

# Valus Q&A

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## What is *Valus*?

*Valus* is a regional campaign sourcebook that provides players and DMs with the information required to run adventures upon the Valusian Isle, the primary setting for my “[Sins of Our Fathers](#)” story hour on ENWorld. *Valus* is the first d20 sourcebook to be published by Different Worlds Publications, and you can find more information about Valus on the DW [website](#).

## At last count there are 456 campaign sourcebooks on the d20 market – why would I be interested in *Valus*?

I tried to differentiate *Valus* from other sourcebooks by concentrating on “vertical” rather than “horizontal” scope. By this I mean that I burrowed deeply into the cultures, peoples, and histories of one 600-mile long island. Other campaign sourcebooks describe a continent, or even an entire gaming world – often this is made feasible by sacrificing depth.

If you enjoy the fiction in my “[Sins of Our Fathers](#)” story hour, then that is certainly another motivating factor to grab the book.

## Talk to me more about this “vertical” nature of *Valus*. What does that really mean?

If a place-name appears on the maps, then I have tried to detail in the text. This is a bit different from the norm; many campaign sourcebooks include dozens, or even hundreds, of names that appear on an atlas but are not mentioned elsewhere. I tried to give DMs and players sufficient information on each area or town to run an adventure with little additional preparation, while still allowing DMs the freedom to develop their own material.

## Is *Valus* a stand-alone product?

Yes and no. You can use the Valus setting for an entire campaign, if you’d like. Some groups, including my own, have done just that. But you could also plop the island down in your homebrew world or within one of the many, other published settings. This twofold approach was part of the development processes behind publishing the book – we wanted the *Valus* to appeal to groups that yearned for a completely new campaign setting, and to groups that sought an exotic, highly detailed locale.

## What makes the Valusian Isle different than other settings on the market?

Ironically, I think *Valus* will feel “new” because it’s “old”. The setting was molded during many, many pen-and-paper sessions from previous editions of d20 gaming. I hope experienced gamers that read the sourcebook get a sense of nostalgia. At the same time, I think newer gamers will

find *Valus* remarkably different from recently-published settings. This world was born within a maelstrom of notebooks, pizza boxes, opaque dice, and beverage cans. Its conception is based more on imagination and wonderment than marketing savvy or mechanical adjustments.

### **I heard *Valus* presents different human races. True?**

Not really. *Valus* offers different human cultures. Each human ethnic group on the island has its own histories, customs, tendencies, etc. While the sourcebook focuses on the island, humans from the mainland are also fully detailed. Even members of the same human ethnic group might be wildly different. In short, a human is not a human is not a human – just like within the real world.

### **So these differences are more “fluff” than “crunch”?**

The human racial differences, like the rest of the sourcebook, fall under the “fluffy crunch” category. I’ve included a racial preference chart, something that’s been dropped from the newest editions of the game, and it’s broken down by race (e.g., human and dwarf) as much as it is nationality (e.g., Carrik and Rhelm). This information may or may not be used by DMs to help influence social skill checks. A chapter within the sourcebook, dedicated solely for the would-be DM of a Valusian Campaign, discusses the mechanics behind such information.

### **Racial intolerance? That doesn’t sound like much fun ...**

It may not be. It’s provided for folks who want an additional level of gritty realism; others can easily ignore it. Different aspects of the Valusian setting will appeal to different groups. I wanted a mature world – and by ‘mature’ I just don’t mean a dark setting with some impending evil hanging over it. I wanted a world that “could have been” – much of *Valus* is based on historical research and real world cultures. It’s not always pretty because the history of the world is not always pretty.

### **Other campaign settings detail different cultures. Does *Valus* have something you could call unique?**

Religion. I own and have read most of the campaign sourcebooks on the market, and I think the religions presented within *Valus* are one aspect that could be labeled wholly unique.

There are two prominent religions. The New Faith is that of the Risen Gods. Clerics within the Valus can only worship deities of the New Faith, and each cleric must have a designated god. The Old Faith is the religion of druids. There’s a significant contrast between the two, so divine spellcasters are quite different than standard d20 clerics and druids. Other religions certainly exist (and are discussed), but there are primarily cults, sects, heretical offshoots, or mainland faiths.

### **What’s different about the Risen Gods?**

They’re beyond good and evil, to borrow a Nietzschean term. Each god has Good and Evil within his possible clerical domains. Every Risen God also has War as a domain, as each church has a martial contingent. For example, a cleric of Ammol, God of Winter, could choose Evil or Good as a domain – but not both (Death, Knowledge, Law, and War are also options). A cleric’s alignment still restricts his choice (though a Valusian feat circumvents that).

**So the same god might have both evil and good followers?**

Yes. Religions are more historically than fantastically grounded. Think of the real world: two followers of the same deity might believe drastically different things. One follower could abhor the slaughtering of innocents, while another may think that such acts are required in order to “spread the word.” One of Ammol’s aspects is impartiality – so a fair, good-aligned judge may worship Ammol, as well as an unfeeling, merciless assassin.

**What do you mean by a god’s ‘aspects’?**

Followers of the same Risen God may worship different aspects of that deity. The god remains unchanged, of course, save in the eye of the beholder. For example, when a Gordian looks to Ammol he might see the merciless God of Winter. A Luc Valusian judge, however, might look to Ammol and envision deity that espouses fairness and impartiality.

**So a character may choose a god and then choose one of the god’s aspects that appeals to him?**

Sure. But most characters, other than clerics, practice pantheism. The vast majority of persons upon the Valus worship *all* the gods – and they pray to whichever deity seems appropriate given the circumstances. If your character is about to embark on a journey across the frigid Borsk Mountains, she might make a donation to Ammol’s temple, since he’s the God of Winter. On the other hand, if she was preparing to penetrate the jungles of the Bight, she might send a prayer toward Jemmia, Goddess of Summer. *Valus* provides a number of example situations in which the worship of a particular god may be appropriate.

**What else is different about the Risen Gods?**

The Risen Gods are engaged in an interminable heavenly war. Each god has one month wherein they are winning the war – this is called his “Ascendancy.” Likewise, each god has a month wherein he’s losing – this time period is called his “Suppression.” Gods are able to grant their clerical followers more divine powers when they’re doing well in the heavenly conflict, and they are not as helpful when they’re being beaten. A cleric’s power in the Valus waxes and wanes with that of her god.

I’m sure you’ve read stories about historical figures or conflicts that may have been influenced by days or months that were considered “holy” or “unlucky.” It’s the same in the Valus. For example, your party would be wise to prepare an assault on Cula Vak’s temple when his black-robed priests are enduring their Suppression (because they will not have divine capabilities they might otherwise possess).

**These Ascendant and Suppressed powers – do they simply affect the number of spells available to a cleric?**

Not at all. Each god offers specific, unique Ascendant benefits, and each god has specific, unique Suppressed penalties.

As an example, here are the Suppressed penalties and Ascendant powers for Ceria, Goddess of the Harvest.

**Specific Ascendancy Powers—Ceria, 4<sup>th</sup> heks**

- **Cerian Reaping (Ex):** Once per day when you use the full attack action, you can give up your regular attacks and instead make one melee attack per caster level at your

full base attack bonus against each opponent within reach. Regardless, you may not target the same creature more than once. This power is otherwise identical to the Whirlwind Attack feat, so you also forfeit any bonus or extra attacks granted by other feats, spells, or abilities.

- **Cerian Buffeting (Sp):** Once per day you may cause a swirling wind to engulf your form for a number of rounds equal to your caster level. This effect causes your hair, clothes, and accoutrements to swirl about madly, at no penalty to you. You gain a +2 bonus to Intimidate checks. Vapors, fumes, fogs, and the like are pushed away from your immediate location for the duration.

### Specific Suppressed Powers—*Qwyn (Qwynna Pru), 2<sup>nd</sup> heks*

- **Fetid Odor (Ex):** Ceria's divine rival Qwynna Pru causes the stench of swamplands to exude from your person. You take a -2 penalty to Diplomacy and Gather Information checks. Creatures gain a +2 bonus to Survival checks when Tracking you with the Scent ability.
- **Mired (Ex):** You may not Run or Charge while in direct contact with natural terrain such as fields, swamps, and unpaved roadways. Qwynna Pru wraps the feet of her rival's followers with unseen and intangible muck, hindering their movement.

### What's different about the other divine classes in *Valus*?

Paladins worship angelic beings, and each paladin has a unique guardian. A paladin can *commune* with her guardian, among other things. The beliefs of paladins are considered heretical by Risen clerics, who dislike the thought of angelic beings being accorded greater respect than the gods that created them. Hence paladins are shunned and even persecuted. The life of a paladin within the Valus is, needless to say, very challenging.

Druids, too, are persecuted. The Risen Faith is dominant, and Risen clerics lambaste the Old Faith from pulpits throughout the land. Druids are feared by the common folk, steeped in mystery and drenched in rumors of bloodshed and savage rituals. A druid, too, may face numerous challenges within the Valus.

### Talk to me about magic – is it different in the Valus?

Yes, though it's impossible to address it fully in this short Q&A format. Suffice to say that *resurrection* and *summoning* spells are different – they carry a greater price than simply the material component requirements within the core rules. The Risen Gods tend to “mark” those who have been granted resurrection by one of their followers – a character raised by a cleric of Ammol, for example, might come back with skin the color of snow. Similarly, gates and other powerful summonings may only be cast when a cleric's god is Ascendant.

### What about character races – any new ones?

Three new races are introduced in *Valus* – roven, trulls, and pems. Roven are dog-like, nomadic warriors. Trulls are the offspring of trolls that have become their own race. Pems are reclusive gnomes. I wanted to target some favored classes that don't exist in the core rules, so roven have ranger as a favored class, trulls have monk, and pems have sorcerer. Each new race is, I think, refreshingly different. I think there are more than enough races already within the d20 market, so I really endeavored to make each of these stand out from their fellows.

### How about other “crunch” aspects of the Valus?

There are new feats, new poisons, drugs, and rules on divine retribution for taboo spells (such as resurrection or summoning extraplanar entities). Many of the classes are tweaked, and paladins and clerics are completely revamped. I already mentioned the new races, but Valusian demi-humans also have different twists from the standard fare – stondurven and hulldurven (dwarves), gammhedrel and horadrel (elves), etc. Imaginative “fluff” is rare within the d20 marketplace, but just as rare is meaningful, balanced, and evocative “crunch”. That said, we didn’t add “crunch” just for the sake of adding it; all the new mechanics are grounded within the setting, including the optional rules (such as human heritage levels).

### Will running a *Valus*-based adventure require more work from the DM?

Not necessarily. A DM can ignore or remove aspects of the setting that he or she doesn’t like. More than enough information on the towns, regions, and geographic areas is provided for those DMs that simply want a different, innovative region for their existing campaign. And, of course, the sourcebook contains a chapter exclusively for DMs that want to embark on a Valusian Campaign.

### Valusian Campaign? What do you mean by that?

A Valusian Campaign is one that differs from standard, core rules concepts. Character wealth is adjusted downward, illiteracy is the norm, and social skills are greatly influenced by race or religion. There are not many high-level NPCs running about, and NPC net wealth is also reduced. I shy away from the suggested number of encounters per character level, so combat tends to be more deadly. A Valusian Campaign is one that incorporates these aspects with those already mentioned above – heretical paladins, persecuted druids, clerics with fluctuating divine powers, etc.

It’s still d20 gaming, but it differs from anything else out there.

### Where can I buy a copy of *Valus*?

*Valus* can be ordered directly from the publisher, [Different Worlds Publications](#), through their website. If you plan to attend GenCon Indy 2004, you can buy copies of *Valus* from Different Worlds at booth #2025. *Valus* is also available through [amazon.com](#) and will be in your friendly local game store soon after GenCon.

### What if I still have some unanswered questions?

Drop by EN World and ask your question in one of the discussion threads about *Valus*. A listing of applicable threads is on the [DW website](#).