

CREDITS

CREATIVE DIRECTION

Nathan Caroland

LEAD DESIGN & WRITING

Mason Crawford

TTB LOGO ARTIST

Patrick Guinane

ART

Hardy Fowler, Jorge Gomez, Alyssa Menold, Bram Sels

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

John Cason & Jorge Gomez

EDITING

Kayli Ammen & Kyle Rowan

SPECIAL THANKS

Kelly Brumley & Aaron Darland

PLAYTESTERS

Jonathan W. Basiago, Terry Batley, Francis Bedell,
Boy Jones, Ben Bryan, Chris Budinger, Hayden T. Burns,
Samuel E. Burns, Samuel J. Burns, Joe Chasek,
Bethany Ennis Clarke, Bryan Clarke, Dan Coltrain,
Michael Costello, Paul DeVincent, Kyle Dolenc,
Pedro Torres Fajardo, Jon Goulbourne, David (Tanja) Ivey,
Brian Jacob, Jeremy Lang, Robert Lefferts, Samantha Lennox,
Kayleigh Lippincott, Paul Lippincott, Borja Vicedo Maíquez,
Lawrence Marzari, Scott Mundorff, Bobby Pearsall,
Streven Rault, Adam Rogers, Dan Saint-Laurent,
Monica Specá, Shaun Stipes, Tiffany Stipes, Josh Thompson,
Miquel Galiana Torres, Henry Ulrich, Robert Vancel,
Kai Wall, P. Leigh Whyte

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4	MAGIC.....	250
		Magical Theories.....	251
THE WORLD OF MALIFAUX.....	6	Soulstones.....	258
The History of Malifaux.....	7	Grimoires.....	260
Malifaux City.....	38	Spellcasting (Magia and Immuto).....	262
Beyond the City.....	56	GAMEPLAY.....	280
Malifaux Factions.....	62	The Fate Deck.....	281
CHARACTER CREATION.....	72	Duel Overview.....	284
Character Creation Steps.....	73	Ongoing Challenges.....	290
Basic Pursuits at a Glance.....	78	Turns and Actions.....	293
Crossroads Tarot Reference Tables.....	82	Damage.....	300
Stations.....	92	Critical Effects.....	303
First Steps.....	96	Conditions.....	306
PURSUITS.....	98	Subordinate Characters.....	310
Basic Pursuits.....	99	Fatemaster Characters.....	312
Advanced Pursuits.....	156	Session Structure.....	316
SKILLS.....	168	Character Advancement.....	318
Skill Chart.....	170	BESTIARY.....	320
Skill Triggers.....	190	BAD THINGS HAPPEN.....	408
GENERAL TALENTS.....	214	Sample Adventure.....	408
EQUIPMENT.....	224	INDEX.....	414
Skill Toolkits.....	225	CHARACTER SHEET.....	415
Weapons.....	226		
Armor.....	241		
Pneumatic Limbs.....	244		
Sundries & Services.....	248		



INTRODUCTION

Through the Breach is a tabletop roleplaying game set in the world of Malifaux. The players take on the role of Fated: men and women who have the ability to defy fate and change their destinies for better or worse. One player takes on the role of the group's Fatemaster, who is tasked with setting the stage for the stories that the Fated will participate in. No matter their role, every player participates in telling the story, like a movie in which the Fated are the main characters and the Fatemaster is the director and supporting cast.

Players who take on the roles of Fated characters will decide what kind of person they wish for their character to be and will then pretend to be that character. The excitement and drama of the story comes from the interactions between the Fated characters and other characters, whether the supporting cast controlled by the Fatemaster or between the Fated themselves.

The Fatemaster, in turn, is tasked with bringing the world of Malifaux to life. She plays the role of many different Fatemaster characters, from the dastardly villain that the Fated have to stop to a helpful ally to the shopkeeper that sells them their ammunition. The Fatemaster sets the stage for an adventure, populates it with interesting characters with their own motivations and goals, and sets up obstacles for the Fated to overcome.

In the end, the goal is for everyone at the table to tell a good story that everyone can enjoy. *Through the Breach* is designed to focus on a different Fated character each session, allowing each character to have their moment in the sun as their goals and ambitions conflict with the plans that fate has laid out for them. In the course of a game, the Fatemaster will challenge the players, and the players will likely surprise the Fatemaster with their actions. Much of the fun of a roleplaying game comes from interacting with each other and watching the story unfold in unexpected ways.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Below is a description of what is in each chapter.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

You're reading this chapter now! Here you'll find an outline of what you can expect to find in this book.

CHAPTER 2: THE WORLD OF MALIFAUX

This chapter details the complex world of Malifaux, including its history, its discovery, and the various factions that struggle to claim Malifaux for their own.

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER CREATION

This chapter walks players through the process of creating Fated characters and fleshing out each character's history and personality.

CHAPTER 4: PURSUITS

This chapter introduces the fourteen basic types of character classes in *Through the Breach*, which are called Pursuits. Each of these Pursuits defines that character's general beliefs and worldview.

CHAPTER 5: SKILLS

This chapter describes the various Skills that represent a character's knowledge and offers a selection of Skill Triggers that characters can learn.

CHAPTER 6: GENERAL TALENTS

This chapter provides the General Talents that represent special feats of strength and cunning. They help to make characters unique and interesting.

CHAPTER 7: EQUIPMENT

This chapter contains a wide array of weapons, armors, and pneumatic augmentations that characters can purchase to assist them in their adventures. Never leave home without a reliable firearm!

CHAPTER 8: MAGIC

Malifaux is naturally rich in potent magic. This chapter catalogues not only the various Spells and Manifested Powers that a character might learn, but also the Magical Theories that shape how she channels and interacts with magic.

CHAPTER 9: GAMEPLAY

This chapter explains the core mechanics of *Through the Breach*, including how to perform a basic duel and how to Cheat Fate. It also goes into detail on the various actions that a character can take during combat and the proper structure of an adventure.

CHAPTER 10: BESTIARY

This chapter contains a wide array of people and creatures that the Fated may encounter in their adventures. Each of the primary factions in Malifaux is included, providing plenty of options for the Fatemaster no matter the adventure.

CHAPTER 11: BAD THINGS HAPPEN

This sample adventure provides Fatemasters with an easy way to kickstart their campaign.

CHAPTER 12: INDEX

The index contains a list of game terms and their page numbers. It also has a blank character sheet.



THE WORLD OF MALIFAUX

Malifaux is a world set aside from our own. Located in another realm, in another dimension of reality, it is home to monsters and mankind alike. Far too often, the two become indistinguishable from each other.

Despite being a different world, Malifaux is similar to Earth in many ways. It has breathable air, discernible seasons, and a blue sky with a sun that rises in the morning and sets in the evening. The soil is suitable for growing crops, and Earth plants have been successfully transplanted to Malifaux (and vice versa) with little fuss.

There are differences, of course. The stars and constellations in the night sky are completely different from those of Earth, and two moons - the bright Illios and the darker Delios - hang overhead at night. Some people claim that the sun makes colors appear brighter and more vivid in Malifaux, as if the world had been painted onto glass, but the majority of people who travel to Malifaux don't notice that much of a change.

In short, Malifaux may seem strange to humans, and it's certainly dangerous in the way of untamed wildernesses, but it's rarely *alien*. Most natural laws, such as humanity understands them, continue to function on Malifaux just as they do on Earth.

The one notable difference that separates Earth from Malifaux is the abundance of magical energy. On Earth, spellcasters have always had to struggle to draw upon the magical energy; only the most powerful spellcasters, emboldened by mystical runes and arcane phrases passed down since ancient times, could even hope to harness this mystical power.

In contrast, Malifaux is saturated with magical energy. The same arcane words that could barely light a candle back on Earth are enough to summon up a whirlwind of flame in Malifaux, and even those with no talent for magic gradually find themselves developing strange abilities as the latent magic of the world seeps into their bodies and souls.

THE HISTORY OF MALIFAUZ

The true history of Malifauz is lost to the annals of time. There are truths and deceptions buried in equal measure among the legends told by its native denizens, but humanity has been able to piece together these myths to create a plausible idea of what Malifauz was like prior to the opening of the Great Breach.

OLD MALIFAUZ

Long ago, Malifauz was inhabited by people similar to humanity. They loved and fought each other as humanity does, creating items of beauty and weapons of war in equal measure. Their earliest civilizations learned of magic and studied its use, and as one empire crumbled to make way for the next, magic and technology advanced in tandem with each other.

In time, the people came to believe that they were masters of magic and technology. They believed that they could solve any problem, rise to any challenge, and one by one, they solved the greatest problems that plagued them: poverty, disease, sickness, pain... Eventually, the most clever among them found ways to live without end and ushered in an era of peace and prosperity.

Gradually, however, these visionaries grew bored with their long lives and, being clever, they sought out ways to keep themselves entertained. Some created breathtaking art that pushed the boundaries of the senses, some set out to gather the knowledge of their people in order to share it freely with their brethren, and others delved deeply into hitherto unexplored realms of magic. Others altered their bodies and the bodies of those around them in ways they found pleasurable, creating new races through advanced science and magical ritual.

THE TYRANT WAR

A handful of the bored immortals turned their attention toward darker pursuits. They found dangerous ways to waste their time, and, being clever, mastered each one in turn.

What was a thrilling dip into the dark waters for some became a headlong, breathless plunge into depravity for others. They found deep within themselves the worst perversions and most terrible desires, and knowing no limits, they turned these things outward onto their fellows. They reveled in the misery they caused and subjected their kin to cruel experiments and unspeakable sadism simply for their own amusement and edification. Illness and pain once again abounded in Malifauz.

Drunk on their own power, these entities cast aside their mortal names and souls like snakes shedding their skins... or perhaps, like moths emerging from cocoons. They assumed sobriquets to describe their new selves - Plague, Obliteration, Meridion, Despair - but to those who had not ascended, there was only one word to describe what they had become: Tyrants.

These Tyrants were so powerful that they seemed to be gods. The desperate people of Malifauz exhausted every available force to stop the Tyrants. They turned to new magic and explored technologies that had previously been too dangerous to consider. Terrible creatures were created through magical rituals and spawned in chemical vats to be unleashed upon the Tyrants in the hope of exploiting an unknown weakness. Armies the likes of which the world had never known marched in the shadows of terrible, continent-shattering war machines.

Despite the best attempts of Malifauz's people, however, nothing seemed capable of standing against the potency of a Tyrant's magic or their mastery of the sciences. The great machines of war were swept aside like children's toys, and entire armies were slaughtered in the blink of an eye.

TITANIA'S BARGAIN

When all seemed lost, it was the queen of the people who rekindled the hope of victory. Titania gathered the scattered warriors, artificers, and mystics to her side and told them of her dreams and the machine she saw there. The machine, she claimed, would allow her to harness the power of death itself in order to destroy the Tyrants once and for all. The glimmer of hope was all that the survivors needed, and they turned all of their efforts toward the creation of Titania's Kythera device.

Unbeknownst to Titania's followers, she had betrayed them. The Kythera device was not designed to merely channel the power of death, but rather, to bring the personification of death itself - the Grave Spirit - into Malifaux; Kythera was a dimensional portal. As it began to open, the Grave Spirit completed its end of the bargain and infused Titania with its fell power. Only then did her subjects finally realized the full extent of the dark bargains Titania had made with the entity.

As their queen turned the power of the Grave Spirit toward the Tyrants, killing their physical bodies, the people who had built Kythera worked desperately to undo what had been done. In the end, they proved unable to close the device, but they did stop the portal from opening any further than it had. The corruptive, necromantic power of the Grave Spirit was seeping out of the device, but the entity itself had been prevented from crossing over and devouring all life in Malifaux.

The act of channeling so much necromantic power had killed Titania, but rather than dying, she passed into undeath and became a sentient, walking corpse. She expected admiration for defeating the Tyrants, but her subjects had seen what she had nearly unleashed upon the world and turned on her.

Undead had never existed in Malifaux before Titania, and her former subjects were concerned that executing her might release her corrupted soul, transforming her into a far greater threat than she already was. Instead, they altered the plans for Kythera and built a second structure - Nythera - to serve as a prison for Titania and those members of her court who were still loyal to her. It was believed that Nythera would keep her contained for all time.

THE GREAT BINDING

In the decades that followed the end of the Tyrant War, the survivors gradually began to realize that the Tyrants had not been entirely defeated. Their physical forms had been shattered, true, but their spirits had endured Titania's assault and lingered in the aether as specters of their former selves. Though relatively powerless in this ethereal form, the Tyrants could still exert their will upon the world in a limited manner.

Worse yet, they seemed capable of forming spiritual bonds with mortals, granting that mortal power as the Tyrant gradually consumed their soul and took their place in the world. Fearing the return of such powerful enemies, the people of Malifaux turned their attention toward trapping the Tyrants in magical prisons. The prisons varied in form and function, utilizing whatever worked best to bind each Tyrant's power.



Many of the Tyrants had their own power turned against them. Meridion drew her power from the ley lines which crisscrossed the world, so the survivors imprisoned her within those same ley lines, forcing her to destroy the very power that gave her strength in order to escape. Obliteration's power stemmed from its ability to manipulate time and remove things from reality, so its jailers constructed its prison from the Tyrant's own spiritual form, ensuring that any act of escape would be tantamount to suicide.

Other Tyrants were too subtle or powerful to be bound in such ways, necessitating the need for cruder prisons. Plague was bound within the Necropolis beneath Malifaux City and warded with spells that would turn aside anything approaching, Cherufe was imprisoned in a cage high in the sky, where its flames sputtered and died without fuel, and Despair was sealed inside a fiendishly clever puzzle box.

One by one, each of the Tyrants was bound in prisons crafted from their own power. Some realized what was happening and chose to exile themselves to different realms of reality: Nytemare fled into the dream world, for instance, while the Dragon split its essence in half, leaving part of itself in Malifaux as it flung its other self through the dimensions and into another world entirely... Earth.

The passage between dimensions greatly weakened both that portion of the Dragon's soul and the barrier that separated Malifaux from Earth, though it would be millennia before the full ramifications of that weakening would be felt.

THE TWISTING

The people of Malifaux had won the war against the Tyrants and bound their spirits, but the price they paid for their victory was steep. The Tyrants had used their magic and science to twist the minds and bodies of their servants and enemies into useful tools, and now, the monstrous survivors of those experiments struggled to find a place in the world.

Some of these creatures, such as the Nephilim, turned their backs on their former masters and took to hunting down those who still served the Tyrants. Others turned to whatever fragments of magic they had scavenged from the fallen Tyrants, using it to mutate their forms into new shapes that their vengeful brethren would not recognize.

Gradually, the survivors of the war began to drift away from each other. The great cities - the sites associated so strongly with the Tyrants - were shunned as the people migrated into the wilds. With each generation, the trappings of civilization fell further away, until the people had regressed into tribes and packs.

Distracted as they were by the aftermath of the Tyrant War, the survivors failed to realize that a far more insidious threat was growing in their midst. The Kythera device provided a link between Malifaux and the realm of the Grave Spirit, and its corruption gradually spread outwards from the portal, transforming the land and poisoning the minds of those who had survived the war. Those who had settled in the most heavily affected areas turned once again to the magic of the Tyrants, reworking their bodies into forms that could survive the spreading corruption.

Centuries passed, and with each generation, the various transmutative magics that had been worked upon the people seeped into their offspring and their offspring's offspring, until eventually, every one of their descendants possessed an ability to change its physical form. For many, this change became a fixed part of their growth cycle, such as with the Nephilim, who required red blood to grow larger, but others retained a greater control over their forms and learned how to change their appearance on a whim.

HIDDEN PATHWAYS

The Dragon was the first entity to travel from Malifaux to Earth, but it was not the last. The fissure caused by its flight was unstable, and through the centuries, portals occasionally opened up between Earth and Malifaux, joining the two worlds for a short time.

THE FALLING STAR (6000 BC)

The half of the Dragon that had been tossed between dimensions appeared on Earth near Mount Etna on the island of Sicily. The Tyrant's arrival triggered a massive volcanic landslide that, in turn, caused a megatsunami that devastated the eastern Mediterranean coastline on the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia. Weakened by its travel through the dimensions and now trapped in a world with far less magical power than Malifaux, the Dragon settled within the mountain's searing core to slowly regain its strength.

In the years that followed, the people of nearby Crete realized that symbols and icons bearing snake motifs had become infused with weak healing powers and began using such icons to ward their homes and heal the sick and infirm.

JOURNEY EAST (5400 BC)

Following rumors and legend, a Cretan shaman traveled to Sicily in the hopes of finding the source of the healing power her people believed resided within Mount Etna. She succeeded in discovering the spectral form of the Tyrant, which promptly possessed her and forced her to do its will. Believing that she had been chosen by the gods, the shaman traveled eastward as the Tyrant directed her from one land to the next, devouring whatever scraps of power it could find in order to regain its strength.

Though kept strong and youthful by the Dragon's influence, the shaman's body eventually failed her and she collapsed into a river in what would one day become Tibet. The Dragon found, to its horror, that it could not separate itself from its host's corpse, and millennia slowly passed as the Tyrant struggled helplessly within its cage of water and bone.

BLOOD OF MY BLOOD (500 BC)

While hunting, a Native American hunting party came across a group of six Malifaux natives in what would one day become modern day Ohio. The hunters were confused by the strange-looking people they found and the incomprehensible language they spoke, but they took pity on the refugees and brought them back to their camp.

Over time, the natives of Malifaux learned the language of the hunters and took spouses from among the tribe, eventually birthing the first children who were the products of two different worlds. These men and women became known for their ability to run with the wolves or fly with the crows, a gift that they passed on to their children and grandchildren.

The descendants of those original hunters eventually split and went their separate ways, spreading their magic-infused bloodline throughout the native people of North America. The ability to shift shapes and walk with animals grew weaker with each subsequent generation, until they were only myths and legends, but in every generation, there were a handful of people with a stronger connection to their heritage.

THE LIVING FOREST (220 AD)

A short time after the turn of the millennium, a portal opened deep within the Amazon rainforest, allowing a small group of plant spirits known as Waldgeist to wander curiously onto Earth. Undisturbed by this occurrence, the plant spirits began exploring their new home and communing with the surrounding trees.

Over the next millennia, the number of indigenous tribes living with the rainforest plummeted noticeably as the tree spirits and their offspring fought back against what they perceived as trespassers in "their" lands. Eventually, stories of its dangerous plant life would reach as far as northern Europe and eastern Asia, though few truly believed the strange stories coming from such an "uncivilized" land.

THE RISE OF THE DRAGON (770 AD)

The Indian monk Santaraksita attempted to build a monastery beside a Tibetan river, but each time, the river surged upwards, knocking the temple back down. Terrified, the construction workers began to whisper of a demon hiding in the river and refused to have anything further to do with the temple.

Fearing for the well-being of the nearby populace, Santaraksita sent for his fellow monk, Padmasambhava, to help him banish the demon and purify the construction site. Instead, the two monks encountered the Dragon, which leapt from the bone fragments of the Cretan shaman and into Santaraksita.

Padmasambhava immediately realized that Santaraksita had been possessed by a spirit far more powerful than he could imagine. Bowing low, the monk approached the Dragon cautiously, giving it the respect he believed it deserved. Padmasambhava appealed to the Dragon's ego and, after a long conversation that stretched across three days, convinced the Tyrant that the wisdom of Buddhism would hold more answers to its plight than wanton destruction. The Dragon listened to the monk, but in its mind, it was already considering what would happen when its current host perished. None of the workers had been suitable hosts; only the monk had the spiritual fortitude necessary to house its essence. In the end, the Dragon agreed to allow the temple to be built, not out of altruism, but out of self-interest.

The Dragon spent the next few centuries wandering Tibet, gathering the wisest humans it could find and either bringing them back to its temple at Samye or inspiring them to build more temples that could house its greatness. Gradually, it twisted the tenets of Buddhism to fit its own needs, creating a dogma that had but one purpose: to prepare humans to become the Dragon's next host.

It would take countless millennia to amass enough magical power to ascend in the starved world of Earth, but the Dragon was patient and had ensured that when its host finally perished, it would have another ready to assume the honor of bearing its spectral essence.

THE MASAMUNE NIHONTO (1293 AD)

Back in Malifaux, a shaman with delusions of ruling over its people freed a powerful spirit from the magical wards which bound it. As the last of the binding enchantments fell away, the spirit revealed itself to be the Tyrant Shez'uul and possessed its horrified savior.

Shez'uul's host was unsuited for such a potent spirit and began to fall apart almost immediately. The Tyrant was powerful, however, and it supplemented its host's life with the blood of those it killed, gradually transforming its unwitting host into a creature of flowing blood. The scattered tribes of Malifaux were forced to unite against the weakened Tyrant.

In the end, the Nephilim turned the tide of the battle by undergoing a ritual that transformed their blood into a corrosive black ichor that proved to be catastrophically destructive to the red blood making up the Tyrant's borrowed form. Rather than allow itself to be bound once more, the Tyrant used what remained of the power it had gathered to hurl itself through the dimensions, much as the Dragon had done millennia earlier.

The weakened Tyrant appeared in the Kanagawa Prefecture of Japan, triggering a mighty earthquake that devastated the city of Kamakura and killed tens of thousands. Realizing that it had barely survived the journey between dimensions, the Tyrant bound its fraying and ragged essence to a samurai lord and forced the man to slaughter those under his command to supply the Tyrant with their blood.

As the body count climbed higher and higher, a desperate prefect traveled into the mountains to petition the master swordsmith, Goro Nyudo Masamune, for assistance. Masamune gave the greatest of his blades, the Masamune Nihonto, to the prefect, who used it to cut away and imprison the evil spirit that had possessed his lord.

The prefect enshrined the sword in his home, where it rested until it was stolen forty years later during the Genko War. The blade passed into legend as Shez'uul influenced its wielders, subtly pushing them toward greater acts of bloodshed and violence, which the Tyrant fed upon like a starving prisoner.

GLIMPSES OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI (1332 AD)

In the fourteenth century, a portal between Earth and Malifaux opened in the Valley of Mexico, unleashing burned and twisted monsters onto the outskirts of Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs were unprepared for the sudden appearance of these creatures, and the glimpse they received of another world - of blasted plains that had been scorched during the Tyrant War and the titanic, charred beasts that lumbered through the still-burning flames - shook their civilization to the core.

Once the portal had closed and the screeching beasts had been slain or driven off, the Aztec people struggled to interpret what they had seen. Many of the creatures they glimpsed were folded into their religion, becoming gods and deities. They believed that the world they had seen through the portal - Malifaux - was a vision of the future after the sun had perished, and in an attempt to avert this perceived fate, their beliefs led the Aztec people down a dark, bloody path.

Spurred onward by their "visions," the Aztec became more warlike and aggressive. Over the next one hundred years, they came to dominate the Valley of Mexico and its surrounding areas. Human sacrifice was not unknown before the Aztecs, but they took the practice to an unprecedented level, at one point sacrificing over eighty thousand prisoners over the course of four days.

This was done in the belief that the blood and beating hearts of the sacrifices would empower their sun deity, Huitzilopochtli, with enough strength to continue fighting against the "monsters" which beset him. If Huitzilopochtli failed, the Aztecs believed, then they would perish as well, for there would be nobody to stand between them and the horrors they had witnessed.

THE FURY OF HOROMATANGI (1575 AD)

In the later half of the sixteenth century, the Maori of New Zealand witnessed a portal opening a hundred feet in the air above the ocean. The portal unleashed a deluge of water that poured down from the sky like a waterfall, bringing dozens of strange Malifaux fish to Earth. Unfortunately, the great Horomatangi, an ancient and titanic sea beast that had fought for Meridion during the Tyrant War, was also pulled into Earth's oceans by the resulting current.

Horomatangi proceeded to terrorize the people of New Zealand for the better part of fifty years, feasting on the Maori whenever they went to hunt or fish. The great beast was eventually defeated by the efforts of the Ngaatoro sisters, two women who adorned themselves with poison and tricked Horomatangi into devouring them. The poison did not kill the great monster, but it did weaken Horomatangi enough to send it into a deep sleep, winning peace for the Maori people and cementing the Ngaatoro sisters as guardians of the island.



AN EMPIRE OF MIRACLES (1642 AD)

In the seventeenth century, another portal opened in eastern Africa, in the nation of Abyssinia. No monsters poured forth from the dimensional rift, and in their curiosity, the Abyssinians explored the seemingly desolate new world and discovered a cache of Soulstones.

The Soulstones were brought through the Breach in the belief that they were normal gemstones, but it was only after the portal closed that the true properties of the Soulstones were realized. When someone died near a Soulstone, the gem would become charged with magical energy which could then be used to cast spells of incredible power.

In the wake of their discovery, Abyssinia became known as a strange and mystical place whose people could wield terrible magical powers. Over time, however, the owners of these Soulstones fought with one another, and the gemstones which fueled their incredible power were gradually lost or destroyed.

Eventually, the number of Soulstones grew so few that the mystical reputation of Abyssinia faded into legend, and they became just another nation, albeit one with unusually advanced cities and some odd traditions.

THE FORMATION OF THE COUNCIL (1780 AD)

Gradually, the spellcasters, shamans, mystics, and healers realized that the meager magic of Earth was dwindling. There were many theories on why the incantations and rituals that had worked for so long were becoming less and less effective with each passing year. Some believed it to be a natural cycle, a tide of magic that would ebb with time. Others thought that there might be a conflict between magic and science, that the growing industrialization of the world might somehow be smothering the arcane rules of magic beneath the spreading influence of science.

The sorcerers, warlocks, soothsayers, and wizards of the world gradually came together to search for a new source of magic. Calling themselves the Council, the group traveled the world in search of a way to replenish Earth's magic. Their members traveled to the New World to speak with the shamans of the indigenous tribes and to eastern Africa to investigate rumors of their powerful sorcery.

At every turn, they found mystics who had noticed the decline of magic but had no answers to give them.

Eventually, the Council began to realize that there was a world beyond their own, and that much of Earth's magic could be traced back to encounters with that hidden world. Only the faintest of dimensional walls kept the two worlds apart... and with enough force, any wall could be knocked down.



THE GREAT BREACH (1787 AD)

It took years of research and cooperation, but the Council came to believe that they possessed the magical power necessary to breach the veil between their world and the next. A great call was sent out across the Earth, passed from cabal to secret society to coven, asking anyone with even a shred of magical talent to gather at Santa Fe, in North America.

From all corners of the Earth and from all walks of life they came, the last of their kind. Hoary, bearded sages from the Siberian steppes, Abyssinian artificers, bespectacled Parisian demon worshipers, stoic Indian gurus, ancient Romani crones, far eastern souleaters, and wizened viziers from the Ottoman Empire, all converged on Santa Fe in one final, desperate gambit: a ritual to ensure that magical power was not forever lost from the world.

When the Council's leaders agreed that it was time, they called the entire city into position. The streets teemed with sorcerers and wizards at every junction, each prepared to do his or her part in the most powerful spell ever cast.

The ritual was grueling beyond imagining. For a day and a night, the hundreds of gathered practitioners poured their last remaining magic into the growing spell. Some were overcome and perished from the strain of it, while others willingly relinquished the last of their life's essence in a final act of desperate sacrifice. The mages who participated were later unable to agree whether the ritual succeeded or failed, but the results were impossible to ignore.

As the ritual reached its zenith, the life force of the lesser sorcerers was torn from their flesh in a torrent of pain and power as the energies of the ritual raced out of control and consumed them. The sudden change in atmospheric pressure combined with the dangerous amounts of gathered aetheric energy to produce a massive shockwave that knocked the largest buildings to the ground while ripping the smaller structures from their very foundations.

In a single moment, Santa Fe was reduced from a thriving settlement to naught but ruin, insanity, and corpses. The city was gone, replaced with a ragged hole in existence and a scant few sorcerers and mystics who were shielded from the worst of the blast.

In the days and weeks to come, the few survivors found that their magical aptitudes had increased exponentially and that unimaginable power now coursed through their veins. Feats of aetheric manipulation that would have taken an archmagus numerous lifetimes to achieve were suddenly at their beck and call. The most powerful magi, conjurers, and shamans the world had ever seen crawled free of the ruins that had once been Santa Fe and peered through the dimensional rift that would come to be known as the Great Breach.

On the other side of the Breach, the surviving members of the Council found a city. Its features were both familiar and strange, as if all the great cities of Earth history had been stacked and shuffled. The buildings leaned and loomed over the streets, and unknown writing was carved in the stone or painted on doors. A sign hung above the city's shattered gates, bearing a word that they took as the name of the city and world alike: Malifaux.

Tentatively, knowing that the new Breach could collapse at any moment, the Council began to explore the city. Old tomes and artifacts littered the ground, and when they realized the power held by these arcane items, the sorcerers snatched them up as quickly as possible. Though joined by a common goal, the members of the Council had little in common with each other beyond their talent with magic, and soon tempers flared as magi and sages accused shamans and gurus of hoarding magical knowledge they believed should belong to them all.

By the end of the first night, these conflicts had erupted into outright warfare. Balls of fire, lances of ice, and bolts of lightning were hurled across the streets and into the sky as the mages attempted to steal the power of their peers or defend whatever magical relics they had claimed for themselves. Friend fought friend, and bitter rivals became desperate allies.

After a fortnight of intense battle, the mages began to gather together into cabals for their own protection, though others were driven northward toward the distant mountains or back through the Breach to Earth. Eventually, one faction succeeded in executing the last of their rivals and seized control of the city. The Council had been reborn.

EARLY EXPLORATION

In all of their feuding, the Council's mages had not seen any sign of sentient life within the city other than themselves. The sheer size of the city made any sort of exploration difficult, however, and grudgingly, the Council retreated back to Earth to solidify their control over the portal.

A veritable army of mercenaries was chartered to ensure that the Breach was defended against anything that might come through from the other world. Small groups of explorers were enlisted to begin investigating the old city and its surroundings, and academics and archeologists by the score were gradually brought to the ruins of Santa Fe to begin unraveling the city's mysteries.

Everyone brought to explore the new world was hired with great secrecy. They spread rumors of a terrible earthquake that had struck the city and of a virulent plague that had been awakened from some hitherto unknown underground cavern, blunting the desire of anyone to look too closely at what was happening in the desert.

One of the Council's first breakthroughs was the discovery of a great repository of books left by the city's previous inhabitants. Duer's Library, named after the explorer who first unearthed its hallowed halls, was a network of vaults and towers that were practically bursting with strange knowledge. A team of scholars worked around the clock for months, clearing collapsed stacks and diligently piecing together the eldritch tongue of those who had constructed the miraculous library.

At the same time, the Council's explorers began cataloging the city and its surrounding areas. Beneath the city, they discovered an entire network of sewage chambers, conduits, passages, and catacombs. Many of these first explorers became lost in those twisting labyrinths, but those who emerged safely from the darkness brought maps that would become invaluable for future explorers.

All the while, the archmages of the Council set themselves to stabilizing the Breach. Without any magical support, the Breach had begun to shimmer and quiver erratically after every passage. There was a concern that too frequent travel might cause the Breach to collapse in on itself or, worse, to rupture even further.

After much debate and research, the Council found a solution to their problem. Months of toil went into the construction of a massive stonework plinth and archway, carved deeply with mystic runes and sigils, which they built up around either side of the rift. When the last enchanted stone was fitted into place, the Breach finally stabilized.

By then, the explorers had begun to slowly filter their way back into the city. Some of their number returned laden with riches, some returned with harrowing tales of strange creatures or former Council members who had formed a cult in the distant mountains, and still others were simply never heard from again.

The greatest discoveries came from the band that wandered the farthest afield. Deep within the southern Badlands, surveyors had come across a deserted town, a few crumbling shanties and little more, perched near a mound of cracked and broken earth. In the center of the barren hillock was an abandoned hole leading deep into the earth.

The burrow was a mine shaft of sorts, and at its lowest point, the men found a cache of Soulstones, the same mythic stones that Abyssinia had discovered one hundred and forty five years earlier. These Soulstones, however, were fully intact, and as the Council members studied them, their scholars pointed out references to the stones in some of the texts they had managed to decipher.

The Council knew from the stories and myths of Abyssinia that those in the possession of Soulstones could channel incredible amounts of magic, and they were even more potent still in Malifaux. Realizing that they would need more people to properly survey and mine the magical gemstones from the ground, the Council decided to share their discovery with the rest of the world.

A NEW AGE (1788 TO 1790 AD)

The Council's announcement shocked the world.

Every tavern, saloon, town square, and boudoir was abuzz with debate. Pamphlets and newspapers were printed in abundance, either praising this new turn of events as the next step in human progress or decrying it as the utter ruination of mankind. Priests, rabbi, and khatib struggled to make sense of not only the knowledge that souls were real, as evidenced by Soulstones, but that there was an entire world beyond their own.

Diplomats, envoys, and politicians from all across Earth traveled to Malifaux to investigate the Council's claims. They were shown the wonders of Malifaux and were bewitched by demonstrations of magic the likes of which had previously been found only in fable and legend. They promised to share the secrets of magic and Soulstone with these nations, provided that they sent their citizens to Malifaux.

In short order, the abandoned city had become a thriving human settlement. First in the hundreds, then in the thousands, travelers made their way to Malifaux. The ruins of Santa Fe were built back up into a similarly thriving city whose only purpose was to support the city a stone's throw and another dimension away. The Council drew upon their potent magics to bring water up from below the desert, creating vast stretches of farmland whose only purpose was to feed the residents of Malifaux.

The mining of Soulstones was backbreaking work, but the Council paid the workers well, and boom towns sprung up around new veins almost as fast as the surveyors could discover them. The largest of the Soulstones were kept by the Council to fuel their own power, but others were shipped to Earth by the cartload and then divvied up among those world powers who had chosen to support the settlement of Malifaux.

Everywhere, people experimented with Soulstones, grinding them up as alchemical components, medicine, or as power sources for increasingly complex machines. Across the world, people with no previous talent for magic drew upon the energy stored within the gems to become powerful and influential mages. Some of these mages even began teaching others how to manipulate the unseen magical energies around them, creating distinct schools of spellcasting, each with their own techniques.

Benjamin Hanks, a Connecticut clockmaker, was responsible for the activation of the first construct. There had always been a great deal of debris around Malifaux that resembled piles of broken or inert machinery.

When Hanks fitted one of these machines with a Soulstone and tinkered with it, however, it was discovered that the debris was, in fact, a fully functional mechanical marvel. Many of the machines discovered in this fashion were simple, tiny servitors or mechanical replicas of different animals. A few, however, were fearsome clockwork titans capable of wielding an assortment of vicious weaponry.

The construction and animation of these constructs soon became vogue in the city, and functioning machines were sent back through the Breach by the droves, as curiosities for kings and courtiers, machines of death for generals and warlords, and objects of careful study for scholars and engineers.

Gradually, the pioneers coming through the Breach began to settle further and further from the city proper, often hoping to strike it rich by discovering a Soulstone vein. As they ventured further afield, reports of fantastical creatures and mythological monstrosities began to filter back to the taverns and public houses of the city. At first, these reports were laughed off, but soon the missing settlers and frantic stories became too great in number to ignore. Begrudgingly, the Council was forced to admit that Malifaux seemed to be inhabited and that the natives were not friendly.

They borrowed a term from Earth's past to describe the natives of their new home: the Neverborn.

THE FIRST RESURRECTIONIST (1791 AD)

As if the appearance of hostile natives was not enough, a new threat emerged from underneath the city itself in 1791. It was common knowledge that the sewers beneath Malifaux City were a labyrinth of twisting and dangerous passages, but there were rumors, fueled by the first explorers of that subterranean maze, of forbidden knowledge interred within the lowest crypts. A few power-hungry seekers of ancient secrets took it upon themselves to discover the veracity of these claims, and one man, his name lost to the ages, had the terrible misfortune to find the knowledge he sought.

Exactly what happened in the darkness of those buried vaults is known only to that necromancer, though various penny dreadful novels throughout the years have made their own dramatic speculations. Some stories claim that the ancient corpse-guardians of the vaults rose up from the slumber of death to attack him, while others have speculated that he made some deal with death itself for the power he wielded. Whatever the case, the nascent necromancer escaped the Necropolis with a single tome that contained the secrets to life after death.

The unnamed necromancer used the blasphemous spells contained within the tome to raise an army of shuffling undead corpses. This unliving horde attacked the Council fortifications en masse, and all who fell before the undead legion rose and joined their ranks. The putrescent zombies attempted to tear the city apart, brick by brick, and as their numbers swelled, it looked as if they would succeed in turning the city into a necrotic monarchy of darkness, death, and despair.

The whole city rose up in defense of their new home. Members of the Council unleashed powerful magics with abandon, and their mercenaries manned battlements and sacrificed themselves to protect their employers. Even with all the power of the Council, however, the weight of attrition was against them, and it appeared unlikely that anyone would survive the onslaught. Desperate meetings were held in the besieged Council chambers as the surviving mages debated whether they should close the Breach, sacrificing thousands in order to keep the relentless dead away from Earth.

What turned the tide were the defenders that rose up, unexpected, from the city's populace. Miners brandishing pickaxes and musketmen firing flintlock rifles fought shoulder-to-shoulder with fire-wielding wizards and clockwork automatons. Whenever things looked their direst, whenever another battle line seemed sure to be swept away by the press of undead flesh, another hero emerged, as if placed into the fray by destiny itself.

During this battle, the Nephilim known as Lilith drew upon her considerable magic to assume a human form, allowing her to walk among the defenders of Malifaux City without alarming them. She was at the forefront of multiple battles, scything down putrefied corpse-soldiers with frenzied, gleeful abandon. When the battle was won, she disappeared into the shadows and reappeared wherever the fighting was thickest. She gave no sign of understanding any of the languages spoken by her impromptu comrades during these battles, and any attempts to thank her or offer her aid were met with a disgusted sneer.

It was a hard-fought battle, but when the dust had settled, the nameless necromancer had been defeated by the combined might of the Council and the new champions of the age. Unfortunately, the dark secret of necromancy did not die with that villain, and, like the undead he shackled to his will, it would rise up years later to terrorize humanity anew.



AN AGE OF HEROES (1792 - 1796 AD)

After the defeat of the necromancer, the city of Malifaux was rampant with danger and adventure.

It was a time of grievous villains. The dark mistress, Astarte, activated a colossal machine buried beneath the southern part of the city and nearly unleashed a terrifying, immortal weapon from the days of the Tyrant War onto an unsuspecting populace. Jean-Philip Archambault, the Quebecois madman, terrorized the streets of the city alongside his Legion de Morts Vivant, a pack of skeletal warriors, which Archambault had animated using the infamous Grimoire that he had stolen from the corpse of the first necromancer.

Evil men and women almost seemed to haunt the city, as if the necromancer's failed attempts to seize control had somehow been the catalyst that brought out the worst of humanity. The shadows of Malifaux seemed to grow darker, and soon, it wasn't safe to tread the city's cobblestone streets at night.

When things are darkest, however, even the smallest candle seems to burn brightly. The heroes which had arisen to defeat the necromancer had not abandoned the city, and colorful personalities such as the Jack o' the Axe, the stunning Lady Zorra, and Devilish McGuinne stepped forward to defend the weak. They fought for their own reasons, sometimes for truth or justice, but just as often for their own glory. Whatever their motivations, however, the people were grateful for their aid. They saved countless lives by dint of their courage and cleverness, and long after they perished, their legends continued to inspire others.

Amidst the heroes and villains, there were others whose true motivations were unknown. The mysterious Clockwork Queen seemed motivated by desires that found her on both sides of the conflict, and the puzzling exploits of the Masked Rider were inscrutable in their purpose. Perhaps most telling was the appearance of Kenshiro, the Weeping Blade, who arrived in Malifaux bearing a very special sword: the Masamune Nihonto. The blade and the swordsman were locked in a battle of wills, but Shez'uul was far stronger than Kenshiro, and each day, it eroded more of its bearer's mind and soul.

PARADISE LOST (1797 AD)

While the residents of Malifaux City were struggling with villains of their own making, a far greater battle was being waged far to the north. Some of the Council members who had fled from the initial battles over the city had traveled north, across the rolling scrubland hills, all the way to the foothills of the great Ten Peaks mountain range. The closer they came to the mountains, the more clearly they could hear the voices on the wind calling out to them.

As a group, the archmages braved the high altitudes, treacherous mountain paths, and chilling temperatures to climb further up the peaks, following the voices. When they arrived at the summit of the tallest peak, however, they found the spectral form of the Tyrant December waiting for them. December whispered to the archmages, promising them great power if they could free him from the mountain winds which bound him.

It took the better part of two long years, but the archmages were eventually able to break the bindings that had kept December imprisoned for so long. Roaring with victory, December's spirit descended upon them, shattering the spirit of the strongest sorcerer in an instant as the Tyrant possessed his body and forced the others into submission. Those who refused to kneel to the Tyrant were butchered and devoured by his chosen proxy.

Things had changed a great deal since December's binding, and the arrival of humans had brought with it an opportunity. The creatures themselves were fragile and worthless, and though his proxy soon grew fat on their flesh, it did nothing to sate the Tyrant's ravenous hunger. The portal they had punched between dimensions, however, was a font of magical energy, and December believed that by consuming it, he could ascend to true godhood.

Swelled by December's influence, the winter of 1797 was a particularly bitter and cold one for Malifaux. Those who were able took shelter in their rime-mantled homes or taverns, their hearths raging to keep the deathly frost at bay. Those without proper shelter made attempts to warm themselves by burning trash or debris in abandoned tenements, trying, with desperate need, to stave off frostbite and an icy, benumbed death.

At the very apex of the weather's cacophonous bluster, December's proxy floated into the city, held aloft by the roaring mountain winds. The Council and the other heroes of the city were huddled in their homes, warming themselves by the fire as their doom floated unopposed past their frosted doors.

The Neverborn, however, had learned of December's escape and were prepared for his attempt at ascension. Lilith and her sister, Nekima, appeared from the shadows, attacking his proxy and his followers with a small army of monstrous Nephilim. It was a brutal battle, for though December was little more than a specter, he was still a formidable opponent.

Using strong winds to push the Nephilim away, December pounced on the stone archway that kept the Great Breach stabilized and began to feed upon its energies. Had it not been for the sudden appearance of Kenshiro and the Masamune Nihonto, December might have succeeded in his plan and ascended to rule over all of reality.

Shielded by the influence of the Tyrant within his blade, Kenshiro was able to cut through December's winds and advance on the Tyrant's proxy. Though December panicked when he sensed the presence of another Tyrant, he relaxed when he realized that Shez'uul was still trapped within its prison. December unleashed a blast of icy wind at Kenshiro, intending to tear the man apart with shards of wind-blown ice, but he had underestimated the swordsman's speed and resilience.

Even as the ice shards impaled and killed Kenshiro, the swordsman raised his sword and brought it down in a killing stroke. The magical blade cut through the magical protections surrounding December's proxy, slicing the man in half and severing December's only connection with the mortal world.

December had invested much of his power into his proxy, and with the man's death, December's influence was greatly weakened. In his rage and anger, December spent what little power he had to summon up one last gale of wind, hurling the Masamune Nihonto back through the Breach and out of his fading sight.

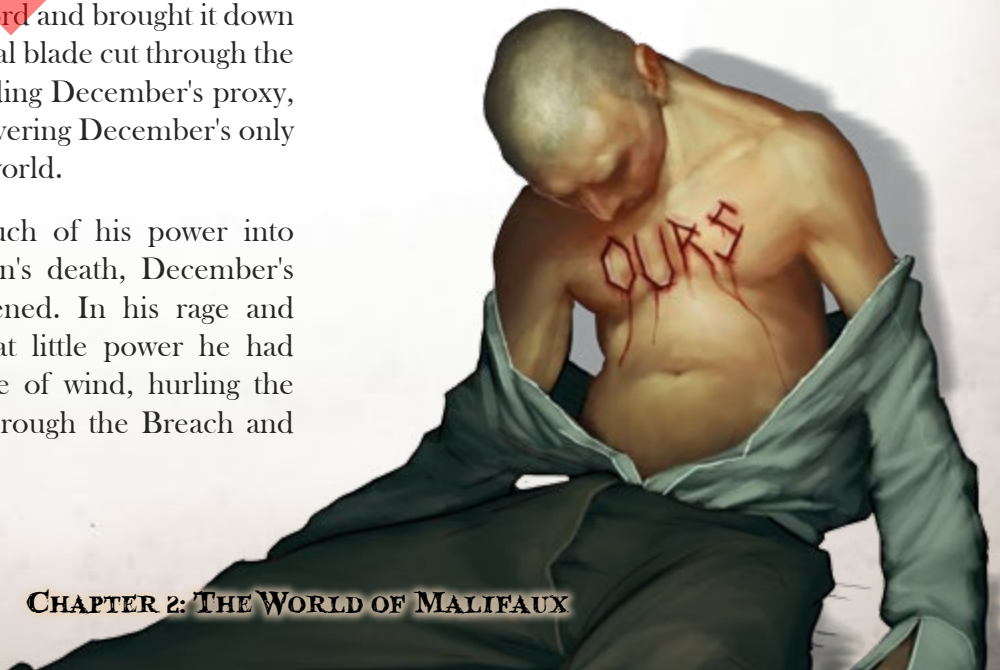
In the aftermath of the battle, Lilith and Nekima took stock of the situation. Humanity had invaded their home less than a decade earlier, and already they had come under the sway of multiple Tyrants. December had been freed from his chains, and their world had nearly met its end.

The two sisters came to an agreement: humanity was too dangerous to be allowed to live. As they debated how to seal off the Breach, they were approached by a human witch named Zoraida. The witch claimed that she could seal the Breach through a powerful ritual, but only if the Neverborn agreed to her terms.

The sisters listened and agreed. With a devious smile, Zoraida gathered the necessary components for her ritual, which harnessed the aetheric energy left in December's wake and turned it back against the portal. The stone archway that kept the portal secure started to violently quake and rumble, and gradually, the rift began to shrink in size. The thaumaturgists back on Earth tried to stabilize the portal, but to no avail. Furthermore, those who attempted to cross through to Malifaux were cut off, as if the portal had been bricked over.

Meanwhile, Nekima took the rest of the Nephilim and spread out across the city, butchering every human they could find. In the morning, she hurled a corpse through the rift to send a message to the humans who had nearly destroyed her world. On its torso was carved a single, haunting word: "Ours."

The Breach lay open for a single moment longer and then closed in upon itself with an ear-rending, sonorous howl. The Great Breach was no more.



FEAR AND CONFUSION (1798 - 1802 AD)

The closing of the Breach shocked the world. One moment, Malifaux was a wellspring of magical power, and the next it was gone, an entire city of people vanishing overnight.

A great many people from all across the world had settled in Malifaux in the decade since the opening of the Breach. When the Breach closed, there was not a corner of the Earth that was unaffected by their loss. In every nation and every city there were men and women who had lost brothers or sisters, children or parents, or husbands or wives. Within days of the news, makeshift memorials had sprouted up all over the world.

Newspaper headlines were garish and sensational in their coverage of the loss of Malifaux. Wild rumors and theories propagated around the globe. Many refused to believe that the Breach had actually closed, thinking it a ruse or a trick intended to raise the price of Soulstones. Others believed that whatever had attacked the residents of Malifaux was coming to Earth. Apocalyptic signs and portents were preached loudly on street corners from Saint Petersburg to New Amsterdam, and the world was gripped in the throes of grief and panic.

In addition to the colossal loss of human life, the source of the world's Soulstones - the fountainhead of every major magical and technological advancement of the past decade - had been lost. Soulstones had already been one of the most sought-after commodities in the world, and in one fell swoop, it had also become the rarest. Institutions began to hoard their meager supplies, and governments began to seize whatever Soulstones they could from private citizens.

Any Soulstone uses that were not deemed essential were immediately ended. This included, tragically, many large public works in addition to most medical applications. If a person was not well-connected, their Soulstones were stripped from them and added to the government stores. Nations began to look to their neighbors in an attempt to gauge just how many Soulstones they had managed to accumulate, and politicians and diplomats desperately tried to sign treaties to keep the peace.

THE BLACK POWDER WARS (1803 - 1814 AD)

At first glance, it appeared as if the various treaties that were signed after the closing of the Great Breach would be enough to usher in a fragile peace. As time passed, however, paranoia began to set in. Everyone had seen the power that Soulstones could unleash, and no nation wished to be caught off guard should their neighbors launch an assault to claim their Soulstones. Diplomats became spies and troops were mustered along borders.

When the first shots rang out in the spring of 1803, it was as if the entire world had released a collectively held breath. Fueled by their own meager supply of Soulstones, the Bulgarian people attempted to revolt against the crumbling grip of their Ottoman rulers, triggering a series of cascading alliances and treaties that dragged all of Europe into a war that would later spread to engulf the rest of the world. With sabre and flintlock, soldiers fought and died for their countries, musket lines holding against the spirited charges of fearless cavalry.

Unlike in previous wars, however, the great nations of Earth now had access to considerable magical power. Amongst the musket lines and cavalry charges, practitioners wielded eldritch energies and rained down fire upon enemy encampments. Animated constructs marched alongside flesh-and-blood troops, and some nations, such as Spain, employed necromantically-infused soldiers, ensuring that their battalions would keep marching even after death.

In Africa, a loose coalition of Soulstone-starved nations marched into Abyssinia from the north while opportunistic bandits and pirates began gnawing at its borders from the south. They found themselves facing a powerful empire that rose to the challenge of war and fought off Egypt, Italy, and the Ottoman Empire in numerous fierce battles.

Further west, the South American colonies of the Spanish and Dutch launched attacks on Brazil, while Mexico pushed northward, seizing the territory of Texas (and its numerous Soulstone warehouses) from Spain. Everywhere, armies fought and died by the thousands for gems that often were so small they could be set into a ring or brooch.

Despite the outbreak of war, however, not every nation was immediately pulled into the conflict. The nations of Japan, China, and Vietnam, for instance, banded together in a peaceful alliance through numerous marriages that tied their royal houses together with bonds of blood, becoming the Three Kingdoms. This kept eastern Asia peaceful for many years, but eventually, the increasing weakness of their neighbors could not be overlooked. Near the end of the war, the Three Kingdoms broke their stalemates and truces and marched on Eastern Europe, Russia, and Western North America.

To the victors went the spoils, not the least of which was a cache of freshly-powered Soulstones, for death was a constant on the battlefield. The Black Powder Wars, as they came to be called, were a time of diplomacy, spycraft, and open warfare the likes of which had a lasting impact on Earth.

THE RISE OF THE GUILD (1815 - 1896 AD)

When the dust had settled, a number of national borders had slightly changed, but the one clear victor wasn't a nation at all: the Guild of Mercantiles.

While the Black Powder Wars were started for national interests, the war was soon hijacked by a second, hidden conflict that raged around the world at the same time.

A handful of hidden cabals and secret societies had spurned the Council's call to restore the world's magic, thinking it to be either a foolish endeavor or part of some elaborate trick. When the Council succeeded, they were incensed and were forced to spend the next decade scrambling for Soulstones like commoners. Other groups had formed around Council members who had fled back to Earth during the initial battle for the city.

While the Breach was still open, these shadowy organizations had wanted to seize control of Malifaux and its Soulstones, but the power and backing of the Council and its archmages had made that prospect dangerous at best and suicidal at worst. After the Breach's collapse, however, these shrouded syndicates saw their chance and redoubled their efforts at amassing power.

The most important generals and politicians of the Black Powder Wars were brought into these cabals, where they could seize control of Soulstones and use magical powers for their own purposes. It was not one conspiracy, but several, and their members used politics, swords, pistols, and lies to outmaneuver each other and the nations they pretended to serve.

By the end of the war, one of these sects had gained de facto control over the vast majority of the world's remaining Soulstones, and with it, the world itself. The Guild chose England for its central headquarters and seeded their people into the courts of every major nation on Earth. As the world began to rebuild, laws were passed that forbade Soulstone ownership by anyone without Guild authorization. Anyone caught violating this ban was executed, often in the presence of the very Soulstone they had illicitly obtained.

The only way for a nation to gain access to Soulstones was to accept Guild liaisons. At first, it was only one Guild agent who would ensure that the nation's Soulstones were only used in a prescribed manner, but as the years passed, more and more liaisons and inspectors were required, until eventually every major nation had an entire cadre of Guild operatives within its court. These agents took to dictating the policies and politics of kings and presidents, and those who refused to dance to the Guild's tune found themselves cut off from its Soulstones. Worse yet, they were frequently punished for their insolence with severe embargoes by whichever of their neighbors proved more willing to follow the Guild's guidelines.

Gradually, the Guild's iron grip tightened around the world. By dictating the movements of other nations' armies, the Guild was able to bring disobedient countries such as India and the Three Kingdoms to heel, turning them from independent nations into occupied police states. Only Abyssinia seemed able to resist their influence, and the Guild had no interest in antagonizing the advanced nation so long as they were content to limit their influence to Africa.

In under a century, the Guild had brought peace to Earth, but it was the peace of a prison, enforced only because none of the prisoners had the power to defy their jailers.

THE BREACH REOPENS (1897 AD)

With all of the Guild's power, they were still unable to reopen the Breach. They made many attempts to force the portal back open over the following decades, both by repeating the original ritual and by devising new ones. Despite all of their power and all of their Soulstones, however, Malifaux remained closed to them, like a door that had been firmly wedged shut.

One century after its calamitous closure, just as the Guild seemed ready to abandon its efforts once and for all, the Breach suddenly and inexplicably reopened. The Guild quickly enacted the protocols they had prepared for such a possibility. Armed forces that had been deployed across the world were immediately recalled to guard the Breach, and high officials met in secret to debate the meaning of its reopening.

Despite all of their precautions and planning, a great panic swept through the Guild. Its leaders used all of their influence to send thousands of soldiers and tons of ammunition through the Breach in the expectation that the Neverborn would either be waiting for them or would soon learn of the portal's opening and launch an attack. Hundreds of thaumaturges and mages, meanwhile, worked to stabilize the integrity of the portal.

When, after a full month, there had been no sign of any sort of Neverborn army, the Guild created the Malifaux Resettlement Corps, armed them with heavy weapons, and sent them scrambling through the Breach to begin scouting the city.

The city was empty. There were a few signs of a recent battle - fresh bloodstains on stone walls, scatterings of shell casings, hastily erected barricades - but no corpses, either human or Neverborn. The city had once been home to thousands of people, but whatever had happened to them, there were no bodies to be found, save for a single corpse found hanging in a twisted tree near the portal's opening. The Resettlement Corps returned to Earth and made its report, and the Guild moved quickly to secure the city.

The Resettlement Corp swelled as the Guild sent more and more of its soldiers sweeping through the city, checking every building for Neverborn before moving on to the next. Smaller groups skirted the edges of the city and began clearing sections along the southern wall, intending to push any Neverborn northward toward the river, where they would have no cover and could be easily dispatched by the larger forces on the opposite bank.

Throughout the entire operation, however, the Guild never encountered anything more dangerous than a few rats. Once the first districts were secure, the Guild sent engineers and expendable laborers through the Breach to begin construction on a central fortress from which the Guild could manage the reclamation process. The citadel, which was christened the Guild Enclave, was soon bustling with personnel, including the newly appointed Governor-General, Herbert Kitchener.

The newly created Industrial Zone began turning out weapons, ammunition, and steel rails for the reclamation effort, and hundreds of civilian workers were brought in to keep the assembly lines rolling at all hours of the day. These workers needed other people to make their food, tend their wounds, mend their clothes, and pour their drinks, and somewhere along the way, the city passed from a military garrison into a full colony.

Eventually, the Guild realized that there were no threats lurking in the shadows of the city and turned their attention toward the real prize of Malifaux: its Soulstones. The nations of Earth, eager to regain access to Malifaux, supplied the Guild with a workforce of convicts and indebted laborers, and scores of troops were redirected from the resettlement effort and marched north to serve as guards and supervisors in the newly reopened Soulstone mines.

The mines were more or less intact from the days of the first Breach, but the Guild cared far more about results than safety in those first days. The resettlement process had all but drained the Guild's coffers, and its leaders were eager to see the results of their investment. Cave-ins, asphyxiation, and flooding claimed nearly a third of the early diggers, an acceptable figure by the Guild's estimation.

A CONVENIENT QUARANTINE

As more and more of the Resettlement Corps left to watch over the convict miners and their indentured peers, the soldiers remaining in the city received orders to cease their advancement and fortify their current position. It soon became clear that the Guild had no real interest in continuing the push into the uncleared areas of the city, which drew the ire of those living in the cramped and overcrowded slums that had sprung up in the Resettlement Corps' wake.

The Governor-General settled the matter by proclaiming that the unsettled areas of the city were filled with monsters and nightmares and were too dangerous for settlement. To reassure the citizenry, he commanded the Resettlement Corps to turn their temporary barriers and blockades into a permanent barricade and announced that the dangerous parts of the city would be quarantined. When the last of the barriers had been erected, the Governor-General disbanded the Corps and restructured them as a constabulary force, marking the end of the Guild's resettlement efforts and the beginning of the Guild Guard and the Quarantine Zone.

THE GROWING CITY

As time passed, the Guild slowly expanded the habitable portions of the city. A grouping of smaller corporations had come to Malifaux to make a name for themselves, and the Guild allowed them to build their homes and offices along the city's northern perimeter.

Using whatever resources they could purchase, these industrialists built up a neighborhood that, to this day, looks more like a frontier town than part of a larger city. Though many attempts were made to come up with a catchy name for the district, most everyone just ended up calling it the New Construction Zone.

This area was not the only district that would come to be known as the New Construction Zone, however. To the south of the Industrial Zone was a stretch of burnt and collapsed buildings, many of which seemed to have fallen off into the nearby river. Some of the settlers saw promise in the devastation and descended upon the district with saws, hammers, and wooden planks. They cut away the collapsed buildings, and in their place, they built a haphazard collection of densely packed homes and warehouses.

The confusion between the two districts soon gave way to further clarification: the ordered settlement built along the northern walls of the city came to be known as the Northern New Construction Zone - or the "NCZ" for short - while the ramshackle maze of buildings that jutted out over the river became the Southern New Construction Zone, or the "SCZ."

In other areas, the residents of the city simply moved into whatever buildings they found waiting for them. The Guild wasted no time in laying down rails that would enable them to more safely and easily ship Soulstones from the northern mines back through the Breach, and people settled around these lines, both in the Northern Hills and within the city proper.

