RuneQuest 1980 – an original, sketchy setting

It's a harsh rural, mountainous land, demanding hard work to keep things together. The main ecology is scrubby but thick woods, with manzanita type growth everywhere. This is gritty, brambly hick fantasy.

People dress for rough weather, in a loose, hooded poncho or short robe type garment, worn over wrapped limbs. There is no usable metal ore – the equivalent is a very hard wood that can keep an edge. For the general visuals, think of the rich, naturalistic animation in *Princess Mononoke*, with the same mild blend of country-style low-tech and olden-days fantasy adventure – remove the anime convention of childlike adults, and you've got it.

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- Male: Ruduver, Tidd, Hermon, Gohan, Nath, Orta
- Female: Metty, Liva, Sunan, Yoreen, Vrisha, Onive

Spiders are a common work and domestic animal, providing some meat but mainly their webbing, which can be spun into silk that's more like cotton and wool. Other main animals include poultry and large, not very safe cattle.

Be prepared for a couple of odd little SF elements, which are not intended to imply a hard-SF setting underlying it all, or a complicated back-story – mainly just to be weird and visually interesting.

For the characters: this is coming of age fantasy, in their mid-teens, as we're really building the characters from the ground up in the classic *RuneQuest* construction. The key point: it's not a good society. People aren't evil, but the institutions are evil, spawned from the influence of distorted gods. The characters are growing up in a bad place and a bad space. More cosmically, their lifetime is tied to fast-developing cultural and metaphysical crisis, but we don't need to map it out and make it happen – we're just playing what it's like to be in it, seeing what happens to you and what you become.

Shamans
Daily life concerns the harvest, village economy, council governance, and all that stuff which is not too metaphysical. Most religious and magic attention concerns local spirits based on ancestry, geography, and folklore.

Everyone uses spirits provided by local shamans, typically one-use Power batteries and 1-point spells. Shamans are generally accepted and treated well, but they're not high-status or otherwise important with a couple of exceptions. Their practice seems at first just provincial, mundane, and socially conservative, but it also serves as the glue that keeps society surviving and relatively functional; otherwise the gods' malign influence would disintegrate or wholly subordinate humanity in some unimaginable way

The Real Gods Are Dark and Bloody
This is the sting, that the actual gods are pretty evil and their cults keep society broken and miserable. They're actually worshipped by only about 10% of the population, but unwilling layman status is all too common.
- The Witch, out in the forests and swamps
- The Taker of Sacrifice, under and within
- The Chieftain, genius of war and magic
- The Mother, of the home and family

They're not reskinned Glorantha gods. Although they're built using the runes, and the rune magic rules are the same, the underlying metaphysics are very different.

Out here in the hinterlands, which is most places, they operate mainly as boogeyman and secret cults, strong enough and infiltrated enough such that no one dares challenge them openly. The cults don't rule, but they do keep society stunted and ignorant, and shot-through with badness.

Implication that in some places, centralized towns type places, there are more civil versions operating in open church-like form, but the resources and organized authorities of these places don't have the reach to control most of the landscape directly

Did Someone Say "Illuminated"
Fortunately or at least relatively so, here are the radical sects – all based on light, all providing more direct means to wield power, also genuinely bonkers except that they're basically correct. Their kookiness and minor benign aid keep them from being safe targets for repression (as well as being bad-asses), but it's an uneasy balance as their influence becomes more visible and also more obviously interconnected

And Robots
The Stickmen, or as they call themselves, the human beings.

Yes, it makes no sense, whatever. It fits Sandy Peterson logic perfectly: a wholly nonhuman race, but emphatically not any pop-SF version, with diet/energy needs and abilities that seem abominable, practices concerning the dead ditto, and reproduction that both boggles and disturbs.

Character creation
It's a little tweaked from the original, with a more setting-focused sequence and the tiniest bit of lifting from the later editions.

Family background, choose or roll
- 1-4 Farmer (Con, Siz)
- 5-7 Trader (Int, Cha)
- 8-10 Hunter (Con Dex)
- 11-12 Council (Str Cha)

Roll characteristics in order, 3d6, with 2d6+6 for the two designated by family as well as for POW

		1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20
Agility	Str	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
	Siz	-5%				+5%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Dex	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
Manipulation	Str	-5%				+5%
	Int	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Dex	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
Communication	Int	-5%				+5%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Cha	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
Knowledge	Int	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
Perception	Int	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
Stealth	Siz	+10%			-5%	-10%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Int	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%

	Dex	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
Attack	Str	-5%				+5%
	Int	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Dex	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
Parry	Str	-5%				+5%
	Siz	-5%				+5%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Dex	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%
Defense	Siz	+10%	+5%		-5%	-10%
	Pow	-5%				+5%
	Int	-5%				+5%
	Dex	-10%	-5%		+5%	+10%

Everyone gets Listen, Scan, HTH Fighting, Lore: Region, and Speak Own Language at base level; get all the listed family skills at base level too
- Farmer: Understand Beast Speech, Animal Care, Cultivation, Find Plant, Masonry
- Trader: Bargain, Conceal, Speak Other Language, Assess Value, Taste Analysis
- Hunter: Track, Move Quietly, Sling, Climb, Throw
- Council: Orate, Bribery, Ride, Shield, Play Instrument

Get +10% each in two of the skills you have. Get one 1-point battle magic spell that's conceivably useful to you at this point.

Choose now: Resentful (+1 Con or Int), Hopeful (+1 Str or Cha), Purposeful (+1 Dex or Pow). Refigure percentages if necessary.

Young adulthood, choose – someone mentored you, group knows you
- Teachers, artists, outriders, crafters, herbalists, entertainers
  - +5% each in two skills, +5/5% with one weapon, one 1-point battle magic spell (can boost prior spell to 2 points)
- Magic options – each lands you with a significant starting obligation
  - Shaman training: trade out one of the two skills for Spirit Lore, gain detect spirit (known) and bound spirit
  - Cult contact: layman belonging status, trade out one of the two skills for a cult skill, gain one 1-point cult spell – serious business, socially and personally

Skill list
- Agility: Climb 15, Jump 15, Ride 5, Swim 15, Throw 15
- Manipulation: Sleight 10, Devise 0, Play Instrument 0, Drive 5, Brew 0, First Aid 0, Cultivation 5, Armorer 0, Masonry 5, Animal Care 10, Treat Disease 5, Treat Poison 0
- Communication: Orate 5, Bargain 5, Speak Own Language (INTx5), Speak Other Language 0, Sing 5, Bribery 5, Understand Beast Speech 5
- Knowledge: R/W Own Language 10, R/W Other Language 0, Map Making 10, Assess Value 5, Acids 0, Venom 0, Antidote 0, Lore 10, General Knowledge 5
  - Lore categories: Disease, Spirits, Stickmen, Cult (1), Region, Alchemy, Esoterica, Poisons
- Perception: Track 5, Listen 25, Scan 20, Taste Analysis 0, Find Water 5, Find Plant 5
- Stealth: Hide 5, Move Quietly 5, Camouflage 10, Conceal 5
- Fighting: HTH 25, Cutting 15, Smashing 20, Thrusting 10, Flexible 10, Sling 15, Bow 5

Family/mentoring battle magic spell list – these carry no ideological weight; get used and replaced via the local shaman
- 1 point: Befuddle, Binding, Demoralize, Detect Detection, Detect Enemies, Detect Magic, Detect Metal, Farsee, Ignite, Light, Mobility, Silence, Speedart
- Variable: Bladesharp, Bludgeon, Countermagic, Detection Blank, Dispel Magic, Dullblade, Fanaticism, Glue, Healing, Ironhand, Mind Speech, Multimissile, Protection, Shimmer, Xenohealing

Shaman training battle magic spell list (known)
- 1 point: Detect Spirit, Spirit Binding
- Variable: Spirit Shield

Cult layman battle magic spell lists (known)
- Witch goddess: demoralize, mobility, detect life, coordination, extinguish, healing, jumping, darkwall, speedart, multimissile, glue, sneeze, preserve herbs
- Sacrifice god: fanaticism, strength, bludgeon, detect enemies, vigor, firearrow, binding
- Chieftain god: glamour, detect undead, bladesharp, farsee, harmonize, mind speech, detect magic, disruption, ironhand, parry, invisibility, silence
- Family goddess: detection blank, detect detection, countermagic, sleep, dispel magic, shimmer, repair, fireblade, ignite, dullblade, protection, befuddle

Well, it's *RuneQuest*, so they're gonna be some sickly, dimwitted, stumbly kids. We need some procedures and standards for playing someone who's basically impaired.

Get this guy: chose Hunter family, rolled Str 15, Con 13, Siz 14, Int 5, Pow 13, Dex 14, Cha 11.
Oh no! I'm playing a [deleted term]! Durrrr!

Actually not too badly off: -5% in Knowledge, Perception, and Stealth, but +10% in Agility, and +5% in Communication and Parry. Look again: he's strong and quick, big and healthy, well-favored, and personable enough. This should mean something, and in particular, let's get over the gamer conceit that we're the "smart ones." Lots of people do well in life without being actively/recognizably bright, it doesn't mean they're impaired. Think of Wojo in *Barney Miller*, who can be oafish, almost certainly has a diagnosable learning disability, and often misunderstands things, but who's also got strong personal presence and moral sense, and, eventually, is almost never wrong about anything important.

I chose Sling and Scan for his starting skills and Silence for his starting spell, and took Purposeful for +1 Pow – and found that at this point I was very much on his side, as a player. Then I had him trained by the outriders, gaining Riding, another +5% with Scan, and Speedart. Not too smart? Fine! He's a lot of good things too. I decide I like him this way – solid, wide-open for adventure, likely the very best possible friend – and forego the magic options.

Or try this one, starting with a council family: Str 16, Con 6, Siz 8, Int 10, Pow 15, Dex 10, Cha 16.
Now wait a minute … runty, sickly as hell, strong and charismatic? Jesus, it's a burning-eyed tubercular poet!

I go with it, taking Spear training, Orate and Play Instrument at +10%, and Demoralize. I wrestle briefly with being Hopeful, as either characteristic boost will benefit my percentages greatly, but I just can't see it, and take Resentful for +1 Con. I move on to teachers' training, with a shamanic swerve, ending up with Lore: Disease, Lore: Spirits, Detect Spirit, Shimmer 1, and a bound spirit. 6 hit points? I can't even train Con up past 8! That's insane! You bet, this is a fragile person – but unless and until something nails them, they ain't stopping. If I have to be the sacrificial story-motor for the group, I'm gonna be a good one.

Starting RQ characters are kids. They're not action heroes, they've got hay in their hair, and they're defined almost as much as by what they're bad or slow at, as by how they excel. It's a good reason for the early adventures to be more like capers, and to set up content for more dangerous and consequential stuff later.

The system offers more help than is readily apparent, e.g., training scrolls, which are easily repurposed to be interesting individuals.

A couple of system/skill thoughts
Many, actually all skills operate as their own lore and should be treated as quite broad. Tracking is pretty much Hunting, as well as "wild animal and practical-survival lore." A lot of basic applications can be expanded to IntX5.

The dedicated lores are carefully chosen. Each includes both benefit and harm, e.g. diseases also includes cures. They serve as well as necessary adjuncts to skills like Brew, which can be very different per person depending on what they know of Alchemy, Spirits, Disease, and Poisons.

General Knowledge is kind of the opposite of Lore – it's basically liberal-arts thinking, putting things together based on patterns, and serves in what other games is often called deduction or research.

There's also a complex overlap among acid, disease, injury, damage, and poison, especially among differing causal agents like diseases, potions, spells, spirits, specialized attacks, and ordinary attacks. The characters aren't skilled enough for this to matter yet, but the distinctions among, e.g., damage to Hit Points vs. reduction of CON can become an important part of play.