## Contents

1: **Fundamentals**  
  - Glossary  
  - General Rules Summary  

2: **Genesis**  
  - The Line of Fae  
  - Relations & Traditions  
  - The Influence  
  - Shared Traits  
  - Chaparrans  
  - Damaskans  
  - Gimfen  
  - Laudenians  
  - Narros  
  - Pagus  
  - Tenenbri  
  - Tilien  
  - Humans  
  - Kodiks  
  - Interspecies  

3: **Backgrounds**  
  - Organizations  

4: **Echan Classes**  
  - Canon Classes  
  - Barbarian  
  - Bard  
  - Cleric  
  - Druid  
  - Fighter  
  - Monk  
  - Ranger  
  - Paladin  
  - Rogue  
  - Sorcerer  
  - Warlock  
  - Wizard  

5: **Techan Classes**  
  - Quick Builds  
  - Grounder  
  - Gunslinger  
  - Heavy  
  - Marshal  
  - Martial Artist  
  - Medic  
  - Sniper  
  - Techie  
  - Techan Archetypes  

6: **Equipment**  
  - Resources  
  - Currency  
  - Tech Levels  
  - Echan Disruption Field  
  - Battery Cells  
  - Weapon Groups  
  - New Weapon Properties  
  - Melee Weapon Descriptions  
  - Ranged Weapons Descriptions  
  - Ammunition  
  - Grenades & Explosives  
  - Armor  
  - Light Armor Descriptions  
  - Medium Armor Descriptions  
  - Heavy Armor Descriptions  
  - Exo-Armor Descriptions  
  - Shield Descriptions  
  - Armor Modifications  
  - Techan Gear  
  - Combat Accessories  
  - Tool Kits  
  - Utilities  
  - Detonators  
  - Special Materials  
  - Techan Vehicles  
  - Vehicle Rules  
  - Standard Ground Vehicles  
  - Echan Terrain Vehicles  
  - Aircraft  
  - Other Low Tech Vehicles  
  - Vehicle Modifications
### 7: MAGIC
- The Source: 259
- The Gates: 259
- Pleroma: 261
- Attricana Spells: 261
- Ixindar & Mengus: 262
- Nihilimancy: 262
- New Spells: 265
- Creating Magic Items: 265
- Restricted Items: 266
- Artifacts: 266
- Eight Shards of Amethyst: 269

### 8: CULTURE
- Alien Similarity: 277
- Ecological Influence & Corpus Continuity: 277
- Cultural Landscape: 278
- Languages: 279
- Religion: 283
- Medival Trappings: 287
- Travel: 289

### 9: THE WORLD
- Bastions: 294
- Angel: 295
- Mann: 298
- Selkirk: 300
- Sierra Madre: 303
- York: 304
- The World Beyond: 306
- Abidan: 307
- Baruch Malkut: 309
- Dawnamoak and the towers of Jibaro: 312
- Fargon: 313
- The Finer Fire Pits: 315
- Kannos: 317
- Laudenia: 318
- Limshau: 321
- Salvabrooke: 324
- Seliquam: 325
- Free Houses: 327
- The Wild: 327
- Wastelands: 329

### 10: MONSTERS
- Fae Anathema: 335
- The Fall: 336
- Spawn: 338
- Rule Amendments: 338
- Available Monsters: 339
- Bogg: 341
- Dojenn: 344
- Dragons: 345
- Archon Dragons: 346
- Typhox Dragons: 346
- Neutral Dragons: 359
- Yok-Ani: 359
- Iron Sons: 360
- Kodiak: 362
- M.A.X.: 364
- Pagus: 366
- Pugg: 369
- Satyr: 370
- Shapeless Wild: 370
- Shemjaza: 372
- Skegg: 373
- Thornshroud: 375
- Werebeast: 377

### 11: CAMPAIGN
- Themes: 381
- Concept: 381
- Origin: 382
- Relations: 382
- Talents: 383
- Adversity: 383
- Mixed Groups: 383
- Patterns of Landscape: 384
- The Single Stone: 386
- Section 1: 386
- Section 2: 387
- Section 3: 389
- The Keep of Zellis: 390
- Conclusion: 396
When Aiden Camus was twelve, his watch stopped. He sat frozen on a field of broken glass, eyes fixed on the sky. Screams filled his ears coming from the wounded, the dazed onlookers at the edge of the devastation, and from the fallen boy beside him.

He was older than Aiden by several years, with mottled chin stubble and crewcut hair. His eyes were shut as he wailed. He reached for Aiden, still locked out of time as the events of the past minute began to sink in.

Blood dripped from deep slices across Aiden’s palms as he held up his weight. Pain started to jostle his attention. His eyes fell back to the destruction surrounding him. The overturned cars, the shattered windows, the buckled pavement, the memories that would never fade.

On its surface, his watch looked undamaged. It hadn’t broken when he fell. The battery hadn’t died. It had a miniature electric motor powered by the motion of his arm, intended to keep perfect time forever.

Both children lay crumpled in the middle of the street, flanked by splintered wood and twisted steel. A fountain sprayed from a broken hydrant at the intersection corner a few yards away, trickling water over Aiden’s matted brown hair.

He noticed survivors at the periphery desperately attempting to rally support. The vehicles on the fringe had stalled, blocking traffic into the scene. Traffic lights had gone dark. Cellular phones refused to turn on. Scores of people were still fleeing from what they saw, or rather what they refused to believe they saw.

Aiden remained still, even when the surrounding yells blended into sirens or when the aircraft began swarming above. He felt emergency workers attempting to rouse him from his daze. He repeated the last few moments over in his mind, trying to find some rationale for what had happened and why. It wasn’t that it shouldn’t have happened, rather that it couldn’t have.

His watch’s balance wheel which charged the battery had seized. The ratchet and rotor locked the hands three seconds into the third minute past ten o’clock.

It was a Sunday.

Aiden’s life until then had been filled with concessions—moments of happiness he accepted only because his dreams could never be fulfilled. He preferred aspirations over practical goals. Aiden, like all children, desired the impossible, until reality forced its way in.

The recovery would be orderly. The damage would soon be repaired. The dead would be mourned. The events of the last few minutes would be reported and then forgotten. Everything would fall back into place.

Except Aiden and his stopped watch.

...
slur or stumbled phrase. Through his mother’s lips, those stories had carried the weight of gospel.

“Is it good?” his mother asked.
Aiden kept his eyes on the book. “Best one yet.”

The window was open. Between them and Martin’s empty bed sat his own collection of books, modern stories and science fiction. Aiden liked the ones with frayed edges, bent spines, and old words.

“This old, must be magic,” she teased. “Looked like no one had touched it in a century.”

“How much did this cost?” He turned to her.

“Twelve year olds are never supposed to ask how much something is.”

“Mom!” he pushed.

She patted his lap. “Come on, read me one.”

Aiden swung the wooden cover open; it groaned like a satisfied lion. The first cockled leaf repeated the book’s title flamboyantly, like it was hand written on the page. Aiden rolled it over carefully. He flipped several more until reaching the first illustration.

The dragon was sketched in graphite and accented with thick strokes of India ink. The image’s title was fitting for such a beast, The Death Dragon, Zmey Gorynych. They held the book between them.

“Zmey was a sickly creature,” Aiden started. “Muscles stretched tightly around his bones. He appeared too feeble to flap his pitted wings, let alone fly. This dragon needed magic to take to the air. He belched soot and flame and blackened the ground when he landed. Where death lurked in abundance, one would find him. He required the long deceased to feed upon.”

“Well that’s…appropriate,” his mother muttered. Aiden had weathered far worse stories.

“It’s a story, Mom,” Aiden replied.

“Sorry, go on.”

Aiden scanned his finger to find his spot. “He belched soot—”

“You read that part.”

Aiden smirked. “It was worth mentioning twice.” He returned to the story. “But he was no match for Willum Raenis. Willum was a farmer’s child. Neither a favored son nor a fond sibling, he dreamed himself as a knight of legend. But the only thing bigger than his dream was his appetite. He couldn’t run. He couldn’t lift great weights. In school, brothers above and below excelled where Willum faltered. He desperately wanted to be special. Without stature or charisma, there was no way for Willum to win the heart of one to suit his wishes. He looked no higher than the nice—”

“Niece—” his mother interjected.

“Niece of the elven lord, Elisa Stormbringer, a petite flower of golden petals. She was…” Aiden fell silent as his finger continued to run down the page.

“What are you doing?” his mother asked.

“Skipping.”

He flipped a page. And then another. His finger skimmed through the paragraphs. He resumed, “Zmey’s shadow was peppered with breaks of sunlight—”

“Wait, wait. Why did you—” his mother started.

“Girl stuff,” Aiden answered.

“I think I’d disagree with that—”

“Can I continue?” Aiden interjected with a smirk. His mother shrugged and pointed back to the book. “Zmey’s shadow was peppered with breaks of sunlight, piercing through the cracks and holes in his leathery wings. He swooped down and sliced open Willum’s brothers as they tended the crops. Willum knew the legend of the dragon of death as well as its appetite. It had already turned its sights to the nearby castle. Willum offered no deal to the kingdom.”

“You know the rest of the story would probably make more sense if you knew what the elf princess was like—” his mother said.

“Nope,” Aiden interrupted. Cut to the dragon. He flipped a page. “Willum’s father, a once proud servant of the realm, owned a blade of refined steel and nobility. Willum took his father’s blade and wielding no skill, cut down his farm’s livestock. The meat rotted until the aroma was irresistible to the mighty creature—”

“It takes days for food to spoil,” said his mother.

“Wouldn’t the dragon have killed them all? Aiden gave her a frustrated look. She chuckled, shook her head, and beckoned him back to the book.

“The beast turned from its pillaging to enjoy the impressive feast placed before it by an obvious admirer,” Aiden continued.

“Little did Zmey know that in the stomach of every corpse, Willum had sewn in fresh food. Berries, plums, turnips, even a bushel of green bananas. This meal didn’t sit well. Zmey tried desperately to spit up its meal, but the food sat. It gripped the beast in unbearable pain. When the creature breathed its last, all Willum had to do was pull on the withered carcass to tear the head from its body. Willum then carried his trophy to the castle.”

Aiden closed the book. He looked to his mother.

“Awesome,” he admired, then rolled more pages by.

“Dozens more.”

“Yes, but enough for now,” said his mother. She closed the book and placed it among his collection.

“I missed it when you read to me…but I know I’m too old.”

“Doing quite fine on your own,” she replied.

“But they sounded real coming from you.”

“Well, stories don’t need a voice to be any more real.”

She patted his lap. “They don’t even need a reader.”

He slumped into the bed and rolled on his side. She kissed his cheek. His eyes were closed, but he wasn’t close to being tired. His mother exited quietly.

As she slinked to her bedroom, she noticed the stern look Martin was giving her from the end of the hall. Four years older than his brother, with pruned hair and optimistic goatee, he already resembled their late father. He inherited the same stare mixing bewilderment with annoyance. She paused to offer a forehead kiss and made for her room. He didn’t respond and waited for the door to close before returning to the computer and his blog that no one read.

Aiden opened his eyes moments later and stared through the open drapes to the night sky where a thin film of orange pollution garnished the skyline. The view, half way up a strata juggernaut of a thousand apartments,
the city appeared to spread to the vanishing point. Aiden couldn’t see the city wall. Bright lights and a narcissistic waning moon blotted out the stars, except for one brilliant white spark hanging off the edge of a lunar sea.

Aiden stretched out his arm to the shelf and dug his nails into the headband of the codex. He held it precariously by the edge of its spine and carried it back to the bed. The glow bleeding from the window precluded the need of a nightlight.

Aiden flipped to the first story, past the sketch of Zmey, past the introductions, to the part about the elf. Elisa and Willum married. The magic of an elvish bond gave him centuries of youth. And she bore him sons for a new kingdom they would create.

Aiden turned another page, before the start of the next story, to a pencil sketch of the fictional couple. Willum on his knee, the tall elf princess smiling upon him. Aiden angled the book under the window light to illuminate the girl. Unlike the rough interpretation of the dragon, lacking features from a deficient imagination, the elf showed detail like she had posed for the artist. Flawless skin, a pointed nose, almond eyes, and a delicate figure. The sharp ears were subtle, barely nudging through straight uncolored hair.

Aiden just remained there a moment, hoping for that impossible chance when her eyes might meet his.

* * *

A close second to Aiden’s obsession with books was his affection for video games. Martin’s favorites had guns, robots, and tanks vaporizing whatever monsters moved before the reticule. Aiden favored sword-wielding and spellcraft, but those were growing difficult to find. His mother located a free download from an obscure website.

"Hey! Homework!" Martin barked as he approached behind Aiden.

"Done," Aiden replied, attention fused to the screen. His warrior dodged and flipped in burdened armor, cleaving with a blade that never wore down. The hero’s meal was some generic ration devoured in a single swallow and supplying energy for another twelve hours of continuous movement. Wounds sustained vanished with a moon’s pass.

"Where?"

"In the kitchen," Aiden replied with a nudge. "I have to get on there, by the way." Martin poked him.

"Mom said I had until 5:00."

Martin stepped closer, offering a distracting shadow on the screen. "How many hours you into it?"

"Last save was sixty five."

Martin coughed a laugh. "Why don’t you go out?"

Aiden’s retort was worth him breaking his focus from the monitor, "This is more interesting." Aiden returned to his game.

"You’re going to have to do something with your life eventually, you know."

"Honor roll. How are your grades?"

Aiden’s hero’s clothes were always comfortable, the romance always willing. The woman the champion had won was a meagrely decent falsehood with long lines of exposed skin and the brassiere of a medieval dominatrix. She never complained of the cold and fell at the hero’s feet when the programmer deemed it appropriate. Death was as quickly resolved as one’s finger moved to the hockey. Castles were a minute’s walk apart. Money was easily acquired from the bellies of wandering beasts.

Before leaving, Martin reached a foot across to the machine’s power supply and turned it off.

"Marty!" Aiden screamed. Martin laughed as he was chased from the room. Aiden had only lost a few minutes progress. The hero and his world, secured within the last save file, waited patiently for his player’s return. The sprite never complained to its god about the lack of refrigerators, central heating, or proper medicine.

* * *

Aiden’s eyes followed the passing lights of the tunnel in the Underground Transit Rail. While the train wasn’t moving, a flush flat panel television on the outside of the train played through various ten-second commercials, most involving the necessity to improve one’s appearance with cosmetics or the latest synthetic drug made to placate the anxieties of modern life.

The transit system was meticulously controlled, with stringent fines against litter and vandalism to keep it and the city above clean. Walls were unspoiled by graffiti, the floor was practically hygienic, and the air was conditioned. Aiden’s mother sat beside him, holding his books under her arm. Aiden saw a portable electronic game in the hands of a boy half his age on an opposite seat. The boy’s father ignored him as he held onto the railing.

Aiden leaned forward to see the inside of the train bending through the tunnels at speeds he couldn’t comprehend. He imagined the transit rail was a giant serpent, gnawing its way through the rock. Aiden embraced the creature’s course mane, or perhaps boney frill, and commanded the monster to burst from the shell of the Earth. It lifted the child on its head, taller than the tallest tower in the city. Maybe it dangled little legs behind so it could shuffle about the ground. He would trick the beast to dig too deep or breach a barricade to the canal and drown. Then Aiden could follow the tunnel to the monster’s lair and rescue his own princess.

* * *

Mother and son scaled the crowded stairs and exited the UTR station into downtown. Pine trees genetically altered to survive in the shadow-plagued skyscraper forest flanked the sidewalk. The cars whizzing by them hummed like single-note violins. The sun was bifurcated by the dagger-tip of a corporate monolith looming several blocks down. The ivory tower, covered in a checkerboard of white tinted windows and photovoltaic panels, paved a shadow ahead of them.

Aiden asked for bubble-gum at a passing vendor. His mother relented but told him to choose quickly. Between cherry, apple, watermelon, long-lasting, sugar-free, and...
extra-chewy, there were a hundred varieties. Eventually, his mother stepped in and snagged a cinnamon and paid with a bank card. He didn’t want cinnamon but didn’t object.

They walked leisurely down the walkway. Occasionally, the cloudless sky would be invaded by a passing aircraft—helicopters mostly—hopping between the peaks.

An elderly man with clean skin and weathered eyes stood at the summit of the ashen citadel, breath slow and calm. He was topped with unkempt white hair which blew madly around his face. The people below looked only as a mélange of reds, oranges, and blues.

The noises below resonated up the spine of the building. The stranger smiled as he leaned forward. Workers, prioritizing their own safety, crawled upon the ridge, screaming for sanity. The stranger spread his arms wide and drifted over the edge. Swollen white garbage bags flopped firmly in his grip. They were stuffed but nearly weightless in the wind. The workers failed to catch him.

From the altitude, his descent resembled a crawl. The wind didn’t slam him into the tower or drift him away from its shadow. He fell straight, the rushing torrent rupturing the bags in his hands. Thousands of wisps of paper fluttered away like feathers from a dying bird.

At ground level, iron-gilded stone supports lent themselves to some dictator’s dystopia. Two story glass shutters opened quickly and effortlessly for customers. The crowds shuffling about the entrance didn’t notice the body until the stranger disintegrated through an empty bus. Screams followed, and people gathered quickly.

Aiden’s mother noticed the swarming onlookers before her son did. She could see the crushed vehicle and stopped a block away. Aiden was an inch too short to catch the commotion.

His mother guided him down another street. “Honey, let’s…let’s walk around that.”

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“Let’s just avoid it.”

Aiden spotted the falling shreds of paper.

“Mom, look!” he shouted, waving his hands to swat the tatters around. One wrapped around his finger. “Like snow…” He noticed hand writing. “It’s raining words.”

“What’s it say?” He showed it to her. She read it, and then grimaced. “She pulled him down the side street. ‘Let’s go, we’ll be late.’”

Aiden stroked the paper in his hand as he read it again.

Our dreams are a prison.

* * *

Aiden’s school was separated from neighboring skyscrapers by an alienation of white walls, heavy iron gates with brass balls atop the posts, and a stretch of genetically engineered, perfectly permanent emerald grass. Aiden’s mother fixed his clip-on tie under his brown sweater. “I know it’s a Friday but no walking home this time,” she said. “Wait for Marty.”

“Gotcha.”

“You didn’t lose the essay did you?”

“No. There’s not going to be a test on it, you think?”

“Test? What do you think this is, school?” She smiled; he smiled. “Here.” She reached into her pocket. “I got something for you.” She pulled out a necklace, a delicate silver chain. Hanging from it was a coin bearing an embossed image of an elderly man wielding a staff in one hand and an infant in the other. The letters that ringed the coin were in an old tongue that few people in the city could read. She dropped it around his neck. “It’s a charm. He protects children. Especially brave ones.”

Aiden lifted it to his eye and could tell it was old. “Is it magic?”

She tucked it in his shirt. “It’s a flashlight to remind God where you’re standing.”

“He can see us all the time!”

“Every second, every step. Where you’ve been and where you’re going.”

“How can he know that?”

“He knows everything.”

“But he can’t control everything.”

“No…You’re right.” She pointed at Aiden’s chest. “He can’t control you.”

“Then how can he know where I’m going?”

She thought about it. “Because he knows you so well, he knows where you’ll go, what you’ll do and what you’ll
see. We all have a place.
Aiden looked at the pendant again and whispered, "But what if I want to do something else?"
"All right, enough of that." She eased him past the gate.
"Off with you and for everything you learn, teach something."

"Camus-kun," interrupted the teacher.
Aiden snapped his attention back from the window, the scrap piece of paper still rolling around his fingers. His thoughts had been on the bedtime story, about the parts he skipped. What was she like? Did she read books or play-sports? Would she finish Willum's sentences and laugh at his jokes?
"Yes...sorry, Leach-sensei," Aiden answered.
It was a class for advanced students, and Aiden was the youngest by a year. Unlike Willum Raenis, Aiden Camus was exceptional. "You know, you might actually find this subject interesting."
"I was following," Aiden lied.
"Eyes on me then, please." Leach shifted across the front of the small class waving a thousand page opus in his hand. The blank digital tablet hanging behind him had the color of a chalk blackboard. "What defines a civilization?" He let the moment linger, the students wondering if it was rhetorical. "It could be said that the author believes it's based entirely on its builders and thinkers, and not the kings and presidents at the top or the consumers and peasants at the bottom. You take them away, civilization collapses. A society is worthless if it doesn’t develop...both socially and technologically. So what causes a civilization to stop growing?"

As in every class, the students looked to each other and waited for one of them to break the silence. "War," Lara popped up.
"War. I don’t think so," Leach corrected. "Actually war, and the prospect of it, encourages change. War gave us nuclear power. The potential of war gave us computers, rockets, the internet."
"Segregation," spoke up William, another student, the oldest and largest. "Leach nodded for clarification. "The separation of upper and lower class," he continued.
"Peasants farm, soldiers fight, nobles rule...and sometimes think."
Leach nodded. "That can cause a civilization to slow down."
"A fourteen year old girl across from Aiden asked "Religion?" Leach waited for her to continue. "Burned libraries," she continued, "executed or imprisoned anyone questioning the church."
"Absolutely. We've had famous libraries burned, technological breakthroughs suppressed as being too dangerous...all from religion. They may claim to encourage scientific progress but they've always been its rival." Leach made his way back across to Aiden's side. "A great author once said that if suppressed breakthroughs and progressive ideas had been embraced by their societies, we'd be living in an era 3,000 years advanced from where we are now. Civilization has to expand. It can't help it. We teach our children, and they learn and better our achievements. Something like religion can slow progress but can't stop it. For one, the world is big. You halt the progress of a civilization on this part of the planet; it won't stop another civilization on the other side.
"Take pasta. It wasn't Marco Polo that cultivated it across the world. Pasta just appeared naturally around the same time across the globe. It's necessity that forces us to build and expand." Leach brought up the novel again. "This is why the book has that flaw. If you take away the builders, new builders will emerge from the rubble. You remove a ruler; someone else will step forward." Aiden was listening now, but his thoughts were to the books he had been reading, of ancient mythologies and empires that marked their progress by millennia.
"You can impose religion," Leach continued, "suppress dangerous knowledge, but you can't stop progress. Eventually, people will start building."
"What do you mean?" Leach asked calmly.
Aiden cleared his throat, keeping his eyes on the teacher rather than the class. "If you can create anything you want out of thin air, you wouldn't need to build it."
"That's stupid..." William barked.
"No," Leach interrupted, "that's actually a good point. In a fantasy world, thousands of years pass without even the hint of technology, beyond carts and swords. But that can never happen."
"Why?" Aiden asked.
William butt in, "Because magic isn't real!"
Leach flicked William's ear as he answered. "Because like I said, necessity forces us to build. That's why it's a fantasy." Leach worked his way towards his youngest savior, "I read one of those when I was your age. George something. There was magic but it was uncommon. Kingdoms lasted centuries without ever changing. You can include a caste system, religion, ironclad traditions, some ancient law against the use of machines, but eventually, technology will develop. Fantasy novels don't need to explain why. It's fantasy. It doesn't have to make sense. The moment you apply logic to a fantasy novel, it falls apart. Their worlds are too small, timelines are too long. Monsters are too many and there's usually a frighteningly insufficient lower class. And if that world has magic, there'd be chaos. If any child could be raised to wield a wand, you'd have anarchy. Even considering that, those without magic would still build. In our history, there were empires which lasted beyond a thousand years, but even those had moments of social and technological innovation." Leach was imposing but lowered his voice to not impose. "You simply cannot suppress the desire for humans to grow. I'll also say that I would loathe any civilization that existed for thousands of years and not be able to figure how to make a machine that washes my dishes."
The class laughed, and Leach returned to head of the room.
Aiden could still see a few eyes on him from the older students. From Lara, smiling at him. From William, an-
nyed at the time wasted. As the class ended, Aiden filed out last, avoiding William’s hex-vision stare. As he passed the teacher’s desk, Leach called out, “Aiden!”

“Yeah, sensei!” Aiden answered, noticing the teacher beckoning him back. After the last student departed, Aiden stepped back to the desk. “Was I out of line?”


Leach prepared a detailed answer, but then paused and answered simply with, “It’s just best…for now.” Aiden still didn’t comprehend the issue. Leach leaned forward and spoke, “The people around you, parents, teachers, engineers, they need the world around them to work…in a specific way. They lay down rules and permit only a narrow field of thought. Nationality, technology, theology, they can’t allow something rejecting those tenets.”

“I don’t understand,” Aiden replied.

“Do you believe in Santa Claus?” Leach said suddenly. Aiden shot glances about the room as he answered.

“Of course not.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s not real.”

“And what if he knocked on your door and said ‘Hello?’”

Aiden’s answer came quickly. “I’d ask for a bike.” Leach chuckled, covering his mouth to prevent a louder reaction. “And that’s the difference between you and the rest of the world,” he answered. “They would point and say, you’re not real!” They can’t allow something to break from what they know. They need order; they need a reflection of their beliefs.” Leach pointed to the fantasy novel nestled under Aiden’s arm. “It was an old edition, and one of the last printed. Aiden glanced down at it. “And not to be reminded of what can’t exist.”

“That’s odd,” Aiden answered, still honestly confused. He knew there was something not being said. “I still don’t understand the big deal.”

Leach smiled and patted the desk in front of Aiden. “You’ll have to ask your mother that one day,” he said.
"Yes."

Aiden ran his fingers around the crevices and grooves in the book. "...Someone died today, didn’t they?"

She stopped loading and turned to him. "Yes." She never lied. "Yes, someone died."

"Why’d he do it?"

She placed a mug down and orbited around to sit beside him. He didn’t look at her. "I don’t know, honey. Some people have a pain that no medicine or words can cure. To them, death is the solution; but they don’t realize how selfish and narrow-minded that solution is."

"But what he wrote. It was like he was trapped. Are we trapped?"

She smiled, patted his shoulder, and returned to her dishes. "You’re only trapped if you can’t find the door."

She cleared out half the machine when Aiden closed the book and made for the living room, dominated by its 47” liquid crystal flat-screen television. Aiden stopped and voiced another question. "Mom, is Santa Claus real?"

She stood up quickly, bewildered. "That’s a strange..." she answered, "No."

"Just checking," Aiden said as he left.

*****

A Sunday morning meant Sunday service. Aiden refused to set his alarm. Face crammed into his pillow, he rolled his head as his mother parted the blinds. The window was open and the sirens and screams of morning traffic were already polluting the city. The orange sun was poking between several distant buildings. Aiden could see the peaks of the tallest towers parting clouds. Solar cells twisted like blossoms. On the horizon, a forest of smokestacks belched pollution to be carried by the wind out to the ocean. A helicopter caused a mild distraction as it passed by Aiden’s window.

Before Aiden had swallowed his morning yawn or flipped the crust from his eyes, his mother laid out the good clothes.

By the time his mother had returned, Aiden was still undressed, listening to the news broadcast from the screen in his bedroom. "Find out which food supplement is deadly, after the next break..." Aiden changed the channel. "Guilty is the verdict today in the murder of pop sensation..." Click.

"Get dressed, come on," his mother said.

"Just trying to find a channel while I change," Aiden pleaded.

"There’s nothing good on. All this news." She left and called out from the hall, "You’ve got five minutes." Another channel showed green grass and tall trees put to old music.

"Aiden!" Martin shouted, already dressed with his head poking through the doorway, "let’s go!"

*****

Aiden, Martin, and their mother took the UTR to church. On the train, Martin sat on the left of his mother, Aiden on the right. Martin watched a rerun on a portable flat-panel screen.

Aiden watched the train. Their mother’s left hand held a purse; her right played with Aiden’s hair.

The church of the Sacred Mary was a five-storey wooden A-frame as old as the city. No ration was given to parking and every curb was filled with a variety of electric vehicles.

Aiden’s mind wandered during the plodding repetitive mass. The priest was old with a comical lisp and mumbling words. Aiden ran grooves in the soft wood of the bench with his nails. A hand slap from Martin only discouraged Aiden for a short time. A prayer, a passage, and a Eucharist later, and Aiden was clear from his obligations for another week.

As they left the mass, Aiden pondered his day’s plans. Part of it involved his armor-clad digital warrior slashing through an improbable number of foes in an equally post-apocalyptic dungeon built illogically to geometric precision.

The three of them quickened their pace from the church doors to the sidewalk to catch the street lights before they changed. Aiden checked his watch. It ticked two minutes past 10:00.

An air siren jolted the crowd, the high pitch oscillation bouncing off buildings. People ran blindly into the streets, some to their vehicles. Martin’s instinct pulled Aiden and his mother close, wrenching them to the UTR tunnel entrance a block away. "Come on, let’s go! Hurry!"

The second sound was not a siren, not a helicopter. It was louder, not mechanical, from an empty sky. People followed with their own yells. The source of the sound revealed itself as a silhouette unfurled its wings to eclipse the sun.

Daggers of daylight broke through the holes in its leather wings. Talons as long and sharp as swords tore the church peak apart as it landed. Wood splintered, and a poorly carved soapstone Christ shattered upon the pavement. Twice the size of the church, the beast roared and spit a torrent of liquid fire across the sky. Aiden was unable to look away as his brother dragged him by the cuff. The creature’s black skin was drawn tight across its body. Its eyes like drops of cream in strong coffee. Its teeth were jagged and jumbled. Lips were too thin to close around its mouth.

"Zmey!" Aiden whispered. He was sure of it. He had pictured it larger and more pestilent. The stream of flame struck an approaching military helicopter. It melted the craft instantly. The vessel toppled to the ground as a forged chunk of glass and iron.

"Aiden! Come on!" his mother snapped.

The creature looked down at the scattering masses before it. Leaping from the church peak, it crushed a half-dozen of them underfoot. It snatched more from across the road, throwing them against the walls of nearby buildings.

Its rampage migrated down the street towards the crowd rushing to the safety of the UTR entrance. Martin held his younger brother’s collar, pulling vigorously, indifferent to the monster gaining ground. Aiden’s curiosity forced his gaze back.

If it was Zmey, why was it not dead? How much of that story was wrong?

"Is that Zmey, mom?" Aiden shouted.
"Shut up!" Martin snapped.
"Mom?!"
"Aiden, I’ll explain everything later!" she answered.

Her heel broke, and she fell to a knee behind her boys.

"Mom!" Martin shouted, turning quickly back. Aiden stopped as well, but his attention was still on the dragon. The more he stared at it, the more real it became; the less Aiden believed he was dreaming. Perhaps then he could be frightened of it.

Zmey’s claw came down in front of them. Martin fell back with a slash suffered on his arm. The concussion of air brought Aiden to his knees. Martin ignored his wound and clenched his fists. He closed his eyes waiting for his end.

Aiden could smell the putridness wafting from the dragon, felt the heat of the inferno brewing in its belly. A part of Aiden kept reminding him that this couldn’t happen. This was a normal world and a dragon can’t fly, can’t spew flames from its mouth. Aiden believed he would awaken, perhaps in his bed, perhaps in a pew.

As Aiden fell, he cut his hand on a shard of glass. The quickness of the pain pulled the air from his lungs. The numbness, the detachment that accompanies a dream, started to pass. Aiden began to notice what had happened, what was happening. People had been killed. Buildings had been destroyed. Crowds were fleeing. Aiden felt a cool sprinkle from a broken hydrant. He heard his brother wailing. Like a shock through this spine, Aiden saw the beast for what it was, the monster he should fear. It was real.

As Zmey’s brought its claw back up to claim another victim, the beast fell back from a tackle, tossed into the empty church. The cathedral collapsed from the weight of two monsters.

No one had seen the other beast slam into Zmey. Zmey’s opponent pulled away to plot another attack. The new arrival was longer with smaller wings. Its gold and blue scales broke light into colors. Long white whiskers flapped like gravity had no control of them. Each of its four arms ended in four ivory claws. The monster snaked in the air, and its jaws opened wide enough to swallow a car. Its forked tongue sparked a flame, but it only belowed. As the echo bounced off the buildings, lights within rooms went dark. The traffic signals went dead. Cars drifted to a stop.

The newcomer’s eyes were those of a man’s, soft blue and brilliant. Its body twisted around Aiden and Martin. It blocked them from harm as Zmey slashed with a bladed tail. The monster of gold and blue scales kept its defense and suffered a deep gash to its belly. In its counterattack, it leapt across the road and dug talons and teeth into decaying flesh. The creatures coiled around each other, but the black beast could not match the dexterity of its rival. A solid bite and its golden opponent had torn off an arm. Dark molasses dripped as blood from the wound. The black beast tore itself free from gripping claws, causing more damage as it took to the sky.

The one with golden scales swiveled its head to look at the boys. Its eyes were the same shape but the size of a child’s head. Aiden couldn’t help it. He raised his bloodied palm from the pavement and offered a feeble wave.

The dragon smirked back. It winked.

It twisted its form again and leapt back to the sky to chase down its opponent. It pursued the cripple around a distant building where Aiden lost sight of them. A dozen military fanjets slipped overhead to take up the chase.

Martin shouted Aiden’s name and repeated it until the syllables merged to a wail. Aiden’s attention drifted back to where the beast had come down. Aiden’s daze had begun to lift; his breathing quickened. Whatever lingering strength he had bled away, and Aiden felt a sharp tightness in his chest. His fingers began to tremble as he realized what had happened.

She was gone.

Martin crawled to his brother. He lost the strength to pull Aiden to him but refused to let go. He slumped to the ground.

Aiden turned his attention back to the sky while Martin cried.
The brothers had barely talked since the morning. Aiden sat on his bed with the opened Codex Dracontis on his lap.

Aiden ignored the clothes he was supposed to take. He rummaged in his coat pocket for his glasses. He curled them around his ears. He tried to ignore the stabbing pain from the stitches in his palms but couldn’t avoid the tension in his chest when he thought of his mother. When he thought about the dragon, about the questions he had, the weight would lift slightly.

Aiden had blisters over his lips and rings around his eyes from previous breaks in concentration. He sniffed and rubbed his nose as he frantically flipped through the pages.

Finding the entry for Zmey, he studied the sketch. There were differences. Its head was larger in proportion to its body in the drawing. Eyes were white, not black. Aiden was positive the book took inspiration from the real beast, which was then altered by the artist’s foggy recollection. Aiden slumped upon his bed and stared at it. He flipped through the other pages, other dragons, some with white feathers, others with silver scales. He searched for the one that saved him. Aiden glanced at the other books he had acquired, ones on elves, sorcerers, and sword wielding.

“What are you doing?” Martin asked from the doorframe, an empty suitcase under his arm.

Aiden looked up from the book. “I can’t find it.”

“What?” Martin responded, quickly and cold.

“The gold and blue dragon. He’s not here. It has Zmey but not the other.”

“Mom’s dead, Aiden.”

Aiden paused. His bottom lip quivered and this throat clenched. He didn’t want to cry in front of his brother. “I know…But…”

“Enough….” Martin whimpered. “Just leave it. Please…leave it. Pack and let’s go. People are waiting.” He left his brother alone, staring at the book. Both brothers had wanted to remain home, but Martin wasn’t old enough, and there was no one willing to stay with them. Cousins willing to take them in lived half way across the city, closer to the “crown.”

Martin lingered for a lie but couldn’t. “Not everything. Just that…this city…is all people like us have left.”

“And what’s past it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Has anyone left?” Aiden asked.

“No one leaves,” Martin replied. “They only try to get in.”

“Then someone knows. There are dragons.” Aiden reached for the book.

“They killed mom—”

“And saved us—”

“They took everything Aiden,” Martin snapped. “They took…everything we were and could ever be.”

“You never wanted to look?”

“Don’t have to.”

“Why not—”

“Aiden!” Martin shouted. “It’s not our world. She wanted you innocent. Everyone is…for a while. That’s over. I’ll make sure we stay together. It’s just us now.”

“But the other dragon!”

“Who cares?! It’s done! No more of this!” Martin stepped forward hastily to snatch away the book. Aiden instinctively clutched it to his chest. He grasped it tightly as his armor, tears rolling as he began to cry. Martin tried to wrest the tome from his brother’s grip. He shouted as he tried to separate book and boy. “Burn them all! They killed mom!”

Aiden curled fetal around the book. He stayed tightly wound in a bundle of clenched limbs. Martin pinned one leg on Aiden’s shoulder and pried an arm free, ripped the book from his brother’s hand. Martin was hurting Aiden; cries turned to yells.

Martin felt it had to be done, like tearing a bandage off or striking a disobedient child, the act of an adult. “It’s not a fantasy, Aiden! Grow up!” Martin stormed out of the room. “Two minutes! I’ll drag you if I have to!” Aiden could hear the sound of the kitchen garbage can opening and the loud thump as Martin dropped the book into it. Martin knew Aiden could just take it back from the trash, but Martin knew rules needed to be followed and he expected Aiden would respect that.

He didn’t.

Aiden waited until hearing the slam of his mother’s bedroom door down the hall before shuffling quickly to the kitchen to take back his book. Martin fell upon the queen mattress and began crying while Aiden stroked his fingers across the front cover of the codex, at the embossment, at the image of the dragon’s eye.

Aiden glanced across his arm to his watch. There were no cracks or scratches, no signs of impact damage. It had stopped three minutes past ten.

He opened the book again and noticed the stamp at the bottom of the inside cover. It was printed in two languages, English and Sinitic, but Aiden only knew a few of the Asian characters. The ink had faded. Aiden read the book’s origin: David Obatala Chen’s Biblio, 23C Huangxia Street, Genai.
A STORY

It's real.

It’s all real.

Amethyst is at its core a role playing game, one involving the clash of magic and technology. However, this conflict provides only the foundation from which many types of stories can emerge. In essence, the setting can be described as satire, with many of the assumptions of the fantasy genre open to critique or even ridicule. It can serve up to be allegorical, thoughtful, or just mindlessly entertaining.

The concept is simple: What would happen if a true-to-book fantasy setting was forced upon our real world? We read and watch stories speculating how society would react if that were to occur—and most of the time, society takes it rather well. In truth, there wouldn't be such a smooth transition as fantasy tropes affront modern society. There would be immediate repercussions, including social, political, religious, and philosophical. Would we welcome the world of fantasy into our lives or would we fear its very presence? For most, it would be the latter. Magic operates on its own terms, disobeys rules set by both nature and religion.

The future presented in this setting emerges from the world we know—a world where books and movies written about fantasy exist. Those that live in this new age saw firsthand what they had previously thought to be fiction. Some even rushed to embrace this new world, only to be devoured by the harsh realism that awaited them. They were not the architects of their own dreams. Nothing matched expectations. Even major religions had difficulty adapting to such massive shocks to their dogma.

And that wasn’t even the worst of it. On top of this social dilemma came the issue with disruption. Magic is a chaotic system that overwrites itself on reality, disrupting many of the normal rules of the universe that technology requires to operate. Although this interference doesn’t directly destroy life, it does retard the progress of civilization, preventing technology from operating beyond simple mechanisms like windmills and bicycles. Where magic is prohibited, normality returns and technological advancement can continue. Those creatures born from magic have little choice on the matter, but those consequential to evolution can still choose which world to live in.

What remains of our previous society and its technology survive in cities resembling those of memory, though walled in against the encroaching magic around it. Inside are cars, central heating, refrigerators, and all the other conveniences of modern life. Outside, there be dragons. The fantasy world may be wondrous, but it is also real. People die from the simplest calamities. Monsters prey on the innocent and unarmed. Empires have risen, and in many situations, are controlled by new races claiming a foothold in a world previously dominated by a single species.

Will mankind be able to retake the planet and push the fantasy back into the realms of our imagination, able to resume our blind passion for consumerism and industrialization? Will religion be allowed once again to define miracles? Or is this world better than the one mankind squandered?

Meanwhile, outside of these bastions of technology is a complex mythology with its own conflict, where the fantasy world is divided between two opposing forces. Magic is not a singular energy but a complex power emerging from two metaphysically contrasting sources, the white star of Attriana and the black gate of Ixindar. The main axis between evil and good is not one where the law-abiding, civilized nations of good battle against the destructive force of chaos, but where the chaotic tendencies of life clash with the controlled and methodical might of syrnpoty. The conflict sets anarchy against order, uniformity against unpredictability, and determinism against free-will. Where life needs a level of uncertainty to blossom, homogeny leads only to death. The fantasy world is not some singular entity, but a complicated, multi-layered world of warring nations, political strife, and monsters clever and powerful, as well as dumb and many.

AMETHYST EVOLVES

Cities collapse, heroes rise, and the future falls into the hands of a few. The world alters, grows, and plummets into shadow. These heroes encounter their greatest fears and challenge true evil in all forms. They find depth in an easy situation, complexity in a single idea. A world that changes around a band of adventurers. A setting with a point and a climax. A world where an ending waits. Solve it and discover the truth. Fail and the planet crumbles underneath.

The setting of Amethyst relies on the clash between magic and technology. Many fantasy worlds blend the two, usually with magic gaining the foothold and technology falling behind. Amethyst presents a world where the two sides stand almost at war and—from a metaphysical point of view—actively disrupt each other’s existence. This is not to say that individuals from both sides cannot coexist: it is the differences between people that make them stronger when together. Although an individual might not be able to wield both a spellbook and a gun, this does not extend to the limits of the group. Perhaps, despite growing tensions and mounting enmity, a balance between the two worlds can be found.
Player characters in *Amethyst* are neither sitting on the sidelines nor are they following braver and more powerful leaders into glory: they are meant to change the world. They do not dig ditches or hand out food while armies march into combat, but command legions, infiltrate empires, save princesses and slay kings. The end of the game should be different from the beginning. Of course, a player can claim a kingdom after vanquishing his enemies, but the real journey takes one’s soul across the world, to meet one’s final destiny after a very long crusade. A GM is encouraged to plan out her strategy for the game—whether the characters will travel to their final destinies in Canam (the continent described herein) or only progress part of the way before tackling the next chapter in a foreign land.

**THE HISTORY**

The history of the world begins with the conundrum of the chicken and the egg.

Millions of years ago, a fracture occurred in the fabric of space and time. It exhibited traits that were scientifically measurable, yet broke many acceptable rules regarding electromagnetism, gravity, and quantum mechanics. Scientists later deduced that this rip, called Attricana in the previous era, was a bridge between two universes. The alternate side contained a cosmos with rules of science abnormal to our own. As this universe spilled into ours, the conflict of two orders of nature encouraged aberrations upon the Earth, impossible until that point.

But what opened the gate?

*Amethyst* is a modern name given to a dragon from this age—the first creature of fantasy born upon the Earth. Legends also maintain Amethyst was the architect of the gate’s creation. But if Amethyst created the gate, then what created Amethyst? Creatures born from magic require it to survive. If Amethyst came before, then he would be the single exception to this rule. Some historians believe he is not a dragon at all but something else.

Some proclaim him a god, but gods cannot die.

For millions of years, before Earth was called Earth, the denizens of the planet referred to it as Terros—a land of magic and wonder spared from the wrath of malevolence. Dragons flew overhead while fae creatures scurried below. Attricana encouraged life in every possible form. Monsters did emerge but never with the coordination to form a civilization.

Meanwhile, the elder races were witnessing a slow degradation of enlightenment. The fae were not evolving but degenerating. Their descendants were begetting feral beasts. At the bottom of this inverted tree were uncultured boggs, violent skeggs, and veracious

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**GLOSSARY**

_After Enchantment (A.E.)._ The progress of time in this new era. The game begins for many in the year 508 A.E., just a little over five-hundred years from when the white gate reopened. Note that many communities retain their own system of reckoning, and there is no consistent calendar accepted by all.

_Arkonnia._ The region occupied by the continent of Africa and the Arabian peninsula in old Earth.

_Amethyst._ The first intelligence to emerge on Earth, Amethyst was a powerful dragon-god whose death ended the time of magic millions of years before man.

_Anathema._ Devolved fae, most of limited intelligence, generally regarded as monsters by all civilized folk.

_Attricana._ The term given to the enchanted realm existing beyond the white gate. It hovers between the Earth and Moon and is bright enough to read by at night.

_Bastions._ Sanctuaries of men and machines. These are technological enclaves heavily fortified and densely populated. Most are echophobic and forbid the use of magic within their walls. Each bastion stands as its own country, with very little to no contact with either the outside world or other bastions.

_Blinder._ A common derogative nickname mages and other magically imbued individuals call techans.

_Canam._ The continent previously occupied by Canada, the USA, and Mexico. Mostly pristine wilderness, with a number of large kingdoms and free houses loosely connected by a few well-maintained roads.

_Chaparran._ One of the oldest species of fae, who inhabit the woods and wild places of the world and are known as peerless archers.

_Corpus Continuity._ This is the belief, mostly spiritually-based, that the humanoid form shared by humans and fae descends from a common origin. While some claim it relates to echalogical influence—that humans look humanoid because of a lingering echo from the fantasy age—others claim a divine origin.

_Damaskan._ A younger branch of the fae, dedicated to the accumulation and preservation of knowledge and the principles of settled civilization.

_Disruption._ This is magic’s capacity to disrupt the laws of nature that technology requires to function. This process only occurs in one direction—technology cannot disrupt magic. The entire planet is covered in a disruption field (see EDF), though the risk of disruption is not uniform, meaning certain areas have a higher rate of disruption that others. Disruption is at its minimum within bastions.

_Echa._ The slang term for magic or ‘enchantment’. It often refers to visual use of magic as well as being used as a blanket term for the fantasy world. Someone touched by magic or using magic is commonly called ‘echan,’ although this term mostly refers to humans specifically embracing the path of enchantment, and occasionally to fae. Some still consider this ugly bastardization of ‘enchantment’ derogatory, but it is now too widespread to do anything about.
and swarming puggs. The chaparrans hid in their forests. The laudenians took to the sky. Damaskans recorded knowledge and history. Narros defended the cities. This left the gimfen to ignore such concerns and remain forever at play, remaining innocent against the encroaching violence.

Whether or not this could have endured would never be known.

The residents of Terros never questioned the origin of Amethyst. He was the greatest and wisest of them. They called him a god. They called him an avatar. He was connected to Attricana more intimately than any other entity. Many thought this would last forever.

This changed when Ixindar arrived.

Unlike Attricana, records on the black gate’s arrival are detailed. It drifted over the planet, sweeping across the night. From it spilled the corruption of order. If Attricana was a wellspring from a chaotic universe (perhaps one in the founding minutes of its creation), then Ixindar was the fountainhead of syntropy. It led to a realm of perfect harmony, perhaps to a cosmos of death and tranquility—a universe in its final moments. This gate had its own avatar, its own god to warrant worship. This was Mengus, a disembodied entity that whispered corruption without creating anything on its own. In one night, Ixindar had distorted a million fae to follow it. Servants gathered at the place where Ixindar came to rest, a spreading expanse of black glass later dubbed Kakodomania.

The noble forces of chaos had difficulty forming an army while their opponents quickly expanded and reproduced into battle lines. Within a thousand years, war had torn the planet apart. It would be several millennia before both sides realized mutual attrition was the only possible outcome. But elements from beyond would prevent this ultimate fate.

Mankind knew this incident at the K-T Extinction event—when a ten kilometer bolide impact off the Yucatan Peninsula created the 180 kilometer Chicxulub crater, wiping out the vast majority of plant and animal life on the planet.

The fae called it the Hammer of God.

Both sides of fantasy separately sought refuge on the other side of their gates, within dream realms formed by those gate’s avatars. Mengus faked complicity in order to ambush Amethyst when isolated, believing Ixindar would survive the calamity to come.

Amethyst found himself surrounded by the soldiers of order. The general of this army, a construct known only as Gebermach, inflicted the killing blow, driving the dark sword Dogurasu into Amethyst’s heart.

In his reprisal, Amethyst sacrificed his physical body. The resulting eruption of chaos wiped out the
armies of Mengus and shattered the sky above them. A single beam of light from the gate before its closing drove Ixindar deep underground, sealing it under impenetrable stone. Attricana closed upon Amethyst’s death. All remaining constructs and creations of magic fell to dust. All evidence was washed away. Earth belonged to no one.

With nothing to compete with, the principles of our universe regained control. The natural order of evolution took root, leading eventually into mankind. Through his history, humanity told stories they could not possibly know, about mythical monsters and warring gods. These tales came from the whimsy of imagination but all carried a portion of truth, some more than others.

These stories became myths, books and religions. This influence from a time no human had seen carried onto crests, flags, and banners. Their origins were explained, connected to other stories and fables. Some were tied to science—seeing a manatee and believing it a mermaid. Fantasies remained locked in the dreams of those living in a real world. Pushed aside as fancy, mankind continued his evolutionary drive to build, understand, and conquer. Society advanced as did the machines in servitude. Gaining a full understanding of science in all its unchanging rules, there was nothing man could not achieve given enough time.

History unfortunately would repeat itself.

A second bolide impact occurred, this time directly over Ixindar. To this day, no one knows the cause, as there was no warning before impact. It was a smaller event compared to the last but enough to reveal Ixindar to the world. The forces of synropy emerged and corruption followed.

The following events are muddled. Ixindar opened, and some indeterminate time later, Attricana followed—but did Attricana’s first stirrings perhaps provoke Ixindar’s re-emergence, or was some mechanism in place to open the white gate if Ixindar were ever exposed? By the time of the white gate’s reappearance, mankind had already been reduced to less than a tenth of its peak population, though whether due to disasters born in the wake of the Second Hammer or through wars over resources or ideologies is uncertain.

Mankind did not have the luxury of philosophy. He was fighting a losing battle on two fronts, from order and from chaos. To make the situation more desperate, the technology humanity had been relying on for hundreds of years had begun to fail. From the fountain of Attricana flowed rules of nature antithetical to the science machines required to function. The more advanced the technology, the greater the chance of disruption. Surviving humans had to make a choice: wall themselves in from the flood of encroaching enchant-

GLOSSARY (Cont.)

**Echagensics / Echalogy.** The study in both echan and tehcan cultures of the similarities between humanity and its recorded history against the fae, dragons and their recorded history. This analyzes the obvious physical similarities between fae and man in conjunction with historical coincidences in their religions, legends, and mythologies. Theologians studying echalogy are referred to as echalogians.

**Enchanted Disruption Field (EDF).** The enchantment disruption field prevents radio communication beyond a few miles, inhibits electrical conductivity and disrupts electronic circuits like an electromagnetic pulse when extremely powerful magic is nearby. It also has the tendency of jamming mechanical devices above a certain complexity (the limit of which varies based on the strength of the field). While most early industrial-age technology up to (approximately) the level of the steam engine is usually safe from disruption, anything that relies on moving parts or electrical current (no matter how minor) can be affected with sufficient exposure.

**Echalogical Influence.** The belief that the history of the fae and dragons inspired human fiction through an immesurable, unproven, undetectable echo which somehow resonated through sixty million years of evolution until minds advanced enough to understand that echo listened.

**Fae.** A catchall term for the several humanoid species which inhabited the Terros age alongside dragons millions of years ago, and reappeared in the modern age with the reopening of Attricana. As creatures of magic, they are antithetical to the technological societies of Mankind.

**First Hammer.** The first impact that destroyed the dinosaurs and ended the first reign of magic. It initiated the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event.

**Glimfen.** The youngest branch of the civilized fae, and the only ones who can handle technology without risk of disruption.

**Inosi.** The region of Earth previously referred to as the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia.

**Indoauas.** The region of land previously occupied by Australia and Indonesia.

**Ixindar.** The name given to the realm existing through the black gate. The gate is across the world, sitting half buried at the center of Kakodomania.

**Kaddog.** The general term for the three most common branches of damaskan anathomia (and the most prolific monster species in Canam): puggs, boggs, and skeggs.

**Kakodomania.** A smooth obsidian glass which spreads radially from Ixindar. This realm envelops most of central Slav in permanent darkness.

**Kodisk.** Intelligent, bipedal grizzly bears native to northern Canam.

**Laudenian.** The oldest branch of modern fae and the most magical, who fled from contact with the ground for fear of devolving into lesser beings.
ment, or settle for a primitive life surrounded by the wonders of fantasies they once could only read in fiction.

Five hundred years later, the humans that clove to their machines have built immense cities of technology. These bastions are the last bulwarks of a time these men and woman refuse to surrender, a world run by science where mankind held dominion. Some of these cities have grown to the size of small countries. Outside the bastions live the empires and wastelands of fantasy. Dragons and elves have returned to lay claim to the mountains, forests and fields. Monsters hide in dungeons and prowl in murky forests. The wilderness has become dangerous but at the same time all the more romantic. Magic will always be a lure to those willing to wield it.

Order versus chaos, science versus magic; these conflicts make fanatics of everyone. An unspoken stalemate has arisen, with none gaining the upper hand. This may change with the proof of a once forgotten legend. When Gebermach slew Amethyst, the dragon’s crest of stone fell upon the ground and shattered. For millions of years, the fragments drifted to the far corners of the world. Now, one has been found, and the crusade to find the others has begun. The legend claims that if the pieces of Amethyst’s crown are brought together at the place of his death, one could call the god back to life, or take the mantle of command from him. With such a power, one could resurrect the most powerful creature to walk the Earth, or close the gate of magic forever. Who will find these artifacts?

Who will emerge victorious?

And, ultimately, will it be worth the cost?

**THE CONFLICT**

The world is not engulfed in war, but widespread peace across the land is still a distant dream. Not only are the remaining bastions of pre-Hammer mankind fighting a desperate and seemingly hopeless struggle against encroaching enchantment, but the individual bastions themselves are also paranoid about their own technological sovereignty over rival bastions.

Further, the world of fantasy is not all of wonder. There are two realms of magic, flowing from two different breaches into our normal universe: the white gate of Attricana floating high above the sky, and the black gate of Ixindar half-buried in rock in the land of Kakodomania. Their influence and the armies loyal to them provoke conflicts whenever both sides meet. While Attricana encourages creation and chaos, Ixindar promotes order and syntropy. While many people directly involved in this conflict do so from an obsessive desire to protect their ways of life, others have been tempted to cross over, embracing an alternative way of thinking.

**MAGIC AND FAITH**

In *Amethyst*, there are only three ways magic can be focused, and thus, at least partially, controlled:

- **The Language of Dragons.** Wizards utilize a script and dialect naturally imbued with magic. This language is called Pleroma—created by Amethyst and fluent only to his kin, other dragons. It is the power of creating something by naming it. Despite using Pleroma, wizards cannot claim complete mastery. The language is unique in that no magic can decipher it, probably as the script extends itself into multiple dimensions.

- **Magical Reactivity.** There are thousands of elements and combinations of elements that produce different magical results. The practices of alchemy and metallurgy have returned. Those with such knowledge forge items of enchantment by simply being aware of the exacting ratios of components required. Fae iron, coruthil, and angelite are such examples as well as the myriad forms of magical potions. Nearly every magic item features this to a degree.

- **Inborn Magic.** Fae beings and monsters are magical by their very nature, even if they cannot consciously wield magical forces. Some, be they fae, monster, or even human, possess magical abilities on their own from birth. A few claim this power as divine, but many others refute that. Just as it was with man’s time, god or gods are as silent as he, she, or they always were. There are no proven sanctified or blessed users of magic in a world with silent and unproven gods. Still, the rare priest or druid often finds no other reasonable explanation.

Religion does exist in *Amethyst*. Most are old—dating back through humanity’s history—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and the like. Others are derived, updated, or reconstructed from the memories of the fae. Still others blend disparate elements as it suits their practitioners.

Every faith can claim to possess one or two folk supposedly blessed with the spark of divinity. There are also those with no faith able to wield magic purely from a natural endowment they cannot explain. Others know very well where their power originates and understand there is no intelligence or deification beyond said gift. Because of this doubt, there is still no proof of God or gods in *Amethyst*, despite the claims of many who believe.
REAL MAGIC

Despite appearances, the world of *Amethyst* is a low-magic setting; powerful spells are rare and obtained only at great cost and difficulty; major magical items are just as rare and hardly ever can be found outside the hands of the great and powerful; true artifacts are the stuff of legends, and most are completely mythical.

All magic, whatever its supposed provenance, comes from the gates, but spell casting techniques are unique depending on the caster. Those who claim to have a spark of the divine, called either gneolistics or vivicators, gain their power directly from Attricana. Whether this power is granted to them by some unknowable intelligence, drawn into their soul by the power of their belief, or merely a quirk of birth is unknown. Druids and shamans also obtain their power from the gate, though not directly. They receive their abilities from a conduit, the Earth. They worship nature and the world around. In their belief, the world channels the power from the gate and casters gain their power from below, not from above. Shamans harness the wind, earth, fire, and water as well as the animals and plants around them, shaping and controlling them as they wish.

Mages disregard channeling and mysticism, approaching the gate with an almost scientific eye. They claim while others blind themselves to the mysteries of the gate, mages dive head first, taunting the cosmos to reveal its darkest secrets. Long before man or even elves, the first power from the gates was channeled through the immense capacity of the draconic language, Pleroma. This practice continues today and remains the most popular form of spell casting. Only with lifelong persistence and an innate gift for understanding such intricate mysteries can the extremely few channel anything more than cantrips.

REQUIRED TO PLAY

*Amethyst: Quintessence* is a pen and paper role playing game utilizing the 5th edition (5E) of the first fantasy roleplaying game, the defining RPG of the last, current, and most likely next generation. The core books of that edition are required. This book was crafted utilizing those core 5E books and no others, as to not make the required list longer than needed.

Oh, and dice to. Totally need dice, all the standard polyhedrons. And pencils and paper.

Although numerous rules are referenced from these core books, none are reprinted or defined. A few rules (specifically referencing firearms) are expanded upon, but the original 5E rules are not altered. This book creates original material within the same rules structure while also attempting to honor the original game’s philosophy.

GLOSSARY (Cont.)

**Laurops.** The term given to the region covering the lands of Europe west of the former Ural mountains. Consists mostly of neo-feudal kingdoms, with the fae empire of Damaska occupying most of the central landmass.

**Mengus.** The disembodied intelligence that resides within Ixindar, whispering corruption to any creature disposed to hear her. The most implacable enemy of Amethyst.

**Narros.** The middle fae, short and stocky, dwelling primarily underground and obsessed with tradition and perfection.

**Pagus.** Corrupted fae of ages past who answered the call of Ixindar and were transformed into huge, brutally effective warriors.

**Second Hammer.** The second impact that destroyed the technological empire of man. It struck Siberia, exactly where Ixindar lay buried and exposed its influence to the world.

**Shemja.** The proper term for the fae-like creatures known by humans as ‘demons,’ the ultimate servants of Ixindar. Although all look practically identical, each shemja is designed for a particular purpose.

**Slav.** Often separated into Western and Eastern Slav, this region on Earth covers the majority of China and the entire former Eurasian region east of the Ural. Rendered mostly uninhabitable by the Second Hammer and the subsequent spread of Kakodomania, most of the survivors of the eastern region migrated to Canam centuries ago.

**Southam.** The region of Earth formerly known as South America. Consists mostly of feeding underground kingdoms, and rainforests populated by ogres who hunt primitive humans for food and sport.

**Syntropy.** The principle of infinite static existence, embodied in the power of Ixindar. It is the antithesis of positive magic, and indeed, of the fundamental principles of life itself.

**Techa.** The slang term given to the technology of man and is usually reserved for the bastions and their machines. Its wielders use the title 'techan' as a badge of honor.

**Terros.** The era before man, from when the dragons and fae appeared until their disappearance 65 million years ago.

**Tenenbri.** Blind, but hardly handicapped cousins of the damaskans, masters of an underground theocratic empire beneath the mountains of Southam.

**Tilen.** Another cursed fae line whose ancestors embraced the power of Ixindar to transform themselves into free-willed undead. Their modern descendants, freed by Attricana’s resurgence, struggle against the urges of their blood and fight for the survival of their species.

**U.C. (Universal Credits).** A currency that most bastions and wandering techans trade in. Only techans accept and use uc. Unlike fantasy currency like gold and silver coins, uc has no face value.
However, there are exclusions, specifically in reference to established setting elements presented within the 5E core books. As *Amethyst* is a different world in a different time, no setting elements from the 5E world will be found here unless stated otherwise. Notable examples include the races and many of the monsters.

**A QUINTESSENTIAL TIME**

The story of *Amethyst* involves a group of heroes from hopefully different nations, ideologies, and traditions, banding together to affect a permanent change to the world—a change which depends on said group’s motivations. Despite some assumptions, this setting does not presuppose a certain party composition or motivation. It might not be about fantasy heroes fighting against the encroachment of technology or embracers of technology fighting against the chaos of magic; it may actually involve a mixed party reaching a compromise in order to fight a greater threat. This book (and other iterations for other systems) directly encourages romantic entanglements which can cross race, tradition, gender, and (new to this world) magical boundaries.

*Amethyst* deals less with the past and more about the present—about how the world is today. As such, very little is mentioned about the events which brought the world to this point: for most people living in the world, this information is either unavailable or, more likely, irrelevant. Even a character’s history may be vague, pointing more to motivation than a detailed list of exploits and an itinerary of locations. At the beginning of this story, characters may not be unique or special in any way. No gods have smiled upon them and no prophecies have spoken their names. Their importance emerges from their actions as the game begins.

*Amethyst* also involves a story where the world eventually focuses upon the quest the players are undertaking, eventually leading into clashing armies and world-changing events. Humble origins may lead to legendary titles.

**BACKGROUNDs**

Backgrounds function exactly as they do in official 5E licensed products. However, the ones presented here are more specific. Instead of three or four tables, *Amethyst* offers only one, but expands on it to create hooks in which to hang an expanded backstory and personal motivation. *Amethyst* backgrounds are often location or race specific and many list prerequisites. Unlike races, players are still open to select any backgrounds from official 5E license products as long as no specific setting is mandatory. Additionally, *Amethyst* also introduces background-based feats.

**CLASSES & ARCHETYPES**

*Amethyst* endorses many of the traditional fantasy classes one would expect to find, though some require conditions to be included. Others are expanded with new archetypes based on aspects of the setting. Specifically the fighter and rogue have numerous additional options.

In addition to these are ten new modern—or techan-based classes. These classes are not magical and often require technology to fully take advantage of their abilities. Unlike traditional classes, all techan classes list archetypes abilities at the same levels; techan archetypes are universal—they are not bound to one specific class, meaning you can pair any techan archetype with any techan class. There are more than twenty techan archetypes.

**EQUIPMENT**

*Amethyst* offers dozens of different weapons, armors, and general items across every level of technology. Tech levels denote how advanced an item is as well as its susceptibility to magical disruption. Unlike other core editions of *Amethyst*, in *Quintessence*, Tech Levels do not always equate magical bonuses. The firearm rules presented are an expansion of the basic ones listed in official 5E licensed products.

**MONSTERS**

Although many of the traditional mythological monsters are still present, many of the others have been replaced. The simple rule is if any creature can form a community with other similar creatures, they wouldn’t be found in canon *Amethyst*. These races have been replaced, kobolds with pugs, goblins with boggs, and so on. Additionally, *Amethyst* offers its own flavor of dragons. Other new opponents include techan mercenaries and robots.

**SKILLS & PROFICIENCIES**

**INTELLIGENCE (COMPUEER USE)**

Knowing where the “on” switch is and understanding a point/click interface is a common skill expected of everyone. Computer Use specifically covers more advanced concepts like hardware modification, upgrade, and maintenance. Computer Use is also employed in
the researching of online materials. You can attempt the repair or modification of a computer, circumvent security, or use it to replace Intelligence (Investigation) when researching a subject.

INTELLIGENCE (DEMOLITIONS)
If proficient in demolitions, you can set and disarm explosives. This includes the planting of all manners of mechanical and electronic detonators. A successful check lets you place explosives to best effect and set or disarm detonators. Failure means that the explosive fails to go off as planned. The explosives are not lost. Failure by 10 or more means the explosive might go off (if it is an explosive that can) as the detonator is being installed. A failure with wiring explosives together means the extra wired explosives will not go off with the primary (See Equipment).

INTELLIGENCE (ENGINEERING)
This is the broad skill dealing with all applications of technology, allowing you to craft, modify, and repair devices. These include electronics, general machines, exo-armor, techan armor, techan weapons, and vehicles.

Crafting: Crafting technology deviates slightly from crafting mundane items. Not only are you required to be proficient in Intelligence (Engineering), but you also must possess the appropriate Engineering kit. If so, then you can expend 5 uc in widgets each day until you reach the market value of the item (this is called a build schedule). You must have widgets or parts on hand. Alternately, you can attempt to make an Intelligence (Engineering) check—the result -15 is how many uc you progress instead of taking the normal 5 uc each day.

The tech level of your engineering kit affects the speed of your build. If the tech level of the kit matches the item you are building, the build schedule remains 1 day for each widget investment. If the tech level of the kit is lower, add the difference to the number of days to your build schedule (if the item is TL 5 and you only have a TL 1 kit, it takes 4 extra days, 5 total, before you can expend more uc). If your engineering kit is more advanced, the difference is added to the uc you can expend on that day (if the kit is TL 5 and you are building a TL 1 item, you expend 4 more uc that day). You cannot build other kits or medical injections.

Disarm Electronic Locks: When attempting to disarm a trap or break through a lock using an Engineering tool kit, you can use Intelligence (Engineering) granted you have a tool kit of at least equal tech level of the device you are trying to affect.

Recover Hit Points: You can take a day of downtime and make an Intelligence (Engineering) to recover the hit points of damaged items or vehicles. The number of hit points recovered is equal to the result of your skill check -10.

This value can be adjusted with an appropriate engineering kit. If the kit is more advanced than the item being repairs, add the difference to the hit points recovered. If the other way around, the recovered hit points is reduced (if repairing a TL2 item with a TL4 kit, you gain a +2 bonus to the hit points recovered—if reversed, it becomes a -2 penalty).

The repair cost in widgets for each day is equal the number of hit points recovered x 5.

Reverse Engineer: You can use the Intelligence (Engineering) skill to convert found technology into widgets to be used in the creation of other technology. Each attempt to reverse engineer an item takes six hours. Reverse engineering destroys the item being selected. The end result is you acquire one-fifth of the item’s value in widgets.

Sabotage: You can use Intelligence (Engineering) skill to sabotage devices and vehicles. With this technique, you can inflict effects instantly or when certain conditions occur.

You can only attempt sabotage against a target which you can disrupt or incapacitate logically. The GM can refuse a sabotage attempt if you have no way of accessing vital components in the target. The GM may also require you to spend time gaining access to said components.

There are hundreds of different effects you can accomplish with sabotage. Effects last until the effect is repaired unless stated otherwise. Effects can be repaired by a contested Intelligence (Engineering) check or with specific solutions to each problem (breaking open a door instead of fixing the sabotage).

INTELLIGENCE (SCIENCES)
This is the general study of the applications of the unaltered rules that govern the real world. It deals with broad studies like Biology, Astronomy, and Geography and into further specific fields of expertise like Biochemistry and Astrophysics. Given enough dedication, you could earn grants and degrees, specializing in a field of study to better your species and the natural world. Being a top mind of the profession could enable you to unravel a genome or to design and build your own superconducting supercollider. This skill also allows the study of the differentiation between the ironclad laws of science and the malleable rules of magic.

You do not have to specify a field of expertise. This skill refers to a general knowledge of science. You use this skill for general scientific observations and to discern if an effect could be natural or magical. This is not a techan skill, but certain applications of it may only be available to teehans.
INTELLIGENCE
(REGIONAL HISTORY)
Regional History is a subset of Intelligence (History). You have proficiency when making checks in context of specific areas of the world: when dealing with immediately neighboring regions (or those with which your home region has extensive dealings), you add half your proficiency bonus.

- Abidan, Apocrypha, and Ažhi Dahaka
- Alpinas, Dagron, Seliquam, Quinox and Selkirk
- Angel, Crax, Dannahmoak, Torquil, and Xixion
- Baruch Malkut, Laurama, and Tranquiss
- Fargon
- Gniffall, Mann, and York
- Kannos, the Finer Fire Pits, and Salvabrooke
- Laudenia
- Limshau, Orchis, Plicato, and Skyrose
- Sierra Madre, the Gloam

VEHICLE PROFICIENCY
If proficient with a vehicle, you know how to drive or pilot said vehicle and any situation. There are five types of vehicle proficiency—light ground, heavy ground, super-heavy ground, and aircraft, and watercraft. If possessing one, you know how to control all vehicles of that type. If you ride one bike, you can ride them all. Although not entirely accurate given the broad range of technology seen across the world, this is a compromise to prevent clutter.

Routine tasks such as ordinary driving don’t require a check. You only make a check when experiencing unusual circumstances (such as stormy weather or a slippery surface), performing a stunt, driving at high speeds, or if trying to operate a vehicle while being attacked or attacking.

If you fail a Dexterity check with a vehicle, you must suffer the consequences. This can include a second change to recover, a slide, or a crash. Some stunts are easy, and they neither require a skill check nor have consequences.

If you are crashing, you often lose control of your vehicle and cannot perform any checks involving your vehicle until the crash is resolved. In most crashes, you continue your remaining movement in the direction you were previously pointed. In others (like catastrophic jumps), you immediately stop your movement.

See Vehicle Rules in the Equipment chapter for detailed rules on vehicles and how they are controlled.

NEW FEATS
Amethyst also presents a handful of new feats. There are additional ones listed under specific races as well.

**EXO-ARMOR PROFICIENCY**
- Increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with techan exo-armor.

**CROSSFIRE**
- Increase your Dexterity or Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Any ability you have requiring an ally within 5-feet of an enemy is now extended to any ally with a firearm within 20 feet of an enemy.

**FIDGETY FINGERS**
- Increase your Intelligence or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- When crafting technology, the UC you can expend per day (or longer with a mismatched engineering kit) is doubled.

**NATURALLY ECHAN DEFIANT**
- Increase any ability score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on all disruption saving throws.
- The first time after a long rest that you suffer disruption, the targeted technology instantly recovers.

**FIREARM EXPERTISE**
- Increase your ranged attack ability score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You can reload one clip, magazine, or cell using fifteen feet of unspent movement.
- Before making a ranged attack with a firearm that you are proficient with, you can choose to take a -5 penalty to the attack roll. If the attack hits, you add +10 to the attack’s damage.

Experts in dressing death had reconstructed what was left of her body. They placed a plastic smile on her face. The waxy finish of the skin convinced Aiden this was less his mother and more an imitation. Friends of his father, military veterans, brought the closed casket up. Father Tom, like the church, was new. One by one, friends neither he nor Martin knew offered hands and hugs. The mass was long with prayer passages reminding the mournful of god’s grand purpose. Aiden ignored them. He never paid attention during regular mass; the words felt equally hollow now. Aiden hoped the blue eyed and golden scaled dragon would rip off the roof and whisk him to a new life. The church’s packed capacity marched to the casket, touching, praying, crying.

Aiden was relieved to see the afternoon light as he
Aiden followed the pallbearers out of the church. Martin offered tears for each weeper and wailer walking by. Aiden nodded and hugged but remained dry save an occasional sniff. More words of divinity leapt from a priest’s lips as the casket slipped through the open maw of the marble wall at the necropolis.

Aiden looked scornful at the cross at the entrance. He wondered if God was real as well. An omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient being, benevolent and divine? Then why was she dead? Did the dragon break the rules? No creature shaped like that could fly; yet it did. No animal could breathe fire, yet it did. They couldn’t exist, but there they were.

Father Tom’s words, though carefully chosen, were no more uplifting than the compassionate whispers of distant family members.

“Men pale in the wisdom of God,” he said to Aiden. “Not even I can understand why things happen when they happen. There is a reason for everything. God has placed you on a path; there is something to learn from this. Even the worst of times are intended, by his will, to guide us. Occasionally, his hand must be firm. In times like this, our faith in his plan must remain strong.”

“She was killed by a dragon, father.” Aiden emphasized dragon as much as killed. Father Tom didn’t say much after that.

As they exited the mausoleum, Aiden glanced at the wall, the periphery of the city. The monstrosity stood twenty stories and toppled with battlements. It enclosed all ten thousand square kilometers of the city. It was only the latest iteration, with monuments of previous walls counted like tree rings to mark age and expansion. The last one was the tallest, the longest to build, and the most resolute in keeping everything that wasn’t in, out. Aiden heard people calling it the crown. Years ago, when Aiden asked Martin what was beyond the wall, his brother had said, “Nothing you should care about.”

He’d lied.

Aiden wished he had asked his mother. He wished he had discovered the truth by her telling him, by closing the codex and whispering, “It’s all real.” He should have followed what Leach had suggested and just asked her. Aiden wished that if the cost was to be that great, he would’ve preferred ignorance a few more years. Wishes kept Aiden a child. Wishes separated Aiden from his brother. Wishes were magical and romantic and had a peculiar tendency of coming true. Aiden wished his mother would come back, but that could never happen.

* * *

After a week, Aiden was back in class. The students kept their distance, even William. Lara was the only one that attempted to console him, offering a hug and asking how he was. No one else bothered, keeping a wide berth as the orphan passed them. To acknowledge his loss would be to admit that it occurred, that something abnormal could happen in an ordinary world. Were all the victims that day as disregarded? If only it had been cancer like Aiden’s father, something average, common, and predictable. Lara offered him a half sandwich at lunch.

Martin sat with Aiden on the UTR. Such a wonder was lost on Aiden. He wanted to open a book and read but was afraid of Martin’s reaction. Aiden just leaned forward, feeling the breeze across his face. He didn’t close his eyes and imagine a dragon. He thought of when his imagination was all that was required.

What about magic and Elisa the elvish princess? Aiden pondered what other fictions could invade his life. Martin reached over and began to coddle his brother’s hair.

* * *

It was a week before Aiden could sneak out of his new house. He waited until everyone had settled. Their house was cast in an early night as the sun dropped behind the crown. Past 10:30 pm, Aiden saw the crack of light peeking under the bottom of the bedroom door go dark. He heard his relatives conclude their evening bathroom rituals. The opposite bed was empty; Martin was hanging with friends that weekend, drinking and forgetting his problems. Their guardians offered him a wide berth. He would have taken it either way. Aiden knew Martin was doubtful to return for several hours, if at all, until morning.

The UTR station was a two-block walk. The few coins in his pocket would get him to Genai. The navigation screens were easy. The ride was forty minutes in an empty car. Each time the train stopped, Aiden leaned out to see if anyone was boarding. He tapped his feet uneasily, waiting for the seconds to pass before the doors closed. Just as Aiden’s imagination had turned the train into a serpent, it was now unwillingly generating various subway denizens, none of them terribly friendly. The doors closed and shuffled Aiden to the next station, where he had to change lines, forcing a five minute wait alone on the platform. His head twitched in the direction of every little snap or pop. Distant laughs from drunken teens faded as they diverted down another street.

The next train contained a single passenger, an elderly olive-skinned man that stared incessantly at Aiden. Aiden looked up occasionally, wondering who would break the silence. Neither did. Aiden disembarked twenty minutes later.

He finally stopped at the concrete barricade that sealed Genai from the rest of the city. Every road had a gate any card-carrying member of the city could cross. Pedestrian walkways were seldom watched with turnstiles installed to monitor traffic. Aiden wondered if the gates were meant to keep out or in. He dodged under the ratchet bar as there was no guard on hand to prevent him.
CHAPTER TWO: GENESIS
Earth remains a crowded place. Millions of humans survived the holocaust they may or may not have brought on. Added to that is the flood of peoples only previously believed to exist in fiction, with their own cultures matching closely to those portrayed in human mythology. In those ancient tales, the interlopers went by many names. To this day, humans still often refer to them by these labels.

How these peoples respond to them is based strictly upon the individual. Some take it a compliment being likened to noble and whimsical creatures of legend. Others despise the comparison. None of them ever match the mold precisely. Some may look the part, but their personalities may differ radically. Some exhibit traits from a variety of different legends while others are wholly unique without a mirror in fable. There are also creatures birthed from enchantment that are new to this era, possessing no history from the previous age.

The following races (or more properly, species) are broken up into three categories:

- **Fae**: These are naturally born from magic, with no original primordial form to track evolution back to. They began as the original fae (believed extinct), but have been continuously slaves to magic’s whim. As time progresses, they continually “devolve” into more tribal, animalistic forms. It is believed the initial fae have long since vanished. Fae peoples include descendant species like damaskans, laudenians, and narros. Although some claim they no longer fit into the category, the tilen can also be found here. In truth, there are dozens of fae species and only a few of the oldest fae actually know them all. Other variations are dealt with later as monsters.

- **Evolved**: Humanity stands as the only example of an evolved race (at least on Earth) that has achieved intelligence without the assistance of magic.

- **Spawn**: Spawn are those that were once normal evolved creatures that have succumbed to magic’s influence and have been altered and enhanced. For the purposes of this chapter, spawn races listed here are those that have been pushed by enchantment into a form that possess enough intelligence to form a community. All non-natural creatures on Earth which are not fae or human are spawn. In Canam, only the kodiaks have advanced to the point of developing a culture.

### The Line of Fae

No one is certain how the fae appeared. Some insist they birthed from trees while others claimed the sky. Others profess neither, pointing to the soil as the source. Only dragons knew for certain and they regard such things as trivial, not worthy of remembrance. Considering the oldest fae maintain a connection with nature, the exact specifics of their origin seemed inconsequential (though never state that to a laudenian or a chaparran). The word “fae” is another controversial debate. While the etymology points to a simple “touched by magic” description, it shares its root with “faerie.”

Echalogical influence appears in numerous cultures, connecting threads from various human legends and myths to the time of Terros. The fae would later influence mythologies previously thought unconnected. Though damaskans, laudenians, and chaparrans would fall under a wide range of Germanic elf legends, other distant cousins would appear in Greek or Egyptian lore, with no apparent connection between these influences. Even obscure concepts of Attricana found its way into Chinese and Japanese myths. Most fae are aware of how they were represented in human literature. Oddly enough, the traditional prejudices of fantasy tend to match the new reality as well. The more dominant fae look down on their lesser brethren, thinking of them only as outcasts—uncivilized and primitive offshoots prone to violence. Few survived the exodus, but magic kept its persistence and they reappeared soon after in the modern age, as if their introduction could not be stopped.

As it will be explained in more detail later, long after the dragons appeared in the world, the ancient fae appeared. These creatures
were humanoid, statuesque, and attuned to the ways of magic. As the dragons, the fae could comprehend and even manipulate the enchanted world around them; however, they were not masters of it.

Soon, the fae found themselves changing, but not for the better (in their eyes). Successive generations appeared unsophisticated, less enlightened, with decreased awareness on how to control magic. Despite their best efforts, the original fae eventually vanished, replaced with lesser races, who in time would begot their own lesser forms. This would ultimately result in the anathema—primordial monsters, mere shadows of their ancestors.

Although the ancient fae have vanished, none of the successive races have, though some, like the laudeni- ans, have dwindled dramatically. Modern fae wonder if they are doomed to devolve into mindless animals while man continues to grow and expand. The fae take pride in their rich culture and a growing fear has taken root that it may all bleed away in time.

Outside of the main branches of fae, there are two species still classed in the same company, though not directly connected to a parent species. These are the pagus and the tilen. The pagus appeared with the Ixindar migration (when the black sun passed over the world and settled in its new home in the previous age). Pagus break most of the rules associated with fae. They are the oldest species without a deviation branch of their own. After Mengus created them, they never changed, as if Attricana stopped talking to them.

This leaves the tilen, a small group of vampires from the previous age that were forced from Ixindar to Attricana when the latter opened in the new age. Though the elder tilen—the original group—numbered few, their population has exploded in the centuries since.

In the present, the descendants of the original fae continue their traditions and beliefs with hardly a hiccup from the old time. Tenenbri dig, laudenians fly, narros protect, and damaskans remember. Meanwhile, their new ape-evolved neighbors continue to expand.

**RELATIONS AND TRADITIONS**

Despite some common ground, there exist major cultural differences between human and fae. When the first fae encountered humans, they assumed that by understanding one group of men, they would comprehend the entire species, as there is little if any cultural deviation between fae of the same type.

Disastrous initial encounters between fledging fae and human communities in southern Canam soured relations for decades. Early chaparran encounters with mankind were so dire, it curdled the entire race's opinion of the 'monkey-fool,' a belief persisting to this day; as the details of the incident are lost to history, it seems unlikely ever to be resolved. Laudenians also share a resentful opinion of man after an incident with the miners of Selkirk, the only bastion without an intrinsically adversarial relationship to the fantasy world. Selkirk had already benefitted from a successful first encounter with the narros years earlier. Though the miners were not immoral in any way, and tried their best to impress the elder elves, the humans' brash and unkempt nature fell afoul of the decorous and conceited attitude of the laudenians. They judged the whole of the human race upon that single meeting as offensive and unpleasant and has since found little reason to change that opinion.

In Southam, where humans were a minority, their bitter opinions of the fae came from constant conflict. With the exception of the narros, most fae in Southam think of mankind as little different from animals, to be hunted or domesticated like any other. Thankfully, other encounters in the north were not nearly as soiled. Damaskans and narros discovered kindness and loyalty among the humans in their first encounters. They also found to their initial shock that human traditions change with each nation and that time and distance encourage greater deviations. After only a few decades, two separate human societies populated with identical humans would create distinct traditions and even new languages. Unlike the chaparrans, laudenians, and tenenbri, inconsiderate and inflexible in their traditions and their acceptance of other customs, damaskans, narros, and gimfen grew to tolerate and even welcome cultural diversity.

Thankfully, ecological influence preserved many of the social customs from the ancient past, allowing a certain common ground in basic relations even when there is no common language. Though each nation has their own cultural standards, there has never been a major diplomatic incident between nations over traditional practices.

Hand shaking is understood, though damaskans abhor unnecessary physical contact with strangers despite having no concept of personal space, while gimfen wipe sweat from their face before shaking hands. Waving one’s hand to another is a greeting to many human cultures though gimfen hate any hand gesture where the palm is exposed to them.

The many variations of saluting and bowing are understood and even practiced by several fae peoples. Narros salute by touching the first knuckle of a clenched fist to the middle of their brow. Since damaskans don’t officially recognize royalty (regarding ‘king’ as a mere job description) or religion, the concept of bending knee or prostrating before a lord or faith is unknown to them, causing accusations of disrespect. Meanwhile, gimfen kowtow to virtually anybody, including their own tools (considering how close their heads are to the ground, this is hardly an impedance of...
strain on their backs). Chaparrans will kneel but rarely bow.

Standards of politeness and decorum are also very different from group to group. Tenenbri are known to curse and swear loudly during the course of their daily affairs, while laudenians are encouraged to speak diplomatically even in private. While damaskans are reserved and frown on direct contact in public, chaparrans and tenenbri are generally exuberant and openly affectionate. The basic kiss, thankfully, rarely changes and is still a sign of affection with both human and fae nations.

Laudenians never wear undergarments and usually keep to single layers, especially at home, regardless of company entertained; narros like to flaunt their self-mastery by wearing silk in the bitterest cold and layers of wool in the fiercest heat.

These traditions, though many and varied, are not considered serious faux pas when violated; most human and fae cultures are aware that other cultures are varied and intricate and will not greatly begrudge another for not understanding every nuance of their own, with notable exception again of the laudenians who take politeness very seriously and consider it an outsider’s responsibility to fit in, rather than theirs to make a guest feel welcome.

However, there are many more serious tripping hazards. Holding one’s hands up, palms open, is considered a sign of submission or greeting in many human cultures, and is repeated with both damaskans and laudenians. However, the narros take it as an insult, insinuating that one is “raising a wall” in defiance to the other. Other misunderstandings include the use of connecting the forefinger and thumb to form an “O” or the crossing of the index and middle fingers, both considered sexual insults with chaparrans and laudenians, though each sign insinuates opposite slurs between their cultures.

To the tenenbri, all silent hand signals are considered rude, akin to talking about someone behind their back; even the most basic manual communication is frowned upon unless joined by a verbal accompaniment. On the other hand, laudenians despise noise and relish silence, thus screaming in joy is considered unforgivably coarse, regardless of the situation. Applause is welcomed among the tenenbri, accompanied by roars and foot pounding, while the laudenians show praise with simple bowing. Gimfen find both methods an inadequate expression of appreciation, and instead throw money.

Showing only the middle finger is a human insult with no equivalent in any fae culture; however, one of the most bizarre misunderstandings involving hand gestures is the corna, or “horn” sign. This involves extending the two outer fingers from an otherwise closed fist. Though initially considered an insult and a symbol of the devil in many human cultures, it is well known throughout most fae nations as a sign of greeting, often used by fae to display racial pride. It is welcomed from humans, interpreted to saying “I respect you and your species.” However, the thumb must be kept closed for this salutation, as extending it out the side indicates a request for intercourse. Since this discovery, some humans have created a variation, where placing the gesture unknowingly behind a human’s head insults him or her as a “fae lover,” a slur in some communities.

These are a few examples of the many cultural confusions that have arisen when fae mingle with humans. In places with extensive contact between cultures, boundaries tend to erode, although the fae nature is such that usually humans adopt fae practices rather than the other way around, though extended contact will wear away even the most hidebound fae’s resistance to change. In Limshau, for instance, damaskans have adopted the practice of slapping the raised hand of another in celebration despite their gen-
eral taboo on physical contact; this tendency has been exhibited by no other fae as far as anyone knows.

Most humans find the honesty of fae alarming. Damaskans display the tendency most, but all fae find the concept of untruth somewhat baffling (even the gimfen, whose fast-and-loose attitude toward faet is explained as being ‘poetically true’). Though they might not answer a question directly or volunteer a secret willingly, they rarely lie (not that they are incapable, but it requires conscious effort; the closest thing the fae have to the concept of a pathological liar is called aeshomu, or “mockingbird”—one who uses half-truths to mislead). The sometimes brutal application of this belief has ruffled more than a few feathers, especially among the noble human houses. This, accompanied by the fae’s tolerance for alternate lifestyles and practices among their own people has made them unpopular with fanatical human religious movements. Many fae have been declared corrupt and wicked by church leaders. Some fae are guilty of this as well, considering mankind barbaric and primitive, regardless if he uses magic or technology. Some fae have accused humanity of being inferior, both in breeding and in brains. Humans have countered with similar accusations, adding that fae are tools of the devil, an image personified in the zealous ramblings of King Danus of Baruch Malkut.

And yet, many fae nations maintain a positive relationship with humans in spite of the massive casualties the fae suffered in the first century as well as their capture and enslavement by raiders and evil nations, a practice as prevalent now as it was when it began 250 years ago. With the fae’s long life and even longer history, the intricacies of their culture are so extensive that the rare humans who marry a fae can take the entirety of their extended lives learning the details and still be surprised at the end.

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Studying sample 345B
Subject: Larena Senarius, Damaskan (Volunteer)

Analyzing sample discovered a standard long polymer of nucleotides in a double helix configuration. Initial investigation found the helix to be super coiled. Twenty-three pairs of chromosomes were identified. However, chemical imperfections have been located along several pairs. A few nucleotides are missing in key areas for life to sustain itself. Defects have been detected on the adenine, thymine, and cytosine. Five copying errors have been located, leading evidence towards extensive somatic mutations of a severe variety. At least two chromosome inversions appear along the strand. Many of these mutations seem of a dominant phenotype. These anomalies cover the spectrum of patterned genetic diseases, some being autosomal dominant, while another is autosomal recessive, and yet another will be mitochondrial.

Thinking logically towards this, the patient should be affected by sickle cell anemia, hypophosphatemia, and leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy. I also personally identified two other defects connecting to hemophilia and spinal muscular atrophy. To be blunt, this subject should be dead. I have confirmed that EDF had no part in corrupting this data. I am in no way experienced with this level of genetic abnormality. By all accounts, the patient should not be able to walk, talk, or even breathe, let alone hunt and have a family. I will thank the volunteer for her services and forward my data to the Tilthe. Personally, I find this breakdown of scientific reasoning disturbing and hope that my data is flawed.

Walter Krause
Porto Medical Journal, smuggled to York
January 2, 495 A.E.
THE INFLUENCE

After dragons, the first species born on Earth were the fae. No one remembers what they originally looked like or how many species of the original fae vanished hundreds of thousands of years before the First Hammer struck (though they must have had pointed ears and sharp features, as these dominant features still survive in all their descendants). Their susceptibility to magic altered their original form and they broke off into smaller offshoots relatively quickly. These offshoots remain genetically compatible and physically similar in basic ways, for all that they are commonly considered separate species. They are usually bipeds with ten fingers and ten toes, stereoscopic vision and hearing, no unusual organs (though they lack certain vestigial ones, and those they have often work in unusual ways) and sexual reproduction. Human scientists, even after a few centuries of examination, have always failed to determine how fae resemble evolved apes to such an extent. Although it has been commonly agreed upon that alien life would evolve naturally along similar lines, the parallels between fae and man are too numerous to be considered a coincidence.

Those believing in a creation by a divine hand take the numerous similarities in enchanted species of fae and the evolved species of man as proof of the existence of God, a philosophy known as Corpus Continuity. The humanoid form, consisting of binocular vision, binaural hearing, base ten appendages, erect stature, and mammalian physiology match the fae species exactly, a species not evolved from primitive animals but formed from magic itself. With the exception of the pointed ears and the variations of fae species when they adapt to their environment, there still remain remarkable similarities scientists cannot explain. Because fae arose first, many believers in Corpus Continuity also subscribe to Echological Influence. Those of faith on both sides believe in the idea that God or gods liked the humans and the fae in their own right, and used different ways to succeed at it. Scientists refuse to acknowledge this and believe a genetic reason exists for the similarity. To them echological influence may be the reason itself—the previous age influencing evolutionary paths to make humans resemble their long dead progenitors.

Another popular theory claims it to be a coincidence; base ten appendages, binocular vision and stereoscopic hearing simply makes sense and that all intelligent life will eventually evolve towards that end. Others cling to the prevalent theory that the fantasy world doesn’t exist at all, only emerging because of man’s desire for it to exist; thus, the appearance of man dictates the physique of fae, rather than the other way around.

FAE RACIAL TRAITS

There are several features applying to all of the fae descendants:

**Echans.** All fae (except pagus) are tied to chaotic energies of the white gate of Attricana. Any technology you attempt to use is automatically disrupted, and you incite the risk of disruption of any device in the same general vicinity. You have a saturation value of 20, which can never drop below this value unless your soul switches from Attricana to the negative energies of Ixindar (see Corruption).

**Immunities.** You are immune to all natural disease, and cannot be a carrier of such ailments. You are unaffected by all genetic diseases and disorders, but not mutated genes from radiation or enchanted viruses. Furthermore, you are unaffected by natural psychological or behavioral ailments such as addiction or schizophrenia, though concerted attacks on your sanity may still affect you. Enchanted diseases and conditions can still affect you, as can natural diseases that have been imbued with magic.

**Light Sleeper.** Unlike humans, fae require little sleep, and they jostle awake with surprising ease. You can sleep comfortably in any position and maintain balance while doing so. You require only four hours of sleep every 24 hours, which may be non-consecutive. Like all living creatures, you require REM sleep, but this only requires four hours of consecutive, comfortable sleep every three days. If you are not allowed comfortable sleep in order to reach a REM state, sleep deprivation will eventually set in.

**Fae Iron.** A specific ratio of lead and iron (known as cold iron to some) is extremely toxic to all fae. It is a forbidden substance, outlawed in most civilized communities. You are vulnerable to fae iron.
CHAPARRANS

The huntress sat perfectly still in the canopy above as the prey blundered carelessly along the forest path. Though they bore no signs of their allegiance, she recognized their bearing: slavers, almost certainly from the despooier nation to the east, invading her forest in search of chattel. The more fools they. The huntress stood silently, balancing effortlessly on the thin branch, and fitted an arrow to her bow.

"Ambush!" the leader yelled, drawing a crossbow.

"Get—" his words were cut off as he suddenly felt the pressure of a knife at his throat. He could have sworn the elf hadn't moved, and yet somehow she had fallen from the trees and crossed the clearing in the blink of an eye.

"Who's next?" whispered the chaparran as she melted back into the trees, leaving the slaver captain bleeding out onto the mossy ground.

Hiding in the deep woods across the world, the chaparran fae have evolved concealment to an art form. Where the laudenians are merely disdainful of those unlike themselves, chaparrans are downright xenophobic and hostile to outsiders. Their kind date back further than anyone can recall, including themselves, for they keep few records, and almost none of those written — where other fae take pride in their history, chaparrans seldom write anything down. Chaparrans believe most other fae have forgotten their origins. They believe that the original fae were birthed from the forests and should always remain tied to them. The chaparrans live almost exclusively among the woods, growing towers, temples, and whole communities from the soil and roots. Their mere presence encourages vegetation, and the tallest, thickest trees in the world grow where chaparrans live.

Most communities are small. With such an obscure people, accurate numbers are impossible to come by. Estimates range from 80,000 to 800,000 chaparrans across the world (even the most optimistic guess falls just shy of a million), scattered among a thousand forests of varying size. Chaparrans mostly keep to themselves, refusing to become involved in the affairs of outsiders. One could walk through a chaparran forest without ever knowing of their presence. Unless threatening fae or tree, trespassers often cross without worry or encounter: more nefarious individuals vanish after entering. They defend the forests when necessary with their near-invisible archery skills. Their bows and arrows grow naturally from wood, a result of their symbiosis with the trees around them.

Their outward emotional displays are reflected mostly in their music and dance. They pound beats into fallen logs with amazing speed and augment those sounds with kinetic syllables of phrases strung so fast as to make the words meaningless. Chaparrans' passion for dance knows no equal. A chaparran's heartbeat will increase to virtually that of a hummingbird in the grip of a dance. Both bodies move almost violently, with fast pounding and legs striking, only their absolute discipline preventing injury to others. Watching a chaparran dance charges the soul and pumps the heart. Every move denotes a meaning others seldom understand. To outsiders, the dance looks chaotic with thrashing appendages and whirling bodies without care for people or objects around. Those involved in the dance hardly open their eyes, confounding outsiders as to how the dancers don't crash into each other. Most chaparrans know this dance and practice it daily. The art connects to a form of martial art called Manora Chaparr, believed to purge the darkness from their souls, allowing them to fight with clean spirits. This form developed after the First War. The majority of the pagus created on the night of migration came from chaparrans and the fae left behind swearing to eliminate their cursed brothers from the world. Their obsession continues to this day.

The chaparrans believe the fae are not devolving but becoming one with nature. Their descendant offspring are not necessarily violent xenophobes, becoming increasingly skittish of outsiders. They also grow more connected with nature, even to the point of exhibiting animal physical traits. Chaparrans respect their descendants and scold the laudenians for hanging onto what they call a "bankrupt obsession."

When chaparrans die, tradition decrees that the body must be dropped into a grave without a coffin. After prayers are finished and before dirt pushed over, a single acorn is placed in the mouth. This seed always grows, despite surrounding competition and available water. These trees grow taller and wider than any grown from nature and many claim the great temples of Libaro and Libanus emerged from fallen chaparran priests. This tradition extends to wandering chaparrans as well, and travelers across the world always know where one is buried by the massive tree dawling all those around. Such lone sentinels have appeared in deserts, atop great peaks, and even in caves, declaring to all those who see it that a chaparran rests there. They contend that their souls will move from wood to flesh every generation. Killing one secretly moves their soul to a tree for its lifetime. After an era, the soul returns to flesh.

The actions of the past are simply covered up. Rings of wood grow over old wounds, protecting damage. As long as the wood grows, all is good. The trees spoke of terrible sins of man committed upon nature, the raping of the earth to construct false idols. But man refuses to hear the song of the wood, even now. Man ambles unaware. When they walk into the forest, they fear. They fear the unknown. They fear resentment and retaliation. They walk oblivious to the truth.

Nature forgave man. Like a mother forgiving all the sins of the son, nature absolved man of his past transgressions. The Hammer was an act of God, not of nature. They seldom got along anyway. The mother created life. God gave them ambition. God punished them. Nature simply gave life another chance, forcing the planet to erase and try again. Man should consider himself blessed. If they embrace the ways of nature, following us into the wood, speaking the ageless tongue, we would—as the wret—welcome them into open arms... and they shall never fear again.

Ambition. It should be a sin. Sylvanakassus

356 A.E., from a speech
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Chaparrans are only slightly taller than damaskans, on par with the average human, but give the illusion of much greater size due to their increased muscle mass and physical stamina. Of all the fae descendants, the chaparrans have the greatest spectrum of skin tones, from light tan to ebony black (thought mostly the latter). Their ears are short and flush with their heads, making them almost indistinguishable from humans at a distance. A chaparran’s eyes usually are of green and blue hues and they will often pierce their ears in several areas and color their bodies with tattoos, especially around the face, shoulders, and back. Fae in general remain youthful in appearance throughout their long lives, but this tendency is the least pronounced among the chaparrans due to their constant exposure to the elements. While chaparrans spend most of their lives with an apparent age ranging from a human young adult to a healthy adult in their late 30s, those past their second millennium more often resemble a human in their sixties. Most chaparrans have brown hair (dark brown is most common, but any brunette shade is possible), though a few have black or even red hair. This is curiously more often than not, and generally worn short or in tight dreadlocks to avoid catching on branches. All their joints are capable of hypermobility, and a chaparran’s big toes, while not fully opposable, are significantly more extended and stringy than normal, enabling them to grasp branches equally well with feet and hands and giving them improved balance in the tree canopy; a chaparran archer hanging upside down from a branch to set up a shot is a truly fearsome sight. They often wear fur and pelts, adding to their girth, but exposing a great deal of skin to maintain agility. They hate adorning themselves with gems or shiny rocks and seldom wear metal of any kind.

PLAYING A CHAPARRAN

Chaparrans are the best species to play because they are the most like the traditional elves of legend. They have the oldest history and the most exotic beliefs. They are proud and powerful and are the envy of many others. To play a chaparran is to wholly embrace the fantasy world and all of its possibilities.

Chaparrans seldom seek adventure outside their forests. Of all fae peoples, they and the tenenbri are the least encountered outside of their regions. Since only a laudenian-chaparran crossover can result in chaparran offspring, few outcasts can be identified as such. Only in cases do chaparrans brave the outside world. Only the young and curious disobey their culture and heritage to embark on such a voyage.

A player creating a chaparran should be aware of their propensity for solitude. Though some will obviously forge and protect friendships with outsiders, they still prefer fae to humans and seldom invest time or emotion in relationships with the latter. Chaparrans rarely bond with non-chaparrans and less so with humans.

Chaparrans avoid heavy armor and favor wooden weapons over metal; if metal is unavoidable, the weapon will be crafted with a wooden grip. For most, the bow is the weapon of choice, followed by the spear, fighting knives, or even the scythe; while chaparrans will use swords, they prefer makanas (a wooden club inlaid with sharp protrusions of stone or metal).

Many assume chaparrans are utterly wild in demeanor and decorum. In truth, they are quite civilized and maintain good grooming and health. Unlike other fae, known for being austere, chaparrans wear their emotions on their sleeves—if they actually had sleeves. Everyone knows immediately when a chaparran is upset. Thankfully, this openness spreads to more upbeat emotions as well. Chaparrans enjoy the outdoors and need to see the sun to orientate themselves. Without this, they often grow confused about the time of day, sleeping at odd hours for random lengths. Chaparrans also have the dual disadvantage of being both agoraphobic and claustrophobic: they are intensely uncomfortable outside of a forest, edgy almost to the point of uselessness in a dungeon or town, but virtually unstoppable in their forest homes.

Chaparrans are also highly religious and commonly profess a faith in Berufu, the fae mother god who gave life to their ancestors. Nearly all chaparrans openly pray to the woods every morning, noon, and night, thanking her for their life. They assumed men all acted alike. Trees were just wood to us, construction and kindling, as worthless as dirt, trodden on with equal disdain. I remember and recounted a different view. I spoke of ancient lore, where the tree stood tall in its rightful place of worship. I brought up the Garden of Eden, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge, though I do admit starting with that later anecdote probably wasn’t wise. I moved onto the Kabbalah’s Safirion tree, depicting the map of creation. I mentioned the Ashwath Viksha, the banyan tree that represented eternal life in the Hindu religion. I even remembered the Lote tree at the end of the seventh heaven. Of course, I refrained from mentioning Christmas trees as I imagine that may really upset them. When I spoke of the ash tree Yggdrazil from Norse and how it supported the heavens, I finally got the attention of the priests. I told how the tree connected the sky, the earth, and the underworld together, and how its existence was vital to the entire universe—referred in popular myth as the World Tree. I even added that the last humans would survive Ragnarok by hiding within its branches.

These are all legends and taste of the flamboyance my ancestors were known for. One of the priests scolded my scoff, declaring a similar concept in their faith. They claimed Berufu, the mother of all fae, planted a single tree to remind the fae where they came from and where they were destined to end. Berufu proclaimed any who climbed to its tallest branch would feel her breath and understand the world’s true purpose and form.

This great tree cannot be found in this forest or any other on this side of the planet. It grows from another on the far side of the world. It is not a stout tree with a trunk of mighty girth. It resembles the trees seen here, reaching a point where one could observe the curvature of the planet. This tree cannot be seen by flyers or from the ground at any distance. A tree growing to the stratosphere would be a grand climb indeed.

Sugi Gantilanna
The New Irminsul
Unlike other fae, often taking human-like names to better associate with the human world, chaparrans refuse to do so. Their names, like all fae, are personal and are only meant to be heard by pointed ears. A chaparran's family name merges with their given name; this full name is usually four or more syllables long and always features both hard consonants and hissing sibilants (multiple instances of K, G, or S when spelled in the English orthography) interspersed with elongated, rich vowels. Since they don’t adopt human names and refuse to let humans address them by their given titles unless they are true intimates, most simply ask that outsiders refer to them as “Krysid” which means “Fae-Born” in their language (it was more than a century after mankind’s initial contact with chaparrans before the humans figured out why they all had the same name). With proven comrades, the chaparran may permit a human to address them by an adopted title which describes their accomplishments or role in society. Under no circumstances will any human, even the closest of friends, be allowed to use a shortened form of their true name.

**Example True names:** Brassekonnas, Jassakerak, Killikassawar, Marakenassa, Taneggoras, Satthrassin

**Example Titles:** Darawren (“Earth-seer”), Hiinodorran (“Fire Dancer”), Kitarri (“Black Bow”), Merawrak (“Swift Birdcatcher”), Nathash (“Red-Bellied Salmon”), Shikkakarri (“Deer Stalker”)

**Chaparran Traits**

Your chaparran character has a variety of natural abilities common across the planet.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Wisdom score increases by 2.

**Age.** Chaparrans reach physical maturity around 80 years, remaining children long after most humans have died of old age. Most starting ages begin around 100 years. Chaparrans can live to as much as 3,000 years.

**Size.** Chaparrans range between 5’8” and 6’3”. Because of hollow bones and lean bodies, they weigh under 120 pounds. Your size is Medium.
Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet. See also Brachiate.

Darkvision. Accustomed to twilit forests and the night sky, you have superior vision in dark and dim conditions. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray. As an unfortunate side effect of this ability, you have dichromatic vision, responsive to green and blue; you are missing the photoreceptor for red (you are partially colorblind).

Brachiate. You have a climb speed equal to your speed. You can move through difficult forest terrain without a reduction in speed.

Listen to the Wind. Your perception is so keen you could use an enemy's breathing in the dark to aim your shots. When wielding a shortbow or longbow, you may use Wisdom for attack and damage rolls instead of Dexterity. When wielding a shortbow or longbow, you may use Wisdom for attack and damage rolls instead of Dexterity. You have advantage on your first attack roll on the shortbow, the dagger, and any two weapons made from wood.

Chaparran Weapon Proficiency. You are proficient with the shortbow, the dagger, and any two weapons made from wood.

Surprisingly Resilient. While not wearing heavy armor or carrying a shield, you gain a +1 bonus to AC.

DAWNAMOAK CHAPARRANS
Dawnmoak is the treasured kingdom of the chaparrans, and is considered the center of their world. You could have been raised in the shadows of the three towers, offering you unparalleled access to the entire history of one of the oldest species. If only they recorded more of it. Dawnmoak is more about teaching how chaparrans should act, and less about how they did. There are elders willing to impart their knowledge on archery, swordsmanship, and magic, but don’t appear to know (or are unwilling to disclose) how they acquired it themselves. Whatever history is unveiled comes in the form of ancient traditions and theology.

You were most likely raised without threat and without exposure to other ideas or even races. However, unlike those from Laurama, there is room for curiosity. The offspring of Dawnmoak can be found throughout the world, and subsequent descendants all reflect similar qualities. This is considered the default for chaparrans.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 1. You can swap this bonus with your racial bonus to Wisdom.

Chaparran Weapon Proficiency. You have proficiency with the longbow, the makana, and a single one-handed melee weapon of your choice.

Learned in Ways of the Forest. You have proficiency in Intelligence (Nature). You can use Wisdom instead of Intelligence with Nature.

CHAPARRAN FEATS

CHAPARRAN AUTOMATISM
You are so aware of your surroundings that you react without thinking, gaining the following benefits:

- You can use Wisdom in place of Dexterity when determining your ability bonus to AC.
- Your Wisdom score increases by 1, as does your maximum for that score.

IMPROVED WEALD WALK
You have mastered your innate link with nature, gaining the following benefits:

- Your weald walk’s range is extended to 200 feet.
- You gain advantage on your first attack roll on the same turn after using weald walk.

NATURE’S CHANNEL
Your Wisdom score increases by 2, as does your maximum for that score.
DAMASKANS
I sidestepped the bravo easily and delivered a precise chop to the back of his neck. He went down without a sound. The remaining thugs regrouped, hefting their testubo nervously. One came for me, but I ducked and threw myself to the side, one finger catching ahold of the shelf on the wall beside me. Twisting in mid-air, I scuttled backwards up the shelf, noting as I did so that I had been remiss in dusting this section of the stacks and reminding myself to attend to it once I had dealt with these hooligans. Drawing two shuriken from an inside pocket of my leather coat, I removed two of the remaining combatants with accurate strikes to the hamstrings, then drew my blades and looked down at the last one. His downed companions were moaning most annoyingly. “Did you not read the notice?” I asked the band of ruffians. “It plainly says ‘silence in the library.’”

The first Damaska, before the Hammer fell, was the oldest empire in history (using the literal definition of empire). After the gate re-opened, damaskans rebuilt their civilization, though split into two different nations on opposite sides of the planet. In the ruins of the laughably termed “old world” of Lauropa, Damaska was restored to its former glory. Conversely in Canam, the fae erected the empire of knowledge. Limshau. Because of the peculiar homogeneity of all fae, both nations should looked identical...but this ended up not being so in this case.

All damaskans favor stone or adobe for building, rather than wood. Most of their cities are built into tall mountains or next to cliffs and always facing a major river or body of water. Where they differ is that Damaska’s cities expand with abandon across open fields, while Limshau restricts its cities with stout walls. Damaska’s cities scrape the sky with sharp spires—a landscape of porcupine quills—while Limshau's jigsaw of flat, interlocking, and tessellating buildings allow one to sit atop a rooftop and watch an unobstructed sunset. The Damaskan fae art was inspired by Lauropans, whereas Canam fae wear looser clothes, wield different weapons, and are more open in public, whereas the Canam damaskans are more reticent, with clothing and weaponry largely influenced by the Asiatic human cultures. Since fae never change unless branching into a new species, this deviation in Canam is solely due to their interactions with humanity, a species almost completely foreign to the Damaskan Empire in the East.

Damaskans are the most common, most often seen, and most widely circulated fae. Though the people of both Damaska and Limshau are considered the same species, damaskans from Limshau often refer to themselves as “Limshau fae” to emphasize their cultural distinctions. Damaskans are also one of the few fae species to permit the term ‘elf’ to be applied to them, owing to their interactions with humanity, a species which the Canam damaskans are more reticent, with clothing and weaponry largely influenced by the Asiatic human cultures. Since fae never change unless branching into a new species, this deviation in Canam is solely due to their interactions with humanity, a species almost completely foreign to the Damaskan Empire in the East.

Damaskans migrated across the globe very quickly. Even though Damaska remains the largest fae empire, dozens of other independent cities appeared in a matter of decades. The Damaskan and Limshau empires remain loyal to each other, though not often in contact.

Damaskans loathe pagus as well as the majority of anathema fae due to their destructive tendencies, but if they encounter a free pagus with no overtly hostile intent, they will not disturb them, in theory. Damaskans are one of the few fae species to permit the term ‘elf’ to be applied to them, owing to their interactions with humanity, a species almost completely foreign to the Damaskan Empire in the East.

Damaskans are also one of the few fae species to permit the term ‘elf’ to be applied to them, owing to their interactions with humanity, a species almost completely foreign to the Damaskan Empire in the East.

Each individual damaskan possesses an encyclopedic knowledge on a subject defined by their individual tastes. Where those from Damaska prefer internal recall for this information, citizens of Limshau insist on writing everything down. Until the damaskans appeared, fae seldom recorded anything. Their history was re-written with inaccuracies, legends, claimed as fact, or facts discredited as myth. This was part of the reason why fae history from the time of Terros is so vague and sporadic. Ats, damaskans could bring nothing with them to the new world and had to reconstruct their past from memory, and although their memories are good, they are not eidetic. One distinction damaskans are clear to make is that they never volunteer their own opinion in their papers or journals, nor clog the books with judgment, sentiment, or meaningless diatribe. Where humans believe any individual can stand on a box and preach prose worthy of print, damaskans remain quiet, recording events objectively.

The damaskan written form is substantially different from other fae languages. Damaskans know both the classical cursive and a shorthand variation they invented called sonra-eliana, which has been translated into English as ‘orthoglossy’. Every damaskan from both empires knows this writing style. Using orthoglossy allows a damaskan to write five times faster than any other scholar. With some effort, non-damaskans can be taught this writing style, but its intricacies require considerable study to master, and those without a damaskan brain simply cannot manage the mental gymnastics required to write it at full speed.

Damaskan musicians prefer quiet, more subdued music as a rule, and favor woodwind instruments. Their preferences in the physical arts tend naturally toward calligraphy, followed by the arts of illustration: drawing, illumination, woodcuts, lithographs, and the like. Lauropan damaskans maintain a certain interest in architecture; Canan damaskans have largely substituted this for an appreciation for the aesthetics of craft and engineering.

When they die, their bodies are burned and scattered to the wind.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES
A damakan’s eyes are slightly slanted and have epicantic folds similar to humans of Asian descent. Their ears taper straight out the sides of the skull to a very sharp point and have a tendency to flutter and vibrate slightly depending on mood. They generally have dark hair tones and seldom grow it beyond shoulder length. Their skin ranges from light tan to olive color with eyes of brown and grey. When reaching adulthood, damaskans still resemble human young adults
barely out of puberty (17-19 in human years). Even at their most venerable age, damaskans don’t often look a day past 30 and none look older than 40 when they finally shuffle on. Because of a peculiarity of the damaskan brain, they are able to employ both lobes simultaneously, and their analytical and creative centers are diffuse rather than localized. This makes them functionally ambidextrous, as well as enabling them to work on one project while thinking about another. Damaskans frequently wear new clothes, or at least pressed and clean. They abhor getting dirty. They also rarely pierce their skin or adorn their bodies with tattoos, although this has little to do with any philosophy other than just not seeing the point.

PLAYING A DAMASKAN

Damaskans are clearly the best species to play because they are built on the strengths of being a fae without the arrogance and xenophobia of other peoples like the laudenians and chaparrans. They are the easiest to get along with, are possessed of a wide range of talents suited for almost any class, and have a virtuous path ingrained in their soul—the pursuit of knowledge. What path could be more honorable? They are civilized, numerous, and are the least stigmatized of all the fae species.

A player creating a damaskan should be aware of their timid nature. Damaskans are often reserved, seldom speaking out of turn, but can be prone to sudden bursts of emotion when finally pushed. Some might call them shy, often staying quiet during conversations, but in reality they merely prefer to speak only when having something useful to say. Until then, they keep back and avoid making their presence intrusive. This makes them appear distant, detached, and even cold. They are not actually emotionless, but prefer not to be demonstrative except in private or when not on duty. When dedicated to a task, they think of little else and speak only when necessary; however, get them started on raw knowledge or ask them to recite some nugget of information and they talk like uncorking a champagne bottle.

Damaskans believe in discipline and order and find disorganization of any kind unsettling. Deliberate falsehood sets their teeth on edge. Damaskans seldom understand fear and often engage in fights they know they cannot win to save the life of another. They also place an unnatural level of security on the written word, putting themselves in harm’s way to protect a book; even the less scholarly-inclined from Damaska find this urge nearly unavoidable.

Due to the shape of their ears, damaskans avoid wearing helmets whenever possible, and because of their slight builds, favor lighter armor over heavy plate. Limshau fae prefer light, form-fitting leather armor with a generally Asian cut, and their preferred weapons are similarly of oriental styling; all damaskans favor polearms or light weapons that can be dual-wielded whenever possible.

Damaskans maintain a deep pride in whichever beliefs they profess and are known to defend their convictions to the death, but at the same time they do not consider it their place to criticize another person’s beliefs. Due to their large numbers, damaskans follow several belief systems. The largest percentage of the spiritual worship the dragon god, Amethyst, believing...
his soul exists beyond the gate. Others worship the fae god Berufu, while others follow the earth god Oaken. A smaller number have even embraced a human faiths.

Regardless of their proclivities, a truly pious damaskan is a rarity: less than 5% of damaskans worldwide endorse any religious belief, and fewer still are inclined to proselytize what faith they do have. For most, the pursuit of knowledge takes the place of other spiritual concerns.

Damaskans welcome adventure for the sheer experience of it, and often engage on what has been sometimes termed a “scholarly pilgrimage” to discover new learning. Some also embark on quests for their people. A common sight in open echa, damaskans are ever expanding and rely on the adventuring spirit of their people to establish a growing civilization. They react to threats to knowledge in much the same way that zealots react when their beliefs are challenged: threatening to put flame to parchment is the surest way to enrage such fae.

The world evolves.

Magic and science are interchangeable. Interpreting one from the other depends on your vantage point. Elves, much like any other intelligent race aware of its own progress, observe life from a sword’s edge, with the past and the future on either side. I fear elves never bother to walk this line, choosing to live in old ways. Humans arose and – given the chance – failed at greatness. Their weakness is mortality. Man’s obsession with compressing time doomed their species. How I respect those humans that can sit for a week under a tree and pray, close one’s eyes for a whole day without opening them. What courage that must take for a species so short lived. Most elves, including those responsible laudenians, don’t appreciate the small victories in other species. The path remains the same.

Utilizing our patience, elves gain the opportunity to learn from Man’s mistakes. We live enchanted. Magic flows through us but does not control us. Earth is a shared planet. Only by uniting and merging our knowledge with those of humans, narros, and gimfen, can we build a future.

Limshaw Historical Entry 2534A
Ravenar Limshaw IV

**Names**

Unfortunately, while phonetically pleasing to the ear, the damaskan language can somewhat difficult for those unfamiliar with it, to get their tongues around. Damaskans often adopt a human-sounding name when in public: their contact with humans has been so extensive over the centuries that modern damaskan parents generally give their name alongside the traditional one at birth, even in all-fae communities. Some damaskan families, especially in Limshaw, have adopted their chosen human name as their true name, nearly forgetting their heritage. Not just due to integration, many believe a new world requires a clean slate, and a new family name is a good place to start. Other fae frequently deplore this practice and a few damaskans without native names have been denied entry in fae-only communities on this basis.

Most damaskans keep their fae names—if they have them—privately known only by loved ones and family. Even in situations where the damaskans use their family name, they still regularly select a human given name because the damaskan language contains many phonemes and tonal variances that sound similar to human names, and consequently their native names can be difficult to pronounce accurately. Their chosen human names are usually simple, with little cultural identification, and are often picked to reflect an attribute of the individual. Family names are very culturally specific and sometimes reflect an attribute of the family or important individuals within it. Damaskan names are not gender-specific. While both Limshaw and Damaska place the given name before the family name, a damaskan will usually adopt the name order of whatever community they are currently in (so a damaskan visiting Fargon or Genai will give their family name first).

**Examples:** Ravenar Limshaw III is his real name, but his sister’s husband elected to adopt the human title “Strongbow” to replace their damaskan family name of Kaixiu’Ooria. Centuries later, few in that family ever use that title. Their fourth child, a daughter was given the damaskan name Reivune, which eventually turned into Raven, which she elected as her open-name, as well.

**Example Given Names:** Demosin, Keelihan, Ourokess, Ravenar, Reivune, Zallamber

**Example Family Names:** Añiquore, Ekka’Vraiul, Hastalleieki, Kaixiu’Ooria, Talassezc, Uotha Vuesto

**Example Open Names:** Damon, Chandizer, Hope, Perigrin, Raven, Salla

Limshaw is a repeating events of Earth’s past and will fall under a hailstorm of fire and brimstone the like of which only god has seen before. Those with ears pointed and round commit the most grievous sins of hedonism. Its capital and all its cities both walled and open are cursed by god. It is too late for prayer, for they are all doomed.

This damnation spreads to all those within the white walls, especially the impotent human sodomites who fall for the pleasures of the sinned, soiled flesh. Divine punishment shall come quick. When their flesh burns away, we will mock their calamity. It is not a sin to take pride in god’s fury.

Shall we be the hands of god!

Father Prias
Selected Sermon
Faustis, Baruch Malkut

**Damaskan Traits**

Your damaskan character has a variety of natural abilities common across the planet.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Dexterity score increases by 2.

**Age.** Damaskans reach physical maturity around 80 years, remaining children long after most humans have died of old age. Most starting ages begin around 90 years. Damaskans can live to as much as 1,500 years.

**Size.** Damaskans range between 4'-8" and 5'-7". Because of hollow bones and lean bodies, they weigh between 70 and 100 pounds. Your size is Medium.

**Speed.** Your base walking speed is 35 feet.

**Languages.** You know Damaskan and English.

**Ambidexterity.** You are neither left nor right handed, and thus never suffer disadvantage in situations where handedness matters.