

Amethyst



QUINTESSENCE

By Chris Dias

2.0



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CHAPTER ONE FUNDAMENTALS

Voss Terberis was a clean-shaven Neanderthal with skin like a braille map and hair like knotted leather. One scar almost claimed his left eye, and his face had the color of rusted earth.

And yet, perfect teeth.

His armor, an interlace of chain and plated mail, took its fair share of strikes. The sword was a fifty-inch claymore inherited from his father and christened 'Ferrule,' cool-sounding, except it was also the name of that metal ring found on a pencil. The damage to the armor and Voss's recent injuries could be easily patched for a few ingots back at the village.

The opponent had been a dragon, a fitting end to a quest, a beast the locals had called The Red Menace. The locals weren't particularly inventive. It was the size of a large house, with an impracticable wingspan, customary fiery breath, and a completely illogical drive to light the landscape ablaze. None of that mattered; it was a dragon.

There had been an opportunity for civil discourse before Ferrule was unsheathed, but the desire to skip to the action was overwhelming. And Voss was not alone on this impulse. His party had met over a tankard at a local pub, as was the custom and cliché. Kur Googruk, the dwarf and a palindrome, had been Voss's loyal sidekick since the Battle of Kenosis Valley, an event that would never be explained.

Elina Sif, the love interest, was a meagerly decent elvish vixen with long lines of exposed skin, pointed ears, and the brassiere of a medieval dominatrix. She never complained of the cold, given her lack of garments, and would eventually fall at Voss's feet when the programmers deemed it appropriate.

"This was but a juvenile," mumbled Kur through a beard so thick his mouth never appeared to move.

"Its parent would know of this death, no matter the distance," said Elina. "Certainty a greater enemy was sowed this moment." Because people totally talked this way in a fantasy setting.

"Best we take what we can," said Voss, "lead a trail away from the village. Fight the beast on our terms. Let us make for the Scamander Chaos!" He shouted for some reason.

It would be a week's walk to Scamander because, unlike the real world, a fantasy setting can be crossed in about a week. On the second night, Elina visited Voss in his tent.

"I would speak to you?" she said after entering. Voss was sans armor but still with his thick padded woolen undergarments.

"You are welcome to do so," he replied.

"Do you believe such a beast can be lured so easily?"

"Well, you appear drawn with little encouragement." He smirked. Voss was not particularly attractive, but Aiden had little control over the looks of the character. "I'd imagine a monster wouldn't require as much effort."

"Are you implying I'm an animal in a trap?" Elina asked, nudging closer. "What bait did you drop?"

"Why don't you step a little closer and

"That doesn't look appropriate," Martin said.

"Hardly," Aiden responded. "She never takes anything off."

"Really?" Martin loomed over his brother, secretly hoping to spot some digital skin. He was older than Aiden by several years, with optimistic mottled chin stubble and crewcut hair. They shared the same brown hair and poor eyes requiring glasses—doppelgangers of their late father. The game had Voss and Elina rub their undergarments together for a few seconds before fading to black. Aiden shrugged and skipped out of the cinematic.

Martin's favorite games had guns, robots, and tanks. Aiden favored sword-wielding and spellcraft, but they were growing difficult to find. His mother had located one from an obscure website.

"You're not going to tell mom," said Aiden.

"Should I?" Martin asked.

"It wasn't a question."

"I'd feel better if your homework was done." As the brothers talked, Voss had found himself in another fight, dodging and flipping in burdened armor, cleaving with a blade that never dulled.

"Uploaded an hour ago," Aiden replied, focusing his attention on the screen.

"All right then. But just to let you know, I need the machine after supper. Got my own homework."

Aiden turned to face his brother. "Homework or chatting with Nicky Floros?"

"She helps me with chemistry."

"Oh sure, you'd rather work on her chemistry..." Aiden offered a coy smirk. "That's a joke because when a woman—"

"Shut up, smart ass."

"I could help you if you want."

"When you stop dealing with fantasy women and start on the real thing, I might seek—"

"With Chemistry, you chowderhead."

"I'll manage." Martin stepped closer, offering a distracting shadow on the screen. "How many hours are you into this, by the way?"

"Last save, I think, was sixty-five."

"Why don't you go out? Socialize with real people in the real world?"

"I have video chat." Aiden returned to his game, "besides, people are always complaining about kids being cooped up. Some of us find it easier to socialize this way. Excuse me for not being an athlete and knowing the difference between glucose and fructose."

"Do you really?"

"I'm excelling in advanced molecular biology."

"Your twelve years old."

"I'm reading the ingredients off that energy drink on the shelf."

"That I believe."

Aiden returned to his game, as Voss had just reached level seven and could select a new class feat. With the extra hit points, he would be prepared to face the final boss.

"I just want the best out of you," said Martin as he placed his hands on his brother's shoulders. "That's what big brothers do; they wish the best for their siblings."

Aiden stopped his game and turned to face Martin. He was not maudlin.

"Are we going to hug?" Aiden asked. Martin casually spun Aiden's chair and made for the hallway.

"Nothing good comes out of games like that," Martin said as he left.

Aiden shouted to his brother in the hallway, "Totally right; I should play something suitable, where I shoot foreigners in the face with assault rifles. Respectable."

Aiden returned to his game, to a world where clothes were always comfortable, the romance always willing. Death was as quickly resolved as one's finger moved to the hotkey. Castles were a minute's walk apart. Money was easily acquired from the bellies of wandering beasts. Aiden quit when dinner was called. Voss and his world, secured within the last save file, waited patiently for his player's return. Voss never complained 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. Although he had been allowed to ride alone, his mother's job was along the way. She read a novel quietly beside him. It was the literary equivalent of a rice cake, a paranormal erotic tale, probably involving vampires.

When 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 alleviate 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 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.

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 split 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.

Their path brought them within view of the bulwark, near the horizon, but taller than the surrounding buildings. Aiden had never been close enough to gauge how immense the outer barrier was. And like the walls of a house, he assumed there was a reason for it, though never asking what it was. All

he knew was that adults occasionally called it the 'crown.'

Aiden asked for bubble gum from 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, snagged cinnamon, and paid with a bank card. He didn't want cinnamon but didn't object.

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

Elsewhere, an elderly man with clean skin and weathered eyes stood at the summit of the ashen citadel, breathing 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 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 handwriting. "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 reread it.

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, permanent, and perfect 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.

"Mr. Camus," interrupted the teacher.

Aiden snapped his attention from the window, the scrap paper still rolling around his fingers.

"Yes...sorry, Mr. Leach," Aiden answered.

It was a class for advanced students, and Aiden was the youngest by a year. Not unlike Voss Terberis, 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. The blank digital tablet hanging behind him had the color of a chalk blackboard. "So 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, not the kings and presidents at the top or the consumers and peasants at the bottom. You take them away, and 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 at each other and waited for one of them to break the silence. "War," Lara popped up.

"War. I don't think so," Leach corrected. "It actually encourages change. War gave us nuclear power. The potential of conflict and paranoia gave us computers, rockets, and the internet."

"Segregation," spoke up William, another student, the oldest and largest. Leach nudged 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."

"Religion?" a fourteen-year-old girl across from Aiden asked. Leach waited for her to continue. "Burned libraries...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 rabble. You remove a ruler; someone else will step forward." Aiden was listening now, but his thoughts were on 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."

"Magic?" Aiden offered. The class turned to him. An awkward pause followed, broken by the larger William.

"Magic?!" William mocked.

"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 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 butted in, "Because magic is bullshit!"

Leach flicked William's ear as he answered. "Because, as I said, necessity forces us to build. That's why it's a fantasy." Leach worked his way toward his youngest savant. "I read one of those when I was your age. There was magic, but it was uncommon. Kingdoms lasted centuries without changing. You can include a caste system, religion, ironclad traditions, some ancient laws against 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 had magic, there'd be chaos. If any child could be raised to wield a wand, you'd have anarchy. But 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 lowered his voice to not impose. "You can't suppress the desire for humans to grow. I'll also say that I would loathe any civilization that existed for thousands of years and be unable to figure out how to make a machine that washes my dishes." The class laughed, and Leach returned to the head of the room. Aiden could still see a few eyes on him from the older students. From Lara smiling at him. From William, annoyed at the time wasted.

Aiden filed out last as the class ended, avoiding William's hex-vision stare. As he passed the teacher's desk, Mr. Leach called, "Aiden?"

"Yes, Mr. Leach?" Aiden answered, noticing the teacher beckoning him back. After the last student departed, Aiden stepped back to the desk. "Was I out of line?"

"Nothing of the sort," Leach answered. "But perhaps it's best you keep such talk about magic private?"

Aiden furrowed his brow. "Why?" he asked.

Leach prepared a detailed answer but then paused. He 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'?"

"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 can't allow something to break from what they know. They need order. They entertain

Santa Claus but would never seriously consider the possibility of his existence." 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. "It wasn't always that way." Leach was wording himself carefully, ensuring no lines were crossed. "Those books were far more common once. Now, when it comes to mythology and faith, most people stick to religion."

"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."

William expressed his dissatisfaction with Aiden after school, only feet away from the exit. "Don't waste the class's time, Aiden!" he snapped. He loomed inches over Aiden's face, ensuring a moderate amount of spittle landed in the boy's eye.

Aiden wiped his face and leaned back. "Oh God, I can taste your stupidity," he answered calmly.

"You don't belong in that class. You're too young anyway. And why are you reading this?" He snatched the novel under Aiden's arm and glanced at it.

"Pratchett!" he snapped. Aiden jumped up to the taller student, flimsily pawing at the distant book over his reach. "It's all bullshit!"

"What is wrong with you?" Aiden shouted, slapping around William's limbs. William pushed Aiden to the pavement with his free hand. The Pratchett novel fell to the fallen boy's lap as a pair of larger arms wrapped around William's collar and lifted him off his feet. Martin had three inches, twenty pounds, and two years on the bully.

"Billy!" Martin barked. "You're smart. Smarter than me. So, I'm going to start hitting you until you talk me out of it. Good?!"

William wrestled free and made his escape. He grabbed his bag and ran for the gates. Aiden retrieved his book and accepted Martin's offer of a hand.

"Okay?" Martin asked.

"I had the situation under control. I was just about to hit him with some Nietzsche quotes that would've blown his mind."

"Who?" Martin asked as he pulled Aiden to his feet.

"Philosopher. Light reading."

"So what did you say this time?"

"I never need to say anything. Poor breeding, too much benzene in his family's gene pool."

"Maybe because you were being a smart ass. Let's just go." Martin pushed Aiden ahead of him. Aiden checked his book for damage. A corner had frayed, and a new rip had appeared on the case wrap.

"So that's why?" Martin said.

"What?"

"Aiden, I don't care for those books Mom gets you, and many people would agree. And if I wasn't your brother, I may act the same, so keep that stuff guarded. Don't tell anyone you read them; don't show them off."

"What's the big deal? Teacher said the same thing. How are mine any different than yours."

Martin stopped and spun around to face his brother. Aiden instinctively dropped the book to his side if Martin tried to reach for it. "Because mine deal with what can happen. They're about science and progress. Fantasies...they're about what can't happen. They're about dreams and myths."

"But...we go to church," Aiden muttered. Martin resumed his walk.

"Yeah, let's not go there," Martin grumbled. Aiden kept still, glancing at his book. He gently nuzzled it back into his pack and raced to catch up to his brother.

"I liked what you said to Billy, by the way," Aiden said.

"I've wanted to say that to him for like a year."

As they crossed a street, Aiden took another glance at the city wall. No windows and topped with weapons. This was as close as he usually gets.

"It's like people are scared," said Aiden.

"Of what?"

"I don't know. Maybe they don't know either." Aiden stopped and took a moment to stare at the crown. Martin wasn't having any of that.

"Don't do that."

"Do what?" asked Aiden.

"That brain thing. I didn't know when you asked when you were five. I don't know."

"You've never been curious about what's out there?" Aiden was more pleading than asking.

Martin encouraged Aiden to keep walking. "Nothing good," Martin said. No one would build something like that as a joke or political ploy. It's not a wire fence; it's the largest construct in known history."

"Emphasis on known."

"There had to be a very, very good reason."

"Keep something out or keep us in."

"It's not a jail. When you're an adult, you can leave if you want."

"Maybe I will," Aiden whispered.

"Then you'd be an idiot, and you'd be doing it alone."

Their mother was not one for the kitchen. Dinner was prepackaged imitation parmesan cheese and powdered milk mixed with stabilizers and corn starch. It was layered over a bed of rock-hard tortellini softened after five minutes in the microwave.

After the meal, Martin departed without a word while their mother began to fill the dishwasher. Aiden remained. "Mom?" he asked.

"Yes."

"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 pain that no medicine or words can cure. To them, death is the answer; but they don't realize how selfish and narrow-minded that answer is."

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

She smiled and patted his shoulder. "You're only trapped

if you can't find the door." She took this moment to retrieve his gift from its hiding place in a nearby cupboard. She set it in front of him.

"What's this?" Aiden remarked at the recognizably book-shaped offering.

"I remember a deal if you passed your Biology exam."

Aiden had almost forgotten. He sat up and studied the burlap knot hemp paper wrap. "I chose well, being your son."

"I won't let you down," she joked back.

Aiden began to peel the wrap carefully. He assumed it would be another fantasy work to add to his collection. "Eddings, Salvatore?" He rolled his fingers across the swells and dimples of the embossed cover, then rattled his nails across the uneven pages, thick with rough edges. Aiden was impressed. It looked recently unearthed from an ancient tomb, brushed off errant dust, and dropped into a shopping bag. The pearl-shaded dragon on the cover had perfectly enmeshed scales, making its skin a uniform matted silver. Only the spine showed the title.

The Codex Dracontis, by Ido Beldhof.

"Where did you find this?" Aiden asked his mother.

"Is it good?"

Aiden kept his eyes on the book. "I don't know the author, but it certainly looks rare. I'd call it the best one yet. How much did this cost?"

"Twelve-year-olds are never supposed to ask how much something is," she said.

"Mom," he pushed.

"I know it doesn't have state-of-the-art graphics or—"

"It's perfect," said Aiden. He swung the wooden cover open; it groaned. The first cockled leaf repeated the book's title flamboyantly like it was handwritten. 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 Indian ink. The image's title was fitting for such a beast, The Death Dragon, Zmey Gorynych. His mother stepped forward and shared Aiden's fascination. "Terrifying," she whispered.

"I think I had Voss fight that yesterday," said Aiden.

"Voss?"

"The character in my game. This doesn't look like a novel. More like an encyclopedia." Aiden flipped through a few more pages. "Like a collection of monsters. How unusual..." She looked concerned he wasn't happy. "...but not unheard of. You find this at the same place as the others?"

She nodded. "Same; it was recommended."

"What are you doing?" Martin interjected from the archway. Aiden turned back and noticed his brother addressing their mother. Aiden answered anyway.

"Enjoying a new acquisition—" said Aiden.

"Don't play stupid, Aiden," said Martin. "I know your IQ." He then addressed their mother. "I peeled a bully off him this morning because of books like that."

"Books can never be blamed for the actions of people," their mother said. "Only the people."

"I know a few books with blood on their pages. You make me read from one every Sunday." That stung enough for their mother to remain silent. She was not one to be spiteful but had the disappointed-mother routine down pat.

"Mom's right," shouted Aiden. "It's a book, and don't act

so smart, Martin. I know your IQ."

"Enough, both of you," their mother snapped, then turned to Aiden. "You were in a fight?"

"If a punch was thrown," said Aiden. "Billy Williams is a... troglodyte."

"Well, that's inventive."

"As long as you encourage daydreams," interjected Martin, "I'll be the one forced to wake him from it." He left the two at the table and returned to his massive multiplayer online role-playing game.

"I love the book, Mom," said Aiden. He grabbed his gift and offered her a peck. "I'm going to go to my room and read."

She nodded, then grasped his arm. "One thing," she said. "His name is William Williams?"

"Obvious anger management issues resulting from bad parenting," Aiden answered. She released him, but before leaving, he turned to ask one more question. "Mom, is Santa Clause real?"

"That's a strange...No."

"Just checking," Aiden said as he left.

His bedroom window was open. Between the beds sat Martin's collection of books, modern stories, and science fiction. Aiden liked the ones with frayed edges, bent spines, and old words.

The codex was advanced. Aiden had to look up some of the words. He didn't care. Octagon-shaped glasses edged precariously off his nose.

Zmey was a sickly creature, Aiden read. 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.

But he was no match for Willum Raenis. Willum was a farmer's child. Neither a favored son nor a fond sibling, he dreamt 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, whereas Willum faltered. He desperately wanted to be remarkable. 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 niece of the elven lord, Elisa Stormbringer, a petite flower of golden petals. She was...

Aiden's finger continued to run down the page. Girl stuff. He flipped a page. And then another. His finger skimmed through the paragraphs.

...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.

Aiden 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," Aiden muttered. "Wouldn't the dragon have killed them all?" He shook his head and continued.

The beast turned from its pillaging to enjoy the impressive feast placed before it by an obvious admirer. 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 and placed it beside his pillow. He slumped into the bed and rolled on his side. His eyes were closed, but he wasn't close to being tired. He could hear Martin busy in the next room, chattering away at his keyboard 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 outer wall from his vantage. 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.

The glow bleeding from the window precluded the need for a nightlight. Aiden opened his book again and 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 following 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 remained there momentarily, hoping for that impossible chance when her eyes might meet his.

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 to the ocean. A helicopter caused a mild distraction as it passed by Aiden's window.

Before Aiden had swallowed his morning yawn or flicked 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 and 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-story wooden A-frame almost as old as the city. No ration was given to parking, and every curb was filled with various electric vehicles.

Aiden's mind wandered during the plodding repetitious 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 Voss Terberis slashing through an improbable number of foes in an equally preposterous 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 spat a torrent of liquid fire across the sky. Aiden could not 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?

"What's going on, 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 sat frozen on a field of broken glass, eyes fixed on the sky.

Aiden could smell the putridness wafting from the dragon and felt the heat of the inferno brewing in its belly. A part of Aiden kept reminding him that this couldn't happen. This was an ordinary world, and a dragon couldn't fly, couldn't spew flames from its mouth. Aiden believed he would awaken 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 his 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 the light into colors. Long white whiskers flapped like gravity had no control over 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 bellowed. 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 leaped 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. And winked.

It twisted its form again and leaped 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 into 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 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 doorway, an empty suitcase under his arm.

Aiden looked up from the book. "I can't find it."

"What?" Martin responded quickly and coldly.

"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 his throat clenched. He didn't want to cry in front of his brother. "I know..."

"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 no one was willing to stay with them. Cousins willing to take them in lived half way across the city, closer to the crown.

Martin lingered on his locked softside suitcase and did so for five minutes. He crammed and crinkled five changes of underwear, three dress pants, and five shirts, leaving substantial space for a pair of albums and a photo of him and his mother from his Confirmation. He had previously wedged in more photos but realized he hadn't packed any shirts. He always considered himself the surrogate adult, the proxy for his father, someone that Martin knew, but Aiden never did. When Martin returned to his brother's room, he noticed the half-full holdall occupied by one change of clothes and topped with the codex. "Leave the book," he said.

"No," Aiden replied, still focused on the tome.

"Aiden—"

"You knew."

"Knew what?"

"Martin, I can tell the difference between fear and surprise."

"Please, Aiden," Martin answered.

"You knew," Aiden repeated.

Martin opened for a lie but couldn't. "Just that...this city... is all people like us have left."

"And what's beyond it?"

"I don't know. I don't ask."

"You said no one leaves. 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. 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 the book from boy. "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, pried an arm free, and 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 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 and no signs of impact damage. 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. The 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.

He opened the book again and noticed the stamp at the bottom of the inside cover. It was printed in two languages, English and some Asian type Aiden couldn't understand. The ink had faded. Aiden read the book's origin:

David Obatala Chen's Biblio, 23C Huangxia Street, Genai.



be immediate social, political, religious, and philosophical repercussions. Would we welcome the fantasy world into our lives or fear its presence? For most, it would be the latter. Magic operates on its own terms, disobeying the rules of 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 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 of 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 humanity be able to retake the planet and push the fantasy back into the realms of our imagination and 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 humanity squandered?

Meanwhile, outside of these bastions of technology is a complex mythology with its own conflicts, 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 Attricana and the black gate of Ixindar. The central 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 systematic might of syntropy. 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.

A Story

It's real.

It's all real.

Amethyst is, at its core, a role-playing game 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 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

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 and 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: the differences between people 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. Despite growing tensions and mounting hostility, a balance between the two worlds may 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 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 scientifically measurable traits 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, which were 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, he would be the 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 voracious 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 of 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 a cosmos of death and tranquillity—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.

Humanity 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 to ambush Amethyst when isolated, believing Ixindar would survive the calamity.

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, eventually leading to humanity. Throughout 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 and connected to other stories and faiths. Some were tied to science—seeing a manatee and believing it a mermaid. Fantasies remained locked in the dreams of those living in the real world. Pushed aside as fancy, humanity continued its evolutionary drive to build, understand, and conquer. Society advanced, as did the machines in servitude. Gaining a complete 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. No one knows the cause to this day, 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 syntropy 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, humanity 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.

Humanity did not have the luxury of philosophy. It was fighting a losing battle on two fronts, from order and chaos. To make the situation more desperate, the technology humanity relied 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 choose: wall themselves in from the flood of encroaching enchantment 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 individuals refuse to surrender, a world run by science where humanity 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 humanity fighting a desperate and seemingly hopeless struggle against encroaching enchantment, but the individual bastions themselves are also paranoid about their 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 & 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, as the script extends itself into multiple dimensions.

- ◆ **Magical Reactivity.** Thousands of elements and combinations of elements 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 exact ratios of components required. Fae iron, coruthil, and angelite are examples of myriad forms of magical potions. Nearly every magic item features this to a degree.
- ◆ **Inborn Magic.** Fae beings and monsters are naturally magical, 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 in man's time, god or gods are as silent as he, she, or they always were. No proven sanctified or blessed magic users exist 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 re-constructed 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 individuals 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 significant 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 entirely 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. Though not directly, Druids and shamans also obtain their power from the gate. They receive their abilities from a conduit, the Earth. They worship nature and the world around them. 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

Glossary

After Enchantment (A.E.). The progress of time in this new era. The game begins for many in the year 508 A.E., over five hundred years from when the white gate reopened. Many communities retain their own system of recording, and there is no consistent calendar accepted by all.

Arkonnia. The region occupied by the continent of Africa and the Arabian peninsula.

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 is 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 echaphobic and forbid magic. Each bastion stands as its own country, with little to no contact with the outside world or other bastions.

Blinder. Common derogative nickname magically individuals call techans.

Canam. The continent previously occupied by Canada, the USA, and Mexico. Mostly pristine wilderness, with several 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.

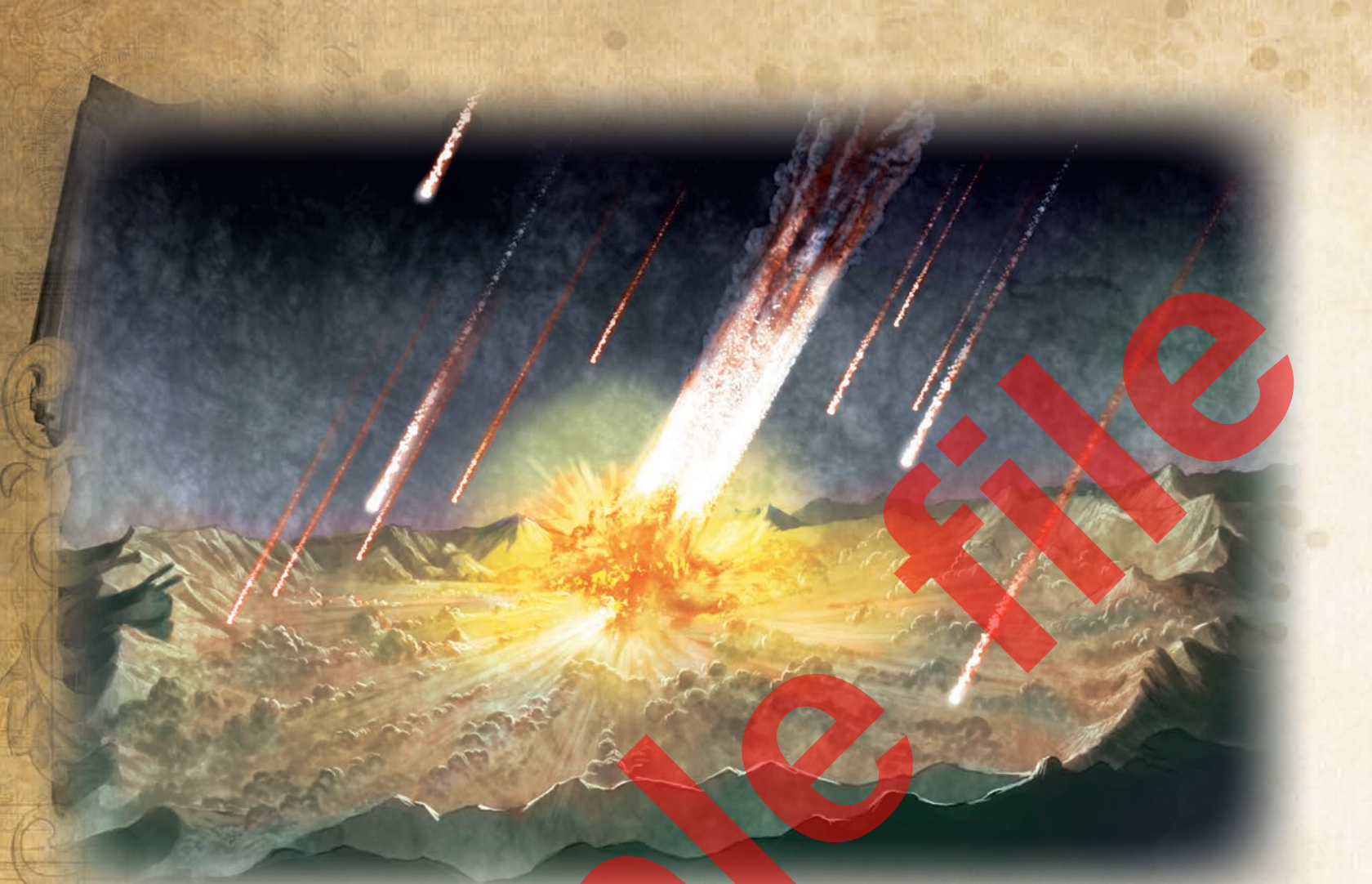
Corpus Continuity. This is the belief, primarily spiritually based, that the humanoid form shared by humans and fae descends from a common origin. While some claim it is related to echalogical influence—that humans look humanoid because of a lingering echo from the fantasy age—others claim a divine origin.

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 than 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 primarily refers to humans embracing the path of enchantment and occasionally to the fae. Some still consider this ugly bastardization of 'enchantment' derogatory, but it is now too widespread to do anything about.

Echagenics / Echalogy. The study in both echan and techan cultures of the similarities between humanity and its recorded history against the fae, dragons, and their recorded history. This analyzes the 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.



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 spellcasting. 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 role-playing 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 so as not to make the required list longer than needed.

Oh, and dice too. 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.

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 permanent change to the world—a change that depends on said group's motivations. Despite some assumptions, this setting does not presuppose a particular 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 involve a mixed party reaching a compromise 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 with 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 on the quest the players are undertaking, eventually leading to clashing armies and world-changing events. Humble origins may lead to legendary titles.

General Rules Summary

Here is a general list of what to expect in Amethyst Quintessence:

RACES

No races other than humans are canon within the Amethyst setting. This book introduces nine, all inspired by folklore and mythology. Parallels between these races and those found in official 5E licensed products are unavoidable, as they were also pulled from folklore and mythology. Additionally, Amethyst also introduces race-based feats.

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 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 selecting 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 take advantage of their abilities fully. Unlike traditional classes, all techan classes list archetype 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, armor, 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, Tech Levels do not always equate magical bonuses in Quintessence. The firearm rules presented expand the basic ones listed in official 5E licensed products.

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 tends to jam mechanical devices above a certain complexity (the limit 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.

Echological Influence. The belief that the history of the fae and dragons inspired human fiction through an immeasurable, unproven, undetectable echo that 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 that 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.

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

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

Indoaus. 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 anathema (and the most prolific monster species in Canam): puggs, boggs, and skeggs.

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

Kodiak. 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.

Lauropa. The term given to the region covering the lands of Europe west of the former Ural mountains. Consists primarily 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 massive, brutally effective warriors.

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

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 puggs, 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 (COMPUTER USE)

Knowing where the "on" switch is and understanding a point/click interface is a common skill expected of everyone. Computer Use covers more advanced concepts like hardware modification, upgrade, and maintenance. Computer Use is also employed in the research of online materials. You can attempt to repair or modify a computer, circumvent security, create programs, 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 bombs to the best effect and set or disable detonators. Failure means that the explosive fails to go off as planned. The explosives are not lost. Failure by 10 or more means the bomb 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 a broad skill dealing with all applications of technology, allowing you to craft, modify, and repair devices. These include electronics, general machines, exo-armor, mecha, 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, you can expend \$5 multiplied by your character level in widgets each day until you reach the item's market value (this is called a build schedule). You must have widgets or parts on hand.

Alternatively, you can attempt to make an Intelligence (Engineering) check—the result -10 multiplied by your character level is how much in \$ you progress instead of taking the standard \$5 each day. This value can increase with the use of engineering kits.

The tech level of your engineering kit affects the speed of your build, being a multiplier affecting the number of \$ you can invest per day of use. A TL1 kit thus cannot affect your build time, while a TL5 kit allows you to spend 5 times more \$ than generally for a day's work. You cannot build other kits or medical injections.

For Example, if the item you are trying to build costs \$5,000, and you possess a TL3 Engineering kit and are 10th level, you can spend $5 \text{ (base)} \times 10 \text{ (level)} \times 3 \text{ (kit)} = \150 a day without rolling. If deciding to roll one day, and your result is a 20, you can spend $10 \text{ (roll)} \times 10 \text{ (level)} \times 3 \text{ (kit)} = \300 that day.

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 machines. The number of hit points recovered equals the result of your skill check -10. This does not apply to mecha (see Mecha).

This value can be adjusted with an appropriate engineering kit. If the kit is more advanced than the repaired item, add the difference to the hit points recovered. If the other way around, the recovered hit points are 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 equals the number of hit points recovered $\times 5$.

Reverse Engineer. You can use the Intelligence (Engineering) skill to convert technology into widgets to be used to create other technology. Each attempt to reverse engineer an item takes six hours. Reverse engineering destroys the item being selected. The 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 that you can hinder 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 (REGIONAL HISTORY)

Regional History is a subset of Intelligence (History). You have proficiency when making checks in the context of specific areas of the world. You add half your proficiency bonus when dealing with neighboring regions (or those with which your home region has extensive dealings).

- ◆ Abidan, Apocrypha, and Ažhi Dahaka
- ◆ Alpinas, Dagron, Seliquam, Quinox and Selkirk
- ◆ Angel, Crax, Dawnamoak, Torquil, and Xixion
- ◆ Baruch Malkut, Laurama, and Tranquiss

- ◆ Fargon
- ◆ Gnimfall, Mann, and York
- ◆ Kannos, the Finer Fire Pits, and Salvabrooke
- ◆ Laudenia
- ◆ Limshau, Orchis, Plicato, and Skyrose
- ◆ Sierra Madre, the Gloam

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, Geography, and 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.

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.

Because science.

VEHICLE PROFICIENCY (TOOL)

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, aircraft, and watercraft**. If possessing one, you know how to control all vehicles of that type. So, if you ride a bike, you can ride them all. Although not entirely accurate, given the broad range of technology worldwide, 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 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 chance 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.

New Feats

Amethyst presents a handful of new feats.

EXO-ARMOR PROFICIENCY

- ◆ Increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1 to a maximum of 20.
- ◆ You also gain proficiency with exo-armor.

Shemjaza. The proper term for the fae-like creatures known by humans as 'demons,' the ultimate servants of Ixindar. Although all look practically identical, each shemjaza 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 Urals. Rendered chiefly 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 mainly of feuding 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 their blood's urges and fight for their species' survival.

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.

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 \$ you can expend per day (or longer with a mismatched engineering kit) is doubled.

FIREARM EXPERTISE

- ◆ Increase your ranged attack ability score by 1 to a maximum of 20.
- ◆ Using fifteen feet of unspent movement, you can reload one clip, magazine, or cell.
- ◆ 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.

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.

Resistances & Immunities

Within the pages of the equipment chapter, numerous new rules will be introduced regarding how firearms work. These rules are in addition to those presented in official core 5E publications (few that there are). Pertinent rules are replicated. As small arms within the Amethyst setting cannot be enchanted, the only way to circumvent many monsters' defenses would usually be to switch to magical melee weapons.

Thankfully, advanced technology can often be mistaken for magic (per the adage), and weapons with the **ARMOR PIERCING (AP)** property are also counted as magical. However, these rules have been expanded slightly, which also retroactively affects how magical weapons work.

A weapon with the AP property ignores a target's resistance to the weapon's damage type (e.g., a piercing weapon ignores resistance to piercing), though only regarding physical damage (bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing).

If the target has fantasy damage resistances, the weapon also counts as magical, silver, and adamantite.

If an opponent has immunity to the weapon's [physical] damage type and the weapon has the AP property, the opponent has only resistance to that weapon instead of immunity.

Certain weapons unlock the AP property at indicated character levels, while others gain them immediately.

While this explains how firearms react to technology and monsters, it doesn't thoroughly explain how magic affects technology.

When engaged with non-fantasy monsters, any magical weapon also reduces physical resistance in the same way. Thus a vehicle, such as a tank, that is immune to slashing damage, is now only resistant to the slashing damage from a magical sword, while an armor resistant to slashing damage no longer benefits from that protection from that same weapon.

With 5E monsters, a resistance entry will often be listed as being "from nonmagical weapons." This affects all beasts presented in this book that are resistant or immune to physical damage types.

Additionally, while some firearms possess the AP property, other weapons without it can work around this absence by employing specialty ammunition, such as silver and magnarros (the latter being extremely expensive).

It was a week before Aiden could make his move. He claimed he was hitting up the playground, something Martin would never fall for, but their guardians readily accepted.

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, that night. Aiden was given to the moment the sun dipped behind the crown.

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. After which, Aiden was shuffled 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 no guard was on hand to prevent him.

Genai bore no resemblance to any other district in the city. Unlike the rest of the city, organized and methodically laid out, Genai was a model of chaos. Roads split into dead ends; walkways looped around onto themselves. Buildings were built with wood and concrete, topped with ceramic tiles or gardens. The temple, a pagoda atop a pyramid, stood at the center of the town, towering over the buildings around it. Aiden only caught it from the corner of his eye as he tracked the passing street signs.

Aiden found the address. Huangxia Street was an alley branching from the towering monument. Bottom lip quivering, Aiden forced himself deeper down the darkened alley, waiting for his eyes to adjust.

A hundred feet in, he found it. The store was three stories, probably an apartment complex at one point. A set of unlocked wrought iron gates stood ajar and portentous, like a patient basking shark. Behind them, tattered wooden doors tapped in the breeze. Aiden rechecked the address. From the outside, it looked like either the place had been robbed or abandoned years ago. The sign above rocking like a metronome was in the same Asian type Aiden had read inside the codex. At least the number 23C was understandable.

Aiden realized that he hadn't considered what he would do next. He was half-way across town, staring at a store that appeared to have been forsaken. He knew he wasn't being rational. Part of him wished he had stumbled on an elderly Asian man with a crooked wooden cane, round glasses, and a white fu-Manchu beard running a 24-hour corner store stocked with a witch's brew of spices, frozen food, and bottled soda with a curtained-off backroom hiding wands, magic powders, and tiny creatures that looked adorable but acted as monsters if you angered them.

Aiden considered returning home. However, since the door was open, there was no harm in taking a peek. He saw only glimpses in the darkness as he peaked past the threshold. A few shelves sat in silhouette. Cheap tables and bamboo chairs lined one-half of the store. A dim lantern with a faint glow hung over an oak desk at the other end. A few books waited open

for a reader. Aiden willed himself through the iron jaw and past the tapping doors.

He squeaked a "hello" to announce himself but only managed a whisper. He snuck across the room and approached the oak desk. The immense open tome before him had broken its spine at the gutter like it sat at this page for a hundred years. The cover had a marble finish, and as Aiden scrapped his finger across the tail, he realized it was real marble. He removed his glasses from his coat and tried to read.

Aiden could make out most of the words though a few were hidden in the shadow of the gutter. He was apprehensive about touching anything but fought through it to turn the nozzle on the lantern. The light grew bright, and Aiden returned to the book.

The very appearance of humanity confused many fae up-on their return. They discovered that without magic, suppressed rules of nature resumed their original function: species adapt to their environment and do so much slower and less drastically than before. Not only that, but this intelligent new creature evolved from a primitive form—a social animal with bestial ways. Fae could not understand how intelligence could arise through evolution: their experience of the process was a spontaneous degradation rather than a steady improvement.

Aiden didn't notice the light from the lamp was growing brighter. He was engrossed in the words, wondering what fae were. The light drifted slightly over Aiden's head, illuminating the gutter nicely. Aiden continued to read.

Added to that, these creatures looked nearly identical to the fae on the outside, and layered throughout their history, this species had generated a vast literary canon professing the existence of fabled creatures as such that roamed the world in a time when their own ancestors had been nothing but tiny shrew-like creatures. Humanity encountered its own mystery, barely surviving the holocaust of the Second Hammer only to discover a sudden population appearing literally from nowhere. Not only that, but they coincidentally resembled creatures from fiction and legends dating back thousands of years.

Aiden finished and then realized that the light on the page had shifted from his right to his left. He twisted slowly to spot the flicking glowing ball of catkin hovering in the air beside his head. It had opened the lantern door, drifted gently from its cage, and moved closer to offer better illumination.

Aiden screamed and spun around, pinning himself against the desk. The spark jumped from its spot and fluttered around him. It was no dragon, but Aiden's growing anxiety about being far from home made him jump. He also didn't like bugs, and this thing moved very bug-like.

It floated to the book and then tapped the page repeatedly. Aiden didn't know how to respond or even if he should. It didn't have legs or a head; it was just a lantern flame that had floated from its lantern. Aiden bent his head and leaned forward. It tapped the page again.

"What?" Aiden asked.

Tap. Tap.

"You want me to read?"

Tap.

Aiden's heart started to temper. The light drifted up over the book. Aiden stepped back to the desk. "If...you...insist."

He was about to look back down; then it occurred to him that a flame with no fuel source was floating in the air in front of him. "You can't be real," Aiden whispered. It bobbed in the air, floating on an invisible ocean. Aiden didn't know if that was an answer. "You shouldn't...exist."

"Children from the city are not allowed in Genai without a guardian," a voice called out.

The man wasn't a dumpy figure with almond eyes and shriveled skin--this stranger towered over Aiden by several feet. His eyes were a radiant blue, ebony skin. He had fuzzy grey hair with matching whiskers under his chin, thin but with a granite physique.

Aiden backed away from the desk into the shelf behind him, jostling heavy books. The youth glanced back and noticed a hefty volume toppling over. It had a cover of obsidian, parading gold bosses of the gaping maws of dragons. Their front claws reached the outer edge of the single oversized clasp keeping the book closed. Aiden righted it quickly--with considerable strain--and turned back to the man.

"I'm sorry," Aiden said, "I was just—"

"Quite all right, Mr. Camus." His voice was deep and rough, charismatic in how he addressed the child. Aiden couldn't place the accent, but he had no problems understanding him. He had been in his office and must have watched Aiden since he entered. "Snitching on customers is never good for business. And that book survived hundreds of years and hundreds of falls." He approached.

"You work here?" asked Aiden.

"I own the building. You may call me David or Mr. Chen formally." Aiden glanced at the floating light, partly frightened, partly not. "Its life has no meaning unless it can light the way for others," said David. "If only all things had such simple ambitions." Aiden had the urge to touch it but was concerned. "It's quite harmless. In fact, I think it likes you."

The spark began to orbit the two of them. The man stopped opposite the desk and looked down at the book. "The memoirs of Renar Alkanost, laudenian council leader, written 300 years ago and translated." "I just wanted to look..." Aiden trailed off. "You know my name—"

"I knew your mother. I sold her the books. She talked about you at length. Sorry about..." he paused to choose an appropriate word, "everything."

"You sell books?"

"And collect them." David opened his palm, and the spark flew obediently to it. A whisper from his lips, and it leaped from his hand. It bounced and fluttered across the room, igniting every candle and lamp.

Aiden's eyes followed the spark as it made its journey. Aiden's mouth fell open as he took sight of the forty rows of books that encircled the chamber, every wall, floor to ceiling. Each volume looked as old as the book on the desk, like the books Aiden owned. They were magnificent. The only break in the books came from a glass showcase of old weapons modern men never used. They were obsolete devices and implements from a time Aiden delighted to remember. They gleamed with polish as if forged and shaved into shape yesterday--broadswords, throwing axes, and a single longbow shaped from black wood. The flame finally returned to its home and closed the door behind it.

"That...was friggin' cool," Aiden said.

"Unsurprisingly, a lean reaction."

"I did see a dragon recently."

"That you did," David said, slightly melancholy, "the first breach in quite some time."



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 was 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 consider it a compliment to be likened to noble, 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 radically differ. Some exhibit traits from various legends, while others are wholly unique without a mythological mirror. 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 appropriately, species) are broken up into three categories:

- ◆ **Fae:** These are naturally born from magic with no original primordial form to track evolution. They began as the original fae (believed now extinct) enslaved to magic's whim, continually "devolving" as time progressed into

more tribal, animalistic forms. 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 know them all. Other variations are dealt with later as monsters.

- ◆ **Evolved:** Humanity stands as the only example of an evolved species (at least on Earth) that has achieved intelligence without the assistance of magic.
- ◆ **Spawn:** Spawns are once normal evolved creatures that succumbed to magic's influence and have been altered and enhanced. For this chapter, spawn listed here are those that have been pushed by enchantment into a form that possesses 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 culture.

Build Options

Every character is based on three core elements—what they are, how they were raised, and what they choose to do.

Species/genetic origin is the first step and has traditionally been the source of ability score modifiers and traits common among a species.

Lifepath follows, offering color to one's life without contributing much in mechanical gameplay benefits.

Finally, before picking a class, a player selects a **background**, which usually offers a handful of skills along with starting currency and gear.

This no longer has to be followed to the letter.

When creating a character, a player selects one of two options.

Hereditary Abilities

These are ability score modifiers and traits common among a species. By selecting this, you can no longer select trained abilities as part of a background, indicating most of your dominant talents were inherited based on your origin.

Trained Abilities

These are ability score modifiers and traits commonly acquired through rigorous dedication to a specific career/life.

By selecting this, you can no longer select hereditary abilities as part of species/origin selection, indicating most of your dominant talents developed through discipline and practice.

The Line of Fae

No one is certain how the fae appeared. Some insist they were 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 regarded 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," a modern human term.

Echological 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 their 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 also match this new reality. 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.

The ancient fae appeared long after the dragons. These creatures were humanoid, statuesque, and attuned to the ways of magic. Like 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 of how to control magic. Despite their best efforts, the original fae eventually vanished, replaced with new species who would beget their own offshoots in time. This would ultimately result in the anathema—primal monsters, mere shadows of their noble ancestors.

Although the ancient fae vanished, none of their successive species have, though some, like the laudenians, have dwindled dramatically. Modern fae wonder if they are doomed to devolve into mindless animals while humanity 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 the main branches of fae, two species are 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 last age). Pagus break most of the rules associated with fae. They are the oldest species without a 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 last age 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 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.

Species Traits vs. Culture

The oddest attribute of all fae is one foreign to humanity. With the latter, if separated by oceans, mountains, or forests, entirely new cultures could emerge featuring unique traditions and even languages. As such, despite being 99.9% genetically similar, hundreds of cultures of humanity flourished on Earth before the fall.

Fae are quite different, with tribes of identical species separated by half a world possessing near-identical civilizations. People divided by thousands of kilometers will speak the same tongue and share more or less the same beliefs, pointing to fae possessing genetic knowledge surpassing that claimed by humanity. Alternatively, the source of the connection between disconnected civilizations could be entirely magical—that the same ethereal link that drives the creation of fae also dictates their shared traits.

Body weight is shockingly low for the apparent mass of the body...

An attempted biopsy of marrow from the scapula found the bone hollow. Interesting. Almost like a flying mammal. Will attempt another location.

Other cavities located within the sternum and ribs. I know why birds have hollow bones, but how does a humanoid survive with a fragile...

...oddly enough the bone structure itself feel very rigid, stronger than expected, though still flexible.

Bone mineral density test inconclusive, as it does not match with other findings.

Finger bones also hollow but ulna and radius are solid.

Final results: This fae's skeleton accounts for 8-10% of its total body mass, this is in comparison to an average human, where it is closer to 20%. In conclusion, this means this chaparran's skeleton is built more like a bird's than a human's.

<Audio recording>

*Autopsy on unidentified
chaparran (excerpt), Angel
July 15th, 227 A.E.*

This is not entirely exclusive, and exceptions have occurred. For example, in Southam, most tenenbri have fallen within a cult of personality that encouraged an outward disposition alien to their natural tendencies. Additionally, the damaskan elves of Limshau have deviated from their brethren across the planet, influenced by surrounding human civilizations. The tilen, on the other hand, are the only fae that appear not to possess such a connection, but not enough of them exist in one place for any unique traditions to have taken root.

The pagus may possess the most unique situation of all. Their corruption via Ixindar compels them to worship the authority of higher entities—dragons and shemjaza, a form of genetic brainwashing antithetical to their chaotic heritage before the contamination. In their case, they literally have two different magical powers attempting to encourage behavior; it's not surprising why they often act as they do.

Relations & Traditions

Despite some common ground, significant cultural differences exist between humans 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 the fledging fae and human communities in southern Canam soured relations for decades. Early chaparran encounters with humanity were so dire it curdled the entire species' opinion of the 'monkey-folk,' a belief persisting to this day; as the details of the incident are lost to human 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' wild and unkempt nature fell afoul of the decorous and conceited attitude of the laudenians. They judged the whole of the human species upon that single meeting as offensive and unpleasant and have 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. Except for the narros, most fae in Southam think of humanity 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, echalogical influence preserved many of the social customs from the ancient past, allowing a certain common ground in fundamental relations even when there is no shared language. Though each nation has its own cultural standards, there has never been a major diplomatic incident between nations over traditional practices.

Handshaking 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 the knee or prostrating before a lord or faith is unknown to them, causing accusations of disrespect. Meanwhile, gimfen kowtow to virtually anybody, including their tools (considering how close their heads are to the ground, this is hardly an impedance or 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 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 bare 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 severe 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 the 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 of 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 by humans, interpreted as 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 them 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 fae nature is such that humans usually adopt fae practices rather than the other way around, though exceptions do occur. In Limshau, for instance, damaskans have adopted the practice of slapping the raised hand of another in celebration despite their general 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 fact 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 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 humanity barbaric and primitive, regardless if they use magic or technology. Some fae have accused humanity of being inferior in breeding and brains. Humans have countered with similar accusations, adding that fae are tools of the devil, an image personified in the zealous ramblings of King Darius of Baruch Malkut.

And yet, many fae nations maintain a positive relationship with humans despite the massive casualties the fae suffered in the first century and 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.

The Influence

After dragons, the first species born on Earth were the fae. No one remembers what they initially looked like or how many there were, for 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 still survive in all descendants). Their susceptibility to magic altered their original form, quickly breaking off into smaller offshoots.

These offshoots remain genetically compatible and physically similar in fundamental ways despite being 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 sexual reproduction. Even after a few centuries of examination, human scientists have consistently failed to determine how fae resemble evolved apes to such an extent.

Although it has been commonly agreed upon that alien life would evolve 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 between enchanted species of fae and the evolved species of man as proof of God's existence, a philosophy known as Corpus Continuity.

The humanoid form, consisting of binocular vision, binaural hearing, base ten appendages, erect stature, and mammalian physiology, matches the fae species precisely, a species not evolved from primitive animals but formed from magic millions of years before humanity's appearance. Except for the pointed ears and the variations of fae species when they adapt to their environment, there remain remarkable similarities scientists cannot explain.

Because fae arose first, many believers in Corpus Continuity also subscribe to Echalogical Influence. Those of faith on both sides believe that God or gods liked the humanoid form but tried different ways to succeed. Scientists refuse to acknowledge this and believe a genetic reason exists for the similarity. To them, echalogical influence may be the reason—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 makes sense and that all intelligent life will eventually move 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; thus, man's appearance dictates the physique of fae rather than the other way around.

Shared Traits

Fae all share several common qualities. They are peaceful within their own species and often monogamous and loyal to their mates. Divorce is virtually non-existent, and though remarriage upon the death of a spouse is not unheard of, neither is it common.

When single, they are also known to be somewhat promiscuous. Even the laudenians, with their strict heritage and tradition, do not consider sex for pleasure either sinful or immoral between consenting non-bonded adults.

Although they denounce the use of sexual slaves by human masters (as seen in Baruch Malkut), fae species do not prohibit pre-bonded sex. Prostitution is rare, given their sexual freedom, but it has been known to occur, especially in mixed-species kingdoms.

There are virtually no crimes dealing with vice in fae cultures, as they are immune to the ravages of addiction. Most things humans would consider vices simply are not harmful to fae either personally or culturally.

Additionally, all genders occur and are accepted openly in most fae societies, with bonded couples of various combinations being commonplace. Some observers claim most fae are pansexual but also reflect the whole gamut of sexual orientation as they do genders. Some human nations frown

on these freedoms and expressions, especially within those nations that use religion as a device of fear to keep the population in line (a tendency not exhibited in any fae nation).

These non-strictures apply when the fae cultures are allowed to govern themselves. In some locations where fae are not in places of authority, they abide by the rules of the nation they inhabit, usually without complaint—rejection would often result in emigration. As a rule, most fae abhor social conflict and will do anything they can to prevent it, though the extremes they will go to vary from type to type: laudenians and chaparrans will generally remove themselves (or the offender) from the equation; damaskans and narros will attempt to mediate; the boisterous tenenbri will turn the conflict into a formal debate with clear parameters for victory; the accommodating gimfen will quite happily concede anything to an intractable enough opponent and find some way of making up lost ground.

This applies only to non-violent conflict. When a situation turns sour, even the most passive fae will raise a weapon to defend themselves or those they care about.

Fae Traits

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

Echan. All fae (except pagus) are tied to the chaotic energies of the white gate of Attricana. Any technology you attempt to use is automatically disrupted, and you increase 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 diseases 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 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, and you do dream.

Fae Iron. A specific ratio of lead and iron (known as cold iron to some) is highly 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 despoiler nation to the east, invading her forest in search of chattel. The huntress stood silently, balancing effortlessly on the thin branch, and fitted a projectile to her bow.

The first human died with an arrow in his throat. His companions turned sharply at his last gurgling scream and looked at the ominous shadow perched among the leaves.

"Ambush!" the leader said, 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, 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 into 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 these written—where other fae take pride in their books and scrolls, chaparrans seldom write anything down. Chaparrans believe most other fae have forgotten their origins. They believe the original fae were birthed from the forests and should always remain tied to them. The chaparrans live almost exclusively in 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 obscure people, accurate numbers are impossible to come by. Estimates range from 80,000 to 800,000 chaparrans worldwide (even the most optimistic guess falls just shy of a million), scattered among a thousand forests of varying sizes. 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 invaluable 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 chiefly in their music and dance. They pound beats into fallen logs with fantastic 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. Bodies move almost violently, with fists 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

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.

appendages and whirling bodies without caring for people or objects. 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 Chaparra, believed to purge the darkness from their souls, allowing them to fight with clean spirits. This form developed after the First War. Most of the pagus created on the night of migration came from chaparrans, and the fae left behind swore an oath 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 offshoots are not necessarily violent but more xenophobic, becoming increasingly skittish of outsiders. They also grow more connected with nature, even to the point of exhibiting non-fae physical traits. Many 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 is pushed over, a single acorn



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 would the tress – welcome them into open arms...and they shall never fear again.

Ambition. It should be a sin.

Sylvanakassus

356 A.E., from a speech

is placed in the mouth. This seed always grows, despite surrounding competition and available water. These trees grow taller and broader than any grown from nature, and many claim the great temples of Jibaro and Libanus emerged from fallen chaparran priests. This tradition also extends to wandering chaparrans, and travelers worldwide always know where one is buried by the massive tree dwarfing 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 moves their soul to a tree for its lifetime. After an era, the soul returns to flesh.

Physical Description

Chaparrans are 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 most significant spectrum of skin tones, from light tan to ebony black (though mostly the latter). Their ears are short and flush with their heads, making them almost indistinguishable from humans from a distance. A chaparran's eyes usually possess green and bluish hues. Based on the specifics of a tribe, 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 forties. 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 curly 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 dexterous and robust than usual, enabling them to grasp branches equally well with feet and hands, giving them improved balance in the tree canopy.

Depending on the tribe, chaparrans often wear furs and pelts, adding to their girth but exposing a great deal of skin to maintain agility. Almost all chaparrans 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 embrace the fantasy world and all its possibilities.

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

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 makana (a wooden club inset 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 positive 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. Most 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 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.

A chaparran player character wishes to see what lies beyond the trees of home. They may still be skittish of strangers but brave enough to take chances where others would run away. Chaparrans have a natural flight instinct and will bolt instead of standing their ground unless allies, innocents, or trees are threatened.

Names

Unlike other fae, often taking human-like names to better associate with the human world, chaparrans refuse to do so. Like all fae, their names are personal and 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 humanity'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 that 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 Truenames: Brassekonnas, Jassakerak, Killikas-sawar, Marakenassa, Taneggoras, Satthrassin

Example Titles: Darawren ("Earth-seer"), Hiinodorrán ("Fire Dancer"), Kitarri ("Black Bow"), Merawrak ("Swift Bird-catcher"), Nathash ("Red-Bellied Salmon"), Shikkakarri ("Deer Stalker")

Chaparran Traits

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

Creature Type: Humanoid

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: 30 feet

Life Span: 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 many as 3,000 years.

As a chaparran, you have these special traits.

Brachiate. You have a climb speed equal to your normal speed when climbing trees. You have advantage on Strength (Athletics) and Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks when moving through forested terrain. You can move through difficult forest terrain without a reduction in speed.

Darkvision. Accustomed to twilight 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).

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 Sefirot tree, depicting the map of creation. I mentioned the Ashwath Vriksha, 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 Yggdrasil 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 Ragnarök 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, though indigenous to that land. It towers through clouds, upon clouds, reaching a point where one could observe the curvature of the planet. This tree can neither be seen by flyers or from the ground at any distance. A tree growing to the stratosphere would be a grand climb indeed.

*Sugi Gentilanna
The New Irminsul*

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 short bow or longbow, you may use Wisdom for attack and damage rolls instead of Dexterity.

Natural Habitat. You are one with the forest. While in one, you gain advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Weald Walk. You can vanish into the forest and reappear elsewhere to assault your opponent. If within 5 feet of a tree, you can move into it and teleport up to 50 feet to another tree within range as a bonus action. You emerge within 5 feet of the targeted tree. The trees must be rooted in the ground. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a short or long rest. Additionally, you can use inspiration (instead of gaining advantage on a d20 test) to immediately reset this ability.

Regional Focus. Generally, a chaparran in Canam derives from either Laurama or Dawnamoak. You may optionally select one of the following paths to gain hereditary abilities. These are not backgrounds.

Laurama Chaparrans

Hailing from Laurama, you have learned to be on guard against threats from an early age. Being combative comes not from tradition but necessity. Your family has been uprooted at least once. You have most likely lost at least one relative either to the dark forest of Tranquiss or to the slavers of Baruch Malkut. This has created a civilization of extremists willing to reach any lengths to sustain their way of life. Unfortunately, it took a toll on Laurama's culture, as its people think of little other than survival.

You might have left Laurama, but why is anyone's guess—either by your choice or your family's. Alternately, you might be second or third-generation removed from your homeland, but those tendencies die hard. Your aggressive nature is hard to conceal through daily life. Elves from Laurama are indistinguishable from other chaparrans in physical appearance, but the dispositions are apparent among your kind. And people think normal chaparrans are xenophobic and guarded against non-fae. You abhor evil in all forms and have little sympathy for those unable to fight for themselves.

HEREDITARY ABILITIES

If you elect to gain these abilities, you do not gain Trained Abilities as part of your background.

Ability Score Increase. Your Wisdom score increases by 2. Your Strength score increases by 1. You can swap this bonus with your bonus to Wisdom.

Chaparran Weapon Proficiency. You are proficient with the short bow, 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.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Chaparra and one human language (usually English).

Dawnamoak Chaparrans

Dawnamoak 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. Dawnamoak 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 or exposure to other ideas or people. However, unlike those from Laurama, there is room for curiosity. The offspring of Dawnamoak can be found throughout the world, and subsequent descendants all reflect similar qualities. This is considered the default for chaparrans.

HEREDITARY ABILITIES

If you elect to gain these abilities, you do not gain Trained Abilities as part of your background.

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

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Chaparra and one human language (usually English).

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 CHANNELS

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 tetsubo 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 backward 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 different nations across the planet. In the ruins of the laughably termed "old world" of Lauropa, Damaska was restored to mimic 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 look identical, but this ended up not being the 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 face a major river or body of water. Where they differ is that Damaska's cities expand with

abandon across open fields stopped only by water and cliffs, whereas 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 allows one to sit atop a roof and watch an unobstructed sunset. The Damaskan fae across the ocean in Lauropa wear looser clothes, wield different weapons, and are more open in public, whereas the Canam damaskans are more reticent, with clothing and weaponry primarily 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 entirely foreign to the Damaskan Empire in the East.

Damaskans are the most common, most often seen, and 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, often using it themselves. Of all fae, damaskans are the most numerous, with the largest kingdoms. Because of their circulation over the globe, no one can be sure how many damaskans live on Earth, but it's probably between 2 and 3 million, although only about half reside in Canam. Narros hold rights to the largest armies, but damaskans claim all other records. They have the most artisans, the most diplomats, the most historians, and the most architects.

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 civilizations remain loyal to each other, though not often in contact.

Damaskans loathe pagus and 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 distrust him instinctively as another species might. They have a deep mutual respect for dragons. Limshau trusts their proven alliances with the gimfen, chaparrans, and humans—specifically with the kingdoms of Abidan and Kannos. They are generally indifferent to other species, preferring to judge individuals on a case-by-case basis. Limshau is currently in conflict with Baruch Malkut due to said nation's policy on fae slavery, but war remains undeclared.

Limshau is 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 impenitent 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*

Each individual damaskan possesses comprehensive 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 marred with inaccuracies, legends claimed as fact, or facts discredited as myth. This was part of why fae history from the time of Terros is so vague and sporadic. Alas, 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 can clearly make is that they never volunteer their own opinion in their papers or journals nor clog the books with judgment, sentiment, or meaningless diatribes. 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 sonna-eliano, 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 other scholars. 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 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 particular interest in architecture; Canam 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 damaskan's eyes are slightly slanted and have epicanthic folds similar to humans of Asian descent. Their ears taper straight out the sides of the skull to a very sharp point and tend to flutter and vibrate slightly depending on mood. They generally have darker 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 the peculiarity of the damaskan brain, they can employ both lobes simultaneously, and their analytical and creative centers are diffuse rather than localized. This makes them functionally ambidextrous and enables them to work on one project while thinking about another. Damaskans frequently wear new clothes, or at least pressed and clean. They hate 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 laude-nians and chaparrans. They are the easiest to get along with, possess 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 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 worthwhile 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 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 designed.

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 human faiths.

Regardless of their proclivities, a genuinely 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, pursuing knowledge takes the place of other spiritual concerns.

Damaskans welcome adventure for the sheer experience of it and often engage in 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 much the same way zealots react when their beliefs are challenged: threatening to put flame to parchment is the surest way to enrage such fae.

Names

Unfortunately, while phonetically pleasing to the ear, the damaskan language can be somewhat tricky for those unfamiliar with it to get their tongues around. Damaskans often adopt a human-sounding name in public: their contact with humans has been so extensive over the centuries that modern damaskan parents generally give this name alongside the traditional one at birth, even in all-fae communities. Some damaskan families, especially in Limshau, 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 when 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 humans, and consequently, their native names can be challenging 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 Limshau and Damaska place the given name before the family name, a damaskan will usually adopt the name order of whatever community they are in (so a damaskan visiting Fargon or Genai will give their family name first).

Examples. Ravenar Limshau 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.

Example Given Names: Demosin, Keeilian, Ourokess, Ravenar, Reivune, Zallamber

Example Family Names: Anaiquore, Ekka'Vraiul, Hastalleiki, Kaixiu'Ooria, Talassezri, Uotha'Vuesti

Example Open Names: Damon, Chandler, Hope, Peregrin, Raven, Salla

Damaskan Traits

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

Creature Type: Humanoid

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: 35 feet

Life Span: 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 for as many as 1,500 years.

As a damaskan, you have these special traits.

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

Gravity Focus. You can enter a state of heightened awareness. Until the start of your next turn, you gain the following benefits:

- ◆ You increase your speed by +10 feet.
- ◆ You gain advantage on all Dexterity ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws.
- ◆ You gain a +2 bonus to AC.

Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a short or a long rest. Additionally, you can use inspiration (instead of gaining advantage on a d20 test) to immediately reset this ability.

Regional Focus. Generally, a damaskan in Canam is either a plenary—one not bound to Limshau or born and raised within the white walls of the kingdom. You may optionally select one of the following paths to gain hereditary abilities. These are not backgrounds.

Limshau Damaskans

As a member of the most common fae in all of Canam, the default, and the one most commonly and perhaps annoyingly referred to as an elf; you can trace your lineage eventually back to the founding capital city of Limshau. You may, in fact, still reside there. Most elves in this land know little of

their culture before man's inclusion and influence (though some would say corruption). Your nation already held several traditions and beliefs similar to that of Eastern nations from humanity's past, and considering the human immigrants adopted also held those attitudes, amalgamation was unavoidable. Most Limshau (there is no plural) have embraced this new culture. If selecting this path, it is assumed you have as well. You wouldn't be carrying so many books around if you hadn't.

HEREDITARY ABILITIES

If you elect to gain these abilities, you do not gain Trained Abilities as part of your background.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2. Your Intelligence score increases by 1. You can swap this bonus with your racial bonus to Dexterity.

Encyclopedic Knowledge. You gain half your proficiency bonus on all Intelligence-based skills in which you don't already have proficiency.

Polyglot. You can speak, read, and write the Damaskan and English languages. You can speak, read, and write four additional languages.

Tachygraphy. You can write any language you know in damaskan orthoglossy, which can be written five times faster than any other script (non-damaskans can learn to read and write orthoglossy by learning damaskan, but cannot learn to write it at full speed). You can write any other script (except Pleroma) at double speed.

Think Before Acting. Your intellectual pursuits, far from impeding your combative edge, have only honed it. You may use Intelligence for attack and damage rolls with any weapons with the finesse property.

Limshau Academic. You have proficiency with any two Limshau weapons of your choice.

Plenary Damaskans

Although fae from Limshau are the default damaskan in Canam, the plenary damaskans are the default for the entire world—they are simply a rarity in certain parts of it. As one, you look indistinguishable from the locals, but you were either raised well away from a Limshau city or immigrated here from across the ocean years ago. Your attitudes and attire separate you.

Alternately, you could also hail from one of the few non-Limshau damaskan communities in Canam, few that there are. These include Seliquam, Skyrose, and dozens of unlabeled villages across the land. As a plenary damaskan, you don't actually refer to yourself as one—you're simply damaskan, referring to the rest commonly as Limshau. You distinguish yourself by your attire, general disposition, and commitment to not giving a crap about writing down every event in your life.

HEREDITARY ABILITIES

If you elect to gain these abilities, you do not gain Trained Abilities as part of your background.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2. Your Wisdom score increases by 1. You can swap this bonus with your racial bonus to Dexterity.

Fearless. You have advantage on saving throws to resist being frightened. If you pass a save against being frightened, you gain advantage on your next attack roll against the creature that attempted to frighten you.

Expanded Knowledge. You gain proficiency in two skills of your choice.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Damaskan and English.

Damaskan Feats

KAZE

You can use Gravity Focus three times between rests (they can be used subsequently without interruption). During Gravity Focus, you gain the following additional benefits.

- ◆ Your base speed increases by +15 feet instead of +10.
- ◆ You can now walk on walls. If you leave an enemy's reach by moving along a wall, your movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.
- ◆ You are not required to use your hands while climbing while Gravity Focus is in effect.
- ◆ If you do not suffer damage before Gravity Focus expires, it lasts for one additional turn. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a short or a long rest.

NEKO NO ASHI

Your sense of balance is impeccable.

- ◆ You have advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks.
- ◆ Your Dexterity score increases by 1, as does your maximum for that score.

NEUTRAL MONISM

Your Dexterity score increases by 2, as does your maximum for that score.

TSUBASA

Prerequisites. Kaze

You can use Gravity Focus five times between rests. During Gravity Focus, you gain the following additional benefits.

- ◆ You can now walk on ceilings. As long as a wall or ceiling is within jumping distance, you do not provoke opportunity attacks for leaving an enemy's reach.
- ◆ Your bonus to AC increases to +3 instead of +2.
- ◆ You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls while gravity focus is in effect.

Gimfen

He might have been small, but I've never seen anyone put away booze like Errrick. Yeah, that's how he spelled his name—he liked to roll it off his tongue, particularly around the ladies. And there were plenty of ladies crowding around him at the moment, at his table in the middle of the tavern, as he downed shot glass after shot glass of something pungently green. Across the table, his opponent, a big burly human, was starting to look a bit queasy as he placed another glass shakily upside-down on the table. The human burped, his eyes crossed, and he fell sideways off his chair.

"Well, demoiselles," Errrick said, "looks like I win. And with my winnings, I'll buy a drink for any lass who wants a kiss—" he took a small tin out of his pocket —"after I freshen up, of course!" As he chewed the mint leaf, however, three of the human's friends, equally massive, got threateningly to their feet.

"Hold your horses, runt," one of them growled. "Your kind always cheats. I bet you got a bottle strapped to your leg or some other weird gizmo." The gimfen looked up, smiled, then reached down and pulled up his trouser leg. There was indeed a bottle strapped to his calf... full of a golden amber liquid, into which was set some sort of plastic straw leading up through his clothes and out his collar. He winked and took a swig from the straw. Then, as the giant blinked at him, he moved like a cannonball, bowling the man over and shoving the barrel of the plasma rifle, which had, until that moment, resting against the table leg, into his interlocutor's eye.

"'Tis not a manly thing to call a gentleman a cheater, dear fellow," he said evenly. "What say we all settle this outside?"

No one is sure how the gimfen broke off from the other fae, being only superficially similar in body and utterly distinct in mind. They possess a natural curiosity about the world but lack the drive to control or conquer it. They embraced many human customs when relationships blossomed between the two species and are the second most common nonhuman species (after the damaskans) seen in echan human communities. They have a flare for fine food, good tobacco, and comfortable clothes. Gimfen love dance from every culture but have never developed one of their own.

The curiosity about gimfen eventually spread to technology. Most fae reach an impasse when encountering human technology: touching or even being in the same vicinity of any complex device inevitably causes it to break down. However, the gimfen don't share this curse. This strange deviation, once thought to be a production of corruption from Ixindar, was later accepted by the other fae as another attribute of a late branch in the fae tree. The gimfen desire to pursue technology in an age where machinery didn't work reliably turned into a fixation. Many of them are obsessed with discovering a way to allow machinery to operate in a realm of magic. The gimfen eventually produced numerous masterful technicians, engineers, alchemists, and inventors, though nearly always refining existing accomplishments rather than pioneering new ones.

Where laudenians founded totem magic and narros the forging of magical items, gimfen took pride in alchemy, stumbling into potion brewing soon after. What they lack are spell casters—not because they are incapable, but because, for most, the principles of magic simply aren't interesting (and get in the way of the study of mechanisms). Gimfen are never content to observe the world but believe

it can constantly be improved. Even the most sedentary pursue constructive hobbies such as basic carpentry and metalwork, while others find a happy medium with minor gadgets and tools. Many a gimfen's home is adorned with never-used inventions.

After the return of magic, the first bastions were barely more than a few buildings. They grew slowly under constant attack from the outside. A few collapsed or turned to magic, abandoning the old ways of science. Others remained stubborn and fought against the enchantment. Such was the case with the eastern Canam city of York, under a barrage from monsters. The bastion turned to a nearby growing civilization of gimfen for assistance. The gimfen were welcomed into the libraries to learn everything they could about human technology, body sciences, machine, and atom. With the help of the resourceful and inventive gimfen, York could defend itself against predators, and its expansion became reinvigorated. Despite their value, this agreement with an echan people was unofficial and kept secret: the gimfen were not allowed to live within the population or enter through the main gates. After their usefulness expired, the gimfen returned to their homes, leaving only a few behind in the city for maintenance. Thankfully, they did not mind being ostracized and got more than a fair exchange for their labors: they now held the secrets of magnetism, electricity, and internal combustion—advances they would not have discovered on their own. The neighboring gimfen town, Gnimfall, accepted back its pilgrims, and the nation flourished.

Despite lacking the spark of genius necessary for true innovation, gimfen knew one thing humanity didn't: how to insulate technology from magic. (although some have theorized that this was also given to them, by whom is unknown). Although not perfect, this clumsy procedure could help certain machinery operate without the constant fear of disruption. The gimfen combined what they discovered with what they already knew, and within a century, the landscape of gimfen communities changed. Where once there were tiny shops and garages surrounded by farmlands, now the villages were dominated by grind towers—oddities of mutated technology. They hold few people, designed primarily for defense, sound baffling, and temperature maintenance for underground factories. Gnimfall, the largest collection of towers, is not an open-air city but hundreds of levels stretching more than a mile underground. The levels are a mixed lot of housing, factories, and processing plants so jumbled and seemingly disorganized that tourists often get lost without a guide. Grind towers now dot the globe, marking the presence of gimfen communities.

Not all have embraced the way of technology, preferring to keep a balance between nature and machine. Gimfen communities like Salvabrooke are laid-back, agrarian places, possessing little technology beyond that known in the immediate pre-industrial era of humanity's lost history. Currently, there are more than two million gimfen in various villages and colonies worldwide. They get along with the narros and damaskans, but their relations with other fae have strained since the gimfen have often turned away from their roots. Gimfen often welcome humans, especially ones with a new toy.

Most gimfen worship "Mecha," a new deity to the scene from which they believe allows them and only them to operate machinery in the presence of magic (the fact that