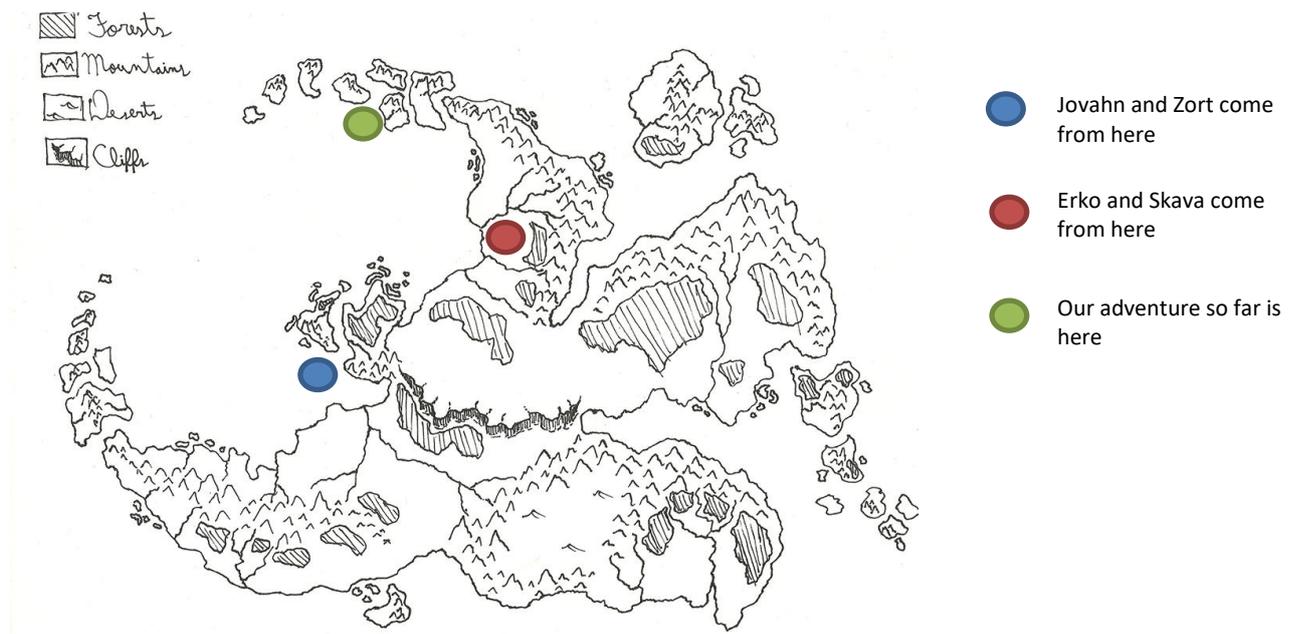


Spelens Hus

Player reference
for our game

Our fantasy setting

This is a big area: at least the size of Europe + northern Africa



The massive cliffs separating north and south are the legacy of a world-shattering, even cosmic event. Although there was “a time” before then, it is culturally and metaphysically lost. Although people refer to the world as “broken,” it is not negative – that moment was effectively Year Zero and is thought of as the ascent of the gods and the proper beginning of reality.

Almost all of the west, including the central plateau and lower river plains, but excepting the northwest islands, is fairly peacefully connected via the central island cluster. It is not really an “empire” but a system of alliances among local leadership and cultural trade. The eastern bay and cultures are connected to it through trade and travel, but are not as closely allied or organized with the island cities. The northern bay and subcontinental islands are mysterious and poorly known to the rest.

The southwestern and island culture is most prosperous and more widely educated and traveled. The northern culture is rougher and more provincial. The eastern culture, including the southeastern corner, has its own standards of prosperity (but I haven’t thought much about it yet).

There is roughly the same range of ethnicity and language as across any equivalent area of the real world, but we are downplaying this for purposes of light fantasy. There is one non or semi-human “race” very common to the west, called halvesnakes, said to be partly descended from the sea serpents of the western bay, comprising the majority in the southern island chain.

Three resolution systems

For things which anyone could do, but also that anyone could fail, roll d100 for a multiplier for a characteristic, usually x5.

- *Examples from our game: communicating important information (Intelligence), getting along socially (Charisma), and resisting nausea (Constitution).*

For technical, skilled actions, roll d100 for your skill value.

- *Examples from our game: too many to list, but common examples include Scan, Local Knowledge, and obviously attack and parry skills.*

For directly-opposed efforts, use the Resistance Table.

- *Examples from our game: Erko matched Constitution vs. the ghoul's venom's Potency; the ghouls' howls matched their Power against all the characters' Power; Zort matched Strength vs. the constricting tentacle's Strength; Skava matched Power vs. Power to retain the controlled spirit.*

Fighting

Strike Rank = basic value + weapon value + any of the following:

- Unprepared spell or missile: 5
- Prepared spell or missile: 0
- Each 3 meters moved: 1
- Surprised up-close: 3
- Surprised: 1
- Power used for spells: Power-1

Attacking uses weapon skill, which is reduced by the target's intrinsic Defense. A parrying weapon or shield can actively defend, with the following results:

- Attacker succeeds, defender fails = attack hits
- Attacker fails, defender fails = nothing happens
- Attacker succeeds, defender succeeds = defending weapon is damaged
- Attacker fails, defender succeeds = attacking weapon is damaged

There is no parrying or dodging a thrown or propelled weapon.

One may also attempt a knockback attack, using Strength + Size vs. Size + Dexterity on the Resistance Table.

Armor subtracts from the damage received to a hit location. Shields operate as armor for their designated locations (arm + a stated core body part) in addition to their utility for parrying, and in this capacity they are effective against thrown or propelled weapons.

Hits reduce total hit points as well as injure the hit location.

- The hit points total is unforgiving. Reaching 0 is death.
- Arms or legs: if the points are exceeded, the limb is useless. If you receive up to twice the location's points in a single blow, the excess is not counted against your total hit points, but you are nearly unconscious from shock. If you take more than 6 points over the location's total, the limb is severed or otherwise maimed so badly it cannot heal naturally.
 - *Example from our game: The above effects are what happened to Zort's arm; it was kept attached by multiple Healing spells, but was restored to function only through Rune magic.*
- Chest, head, or abdomen: if the points are exceeded, you are helpless and will die in two full turns unless tended. If you take more than 6 points over the location's total, that is instant death.
 - *Example from our game: Jovahn's chest received exactly its total in damage, causing him to collapse; if he had not received attention in two full rounds, he would have died.*

Battle magic

Spells are categorized as:

- Temporal vs. instant: whether the spell has a duration.

- Active vs. passive: whether you have to concentrate to keep a temporal spell going.
- Focused vs. unfocused: whether the spell requires a physical rune. You may draw a spell's rune on something or even tattoo it so the focus is easily available.

You may learn as many spells as you want, but you can only hold their Power's total in your mind equal to your Intelligence. Switching out spells takes one hour per point of Power involved.

Casting a spell on yourself or a willing target only requires spending the Power, otherwise you must overcome the target's Power on the Resistance Table. You can spend Power for spells down to 0 if you want without harm (although it lowers your potential to resist others' magic). Power is regained at $\frac{1}{4}$ your full Power value per six hours.

Shamans and spirits

Spirits are part of the natural world, inhabiting the spirit plane, only separate in terms of perception. Shamans access the spirit plane through mental discipline and drugs and function in both planes.

- A bound spirit has been placed in a crystal or in the body of an animal; it may be used as extra Intelligence for spell storing or for Power.
- A controlled spirit provides a one-time service to a shaman in exchange for Power.
- A fetch is a shaman's "second self," a spirit who identifies with the shaman and trades presence between the material/spirit planes with him or her.
- An allied spirit is a special familiar granted to Rune Lords and Rune Priests.

In our setting, shaman and priest magic does not overlap very much. Cults do include special spirits, and shamans may "attach" themselves (permanently) to a cult, and therefore interact with cult spirits, but they cannot gain Rune status in it.

- *Example from our game: this is Imzha's status in the cult of the Queen of Darkness. She is not a priestess but a temple-sworn shaman.*

Spirit combat occurs when a person tries to capture or bind a spirit, when a hostile spirit tries to possess a person, or when a cult sends spirits to punish erring worshippers. Spirit combat is typically one-on-one. A controlled spirit or a fetch may interpose itself against an attacking spirit.

- Both combatants attack using Power vs. Power on the Resistance Table
 - A successful attack permits fleeing (for the spirit), reducing the opponent's Power, or an attempt to bind (vs. the spirit) or possess (vs. the person).

Unlike battle magic, if your Power is reduced to 0 by spirit combat, then this is the end of your character.

Improvement

Skills are raised by 5% through successful use and a chance to improve rolled at the end of a session. Dexterity, Constitution, Strength may be increased by 1 when a characteristic roll results in its value x1 or less, with a similar chance as skills. Power is raised by 1-3 through overcoming a target's resistance during spirit combat or by using spells, with a chance to improve at the end of a session. Charisma is raised by 1-3 by achieving great deeds that are important to a community. Size and Intelligence may not be raised.

New skills and battle magic spells are acquired from the cults, which means participating in cult-associated activities in a given community. This is assumed to be occurring whenever the characters are not in immediate danger.

Runes

These are not game mechanics in terms of numbers and dice, but metaphysical concepts which organize the social and magical game mechanics. A given god and its cult are defined by a very specific combination of runes. I have slightly altered the game text's list to fit our setting, revising the elements regarding the Sky, replacing Dragonewt with Serpent, treating Chaos as a valid Form rune rather than an abomination, and designating some as "ancient" or "unknown."

The elements: Sky (sometimes combined with Sun, sometimes with Stars), Water, Earth, Fire, Air, [Light and possibly others]

- *Example from our game: the Light rune that Skava and Zort observed in the ancient ruins was unfamiliar to them and possibly perceived as irrational or otherworldly.*

The forms: Man, Beast, Plant, Serpent, Spirit, Chaos

- *Example from our game: in this setting, every god must have a Form rune. The absence of a Form rune for a god in the ancient "before times" is perceived as impossible or insane.*

The conditions: Mastery, Magic, [Infinity]

- *Example from our game: the Infinity rune that Skava and Zort observed in the ancient ruins was also unfamiliar and frightening to them and to Imzha.*

The powers: Harmony/Discord, Luck/Fate, Fertility/Death, Stasis/Movement, Truth/Illusion

The term "rune" also applies to any symbol used in religion and community, e.g., every battle magic spell has a rune, and you may conceive of nearly anything of social importance to have one as well, like family names or known spirits of a region. These are magical in the sense of emotions, personal commitments, and concentration.

Cults

"Cult" is used in its older sense, as religious practice and customs as part of a community. Religion in our setting is not ruled by central doctrine, and a "temple" or "church" is just a building. It is not an institution, but a literal language for people's identity, values, and customs. Not everyone is devout and devoted, but everyone is culturally "in" one or more cults – they *are* society. Significantly, government, or anything like it, is always defined and perceived in cult terms.

The larger, more widely-observed cults include several layers of subordinate deities and hero cults inside them. Cult positions and ideologies are always adjusting to circumstances and full of small power struggles. As the characters grow in reputation and magic, they will become players rather than pawns, and may even reshape the religion themselves.

Gods and the pantheon

The central couple

The two primary deities are married partners sharing the Sky rune. In the north, the female partner's night aspect is somewhat emphasized, such that they are called the Queen of Stars and the Bright Husband, whereas in the south, the male partner's day aspect is foremost and they are called the Sun Lord and the Good Wife. Each has multiple aspects, varying widely by region, most of which are dignified and official, but some are a little naughty (including cheating on one another), and some are sometimes split off into separate gods. Each also has multiple practical secondary characters (e.g. childbearing) and hero cults. A given region's local conflicts in power structure are usually reflected in sect-based divisions among its observance of these two figures.

- *Example from our game: Jovahn began play as a lay worshipper of a disfavored sect of the Sun Lord, which reflects political concerns in the imperial city.*

The pantheon

These are a dramatic "social circle" of colorful, very individualized gods found across the setting, variously and sometimes contradictorily defined as siblings, friends, and offspring of the main

couple. They have strong personalities, including lots of stories, adventures, relationships, and rivalries, and they are often associated with cultural heroes and significant social change. Examples of their “spheres” include Love and lust, Commerce and exploration, Memory and legacy, Artistry and excellence, Entertainment and mischief, and Otherness and alternative lifestyles.

- *Examples from our game: the dead explorer wore an amulet from the Hawk Seers, and Erko is an initiate of the Buried Dead.*

Regional gods

Every place in the setting observes one or more local gods based on some combination of geography and ecology; cities or other community centers; and ancestry and ethnicity. In many cases each is compatible with its equivalents across regions, even if the worshippers would find the practices to be a little strange.

- *Example from our game: The Woods Woman is the primary forest deity of the northwest region. If Skava were to travel far across the setting, she might encounter a different “outdoors” deity for an unfamiliar type of forest and with different practices, but she would eventually realize the runes are the same and that her observance would still count in terms of game mechanics.*

Chaos-oriented

Many of the cults in the above categories include a subcult with the Chaos rune, which is thought to have originated with the cosmic event that changed the shape of the lands. It is considered natural, but not exactly normal and quite dangerous, so best integrated with more “solid” aspects as subcults. The few cults with Chaos as a primary rune are socially marginal or specialized for a tolerated but isolated social function.

- *Example from our game: Zort is a lay worshipper of the Merciful Dawn, a support and education network for people with Chaos features, aimed at housing them as children and managing their employment as adults.*

Personal cult status

Most people are lay worshippers of a cult, or of associated cults, simply as part of the local culture. They display minor observances and attend important ceremonies, donating a point of Power. Major cults in diverse areas typically permit temporary lay status for outsiders to “chip in” as members of the community. Access to lay status is socially mediated and does not require dice mechanics.

Initiates have committed themselves to a given cult’s ideology and local institutions, including its standards for handling the dead and therefore the fate of their own spirit. They receive social support, cult-specific training, limited and risky divine intervention, access to special spells, and even temporary use of Rune magic through the priests’ authority. They typically observe distinctive restrictions and responsibilities.

- *Example from our game: Erko is an initiate of the Buried Dead, obviously favored as he had received a Rune spell, but also subject to the demands and authority of the priest who gave it to him.*

Access to initiate status requires dice mechanics, usually some version of [Power + Charisma + money] x5 ÷3. Failure is usually only a matter of delay until the next available chance. Only the friendliest and most tightly-associated cults may share initiation rites and status. However, a single initiation for one version of a given cult counts for any and all versions.

- *Example from our game: Jovahn is a lay worshipper of the Sun Lord, based on practices in the imperial city; he is also recently initiated into the Bright Husband cult following northern practices, which still counts as initiation in his “home” sect.*

Rune Lords are militant champions of a given cult, “favored by the gods.” They receive many social benefits, as well as the capacity to raise skills past 100%, access to enchanted iron arms and armor, reliable divine intervention, use of Rune magic and resurrection through the priests’ authority, and an allied temple-spirit. A given cult does not always have Rune Lords as the status depends greatly

on personal accomplishments, on the unpredictable favor of the gods, and on current social strife. Requirements for this status include initiate status, at least 90% in five designated skills, and at least 15 Power, as well as specific details for a given cult, but does not require a dice roll.

Rune Priests are representatives and social leaders for a given cult. They receive extensive social support and authority, access to enchanted iron arms and armor (if they are fighting-oriented), reliable divine intervention, access to Rune magic through sacrificing Power, the authority to dispense Rune spells to others, and an allied temple-spirit. Requirements for this status vary widely by cult, but they always include initiate status, 90% in the Cult Lore skill, at least 18 Power, and a dice-roll similar to that for initiation. They have extensive responsibilities and cannot raise skills past certain levels, and they must maintain Power at 18 – therefore to gain Rune spells, they must repeatedly increase Power beyond that point.

- *Example from our game: the young priest of the Queen of Darkness at the village does not have much access to Power, so the 2 points he sacrificed to gain the Regrow Limb, for Zort, were a significant trade-off for the community, which would otherwise have benefited from a Divination or a blessing of some kind. At present, the village is magically unprotected.*