward the edge of the crumbling roof. Smoke now came out of cracks and windows down below. The whole library, preserved for ages now burned. A scream erupted from the chimney as the creature made it into the sunlight. It pulled back to the cool shadows of the worn stonework.

“Hah, you ugly bastard. Burn in your castle, or come burn in the sunlight!” Aledyn suddenly felt he was pressing his luck while gloating, but here in the sun, the ocean breeze blowing by, he seemed victorious. He looked over the edge for a way down, but there was just the sheer wall of the keep and the sea many stories below. As he walked back and forth along the edge, looking for a good place to start the climb, the morning light dimmed. He looked up to see a large cloud moving over the pale sun.

Shite.

A loud footstep could be heard behind as the creature heaved itself from the chimney. Its large mouth opened, strange sounds bellowing from the hollow throat as if it mimicked the cries of its past victims. It started bounded along the rooftop, tongue licking

along the rows of teeth, mouth wide, ready to eat. And Aledyn jumped.

In the stories, when a hero jumps off a cliff to the river below or across a chasm to grab a vine, they always grunt, a grimace of determination on their face. Thinking back in later days, Aledyn liked to think he did as well. But he did not. He screamed like a frightened yak as his limbs swung in wild circles. He had a brief thought, that he may want to try and hit the water gracefully, but that did not happen. He hit with a splash that wracked his limbs with pain and knocked his breath out so fast he lost consciousness. He did not get to see as the sun came out and chased the abomination back into the fiery depths of the castle, where it died howling in the pain, a small punishment for all the pain it had brought to other creatures over the centuries. The flames left little evidence behind that the horror had even existed, save for a small pile of charred bone pieces and yellow teeth.

Minutes? Hours? Days? Sometime later, Aledyn washed up on shore. He woke with cold sand on his cheek and seawater washing up his legs. He looked up to see the castle fully engulfed in flame. He thought he could hear the screams of an ancient creature in its depths, but in truth, he could hear little more than the seawater that filled his ears.

He stood and opened his bag. Inside were a few meager possessions and an oilskin-wrapped book. He looked back to the burning keep and then to a small path that led up the cliff in the opposite direction. His hat lazily washed back and forth in the quiet waves of the sea. He reached down, shaking the loose water off as he lifted it to his head.

Hopefully finding someone to translate this book would be a bit less dangerous, he thought as he slowly limped his way up that path. *But with my luck...*



Mini Adventure

POT 003.2 THE CHASE

A continuation of the Shadows of the Tower Campaign, a SagaBorn RPG adventure. A group of 4 to 6 characters of levels 3-4 is recommended.

Goal: The heroes will head south back towards Kowal, chased by Orovari elves loyal to the Kingdom of Uthgard. They will learn of the power of the stone found in module PoT002: The Temple of the Valley and end up being teleported to the Lesh forest by the end of this encounter.

StoryGuide Setup: The adventurers have escaped the ogre lair and find themselves in a wilderness they do not recognize.

Their use of the waystone caused a bright flash of powerful magic, which got the attention of a nearby patrol of Orovari elves. The elves are on horseback and will almost certainly catch up. The nearby ruined town should be presented as the most obvious way to hide or escape. After an encounter with the elves, setting up a future clash as Uthgard invades south, the adventurers will be teleported to the Lesh Forest by the *Keystone, traveling along a leyline that crosses the old village.

*The Keystone is an ancient artifact the heroes will have in their possession after the events in PoT002: The Temple of the Valley. It allows the owner to unlock a Waystone and travel vast distances very quickly. It being used as a way to “jump” into a leyline is odd and will be explained in future adventures.

Read the following to the players:

As you traverse down the wide mountain path, the evergreen trees part to rolling hills covered in tall grass. The tall mountains behind you are similar to the Swordspynes of home, but they are unfamiliar, as part of the range you have never seen before.

From the mountainside vantage point, you can see the hills turn to plains and spread out into the distance. To the south, you see a gathering of buildings next to a copse of trees, not large enough to even be called a town. You also notice a large encampment far to the north, the tents all matching and smoke rising in the cool afternoon breeze. Such a large gathering of tents can only mean one thing, an army.

As you survey the landscape ahead of you, you see a patrol of horsemen gallop out of the camp heading toward your location.

A DC15 Survival skill check will give an indication that they are in the Swordspyne Mountains north of Kowal.

The heroes should at least gather that they are far from their initial location and that south seems the most logical travel direction. The village seen may look like a hopeful place to learn more, but it has been long abandoned.

In general, the heroes should feel apprehensive about the horsemen coming, and seek to find a way to hide. They can not outrun them, as they are not mounted.

THE OROVARI PATROL

Their History

This is an Orovari encampment of House Ka'Dal. They are gathering here in force as Uthgard slowly builds its armies to invade Tiren to the east and to press on Kowal to the south. An Orovari shaman felt the use of the waystone, as well as a bright light being seen in the night when the stone became active. The patrol is heading toward the location of the Ogre cave to investigate.

What They Want

The Orovari shaman in the group is interested in whatever powerful magic was used. She will do her best to recover the source of the magic and bring it before the council of her clan.

Orovari Personalities:

Ma'artal (Lvl 3 Archeon)

Ma'artal is a veteran of war. His tribe was wiped out during the Return by soldiers of the Border Keeps. He has never liked it, but he is driven to find a better place for his people.

Al'alie (Lvl 3 Wylder)

Al'alie is a mage who was born in the far north. While suffering a brutal winter, the Ka'Dal tribe visited and saved them. She is loyal to the Ka'Dal clan and the movement to support the Teran kingdom of Uthgard. She sees tracking this magical artifact as a duty to the tribe and a way to gain renown.

Qelatahl (Lvl 2 Fighter)

Qel is a part of the army, but he is not a soldier at heart. He feels the Orovari need a better place to live than the frozen north, but he is not sure war is the way to secure it.

RUN OR FIGHT!

Whatever the players decide to do, a Skill Challenge should be used to see how well their plan is executed. The encounter should end in them facing off against the Orovari in some way.

Skill Challenges

A skill challenge is a narrative way to handle a non-combat encounter and allows the players to use their character's skills to overcome obstacles. It can be used as a way to describe traveling, handling large social encounters, or events like a chase scene.

The SG will set a DC, and the players must roll skill checks to beat the DC. The SG will choose a certain number of skill rolls needed to overcome the challenge. The resulting numbers of successes and failures define the outcome of the challenge. More successes mean the players have an easier time with the encounter, and more failures mean a harder encounter.

When making a skill challenge check, no player can go twice in a row, and no player can use the skills already used, until at least 3 separate skills have been used. A player must explain how that skill is used to overcome the challenge.

The DC for this Skill challenge is DC 14.

Roll once for each player, and add another roll if a tiebreaker is needed.

If the Skill Challenge is successful, the players evade the larger patrol, only running into a couple of scouts. If they are unsuccessful, the whole patrol tracks them down.

THE RUINED TOWN

The town is the logical place to hide. It is away from the destination of the patrol and easily accessible. If the heroes decide to go another route, you can have the same encounters happen, but at a different location. When the Orovari find the heroes, they

will question them about what they are doing in this area. One of the scouts is an archeon and is biding time to see if they detect any magic, and if the whole patrol is encountered, the shaman will immediately cast Detect Magic to get a better idea of what they are dealing with. The Keystone will glow as bright as a lantern to any magic detection. The Orovari will not be outright violent, but they will demand any magic items detected. They will fight if the heroes resist.

**There are a multitude of solutions to this from the players, but no matter the outcome, this should be remembered and used in future encounters with Orovari and Uthgard.

THE ESCAPE

Whether the players find themselves overwhelmed in the battle with the Orovari, or another calamity (like a massive electrical storm), at some point, Zevaria will help them activate the Keystone and travel to safety.

They will appear in the Lesh forest, west of Kowal, only a few days' journey home. This is to progress the story for getting the players interested in who Zevaria is and how powerful this Keystone could be.

The Lesh Forest

First, you hear the sounds of crickets, then some small creatures running through dry leaves. Everything is dark, but this lasts only a few moments. Soft starlight fills the glade around you. A large stone, with symbols carved on its face dominates the clearing. The white moon beams down on you, giving everything a strange glow. The leaves here are bright colors, even in the dim light of the moon, a cool breeze ripples across them, making soft noises as the dry Fall leaves rustle.

Traveling the ways has taken 3 months since the Keystone started to transport them.





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