

# Adventures in Valeria

Roleplay, Collaborate, Save Valeria, and Feel Good Doing It

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## Dedication

To my friends in our roleplaying group: Cassidy, Chris, Jacob, Jerica, and Katie. I love you all, and your support and encouragement means the world to me. I hope that everyone playing with this book can have as much fun and companionship as we have.

Special thanks to Cassidy Lehman, whose amazing art helps bring this book to vivid life.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Concept

Face serious evils but with room for some light-hearted fun, character building, and friendship in this series of adventures in the richly-imagined city state of Valeria and surrounding regions.

## Complexity Rating

This has a complexity of 1, requiring the least extra prep on your part. There's nothing outside a traditional fantasy setting and no modifications (homebrew) of the core mechanics required. This book gives you everything you need (besides the core rulebook) to run the adventures here. Details on settings, NPC's, scenes, rewards, and adversaries are arranged in each chapter. Plus it gives suggestions for good places to encourage your players to create the world *with* you. You can find lots of places where you (and your group) can improvise, embellish, and detour as you like. You'll see things like "encourage each player to describe a person at the masquerade" with "here is a list of people who can be spotlighted." Some information appearing in chapters is also gathered in Appendices for ease of use. Consistent organization and labelling also helps you find what you need.

## The Pitch

Complete a series of adventures facing serious evils but with room for some light hearted fun, character building, and bonding as well. Set in the city state of Valeria and surrounding kingdoms, explore a richly imagined and detailed fantasy world compatible with the Daggerheart™ ruleset. The villains are willing to enslave and murder people in their greed for money and power. Will the adventurers step up to help? Characters start at level 1 and go to level 10 with 90+ hours of content. Written with player choice and collaborative play in mind, this gives you the resources you need and suggestions for when you might improvise and create more together. With this adventure book and the core ruleset, you have everything you need to lead many sessions of roleplay fun!

## Tone and Feel

There's real danger and conflict, but it isn't non-stop frantic action. The main villains are clearly evil, and they exploit, enslave, and murder people in order to gain power and wealth. However, the book avoids gruesome details. The feel is more like an old adventure movie, the kind where a grinning hero isn't perfect but is clearly good and trying to help people. The goal is to give players plenty of chances to do some awesome things to help people. AND to feel good doing it. The book provides plenty of narrative hooks, mostly connected to helping people, righting

wrongs, and fighting evil. There's room for personal fortune and glory, too, and the adventurers don't need to be perfect paladins or humorless juggernauts to save the day.

Also, there are also lighter scenes, character building, bonding, and more playful moments. From my own gaming, some of the best moments in tabletop RPG's are the spontaneous interactions between the players, and the detours this can cause. Rhealta is a beautiful and wonderful world, and there's time to explore and visit as you and your group likes. There are lulls for downtime activities, side stories, and then still plenty of urgency when it's time to pick up the pace again.

A group of strangers becomes teammates and hopefully friends as they adventure together. They face some dramatic evils, chill in silly moments, and everything in between. Players often have some choices about how to resolve situations, as well. Finally, the story makes it easy to engage in the collaborative play, creating the world and telling the stories together. Everyone knows Snefaloofas are cow-sized quadrupeds, but what exactly do they look like? Ask your group.

## Themes

The campaign is about saving a city, city-state, and region from greedy and power-hungry individuals willing to exploit people, enslave and murder them, and to make deals with otherworldly evils. It's also about becoming friends and building bonds with many different people, with adventurers helping where they can. Despite clear evils to fight, it's also about exciting adventures and good times. There will be some singing and dancing.

Questions that arise while playing might include:

- "Can you be brave enough to do what you can while being wise enough to know what you can't do right now?"
- "Is a common goal enough to make a team? Can you forge friendships? Can you become greater than the sum of the individuals?"
- "How do you stop evil when the crime bosses and corrupt nobles run the city?"
- "How do we preserve freedom for all while stopping those who go too far in their greed?"
- "How can we encourage innovation and change while still guarding against dangers?"
- "Can you change a corrupt system without destroying everything?"
- "Can we treasure the beautiful world and wonderful people we're fighting for?"
- "How can you stand up for ordinary citizens against hidden forces more powerful than you?"
- What is justice? What is vengeance? To what extent (if any) do the ends justify the means?
- How do we balance helping others with taking care of ourselves?

## Touchstones

My biggest inspirations are light-hearted adventure movies. I can find protagonists who aren't perfect but good people trying to do good. I can root for them, cheer for their triumphs and wince at their stumbles. There's drama and conflict, but no need for anything too gory. Those protagonists will struggle and face exciting challenges and maybe an actual cliffhanger, but they will ultimately succeed. It isn't all non-stop frantic action, either... There's cheerfulness, playfulness, a little romance, and plenty of character development. These movies are fun to watch. As a kid, they were fun to act out and build on... I'll save the princess, keep the treasure out of evil hands, or save the world! Maybe all of that. Well, come to think of it, maybe I still want to do those things. Maybe you want to do similar things, at least sometimes in a game.

## Overview

The adventure begins in the metropolis of Valeria. The city in some ways is a meritocracy, with effort and skill bringing big rewards. On the other hand, it is ruled by a monarch, nobility, and crime bosses. Valeria has huge potential, and most people want change for the better and are willing to work for it. A few want to grab power by murder, slavery, and making deals with otherworldly evils. Maybe the adventurers can stop them. Characters start at level 1 and will go to level 10.

In Mayhem from Beyond, characters must survive an invasion long enough to work together to play a small but crucial role in saving the city. In On the Case, characters follow clues to solve the mystery of what happened and who did it. This will eventually help discover who was responsible for so much carnage and then bring them to justice. Next, characters have an opportunity to start their own guild in Arena Tournament. With their own home base, they could do more to help people (and gain fortune and glory.) But the competition is fierce, with Hashgar's Horde a contender and Trevor's Band favored to win. Then in Tower on the Edge, characters face a wacky wizard and his plans to take over the world with his army of clank-jellyfish hybrids, starting with Valeria. After that, characters investigate Marvelous Marty. Are his Miracle Cures actually making people sick? Is he preying on people with the least to lose? No one else will help them. In Splinty Hunt, characters chase one of the masterminds behind the portal invasion, but he's devious and elusive. In Scourge, characters uncover a plot to enslave people with magic collars. Following the supply chain leads to an attack on Lady Vega's fortified manor. Then it's time for a paying job as merchant guards on the road to Calimura, but things go awry. And following up on a clue is a good reason to attend a masquerade ball. After that, criminals take hostages as leverage to control the adventurers. This leads to a daring rescue mission to the gang's secret base deep in the Catacombs. Then the party can assault Diamond's fortified floating island, which may take some planning ahead. After that, a dwarf from a neighboring kingdom pleads for help, so the adventurers travel to the Stone Spire, where a terrible ritual is nearing completion. After all the danger and fighting, city officials decide to reward the team with beach vacation therapy. The beaches are on the resort island of Verona in the Cypress Federation. They've started a school of therapy there to help

people deal with trauma. Of course, the therapists don't want the heroes to be bored, so they try extra hard... What could go wrong? But then there's time for a day at the beach, where the adventurers hear about Spirit Week. They decide to stay and enjoy the festivities. One problem...not all the spirits are harmless. Finally, though, it's time to sail home. But the heroes have made some serious enemies, and an enemy agent sabotages the ship. The captain manages to get the ship to the closest island, but it's full of dangerous monsters. Eventually reaching home, the team agrees to look for some missing orphans at the Carnival. But things go wrong, and they might not make it out alive.

Characters will encounter a variety of social, exploration, stealth, and combat events. Often, players can choose among different approaches for how to resolve situations. For example, they might try to talk their way past the guards, sneak around past them, or fight through them. Details are provided to support this player choice and collaborative play. Some encounters are skill challenges, with players choosing a variety of moves to make. There's good variety in setting, too. Characters travel to and explore the Stitch, the Hub, the Heights, the Valerian countryside, the Stone Spire in the Dwarven Kingdom, Verona and Tehong Islands in the Cypress Federation, and Calimura in the Kingdom of Seiyo. Places and NPC's are vibrant and thoroughly detailed, but with plenty of room for all players to add their own details if you and your group wish to.

## Player Principles

Players familiar with this type of game will be practiced at what they need. General teamwork will cover most everything else.

But it's worth highlighting a few principles:

- Build on what your teammates are doing.
- Pass the spotlight regularly. Everybody needs your ideas, but they also need to share theirs.
- Explore the wonderful and beautiful world. There's room in Valeria for your imagination
- Be patient with your GM.
- Collaborate creatively. The GM will sometimes ask for you to describe a character you encounter, or the special food that makes your character happy, etc.
- Take some time with Session 0 to help establish what's important to the group.

## GM Principles

If you've guided the adventures in this kind of game before, you're already familiar with most everything here.

But it may help to keep a few principles in mind:

- Use the resources here as the building blocks to adventure and group storytelling.

- Let players try. Especially with Hope and Fear, the results can be wonderful.
- Encourage players to help you describe and collaborate to tell the stories together.
- Rely on the “script” as much as you like, but also think of it as the base to return to. You can detour and sidetrack as much as your group wants, and the next scene will be there when you’re ready.
- Ask questions and use the answers to help fill the world with wonder and life and excitement.
- Ask for short breaks to plan, invent, or find a stat card whenever you need, especially when the players surprise you.
- Use a GM screen to hide some of your dice rolls and notes from the players. This lets you keep some secrets and sometimes nudge the results towards what they should be for fun stories.
- Take some time with Session 0 to help establish what’s important to the group.

## Distinctions

Valeria and the surrounding regions are late-medieval era fantasy countries. They’re in a temperate forest and grassland region dotted with towns and farms amid the wilderness. They’re filled with the ancestries, adversaries, and magic of the core rulebook.

Each small kingdom prospers by encouraging free trade and cooperation with the others. Valeria is in the center with a mountain range to the west and coast to the north. It’s the focus for most of the adventures.

Valeria -The City State of Valeria was founded by refugees. Some were looking for a fresh start with new ideas. Others were looking to continue their traditions. There’s tension between innovators who want to rise on merit and productivity and traditionalists who want to keep the old ways of power and prestige. The metropolis has the Stitch, where the rent is the cheapest, but the city guard doesn’t patrol. The Hub is the center of industry, crafts, and new ideas where people can prosper and thrive. Only the nobles and the wealthiest merchants and their retainers can live in the Heights, and the closer to the Royal Palace, the more prestigious. The Tardian Forest is bigger on the inside than the outside, and the Opera House rearranges itself sometimes. The surrounding countryside has wilderness, farms, ranches, vineyards, forests, grasslands, and rivers. Free trade with the metropolis and neighboring countries promotes prosperity.

Cypress Federation - North and west of Valeria, many islands make up this Federation. Most began with settlers looking for refuge or freedom to do as they wished. When they prospered, pirates began raiding. No one island was powerful enough to stand against the threat, so they banded together for the common defence. They eventually wrote a Constitution and crushed the pirates. They still maintain a large navy in a loose federation. Several of the islands focus on tourism, such as Verona with its beaches and resort hotels and Tehong with its monster safaris.

Dwarven Kingdom - In the mountains to the west, there are several clans of dwarves, and they used to fight each other a lot. This made them vulnerable, so they have learned to settle their differences peacefully and work together. Now, they elect representatives called tossers, who debate and determine most kingdom decisions in a cross between a congress and highland games. The etiquette is complex, and some tossers get hurt. However, there are few fatalities and no wars among the vast extended tribes anymore. Kings are elected from clan chiefs, and they step down after losing a vote of no confidence. They were the first kingdom to acknowledge the people in Valeria as a kingdom, and the first to start trading with them.

Kingdom of Seiyō - Seiyō lies east of Valeria. Once, the Egawa Empire controlled a large area farther east, but the Empire became troubled and collapsed. The former province of Seiyō became one small independent kingdom among many quarreling kingdoms, duchies, baronies, and chaos. Seiyō has problems with bandits and the most repressive nobles in the area, but Seiyō has benefitted from Valeria's peaceful attitude and trade.

Southern Wildlands - To the south of Valeria, there are scattered settlements of ambitious pioneers, free-spirited wanderers, and people who have fled conflict somewhere else. Without any government, it's also a land of bandits and petty warlords.

## Book Organization with Examples

Each chapter starts with an **Overview** to help you plan and quickly review for your sessions. Generally, *don't read* those to the players. The narrative hooks give you some ideas about how to get your players invested in that part of the adventure, but you will find your own and players will find them for you.

Most everything else is player-facing and can be read aloud, paraphrased, or adapted as you like. **Location** and **Selected Areas** provide the backdrops you'll need for the action. **Scenes** describe the main story events, with notes for spotlighted NPC's (non-player characters), trait rolls, skill challenges, adversaries, and the like. Scenes with letters (4A, 4B, etc.) indicate where the story might branch or characters might choose some scenes over others, or do them in any order. **[GM Knowledge]** will occasionally note things currently hidden from players. **Rewards** appear near the end of the chapter and include reputation and goodwill as well as tangible things. Detailed descriptions of **Adversaries** with stat cards appear at the end of each chapter.

Appendices at the end of the book collect people and groups that appear in multiple chapters: a **character list** of notable NPC's, as well as notable **political and social groups**. They've been grouped a little. For example, if you can't remember the names of Captain Taldara's two lieutenants, try looking at the captain's entry. Or if you remember that they're city guards, you can find them in the city guard group.

Of course, some of the best storytelling happens in a group, and this campaign book is written to allow you and the other players to improvise, elaborate, and take off on whatever tangents

interest you. In particular, your group will have many opportunities to describe a location or NPC and help create the world the characters live in. The “script” is complete, but feel free to depart from it or adapt it as your group likes, and feel free to redirect them when it’s time.

## Example Overview

### Setting:

City State of Valeria, at the start of the Adventures. It’s early Spring, and many trees, bushes, and flowers are blooming. In the mornings, the grass has heavy dew, but frost is past. Several different types of songbirds chirp in the trees and hedges.

Characters will meet each other in the huge central city. But before they can, the city is attacked by forces much stronger than the level 1 party. Therefore, characters must survive and try to rescue some civilians where they can. They will also play a small but crucial role in saving the city.

### Narrative Hooks:

The characters have all arrived for their personal reasons, but all can find exciting new adventures here. When the city is attacked and powerful monsters wander around destroying and killing, the characters could all die if they fight head-on. (Total Party Kill is scary!) Instead, they need to survive, and they will be much better together. And the civilians are innocent and in great danger. Characters can rescue some and maybe fight some of the fires.

### Leveling:

Characters start at level 1 and will remain.

## Example Selected Area in Location

### The College of Practical Wizardry

Located in the Hub, in the southwest of the city. People often call this “The College of Practical Wizardry and Explosions”. Powerful wizards, sorcerers, and a few other magic users teach magic to enrolled students for set per-course payments. Courses focus on specific, useful things instead of advanced theory or abstract knowledge. They’re also a source of innovation in the city, as people experiment and develop new ideas. Students can pursue planned out sequences of courses or pick and choose as they like. This differs from the master and apprentice method commonly in use in the world of Rhealta. Some faculty feel that the college should focus on using magic to improve daily life for people, while others want to focus on combat training, and others want to build individual skill in whatever ways are most fun and exciting, er, intriguing. Dean Theodore Slatius and his staff make most of the day to day decisions, while House Owl oversees the larger issues. The college is warded to mostly keep the magic from blasting outside of safe practice rooms and yards, but nearby Hub residents hear booms and rumbles fairly often, and no ward is perfect. A few years ago the city suffered a

massive influx of very aggressive rabbits. There was a rumor that this was due to some mishap in the college, but there's no evidence, and the dean denied it. The Wizards even helped in the Great Rabbit Hunt. Non-students are allowed to visit the non-practice areas, the college often hosts cultural events open to the community, and people are encouraged to sign up (and pay) for whatever classes interest them.

### Campus Layout

The campus centers around a very large quad of grass, with plenty of shade trees, benches, fountains, and bushes for people to gather and rest. Walkways crisscross the big yard. The quad is surrounded by classroom buildings, the cafeteria, the gymnasiums, and the practice rooms and yards. Farther out are the administrative center, the stables and shelters for magical animals (this is NOT where those attack rabbits came from, really!), student dorms, professor offices and apartments, and the aquatic practice pond. It's surrounded by a reasonably stout outer wall, which helps anchor the wards protecting the city from stray magic. There are several main gates, numerous side doors for workers, food, and supplies to be brought in. Agile people could hop between city and college rooftops, and tunnel systems connect the basements to the utility and sewer tunnels.

### Example part of Chapter 3, Scene 1

#### 1 Arrival and Things Go Very Wrong

At various parts of the city, the characters arrive and take care of mundane things (food, lodging, etc.). Characters can enter and make their way to whatever area makes sense for their background [entry points noted in Selected Areas.]. If nothing special suggests itself, a character enters by West Gate and wanders around in the Hub, choosing any inn or pub. Characters with very little money might find a cheap inn or even cheaper lot in a tent city in the Stitch. Ask characters to describe the place they get food or rest. There's room in the city to add named inns, pubs, or side streets as you go. (You can ask another player to make notes of these as the group goes.)

Late on the night after the last character arrives, something dramatic happens. In the College of Practical Wizardry, a giant portal opens to another plane of existence, one of the Circles Below. That part won't be apparent to the characters right away, but there's also a huge, very visible pillar of orange fire. It can be seen from everywhere as it rises a few hundred feet into the sky. The portal is in the grassy quad at the center of the college. Minor demons (Tier 1 solo) pour out and spread out in all directions. With each group of several minions, one or two chaos skulls emerge (Tier 2 ranged). Each group is led by one Demon of Hubris (Tier 3 leader.) They attack people, killing some, dragging others back to the portal. This is also very noisy and obvious, and they start a lot of fires, too. Things get more and more chaotic as monsters and their minions spread to all parts of the city. They kill randomly and gleefully, and people run screaming in all directions or cower silently, hiding. The invaders' organization isn't at first very obvious with all the killing, fires, and destruction. But it will become clearer to the characters as they go.

Characters on their own can start trying to respond to this. Narratively, each character ...  
[continues]

Sample file

# Chapter 2 Session 0

## Pre-Game Expectations, Limits, Rules, and Connections

Players can create characters together or on their own. However, the first time people meet, they should do several things together. Don't worry if you've started but never done this... it can be done in between other sessions, and briefly revisited if people need to adjust.

The GM is going to take the lead in this. Ask everyone to contribute, and take notes. You may be an experienced game master and already know how to do everything here (there's a brief review at the end). Complete consensus isn't always needed because one activity can be more than one thing. But asking and listening to what each other needs and wants will make for a healthier, happier, much more rewarding activity.

### Expectations

- What do people expect from tabletop story-telling adventures?
- How often do people hope to get together?
- Will people meet face to face, by video call, or by audio chat?
- What previous experience do people have playing this type of game?
- Roughly how long will people play in a session?
- What about snacks and meals?

Here's what the GM can do with this info. Mostly, you're going to try something that works for everyone in terms of schedule and meeting method(s). I think in person brings the most richness, but it is harder to schedule and travel to. My group has also experimented with video chat plus a website that allowed us all see and manipulate the same virtual maps and minis. The people in my group usually each bring snacks and something for a meal, potluck style, and it works great to play awhile, break for dinner, and play some more... The point is, figuring out these things now as a group makes it much smoother and richer playing later.

The previous player experience levels give you a gauge for how much explaining of systems you'll need to do (v brief reviews). If your group is trying out a new roleplay ruleset, it's worth reminding people that you'll all be learning together. (Be kind to each other, right?)

### Playing

What parts are fun? The combat? Problem solving? Planning and scheming? Drama? Big dramatic world events? Silly tangents? Slice of life? Character growth? Character bonds? Other?

What do you need your character to do?

I used to think everyone had the same answer for that, but people don't. For example, I need my character to succeed in the mission and make positive changes in the fictional world. But one of my friends needs to one-shot an enemy in combat sometimes... She needs her character to be really effective and heroic. Another friend really loves the drama that emerges in good storytelling, and another really values the bonds that characters can forge. Other people might be happy as long as they are playing together with friends.

Sometimes players break out the grid maps/rulers and minis and sometimes they do more as theatre of the mind (more imagination, less maps). What are the advantages and limits of each? Is there one you want to do more of?

What movie rating/game rating would people generally want/be OK with? Part of the fun of a game is it's just a game and people can safely talk about and imagine (often dramatic) situations that they aren't actually in, but they're not trying to traumatize people. What topics are out of bounds?

Any person should be able to speak up if the game goes out of bounds, or if they're really uncomfortable with whatever has come up. The GM also needs to be ready to nudge things back on track or remind players what they agreed on. And it's possible that a group might need a short discussion to re-calibrate, esp. if people haven't played much of this type of game before. Rarely, people might choose not to role play with a group to protect their mental health.

Do people want to be more immersive (players don't usually speak out of character or above the table) or is breaking the immersion more often OK?

It's always allowable for people to speak out of character if the game content has gotten into one of the areas that people decided were out of bounds or really distressing someone.

It's usually fine for rules checks or asking for what a character would typically know. (This one happens to me a lot. The current GM identifies a spell or monster that my character would know, but I don't have the entire list memorized.. "I search my memory. Is there anything I remember about Lesser Hexamysers?")

What ruleset are you using? What optional rules, expansions, homebrew, or other additional things are you using (if any)? What changes (house rules) are you setting? If this is complicated for the group, just go with the basics for now with the option for the group to revisit this question later. It's likely that one adventure will stick to one ruleset.

## Characters

Character creation can happen on the players' own or as a group. But optional rules and allowed resource books do probably need to be decided before turning players loose. A group new to tabletop rpg's might be more comfortable walking through the steps together, at least to get started. Each ruleset has a set of steps, more or less.

Some parts of character creation that can help a party gel are backstory, character traits, catchphrases, and bonds.

Backstories don't have to be elaborate novels, and they don't have to be all written before the adventures start. But it will help to at least briefly make a few bullet points that will shape the character. For example:

- Exiled by his dwarf clan for accidentally killing people in a bar fight
- Survived in the wilderness by learning from the animals
- Now he misses people, so he walked to the city
- Wants to belong to a group and help them

This hardly tells you everything about this character, but it sketches the man's past and hints at some problems and strengths. It can also help to identify some main needs or goals.

Another good thing to do is to list a few character traits, perhaps two or three positives and a weakness or area for growth. These probably grow and change as the adventure progresses, but give the player a starting point for their role play. A few common phrases that the character says can enrich this. What does the character usually say when surprised? Enthused? Distressed? When things are going well? When asking for help? Etc. Think about the character traits and imagine the character in some common interactions (such as greetings, questions, transactions, requests, cooperating, agreeing, disagreeing, waiting, competing, etc.) Non-verbal mannerisms are possible here, too... she taps the side of her nose when she's thinking hard, or he rubs the back of his neck when he's unsure what to say that won't offend, etc.

Along with this, once players have at least the general idea for their backstories and characters, they can together imagine some connections or bonds with another character. For example, maybe the wild man above saved the druid from a pit trap while wandering. Maybe the bard overheard a conversation and knows a secret about the sorcerer. Maybe two people met in an armwrestling contest at a pub. The characters don't have to be complete strangers, and they don't always have to meet in a tavern while looking for work (though that is so commonplace because it always works.)

## Maps

There are several maps provided to help you visualize. There's room in the world to add places as your group creates collaboratively. For example, the city map of Valeria only shows the main highroads and neighborhood composition... certainly not every little street and building. Feel free to ask players where they go and incorporate the answers into the maps, noting or annotating as you like. The dungeon maps give enough detail to get tactical with minis if you wish, but even there, adapt as you like.

## Brief Review

Getting started includes some discussion as a group before the adventure begins.

Most important are setting what's in bounds, and that people should speak up if they're troubled.

Choose among multiple rulesets with many optional rules, additional resources, and homebrew before character creation, so people know what's allowed. It can be as complicated as the group wishes, but it's easier to keep it simple for a group new to roleplay. The group can decide to add, adapt, or experiment later if they wish. Think of this adventure book as a script with resources that you and your group can depart from and return to whenever you wish.

Finally, character creation includes at least:

- Some bullet points of a backstory
- Some personality traits (mostly positive but also an area for growth)
- Some catchphrases or mannerisms
- One bond or connection with at least one party member (players do this together)

This will make roleplay easier with lots of chances for character growth, drama, and bonding (not just leveling).

# Chapter 3 Mayhem from Beyond

## Overview

### Setting:

City State of Valeria, at the start of the Adventures. It's early Spring, and many trees, bushes, and flowers are blooming. In the mornings, the grass has heavy dew, but frost is past. Several different types of songbirds chirp in the trees and hedges.

Characters will meet each other in the city. But before they can, the city is attacked by forces much stronger than the level 1 party. Therefore, characters must survive and try to rescue some civilians where they can. They will also play a small but crucial role in saving the city.

### Narrative Hooks:

The characters have all arrived for their personal reasons, but all can find exciting new adventures here. When the city is attacked and powerful monsters wander around destroying and killing, the characters could all die if they fight head-on. (Total Party Kill is scary!) Instead, they need to survive, and they will be much better together. And the civilians are innocent and in great danger. Characters can rescue some and maybe fight some of the fires.

### Leveling:

Characters start at level 1 and will remain.

## Location

### Big Picture

The City State of Valeria, World of Rhealta

Valeria is a large city state, and players will base from the main city and frequently adventure here. The city state consists of the huge metropolis and the surrounding countryside. People sometimes call the metropolis Valeria the City to distinguish it from the entire city state, although the locals often just call it the City. The city and countryside provide mutual support. Farming, ranching, and basic goods are provided by the countryside farms and villages, which trade mostly with the central city. There are swaths of forest and wilderness which are very lightly inhabited by people of several different types of humanoids. The city attracts and trains skilled artisans, craftspeople, guilds, and late-medieval manufactories, which trade with the villages and towns. The city also maintains a civil guard for peacekeeping and an army for defense. A network of high quality roads radiates out from Valeria the city to connect the larger towns and villages. The high roads reach into the mountains to the west and to Port Valeria on the northern coast. A highroad also goes east to connect to the Kingdom of Seiyo. These highroads are stone and cement much like Roman high roads. Villages are interconnected with packed earth roads, often just cart paths. The guards keep people safe from bandits and

respond promptly when villages ask for help. A major river (the River Erin) runs from the mountains in the west to the coast in the north, with another major river (the River Reily) supplying good water to the land south of the city. There's fishing, but none of the rivers or streams are well suited to barges, being too rocky and with falls or not quite big enough with too many sharp bends..

Valeria the City is socially stratified, with three main districts and several distinct areas. People from many humanoid species inhabit the city, drawn by its innovation and prosperity. The city in some ways is a meritocracy, with effort and skill bringing big rewards. On the other hand, it is ruled by a monarchy, nobility, and crime bosses. Valeria has huge potential, and most people want change for the better and are willing to work for it.

The City-State of Valeria (or Kingdom) is bordered on the west by the Dwarven Mountains, several united clans with an elected clan chief. To the north is the coast and a few days travel by sea to the Cypress Federation, a group of loosely allied islands. To the east lies the Kingdom of Seiyō. All three are major trading partners with Valeria and interested in preserving good relations to maintain that prosperity through trade. To the south lies unclaimed wilderness, sparsely populated by a few hardy pioneers and scattered hamlets. It's troubled by bandits.

## History

What is now Valeria used to be mostly wilderness between various kingdoms with some small settlements by a wide range of humanoids. It became a place where pioneers could make a new start and people could settle. This brought problems with bandits, and people organized protection against bandits. After a period of petty warlords, nobles emerged as leaders, some of them from junior branches of noble families in older kingdoms to the east or far south. The city-state of Valeria was organized as a monarchy, and has at times been aggressive in expanding. Years ago, the metropolis itself gained the power to expand and adjust magically, and some people feel that it may be at least a little self-aware. This is most evident in the Opera House, a prominent building in the Heights that rearranges itself, sometimes overnight, to meet the needs of the inhabitants. The Tardian Forest is another good example, being clearly larger on the inside than the outside, and might exist because the City wants a nature preserve. Few serious magical scholars have traveled to the upstart kingdom to study the city, though. Also, the city may have been founded above the ruins of a previous city, since there are rumors that there are catacombs or a tunnel network below the city public works tunnels (water, sewer, etc.)

## Current Events

The city state of Valeria has emerged as a place where people can make a new start and prosper. In particular, skilled workers of almost every trade can find fair employment. It's also experiencing a rush of innovations as tradespeople and researchers exchange ideas and experiment. The College of Practical Wizardry focuses a lot on magical innovation and learning, too. Despite social stratification, Valeria has become one of the most diverse populations as well, with many humanoid ancestries interacting in (mostly) peaceful and amiable ways. There's

a sense of innovation, invention, and change. Most see all of this as good, bringing new prosperity and power. Some (generally the noble houses) feel the change is too fast and perhaps too much, while others (generally the people in poverty who can't find work or can't get fair wages) feel the change is too slow or not enough.

## Selected City Areas

### The Stitch

People outside of the Stitch think of it as poor and crime-ridden. They're not wrong, but the Stitch also looks after its own, with the local crime boss (Professor Brumble) organizing protection, protection money (um, taxes), and generally keeping the peace. People who can't find work or learn a skill drift down here, where the rent is much cheaper. People who feel that "illegal" just means "some rich noble made a stupid rule" often find kindred spirits here. The graft and corruption are more obvious here than in the Heights, but that's partly because people here are often rather honest about it. Most say that Professor Brumble doesn't keep peace and organization out of the goodness of his heart, but most don't say it very loudly. There is community here, protecting neighbors, and a sense of us against the world.

A common entry point to the Stitch is Low Gate (not actually the city's North Gate, but a broad archway near the North Gate). Another is by entering from West Gate and then going too far north in search of cheaper lodging. Finally, going far enough north or west from the Hub puts a person in the Stitch, too. It's not like there's a line drawn on the ground. Neighborhoods on the edge can become more run-down and troubled, or more prosperous and civil as time passes. But residents who pay taxes and can find the city guard are in the Hub, and those who pay protection money (or risk trouble) without any city guards are in the Stitch.

### The Hub

People travel to Valeria to work in the Hub, a center of trade, industry, and research. It's a place where effort earns steady progress and prosperity. Most shop and business owners will hire based on skill here, and most customers will buy based on quality here. The Hub has grown without careful planning, so a few broad highways are connected to many narrow streets. Many shops include an upper story or two where the owner and family live above the business floor. Dedicated apartment buildings have also been built here. Many types of shops and industry can be found here. These include blacksmiths, farriers, wheelwrights, stone masons, as well as bakers, butchers, restaurants, pubs, inns, and taverns. Weavers and spinners. Tailors and seamstresses. Noodle shops. Street food vendors. Wine makers, carpenters, cobblers, and roofers. Some people practice the traditional methods, while others have found a place to innovate for efficiency and improvement. Glassmakers, armorers, and bell and cannon foundries can be seen. Lawyers, scribes, diplomats, and couriers support people's efforts, and there's almost a postal system through the courier central office. The service industry is emerging here, too, as more workers take steady jobs but aren't bound to any noble's service and household. The Tardian Forest is located here, too. There's a substantial druid circle there

(both the people and the distinctive circle of stones.) Some of the druids are touchy about visitors, while others are almost park rangers. Either way, the forest doesn't mind visitors. The animals are wild, and it's easy to get lost there, though.

A common entry point for the Hub is by following the highroad from the West Gate, since much of the trade with the Dwarven Mts. follows this road. Another is to follow the merchant traffic from North Gate (the main path for trade with the Cypress Federation to the north). Travelling far enough south or east from the Stitch will do, as well. South Gate and East Gate also have wide stretches of the Hub as well as they both bend around the inner, higher wall of the Heights.

## The College of Practical Wizardry

Located in the Hub, in the southwest of the city. People often call this "The College of Practical Wizardry *and Explosions*". Powerful wizards, sorcerers, and a few other magic users teach magic to enrolled students for set per-course payments. Courses focus on specific, useful things instead of advanced theory or abstract knowledge. They're also a source of innovation in the city, as people experiment and develop new ideas. Students can pursue planned out sequences of courses or pick and choose as they like. This differs from the master and apprentice method commonly in use in the world of Rhealta. Some faculty feel that the college should focus on using magic to improve daily life for people, while others want to focus on combat training, and others want to build individual skill in whatever ways are most fun and exciting, er, intriguing. Dean Theodore Slatius and his staff make most of the day to day decisions, while House Owl oversees the larger issues. The college is warded to mostly keep the magic from blasting outside of safe practice rooms and yards, but nearby Hub residents hear booms and rumbles fairly often, and no ward is perfect. A few years ago the city suffered a massive influx of very aggressive rabbits. There was a rumor that this was due to some mishap in the college, but there's no evidence, and the dean denied it. The Wizards even helped in the Great Rabbit Hunt. Non-students are allowed to visit the non-practice areas, the college often hosts cultural events open to the community, and people are encouraged to sign up (and pay) for whatever classes interest them.

### Campus Layout

The campus centers around a very large quad of grass, with plenty of shade trees, benches, fountains, and bushes for people to gather and rest. Walkways crisscross the big yard. The quad is surrounded by classroom buildings, the cafeteria, the gymnasiums, and the practice rooms and yards. Farther out are the administrative center, the stables and shelters for magical animals (this is NOT where those attack rabbits came from, really!), student dorms, professor offices and apartments, and the aquatic practice pond. It's surrounded by a reasonably stout outer wall, which helps anchor the wards protecting the city from stray magic. There are several main gates, numerous side doors for workers, food, and supplies to be brought in. Agile people could hop between city and college rooftops, and tunnel systems connect the basements to the utility and sewer tunnels.

## The Heights

Residents of the Heights are the nobles, royal family, and their closest allies and servants. The richest merchants live here too. They've built large manors, estates, and mansions. Here, for those who can afford it, are beautiful gardens, libraries, pavilions, and ballrooms hosting elegant balls and parties. Power brokers and emissaries make deals and shifting alliances. The noble families, powers in the city, and the richest merchants who would rise higher vie for influence, power, and wealth. Often those three are the same thing. This tangled web of the heights of society offers opulence and corruption, but also genuine appreciation of the fine arts and beauty, a striving for greatness, and sometimes, genuine desire for a free and open society. The royal palace is on the largest floating islands (No one is sure what magic supports them. Floating Island inhabitants tend to discourage experimentation in case that might disrupt the magic). The greatest noble houses each have a floating island for their not quite palaces, and minor houses and nobles spread out downhill from there. The Opera House, banks and money lenders, and libraries are here, too. The most prestigious places are closest to the royal palace, with the least prestigious (but still high society) near the inner wall that separates the Heights from the rest of the city.

A common entry point is to enter the city by South or East Gates and then pass the checkpoints in the inner walls. These are called Sunset Gate and Sunrise Gate. Sunset Gate really does face west as the main highway from the center of the Hub passes through it. On the other hand, Sunrise Gate is more poetic than realistic, since it faces almost north to connect to the east gate road, which diverts north to skirt around the inner walls of the Heights. But what's geography compared to a noble ideal? The main highways continue up to the foothills and floating islands that make up the Heights. Some nobles chafe at the bottleneck at the gates, but it's a defensive measure in a walled city. Travel to the Heights is not restricted, though each noble estate and especially the royal palace are heavily guarded, invite or papers only.

## Optional Spotlighted Locations

Later chapters, esp. Chapter 7, include several shops and franchises in the city that can be spotlighted to fill in details as desired. The city is big enough to allow players to spotlight and create their own locations as well. (The city map suggests neighborhood compositions to help with this.)

## Scenes

### 1 Arrivals and Things Go Very Wrong

At various parts of the city, the characters arrive and take care of mundane things (food, lodging, etc.). Characters can enter and make their way to whatever area makes sense for their background. If nothing special suggests itself, a character enters by West Gate and wanders around in the Hub, choosing any inn or pub. Characters with very little money might find a

cheap inn or even cheaper lot in a tent city in the Stitch. Ask characters to describe the place they get food or rest. There's room in the city to add named inns, pubs, or side streets as you go. (You can ask another player to make notes of these as the group goes.)

Late on the night after the last character arrives, something dramatic happens. In the College of Practical Wizardry, a giant portal opens to another plane of existence, one of the Circles Below. That part won't be apparent to the characters right away, but there's also a huge, very visible pillar of orange fire. It can be seen from everywhere as it rises a few hundred feet into the sky. The portal is in the grassy quad at the center of the college. Minor demons (Tier 1 solo) pour out and spread out in all directions. With each group of several minions, one or two chaos skulls emerge (Tier 2 ranged). Each group is led by one Demon of Hubris (Tier 3 leader.) They attack people, killing some, dragging others back to the portal. This is also very noisy and obvious, and they start a lot of fires, too. Things get more and more chaotic as monsters and their minions spread to all parts of the city. They kill randomly and gleefully, and people run screaming in all directions or cower silently, hiding. The invaders' organization isn't at first very obvious with all the killing, fires, and destruction. But it will become clearer to the characters as they go.

Characters on their own can start trying to respond to this. Narratively, each character early on will see a Demon of Hubris in the distance trailing or leading its group of chaos skulls and minor demons. The invader groups are spread out enough that characters could tangle with a minion or two at a time to get some sense of the power here. The roaming monsters are very obviously too powerful to fight, but characters can try to rescue people, fight fires, keep people calm, help people flee, etc. The minions can be fought on their own, but the higher tier monsters are looming nearby, so the characters are badly underpowered. Players can be creative and maybe take down a monster by luring it into a burning building (and then collapsing the building on it), but there are many monsters.

Captain (Helen) Taldara of the city guards and her lieutenants (Fred) Garvey and (Lila) Trace will pop up trying to rescue some people and fight fires, and they will tell each character that more guards are rallying near the College of Practical Wizardry for a desperate counterattack. Just head towards the pillar of fire instead of running away from it. This will gather the party members together. They can also be narratively steered together as they rescue, run, or help. This part is meant to be chaotic and a scramble to survive and maybe mitigate disaster some. (City guards wear green bell-shaped open faced helmets and brown sashes, but their own personal arms and armor.)

Characters might tangle with a minion here or there, but should really avoid the big monsters. Encourage players to narrate some helpful actions. They can avoid the monsters, but narratively, the monsters are one or two streets over or around the next corner, always nearby. The first fight anyone gets into starts with a minor demon but a nearby chaos skull appears after a round. Then a magic-using guard ("Timulon but they call me Tim") will sacrifice himself to let the party escape alive.

Characters may spend some time trying to rescue people, fight fires, or just find each other. They will also start to notice that the monsters are making loops back to the portal. Heading away from the portal, they're collecting people, and their underlings are dragging those people along. Then the monsters loop back to the portal with their prisoners. They kill for fun and kill anyone who resists, but in fact, they seem to mostly be trying to take prisoners. Are they capturing people for slaves? Food? Sacrifices?

## 2 Small But Crucial Part

As the characters realize they can't hold back this flood of monsters, Captain Taldara, with her green bell helmet missing and her face streaked with soot, turns up for any non-grouped character and says they're rallying to try to fight the monsters at the source, the pillar of fire. Lieutenants (Fred) Garvey and (Lila) Trace will find other characters and give them the same info. Lieutenant Garvey's heavy armor is dented. Trace has a bandage on her arm. If players have already decided to head for the pillar of fire, the NPC's can just give encouragement and ask for help at the pillar. "This way!"

The pillar of fire makes it easy to find the source of the monsters, but traveling across the chaotic city will be challenging. The characters get split off from the city guard (collapsing rumble blocks the street) and must approach on their own somehow. Encourage players to strategize how to find and make their way. Run a skill challenge with 3 successes at Roll (12) to get onto (or under) the College grounds. Failures are narrative setbacks as a path dead ends in flaming wreckage or they avoid a roaming big monster. Characters might navigate and travel to the college using stealth, insightful or agile use of terrain, or knowledge of cities and architecture, etc.

In the College of Practical Wizardry, in the grassy quad at the center, there's a huge magic glowing circle with five barrel-sized crystals at the edges. The area within the circle is...elsewhere, clearly another plane of existence. Anyone with magical knowledge is sure that breaking, maybe even just moving any one of those crystals will shut down the portal/dimensional gateway. They're also sure that all the monsters will be banished the moment the portal shuts down. If no one in the group has any magical knowledge, they can encounter a panicky student wizard from the college who gives this knowledge before scurrying away to hide in the basement somewhere. She has startlingly purple hair, wide eyes, and doesn't give her name.

## 2A The Approach

There's an ongoing fight in the quad between monsters and city guard, army, and wizards versus the monsters and their minions. The people are losing, some hurt, some dead. However, they have clearly made a big push right before the characters arrive. The quad is surrounded by college buildings, with plenty of hallways, classrooms, offices, basements,