


# CHAPTER ONE: FUNDAMENTALS







**W**hen Aiden Camus was twelve, his watch stopped. He sat frozen on a field of broken glass, eyes fixed on the sky. Screams filled his ears coming from the wounded, the dazed onlookers at the edge of the devastation, and from the fallen boy beside him.

He was older than Aiden by several years, with mottled chin stubble and crewcut hair. His eyes were shut as he wailed. He reached for Aiden, still locked out of time as the events of the past minute began to sink in.

Blood dripped from deep slices across Aiden's palms as he held up his weight. Pain started to jostle his attention. His eyes fell back to the destruction surrounding him. The overturned cars, the shattered windows, the buckled pavement, the memories that would never fade.

On its surface, his watch looked undamaged. It hadn't broken when he fell. The battery hadn't died. It had a miniature electric motor powered by the motion of his arm, intended to keep perfect time forever.

Both children lay crumpled in the middle of the street, flanked by splintered wood and twisted steel. A fountain sprayed from a broken hydrant at the intersection corner a few yards away, trickling water over Aiden's matted brown hair.

He noticed survivors at the periphery desperately attempting to rally support. The vehicles on the fringe had stalled, blocking traffic into the scene. Traffic lights had gone dark. Cellular phones refused to turn on. Scores of people were still fleeing from what they saw, or rather what they refused to believe they saw.

Aiden remained still, even when the surrounding yells blended into sirens or when the aircraft began swarming above. He felt emergency workers attempting to rouse him from his daze. He repeated the last few moments over in his mind, trying to find some rationale for what had happened and why. It wasn't that it shouldn't have happened, rather that it couldn't have.

His watch's balance wheel which charged the battery had seized. The ratchet and rotor locked the hands three seconds into the third minute past ten o'clock.

It was a Sunday.

Aiden's life until then had been filled with concessions—moments of happiness he accepted only because his dreams could never be fulfilled. He preferred aspirations over practical goals. Aiden, like all children, desired the impossible, until reality forced its way in.

The recovery would be orderly. The damage would soon be repaired. The dead would be mourned. The events of the last few minutes would be reported and then forgotten. Everything would fall back into place.

Except Aiden and his stopped watch.

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It wasn't his birthday. Aiden could tell it was a book. He knew to be careful in unthreading the burlap knot and tearing the hemp paper away. He rolled his fingers across the swells and dimples of the embossed cover, then rattled his nails across the uneven pages, thick with coarse edges. Aiden was impressed. It looked recently unearthed from an ancient tomb, brushed of errant dust, and dropped into a shopping bag. The pearl-shaded dragon on the cover had perfectly enmeshed scales, making its skin a uniform matted silver. Only the spine showed the title.

The Codex Dracontis.

"Where do you find these?" Aiden asked his mother.

Aiden had passed that age when parents read to their kids. He missed that. From her, every word was impeccably pronounced, never a slur or stumbled phrase. Through his mother's lips, those stories had carried the weight of gospel.



"Is it good?" his mother asked.

Aiden kept his eyes on the book. "Best one yet."

The window was open. Between them and Martin's empty bed sat his own collection of books, modern stories and science fiction. Aiden liked the ones with frayed edges, bent spines, and old words.

"This old, must be magic," she teased. "Looked like no one had touched it in a century."

"How much did this cost?" He turned to her.

"Twelve year olds are never supposed to ask how much something is."

"Mom?" he pushed.

She patted his lap. "Come on, read me one."

Aiden swung the wooden cover open; it groaned like a satisfied lion. The first cockled leaf repeated the book's title flamboyantly, like it was hand written on the page. Aiden rolled it over carefully. He flipped several more until reaching the first illustration.

The dragon was sketched in graphite and accented with thick strokes of India ink. The image's title was fitting for such a beast, The Death Dragon, Zmey Gorynych. They held the book between them.

"Zmey was a sickly creature," Aiden started. "Muscles stretched tightly around his bones. He appeared too feeble to flap his pitted wings, let alone fly. This dragon needed magic to take to the air. He belched soot and flame and blackened the ground when he landed. Where death lurked in abundance, one would find him. He required the long deceased to feed upon."

"Well that's...appropriate," his mother muttered. Aiden had weathered far worse stories.

"It's a story, Mom," Aiden replied.

"Sorry, go on."

Aiden scanned his finger to find his spot. "He belched soot—"

"You read that part."

Aiden smirked. "It was worth mentioning twice." He returned to the story. "But he was no match for Willum Raenis. Willum was a farmer's child. Neither a favored son nor a fond sibling, he dreamt himself as a knight of legend. But the only thing bigger than his dream was his appetite. He couldn't run. He couldn't he lift great weights. In school, brothers above and below excelled where Willum faltered. He desperately wanted to be special. Without stature or charisma, there was no way for Willum to win the heart of one to suit his wishes. He looked no higher than the nice—"

"Niece—" his mother interjected.

"Niece of the elven lord, Elisa Stormbringer, a petite flower of golden petals. She was..." Aiden fell silent as his finger continued to run down the page.

"What are you doing?" his mother asked.

"Skipping."

He flipped a page. And then another. His finger skimmed through the paragraphs.

He resumed, "Zmey's shadow was peppered with breaks of sunlight—"

"Wait, wait. Why did you—" his mother started.

"Girl stuff," Aiden answered.

"I think I'd disagree with that—"

"Can I continue?" Aiden interjected with a smirk. His

mother shrugged and pointed back to the book. "Zmey's shadow was peppered with breaks of sunlight, piercing through the cracks and holes in his leathery wings. He swooped down and sliced open Willum's brothers as they tended the crops. Willum knew the legend of the dragon of death as well as its appetite. It had already turned its sights to the nearby castle. Willum offered no deal to the kingdom."

"You know the rest of the story would probably make more sense if you knew what the elf princess was like—" his mother said.

"Nope," Aiden interrupted. Cut to the dragon. He flipped a page. "Willum's father, a once proud servant of the realm, owned a blade of refined steel and nobility. Willum took his father's blade and wielding no skill, cut down his farm's livestock. The meat rotted until the aroma was irresistible to the mighty creature—"

"It takes days for food to spoil," said his mother.

"Wouldn't the dragon have killed them all?" Aiden gave her a frustrated look. She chuckled, shook her head, and beckoned him back to the book.

"The beast turned from its pillaging to enjoy the impressive feast placed before it by an obvious admirer," Aiden continued.

"Little did Zmey know that in the stomach of every corpse, Willum had sewn in fresh food. Berries, plums, turnips, even a bushel of green bananas. This meal didn't sit well. Zmey tried desperately to spit up its meal, but the food sat. It gripped the beast in unbearable pain. When the creature breathed its last, all Willum had to do was pull on the withered carcass to tear the head from its body. Willum then carried his trophy to the castle."

Aiden closed the book. He looked to his mother.

"Awesome," he admired, then rolled more pages by. "Dozens more."

"Yes, but enough for now," said his mother. She closed the book and placed it among his collection.

"I missed it when you read to me...but I know I'm too old."

"Doing quite fine on your own," she replied.

"But they sounded real coming from you."

"Well, stories don't need a voice to be any more real."

She patted his lap. "They don't even need a reader."

He slumped into the bed and rolled on his side. She kissed his cheek. His eyes were closed, but he wasn't close to being tired. His mother exited quietly.

As she slinked to her bedroom, she noticed the stern look Martin was giving her from the end of the hall. Four years older than his brother, with pruned hair and optimistic goatee, he already resembled their late father. He inherited the same stare mixing bewilderment with annoyance. She paused to offer a forehead kiss and made for her room. He didn't respond and waited for the door to close before returning to the computer and his blog that no one read.

Aiden opened his eyes moments later and stared through the open drapes to the night sky where a thin film of orange pollution garnished the skyline. The view, half way up a strata juggernaut of a thousand apartments, the city appeared to spread to the vanishing point. Aiden couldn't see the city wall.



Bright lights and a narcissistic waning moon blotted out the stars, except for one brilliant white spark hanging off the edge of a lunar sea.

Aiden stretched out his arm to the shelf and dug his nails into the headband of the codex. He held it precariously by the edge of its spine and carried it back to the bed. The glow bleeding from the window precluded the need of a nightlight.

Aiden flipped to the first story, past the sketch of Zmey, past the introductions, to the part about the elf.

Elisa and Willum married. The magic of an elvish bond gave him centuries of youth. And she bore him sons for a new kingdom they would create.

Aiden turned another page, before the start of the next story, to a pencil sketch of the fictional couple. Willum on his knee, the tall elf princess smiling upon him. Aiden angled the book under the window light to illuminate the girl. Unlike the rough interpretation of the dragon, lacking features from a deficient imagination, the elf showed detail like she had posed for the artist. Flawless skin, a pointed nose, almond eyes, and a delicate figure. The sharp ears were subtle, barely nudging through straight uncolored hair.

Aiden just remained there a moment, hoping for that impossible chance when her eyes might meet his.

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A close second to Aiden's obsession with books was his affection for video games. Martin's favorites had guns, robots, and tanks vaporizing whatever monsters moved before the reticle. Aiden favored sword-wielding and spellcraft, but those were growing difficult to find. His mother located a free download from an obscure website.

"Hey! Homework!" Martin barked as he approached behind Aiden.

"Done," Aiden replied, attention fused to the screen. His warrior dodged and flipped in burdened armor, cleaving with a blade that never wore down. The hero's meal was some generic ration devoured in a single swallow and supplying energy for another twelve hours of continuous movement. Wounds sustained vanished with a moon's pass.

"Where?"

"In the kitchen," Aiden replied with a nudge.

"I have to get on there, by the way," Martin poked him.

"Mom said I had until 5:00."

Martin stepped closer, offering a distracting shadow on the screen. "How many hours you into it?"

"Last save was sixty five."

Martin coughed a laugh. "Why don't you go out?"

Aiden's retort was worth him breaking his focus from the monitor, "This is more interesting." Aiden returned to his game.

"You're going to have to do something with your life eventually, you know."

"Honor roll. How are your grades?"

Aiden's hero's clothes were always comfortable, the romance always willing. The woman the champion had won was a meagerly decent falsehood with long lines of exposed skin and the brassiere of a medieval dominatrix.

She never complained of the cold and fell at the hero's feet when the programmer deemed it appropriate. Death was as quickly resolved as one's finger moved to the hot-key. Castles were a minute's walk apart. Money was easily acquired from the bellies of wandering beasts.

Before leaving, Martin reached a foot across to the machine's power supply and turned it off.

"Marty!" Aiden screamed. Martin laughed as he was chased from the room. Aiden had only lost a few minutes progress. The hero and his world, secured within the last save file, waited patiently for his player's return. The sprite never complained to its god about the lack of refrigerators, central heating, or proper medicine.

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Aiden's eyes followed the passing lights of the tunnel in the Underground Transit Rail. While the train wasn't moving, a flush flat panel television on the outside of the train played through various ten-second commercials, most involving the necessity to improve one's appearance with cosmetics or the latest synthetic drug made to placate the anxieties of modern life.

The transit system was meticulously controlled, with stringent fines against litter and vandalism to keep it and the city above clean. Walls were unspoiled by graffiti, the floor was practically hygienic, and the air was conditioned. Aiden's mother sat beside him, holding his books under her arm. Aiden saw a portable electronic game in the hands of a boy half his age on an opposite seat. The boy's father ignored him as he held onto the railing.

Aiden leaned forward to see the inside of the train bending through the tunnels at speeds he couldn't comprehend. He imagined the transit rail was a giant serpent, gnawing its way through the rock. Aiden embraced the creature's course mane, or perhaps boney frill, and commanded the monster to burst from the shell of the Earth. It lifted the child on its head, taller than the tallest tower in the city. Maybe it dangled little legs behind so it could shuffle about the ground. He would trick the beast to dig too deep or breach a barricade to the canal and drown. Then Aiden could follow the tunnel to the monster's lair and rescue his own princess.

\* \* \*

Mother and son scaled the crowded stairs and exited the UTR station into downtown. Pine trees genetically altered to survive in the shadow-plagued skyscraper forest flanked the sidewalk. The cars whizzing by them hummed like single-note violins. The sun was bifurcated by the dagger-tip of a corporate monolith looming several blocks down. The ivory tower, covered in a checkerboard of white tinted windows and photovoltaic panels, paved a shadow ahead of them.

Aiden asked for bubble-gum at a passing vendor. His mother relented. Between cherry, apple, watermelon, long-lasting, sugar-free, and extrachewy, there were a hundred varieties. Eventually, his mother stepped in and snagged a cinnamon and paid with a bank card. He didn't want cinnamon but didn't object.





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

An elderly man with clean skin and weathered eyes stood at the summit of the ashen citadel, breath slow and calm. He was topped with unkempt white hair which blew madly around his face. The people below looked only as a mélange of reds, oranges, and blues.

The noises below resonated up the spine of the building. The stranger smiled as he leaned forward. Workers, prioritizing their own safety, crawled upon the ridge, screaming for sanity. The stranger spread his arms wide and drifted over the edge. Swollen white garbage bags flopped firmly in his grip. They were stuffed but nearly weightless in the wind. The workers failed to catch him.

From the altitude, his descent resembled a crawl. The wind didn't slam him into the tower or drift him away from its shadow. He fell straight, the rushing torrent rupturing the bags in his hands. Thousands of wisps of paper fluttered away like feathers from a dying bird.

At ground level, iron-gilded stone supports lent themselves to some dictator's dystopia. Two storey glass shutters opened quickly and effortlessly for customers. The crowds shuffling about the entrance didn't notice the body until the stranger disintegrated through an empty bus. Screams followed, and people gathered quickly.

Aiden's mother noticed the swarming onlookers before her son did. She could see the crushed vehicle and stopped a block away. Aiden was an inch too short to catch the commotion.

His mother guided him down another street. "Honey, let's...let's walk around that."

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Let's just avoid it."

Aiden spotted the falling shreds of paper.

"Mom, look!" he shouted, waving his hands to swat the tatters around. One wrapped around his finger. "Like snow..." He noticed hand writing. "It's raining words."

"What's it say?" He showed it to her. She read it, and then grimaced. She pulled him down the side street. "Let's go, we'll be late."

Aiden stroked the paper in his hand as he read it again. Our dreams are a prison.

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Aiden's school was separated from neighboring skyscrapers by an alienation of white walls, heavy iron gates with brass balls atop the posts, and a stretch of genetically engineered, perfectly permanent emerald grass. Aiden's mother fixed his clip-on tie under his brown sweater. "I know it's a Friday but no walking home this time," she said. "Wait for Marty."

"Gotcha."

"You didn't lose the essay did you?"

"No. There's not going to be a test on it, you think?"

"Test? What do you think this is, school?" She smiled; he smiled. "Here." She reached into her pocket. "I got something for you." She pulled out a necklace, a delicate silver chain. Hanging from it was a coin bearing an embossed image of an elderly man wielding a staff in one hand and an infant in the other. The letters that ringed the coin were in an old tongue that few people in the city could read. She dropped it around his neck. "It's a charm. He protects children. Especially brave ones."

Aiden lifted it to his eye and could tell it was old. "Is it magic?"

She tucked it in his shirt. "It's a flashlight to remind God where you're standing."

"He can see us all the time?"

"Every second, every step. Where you've been and where you're going."

"How can he know that?"

"He knows everything."

"But he can't control everything."

"No...You're right." She pointed at Aiden's chest. "He can't control you."

"Then how can he know where I'm going?"

She thought about it. "Because he knows you so well, he knows where you'll go, what you'll do and what you'll see. We all have a place."

Aiden looked at the pendant again and whispered, "But



what if I want to do something else?"

"All right, enough of that." She eased him past the gate.

"Off with you and for everything you learn, teach something."

\* \* \*

"Camus-kun," interrupted the teacher.

Aiden snapped his attention back from the window, the scrap piece of paper still rolling around his fingers. His thoughts had been on the bedtime story, about the parts he skipped. What was she like? Did she read books or play sports? Would she finish Willum's sentences and laugh at his jokes?

"Yes...sorry, Leach-sensei," Aiden answered.

It was a class for advanced students, and Aiden was the youngest by a year. Unlike Willum Raenis, Aiden Camus was exceptional. "You know, you might actually find this subject interesting."

"I was following," Aiden lied.

"Eyes on me then, please." Leach shifted across the front of the small class waving a thousand page opus in his hand. The blank digital tablet hanging behind him had the color of a chalk blackboard. "What defines a civilization?" He let the moment linger, the students wondering if it was rhetorical. "It could be said that the author believes it's based entirely on its builders and thinkers, and not the kings and presidents at the top or the consumers and peasants at the bottom. You take them away, civilization collapses. A society is worthless if it doesn't develop...both socially and technologically. So what causes a civilization to stop growing?"

As in every class, the students looked to each other and waited for one of them to break the silence. "War," Lara popped up.

"War. I don't think so," Leach corrected. "Actually war, and the prospect of it, encourages change. War gave us nuclear power. The potential of war gave us computers, rockets, the internet."

"Segregation," spoke up William, another student, the oldest and largest. Leach nudged for clarification. "The separation of upper and lower class," he continued.

"Peasants farm, soldiers fight, nobles rule...and sometimes think."

Leach nodded. "That can cause a civilization to slow down."

A fourteen year old girl across from Aiden asked "Religion?" Leach waited for her to continue. "Burned libraries," she continued, "executed or imprisoned anyone questioning the church."

"Absolutely. We've had famous libraries burned, technological breakthroughs suppressed as being too dangerous... all from religion. They may claim to encourage scientific progress but they've always been its rival." Leach made his way back across to Aiden's side. "A great author once said that if suppressed breakthroughs and progressive ideas had been embraced by their societies, we'd be living in an era 3,000 years advanced from where we are now. Civilization has to expand. It can't help it. We teach our children, and they learn and better our achievements. Something like religion can slow progress but can't stop it.

For one, the world is big. You halt the progress of a civilization on this part of the planet; it won't stop another civilization on the other side.

"Take pasta. It wasn't Marco Polo that cultivated it across the world. Pasta just appeared naturally around the same time across the globe. It's necessity that forces us to build and expand." Leach brought up the novel again. "This is why the book has that flaw. If you take away the builders, new builders will emerge from the rabble. You remove a ruler, someone else will step forward." Aiden was listening now, but his thoughts were to the books he had been reading, of ancient mythologies and empires that marked their progress by millennia.

"You can impose religion," Leach continued, "suppress dangerous knowledge, but you can't stop progress. Eventually, people will start building."

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

"Magic?!" William mocked.

"What do you mean?" Leach asked calmly.

Aiden cleared his throat, keeping his eyes on the teacher rather than the class. "If you can create anything you want out of thin air, you wouldn't need to build it."

"That's stupid--" William barked

"No," Leach interrupted, "that's actually a good point. In a fantasy world, thousands of years pass without even the hint of technology, beyond carts and swords. But that can never happen."

"Why?" Aiden asked.

William butted in, "Because magic isn't real!"

Leach flicked William's ear as he answered. "Because like I said, necessity forces us to build. That's why it's a fantasy." Leach worked his way towards his youngest savant. "I read one of those when I was your age. George-something. There was magic but it was uncommon. Kingdoms lasted centuries without ever changing. You can include a caste system, religion, ironclad traditions, some ancient law against the use of machines, but eventually, technology will develop. Fantasy novels don't need to explain why. It's fantasy. It doesn't have to make sense. The moment you apply logic to a fantasy novel, it falls apart. Their worlds are too small, timelines are too long. Monsters are too many and there's usually a frighteningly insufficient lower class. And if that world has magic, there'd be chaos. If any child could be raised to wield a wand, you'd have anarchy. But even considering that, those without magic would still build. In our history, there were empires which lasted beyond a thousand years, but even those had moments of social and technological innovation." Leach was imposing but lowered his voice to not impose. "You simply cannot suppress the desire for humans to grow. I'll also say that I would loathe any civilization that existed for thousands of years and not be able to figure how to make a machine that washes my dishes."

The class laughed, and Leach returned to head of the room.

Aiden could still see a few eyes on him from the older students. From Lara, smiling at him. From William, annoyed at the time wasted.

As the class ended, Aiden filed out last, avoiding William's hex-vision stare. As he passed the teacher's desk,



Leach called out, "Aiden?"

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

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

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

Leach prepared a detailed answer, but then paused and answered simply with, "It's just best...for now." Aiden still didn't comprehend the issue. Leach leaned forward and spoke, "The people around you, parents, teachers, engineers, they need the world around them to work...in a specific way. They lay down rules and permit only a narrow field of thought. Nationality, technology, theology, they can't allow something rejecting those tenets."

"I don't understand," Aiden replied.

"Do you believe in Santa Claus?" Leach said suddenly.

Aiden shot glances about the room as he answered. "Of course not."

"Why?"

"Because he's not real."

"And what if he knocked on your door and said 'Hello'?"

Aiden's answer came quickly. "I'd ask for a bike."

Leach chuckled, covering his mouth to prevent a louder reaction. "And that's the difference between you and the rest of the world," he answered. "They would point and say, 'you're not real'. They can't allow something to break from what they know. They need order; they need a reflection of their beliefs." Leach pointed to the fantasy novel nestled under Aiden's arm. It was an old edition, and one of the last printed. Aiden glanced down at it. "And not to be reminded of what can't exist."

"That's odd," Aiden answered, still honestly confused. He knew there was something not being said. "I still don't understand the big deal."

Leach smiled and patted the desk in front of Aiden. "You'll have to ask your mother that one day," he said.

\* \* \*

William expressed his dissatisfaction with Aiden after school, only feet away from the exit. "Don't waste the class's time, Aiden!" he snapped. He loomed inches over

Aiden's face, ensuring a moderate amount of spittle landed in the boy's eye.

Aiden wiped his face and leaned back. "Okay," he answered calmly.

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

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

"Magic isn't real!"

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

"Bill!" Martin barked. "You're smart. Smarter than me.

So, I'm going to start hitting you until you talk me out it. Good?!"

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

"Okay?" Martin asked.

"Thanks," Aiden muttered.

"What d'you say to piss him off?"

"I didn't say anything!" Aiden snapped

"Let's just go." Martin pushed Aiden ahead of him. Aiden check his book for damage. A corner had frayed and a new rip had appeared on the casewrap.

"So that's why?" Martin said.

"What?" Aiden replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* \* \*

Their mother was not one for the kitchen. Dinner was prepackaged imitation parmesan cheese and powdered milk mixed with stabilizers and corn starch. It was layered over a bed of rock-hard tortellini softened after five minutes in the microwave. Aiden moved his eyes across the open book beside his plate as his mother followed the rhythms of an artificial cook.

The book was grey with green letters and gilded pages. Aiden read about the lives of pale skinned, subterranean fae called the tenenbri that lived in underground lairs and had vestigial cataract-covered eyes. Oversized pointed ears gave them the senses of a bat. They were an arrogant sort, clashing often the dwarvish people called the narros that shared some of the tenenbri's religious beliefs.

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

After the meal, his mother began to fill the dishwasher. Aiden remained at the table and stared at the cover of his novel. "Mom?" he asked.

"Yes."

Aiden ran his fingers around the crevices and grooves in the book. "...Someone died today, didn't they?"

She stopped loading and turned to him. "Yes." She never



lied. "Yes, someone died."

"Why'd he do it?"

She placed a mug down and orbited around to sit beside him. He didn't look at her. "I don't know, honey. Some people have a pain that no medicine or words can cure. To them, death is the solution; but they don't realize how selfish and narrow-minded that solution is."

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

She smiled, patted his shoulder, and returned to her dishes. "You're only trapped if you can't find the door."

She cleared out half the machine when Aiden closed the book and made for the living room, dominated by its 47" liquid crystal flat-screen television. Aiden stopped and voiced another question. "Mom, is Santa Claus real?"

She stood up quickly, bewildered. "That's a strange..." she answered, "No."

"Just checking," Aiden said as he left.

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A Sunday morning meant Sunday service. Aiden refused to set his alarm. Face crammed into his pillow, he rolled his head as his mother parted the blinds. The window was open and the sirens and screams of morning traffic were already polluting the city. The orange sun was poking between several distant buildings. Aiden could see the peaks of the tallest towers parting clouds. Solar cells twisted like blossoms. On the horizon, a forest of smokestacks belched pollution to be carried by the wind out to the ocean. A helicopter caused a mild distraction as it passed by Aiden's window.

Before Aiden had swallowed his morning yawn or flicked the crust from his eyes, his mother laid out the good clothes.

By the time his mother had returned, Aiden was still undressed, listening to the news broadcast from the screen in his bedroom. "Find out which food supplement is deadly, after the next break--" Aiden changed the channel. "Guilty is the verdict today in the murder of pop sensation--" Click.

"Get dressed, come on," his mother said.

"Just trying to find a channel while I change," Aiden pleaded.

"There's nothing good on. All this news." She left and called out from the hall, "You've got five minutes." Another channel showed green grass and tall trees put to old music.

"Aiden!" Martin shouted, already dressed with his head poking through the doorway, "let's go!"

\* \* \*

Aiden, Martin, and their mother took the UTR to church. On the train, Martin sat on the left of his mother, Aiden on the right. Martin watched a rerun on a portable flat-panel screen.

Aiden watched the train. Their mother's left hand held a purse; her right played with Aiden's hair.

The church of the Sacred Mary was a five-storey wooden A-frame as old as the city. No ration was given to

parking and every curb was filled with a variety of electric vehicles.

Aiden's mind wandered during the plodding repetitious mass. The priest was old with a comical lisp and mumbling words. Aiden ran grooves in the soft wood of the bench with his nails. A hand slap from Martin only discouraged Aiden for a short time. A prayer, a passage, and a Eucharist later, and Aiden was clear from his obligations for another week.

As they left the mass, Aiden pondered his day's plans. Part of it involved his armor-clad digital warrior slashing through an improbable number of foes in an equally preposterous dungeon built illogically to geometric precision.

The three of them quickened their pace from the church doors to the sidewalk to catch the street lights before they changed. Aiden checked his watch. It ticked two minutes past 10:00.

An air siren jolted the crowd, the high pitch oscillation bouncing off buildings. People ran blindly into the streets, some to their vehicles. Martin's instinct pulled Aiden and his mother close, wrenching them to the UTR tunnel entrance a block away. "Come on, let's go! Hurry!"

The second sound was not a siren, not a helicopter. It was louder, not mechanical, from an empty sky. People followed with their own yells. The source of the sound revealed itself as a silhouette unfurled its wings to eclipse the sun.

Daggers of daylight broke through the holes in its leather wings. Talons as long and sharp as swords tore the church peak apart as it landed. Wood splintered, and a poorly carved soapstone Christ shattered upon the pavement. Twice the size of the church, the beast roared and spit a torrent of liquid fire across the sky. Aiden was unable to look away as his brother dragged him by the cuff. The creature's black skin was drawn tight across its body. Its eyes like drops of cream in strong coffee. Its teeth were jagged and jumbled. Lips were too thin to close around its mouth.

"Zmey?" Aiden whispered. He was sure of it. He had pictured it larger and more pestilent. The stream of flame struck an approaching military helicopter. It melted the craft instantly. The vessel toppled to the ground as a forged chunk of glass and iron.

"Aiden! Come on!" his mother snapped.

The creature looked down at the scattering masses before it. Leaping from the church peak, it crushed a half-dozen of them underfoot. It snatched more from across the road, throwing them against the walls of nearby buildings.

Its rampage migrated down the street towards the crowd rushing to the safety of the UTR entrance. Martin held his younger brother's collar, pulling vigorously, indifferent to the monster gaining ground. Aiden's curiosity forced his gaze back.

If it was Zmey, why was it not dead? How much of that story was wrong?

"Is that Zmey, mom?" Aiden shouted.

"Shut up!" Martin snapped.

"Mom?!"

"Aiden, I'll explain everything later!" she answered. Her heel broke, and she fell to a knee behind her boys.





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"Mom!" Martin shouted, turning quickly back. Aiden stopped as well, but his attention was still on the dragon. The more he stared at it, the more real it became; the less Aiden believed he was dreaming. Perhaps then he could be frightened of it.

Zmey's claw came down in front of them. Martin fell back with a slash suffered on his arm. The concussion of air brought Aiden to his knees. Martin ignored his wound and clenched his fists. He closed his eyes waiting for his end.

Aiden could smell the putridness wafting from the dragon, felt the heat of the inferno brewing in its belly. A part of Aiden kept reminding him that this couldn't happen. This was a normal world and a dragon can't fly, can't spew flames from its mouth. Aiden believed he would awaken, perhaps in his bed, perhaps in a pew.

As Aiden fell, he cut his hand on a shard of glass. The

quickness of the pain pulled the air from his lungs. The numbness, the detachment that accompanies a dream, started to pass. Aiden began to notice what had happened, what was happening. People had been killed. Buildings had been destroyed. Crowds were fleeing. Aiden felt a cool sprinkle from a broken hydrant. He heard his brother wailing. Like a shock through this spine, Aiden saw the beast for what it was, the monster he should fear. It was real.

As Zmey's brought its claw back up to claim another victim, the beast fell back from a tackle, tossed into the empty church. The cathedral collapsed from the weight of two monsters.

No one had seen the other beast slam into Zmey.

Zmey's opponent pulled away to plot another attack. The new arrival was longer with smaller wings. Its gold and blue scales broke light into colors. Long white whiskers flapped like gravity had no control of them. Each of its four arms ended in four ivory claws. The monster snaked in the air, and its jaws opened wide enough to swallow a car. Its forked tongue sparked a flame, but it only bellowed. As the echo bounced off the buildings, lights within rooms went dark. The traffic signals went dead. Cars drifted to a stop.

The newcomer's eyes were those of a man's, soft blue and brilliant. Its body twisted around Aiden and Martin. It blocked them from harm as Zmey slashed with a bladed tail. The monster of gold and blue scales kept its defense and suffered a deep gash to its belly. In its counterattack, it leapt across the road and dug talons and teeth into decaying flesh. The creatures coiled around each other, but the black beast could not match the dexterity of its rival. A solid bite and its golden opponent had torn off an arm. Dark molasses dripped as blood from the wound. The black beast tore itself free from gripping claws, causing more damage as it took to the sky.

The one with golden scales swiveled its head to look at the boys. Its eyes were the same shape but the size of a child's head. Aiden couldn't help it. He raised his bloodied palm from the pavement and offered a feeble wave.

The dragon smirked back. It winked.

It twisted its form again and leapt back to the sky to chase down its opponent. It pursued the cripple around a distant building where Aiden lost sight of them. A dozen military fanjets slipped overhead to take up the chase.

Martin shouted Aiden's name and repeated it until the syllables merged to a wail. Aiden's attention drifted back to where the beast had come down. Aiden's daze had begun to lift; his breathing quickened. Whatever lingering strength he had bled away, and Aiden felt a sharp tightness in his chest. His fingers began to tremble as he realized what had happened.

She was gone.

Martin crawled to his brother. He lost the strength to pull Aiden to him but refused to let go. He slumped to the ground.

Aiden turned his attention back to the sky while Martin cried.

\* \* \*



The brothers had barely talked since the morning. Aiden sat on his bed with the opened Codex Dracontis on his lap.

Aiden ignored the clothes he was supposed to take. He rummaged in his coat pocket for his glasses. He curled them around his ears. He tried to ignore the stabbing pain from the stitches in his palms but couldn't avoid the tension in his chest when he thought of his mother. When he thought about the dragon, about the questions he had, the weight would lift slightly.

Aiden had blisters over his lips and rings around his eyes from previous breaks in concentration. He sniffed and rubbed his nose as he frantically flipped through the pages.

Finding the entry for Zmey, he studied the sketch. There were differences. Its head was larger in proportion to its body in the drawing. Eyes were white, not black. Aiden was positive the book took inspiration from the real beast, which was then altered by the artist's foggy recollection. Aiden slumped upon his bed and stared at it. He flipped through the other pages, other dragons, some with white feathers, others with silver scales. He searched for the one that saved him. Aiden glanced at the other books he had acquired, ones on elves, sorcerers, and sword wielding.

"What are you doing?" Martin asked from the door-frame, an empty suitcase under his arm.

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

"What?" Martin responded, quickly and cold.

"The gold and blue dragon. He's not here. It has Zmey but not the other."

"Mom's dead, Aiden."

Aiden paused. His bottom lip quivered and his throat clenched. He didn't want to cry in front of his brother. "I know...But--"

"Enough..." Martin whimpered. "Just leave it. Please...leave it. Pack and let's go. People are waiting." He left his brother alone, staring at the book. Both brothers had wanted to remain home, but Martin wasn't old enough, and there was no one willing to stay with them. Cousins willing to take them in lived half way across the city, closer to the "crown".

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

"Leave the book," he said.

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

"Aiden--"

"You knew." Aiden could discern with his brother the difference between fear and surprise. Martin was frightened of the beast, but its existence was not a shock to him.

"Please Aiden," Martin answered.

"You knew."

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

"And what's past it?"

"I don't know."

"Has anyone left?" Aiden asked.

"No one leaves," Martin replied. "They only try to get in."

"Then someone knows. There are dragons." Aiden reached for the book.

"They killed mom--"

"And saved us--"

"They took everything Aiden," Martin snapped. They took...everything we were and could ever be."

"You never wanted to look?"

"Don't have to."

"Why not--"

"Aiden!" Martin shouted. "It's not our world. She wanted you innocent. Everyone is...for a while. That's over. I'll make sure we stay together. It's just us now."

"But the other dragon?"

"Who cares?! It's done! No more of this!" Martin stepped forward hastily to snatch away the book. Aiden instinctively clutched it to his chest. He grasped it tightly as his armor, tears rolling as he began to cry. Martin tried to wrest the tome from his brother's grip. He shouted as he tried to separate book and boy. "Burn them all! They killed mom!"

Aiden curled fetal around the book. He stayed tightly wound in a bundle of clenched limbs. Martin pinned one leg on Aiden's shoulder and pried an arm free, ripped the book from his brother's hand. Martin was hurting Aiden; cries turned to yells.

Martin felt it had to be done, like tearing a bandage off or striking a disobedient child, the act of an adult. "It's not a fantasy, Aiden! Grow up!" Martin stormed out of the room. "Two minutes! I'll drag you if I have to!" Aiden could hear the sound of the kitchen garbage can opening and the loud thump as Martin dropped the book into it. Martin knew Aiden could just take it back from the trash, but Martin knew rules needed to be followed and he expected Aiden would respect that.

He didn't.

Aiden waited until hearing the slam of his mother's bedroom door down the hall before shuffling quickly to the kitchen to take back his book. Martin fell upon the queen mattress and began crying while Aiden stroked his fingers across the front cover of the codex, at the embossment, at the image of the dragon's eye.

Aiden glanced across his arm to his watch. There were no cracks or scratches, no signs of impact damage. It had stopped three minutes past ten.

He opened the book again and noticed the stamp at the bottom of the inside cover. It was printed in two languages, English and Sinitic, but Aiden only knew a few of the Asian characters. The ink had faded. Aiden read the book's origin: David Obatala Chen's Biblio, 23C Huangxia Street, Genai.







## A STORY

Don't check your brain at the door.  
Don't settle for the dream.  
This is real.

*Amethyst* is a role playing game that postulates what would occur if a true-to-book fantasy setting was forced upon our reality. Our world is populated by many people wanting more from their lives. Our fantasies are filled with nymphs, valiant knights, and fire breathing dragons. We dream about being carried away by the fancies our mothers tell us every night. But what if it was real for everyone? What if it invaded our society? How would humanity truly respond?

This is not some stylized fanciful view of Earth seen in books and on TV. It is a world with all the problems, both social and political, intact. Would we welcome the world of fantasy into our lives or would we fear its very presence? Magic cannot exist; there's no scientific basis for it. How could these creatures of whimsy exist and match so closely to our mythology and religious canon?

This future emerged from the world we know—a world where books and movies written about fantasy existed. People that survived into this new age saw firsthand what they had previously thought to be fiction. The new world matched so closely to their imaginations. How would major religions respond given such a massive shock to their dogma?

On top of this dilemma, magic breaks down many of the normal rules of the universe which technology requires to operate. It is a chaotic system that overwrites itself on reality, and although this influence won't destroy life, it does retard the progress of civilization, preventing technology from operating beyond simple mechanisms like windmills and bicycles. Where magic is prohibited, normality returns and evolution and technological advancement can continue.

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What remains of our modern society and its technology survive in cities resembling those of the previous age, walled in against the encroaching magic around it. Here, they have their cars, their central heating, and their televisions. Outside, the fantasy world may be wondrous, but it is also real. People die from the simplest calamities. Despicable rodents with weapons and wicked brains prey on the innocent and unarmed.

Will mankind be able to retake the planet and push the fantasy back into the realms of our imagination, able to resume our blind passion for consumerism and industrialization?

Or is this world better than the one mankind squandered?

From the fantasy world rises a mythology suggesting that there are two realms of magic: one dark, the other light. The source of this energy originates from two powerful gates, the white star of Attricana and the black gate of Ixindar. The main axis between evil and good is not one where the law-abiding, civilized nations of good battle against the destructive force of chaos, but where the chaotic tendencies of life clash with the controlled and methodical might of syntropy. The conflict – at its root – sets anarchy against order, uniformity against unpredictability, and determinism against free-will. Where life needs a level of uncertainty to blossom, homogeneity breeds only death. The fantasy world is not some singular entity, but a complicated multi-layered world of warring nations, political strife, and monsters clever and powerful, as well as stupid but numerous.

## AMETHYST EVOLVES

Cities collapse, heroes rise, and the future falls into the hands of a few. The world alters, grows, and plummets into shadow. These heroes encounter their greatest fears and challenge true evil in all forms. They find depth in an easy situation, complexity in a single idea. A world that changes around a band of adventurers. A setting with a point and a climax. A world where an ending waits. Solve it and discover the truth. Fail and the planet crumbles underneath.

The setting of *Amethyst* relies on the clash between magic and technology. Many fantasy worlds blend the two, usually with magic gaining the foothold and technology falling behind. *Amethyst* presents a world where the two sides stand almost at war and – from a metaphysical point of view – actively disrupt each other's existence. This is not to say that individuals from both sides cannot coexist: it is the differences between people that make them stronger when together. Although an individual might not be able to wield both a spellbook and a gun, this does not extend to the limits of the group. Perhaps, despite growing tensions and mounting enmity, a balance between the two worlds can be found.

Player characters in *Amethyst* are neither sitting on the sidelines nor are they following braver and more powerful leaders into glory: they are meant to change the world. They do not dig ditches or hand out food while armies march into combat, but command legions, infiltrate empires, save princesses and slay kings. The end of the game should be different from the beginning. Of course, a player can claim a kingdom after vanquishing his enemies, but the real journey takes one's soul across the world, to meet one's final destiny after a very long crusade. A GM is encouraged to plan out her strategy for the game—whether the characters will travel to their final destinies in Canam (the continent described herein) or only progress part of the way before tackling the next chapter in a foreign land.



## THE HISTORY

The history of the world begins with the conundrum of the chicken and the egg.

Millions of years ago, a fracture occurred in the fabric of space and time. It exhibited traits that were scientifically measurable, yet it broke many acceptable rules regarding electromagnetism, gravity, and quantum mechanics. Scientists later deduced that this rip, called Attricana, was a bridge between two universes. The alternate side contained a cosmos with rules of science abnormal to our own. As this universe spilled into ours, the conflict of two orders of nature encouraged aberrations upon the Earth, impossible until that point.

But what opened the gate?

Amethyst is a modern name given to a dragon from this age—the first creature of fantasy born upon the Earth. Legends also maintain Amethyst was the architect of the gate's creation. But if Amethyst created the gate, then what created Amethyst? Creatures born from magic require magic to survive. If Amethyst came before, then he would be the single exception in this world. Some historians believe he is not a dragon at all but something else.

Some proclaim him a god, but gods cannot die.

For millions of years, before Earth was called Earth, the denizens of the planet called it Terros—a land of magic and wonder, spared from the wrath of malevolence. Dragons flew overhead while fae creatures scurried below. Attricana encouraged life in every possible form. Monsters did emerge but never with the coordination to form an organized civilization. Meanwhile, the elder races were witnessing a slow degradation of enlightenment. The fae were not evolving; they were degenerating. Their descendants were begetting feral beasts. At the bottom of this inverted tree were uncultured boggs, violent skeggs, and voracious and swarming puggs. The chaparrans hid in their forests. The laudenians took to the sky. Damaskans recorded knowledge and history. Narros defended the cities. This left the gimfen to ignore such concerns and remain forever at play, remaining innocent against the encroaching violence.

Whether or not this could have endured would never be known.

The residents of Terros never questioned the origin of Amethyst. He was the greatest and wisest of them. They called him a god. They called him an avatar. He was connected to Attricana more intimately than any other entity. No one really knew the truth.

This changed when Ixindar arrived.

Unlike Attricana, records on the black gate's arrival are

detailed. It drifted over the planet, sweeping across the night. From it spilled the corruption of order. If Attricana was a wellspring from a chaotic universe (perhaps one in the founding minutes of its creation), then Ixindar was the fountainhead of syntropy. It led to a realm of perfect harmony, perhaps to a cosmos of death and tranquility—a universe in its final moments. This gate had its own avatar, its own god to warrant worship. This was Mengus, a disembodied entity that whispered corruption without creating anything on its own. In one night, Ixindar had distorted a million fae to follow it. Servants gathered at the place where Ixindar came to rest, a spreading expanse of black glass later dubbed Kakodomania.

The noble forces of chaos had difficulty forming an army while their opponents quickly expanded and reproduced into battle lines. Within a thousand years, war had torn the planet apart. It would be several millennia before both sides realized mutual attrition was the only possible outcome. But elements from beyond the world would prevent this ultimate fate.

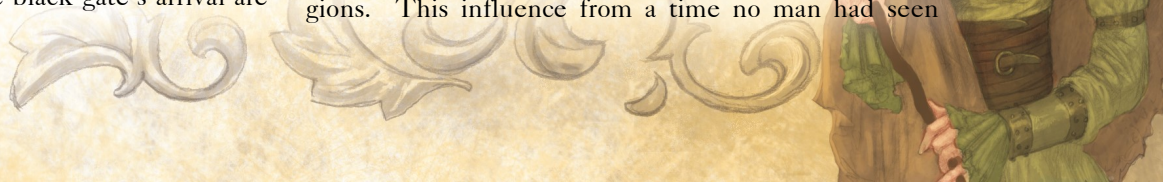
Mankind knew this incident at the K-T Extinction event—when a ten kilometer bolide impact off the Yucatan Peninsula created the 180 kilometer Chicxulub crater, wiping out the vast majority of plant and animal life on the planet. The fae called it the Hammer of God. Both sides of fantasy agreed separately to seek refuge on the other side of their gates, within dream realms formed by those gate's avatars. Mengus faked complicity in order to ambush Amethyst when isolated, believing Ixindar would survive the calamity to come.

The forces of chaos gone, Amethyst found himself surrounded by the soldiers of order. The general of this army, an intelligent construct known only as Gebermach, inflicted the killing blow, driving the dark sword Dogurasu into Amethyst's heart.


In his reprisal, Amethyst sacrificed his physical body. The resulting eruption of chaos wiped out the armies of Mengus and shattered the sky above them. A single beam of light from the gate before its closing drove Ixindar deep underground, sealing it under impenetrable stone. Attricana closed upon Amethyst's death. All remaining constructs and creations of magic fell to dust. All evidence was washed away. Earth belonged to no one.

With nothing to compete with, the principles of our universe regained control. The natural order of evolution took root, leading eventually into mankind. Through his history, he told stories he could not possibly know, about mythical monsters and warring gods. These tales came from the whimsy of imagination but all carried a portion of truth, some more than others.

These stories became myths, books, films, and religions. This influence from a time no man had seen







carried onto crests, flags, and banners. Their origins were explained, connected to other stories and faiths. Some were tied to science—seeing a manatee and believing it to be a mermaid. Fantasies remained locked in the dreams of a real world. Pushed aside as fancy, mankind continued his evolutionary drive to build, understand, and conquer. Society advanced as did the machines in servitude. Gaining a full understanding of science in all its unchanging rules, there was nothing man could not achieve given enough time.

History unfortunately would repeat itself.

A second bolide impact occurred, this time directly over Ixindar. To this day, no one knows the cause, as there was no warning before impact. It was a smaller event compared to the last but enough to reveal Ixindar to the world. The forces of syntropy emerged and corruption followed.

The following events are muddled, another case of a chicken and an egg. Ixindar opened, and some indeterminate time later, Attricana followed – but did Attricana's first stirrings perhaps provoke Ixindar's reemergence, or was some mechanism in place to open the white gate if Ixindar were ever exposed? By the time of the white gate's reappearance, mankind had already been reduced to less than a tenth of its peak population, though whether due to disasters born in the wake of the Second Hammer or through wars over resources or ideologies, no one is truly certain.

Mankind did not have the luxury of philosophy. He was fighting a losing battle on two fronts, from order and from chaos. To make the situation even more desperate, the technology mankind had been relying on for hundreds of years had begun to fail. From the fountain of Attricana flowed rules of nature antithetical to the science machines required to function. The more advanced the technology, the greater the chance of disruption. Surviving humans had to make a choice: wall themselves in from the flood of encroaching enchantment, or settle for a primitive life surrounded by the wonders of fantasies they once could only read in fiction.

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Five hundred years later, the humans that clove to their machines have built immense cities of technology. These bastions are the last bulwarks of a time these men and woman refuse to surrender, a world run by science where mankind held dominion. Some of these cities have grown to the size of small countries. Outside the bastions live the empires and wastelands of fantasy. Dragons and elves have returned to lay claim to the mountains, woods and fields. Monsters hide in dungeons and prowl in mirky forests. The wilderness has become dangerous but at the same time all the more romantic. Magic will always be a lure to those willing to wield it.

Order versus chaos, science versus magic; these conflicts make fanatics of everyone. An unspoken stalemate has arisen, with none gaining the upper hand. This may change with the proof of a once forgotten legend. When Gebermach slew Amethyst, the dragon's crest of stone fell upon the ground and shattered. For millions of years, the fragments drifted to the far corners of the world. Now, one has been found, and the crusade to find the others has begun. The legend claims that if the pieces of Amethyst's crown were brought together at the place of his death, one could call the god back to life, or take the mantle of command from him. With such a power, one could resurrect the most powerful creature to walk the Earth, or close the gate of magic forever. Who will find these artifacts? Who will emerge victorious?

And, ultimately, will it be worth the cost?

## THE CONFLICT

The world is not engulfed in war, but widespread peace across the land is still a distant dream. Not only are the remaining bastions of pre-Hammer mankind fighting a desperate and seemingly hopeless struggle against encroaching enchantment, but the individual bastions themselves are also paranoid about their own technological sovereignty over rival bastions. Further, the world of fantasy is not all of wonder. There are two realms of magic, flowing from two different breaches in the normal universe: the white gate of Attricana floating high above the sky, and the black gate of Ixindar half-buried in rock in the land of Kakodomania. Their influence and the armies loyal to them provoke conflicts whenever both sides meet. While Attricana encourages creation and chaos, Ixindar promotes order and syntropy. While many people directly involved in this conflict do so from an obsessive desire to protect their ways of life, others have been tempted to cross over, embracing an alternative way of thinking.

## MAGIC AND FAITH

In *Amethyst*, there are only three ways magic can be focused, and thus, at least partially, controlled:

- **The Language of Dragons.** The power of these god-like creatures is to create something by naming it—the magic possessed in the language of the greatest species. Even the script extends itself into multiple dimensions. Wizards utilize this for all their magic. This language is called Pleroma.
- **Magical Reactivity.** There are thousands of elements and combinations of elements that produce different magical results. The practices of alchemy and metallurgy have returned. Those with such knowledge forge items of enchantment by simply being aware of the exacting ratios of components required. Fae iron, coruthil, and angelite are such examples as well as the myriad forms of magical



potions. Nearly every magic item features this to a degree.

- **Inborn Magic.** Fae beings and monsters are magical by their very nature, even if they cannot consciously wield magical forces. Some, be they fae, monster, or even human, possess magical abilities on their own from birth. A few claim this power as divine, but many others refute that. Just as it was with man's time, god or gods are as silent as he, she, or they always were. There are no proven sanctified or blessed users of magic in a world with a silent and unproven god. Still, the rare priest or druid often finds no other reasonable explanation.

Religion does exist in *Amethyst*. Most are old-established, dating back through humanity's history – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and the like; others are far older and yet new as well, reconstructed from the memories of the fae; still others blend disparate elements as it suits their practitioners. Every faith can claim to possess one or two folk supposedly blessed with the spark of divinity. There are also those with no faith able to wield magic purely from a natural endowment they cannot explain. Others know very well where their power originates and understand there is no intelligence or deification beyond said gift. Because of this doubt, there is still no proof of god in *Amethyst*, despite the claims of many who believe.

## REAL MAGIC

Despite appearances, the world of *Amethyst* is a low-magic setting; powerful spells are rare and obtained only at great cost and difficulty; major magical items are just as rare and hardly ever to be found outside the hands of the great and powerful; true artifacts are the stuff of legends, and most are completely mythical.

All magic, whatever its supposed provenance, comes from the gates, but spell casting techniques are unique depending on the caster. Those who claim to have a spark of the divine, called either gneolistics or vivicators, gain their power directly from Attricana. Whether this power is granted to them by some unknowable intelligence, drawn into their soul by the power of their belief, or merely a quirk of birth is unknown. Druids and shamans also obtain their power from the gate, though not directly. They receive their abilities from a conduit, namely the Earth. They worship nature and the world around. In their belief, the world channels the power from the gate and casters gain their power from below, not from above. Shamans harness the wind, earth, fire, and water as well as the animals and plants around them, shaping and controlling them as they wish.

Mages disregard channeling and mysticism, approaching the gate with an almost scientific eye. They claim while clerics and druids blind themselves to the mysteries of the gate, mages dive head first, taunting the cos-

mos to reveal its darkest secrets. Long before man or even elves, the first power from the gates was channeled through the immense capacity of the draconic language, known as Pleroma. This practice continues today and remains the most popular form of spell casting. Only with lifelong persistence and an innate gift for understanding such intricate mysteries can the extremely rare few channel anything more than cantrips.

## GLOSSARY

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

**Arkonnia:** The region occupied by the continent of Africa and the Arabian peninsula in old Earth.

**Alternate Quantum Vibrational States (AQVS):** The generic term for any physical state out of phase with our own. Some scientists refer to the realms beyond the gates as AQVS and claim the Enchanted Disruption Field (EDF) derives from this. They also claim Attricana and Ixindar are portals to different dimensions or different universes. AQVS may also be the source of incorporeality. Those without a mind for acronyms call it 'aether.'

**Amethyst:** The first intelligence to emerge on Earth, Amethyst was a powerful dragon-god whose death ended the time of magic millions of years before man.

**Anathema:** Devolved fae, most of limited intelligence, generally regarded as monsters by all civilized folk.

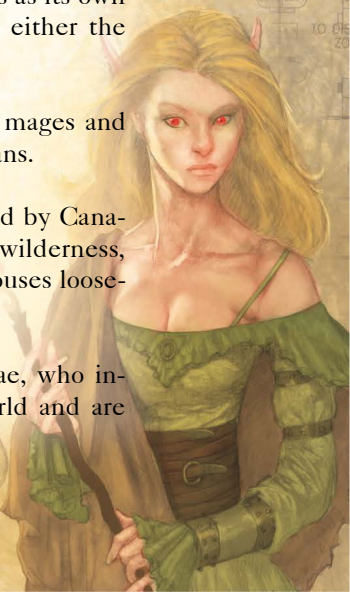
**Attricana:** The term given to the enchanted realm existing beyond the white gate. It hovers in high orbit between the Earth and the Moon and is bright enough to read by at night.

**Bastions:** Sanctuaries of men and machines. These are technological enclaves heavily fortified and densely populated. Most are echaphobic and forbid the use of magic within their walls. Each bastion stands as its own country, with very little to no contact with either the outside world or other bastions.

**Blinder:** A common derogative nickname mages and other magically imbued individuals call techans.

**Canam:** The continent previously occupied by Canada, the USA, and Mexico. Mostly pristine wilderness, with a number of large kingdoms and free houses loosely connected by a few well-maintained roads.

**Chaparran:** One of the oldest species of fae, who inhabit the woods and wild places of the world and are





known as peerless archers.

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

**Damaskan:** A younger branch of the fae, dedicated to the accumulation and preservation of knowledge and the principles of settled civilization. They are the only fae species who respond well to being called ‘elves’.

**Disruption:** This is magic’s capacity to disrupt the laws of nature that technology requires to function. This process only occurs in one direction—technology cannot disrupt magic. The entire planet is covered in a disruption field (see EDF), though the risk of disruption is not uniform, meaning certain areas have a higher rate of disruption than others. Disruption is at its minimum within bastions.

**Echa:** The slang term for magic or ‘enchantment’. It often refers to visual use of magic (spells and magically infused items) as well as being used as a blanket term for the fantasy world. Someone touched by magic or using magic is commonly called ‘echan,’ although this term mostly refers to humans specifically embracing the path of enchantment, and occasionally to fae in mixed communities. Some still consider this ugly bastardization of ‘enchantment’ derogatory, but it is now too widespread to do anything about.

**Echagenics/Echalogy:** The study in both echan and techan cultures of the similarities between humanity and its recorded history against the fae, dragons and their recorded history. This analyzes the obvious physical similarities between fae and man in conjunction with historical coincidences in their religions, legends, and mythologies. Theologians studying echalogy are referred to as echalogians.

**Enchanted Disruption Field (EDF):** The enchantment disruption field prevents radio communication beyond a few miles, inhibits electrical conductivity and disrupts electronic circuits like an electro-magnetic pulse when extremely powerful magic is nearby. It also has the tendency of jamming mechanical devices above a certain complexity (the limit of which varies based on the strength of the field). While most early industrial-age technology up to (approximately) the level of the steam engine is usually safe from disruption, anything that relies on moving parts or electrical current (no matter how minor) can be affected with sufficient exposure.

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

somehow resonated through sixty million years of evolution until minds advanced enough to understand that echo listened.

**Fae:** A catchall term for the several humanoid species which inhabited the Terros age alongside dragons millions of years ago, and reappeared in the modern age with the reopening of Attricana. As creatures of magic, they are antithetical to the technological societies of Mankind.

**First Hammer:** The first impact that destroyed the dinosaurs and ended the first reign of magic. It initiated the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event.

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

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

**Indoaus:** The region of land previously occupied by Australia and Indonesia.

**Ixindar:** The name given to the realm existing through the black gate. The gate is across the world, sitting half buried at the center of Kakodomania.

**Kaddog:** The general term for the three most common branches of damaskan anathema (and the most prolific monster species in Canam): puggs, boggs, and skeggs.

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

**Kodiak:** Intelligent, bipedal grizzly bears native to northern Canam.

**Laudenian:** The oldest branch of modern fae and the most magical, who fled from contact with the ground for fear of devolving into lesser beings.

**Lauropa:** The term given to the region covering the lands of Europe west of the former Ural mountains. Consists mostly of neo-feudal kingdoms, with the fae empire of Damaska occupying most of the central land-mass.

**Mengus:** The disembodied intelligence that resides within Ixindar, whispering corruption to any creature disposed to hear her. The most implacable enemy of Amethyst.

**Narros:** The middle fae, short and stocky, dwelling primarily underground and obsessed with tradition and perfection.



**Pagus:** Corrupted fae of ages past who answered the call of Ixindar and were transformed into huge, brutally effective warriors.

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

**Shemjaza:** The proper term for the fae-like creatures known by humans as 'demons,' the ultimate servants of Ixindar. Although all look practically identical, each shemjaza is designed for a particular purpose.

**Slav:** Often separated into Western and Eastern Slav, this region on Earth covers the majority of China and the entire former Eurasian region east of the Urals. Rendered mostly uninhabitable by the Second Hammer and the subsequent spread of Kakodomania, most of the survivors of the eastern region migrated to Canam centuries ago.

**Southam:** The region of Earth formerly known as South America. Consists mostly of feuding underground kingdoms, and rainforests populated by ogres who hunt primitive humans for food and sport.

**Syntropy:** The principle of infinite static existence, embodied in the power of Ixindar. It is the antithesis of magic, and indeed, of the fundamental principles of life itself.

**Techa:** The slang term given to the technology of man and is usually reserved for the bastions and their machines. Its wielders use the title 'techan' as a badge of honor.

**Terros:** The era before man, from when the dragons and fae appeared until their disappearance 65 million years ago.

**Tenenbri:** Blind, but hardly handicapped cousins of the damaskans, masters of an underground theocratic empire beneath the mountains of Southam.

**Tilen:** Another cursed fae line whose ancestors embraced the power of Ixindar to transform themselves into free-willed undead. Their modern descendents, freed by Attricana's resurgence, struggle against the urges of their blood and fight for the survival of their species.

**U.C. (Universal Credits):** A currency that most bastions and wandering techans trade in. Only techans accept and use uc. Unlike fantasy currency like gold and silver coins, uc has no face value.

Experts in dressing death had reconstructed what was left of her body. They placed a plastic smile on her face. The waxy finish of the skin convinced Aiden this was less his mother and more an imitation. Friends of his father, military veterans, brought the closed casket up. Father Tom, like the church, was new. One by one, friends neither he nor Martin knew offered hands and hugs. The mass was long with prayer passages reminding the mournful of god's grand purpose. Aiden ignored them. He never paid attention during regular mass; the words felt equally hollow now. Aiden hoped the blue eyed and golden scaled dragon would rip off the roof and whisk him to a new life. The church's packed capacity marched to the casket, touching, praying, crying.

Aiden was relieved to see the afternoon light as he followed the pallbearers out of the church. Martin offered tears for each weeper and wailer walking by. Aiden nodded and hugged but remained dry save an occasional sniff. More words of divinity leapt from a priest's lips as the casket slipped through the open maw of the marble wall at the necropolis.

Aiden looked scornful at the cross at the entrance. He wondered if God was real as well. An omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient being, benevolent and divine? Then why was she dead? Did the dragon break the rules? No creature shaped like that could fly, yet it did. No animal could breathe fire, yet it did. They couldn't exist, but there they were.

Father Tom's words, though carefully chosen, were no more uplifting than the compassionate whispers of distant family members.

"Men pale in the wisdom of God," he said to Aiden. "Not even I can understand why things happen when they happen. There is a reason for everything, Aiden. God has placed you on a path; there is something to learn from this. Even the worst of times are intended, by his will, to guide us. Occasionally, his hand must be firm. In times like this, our faith in his plan must remain strong."

"She was killed by a dragon, father." Aiden emphasized dragon as much as killed. Father Tom didn't say much after that.

As they exited the mausoleum, Aiden glanced at the wall, the periphery of the city. The monstrosity stood twenty stories and topped with battlements. It enclosed all ten thousand square kilometers of the city. It was only the latest iteration, with monuments of previous walls counted like tree rings to mark age and expansion. The last one was the tallest, the longest to build, and the most resolute in keeping everything that wasn't in, out. Aiden heard people calling it the crown. Years ago, when Aiden asked Martin what was beyond the wall, his brother had said, "Nothing you should care about."

He lied.

Aiden wished he had asked his mother. He wished he had discovered the truth by her telling him, by closing the codex and whispering, "It's all real." He should have followed what Leach had suggested and just asked her. Aiden wished that if the cost was to be that great, he would've preferred ignorance a few more years. Wishes kept Aiden a child. Wishes separated Aiden from his brother. Wishes were magical and romantic and had a



peculiar tendency of coming true. Aiden wished his mother would come back, but that could never happen.

\* \* \*

After a week, Aiden was back in class. The students kept their distance, even William. Lara was the only one that attempted to console him, offering a hug and asking how he was. No one else bothered, keeping a wide berth as the orphan passed them. To acknowledge his loss would be to admit that it occurred, that something abnormal could happen in an ordinary world. Were all the victims that day as disregarded? If only it had been cancer like Aiden's father, something average, common, and predictable. Lara offered him a half sandwich at lunch.

Martin sat with Aiden on the UTR. Such a wonder was lost on Aiden. He wanted to open a book and read but was afraid of Martin's reaction. Aiden just leaned forward, feeling the breeze across his face. He didn't close his eyes and imagine a dragon. He thought of when his imagination was all that was required.

What about magic and Elisa the elvish princess?

Aiden pondered what other fictions could invade his life.

Martin reached over and began to coddle his brother's hair.

\* \* \*

It was a week before Aiden could sneak out of his new house. He waited until everyone had settled. Their house was cast in an early night as the sun dropped behind the crown. Past 10:30 pm, Aiden saw the crack of light peeking under the bottom of the bedroom door go dark. He heard his relatives conclude their evening bathroom rituals. The opposite bed was empty; Martin was hanging with friends that weekend, drinking and forgetting his problems. Their guardians offered him a wide berth. He would have taken it either way. Aiden knew Martin was doubtful to return for several hours, if at all, until morning.

The UTR station was a two-block walk. The few coins in his pocket would get him to Genai. The navigation screens were easy. The ride was forty minutes in an empty car. Each time the train stopped, Aiden leaned out to see if anyone was boarding. He tapped his feet uneasily, waiting for the seconds to pass before the doors closed. Just as Aiden's imagination had turned the train into a serpent, it was now unwillingly generating various subway denizens, none of them terribly friendly. The doors closed and shuffled Aiden to the next station, where he had to change lines, forcing a five minute wait alone on the platform. His head twitched in the direction of every little snap or pop. Distant laughs from drunken teens faded as they diverted down another street.

The next train contained a single passenger, an elderly olive-skinned man that stared incessantly at Aiden. Aiden looked up occasionally, wondering who would break the silence. Neither did. Aiden disembarked twenty minutes later.

He finally stopped at the concrete barricade that sealed Genai from the rest of the city. Every road had a gate any

card-carrying member of the city could cross. Pedestrian walkways were seldom watched with turnstiles installed to monitor traffic. Aiden wondered if the gates were meant to keep out or in. He dodged under the ratchet bar as there was no guard on hand to prevent him.

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

Aiden found the address. Huangxia Street was an alley branching from the towering monument. The lights barely reached into the dark chasm Aiden had to venture into. Bottom lip quivering, Aiden forced himself deeper down the alley, waiting for his eyes to adjust.

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

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

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

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

Aiden could make out most of the words though a few were hidden in the shadow of the gutter. He was apprehensive about touching anything but fought through it to



turn the nozzle on the lantern. The light grew bright and Aiden shifted his attention back to the book.

Humans suffer from the obsolete notion that they are the dominant species upon this world. Man's strength for conquest comes only from population. He exists in numbers. Using numbers, by all rights, puggs deserve dominion. The Earth requires penance from man for he committed sins against the world that gave him birth.

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

Nature offered man renewable resources, friendly denizens, and land uncontested by evil. He abolished this unwritten rule to care for the world. He committed unforgivable sins against nature when he embraced the machine. Technology offered man growth beyond what he could accomplish by natural means. He turned his back on life.

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

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

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

"What?" Aiden asked.

Tap. Tap.

"You want me to read?"

Tap.

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

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

"Its life has no meaning unless it can light the way for others," spoke the tall figure approaching from the shadow. Aiden jumped upon hearing him. "If only all things had such simple ambitions."

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

Aiden backed away from the desk into the shelf behind him, jostling the heavy books resting upon it. The youth

glanced back and noticed a hefty volume toppling over. It had a cover of obsidian, parading gold bosses of the gaping maws of dragons. Their front claws reached across the outer edge to the single oversized clasp keeping the book closed. Aiden righted it quickly—with considerable strain—and turned back to the man.

"I'm sorry," Aiden started, "I was just--"

"Quite all right, Mr. Camus," he answered. The spark orbited the two of them. "It likes you." His voice was deep and rough, with a heartening charisma in the way he addressed the child. Aiden couldn't place the accent but he had no problems understanding him. The man stopped opposite of the desk and looked down to the book. "The memoirs of Renar Alkanost, laudenian council leader, written 300 years ago." Aiden offered only a blink. "Though personally I think the fae is arrogant in his opinion. Most laudenians are like that."

"I just wanted to look..." Aiden trailed off. "You know my name--"

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

"Who are..." Aiden's voice faded and he mouthed the last word formed.

"I'm a collector. You may call me David...or Chen."

"You collect books, Davidorchen?"

"I share them," Chen corrected. He opened his palm and the spark flew obediently to it. A whisper from his lips and it leapt from his hand. It bounced and fluttered across the room, igniting every candle and lamp.

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

"How did you..." Aiden started.

"I asked it to."

"But it's not alive."

"First rule of Attricana: Anything you can think of...thinks for itself."

Aiden gathered his thoughts. "Attricana?"

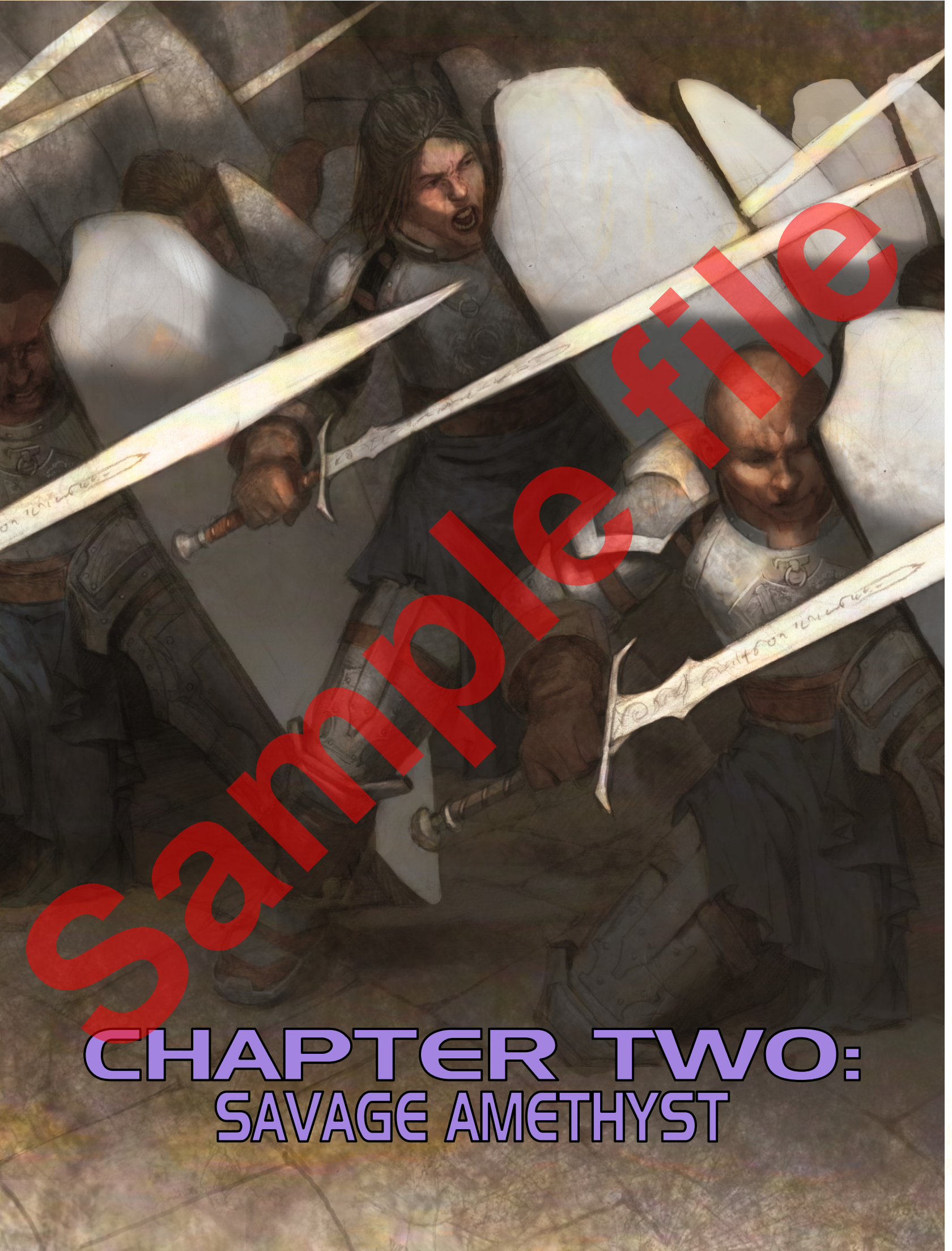
Chen approached a window and opened the shutters to the moonlight. He pointed to the bright star brushing the crescent.

"By way that everything that can't happen, does."

"Can't happen...Dragons," Aiden said.








# CHAPTER TWO: SAVAGE AMETHYST





**A**methyst has seen many revisions and adaptations since its original appearance as a campaign setting for the third edition of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. This rendition uses the *Savage Worlds* system as its basis. *Savage Worlds* provides an edgy, dangerous experience well-suited to pulp adventures of all sorts, from military thrillers to horror stories to classic sword-and-sorcery. Most of the rules in the *Savage Worlds Deluxe* book are applicable to this rendition of *Amethyst*, with the addition of a few special setting rules.

This book contains all the additional rules specific to the *Amethyst* setting, but you will require a copy of a *Savage Worlds* core rulebook in order to create characters. For more details on the setting itself, you will also need the *Amethyst: Untamed World Guide*.

## CHARACTER CREATION

Building characters for *Amethyst* follows the same five-step process as detailed in the *Savage Worlds* core rules. Alternatively, you can just jump to Chapter 3, 4, or 5 and choose an archetype if you want to get into the game right away.

## SPECIES / REGION

There are eleven canon playable species in *Amethyst* (including humans). As your choice of species and region will greatly impact your character's experience within the setting, you should look over the detailed descriptions of each species in **Chapters 3-5**. The available species are divided broadly into three categories:

**Fae:** These are species naturally born from magic, with no original primordial form to track evolution back to. They began as the original fae, but have been continuously slaves to magic's whim. As time progresses, they continually "devolve" into more tribal, animalistic forms. It is believed the initial fae have long since vanished. The modern 'civilized' fae races are:

- The chaparrans (tall, muscular woodland fae adept in archery and natural magic, akin to the wood elves of legend),
- Damaskans (short, vaguely Asiatic fae with a gift for knowledge and a laissez-faire attitude toward gravity),
- Gimfen (pint-sized, technically-minded or pastoral folk reminiscent of both the fictional halflings and gnomes),
- Laudenians (faintly alien, xenophobic fae who weave magic into their entire lifestyle, akin to the high elves of myth),
- Narros (short, stocky warriors and crafters, mostly similar to dwarves),
- Pagus (brutal warriors of Ixindar, similar but not identical to orcs),
- Tenenbri ('dark elves,' a subterranean culture of blind religious zealots),
- Tilen (a rare people descended from ex-vampires).

In truth, there are dozens of fae species and subspecies and only a few of the oldest fae actually know them all. Other variations are dealt with later as monsters, such as the three species of goblinfolk known collectively as 'kaddog': boggs, puggs, and skeggs. All fae are echan (they can't use technology and certain skills, with a few notable exceptions).



**Evolved:** Humanity stands as the only example of an evolved species (at least on Earth) that has achieved intelligence without the assistance of magic. Humans are broadly categorized in two groups: echans (those who have accepted magic into their daily lives) and techans (those who reject magic in favor of technology). The vast majority of humanity actually does not fall squarely into either position, but as they live in the magic-saturated world, they are lumped in with the echans.

**Spawn:** Spawn are species that were once normal evolved creatures that have succumbed to magic's influence and have been altered and enhanced. For the purposes of this chapter, spawn species listed here are those that have been pushed by enchantment into a form that possess enough intelligence to form a community. All non-natural creatures on Earth which are not fae or human are spawn. In Canam, only the kodiaks (bipedal, intelligent grizzly bears) have advanced to the point of developing a culture. Like fae, spawn are unavoidably echan.

## TRAITS ATTRIBUTES

The standard five attributes are used in *Amethyst*.

**Agility:** Agility is especially important to warriors of all sorts, but particularly to techans. High-tech weaponry is the great leveler that enables the soft city-dwellers to survive in the magical wilderness, and no techan will survive long in the outside world without being able to shoot effectively.

**Smarts:** Smarts is essential to be able to distinguish truth from legend. A foolish wizard who mistakes a book of fairy tales for a treatise on real fae behavior is likely to blow himself up with a fireball before he ever has a chance to get riddled with arrows for offending a chaparran chieftain.

26 **Spirit:** Spirit is of paramount importance for those techans wishing to avoid the lure of fantasy, and for anyone who must resist the call of the dark forces that desire nothing more than the undoing of life itself. A strong soul enables those who channel the power of the gates to impose their will on the world.

**Strength:** Strength is a common thread in tales: a strong young hero with a magic sword always seems to be at the center of such fables. It is valuable to real adventurers as well, whether they heft a magic blade or a massive minigun.

**Vigor:** Vigor not only enables a person to resist pain, but also to fight off the myriad afflictions both mundane and magical that may be bestowed by hundreds of different monsters of legend. Even the fae, immune as they are to nearly all disease, must be wary of the

breath of the cancer dragon and the poisonous sting of the dojenn.

## SKILLS

The skill list for *Amethyst* is unaltered from the core rules, but not all skills are equally applicable to all characters.

**Echans:** Echan characters (except gimfen) cannot take the Driving, Piloting, and Repair skills. A techan character with these skills who becomes an echan character later may, at the GM's discretion, exchange them for other skills more appropriate for their new lot in life. High-tech applications of other skills are not explicitly prohibited to echans, but attempting to actually use the technologies that those skills rely on inevitably results in failure as the device instantly disrupts if an echan attempts to use it. For instance, a damaskan scholar may have the Knowledge (Computers) skill, but if she tries to actually use a computer, it will short out as soon as she touches it.

**Techans:** Accustomed as they are to the conveniences of technological civilization, techan characters are considered unfamiliar with most low-tech applications of skills. The Boating, Riding, Survival, and Tracking skills in particular are going to be unfamiliar to most (though not all) techans, at least at the start of their careers. The exception is military and paramilitary personnel, who are expected to have at least rudimentary familiarity with the outside world by the time they finish basic training. Techans' knowledge of open echa is also suspect at best: until such time as they actually encounter a given culture, monster, or other echan phenomenon first-hand, all techans' common knowledge rolls related to those phenomena suffer the -2 non-familiarity penalty.

**Healing Skill:** Fae and human physiology may look similar on the outside, but inside they are vastly different. When you take the Healing skill, you must choose a particular species as a focus. If you take humans as your focus, you cannot use the skill at all on fae patients unless you also take a fae species focus. If you take a fae species, you cannot use the skill on human patients unless you also take the human species focus. Additionally, if you attempt to treat a fae of a different species than the one you chose as your focus, you suffer the -2 non-familiarity penalty (fae in mixed communities tend to rely on magical healing for this reason).

## DERIVED STATISTICS

Derived statistics are calculated as normal, but particular note should be made of Charisma. Most characters have at least a situational penalty to Charisma, due to how insular societies can be in the harsh and ideologically patchwork world of *Amethyst*. Trust should be hard to come by in all but the most open and permissive communities. This is not to say that everybody should



be automatically suspicious of anyone they don't know, but the pervasiveness of bigotry is a major theme of the setting and it is hard for anyone to escape that unfortunate fact. Any party that contains more than a handful of characters with a Charisma penalty will likely draw unfriendly stares whenever they enter a new locale.

## EDGES & HINDRANCES

Most edges and all hindrances from the core rules are applicable to *Amethyst* characters. There are also a few new ones that you can take.

### RESTRICTED EDGES

These edges are not allowed by default: **Adept**; **Arcane Resistance/Improved Arcane Resistance**; **Elan**; **Healer**; **Holy/Unholy Warrior**; **Linguist**; **Liquid Courage**; **Mentalist**; and **Soul Drain**.

All basic arcane backgrounds have been replaced with ones tailored to the setting.

Additionally, some edges are designated as being Supernatural. Only one character per party can have a supernatural edge without special dispensation from the GM. All Supernatural edges automatically give the character the Echan hindrance for no points.

### ALTERED EDGES

The following edges have special rules in the *Amethyst* setting.

**Arcane Background:** See Chapters 3, 5, and 6 for allowed arcane backgrounds. Some arcane backgrounds are considered Supernatural, and are subject to the above restriction on such edges. All arcane backgrounds, except **Experteering Engineer** and **Nihilimancer**, come with the Echan hindrance for no points.

**Beast Master:** By taking this edge as a supernatural edge, the animal companion can be a spirit animal (identical to a normal animal, but insubstantial and invisible to others unless called for). A spirit animal has -2 to all trait rolls when interacting with the corporeal world other than its master.

**Berserk:** Requires Chaparran, Echan Human, Kodiak, or Pagus.

**Champion (Supernatural):** Requires Arcane Background (Paladin) instead of Arcane Background (Miracles).

**Gadgeteer:** Requires Arcane Background (Experteering Engineer) instead of Arcane Background (Weird Science), and Knowledge (Technology) instead of the Weird Science skill.

**Luck/Great Luck (Supernatural):** Although these are Supernatural edges, you only disrupt technology when you actually spend a Benny (even a normal one, not granted by the edge).

**Mr. Fix It:** Requires Gimfen instead of Arcane Background (Weird Science), and Knowledge (Technology) instead of the Weird Science skill.

**Noble:** Requires Damaskan, Echan Human, Half-Fae, Laudenian, Narros, or Tenenbri.

**Wizard:** Requires one of the following Arcane Backgrounds instead of Arcane Background (Magic): **Darawren**, **Gneolistic**, **Incarnate**, **Koana Scholar**, **Laudenian Magos**, **Logian**, or **Mage**.

### NEW EDGES

Only new edges available to all characters are detailed here: for edges unique to specific species and regions, consult the appropriate section in Chapters 3-5.

#### ARMORED SYMPATHY

(Combat Edge)

**Requirements:** Novice, Strength d8+

Whenever you wear armor with a base Armor rating of +3 or better (not armor that has a higher rating against certain kinds of attacks), that Armor rating increases by 1 for you.

#### CARAPACE

(Combat Edge)

**Requirements:** Novice, Strength d8+

As long as you and up to four allies in a line lock shields, every member of the line gains +2 to Toughness, and enemies have -2 to any trait roll that would result in breaking your shield wall. Each member of the shield wall can move up to half their pace on your turn as long as you all remain in a line. The effects end as soon as any member of the wall breaks the shield lock (although you can reforge it on your turn).

#### CLEAVER

(Combat Edge)

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Strength d8+, Fighting d10+

Any melee weapon you wield has its AP rating increased by 1 for you (if it doesn't normally have AP, it becomes AP1).

#### DISRUPTION RESISTANCE

(Weird Edge)

**Requirements:** Novice, Spirit d8+

The first time in an encounter a disruption roll is made for you, the GM rolls twice and takes the result that is



more advantageous to you. If you are an echan and attempt to use a device, the item works properly once, and then automatically disrupts at the end of your turn.

## ECHALOGIAN

(Professional Edge)

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d6+

An echalogian is an expert at teasing out the facts about the fantasy world from the fiction, and framing the unfamiliar in a way that makes sense to everyone. You reduce any Charisma penalties you have for dealing with unfamiliar cultures by 1, and you gain +2 to common knowledge rolls made to relate an aspect of the fantasy world to myth and literature, and vice versa.

## SWORN HAND OF VENGEANCE

(Background Edge)

Requirements: Seasoned, Smarts d6+

You have special enmity for a particular type of creature that has caused you considerable harm in the past. Choose one type of monster: you gain +4 to common knowledge rolls regarding that monster. Additionally, you can make a Smarts roll to identify a weak point of the monster: if you succeed, you and each ally that can see or hear you gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls against that monster (with another +2 for each raise you make).

## YOJIMBO

(Professional Edge)

Requirements: Seasoned, Strength d8+, Notice d8+

At the start of combat, you designate one character as your charge. As long as you remain within your Pace + 2" of your charge, you can always move adjacent to them in time to intercept an attack against them – you become the target of the attack instead. This counts as your movement for your next turn (so if you move again on your turn, you are subject to the normal multi-action penalty as if you were running).

## NEW AND ALTERED HINDRANCES

### BIGOT

(Minor or Major)

You are utterly intolerant of a specific group of people. You never give aid or succor to any member of that group, and always refuse any assistance they or anyone who associates with them may offer you. You may even go out of your way to do them harm. Your Charisma suffers a -2 modifier when dealing with people from that group and their known allies. This can be either a minor or a major hindrance depending on the size and influence of the group: for instance, being bigoted against all fae isn't a hindrance at all if you never leave Baruch Malkut, and is only a minor hindrance if most of the campaign involves traveling along the Continental Cross, but would be a major hindrance if you're meant to be an undercover agent in Limshau.

## DOUBTING THOMAS

(Major or Minor)

Even among echans, there are those who prefer not to place their trust in magic, capricious as it is. An echan can take Doubting Thomas as a major hindrance: it isn't that they don't believe in the supernatural, but they are more wary of it than most and prefer not to rely on magic if there is a non-magical alternative. Such a character will eschew any beneficial magic, even magical healing, unless there is absolutely no alternative. All other effects of the hindrance are the same.



## ECHA-BAKA

(Major)

**Requirement:** Human

Your view of the world is irretrievably skewed by exposure to fantasy literature and lore. You always treat fae species and other magical creatures as if they were the fantasy stereotype they most resemble, ignorantly use words like ‘elf’ or ‘dwarf’ which most species find offensive, and your understanding of magic is idiosyncratic at best. You have a -2 penalty to all common knowledge rolls related to the fantasy world, -2 Charisma against all non-humans except damaskans and gimfen, and if you have an arcane background, you suffer your negative effects on a roll of 1 or 2 on your main die instead of a roll of 1.

## ECHAN

(Minor or Major)

You disrupt technology on and around you. If you attempt to use a technological device, it instantly disrupts, and your mere presence increases the likelihood of a disruption event occurring. This is a minor hindrance if there are two or fewer techan party members, and a major hindrance if there are more than two techan party members. If there are no techan party members, you do not receive points for this hindrance. This hindrance does not count against your normal limits on hindrances.

*Note:* All archetypes in this book that have this hindrance are assumed to have it for no points: if you take one of these archetypes, determine whether you gain extra points per the conditions above (unless stated otherwise in the archetype).

## IXINDAR-BOUND

(Major)

You are fully corrupted by the whisper of Mengus and have given your soul over to syntropy. You are considered an evil being, and you radiate an aura of evil that gives you -2 Charisma against echans, although they have no means of determining your allegiance (your presence just makes them uncomfortable), and you do not disrupt technology even if you normally would (this may give you away if you aren’t careful). Additionally, once per session, the GM can compel you to do anything that is not obviously harmful to your immediate well-being (such as walking off a cliff or shooting an ally in full view of the party, although shooting an ally when there are no other witnesses is acceptable).

## OTAKU

(Minor)

**Requirement:** One knowledge focus at d8+

You are obsessed with your particular area of expertise, to the exclusion of all else. You will ignore even imminent danger if it means you can learn something new about your favorite topic, you frequently forget that

other people don’t know all the same things that you do, and you are unable to meaningfully communicate with anyone on any subject that you can’t in some way relate to your obsession (and what may be a meaningful communication to you can be totally incomprehensible to your interlocutor). You suffer a -2 penalty to most social tasks as a result, unless you can find a way to make common ground (if the other person has a different but tangential interest, for example). One major exception: if you are interacting with someone else who also has this hindrance, even if they have a different obsession, you gain a +2 bonus to most social tasks instead, as you each recognize the other’s kindred spirit.

## TECHAN

(Minor or Major)

**Requirement:** Human

You have -2 Charisma against echans, except individuals (and occasionally groups) who have an established positive relationship with you or your home bastion. This is a minor hindrance if there are two or fewer echan party members (even if there are no echans in the party), and a major hindrance if there are more than two echan party members. This hindrance does not count against your normal limits on hindrances.

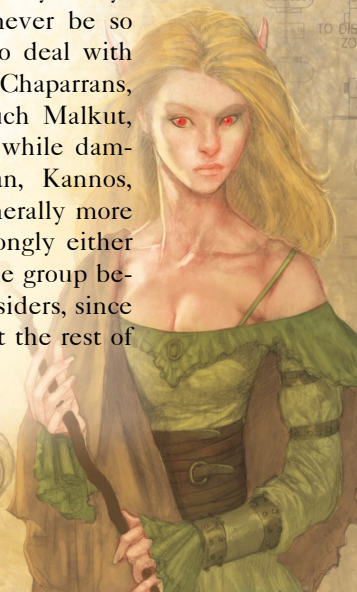
*Note:* Techan humans begin with this hindrance as a minor hindrance, factored into their species abilities. If you have it as a major hindrance, adjust your extra points accordingly.

## GEAR

Echan characters can mostly make do with the medieval equipment in the *Savage Worlds* core rules, but techan characters are defined by their technology. See **Chapter 4** for more equipment options available to high-tech characters, and **Chapters 3** and **5** for some special options available to echans.

## BACKGROUND DETAILS

Describe your character’s appearance, history, and capabilities that aren’t covered by game rules. Of particular importance is your character’s attitude to people not like her: dealing with bigotry is a major theme of the setting, and player characters are not necessarily always enlightened souls, although they should never be so strongly prejudiced that they are unable to deal with whatever the world throws at them. Chaparrans, laudenians, and humans from Angel, Baruch Malkut, and Mann are strongly insular by default, while damaskans, gimfen, and humans from Abidan, Kannos, Limshau, Selkirk and Sierra Madre are generally more open, with everyone else not inclining strongly either way. You should consult with the rest of the group before finally determining your attitude to outsiders, since the views of one character can easily impact the rest of the party.





## ARCHETYPES

The easiest way to see the rules in action is to look at a sample character. In the following chapters, you will find a number of pregenerated characters that you can use as they are or modify to suit your tastes. For these characters, edges and hindrances designated with a \* are new options from this book. All archetypal characters also have the Echan or Techan hindrance: the points (if any) for the Echan hindrance are not factored into the archetype's statistics, and the point(s) for the Techan hindrance are assumed to be spent on extra funds for equipment unless otherwise specified.

## GAME RULES

All the normal rules of the game apply, plus a few extras as detailed below.

## STANDARD SETTING RULES

Amethyst assumes that you are using the following setting rules from the *Savage Worlds Deluxe* rulebook:

**Heroes Never Die:** While Canam is a dangerous place, it makes for a more interesting game if death is not the default assumption in combat. This is particularly important in the case of techan parties, which might spend entire adventures away from their home bastion and have no way to replenish lost personnel. To maintain tension, when a character is defeated, the person who dealt the final blow gets to decide what happens to her – which could be death, but perhaps a monster would rather drag her unconscious back to its lair to eat later (fresh meat is better, after all).

**Joker's Wild:** *Amethyst* takes place in a magical world, and magic is inherently unpredictable. This rule goes some way to modeling the inherent randomness of the world.

**Multiple Languages:** There are three primary dialects of English alone in Canam, as well as five major fae languages with innumerable less common tongues, and the remnants of dozens of old human languages. In the general atmosphere of distrust that pervades the setting, fluency in a given language might make the difference between a warm welcome and being run out of town.

**Skill Specialization:** Especially in a techan group, characters are expected to fill a certain niche. Skill specialization not only encourages more flavorful skill choices and clearer distinction between characters, but it makes enchanted and high-tech items more important (see below).

## ENCHANTMENT LEVELS (EL) AND TECH LEVELS (TL)

Magical items and high-tech gear are ranked by one of six levels, each corresponding to a die type (d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d12+2). A hero wielding such an item can use

the item's die in place of her own trait die if hers is lower for any applicable function of the item (if the user is unskilled, it allows her to use it at d4). An enchantment level 3 shield, for example, grants a d10 in place of the user's Fighting skill for purposes of calculating Parry and defensive actions, unless the wielder has no Fighting skill or has it at d12 or higher.

Tech levels have a few additional properties, which are described below and further in Chapter 4.

## ECHAN DISRUPTION FIELD (EDF)

Magic retards the progression of technology. It breaks down lubrications. It jams gears and shorts out electronics. It overloads batteries. Everything more complicated than basic clockwork is vulnerable, given enough exposure, but the more advanced the technology, the more susceptible it is: in most places, anything up to a simple combustion engine can manage with minimal difficulty, but even something as basic as a bicycle will break down if caught in the backblast from a dragon's breath (of course, at that point, you have bigger things to worry about). Because magic grows as more people use it, bastions are relatively safe within the confines of their walls or city limits. The moment they leave their borders and brave the outlands, their machinery and electronics begins to degrade. As technology comes into contact with higher concentrations of enchantment, it becomes prone to interference. This leads some machines to become less efficient, cease working altogether, or – in some rare cases – violently destroy themselves. Whenever technology is outside of a bastion, there is little anyone can do to impede this disruption. At best, they can slow or delay the effects for a short time.

Magical energies and creatures generate what is called an Echan Disruption Field (or Enchanted Disruption Field), or **EDF**. Some bastions even rate an ED-I, or ED Index, which charts the hot spots in the world which users of technology need to avoid. The low level EDF saturating the entire world interrupts radio waves and nullifies the ability of anything other than gold wires to channel electricity over long distances, preventing communication between the bastions and limiting the lifespan of batteries.

## DISRUPTION EVENTS

Disruption is a constant threat, even within bastions, but the rules applying to it usually only occur when they are the most inconvenient. Disruption events can occur under the following circumstances:

- The first time in an encounter that someone attempts to use the device;
- Whenever a creature that generates EDF touches the device (echans attempting to use the device always results in disruption of TL1 and higher devices, no check required);



## SHIELDING

Shielding does not make an item immune to disruption, but it does make it harder to affect. Unlike gimfen shielding, which does immunize against EDF at the cost of becoming bulky and awkward, techan shielding keeps the overall shape of the original object and does not add significant weight to the final design. If an item has the shielded property, it is treated as one TL lower for purposes of disruption rolls.

Shielding can be added to any TL1 or higher device at a cost of 20% of the item's base price. Some items are shielded by default: if so, the cost of the shielding is folded into the base price.

- Any time the device or its wielder is directly affected by magic (any attempt to enchant the device always results in disruption, no check required);
- Whenever the device or its wielder is hit by an attack with a raise from a magical creature;
- If the device or its wielder is hit by an attack from a pincher weapon;
- At the end of each round;
- Any time that the GM judges appropriate.

At this point, the GM rolls a d12 and adds the TL of the highest-tech item on the character (or in the party, for a general disruption event) or the EL of the item used to make the attack, if any (whichever is higher). On a 4 or higher, a disruption event occurs, plus an additional disruption event for each raise on the roll.

A targeted disruption effect (such as from a spell or being touched by a magical creature) always affects the item or character targeted. For general disruption events, the order of disruption events is determined by the first undisrupted item with the highest TL in the following sequence; weapons, tools/utility items, armor, vehicles, with items actively in use being disrupted first. If there are multiple items, determine the affected one randomly. No player can be affected by another general disruption event per scene until each player has been affected by one. TL0 items (that are not designated as being immune to disruption) are only affected by general disruption events if there is another modifier to the roll.

There is a dire exception, however. If the disruption roll aces, something sinister occurs. A cataclysmic pulse courses through the unfortunate subjects of the disruption, causing more than a simple inconvenience. Every party member carrying technology suffers a disruption event affecting the highest TL item they have. This critical collapse can affect even TL0 items, including those designated as being immune to disruption.

## EFFECTS OF DISRUPTION

A disrupted item does not grant its TL as a substitute to the wielder's trait die. Additionally, the item malfunctions in the most perverse ways and times imaginable: weapons jam at inconvenient moments; powered armor loses power and immobilizes the wearer; utility devices short out, usually in the middle of attempting to use them. As a general rule, any time the wielder fails a roll using the item, it can't be used again until the end of that player's next turn. Once the wielder fails three rolls, the item breaks entirely and can no longer be used until it has been properly repaired.

You can spend a Benny at any time to restore a disrupted item to full functionality, but not a disabled item.

## SCALING DISRUPTION

The basic rules above assume a low impact of disruption on your game. This is not entirely reflective of the setting but does keep the dangers of disruption low to streamline game flow. Disruption events can be made more severe in one of several ways (which can be used separately or combined, but which should remain consistent throughout the game):

**Absolute Disruption:** By default, disrupted items continue to work, but at reduced efficiency and in unpredictable ways. Optionally, when the item becomes disrupted, it cannot be used at all unless someone takes an action to make a Repair roll on it, which restores it to basic functionality but does not allow its TL to be used in place of the wielder's trait die, and leaves it prone to malfunctions (as normal).

**EDF Ratings:** EDF is not uniform across the planet. Using this option, instead of just using the item's tech level as the target for the disruption roll, the GM also adds the area's or attacking creature's EDF rating (from +0 to +5). Bastions have a base EDF rating of +0. Any echan creature within 10" of the item inflicts a minimum rating of +1 per 2 creatures, or per 1 creature if it is especially large or magically saturated (cumulative up to +4). Wilderness areas without significant magical saturation are also +1. The average echan settlement or magical wilderness area is +2, +3 for significantly magical areas. +4 and +5 should be reserved for areas containing artifacts or fundamentally magical creatures such as dragons.

**Wild Surges:** To make disrupted technology especially unpredictable, whenever you ace on an action with a disrupted item, you are treated as if you got one more raise than you normally would – but the item breaks immediately.



## ECHA-SAFE TECHNOLOGY

Not every technology is subject to disruption – only technology above a certain threshold of complexity. The maximum level of ambient complexity required to make an item immune varies from place to place. Various technological items are also more resistant to disruption: either the technology is so basic that there is nothing for magic to latch onto, or it is so heavily shielded that the EDF cannot affect it. The following cannot be affected by a routine disruption event:

- Items with the 'immune' property;
- Any gimfen thingamajig;
- Any armor not requiring a battery cell for operation;
- Boosters and medical injections;
- All TL0 gear except TL0 weapons.

This does not mean that the item can never be disrupted, but doing so requires a targeted disruption event. Magic can get at anything that depends on moving parts or variable energy states, even something as simple as a windmill or waterwheel, so it's best not to invite it in.

## HEALING

The world of *Amethyst* is a dangerous place, but there is one advantage to being constantly saturated by a raw force of life itself: you heal faster. Outside of a bastion or any other magic-resistant zone, wounded characters may make a Vigor roll each day instead of every five days to reduce their wound levels.

As mentioned above, multiple different species with profoundly different internal structures makes using the Healing skill to treat an unfamiliar life form hazardous at best – someone without experience treating a patient of a given species suffers the standard non-familiarity penalty. A patient treated by a medic unfamiliar with her physiology suffers a -1 penalty to her natural healing roll.

High-tech healing options are available to techans and gimfen (subject to the above unfamiliar physiology penalty), and while standard first aid, basic surgical techniques and some medications will work on other echan creatures, only those from lower-tech bastions or trained in archaic medical techniques are able to manage complex healing without modern machinery. For purposes of Healing rolls, TL0 medicine counts as basic medical attention (no bonus or penalty to the roll), TL1 medicine grants +1 to the roll, TL2-3 grants +2 to the roll, and TL4-5 grants +3 to the roll.

Magical healing, of course, works regardless of the practitioner's or patient's species, and thus is far more prevalent in echan communities than mundane doctoring. Although magical healing is less effective in general than high-tech options (being the equivalent of basic medical attention rather than advanced medical attention), it has the advantage of working on everybody equally.



"How did you..." Aiden started.

"I asked it to."

"But it's not alive."

"First rule of Attricana: Anything you can think of...thinks for itself."

Aiden gathered his thoughts. "Attricana?"

Chen approached a window and opened the shutters to the moonlight. He pointed to the bright star brushing the crescent.

"By way that everything that can't happen, does."

"Can't happen...Dragons," Aiden said.

"Quite right. Hard to miss when they appear as they did."

"They aren't real," Aiden forced himself to say, "Can't."

"So says the normal world," Chen replied with a shadow of a smirk. Aiden was not smiling. Desperation had set in.

"I don't understand."

"Should you?"

"Was it Zmey?"

"Zmey?" Chen pondered the sudden question. Aiden could see the man rifling through old thoughts. "Zmey is a myth, based on several stories. What attacked you...was a death dragon."

"I couldn't find the other one in my book."

"Book?"

"Codex Dracontis—"

"Oh yes. I remember that one. There are better resources."

"That show the other dragon? The one with gold and blue scales, blue eyes, white whiskers and white talons. A long snake body. Four arms, four talons."

Chen circled around the desk, rolling his fingers across the spines on the shelf behind Aiden. "You know, they say spotting a Yok-ani is a good omen. Seeing two portends a blessed life." Chen found the book in question and pulled it out. It was almost as large as the one already on the desk, but with no cover art. There was only a single large Asian-sinitic letter and the English words underneath Myths of the Kuraukou-Puru.

"Yok-ani? Are they good?" Aiden asked.

"Some people certainly think so," Chen responded as he placed the book gently on the table. He respectfully slid the other to the side. "What do you think?" He unclasped the latches at either end of the new book.

"I think it was good."

"You sure it had four talons?"

"Yes."

"Good eye for detail, considering. They grow more as they age. Three to four to five." He opened the book. The heavy-stock pages were rough on the leaf, a hemp-pulp hybrid. The letters were pounded heavily into the stock. "This one talks of them. They are quiet, reserved, renowned for wisdom, and worshipped for the humility of their power. Under their guidance, lands see no war, famine, or grief. At least that's the claim. Reality, well...I guess they try their best." Aiden broke from the book to look at Chen. "Read it," Chen added. "Stay if you wish."

"My brother will kill me if he finds out."

"Yes, I imagine he will."

Aiden smiled and reassured himself. He thought of Martin's shoulder punches and whatever punishment his new guardians



would inflict if he got caught. "I'll stay," he said.

"I'll make tea," said Chen as he walked to his kitchen.

"Uhh, Mister?" Aiden still wasn't ready to call him by name. "How much is true? Dragons? Elves?"

Chen looked back at the young boy. A quiver of a smile crept on his face. "All of it."

\* \* \*

The other dragons grew to power and passed the Yok-ani in number. By the closing of the gates, only nine Yok-ani had been born (or perhaps created). None of them died by natural causes or fell by the hands of an enemy. Nine still remain today. In the five centuries since the re-opening of the gate, the Yok-ani made no attempt to increase their numbers. Although few, they are the most powerful dragons in the world, rivaled only by the remaining dragon kings, of which Shaka, a Yok-ani, is counted as a member of.

The tea was no simple drop-bag of disheveled twigs and bark. Chen had brought a kettle of scolding water, a saucer and cup, and a smaller kettle. Inside the smaller kettle was a collection of dried herbs, flowers, leaves, and honey. Chen poured the hot water in the small kettle, and then emptied the small kettle into the cup. Aiden repeated that process and emptied the larger kettle before finally speaking to the man again.

"Do you have more?"

"Tea or dragons?" Chen replied.

"About everything outside."

Chen waved to the room. "They're all on that subject."

"I want to read them all."

"There will be time for that. It's getting late."

"Then I want to see it myself."

Chen raised a brow. "A zeal for adventure got you already?"

"It's just like the books. Just like the games I play." Aiden was getting excited. "I want to see it all, everything that they said wasn't real, castles, magic, fae."

"It may look the dream, child, but it'll carry the chill of reality. And what will it prove? Even if it feels like your fantasy, you're not the storyteller." Aiden didn't appear dissuaded. "How will you survive out there? Can you wield a sword, shoot an arrow?"

"Maybe," Aiden responded in reflex before realizing that the most strenuous physical activity he had ever done was avoid a soccer ball when playing goalie because he didn't want to get hit in the face. Chen saw through the boy's naivety.

"I don't mean to turn you away," he said, "just understand that many people claim that world as home, and you would not be any more special out there than in here. You may wish to be a character in your own fantasy, but this is no work of fiction. It's real. You're not chosen by fate. Your parents were ordinary. No gods kissed you upon your birth. What do you do well?"

Aiden scrunched his lips, shrugged, and sighed. "I read books. Don't suppose that means much." The sudden wash of insight over his face was unmistakable. "Magic. I could do that."

"How?" Chen motioned to the lamps. "You've just seen that. How could you know? Maybe it's something I do naturally no one else can."

"If it's all real then magic can come from books! I can

learn!" he begged. "I can do that! Just give me the right books!" The wide-eyed appeal of the youth showed his commitment.

Chen reached out and grasped Aiden's wrist. He pulled the boy's sleeve to reveal the broken watch. Chen pointed to the timepiece.

"This world," he said, pointing to the east, "and that world do not mingle. What you have here doesn't work out there—no cars, no computers, no phones. Once you commit to that path, you can't come back."

"I..." Aiden trailed off. He was about to say I understand, but he didn't. Why was it that way? Why were there walls around the city? Why did the mere presence of dragon make his watch stop? Aiden remembered books about the kid that discovered he was a demigod, or an heir to a kingdom, or a member of a secret order, or a wonder child with a wand. That's what he wanted; those characters never had to give anything up. He wanted his fantasy. "I don't like this place. I prefer the world I read about."

"Why?" Chen answered.

"Because...I don't know...because it's different, because it's amazing. Because..." Aiden felt a drop run out of his nose. He sniffed it up quickly and swallowed. "Because my mother made it sound so wonderful." Aiden held back a tear. "And I want my dreams to be real."

Chen placed his hand gently on Aiden's shoulder and a tear finally broke free from his eye. "If you run from a life, running will be your life. A fulfilling existence is defined by moving towards something, not away from it. You can read about that world for as long as you like, but I can't let you make that decision."

"Isn't it mine to make?"

Chen nodded. "But you need to know why you make it...and now's not that time."

Aiden's shoulders slumped and he tried to hold back in his emotions. He threw Chen's arm away and bolted for the door. He didn't look back. Aiden wanted to abandon his normal life, the one filled boring classes, imposing bullies, overbearing brothers, and callous gods, a life commonplace in the real world. He wanted to be like the characters he read about, like the computer avatar he controlled, someone of consequence, with a life ending in a happily ever after, not a number on a marble cover wedged alongside hundreds of others in a mausoleum.

Aiden slammed the gate open, and it ricocheted off the concrete wall. He was too angry and confused to be frightened of switching stations or running down streets with inadequate lighting. He darted across intersections without alerting the crosswalks and ducked into darkened paths between buildings to shortcut his return home. All the while he thought of what could be out there. He imagined the dragons, the fae, the princesses, and the possibilities that, until now, had only existed in fiction. Out there was everything he could not be in here.

\* \* \*

Aiden returned only minutes before sunrise. The door to the apartment didn't creak. He snuck into his room and navigated around the unpacked boxes. The moon was about to fall under the crown. Aiden slipped under the sheets and closed his eyes. Despite being tired, he opened them moments later and



rolled back to see Martin's still empty bed. Aiden moved his attention to the window, to the setting moon and its companion, to that one bright star floating near the lunar horn.

Attricana.

It wasn't a star but a hole in the cosmos, a door to another place. From it flowed the chaos that shaped a new world while destroying the old one.

Aiden closed his eyes and dreamt, though not of dragons and elves, of knights and wizards. He dreamt of his mother.

\* \* \*

Aiden looked at the passing businessmen, politicians, policemen, and teachers. They all knew. Maybe not of magic and monsters, but they'd known enough and hadn't told him. They didn't care. They didn't want to know, to be reminded about what wasn't normal. Children played the games. They dreamt. The avatars they took on in the digital world offered them the role they could never fulfill in life. Aiden looked over his classmates and wondered how many of their dreams had been denied.

"Computer programmer!" William shouted. Aiden realized that the books given to him were old and worn for a reason. No one wrote these stories anymore. No one wanted to be reminded about what they had lost.

"Nice, Jeffery. Lara?" Mr. Leach asked. Aiden wondered why his mother had made the exception. Why did she tell him those stories, search for that rare freeware?

"An architect," Lara answered.

"Good, that's productive, Aiden?"

Weeks before, Aiden had been daydreaming of riding dragons and rescuing princess, engrossed in forgetting the world around him. Now he wanted to know everything, every why and every how. Leach didn't repeat himself; he leaned in to force Aiden's attention.

"Hmm?" Aiden responded, oblivious to the subject. The class never taught him what he really wanted to know. He learned it because society expected him to, because he was adept at it, because eventually childhood must end. But fantasies were now fact, and Aiden could learn of that without the mockery of embracing a dream.

Leach was about to scold him again, but stopped. "What do you want to do when you're older?"

"What I want?" Aiden almost mumbled.

"Yes...I mean we have an architect, programmer, doctor." He pointed to another child. "A janitor for some reason. What do you want to be?"

Aiden thought it over. He didn't care how the class would react. "I want...to be a wizard."

The students looked to him. A few chuckled. William gritted his teeth. He had been warned to keep quiet. "A...wha... Aiden," the teacher stuttered. Leach could piece together in an instant what thoughts had been circling like a maelstrom in Aiden's mind.

"Yes," Aiden answered.

"Why?"

Aiden tried to think of a better answer but his mind had been fixated on the how, not the why, so no better answer slipped out. "Because I can," he said.

\* \* \*

Martin was leaning on a railing outside of Aiden's school as his little brother ran out.

"All good?" Martin asked. Aiden nodded. Martin led his brother away. He took the responsibility seriously, checking traffic and passersby.

"Aiden!" Lara shouted from a playground. The brothers noticed and stopped. "We're playing at the grounds, wanna come?"

Aiden looked back to Martin with his doe eyes on cue. "Yeah...it's ok?" Martin answered. Aiden smiled and hobbled with his heavy bag to the girl. "Be home by 4:00," he added. "Go nowhere else!"

Aiden finally turned back and waved. "Thanks, Marty!" he shouted. Martin watched them approach the swings with other children. Aiden placed his bag on the sand. When Martin was satisfied that Aiden wasn't walking into a bully trap, he continued walking. When he was out of sight, Aiden immediately turned to Lara.

"Thanks Lara," Aiden said, picking his bag back up and strapping it to his back for the long haul.

"You are invited," she answered.

"Thanks...I know." Aiden made for a nearby path that bisected two houses and led back to a main road.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

Aiden stopped and turned back. "Better you don't know."

"You're weird, Aiden."

"Thanks." He smiled. He stepped away to the path but kept looking at her. "Lara? Do you know about what's beyond the city?"

"Past the wall?" she asked. Aiden nodded. "It's wild and dangerous. Why?"

"No reason," Aiden replied, turned and upgraded his walk to a run as he reached the path.

\* \* \*

David Chen held a paper bag of various fruits, purchased from Genai farms, grown under sunlight with rain fallen from clouds. They weren't genetically modified replicas designed to be cultivated in foreign environments. They weren't grown in atmospheric controlled multi-leveled greenhouses. The shop was still open, being tended by Chen's single employee, a fifteen-year-old Asian girl with trimmed straight black hair, oversized glasses, a long neck and a chest as flat as Ganymede-moon or myth. As Chen approached the open gate with his groceries, he heard Aiden's shout behind him.

"I don't want to be what they tell me!"

Aiden had gotten his attention. Chen turned around.

"Pardon?" Chen asked.

"I don't want to be like them, like my brother!"

"There are many things you can do to be different, Aiden."

"I want to be what I want!" Every sentence got louder. "Why do I have to settle for what they say I can be? I don't have to now! I don't want to be part of this! How can I go back, knowing what I know? I want magic! I want dragons! I want everything they said I couldn't have!"

Chen stepped forward. Aiden had also gotten the attention of Chen's employee, leaning in from her duties to see the commotion. "It will take a long time," Chen answered. "Not all the books were right. It'll be years before you're ready, and it doesn't always take."



"The sooner I start..."

"Even knowing what you'll have to give up. Cars?"

"Don't drive."

"Television?"

"Nothing good on."

"Computers?"

"I play games with magic." Aiden had an answer for everything, he thought ahead.

"Refrigerators?" Except that one. "Central heating?" Chen paused and emphasized the next one. "Electricity?"

"Can't I make my own?"

Chen smiled with nod. "Yes, you may actually." He nudged his chin in the direction of the door. "Enter then."

Aiden approached the entrance and noticed the girl staring at him.

"Aiden," Chen said, "this is Min Xia Wen, my employee." The girl waved and Aiden, suddenly revolted by his school clothes, responded bashfully with a nod. Chen motioned Aiden to a desk. "Have a seat."

Aiden followed, dangling his legs over the uncomfortable stool. A fifty pound book weighted with gold leaf and wooden toggles slammed onto the desk. Chen unlocked it and flipped a few of the metallic pages. There was no artwork and the phrases were complicated and convoluted, containing numerous syllables with meanings beyond a twelve-year old's comprehension.

"What's this?" Aiden asked.

"The first of many," Chen answered as he walked away. Aiden shared a look at Min, who shrugged back.

Aiden examined the intimidating hardback. "You're only trapped if you can't find the door," Aiden repeated his mother's passing comment.

Aiden leaned in and began to read.

\* \* \*

Children assumed the truth until learning the virtue of doubt. They reached an age when they began to question the world around them. They turned to parents for reassurance. The goblins were never under the bed. No one snuck down the chimney to take cookies or leave presents. The disappointment that followed discovering the truth never settled. Aiden had reached that point when dreams rooted in reality replaced those impossible to achieve.

Every legend, myth, and tale his mother had narrated was a fiction that Aiden had so badly wanted to be real. He realized that every one of them held some fragment of fact. Historical accounts of modern empires, works of whimsy from when mankind ruled the planet alone. She was preparing him for the inevitable day when he would discover it for himself. There was no set time when someone was told. Like sex, it was just something picked up or stumbled through mostly by accident. The wrong book was opened, the wrong program watched. The child asked the proper questions at an improper time. Parents muddled their way through the answers.

Aiden had a dragon.

His mother had known the real world better than most, better than her husband, better than Martin. She knew more than most people about what was out there. With those books, she had told him everything.

\* \* \*

Aiden looked up at the long flight of stairs, up the side of the crown. To call the outer wall a crown implied to Aiden that everyone behind it thought of themselves as royalty, claiming supremacy over everything they saw.

He clambered clumsily upwards, glancing occasionally to gauge the length of the climb. The steel railing didn't feel safe. The stairs were draped in darkness from the sun setting behind the wall. A gust of cool wind struck Aiden as he reached the summit.

Aiden walked to the edge of the fortification. He stood between the jagged and uneven ramparts that topped it. Aiden would only have a few minutes before the next patrol. When standing on the peak of the crown, the city appeared to expand forever, over the horizon until heat radiating from concrete and iron mountains blurred to the sky. Skyscrapers, farms, manufacturing facilities and the last scraps of humanity's past. Aiden had seen such a view from his family's condo; anyone else would be amazed by it. But Aiden only offered it a passing glance, as much acknowledgement as traffic he wanted to cross.

He discarded one view for another, across the wall to a towering emerald forest of wild trees. They were alive and growing as tall as the city wall, without pruning or any arboriculture. Aiden had read that it was called Cyon, a dense pack of woods that encircled most of the south and east sides of the bastion. Aiden picked up noises from the forest—calls and yells from massive lungs. None of them sounded familiar. A high pitched screech resembled something a young girl could emit, though greatly amplified. A throaty bellow shook the trees and scattered birds. It was followed by something immense under the canopy shuffling leaves, shifting branches, and snapping undergrowth.

A hawk with a span to cross an expressway lifted from a lower perch, jostled by the unseen beast brazenly bullying its way through the forest. The bird vanished back into the thick.

Aiden assumed that a jutting rock larger than Chen's store was the peak of small crag only a few kilometers from the city. He then noticed it gradually turning. The rock was not attached to the ground; it hung silently, dangling from an unseen string.

Aiden caught a faint whisper in the breeze, not as such carried by the wind but part of it. He leaned to the edge of the wall. The whisper was from no beast; it was comforting, tempting, an aria of the air—feminine and beautiful.

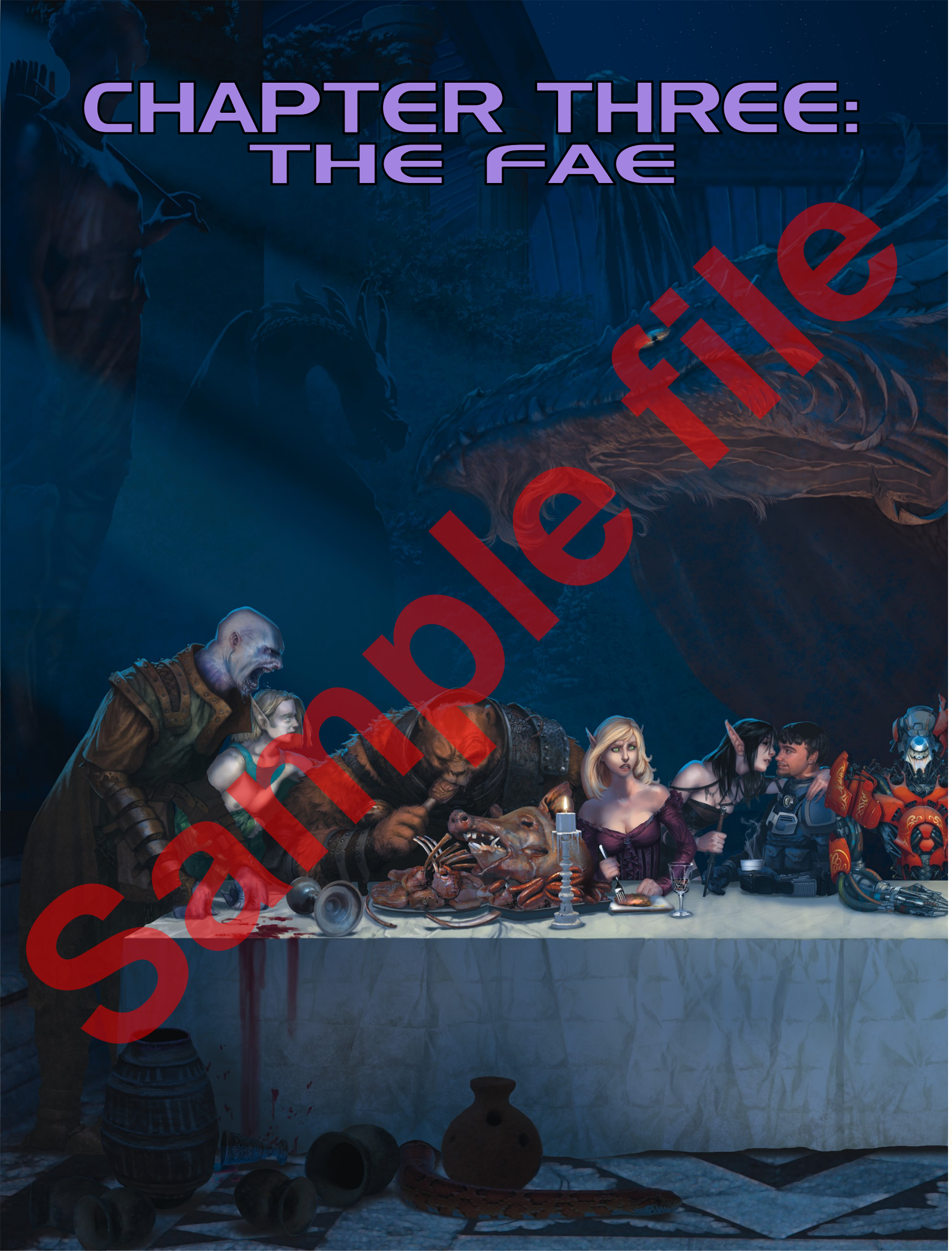
Aiden imagined everything that could be out there, all the wonders denied by science. Everything he had read about, hiding past those trees, as easy as crossing a street. Aiden made a promise to himself at that moment while standing at the edge of the wall. He would become what he had read about, what he was told he could not be. He would pass from his world to one echoing the whims of writers for thousands of years. He would have his fantasy. It would be real.

Aiden smiled.






# CHAPTER THREE: THE FAE







Earth remains a crowded place. Millions of humans survived the holocaust they may or may not have brought on themselves. Added to that is the flood of peoples only previously believed to exist in fiction, with their own cultures matching closely to those portrayed in human mythology. In those ancient tales, the interlopers went by many names. Humans, to this day, still often refer to them by these labels, sometimes thought of as endearing, other times taken as insult.

How these peoples respond to them is based strictly upon the individual. Some take it a compliment being likened to noble and whimsical creatures of legend. Others despise the comparison. None of them ever match the mold exactly. Some may look the part, but their personalities may differ radically. Some exhibit traits from a variety of different legends while others are wholly unique without a mirror in mythology. There are also creatures birthed from enchantment which are new to this era, possessing no history from the previous age.

## ELDERS

After dragons, the first species born on Earth were the fae. No one remembers what they originally looked like or how many there were, for the original fae vanished hundreds of thousands of years before the First Hammer struck (though they must have had pointed ears and sharp features, as these dominant features still survive in all their descendants). Their susceptibility to magic altered their original form and they broke off into dozens of smaller offshoots relatively quickly. These offshoots remain genetically compatible and physically similar in basic ways, for all that they are commonly considered separate species. They are usually bipeds with ten fingers and ten toes, stereoscopic vision and hearing, no unusual organs (though they lack certain vestigial ones, and those they have often work in unusual ways) and sexual reproduction. Human scientists, even after a few centuries of examination, have always failed to determine how fae resemble evolved apes to such an extent. Although it has been commonly agreed upon that alien life would evolve naturally along similar lines, the parallels between fae and man are too numerous to be considered a coincidence.

Those believing in a creation by a divine hand take the numerous similarities in enchanted species of fae and the evolved species of man prove the existence of God, a philosophy known as Corpus Continuity. The humanoid form, consisting of binocular vision, binaural hearing, base ten appendages, erect stature, and mammalian physiology match the fae species exactly, a species not evolved from primitive animals but formed from magic itself. With the exception of the pointed ears and the variations of fae species when they adapt to their environment, there still remain remarkable similarities scientists cannot explain. Because fae arose first, many believers in Corpus Continuity also subscribe to Echological Influence. Those of faith on both sides believe in the idea that God liked the humanoid form but tried different ways to succeed at it. Scientists refuse to acknowledge this and believe a genetic reason exists for the similarity. To them echological influence may be the reason itself--the previous age influencing evolutionary paths to make humans resemble their long dead progenitors.

Another popular theory claims it to be a coincidence; base ten appendages, binocular vision and stereoscopic hearing simply makes



sense and that all intelligent life will eventually move towards that end. Others cling to the prevalent theory that the fantasy world doesn't exist at all, only emerging because of man's desire for it to exist; thus, the appearance of man dictates the physique of fae, rather than the other way around.

Fae all share several common qualities. They are peaceful within their own species (i.e., laudenians never fight laudenians). They are also monogamous and loyal to their mates; divorce is virtually non-existent, and though remarriage upon the death of a spouse is not unheard of, neither is it common. When single, they are also known to be somewhat promiscuous. Even the laudenians, with their strict heritage and tradition, do not consider sex for pleasure either sinful or immoral between consenting non-bonded adults. Although they denounce the use of sex slaves by human masters, fae races do not prohibit pre-bonded (pre-marital) sex. Prostitution is rare given their sexual freedom, but it has been known to occur. There are virtually no crimes dealing with vices in fae cultures; as they are immune to the ravages of addiction, most things humans would consider vices simply are not harmful to them either personally or culturally. Additionally, they do not consider homosexuality a sin and bonded same sex couples occur openly in all fae communities. Some observers claim fae are all pansexual, though this is not entirely the case: most exhibit distinct preferences, but often these preferences are based on previous exposure rather than biological imperative. Some human nations frown on these freedoms and expressions, especially within those nations that use religion as a device of fear to keep the population in line (a tendency not exhibited in any fae nation).

These non-strictures apply when the fae cultures are allowed to govern themselves. In some locations, where fae are not in places of authority, they abide by the rules of the nation they inhabit, usually without complaint. As a rule, all fae abhor social conflict and will do anything they can to prevent it, though the extremes they will go to vary from type to type: laudenians

and chaparrans will generally remove themselves (or the offender) from the equation, damaskans and narros will attempt to mediate, the boisterous tenenbri will turn the conflict into a formal debate with clear parameters for victory, and the accommodating gimfen will quite happily concede anything to an intractable enough opponent and find some way of making up lost ground later.

## UNIVERSAL FAE TRAITS

**Echan:** All fae (except pagus and gimfen) disrupt technology on you and around you. You have the Echan minor hindrance, but receive no points for it. If you take Echan as a major hindrance, you only gain points as for the minor hindrance. You can never buy off this hindrance.

**Immune to Natural Disease:** You are immune to all natural disease, and cannot be a carrier of such ailments. You are unaffected by all genetic diseases and disorders, but not mutated genes from radiation or enchanted viruses. Furthermore, you are unaffected by natural psychological or behavioral ailments such as addiction or schizophrenia, though concerted attacks on your sanity may still affect you. Enchanted diseases and conditions can still affect you, as can natural diseases that have been imbued with magic.

**Light Sleeper:** You can sleep comfortably in any position and maintain balance while doing so. You require only four hours of sleep every 24 hours, which may be non-consecutive. Like all living creatures, you require REM sleep, but this only requires four hours of consecutive, comfortable sleep every three days. You cannot be put to sleep by magic and you can make Notice rolls while asleep (but you cannot gain raises this way).

**Fae Iron Weakness:** A specific ratio of lead and iron is extremely toxic to all fae. It is a forbidden substance, outlawed in most civilized communities. Damage rolls against you with fae-iron weapons gain one raise over and above the result of the roll.





## CHAPARRAN

*The huntress sat perfectly still in the canopy above as the prey blundered carelessly along the forest path. Though they bore no signs of their allegiance, she recognized their bearing: slavers, almost certainly from the despoiler nation to the east, invading her forest in search of chattel. The more fools they. The huntress stood silently, balancing effortlessly on the thin branch, and fitted an arrow to her bow.*

*The first human died with the arrow in his throat. His companions turned sharply at his last gurgling scream, and then looked up at the ominous shadow perched among the leaves. "Ambush!" the leader yelled, drawing a crossbow. "Get—" But his words were cut off as he suddenly felt the pressure of a knife at his throat. He could have sworn the elf hadn't moved, and yet somehow she had got out of the trees and crossed the clearing in the blink of an eye.*

*"Who's next?" whispered the chaparran as she melted back into the trees, leaving the slaver captain bleeding out onto the mossy ground.*

Hiding in the deep woods across the world, the chaparran fae have evolved concealment to an art form. Where the laudenians are merely disdainful of those unlike themselves, chaparrans are downright xenophobic and hostile to outsiders. Chaparrans believe most other fae have forgotten their origins. They believe that the original fae were birthed from the forests and should always remain tied to them. The chaparrans live almost exclusively among the woods, growing towers, temples, and whole communities from the soil and branches. Their mere presence encourages vegetation, and the tallest, thickest trees in the world grow where chaparrans live.

Chaparrans mostly keep to themselves, refusing to become involved in the affairs of outsiders. One could walk through a chaparran forest without ever knowing of their presence. Unless threatening elf or tree, trespassers often cross without worry or encounter: more nefarious individuals vanish after entering. They defend the forests when necessary with their inestimable archery skills. Their bows and arrows grow naturally from wood, a result of their symbiosis with the trees around them.

The chaparrans believe the fae are not devolving, but becoming one with nature. Their descendant offshoots are not necessarily violent, but more xenophobic, becoming increasingly skittish of outsiders. They also grow more connected with nature, even to the point of exhibiting animal physical traits. Chaparrans respect their descendants and scold the laudenians for hanging onto what they call a "bankrupt obsession."

**Physical Description:** Chaparrans are only slightly taller than damaskans, on par with the average human, but give the illusion of much greater size due to their increased muscle mass and physical stamina. Of all the fae descendants, the chaparrans have the greatest spectrum

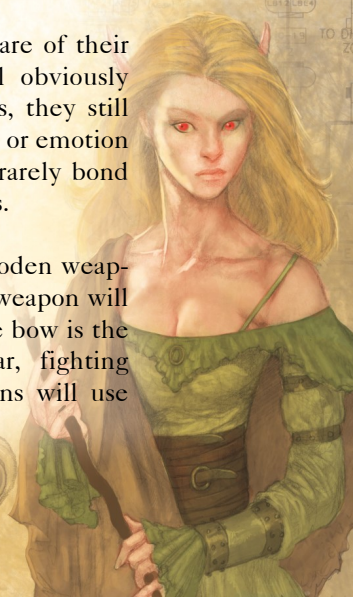
of skin tones, from light tan to ebony black. Their ears are short and flush with their heads, making them almost indistinguishable from humans at a distance. A chaparran's eyes usually are of green and bluish hues and they will often pierce their ears in several areas and color their bodies with tattoos, especially around the face, shoulders, and back. Fae in general remain youthful in appearance throughout their long lives, but this tendency is the least pronounced among the chaparrans due to their constant exposure to the elements. While chaparrans spend most of their lives with an apparent age ranging from a human young adult to a healthy adult in their late 30s, those past their second millennium more often resemble a human in their sixties. Most chaparrans have brown hair (dark brown is most common, but any brunette shade is possible), though a few have black or even red hair. This is curly more often than not, and generally worn short or in tight dreadlocks to avoid catching on branches. All their joints are capable of hypermobility, and a chaparran's big toes, while not fully opposable, are significantly more dexterous and strong than normal, enabling them to grasp branches equally well with feet and hands and giving them improved balance in the tree canopy; a chaparran archer hanging upside down from a branch to set up a shot is a truly fearsome sight. They often wear furs and pelts, adding to their girth, but exposing a great deal of skin to maintain agility. They hate adorning themselves with gems or shiny rocks and seldom wear metal of any kind.

**Playing a Chaparran:** Chaparrans are the best species to play because they are the most like the traditional elves of legend. They have the oldest history and the most exotic beliefs. They are proud and powerful and are the envy of many others. To play a chaparran is to wholly embrace the fantasy world and all of its possibilities.

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

A player creating a chaparran should be aware of their propensity of solitude. Though some will obviously forge and protect friendships with outsiders, they still prefer fae to humans and seldom invest time or emotion in relationships with the latter. Chaparrans rarely bond with non-chaparrans and less so with humans.

Chaparrans avoid heavy armor and favor wooden weapons over metal; if metal is unavoidable, the weapon will be crafted with a wooden grip. For most, the bow is the weapon of choice, followed by the spear, fighting knives, or even the scythe; while chaparrans will use





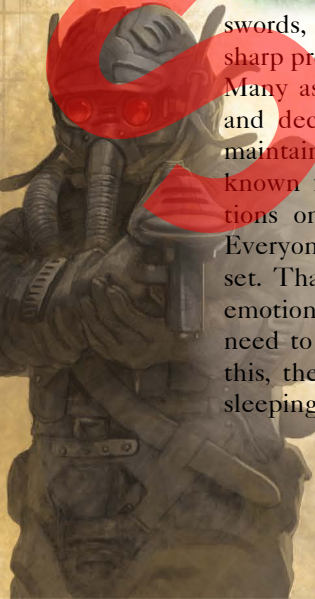


swords, they prefer makana (a wooden club inset with sharp protrusions of stone or metal).

Many assume chaparrans are utterly wild in demeanor and decorum. In truth, they are quite civilized and maintain good grooming and health. Unlike other fae, known for being austere, chaparrans wear their emotions on their sleeves...if they actually had sleeves. Everyone knows immediately when a chaparran is upset. Thankfully, this openness spreads to more upbeat emotions as well. Chaparrans enjoy the outdoors and need to see the sun to orientate themselves. Without this, they often grow confused about the time of day, sleeping at odd hours for random lengths. Chaparrans

also have the dual disadvantage of being both agoraphobic and claustrophobic: they are intensely uncomfortable outside of a forest, edgy almost to the point of uselessness in a dungeon or town, but virtually unstoppable in their forest homes.

Chaparrans are also highly religious and commonly profess a faith in Berufu, the fae mother god who gave life to their ancestors. Nearly all chaparrans openly pray to the woods every morning, noon, and night, thanking her for their life.





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

**Names:** Unlike other fac, often taking human-like names to better associate with the human world, chaparrans refuse to do so. Their names, like all fac, are personal and are only meant to be heard by pointed ears. A chaparran's family name merges with their given name: this full name is usually four or more syllables long and always features both hard consonants and hissing sibilants (multiple instances of K, G, or S when spelled in the English orthography) interspersed with elongated, rich vowels. Since they don't adopt human names and refuse to let humans address them by their given titles unless they are true intimates, most simply ask that outsiders refer to them as "Krysid" which means "Fac-Born" in their language (it was more than a century after mankind's initial contact with chaparrans before the humans figured out why they all had the same name). With proven comrades, the chaparran may permit a human to address them by an adopted title which describes their accomplishments or role in society. Under no circumstances will any human, even the closest of friends, be allowed to use a shortened form of their true name.

*Truename Examples:* Marakenassa, Jassakerak, Brassekonnas

*Title Examples:* Darawren ("Earth-seer"), Kitarri ("Black Bow"), Merawrak ("Swift Birdcatcher"), Nathash ("Red-Bellied Salmon")

## CHAPARRAN SPECIES ABILITIES

**Agoraphobia:** You are uncomfortable in open spaces. You suffer a -2 penalty to all trait rolls when not in close quarters.

**Brachiate:** You ignore difficult ground in woodlands or similar terrain.

**Forestsight:** You have low-light vision and +2 to Notice rolls related to hearing.

**Surprisingly Resilient:** You can take more of a beating than your appearance would suggest. You begin with a d6 in your Vigor attribute instead of a d4.

**Weald Walk:** You are trained to disappear into the trees and reappear elsewhere when your foe is not looking. You start with the Stealth skill at a d6, and running while using stealth does not inflict penalties to your roll.

**Xenophobic:** You have -2 Charisma outside your own species due to centuries of suspicion of outsiders.

**Average Height:** 5'8" – 6'3"

**Average Weight:** 80-120 lbs.

**Average Starting Age:** 100 years

**Estimated Life Expectancy:** 3,000 years

**Starting Language:** Chaparran

## NEW EDGES

### KITARRI

(Professional Edge)

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Shooting d10+, Chaparran trained by a kitarri-kansi master

The kitarri are the ultimate archers, trained in the ancient bow arts, armed with black bows and storied reputations that eclipse their names. You have a kansi name that describes your greatest achievement, and is known to all chaparrans. Additionally, you gain a kitarri black bow for free when you take this edge, and if you are openly carrying this bow, your Charisma increases by 2 when dealing with chaparrans who know you by your kansi name.

### KRYSALLIS

(Weird Edge, Supernatural)

**Requirements:** Novice, Spirit d8+ and either Chaparran or Arcane Background (Darawren)

Considered the perfect form of the chaparran species, the krysalis has become one with the natural world. You can make a Spirit roll to create a metaphysical connection between yourself and a number of wooden objects equal to half your Spirit. While this connection is forged, you can use all your movement for the round to physically merge all or part of your body with the target items or teleport to an item's position through any wooden surface.

### REKII

(Combat Edge)

**Requirements:** Novice, Smarts d6+, Chaparran

As long as your allies can see or hear you, they use your range from the target to determine range penalties for attacks instead of their own range. This benefit does not apply to targets beyond their weapon's long range. Additionally, if you are not surprised at the beginning of combat, none of your allies who can see or hear you are surprised either.

## WEAPONS

**Kitarri Black Bow:** Legend claims that the wood inside of a kitarri black bow is partly infused with the spirit of dead chaparran. It is commonly known that when a chaparran dies, the body is placed in the dirt without a coffin, along with a single acorn. The tree which grows requires neither light nor water. Chaparrans have a secret technique of persuading wood to naturally grow objects for them to use, including weapons.



MELEE WEAPONS	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	COST	NOTES				
Makana	Str+d6	7	150	AP I vs. rigid armor, Parry +I				
RANGED WEAPONS	RANGE	DAMAGE	ROF	COST	WEIGHT	SHOTS	MIN STR	NOTES
Kitarri Black Bow	30/60/120*	2d8*	2*	--	5	--	d6*	AP I*

\*When wielded by a character with the Kitarri edge. Otherwise, use the stats of the English longbow.

It was at some point where these two traditions merged, and these trees enchanted with the spirit of passed fae were asked to create great structures and items for the elite of chaparran society. The temples of Jibaro are thought to be such examples. Kitarri black bows are believed to be another, capable of adapting themselves to any chaparran (or other worthy spirit) wielding them. Black bows do not bond permanently to a user but they have been known to “play favorites”. Being a non-chaparran and gaining the benefits of a black bow is rare, but has been known to happen; however, chaparrans consider non-chaparrans wielding black bows to be a mortal insult against their people and will respond with lethal force to this affront.

**Makana:** Chaparrans do not like using metal weapons if they can avoid it. While they will use swords if they have to, most prefer the makana – a thin, sharp-edged club made of very dense wood, studded with stone, bone, or occasionally steel rivets at regular intervals along opposite sides of its length. The makana handles similarly to a short sword under normal usage, but can be shifted to act as a heavy club.

## CHAPARRAN ARCHETYPES

### DARAWREN

(Seasoned)

Many wizards across the world classify the Towers of Jibaro as the greatest collection of arcane magic, even compared to the repositories of Limshau and Laudenia. However, the knowledge locked inside Jibaro is accessible only to a select few, the elite spellcasters of Jibaro, the darawren. With only one wizard graduating each a year, Jibaro is considered one of the most prestigious and daunting learning experiences in arcane wizardry on the planet, more so than even Laudenia. Where Laudenia's limited enrollment stems from its prohibition of non-laudenians, a restriction the chaparrans do not share although non-chaparran students are very rare, Jibaro's small membership is due to a lengthy and unorthodox teaching model. Although still employing totems, the mandatory standard of all wizardry, Jibaro teaches an altered viewpoint of their purpose, being only a repository of words, and not the focus of magic. Jibaro instructs its students that magic rises from the Earth, not falls from the gate. The gate may be the ultimate source of magic in the world, but the chaparrans cite one observable fact—there's no magic in space. All creatures rise from the soil, and it follows logically that magic, too, derives from Earth. Magic would not exist without the Earth. The wizards of Jibaro are taught to channel Pleroma—the language of magic—through material components brought up from the Earth. This can

be as extravagant as jewels but often enough it only a handful of dirt or sand. A darawren often carries a pouch of soil when entering a dungeon or building.

**Species:** Chaparran

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Healing d8, Intimidation OR Persuasion d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d6, Knowledge (Nature) d6, Spell-casting d10, Stealth d6, Survival d6, +1 additional skill point.

**Charisma** +0 (-2 against non-chaparrans); **Pace** 6; **Parry** 2; **Toughness** 5

**Hindrances:** Echan\*, Pacifist (minor), one major, one minor

**Edges:** Arcane Background (Darawren)\*, New Power (x2)

**Totem:** Staff

**Power Points:** 13

**Powers:** Barrier, burrow, environmental protection, shape change, stun

## DAWNAMOAK KITARRI

(Seasoned)

Many of the tales about chaparrans describe them as phenomenal archers, able to send arrows clear over the horizon to strike a bull's-eye. They carry bows of inflexible wood only they can coax to bend. When a chaparran fires his bow, the arrow flies with enough strength to pass through trees or skulls. When images of these archers come to mind, people are thinking of the Dawnamoak kitarri, masters of the ancient martial art of kitarri-kansi and bearers of the black bow of their order. Kitarri are rarely known by their own names in greater chaparran society, but every one bears a 'kansi name' – a nom de guerre which describes their greatest accomplishment prior to being confirmed among the order. Every chaparran in Canam knows these names, and everything the archer does after becoming a kitarri is expected to at least equal if not surpass this mark. Most kitarri live in the nation pierced by the three tower trees but most chaparran villages across Canam can claim at least one member of the order. No chaparran would even think of wielding a black longbow fraudulently and a non-chaparran carrying a black kitarri bow is considered to have taken it from the original wielder's body, and is dealt with accordingly.

**Species:** Chaparran

**Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Tracking d8

**Charisma** +0 (-2 against non-chaparrans); **Pace** 6;





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**Parry 5; Toughness 5**

**Hindrances:** Arrogant, Echan\*, two minor

**Edges:** Alertness, Kitarri\*, Marksman, Trademark Weapon (black bow)

## LAURAMA SOMBRA

(Novice)

The forest of Laurama is the scene of the most mutually dedicated campaign of ethnic cleansing in Canam, between the chaparrans who call the forest home and the reavers of Baruch Malkut who come to kill and enslave them. The Laurama fac learn to transform their hatred of the invaders into dark strength, and prefer to kill up close, dragging their victims into the shadows of the trees before reappearing to kill again, allowing their enemies' fear to do the work for them. They paint their faces and bodies in pale skeletal patterns that are hid-

den in shadow but glow when a shaft of sunlight is allowed to touch them, in mockery of the golden skull-masks of Darius Konig's inner retinue. The Malkut slavers call these black-avised fac "da Sombra" ('shadows'), and tread more carefully in their known haunts.

**Species:** Chaparran

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Throwing d4, +1 additional skill point.

**Charisma** +0 (-2 against non-chaparrans); **Pace** 6; **Parry** 6; **Toughness** 5

**Hindrances:** Echan\*, Vengeful (major), two minor

**Edges:** Rekii\*, Quick





## DAMASKAN

*I sidestepped the bravo easily and delivered a precise chop to the back of his neck. He went down without a sound. The remaining thugs regrouped, hefting their tet-subo nervously. One came for me, but I ducked and threw myself to the side, one finger catching ahold of the shelf on the wall beside me. Twisting in mid-air, I scuttled backwards up the shelf, noting as I did so that I had been remiss in dusting this section of the stacks and reminding myself to attend to it once I had dealt with these hooligans. Drawing two shuriken from an inside pocket of my leather coat, I removed two of the remaining combatants with accurate strikes to the hamstrings, then drew my blades and looked down at the last one. His downed companions were moaning most annoyingly.*

*"Did you not read the notice?" I asked the band of ruffians. "It plainly says 'silence in the library.'"*

Damaskans are the most common, most often seen, and most widely circulated fae in the world. Though the people of both the Lauropan empire of Damaska and the kingdom of Limshau in Canam are considered the same species, damaskans from Limshau often refer to themselves as 'Limshau fae' to emphasize their cultural distinctions. Damaskans are also one of the few fae species to permit the term 'elf' to be applied to them, often using it themselves. Of all fae, damaskans are the most numerous with the largest kingdoms. They have the most artisans, the most diplomats, the most historians, and the most architects. Their wizards all employ the book as their totem, which makes them hard to distinguish from others since nearly all damaskans (at least in Limshau) carry books through their day-to-day activities.

Damaskans migrated across the globe very quickly. Even though Damaska remains the largest fae empire, dozens of others appeared in a matter of decades. The Damaskan and Limshau empires remain loyal to each other, though not often in contact.

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Each individual damaskan possesses an encyclopedic knowledge on a subject defined by their individual tastes. Where those from Damaska prefer internal recall for this information, citizens of Limshau insist on writing all of it down. Until the damaskans appeared, fae seldom recorded anything. Their history was marred with inaccuracies, legends claimed as fact, or facts discredited as myth. This was part of the reason why fae history from the time of Terros is so vague and sporadic. Alas, damaskans could bring nothing with them to the new world and had to reconstruct their past from memory – and although their memories are good, they are not eidetic. One distinction damaskans are clear to make is that they never volunteer their own opinion in their papers or journals, nor clog the books with judgment, sentiment, or meaningless diatribe. Where humans believe any individual can stand on a box and

preach prose worthy of print, damaskans remain quiet, recording only objective events.

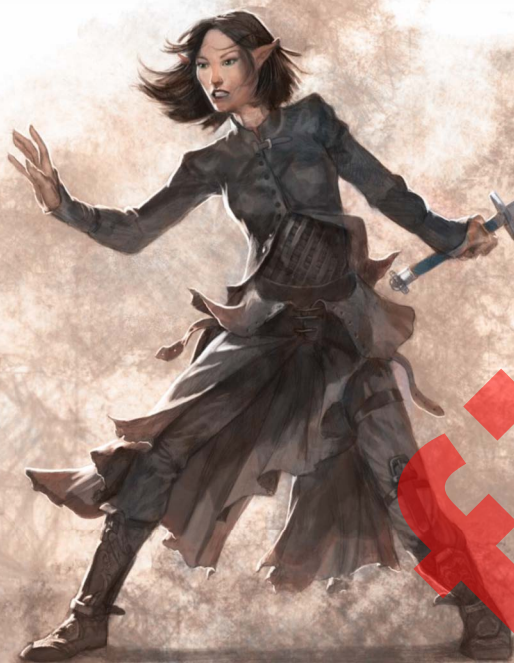
**Physical Qualities:** A damaskan's eyes are slightly slanted and have epicanthic folds similar to humans of Asian descent. Their ears taper straight out the sides of the skull to a very sharp point and have a tendency to flutter and vibrate slightly depending on mood. They generally have darker hair tones and seldom grow it beyond shoulder length. Their skin ranges from light tan to olive color with eyes of brown and grey. When reaching adulthood, damaskans still resemble human young adults barely out of puberty (17-19 in human years). Even at their most venerable age, damaskans don't often look a day past 30 and none look older than 40 when they finally shuffle on. Because of a peculiarity of the damaskan brain, they are able to employ both lobes simultaneously, and their analytical and creative centers are diffuse rather than localized. This makes them functionally ambidextrous, as well as enabling them to work on one project while thinking about another. Damaskans frequently wear new clothes, or at least pressed and clean. They abhor getting dirty. They also rarely pierce their skin or adorn their bodies with tattoos, although this has little to do with any philosophy other than just not seeing the point.

**Playing a Damaskan:** Damaskans are clearly the best species to play because they are built on the strengths of being a fae without the arrogance and xenophobia of other peoples like the laudenians and chaparrans. They are the easiest to get along with, are possessed of a wide range of talents suited for almost any class, and have a virtuous path ingrained in their soul—the pursuit of knowledge. What path could be more honorable? They are civilized, numerous, and are the least stigmatized of all the fae species.

A player creating a damaskan should be aware of their timid nature. Damaskans are often reserved, seldom speaking out of turn, but can be prone to sudden burst of emotion when finally pushed. Some might call them shy, often staying quiet during conversations, but really they merely prefer to speak only when having something useful to say. Until then, they keep back and avoid making their presence intrusive. This makes them appear distant, detached, and even cold. They are not actually emotionless, but prefer not to be demonstrative except in private or when not on duty. When dedicated to a task, they think of little else and speak only when necessary. However, get them started on raw knowledge or ask them to recite some nugget of information and they talk like uncorking a champagne bottle.

They believe in discipline and order and find disorganization of any kind unsettling, and deliberate falsehood sets their teeth on edge (this is not to say that there are no damaskan criminals, but even these tend to rely on verbal misdirection rather than outright lies). Dam-





askans seldom understand fear and often engage in fights they know they cannot win to save the life of another. They also place an unnatural level of security on the written word, putting themselves in harm's way to protect a book; even the less scholarly-inclined from Damaska find this urge nearly unavoidable.

Due to the shape of their ears, damaskans avoid wearing helmets whenever possible, and because of their slight builds favor lighter armor over heavy plate. Limshau fae prefer light, form-fitting leather armor with a generally Asian cut, and their preferred weapons are similarly of oriental styling; all damaskans favor polearms or light weapons that can be dual-wielded whenever possible.

Damaskans maintain a deep pride in whichever beliefs they profess and are known to defend their convictions to the death, but at the same time they do not consider it their place to criticize another person's beliefs. Due to their large numbers, damaskans follow several belief systems. The largest percentage worship the dragon god, Amethyst, believing his soul exists beyond the gate. Others worship the fae god Berufu, while others follow the earth god Oaken. A smaller number have even embraced a few human faiths. But regardless of their proclivities, a truly pious damaskan is a rarity: less than 10% of damaskans worldwide endorse any religious belief, and fewer still are inclined to proselytize what faith they do have.

For most, the pursuit of knowledge takes the place of other spiritual concerns. Damaskans welcome adventure for the sheer experience of it, and often engage on what has been sometimes termed a 'scholarly pilgrimage' to discover new learning. Some also embark on quests for their people. A common sight in open echa, damaskans are ever expanding and rely on the adventuring spirit of their people to establish a growing civilization. They react to threats to knowledge in much the same way that zealots react when their beliefs are challenged: threatening to put flame to parchment is the surest way to enrage such fae.

**Names:** Unfortunately, while phonetically pleasing to the ear, the damaskan language can somewhat difficult for those unfamiliar with it to get their tongues around. Damaskans often adopt a human-sounding name when in public: their contact with humans has been so extensive over the centuries that modern damaskan parents generally give this name alongside the traditional one at birth, even in all-fae communities. Some damaskan families, especially in Limshau, have adopted their chosen human name as their true name, nearly forgetting their heritage. Not just due to integration, many believe a new world requires a clean slate, and a new family name is a good place to start. Other fae frequently deplore this practice and a few damaskans without native names have been denied entry in fae-only communities on this basis.







Most damaskans keep their fae names if they have them, privately known only by loved ones and family. Even in situations where the damaskans use their family name, they still regularly select a human given name because the damaskan language contains many phonemes and tonal variances that sound similar to humans, and consequently their native names can be difficult to pronounce accurately. Their chosen human names are usually simple, with little cultural identification, and are often picked to reflect an attribute of the individual. Family names are very culturally specific and sometimes reflect an attribute of the family or important individuals within it. Damaskan names are not gender-specific. While both Limshau and Damaska place the given name before the family name, a damaskan will usually adopt the name order of whatever community they are currently in (so a damaskan visiting Fargon or Genai will give their family name first).

**Examples:** Ravenar Limshau III is his real name, but his sister's husband elected to adopt the human title "Strongbow" to replace their damaskan family name of

Kaixiu'Ooria. Centuries later, few in that family ever use that title. Their fourth child, a daughter was given the damaskan name Reivune, which eventually turned into Raven, which she elected as her open name, as well.

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

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

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

## DAMASKAN SPECIES ABILITIES

**Ambidexterity:** You suffer no multi-action penalty for performing a non-movement action with each hand (this also conveys the benefit of the Ambidextrous edge).

**Encyclopedic Knowledge:** You have a near-perfect memory for facts. You begin with a d6 in your Smarts attribute instead of a d4.



**Fearless:** Concern for your own safety rarely factors into your decisions, especially when a friend is in danger or there is a new fact to be learned. You gain +2 to Spirit rolls against fear, but you also gain either the Curious or Loyal hindrance for no points.

**Gravity Focus:** Your climbing and maneuvering skills are legendary, almost supernatural. You begin with a d6 in the Climbing skill, and you do not suffer any penalties for poor handholds. Additionally, you can spend a Benny to gain the Wall Walker ability for ten minutes.

**Polyglot:** You know many languages and can pick up the rudiments of one in the course of a single conversation. Your Smarts die is treated as one size larger for purposes of determining how many languages you know (using the Multiple Languages campaign option), and you can make a Smarts roll (at its normal die size) to be able to communicate on a rudimentary level with someone whose language you do not know.

**Tactless:** You have -2 Charisma due to your bluntness and compulsive honesty. Against other fae, this is reduced to -1.

**Average Height:** 4'8" – 5'7"

**Average Weight:** 70-100 lbs.

**Average Starting Age:** 100 years

**Estimated Life Expectancy:** 1,500 years

**Starting Languages:** Damaskan, English (Common and Englo-Lingo), one other

## NEW EDGES

### BIFOCAL BRAIN

(Background Edge)

**Requirement:** Damaskan

You do not suffer a multi-action penalty for performing a purely mental action in addition to one other action (physical or mental). If you are a spellcaster, you cannot cast two spells at once (since you only have one mouth to speak the Pleroma words), but you can maintain one spell for free before you start suffering penalties to your arcane skill rolls.

### CARTOON PHYSICS

(Weird Edge)

**Requirements:** Climbing d8+, Damaskan

Whenever you ace on a Climbing roll, you gain the Wall Walking ability for one minute.

### ELVEN MEMORY

(Background Edge)

**Requirements:** Smarts d8+, Damaskan

You never forget anything you have ever learned, however inconsequential. You never suffer an unfamiliarity penalty when making common knowledge rolls, or for

using a Knowledge skill outside of your normal area of expertise. If you are ever called upon to make an unskilled Knowledge skill roll that is not common knowledge, you use your Smarts die for the roll instead of a d4.

## DAMASKAN ARCHETYPES

### KOANA DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

(Seasoned)

Despite their inherent mental edge, damaskans are not all that uniquely gifted at magic. What they are good at is patient study and research. Human wizards of the Koana school tend to be more impatient (by fae standards) and only occasionally pursue the colleges' advanced degrees, but for a damaskan (for whom the eleven-year undergraduate period is barely significant), there is little reason not to. While necessarily a specialist, A doctoral candidate usually has a few years of fieldwork under her belt in addition to her schooling, and with typical damaskan fixation, can be a formidable opponent to anyone and anything who gets in the way of her research.

**Species:** Damaskan

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Climbing d6, Investigation d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Persuasion d6, Spellcasting d10, +3 additional skill points.

**Charisma** -2; **Pace** 6; **Parry** 2; **Toughness** 5

**Hindrances:** Curious, Echan\*, one major, two minor

**Edges:** Arcane Background (Koana Scholar)\*,

New Power (x3), Wizard

**Totem:** Book

**Power Points:** 10

**Powers:** *Armor, bolt, detect arcana, dispel, elemental manipulation, healing, slumber, telekinesis*

### LIMSHAU CUSTODIAN

(Novice)

Behind the white walls of Limshau, elite guardians patrol the stacks, defending knowledge and people against anyone wishing to destroy such riches. Because of the tight confines of narrow city streets and alleys, this elite force eventually developed a discipline revolving around fast movement and quick, decisive strikes at critical enemy weaknesses. This martial art is known as gorna sersannis, or 'Lotus Blade'. Custodians wear form-fitting, flowing leather coats (white inside the walls, black outside) and dual-wield light-weight weapons such as the katana and wakizashi, or finessable polearms such as the naginata. A custodian's priorities are on the freedoms of all. Free speech and the written word are both worthy causes for a custodian to die for.

**Species:** Damaskan

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6







**48** **Skills:** Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Investigation d6, Knowledge (any subject) d8, Notice d6, Stealth d4, Streetwise d6, Throwing d6

**Charisma** -2; **Pace** 6; **Parry** 6; **Toughness** 5

**Hindrances:** Book Lover\*, Echan\*, Vow (minor: defend knowledge), one minor

**Edges:** Custodian\*

**Special Equipment:** Limshau kawabari armor.

## ROOFRUNNER

(Novice)

Damaskans are city-dwellers by preference, and even outside of their own nations, they have a fairly direct approach to navigating in cities: the best route to any place is a straight line, with the streets only being one possible option. Their skill in this regard makes them popular as messengers, and many city elves make a reasonable living running letters, dispatches and packages

from one end of a city to another. Of course, since occasionally other people disapprove of their roofs and gardens being used as a thoroughfare, roofrunners learn to be stealthy and circumspect, skills which also serve them in good stead if they fall into a more unsavory line of work.

**Species:** Damaskan

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Knowledge (Area Knowledge: home city) d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6, Throwing d4, +3 additional skill points.

**Charisma** -2; **Pace** 8; **Parry** 5; **Toughness** 6

**Hindrances:** Curious, Echan\*, Overconfident, two minor

**Edges:** Fleet-footed, Quick



## GIMFEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

and inventors, though nearly always refining existing accomplishments rather than pioneering new ones. Where laudenians pioneered totem magic and narros the forging of magical items, gimfen took pride in alchemy, stumbling into potion brewing soon after. What they lack are spell casters – not because they are incapable, but because for most the principles of magic simply aren't interesting (and get in the way of the study of mechanism). Gimfen are never content simply to observe the world, but believe it can always be improved. Even the most sedentary pursue constructive hobbies such as basic carpentry and metalwork, while others found a happy medium with minor gadgets and tools. Many a gimfen's home is adorned with never-used inventions.

Despite lacking the spark of genius necessary for true innovation, gimfen knew one thing mankind didn't: how to insulate technology from magic. Although not perfect by any means, this clumsy procedure could help certain machinery operate without the constant fear of disruption. The gimfen combined what they discovered with what they already knew and within a century the landscape of gimfen communities changed. Where once there were tiny shops and garages surrounded by farmlands, now the villages were dominated by grind towers—oddities of mutated technology. They hold few people, designed primarily for defense, sound baffling, and temperature maintenance for underground factories. Gnimfall, the largest collection of towers, is not an open-air city, but hundreds of levels stretching more than a mile underground. The levels are a mixed lot of housing, factories, and processing plants so jumbled and seemingly disorganized that tourists often get lost without a guide. Grind towers now dot the globe, marking the presence of gimfen communities. Not all have embraced the way of technology, preferring to keep a balance between nature and machine. Gimfen communities like Salvabrooke are laid back, agrarian places, possessing little technology beyond that known in the immediately pre-industrial era of humanity's lost history.

**Physical Qualities:** Gimfen are the shortest of the major faekind. They feature thin, lightly slanted eyes of bright green and blue tones. Their hair is often vibrantly colored and their ears taper straight back, with the tips sometimes as much as an inch from the back of their head. Their skin is often lightly colored, and unlike other fae, they are known to freckle. Because of their quickness to adopt other cultures, anything goes when it comes to their attire and whatever else they do to their bodies. Gimfen enjoy their sense of humor as well as a desire to possess shiny objects. Their connection with nature has largely fallen by the wayside in favor of the new knowledge from man and their obsessive fascination with human machinery.

Gimfen look like pubescent youths through the majority of their lives. This makes many humans uncomfortable when dealing with gimfen adults. They only break

