

# VERMILION



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# VERMILIAM

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Thank you!

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## Chapter One

# INTRODUCTION

The new world is the last refuge of humanity, though it is one of untamed wilderness that has been changed by some supernatural force. Both the north and south continents, the Auroras, have grown over the bones of an ancient civilization that now lies in ruin, but this was not always so. They were once home to the Architects, masters of construction, and of the machinery and magic of the old world. At least, they were before The Bleed. According to the natives, the Pale — the place where all magic originates, and where people's spirits once journeyed after death — bled into the mortal realm thousands of years ago, changing both forever.

Not long after stepping foot on the shores of the new world 328 years ago, the human colonists far from their lost homeland found they were not alone, and would have to fight for their claim to these lands. After years of uncertainty and inner conflict, they formed the Empire, which has wrested most of the Inner Crescent from the many peoples — dwarves, elves, halflings, sasquatch, and even clockworks — who have called this place home since memory began, who now occupy much of the largely unexplored land beyond the encircling mountain range. The dwarves to the north are still recovering from a brutal civil war that saw the western clans unite to defeat the barbarous, vampiric dwarves of the east, who were bent on enslaving all others to slake their thirst. Far to the west, the halflings jealously guard their resource-

rich territories and treetop cities, standing defiantly in the face of imperial expansion. Tribal kingdoms of elven hunter-gatherers to the south continue to roam the sweeping deserts, roiling tropical seas, and mist-shrouded jungles as they have always done, divided as a people by geography, lifestyle, and age-old rivalries. Some native groups have integrated into imperial society, begun to welcome trade, or hidden themselves away, but most are willing to fight for their freedom.

Ruled by Empress Adara Aurelia, the imperials are almost as divided as they once were, with their many factions vying fiercely for power. Under the guidance of High Priest Obraham, the Temple of Light exerts significant control over the Empire through faith and the iron fist of the knightly Order of Inquisitors. As a result of their oppressive influence and harsh laws, many so-called heathens, criminals, and even pioneers have been forced elsewhere, giving rise to desperate outlaw gangs, covens of witches, and organized crime syndicates such as the Black Hat Society in the Outer Crescent colonies. In the shadows, even the Inner Crescent is rampant with lowlifes and down-and-outs hopped-up on herbal drugs or drunk on tinctures as a means of escape. The Temple has an antagonistic relationship with the Imperial Academy, whose professors, engineers, and young minds seem to favor the knowledge of the Auroras' ancient past over their faith in the Sun God. The Academy funds expeditions to locate the old world's lost

## A BRIEF HISTORY

The imperial calendar began with the Dawn of Man 328 years ago. Any major events in the Auroras before then are remembered only through oral tradition, engraved images, and sparse writings. Among humans, their lost home is barely remembered at all. The events listed here are relatively common knowledge for most educated folks, regardless of culture.

**0:** Humans leave their dying homeland in the Eventide's Exodus, crossing the Celestial Ocean in pursuit of the setting sun — and a new hope. After time unknowable, they arrive on the shores of the Coralline Archipelago.

**6:** Vermilium is discovered in the Cruo River, becoming the new colonial currency. Nophra Dawn is built over an ancient, ruined city spanning the river's Red Delta.

**12:** The first of the Vermilium Wars breaks out between the humans and the elves of the Vol'doon and Qol'kaan over rights to the precious metal. The colonial territories expand.

**21:** Ships stop arriving from the humans' eastern homeland, and contact is lost forever.

**25:** The Colonial War begins as the humans fight among themselves for land and power. Humans and halflings encounter each other for the first time on the grasslands of North Aurora. Many halfling warriors and sorcerers are hired as mercenaries by the northern human colonies to help fight their war.

**43:** Blood lust spreads from the Thu'loon elves to the humans for the first time.

**52:** The Colonial War ends in a ceasefire, initiating the slow formation of an empire that would come to span the Inner Crescent. Nophra Lah I becomes the first empress.

**65:** In an act of cruel betrayal, the united Empire begins pushing the People of the Dancing Grass out of their long-held territories, ending in a heroic last stand by the halflings during the Battle of Rapture River. The victorious halflings form a new nation beyond the northern banks: Halfling Country.

**77:** The human fishing colony of Almouth, which was founded atop a great battlefield, becomes a crucial hub for culture as trade is established between the Empire and the dwarves.

**99:** The Temple of Light founds the Order of Inquisitors, arranges for the reconstruction of the Vaults of Zin, and outlaws magic across the Empire. Witchcraft and sorcery go underground.

**127:** The Imperial Academy is founded in the growing city of Almouth. Academic expeditions make their first discovery of working artifacts inside an old world factory ruin, spurring sudden advances in technology.

relics and technologies, to be studied and replicated to the best of the scholars' abilities. Industries are created around their inventions, which are built in the factories by prisoners and orc laborers.

These archaeological excursions have been unearthing an increasing number of primordial industrial ruins and clockwork automatons; many had lain hidden and overgrown for untold millennia. The secrets they reveal improve imperial life, but are met with dire portents from the indigenous religious leaders, who warn that things that are buried should be left in peace. The ruins contain forgotten treasures, powerful artifacts, and infinite wealth for those brave or foolish enough to venture after them, and for those able to avoid or defeat the things that guard them. Fortunes in shining red vermilion — the unifying currency of the new world, denoted by the V symbol — can be made by those who are strong of heart and willing to hunt man, monster, or machine.

Now, in the third era of this world, is a time of antiheroes: bounty hunters, tomb robbers, black market dealers, vigilante drifters, and soldiers of fortune all trying to survive in a dangerous frontier that has yet to be charted, tamed, or even understood. To follow the path of adventure is to accept a life of desperation, never knowing what the next job will be, or where the next meal will come from. They may fight for either side of the law, or risk their lives to take on jobs no one else wants to get their hands dirty for, but they must be prepared for the consequences.

Some seek to uncover the mysteries of the Auroras' ancient, industrial past, while engineers repurpose old relics to create new, modern inventions. Indigenous sorcerers learn to harness the chaotic magic that saturates the very earth and all that grows from it, while witches risk corruption by taking that power and turning it into something perverse and unnatural. The imperial sun priests believe they speak with the divine, calling for power from the Great Star in times of darkness. Collecting artifacts or learning how to harvest plants, animals, and monsters can grant power beyond reckoning in the new world, and from these items creative folks can concoct weird and wonderful remedies, make weapons, and even construct new items of power to aid them in their adventures. They're going to need them.



Whatever their background, throughout their careers antiheroes will likely have to battle violent outlaw gangs, corrupt law officials, mysterious witch covens, hostile warrior societies, supernatural beasts, ancient automatons, and magical diseases promising boons in exchange for a sinister cost. If they're lucky, they'll live long enough to retire on a plot of quiet, untainted land after enough blood has been spilled and enough vermilion has been earned, but most don't make it that far. No one said the job was supposed to be easy.

Welcome to the new world. Welcome to Vermilion.

## MATURE THEMES

*Vermilion is a game of antiheroes in a dark fantasy world. It incorporates mature themes and subject matter including violence, death, cannibalism, disease, oppression, colonization, medical experimentation, and vivisection.*

*Before you run or play in adventures in this setting, make sure your group is aware of these themes and that you all feel comfortable raising any concerns regarding them.*

*Remember, your antiheroes may do the right things for the wrong reasons, but they're still the heroes of your stories.*



**175:** The Bowfight at Cremation sees knights and squires of the Order battle a witch coven gang called the Sisters, led by the infamous outlaw Ezmerelda Thorn. Many are slain or burned at the stake.

**199:** Famine grips the Winterlands as many desperate dwarf families set out from Hunger Bay in search of greener pastures, never to return.

**220:** The imperial colony of Stillwater is lost to the blight, and is abandoned.

**250:** The Black Hat Society and its ruling court are founded and begin running a series of black markets and illegal enterprises.

**275:** Adara Aurelia, the Virgin Empress, is crowned following the death of her mother, Nophra Lah III. In her first act of power, she abolished slavery.

**285:** Members of the now-legendary mercenary outfit Nobody's Heroes meet for the first time in the small town of Lonely Hollow. During their first adventure together, they discover a passage to the Underearth, and what lies below, beneath the roots of the Wildwood.

**288:** The Sanguine War erupts between the dwarf clans of the east and west. In a peace effort, the western lords gather in the great hall of Voryn Frey, leader of the vampiric Red Coyotes, only to be assassinated and feasted upon.

**292:** The remaining western leaders desperately create the skin walker warrior society, and accept an alliance with the Empire. Together, they defeat Frey. The victors found the Clan Confederation, and their new leader, Drexel Fenn, exiles the surviving skin walkers to the Werewood.

**294:** The Hunger Bay Trading Company becomes the first chartered barony to hold its own territory.

**299:** Vermilion deposits are discovered in huge quantities south of the Crescent Mountains, attracting hundreds of pioneers and prospectors during the Red Rush.

**300:** At the turn of the century, engineers of the Imperial Academy re-create the first steam trains to travel the rails along the Baron's Road. Zero Wolverine becomes the youngest war chief in halfling history, and reignites conflicts between his kin and the imperial settlers.

**320:** The Doom That Came to Serenity scars the imperial boomtown of Serenity forever. Many are killed, including Baron Rufus T. Firefly.

**323:** Famed explorer Sol Bellamy, responsible for charting much of the known world, disappears while searching for the lost elven city of N'ool.

**328:** The present day.