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INTRODUCTION

An adventure surpassing your wildest dreams awaits you in the **Fabula Ultima Atlas**!

This expansion of the **Core Rulebook** focuses on **high** (or epic) **fantasy**, a genre characterized by ancient mysteries, breathtaking vistas, incredible magic, and mighty entities who battle each other for control over imaginary worlds that may appear far removed from our own.

Truth be told, you can see this **Atlas** as a natural continuation of the **Core Rulebook**, since the latter already showcases many examples and situations typical of high fantasy, due to it being a popular flavor in JRPGs.

Besides offering a brief introduction to our concept of the high fantasy genre, the Atlas provides **advice and game materials** for Game Masters and **additional rules** for Players, all in three simple chapters:

◆ The **World** provides valuable elements for creating high fantasy settings, including 10 archetypal locations you can use as campaign elements or for inspiration, plus a list of new **rare items** and **artifacts** for truly epic adventures.

◆ The **Protagonists** introduces **4 new Classes** (Chanter, Commander, Dancer, and Symbolist). It also provides several **optional rules** (such as Zero Powers) to push your characters over the top and unlock ever more combinations.

◆ The **Antagonists** chapter focuses on **5 Villains** – pregenerated Bosses, each more fearsome than the last – that will put even the most expert Players to the test.

This Atlas doesn't presume to be seen as a complete guide to high fantasy; the genre is widespread and takes on countless shades. Instead, this book is closely connected to its authors' creative and philosophical inclinations: their goal is to provide advice and examples from established JRPGs (see page **199**), useful both to those well-versed in this genre, and especially to those who have recently found their way to **Fabula Ultima** and JRPGs in general.

Just turn the page to learn more!

WHAT DEFINES FABULA ULTIMA'S HIGH FANTASY?

High fantasy can mean a lot of things, even within the world of **JRPGs**. In this book, and in **Fabula Ultima** more broadly, the term indicates several elements that the authors feel represent a specific way of building stories and settings.

In brief, we are discussing the authors' personal visions, which do not claim to be the absolute truth. Indeed, narrative genres have nebulous boundaries, and it would be impossible – maybe even irresponsible – to box them in too much.

What follows may help you to better understand the creative vision behind this book!

BE GOOD TO THE BONE

Your Player Characters in a high fantasy campaign are **good** to the point of being idealized. They always hesitate before wounding or killing, consider violence the last resort, and forgo all forms of opportunism.

One exception is the **tortured hero**, ready to cross the line when needed. Though the actions of these character types initially **contrast with those of their companions**, eventually the events of the campaign will cause **goodness to take root in their hearts**. The entire group is responsible for contributing to this character arc.

HAVE EXTRAORDINARY TRAITS

High fantasy characters, creatures, objects, and locations always have **extraordinary and extreme traits**: a mighty warrior able to smash through the very walls with her sword, a secret fortress floating above jagged peaks, and so on. In other words, **go over the top**!

WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE

In high fantasy campaigns, your characters' emotions should manifest **clearly and constantly** – often **without half measures** – in their words, actions, choices, clothing, and the weapons and magic they use in combat. This doesn't mean playing boilerplate characters; on the contrary, it means making the most of your screen time and **fully expressing** your character's nature.

DISCOVER A HIDDEN WORLD

An **absolute and shocking** truth emerges in the second part of a high fantasy campaign, completely overturning the balance of power. It might be the discovery of **another world**, a **looming disaster** that lies at the heart of your opponents' actions, or the **dark side** of an apparently benevolent institution.

CHALLENGE DESTINY AND THE DIVINE

High fantasy campaigns often end in an epic battle against an **inescapable fate** or **immutable reality**, which can take the shape of a **false god** or another entity with nearly **divine** powers.

MAIN REFERENCES

Here are some titles that shaped the artistic vision of this book:

- **Bravely Default** and **Bravely Second** feature plotlines that begin traditionally but later **overturn the Player's expectations** of heroes and antagonists, reaching a point of pure **metanarrative subversion**.

- **Final Fantasy IV** starts as the **redemption** story of a protagonist who has committed **a heinous crime** and then continues with a series of explosive and ever more over-the-top scenes and situations.

- **Final Fantasy IX** is an excellent example of a group **brought together by fate** into an often whimsical story, with some dramatic and spectacular moments, and an **extraordinary and diverse** cast for whom magic is crucial. It is also not afraid to tackle heavier themes such as like **death** and **war**.

- **Final Fantasy X** showcases a setting far removed from a pseudo-medieval European aesthetic. Its story focuses on **summons**, the struggle against **dogmatism** and **prejudice**, the need to accept **death** and **change**, and the right of future generations to **choose their own fate**.

- **Tales of Arise** is a great inspiration for a campaign focusing on a **revolution**. It takes place in a world **torn apart by colonialism**, where the protagonists must painstakingly learn to trust one another, and where the horrors of slavery and oppression are **portrayed visibly** through the theft and manipulation of life force.

HIGH FANTASY PILLARS

On page **14**, **Fabula Ultima**'s **Core Rulebook** discusses the **Eight Pillars** that uphold its entire play experience. This Atlas builds on those elements in its own way.

ANCIENT RUINS AND HARSH LANDS

This pillar really comes to the fore in high fantasy: dense magical forests, ancient cities buried beneath the sands, haunted castles, and ruins hiding sinister secrets.

Each location is the **allegory** of an emotion or concept.

The **frozen Western Wasteland**, dotted with gray ruins that crumble to the touch, represents **magic's catastrophic costs**. The silence and blinding whiteness of the snow make this place a limbo without end.

A **castle with crystal towers** stands on the moon's dark side – the dwelling place of the last dragon, reachable only with an ancient airship. It symbolizes the search for **solitude** and the **loss of faith** in the world's people.

An opulent **city-cathedral** with jagged spires reaching to the sky. Wyvern flocks circle among the clouds, and **bronze sentries** silently guard fleets of stairs – all symbols of the **Dragon Church**'s military might.

A WORLD IN PERIL

The world hides incredible secrets and powerful magic… but they are not hidden to all! What you know at the start is often the mere tip of the iceberg – as the campaign delves deeper into the world's lore, you may discover that the **Villains** you faced until now are simply pawns in a much vaster game.

Commander Cadmus of the royal army plans to convince the king that the movement of Imperial troops along the border warrants a preemptive assault. Cadmus believes he will soon become general and has faith in the **Light Stone** he received from **Nileth the Witch**. He is unaware that the jewel will react with the Imperial **Shadow Stone**, awakening a dreadful power that will bring chaos to both nations…

Hordes of monsters periodically surge from the dark rifts secretly created by the **Undying Popess** to justify the existence of the **Unsullied Order** and preserve her power, keeping a terror-stricken world in thrall.

CLASHING COMMUNITIES

High fantasy stories often begin with wars or great turmoil – the protagonists are called upon to fight on behalf of a faction or rescue innocent lives. But, sooner or later, the situation will escalate and become a matter of ideology – freedom versus order, hope versus desperation, or tolerance versus prejudice.

While the **Acheronian Empire** attacks the city of **Platea**, the principality of **Kemet** builds walls along their borders. The **Xanadu** islands, torn by succession wars, will be the next target of Imperial hunger. Alone, none of these peoples stand a chance against the Acheronian magitech armies.

For centuries, the realms of **Londinium** and **Gralia** have fought over **New Babylon**, each monarch wielding claims based on blood ties to the city's deceased **Matriarch**. The airship on which you are traveling is struck down by Gralian fire. The crash unearths a **dire weapon** forgotten by time, while the armies send forth their most ruthless leaders to crush the enemy, with no concern for the local population.

EVERYTHING HAS A SOUL

The stream of souls (see page **72**) is crucial to high fantasy settings: it's the only thing truly eternal, from which all else came forth and shall one day return. However, it has no will of its own and can be altered by especially powerful magic and entities, sometimes with no turning back.

Zephyr is a world of islands that float around a core of thunderclouds – some say the **Everlake** can be found there, the source of both magic and life, to which all spirits return after death. Only those with the blessing of the **Church of Nimuë** may access the **springs** hidden between the isles: water basins where the life-flow condenses in luminous vapors, allowing contact with the Everlake.

The **Astral Drake Midgardsormr**, a **demon** created within the stream of souls by the peoples' despair, is now hijacking the stream itself, slowly draining the planet of its life force. Plants wither, oceans grow still and lifeless, and animals transform into fierce **monsters**. Only by finding and awakening the **six Elemental Guardians** can you defeat Midgardsormr, but there are also those who profit from the crisis caused by the Guardians' long slumber…

MAGIC AND TECHNOLOGY

In high fantasy settings, the connection between magic and technology tends to be extreme: they are either one and the same – with powerful magitech infantry and ritual containment circuits – or in open conflict. If the latter is true, magic tends to be an ancient and lost art, while technology is dangerous and unfeeling. But there may be exceptions: magic could bring destruction while technology appears more controllable.

Asteride's vanguard troops use cutting-edge **weapons** and **magitech armor** designed to protect the **mage-tacticians** from enemy attacks. Conversely, the nearby nation of **Dagda** follows the path of martial arts and healing magic, believing that only cowards would rely on magically enhanced soldiers.

After the tragic **Night of Shattered Stars**, the **Quivira Federation** imposed harsh restrictions on magic, which has become illegal for anyone outside the **Crimson Caste**. Things grow more complicated when a **rebel** group from the vassal realm **Olmedia** finds a **young star witch**, barely alive after escaping the horrors of a secret Quivirian lab...

Either way, both magic and technology reach explosive and visually stunning peaks in high fantasy tales.

HEROES OF MANY SIZES AND SHAPES

Not only are there no limitations to what a high fantasy hero can be, but you should make sure these protagonists are **over the top**:

Albus is a **wood elf** from the **Petrified Forest**. He fights using swarms of floating crystals and unleashes powerful light spells. His antlers flower with countless blossoms when he casts his most potent spells.

Lydia is a **golf champion** who landed in this world from **another dimension** after touching a shard from a **time crystal**. The jewel still sparkles on her hand, allowing her to summon Arcana and use Entropic magic.

Pwih is an unusual blue-colored **mellow ooze warrior** who can speak and take humanoid shape. She doesn't know where her powers come from and has joined a group of heroes to learn more about humans.

"It makes no sense! Why? If we are so alike, why are you surrounded by people ready to protect you with their lives? Why are you not alone?"

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HEROES

In high fantasy, world events are **inextricably** tied to your heroes. Some of them may know that from the start, while others will learn with time. Either way, no hero is part of this tale by mere chance – and if they are, then it will likely be this existance "outside the boundaries of destiny" that lets them overturn the world's fate.

The prophecies speak of **four heroes** who will save the world from the clash between the **Giant of Fire** and the **Giant of Ice.** As foretold, the **Mark of the Lily** has appeared on the right hands of the **Prince of Alfheim** and the **Twin Vestals**… but also upon those of a **wandering sword master** and the **Prince's younger sister**!

Run over by a carriage when she was only a child, **Valea** lost her left eye and leg but she was saved by the **Bandit Princess**. The girl grew up to become an accomplished thief and joined a group of revolutionaries, but she is about to discover that the man leading the royal army was onboard that fateful carriage, and that the Bandit Princess was not motivated by altruism alone…

As always, these connections and plot twists may come from the Game Master or from Players using Fabula Points.

MYSTERY, DISCOVERY, AND GROWTH

In high fantasy campaigns, mysteries are deep, ancient, and shocking – the protagonists' personal growth happens precisely when dire revelations overturn their understanding of politics, magic, or spirituality. That's when your heroes may discover that they have been aiding the schemes of a **supreme Villain** for much of their previous adventures!

Kain – the last of an ancient line of **priestesses** – begins a desperate pilgrimage to revive the **Sacred Flame**, risking his life against the monstrous **angels** that haunt the wilderness between the city-states. However, what Kain and his escort ignore is that the Flame demands a terrible sacrifice and that angels were once something completely different…

By defeating **Charybdis, Maelstrom**'s monstrous **guardian**, you have unwittingly broken the **Northern Sigil**. This has accelerated **Rector Lucretia**'s reckless plan of opening the four cardinal sigils in order to channel the planet's energy into the magitech engines of her new **dimensional ship**.

BEFORE WE START

The following pages discuss some crucial aspects of participating in a high fantasy campaign with **Fabula Ultima**.

Since the **Core Rulebook** is strongly tied to high fantasy, these suggestion are also appropriate for the vast majority of **Fabula Ultima** campaigns.

PROTAGONIST SYNDROME

You will often find plots centered on one or two characters when searching JRPGs, manga, or high fantasy anime for inspiration. These tales are frequently written as escapist fantasies focusing on a male protagonist – with whom the expected average audience can identify – plus a romantic interest and a handful of more or less well-defined sidekicks.

Conversely, in **Fabula Ultima**, all Player Characters are equally important, which allows all of you to have an equal share in developing the story. Even PCs with "main character" **Quirks** (see page **114**), like **Ruinbringer** or **Glorious Fate**, should not steal the spotlight from the other protagonists.

COMPLICATED AND RIGID PLOTS

High fantasy worlds are rife with magic and mystery, and are thus suited for plot twists and revelations, ancient prophecies, and travel through space and time. These elements are acceptable in **Fabula Ultima**, but don't overdo it – it's better for twists to result from Fabula Points or **opportunities** rather than being part of a dense and complex web of secrets imagined by the Game Master. The planning should remain **flexible**: you don't need an answer for everything, especially if these answers railroad the story, limiting Player creativity and damaging play.

DIVINE AND IMMUTABLE POWERS

The people of high fantasy tales often worship a great variety of gods, however, one of **Fabula Ultima**'s premises is that even the most formidable entities should be limited somehow. These beings may have accrued immense power, but they can still be bested by those with enough courage and loyal allies.

The world changes **constantly**, and **no one** is omnipotent nor eternal.

ARCHETYPES AND STEREOTYPES

High fantasy tales rely on various archetypes, from the **noble warrior in exile** to the **gloomy witch**, who appears **intriguing and reserved**. These archetypes are useful when establishing a character's concept and **Traits** but they should not become **stereotypes**. Try to include unique details, overturning expectations and showing that the first impressions of your heroes hide complex personalities.

Take special care with the following:

◆ **Archetypes that model real-world peoples and cultures.** Avoid stereotypes when representing cultural elements like religions, customs, and practices. If you want to build your character based on real-world figures – like exorcists, gladiators, ninja, pirates, priests, samurai, witches, or vikings – get your information from sources that do not reduce these people to mere narrative tools or aesthetic. If you use good quality sources, you will create complex, multifaceted heroes – it's also a great way to broaden your horizons.

◆ **Beauty, gender, and clothing stereotypes.** Try avoiding or subverting stereotypes that moralize the body – for example, do not make all heroes young, athletic, and conventionally attractive while their enemies are grotesque caricatures. Also, pay attention to harmful tropes related to gender, social relations, or clothing: a maternal and timid female hero, an aggressive tribal warrior, a cruel and sensual antagonist, or a perverse and diabolical Villain whose appearance does not conform to the gendered expectations of the real world we live in.

Creating a fantasy world allows us to let go of our daily burdens. We should embrace this opportunity without forgetting that the words, images, and symbols we use have historical and culturally rooted meanings, which will affect those around us.

ONE DIMENSIONAL VILLAINS

You are welcome to give your high fantasy Villains striking appearances and awe-inspiring abilities, but don't forget to make them **multifaceted characters**. Likewise, exploring concepts like "absolute good" or "absolute evil" isn't especially interesting – the Game Master should give their Villains believable motivations, turning them into the protagonists' proper nemeses.

After all, from great heroes come great Villains, and vice versa!