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obvious: If you don't recognise the rules, don't worry; you don't need to know anything about the old game in order to play this one!

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Behind the Curtain

Throughout this book, you'll occasionally see a "Behind the Curtain" note like the one below. These boxes contain design notes about the game, either to give you an insight into why various design decisions have been made, or just because I thought that you might find them interesting.

Behind the Curtain

A quick note on the usage of pronouns: throughout this book I will be mostly using the "singular they" construction to refer to people of indeterminate gender such as generic characters.

While this can sometimes lead to slightly clumsy sentence construction, I feel that this is preferable to other less gender-neutral language.

FOREWORD

Welcome to **Lightmaster**! This game is a retro-clone of a particular edition of a popular role-playing game from the late 1980s. Unfortunately, for legal reasons that game can't be named here, but if you check out the attack tables and critical hit tables in the back of the book it should be **obvious** which set of rules this game emulates.

You're not going to find a "what is a role-playing game" section in this introduction. I'm assuming that you wouldn't have got so far as to be reading this if you weren't already familiar with role-playing games.

How Accurate is This Clone?

If you're a fan of the original game on which this is based, you are probably interested in how closely the rules of this game emulate their source of inspiration.

The answer to that question is that this clone greatly simplifies and streamlines the original game while keeping its essential character. In particular, character generation is much simpler; with its core mechanic for developing skills being inspired by one of the spin-off games related to the main game that is being emulated.

Many of the simplifications in this game come from a more recent edition of a different role-playing game—the world's most popular role-playing game, in fact (which, again, I can't name for legal reasons). As the game's author, I find this particularly ironic because the more complex mechanics of the original game were originally developed as a set of house-rules for that other game; so blending the two back together brings things full circle.

As such, there is pretty much no part of **Lightmaster** that is a direct mechanical emulation of the equivalent part of the original game. This game instead aims to feel like the original while having simpler, smoother, and more consistent mechanics. As the author, I still consider this to be a clone in intent, but one that can sit alongside the original for those who prefer something that runs more smoothly, rather than on that is intended to replace the original warts-and-all.

If all that sounds unnecessarily vague, it's because much as I would like to give credit where credit is due; the terms of the **Open Game License** under which **Lightmaster** is released explicitly forbid the use of any trademarks (which would include the name of the game that inspired this one) in a context that might be construed as a claim of compatibility with that trademark.

Example: *Rose is a Lightmaster character who will be used as an example throughout this book, along with her companions. Whenever you see an example picked out like this one, it will contain an excerpt from play that illustrates the particular rule or rules that are being discussed.*

The Game Master for the group is Dean, and the players are: Sofia, playing Rose (a Bounty Hunter); Liam, playing Lucius (a Necromancer); Steph, playing Asenath (an Empath); Elena, playing Callow (a Warrior); and Gene, playing Gregor (a Spellsword).

IMPORTANT!

This book contains the rules for the **Lightmaster** game, but it is not sufficient to play the game. You will also need the **Book of Tables**, the companion book to this one. That book contains all the combat charts and spell paths that you will need.

THE GAME'S SETTING

The game of **Lightmaster** is primarily set on a world that is superficially similar to our own, but which has some striking differences. The most obvious difference, of course, being the presence of magic and monsters and similar fantastic elements.

Although this chapter describes the setting in broad terms, you will find no detailed maps or long timelines full of the dates of invented historical events. Such details are left for you to **flesh out yourself** in as much or as little depth as you like. However, by default the game does make some assumptions about the setting that you are using, and this chapter describes those assumed setting elements. It is intended to act as a springboard for your imagination, not as a strict canon that you must stick to.

FEEL AND INSPIRATION

The assumed setting for **Lightmaster** is inspired by the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, H. G. Wells, H. P. Lovecraft, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan Doyle. It is a place of pulp adventure where you can take a flying ship and visit the jungles of Venus, or battle against cultists who worship alien entities. As such, there is little “Tolkienian” about it, and you are more likely to meet a crustaceanoid alien from Pluto than you are to meet an **elf**.

That’s not to say that the setting is designed to be one of Lovecraftian horror. It is still a fantasy game, and most fantasy tropes still hold, but it is fantasy with a twist of pulp.

THE WORLD

Lightmaster assumes that the world is on a technological level that varies between being the equivalent of Earth’s Bronze Age and Earth’s Renaissance period. It is a world that has had people using magic for all of its recorded history and beyond, and this makes it rather hard to pin down to being the technological equal of any particular period in Earth’s history.

For example, **runesmiths** are able to make iron, steel, and titanium by magical means. On the one hand this means that the world has the knowledge and use of those metals, but on the other hand, it means that creating the metals is a “solved” problem and non-magical methods of smelting them have never been developed. This means that you have advance materials, but not the industrial base that you would expect to need to be able to make them.

Similarly, farming is much more intensive in the game than in the real world, since plants and crops can be greatly enhanced using magic. Towns and cities can be therefore supported by much less farmland than in the real world, needing less support infrastructure.

COSMOLOGY & METAPHYSICS

The universe of **Lightmaster** is not our universe. It doesn’t run on our scientific principles of physics and chemistry. If you break down matter you don’t get the chemical elements of our periodic table, but instead you get the classical elements of alchemy. Similarly, **gravity** doesn’t decay with distance, instead having a fixed strength out to its limit and then dropping to nothing suddenly, and things like the “inverse square” law that prevents large arthropods from being able to breath don’t apply.

While this may sound as if the setting is very different to our world, the intent is that it is superficially the same. It’s only on the very large scale (such as a planetary one) and the very small scale (the molecular one) that it’s different. On the scale of human senses, it behaves pretty much in the way that you are familiar with.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE

Although the planet that the game is set on is assumed to be similar to Earth, the larger universe is not. The solar system is heliocentric, and has the same planets as ours, but the stars are not physical objects but are windows in a huge **celestial sphere** that surrounds the solar system through which the light of the luminiferous aether shines. Beyond this, currents in the aether join the sphere to other spheres containing their own solar systems of varying types.

flesh out yourself: The assumed setting of **Lightmaster** should be flexible enough that you can easily adjust bits of it to set the game in almost any existing published fantasy setting, if you prefer to do that rather than fleshing out the default setting with your own details.

elf: Of course, if you prefer it you can introduce elves, dwarves and similar “races” to the setting if you like, but by default they do not appear in this game.

runesmith: This is one of the professions that the player characters can have in the game. As with the other professions mentioned here, you can find details of them in the **Creating a Character** chapter.

gravity: The way gravity works is detailed in the **Lightmaster Travel** chapter.

celestial sphere: Full details of the cosmology of spheres and aether can be found in the **Lightmaster Travel** chapter.

lightmaster ships: Ships equipped with magical sails that allow them to sail through the sea, the air, and even through space along currents of light. These are fully described in the **Lightmaster Travel** chapter.

new type of magic: This new type of magic is the sphere of **psychic magic**. It is possible to play a character who uses psychic magic.

divine magic: One of three types of magic that you can use in Lightmaster. Divine magic is generally associated with healing, life, and fertility, rather than flashy effects; but there are a few exceptions.

priests: Priests are one of the professions that a player character can have.

Mars: Mars is a dry, dead planet with little surface life; but it contains numerous underground cities where undead martians still dwell.

arcane magic: One of three types of magic in **Lightmaster**. Arcane magic is the more flashy and spectacular magic of stereotypical fantasy wizards.

shades: Shades are non-corporeal undead who can interact with the world only weakly but have all the memories of their former life.

skeletons: Skeletons are physical undead who, unlike zombies and husks, are sapient and free-willed and retain all the abilities they had in life.

LIGHTMASTER SHIPS

One of the most important aspects of the world that really changes things socially and geographically is the presence of **lightmaster ships**, (after which the game is named). These ships are able to sail through the sky and, providing they are piloted by an experienced spell caster, can reach anywhere in the world in around a week. This means that messengers, diplomats, and goods (not to mention adventurous player characters) can relatively easily get to any city on the planet that is either coastal or has a dry-dock in a short time frame.

One consequence of this ease of air transport, combined with the relative lack of farmland between cities, is that there are many loose alliances of city-states that each control a small amount of land around themselves and has a few satellite towns and villages, and the land between them is relatively wild. While there are still remnants of larger empires (**lightmaster ships** have only been in use for a century or two), they are fragmenting politically as long distance trade roads become less used and less maintained, often becoming overgrown and disappearing completely.

Lightmaster ships are not only able to fly through the sky, they can fly through space as well and reach other planets and even break out of the celestial sphere and sail through the luminiferous aether to other stars. Humans have visited many other planets and moons, meeting new species and finding new resources and even learning a whole **new type of magic** from aliens.

SOULS AND THE AFTERLIFE

All sapient beings are known to have souls, and these souls hang around after death for a couple of minutes before disappearing to whatever afterlife awaits. If a person is healed within this crucial period, their soul will re-enter their body and their time as a disembodied soul will be remembered as an out-of-body experience.

Beyond that **grace period**, the soul goes somewhere else. Where it goes may be known in your version of the setting or may be unknown, but there is nothing in the game that requires it to be any particular place or state of being. All that matters to the game is that powerful magic can bring the soul back (or possibly reconstitute/recreate it) as either an undead or by bringing the person back to life. Again, it's up to you whether or not people brought back from the dead in this way remember anything of the afterlife that they were brought back from, or even if there is one. Whatever lies beyond death is out of scope of the game.

RELIGION

Religion plays a big part in the world, since people with strong beliefs can learn to use **divine magic**, and this magic is of great usefulness to the general population. Whether the mainstream religion is monotheistic or polytheistic is up to you, as is whether there is a single religion throughout the world or many different religions in different regions and cultures, and how much syncretism exists between different religions. Similarly, it's up to you whether the gods that are worshipped are actual entities that exist or are a human invention.

As far as the game is concerned, **priests** (or the equivalent) of all the mainstream religions all get the same divine spells, regardless of who they worship and how, and this goes a long way towards religious tolerance.

There are some minority religions that use different divine magic to the mainstream religions, and this difference picks them out as being unusual.

Firstly, there is the "Old Faith" practised outside the cities. This religion pre-dates most of the mainstream religions and is organised around reverence of nature rather than gods. While a distinct minority, the magic provided by this religion to its adherents is essential for keeping crops bountiful.

Secondly, there is the worship of the dead gods of **Mars**. This is a new religion that has only spread to the Earth since humans first travelled to that planet in **lightmaster ships**. The religion teaches eternal life through necromancy, and the blend of divine and **arcane magic** it provides allows the re-animation of the dead into **shades** and **skeletons**. This is naturally a rather controversial religion, and there is a large amount of friction between it and the other religions. The attitude towards shades and skeletons varies from place to place, with them being considered anything from full people with as many rights as everyone else to being abominations that must be destroyed. It's up to you how much of an issue to make this in your version of the setting,

depending on how much interest there is in your group for player-character **necromancers** or even player-character undead.

Thirdly, there is the worship of the alien **Plutonic** philosophy of Annihilationism. As with the Martian religion, this is a new arrival on Earth that has only started to take hold since humans have fairly recently encountered it. It is a strangely nihilistic religion that teaches that nothing we do ultimately matters in the face of the cosmos so we may as well do as we want. The Plutonic religion is actively banned in many countries and thought to be morally suspect, although since it doesn't involve the creation of undead it is less visible than necromancy and it is easier to practice in secret. Its priests use a combination of divine and psychic magic (itself considered new and alien) to cause destruction of all types.

MAGICAL TEACHING

The divine magic described above is usually taught by its respective religions, but there are also secular organisations that can teach magic.

Arcane magic is taught in an academic context. While there are many smaller independent schools that teach it, the two largest and most prestigious are the College of Sorcery and the University of Arcane Arts. The two schools between them have a campus in almost every major city, and there is a great deal of (mostly friendly) academic rivalry between the two. Both are ancient institutions that have been teaching arcane magic since it was first discovered and developed, and in truth there is little difference in the quality of magical training that each provides.



While both the University of Arcane Arts and the College of Sorcery have a heavy overlap in terms of the type of wizards that they train, they are not identical. It was mages from the College of Sorcery who first brought back the practice of necromancy from Mars and for a couple of decades the College trained necromancers. Eventually, however, they bowed to public pressure and expelled those following the Martian religion – who went off to found their own School of Necromancy, which is as much a religious organisation as an academic one.

The University of Arcane Arts never taught necromancy, but it too has shown an interest in combining arcane magic with other forms. Researchers at the University have managed to successfully blend arcane magic with psychic magic, resulting in the training of **conjurers** who use both traditions.

Speaking of psychic magic, this is the relative new kid on the block when it comes to magic, since it was originally developed by at least one alien race and has only recently been discovered by humans. Humans initially encountered it being used by the insectoid philosophers of **Jupiter**, although it is also used on Pluto and presumably in other as-yet undiscovered places too.

Psychic magic is all about the strength of one's mind and personality, and as such it is more easily taught in a master-apprentice manner than in a classroom format. There is therefore no

necromancers: Necromancers are one of the professions that a player character can have.

Plutonic: The sapient crustaceans that live on the icy world of Pluto have very alien mindsets compared to that of humans.

conjurers: These are spell casters who specialise in the conjuring of semi-tangible constructs of force and light.

Jupiter: Technically, the insectoid philosophers live on Io, one of Jupiter's moons. Jupiter itself is a gas giant with no indigenous life.

consent: Naturally, consent is not needed for a psychic spell caster to stun an enemy in combat with a mental blast, it is only needed for the use of mentally invasive magics such as those that read thoughts or memories and those that control a target's behaviour. Some countries waive this consent requirement if a psychic is acting on behalf of the state to help interrogate a suspected criminal, but others don't allow evidence gained in this manner to be used.

goblins: Goblins are small green humanoids that are considered by humans to be mischievous at best and evil at worst. Goblins are not available for use as player characters.

Selenites: Graceful insectoids that live on the moon. It was Selenites that first introduced humanity to the concept of **Lightmaster sails**.

Mercurians: A race of sapient and mobile plants. They love to farm, and occasionally come to Earth because of its rich and diverse vegetation.

dragon: Dragons nest in the asteroid belt, and are the only currently known species that can fly through space under their own power. **Lightmaster sails** are made from the wings of slain dragons.

academic facility that exists to teach psychic magic. The various practitioners of the art act as mentors and pass it down to individual apprentices.

However, psychic magic tends to scare people more than arcane or divine magic does, since its nature can be more insidious. Because of this, most people who use psychic magic belong to the Psychic's Guild. While not an academic institution per-se, the Psychic's Guild exists to promote psychic magic and as part of this promotion it can connect potential apprentices with mentors. The Psychic's Guild encourages its members to follow a strict code of conduct about **consent** to having psychic magic used on you, and also encourages its members to wear the guild's emblem to identify themselves as members of the guild.

Naturally, not all psychics are members of the guild, some prefer to be anonymous and keep their talents hidden, but most find that being trusted as a guild member is worth the inconvenience of having to identify yourself, and the University of Arcane Arts insists that all conjuration students are members in good standing.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The impact of magic in the world goes beyond infrastructure and agriculture. Magic makes the day-to-day life of people easier. Injuries can be healed, and diseases cured, and in emergencies food and water can be magically conjured from nothing. Even death can sometimes be reversed if caught in time. Automata can perform dangerous or repetitive tasks, providing power for mills and keeping forges stoked.

This is not to say that the world is a utopia, of course. While such magic is useful, it doesn't cure all of society's ills. For a start, while almost everyone can learn a low level spell or two, only those who are both naturally talented and dedicated to their studies can master more powerful magics, so more powerful magical effects are – while still occasionally available – not every day experiences for the average person.

THE SETTING'S INHABITANTS

The majority of the planet's inhabitants, at least the majority of the planet's sapient inhabitants, are humans of varying culture. However, humans are not the only people on Earth. In fact, they're not even the only indigenous people.

Humans share the earth with **goblins**. Goblins and humans are so different psychologically that they struggle to live together. Goblins find human civilisation with all its laws and social mores to be extremely oppressive, and only a tiny minority can stand to share it, and similarly most humans find goblins far too wild and chaotic to live with. Goblins see humans as big, slow, ponderous giants with nonsensical and arbitrary rules and expectations, whereas humans see goblins as bundles of chaos who can't be trusted.

Because of this fundamental difference in nature, goblins tend to live in wilderness areas away from human settlements (and vice versa) and there is much friction between the two species. Trading and friendly contact is sporadic at best, and the presence of local goblins is often seen as a nuisance or threat to a stable life. The only reason goblins haven't been driven to extinction is that most of them live underground in places that humans can't find or can't get to easily and that their shorter lifespan is coupled with a frenetic breeding rate.

Apart from the goblins, there are many other dangers in the wilderness. A wide variety of magical creatures exist, from deadly basilisks to vicious manticores.

As well as its natural inhabitants, the Earth is also home to visitors from other worlds. While a few delicate **Selenites** or bulbous **Mercurians** live on the Earth, the majority of Earth's visitors are Plutonians and (undead) Martians, both of whom have religious compatriots here. A less frequent, but far more noticeable, visitor is the **dragon**. There are never very many dragons on Earth at any given time, but the presence of such a huge and powerful beast in an area is of great note.

All these visitors are from our own solar system, of course. There are sometimes visitors from other systems, but they are much rarer (and their details will vary from campaign to campaign and are therefore left for the **game master** to decide).

LEVELS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

As characters increase in level, they go from being raw novices to being some of the most capable people in the world. However, they are not the only people with character classes. The world is full of people with similar abilities to player characters, people who have trained as runesmiths or become witches; or even guards and soldiers that are experienced warriors.

LEVELS AS AN IN-CHARACTER MEASUREMENT

Generally, character levels can be divided into four broad ‘tiers’. These tiers are not anything that is used in-setting to describe people, they’re just an out-of-character label to help you visualise how the player characters compare to those around them and to give you an idea of what sort of level non-player characters found in various locations are likely to be.

Having said that, people in the setting do have a rough idea of the concept of levels. Spell casters have spell paths that have spells that are at discrete intervals on the path, and use a number of points of mana to cast based on their position on the path. It’s a short step from describing a spell as a “five mana spell” to describing a spell as a “fifth level” spell; and therefore most spell casters can be accurately described in-character as “being able to cast seventh level spells” or “being able to cast a fifteenth level spell”. Obviously, this is not an exact science. There are not spells at every level, so if two characters can both cast twentieth level spells there is no easy way to distinguish between them until one or the other manages to cast a twenty fifth level spell.

Similarly, it’s possible (although it would be very unusual for a player character) that a spell caster could be high enough level to cast a spell of a given level but to have never actually learned any spell paths to that level. A twelfth level character who has only ever learned spell paths to tenth level will be pretty indistinguishable from a tenth level character.

The same thing applies to non-caster characters. While even non-casters can learn a few spells with difficulty, they can’t learn any spells higher than fifth level. It might be obvious from the amount of mana that someone has access to and how skilled they are in various fields that they have progressed far beyond the capabilities of most spell casters who can cast fifth level spells, but skill levels aren’t easily and objectively measured like spell levels are, so it’s much more difficult to pin down someone’s exact level.

It’s not impossible, though. Theoretically, it’s possible to work out someone’s level from how much mana they have (assuming you have a way of determining that), and there are some spells that can detect someone’s exact level.

To sum up, it’s acceptable for player characters and non-player characters alike to refer to someone’s “level” in-character, and shouldn’t be considered to be metagaming. However, the exact level that someone is might not be readily apparent (and the level of non-sapient extras is even less apparent).

NOVICE CHARACTERS (LEVEL 1–4)

Beginning characters are rank novices in their chosen field or profession. A first level **warlock**, for example, is someone who has just finished their studies at one of the magical academies and has learned the basics of arcane magic but is barely able to cast more than the simplest spell; and even then they can only cast them a couple of times per day before running out of mana. They may be able to boil some water or shine a beam of light from their palm, but they’re by no means masters of magic.

The vast majority of people with levels fall within this range. Many people are sent to get an education for its own sake, and therefore learn a little bit of magic but then return to a mundane life afterwards and never make the effort to progress much further. Similarly, people who have trained in martial techniques are likely to join a militia or get a job as a guard and never get the heavy combat experience needed to progress beyond there.

People with classes at levels 1–4 are not considered exceptional, and are common throughout the world. Even small villages are likely to have a few, and while hastily organised militia might mostly consist of people without class levels, professional guards and the like will be level 1–4.

Behind the Curtain

The game assumes that characters will start at first level and as such they will be inexperienced, but if you don’t want your characters to start as such novices you can start a campaign with higher level characters.

To do this, follow the guidelines in the **Adventuring** chapter for when a character joins an existing campaign that is at higher than first level, but do that for all the characters at the start of the campaign.

This is not something that I ever do, because I prefer characters to grow organically from their beginnings rather than starting in media res, but it’s not as if the **Game Police** are going to come and arrest you if you prefer to do things differently.

level: If it really bothers you to hear people refer to the “level” of characters and monsters in-character, try substituting a different term such as “circle”, “grade”, or “rank”. It’s surprising how big a difference it makes to use a term that you’re more comfortable with.

warlock: An arcane spell user whose spells manipulate the elements.