

Stray Blade Backstory

The Setting: The Valley of Acrea

(AKA The Vessel of Truth aka Crater of Strength aka Cradle of Power.)

- A crater encircled by a perimeter of rock.
- Three equidistant peaks around the rock wall are inlaid with three powerful elements that run into the crater's centre: seams of **intium** (a gold liquid), **xhinon** (a cloudy white crystal), and **maninite** a shiny black metal).
- In the sky above the land between each seam are three constellations: **The Stag**, **The Snake** and **The Bear**.
- The constellations are reflected on the ground in the crater, where the elements protrude from the ground to make the shapes of each animal.



SPIRIT-HOLDING ROCK

The rock of Acrea has spirit-holding capabilities.

Whenever something or someone dies, the nearest rock soaks up the soul and holds it until you release it. If there is an element in the rock, the spirit infuses with it, so that when it is released, it is imbued with the power of that element.

Backstory

PREHISTORY

THE NATIVES OF ACREA (Acreans) lived lightly on the land, in balance with nature.

They used the rock in their funerals, capturing the spirits of their dead in a stone, placing it on a sacred rock pile and performing an ancient ritual to release the spirits peacefully to the sky, to join their star gods --The Stag, The Snake and The Bear.

DISCOVERY

Four giant ALCHEMISTS – The Seer, The Protector, The Champion and The Sage – journeying ahead of their nomadic people, the Elessine, discovered the Valley of Acrea.

They found rich seams of the three elements most highly valued by alchemists.

They learned about the spirit-holding capabilities of the valley's rock and learned the releasing ritual from the natives.

Erray The Sage was the first to attempt a subversion of the ritual: he took himself near death, casting his spirit into an Acrean stone and then returning it back to his body via the releasing ritual, giving himself power from the minerals within it.

The alchemists knew the properties of xhinon, intium and maninite. Each of the others performed The Sage's revival ritual using rock filled with their chosen element.

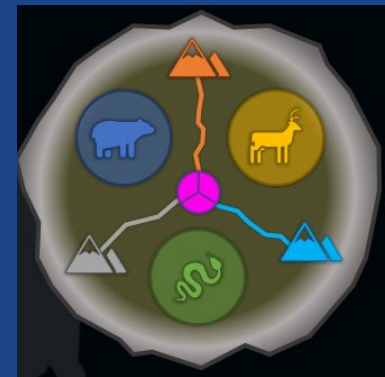
Tezuth The Champion | **intium (golden liquid)** | Stag | energy, agility, speed

Inglu The Seer | xhinon (white crystal) | Snake | wisdom, foresight, perception

Uskol The Protector | maninite (black metal) | Bear | strength, protection, endurance

They told the native Acreans that they had been empowered and chosen by their Star gods to rule over Acrea. They took their places as demigods, forcing the Acreans to build a palace-temple to each of them on their elemental seams.

The rest of the giant people of Elessine moved into the Valley of Acrea and forced the colonised Acreans to build them great cities in the land.



Only Erray The Sage remained detached. He retreated into the densely forested centre of the crater, where the elemental seams met. Here he built his own temple from all three and delved even deeper into their powers and secrets. (Pink circle in the diagram)

DOWNFALL

Augmented by the elements, The Alchemists were near immortal. With centuries of worship, The Xhinon Seer, The Maninite Protector and The Intium Champion became lazy and distrustful of one another. The Elessine splintered into three civilisations, each under their chosen Alchemist ruler, and dissent bubbled. The Sage called his fellow alchemists to a peace summit in his temple. They wouldn't listen, but they DID notice his experiments: creatures of the forest with elemental enhancements like theirs.

Inspired, they prepared for civil war:

The Seer brought snakes into her palace and performed the ritual on her xhinon altar, creating an army of xhinagas -- snakes with heightened intelligence.

The Protector did the same with bears, using maninite to create her own formidable force of manibors.

The Champion combined the energetic force of intium with majestic, tireless stags, to create scores of **intemis**.



Unaccustomed to wartime discomfort, Elessine from each of the three civilisations their maniacal leaders and abandoned the Valley with their families, native Acrean slaves, culture, gods and traditions. They fled, going their separate ways to expand their influence beyond the valley.

SHOWDOWN

In Acrea, the three armies clashed: xhinon snakes vs intium stags vs maninite bears.

The Sage pleaded for a truce. The alchemists ignored it. So he suggested that all the lands of Acrea would belong to the winner in a battle: alchemist to alchemist to alchemist. They agreed, banished their armies into the cave dungeons and completed one more ritual each.

Inglá The Xhinon Seer sacrificed a snake, captured its spirit in her xhinon egg and used it in the revival ritual to transform herself into Xing, Asp of Xhinon.

Uskol The Protector did the same, using her maninite shield, becoming Uza the Maninite Bear.

Tezuth The Champion used his intium bowl to become Tez the Intium Stag.

Now part-human, part-element, part-animal, the monsters stepped out to face one another.

Erray The Sage had also prepared. Over centuries he had learned how to harness the power of all three elements and now called them together, crafting a tower above his temple and building an altar on top, with the help of his favourite elementally enhanced animal servant, a xhinon wolf, named Boji.

The Sage sent Boji out of the valley and the creature watched from afar as The Sage used the full force of all three elements to send out a devastating shockwave that decimated the everything in the land with an elemental enhancement. Everything was destroyed and every spirit cast into the rock wall of the valley. With the power of all the elements in balance, the energy of the shockwave held like a forcefield over the valley and Boji, with his elemental enhancement, could not re-enter. Neither could he leave: his xhinon soul was connected to the land and at any great distance, he was mortally weakened. He roamed the peaks, watching over and longing for his home.

PRE-PRESENT DAY, CENTURIES LATER

When the Elessine refugees from Acrea settled around the world, they did not fare well. Used to comfort, the giant overclass struggled and, as their elemental tools, weapons and armour became less powerful outside of Acrea, their slaves saw an opportunities. The Acreans overthrew their masters and became the leaders of their societies.

Now, their descendants are established in far-flung corners of the world, living according to ancient customs created by forgotten gods. Though they name it differently, each culture claims a valley, now long lost.

The Explorer (our hero) is an anthropologist from another land. He/she studies the histories and ancient texts of the three cultures, charts the stars, puts the puzzle together and finds the Lost Valley of Acrea.

GAME INTRO

The Explorer ventures into the valley with his team, fascinated by the tower in the densely forested centre. They discover The Sage's temple, built from black, white and gold rock. It's glowing and humming with stored energy: the source of the forcefield. The Explorer's team urge him to go home, publish his discovery and take the glory. He won't. They leave, scared.

The Explorer approaches the glowing, humming temple. It explodes, blasting him back. Crashing to the ground on the edge of the forest, The Explorer's chest is embedded with a shard of the black, white and gold rock. The blast sends a surge of energy down the elemental seams. The ground before him cracks, creating a deep ravine around the central temple, cutting off all access. He dies.

MEANWHILE...

The Explorer's team publish the discovery of the lost valley and word spreads.

The three nations that are originally descended from the Acrean slaves colonised by the Elessine begin to send factions to the site and stake their claims on the crater.

The ancient scriptures of Udeland describe a Valley of Power; they send their Golden Order to take it back. The Church of the Observer claims The Vessel of Truth as the original source of their culture's wisdom, and moves in to take it for The Empire of Jilam

The Blackclaw Clan claim the land as the Forge of Strength in which their people--the Kol were wrought.



The Golden Order



The Church of the Observer



The Blackclaw Clan

The factions move into the Valley of Acrea.

They discover the ruined palace-temples, adding weight to each of their claims as they find them filled with long-lost insignias of their cultures. Each faction sets up their basecamp in the temple of their ancestors.

(icons)

They war over the lands for a century, sometimes gaining, sometimes losing ground. (red X = battleground)



None can access the central, impenetrable forest-island (yet).

Despite their holy texts, none of them understands the true power of the valley or what the distant spire towering up from the forest means. (pink circle)

The war is political, strategic, bloody and endless.

PRESENT: READY PLAYER

Boji saw the alchemists ruin his land and watched from afar as his master The Sage destroyed them. Now the forcefield is down (tripped by The Explorer), he has returned to his valley home and he watches again in despair as the factions ravage his native land like their ancestors, and believes there is no solution.



Dodging the faction armies, he stumbles across the dead Explorer and sees that his spirit is held in the shard of rock embedded in his body. The rock was used to build the Sage's temple and it contains all three elements. Using the ritual, Boji revives the Explorer and in doing so, imbues his spirit with maninite, intium and xhinon.

[More on the characters here.](#)

Back from the dead, The Explorer gets an update from Boji.

Boji needs to get to the altar at the top of the central temple to try to revive The Sage but only someone with certain powers can approach. Because of the revival ritual, the Explorer could wield those powers, and Boji can teach him.

The Explorer is fascinated by his revival and by the true history of Acrea; he also feels responsible for wrecking Boji's land and is eager to explore his powers. Plus, now he's elementally enhanced, he can't leave without being mortally weakened. Maybe if they revive The Sage, he'll know how to free him. The Explorer agrees to help. GAME ON.

What's coming

While everything with an elemental enhancement got destroyed in the shockwave, the natural world of Acrea was untouched. Native creatures roamed freely and happily. Gwars and drackels and ket kets are out there and they're hungry.

When The Explorer set off the temple and got himself killed, the aftershock released the souls of the manibors, intemis and xhinagas, so he'll have to fight them.

Ditto the monstrous alchemist bosses.

Ultimately, he has to learn how to use his powers to manipulate and channel the elements to get to the central temple, where Boji wants to revive The Sage, so he can bring peace to Acrea again.

Before they can get to The Sage at the top of the tower above the temple, The Explorer will have to face and control the energetic expression of all three elements -- Final boss.