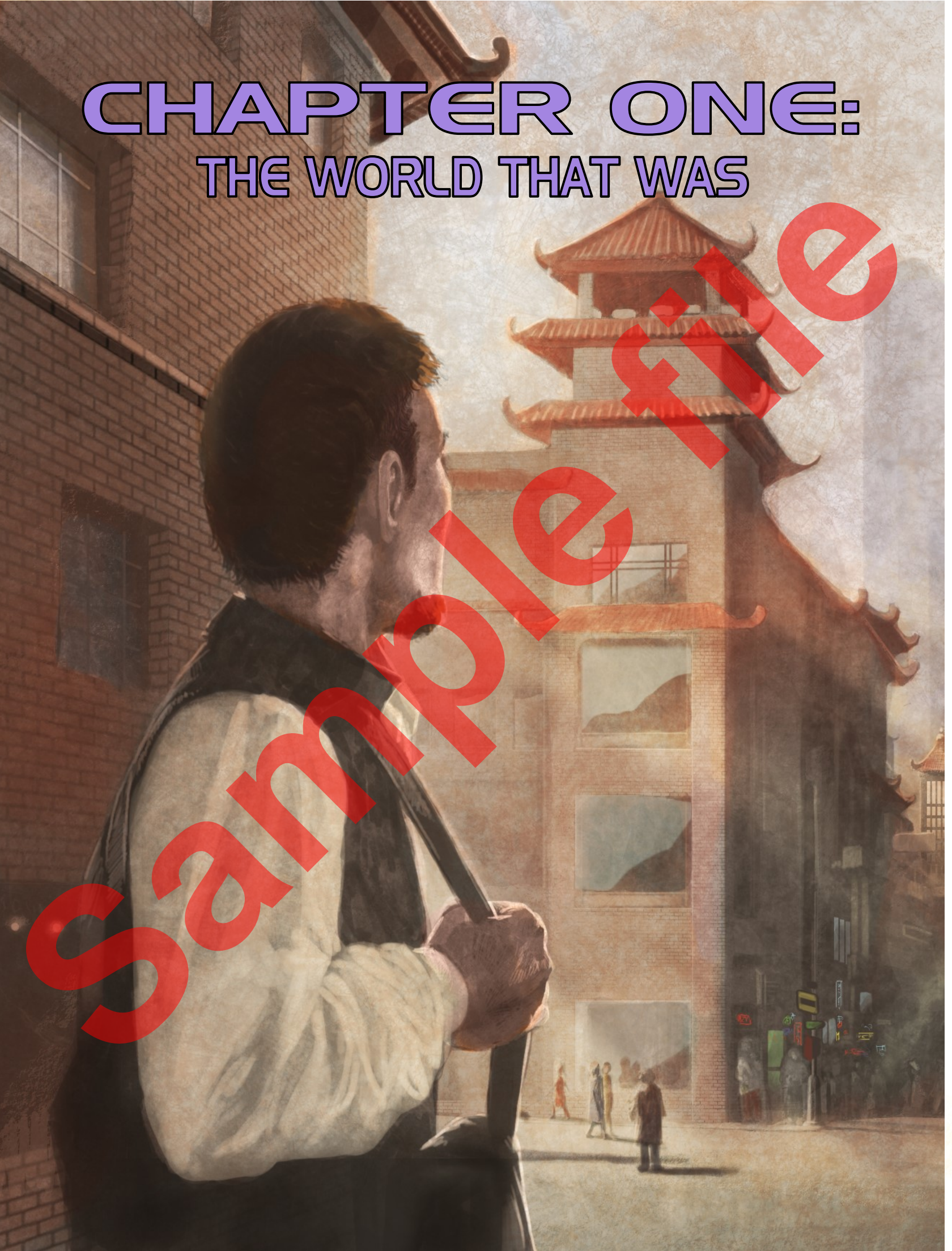





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CHAPTER ONE: THE WORLD THAT WAS





Being a brief record of the travels of Glynn Glengarrie, Esq. across the lands of Canam, as compiled and edited by Mssrs. Chris Dias and Christopher P. Stilson...

Some people travel to see things. Personally, I am much more interested in meeting people.

Twelve days ago, the caravan with which I had most lately booked passage came across a lone human woman traveling on foot along the Continental Cross. She was thickly bedecked in coarse traveler's garb, and carried only a wooden bough as large as my fist as both an aid to walking and defense. Our caravan-master, a kindly sort, halted and asked if she wished to ease her journey with us. The woman shook her head and trudged onward, though the rains were coming on ahead as we passed her by. She caught up with us later that night, and this time gladly took shelter from the storm beneath our canvas. A large woman even by biggun standards, her size and visage dissuaded most of our fellow pilgrims from conversation, so in the interests of good humor I endeavored to strike up her acquaintance.

"Gutag, que d'tu bedo?" I began. She looked up. Her eyes were lidded under the heavy red linen hood.

"Non sprek'n den Lingo," she said curtly. I could not for the life of me place her accent, for all that I am familiar with every tongue in this great land of ours.

I shrugged and tried again in Angelish. "Nihowa, howja doin, kimi-san?"

"No speeksu da Common, no Shinigo neetha."

"Ken yu da Kannos-tok?"

"Ken not."

"Be tu speaken ta Onespeak?"

"Não."

"Hal tatakulem Semiya?"

"Leh."

"My, what a lot of languages you can say you don't speak," I said to myself in damaskan. My interlocutor cocked her head to one side.

"Some the damaskan, I know," she said in broken sentences, as thickly accented as her other utterances but more obvious in my preferred tongue.

"Well, there's a mercy at least," I said, passing over my hip flask. She looked at it suspiciously. "You a Muslim?" I asked. "It's not made from grapes, if that matters—I've never really understood that part." She shook her head, and took a pull of the mead, wiping her mouth with a grimace.

"No good," she said in a flat tone.

"Agreed," I laughed. "But it keeps the cold out. Where are you from, then?"

"Mossokev. Over sea. Past elfenland."

My eyes widened. "Not from Canam then? Now there's a wonder. I've wandered all over this land and I think I can count the number of Lauropans I've met on the fingers of one hand." I proffered said appendage. "Glynn Glengarrie of Gnimfall's the name. I'm a photographer. You?"

She took my delicate fingers in her large paw tentatively. "Sachenka. I look for something, is lost."

"Well, Sachenka of Mossokev," I said warmly, taking a long swig of the mead. "We are fortuitously met. I happen to be very good at finding lost things. Not to mention people."

* * *

There are two worlds: there is the world as it is, and the world as we assume it to be. These worlds never entirely match, no matter how realistic or down-to-earth the observer – in fact, such an individual is sometimes at a disadvantage, for the world is full of wonders that defy the rational mind's ability to classify. The world I am about to describe is about the conflict between these two worlds: the efforts of some to bring them together, and the efforts of others to drive them further apart, or even to destroy one or both.

This travelogue details the lands of Canam, introduced briefly to the discerning reader in the *Amethyst: Untamed Player's Guide*, and provides all the information a game master needs to populate those lands with dark plots and vicious monsters for mighty heroes to overcome... or not, as the case may be. The world has become wild and dangerous, and unlike in stories, there is no guarantee of a happily ever after.

In addition to this book, an *Amethyst* GM requires a copy of the *Player's Guide* and the *Savage Worlds* core rulebook.

RUMORS AND LIES

Glynn Glengarrie at your service, minna-san. As you progress through this volume, you will frequently espy these convenient sidebars. Here I have collected an assortment of sundry information gathered on my travels throughout Canam, the veracity of which I have not endeavored to confirm. Take it at face value at your peril, but it has been my experience that there is usually a grain of truth to be had in even the tallest tale. If nothing else, they may serve as inspiration for other raconteurs.

THE CHANGING EARTH

World history is what the humans would call a 'crapshoot' at the best of times, all the more so when it traverses several geological eras. Much of what really happened is forgotten, or becomes distorted by legend or propaganda. Even the fae, disposed as we are to uttering only the untarnished, unvarnished truth, are not immune to the distortions of time. What follows is merely the best consensus anyone can construct from the half-remembrances of the eldest fae and dragons.

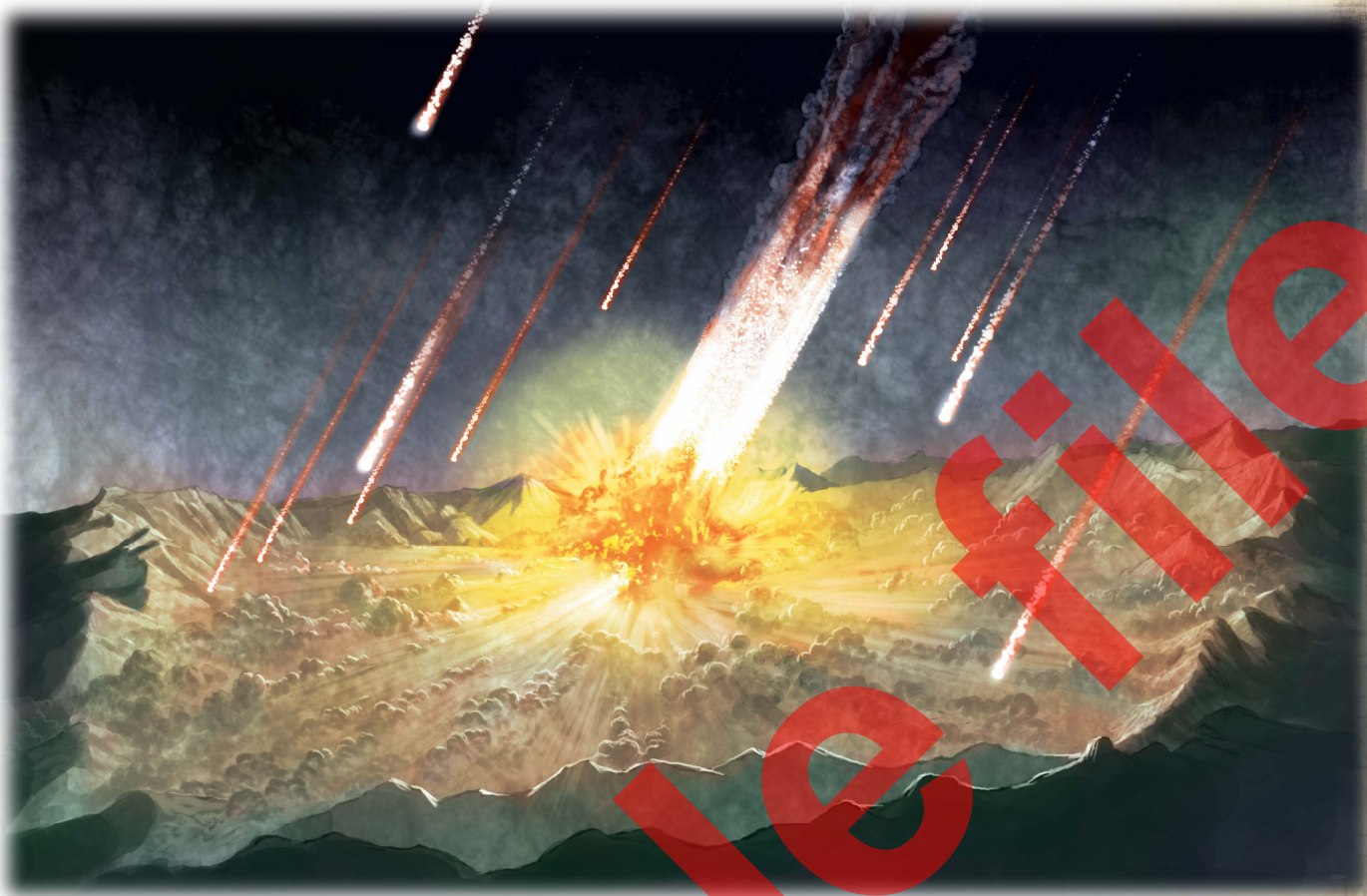
The world once went by the name Terros, dating from the beginning of Amethyst's emergence (or landfall, depending on the legend) to the falling of the First Hammer, when the planet fell back under control of nature. In geological terms this span of time was only an epoch of the Cretaceous period, lasting only a few million years and explaining the relatively 'normal' development, by scientific standards, of reptilian and mammalian life in fossil records throughout ancient history. Further, since fae developed their culture rather slowly, they never reached a point of creating materials capable of surviving 65 million years of erosion and decay. Any

other evidence disappeared when magic dissipated. Even the bodies of these new creatures fell to dust with the closing of the gates, another odd feature of those birthed by magic. After only a few years, every remnant of what magic created was gone. Everything else escaped into the gate, into a deep slumber, hoping for a chance to return.

Man always knew a major bolide impact would be an extinction level event, but he hoped it would not repeat until his technology reached a level to detect and defend himself. The First Hammer, as it was later known, struck what was then known as the Yucatán Peninsula at the exact moment of Amethyst's death and created the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event, wiping out many of the non-avian dinosaurs and planktonic organisms on the planet. It was followed by a massive environmental shift resulting in further losses over the next few thousand years. The planet never fully recovered and the impact, along with massive volcanic activity, shifted the entire ecosystem. It allowed other lifeforms to prosper and permitted natural selection to evolve to mankind. The collision, environmental aftereffects, and simply time itself, removed any surviving evidence of the old world's existence. Though some bizarre artifacts were encountered pointing to the possibility of a hidden history of the world, these discoveries were dismissed as aberrations or hoaxes.

The second collision, now dubbed the Second Hammer, occurred with apparently so little warning as to not warrant a single announcement. The few surviving accounts never reported the discovery or the anticipation of the impact. Modern views believe the resident population knew nothing of the collision until it masked the sun and shook the entire planet. The bolide struck a region of land once called Eastern Siberia. By seemingly pure coincidence, this impact occurred exactly at the location of the buried Ixindar gate. Though the rock coffin sealing the tear inside could never be broken by mankind's hand given his then-current level of technology, a two-mile asteroid easily succeeded. Fragments of the absolute rock scattered across the globe and Ixindar's wave of corruption flowed out like a broken dam. Coupled with Attricana's reopening, either shortly before or shortly thereafter, the world would never be the same.

The return of Attricana caused severe changes in the physical landscape of the Earth. Several large volcanic eruptions rocked the planet. Physical landforms became more extreme: mountain ranges rose higher, lakes grew deeper and vaster, disappearing glaciers replenished themselves, rivers burst their banks and expanded to many times their former size, while others dried to dust. Cliffs rose higher while valleys sank deeper. Fossil fuel deposits shifted: some sank to the crushing depths while others exploded upon the surface. According to *The Final Word of Echan Influence on Geochronology*, by Marikarma, magic disturbed the calm status of the



globe by increasing the rate of seafloor spreading. For nearly a century, the amplified geologic turmoil destroyed every last fragment of mankind's presence. Harsh winds washed across skies. Earthquakes ripped the ground apart. Although the volcanoes and earthquakes eventually subsided, they never reached a level of calm like mankind was blessed with in the thousands of years prior to the Hammer's fall.

BURIED TREASURE

*They say that all of Earth was scoured clean by At-
tricana, but if that were true, how could there be a
copy of William Shakespeare's first folio in the
Limshau archives, or old cinematographs squirreled
away deep in Gnimfall's towers on well-preserved
Beta tapes? Who built the tower that juts from be-
neath the waters of Lake Nioba, or the bottomless
pits of Arx-Cis from which no explorer has ever re-
turned? Much of the legacy of Earth's recent past
lives on beneath the soil – decayed and forgotten,
perhaps, but not lost or destroyed.*

The wave of magic sweeping the globe altered nearly everything. When the enchantment saturated the world's every molecule, the planet convulsed and shuddered. The first century saw great loss of life, especially with man, already weathered and battered from the previous age. No one is sure how many humans survived the pre-gate turmoil, but many more lost their lives to the ravaging Earth. More fell victim to monsters choosing them as prey. Finally, after a century, the planet fell

back asleep. The earthquakes stopped. The winds died down. Nature swallowed up nearly every machine and nearly every building. Even the scars left by industry were overrun by plants and moving dirt.

THE NEW WORLD

Nothing lasts forever – not even an apocalypse. Out of the rising mountains came a short, sturdy people obsessed with perfection. Out of the deepening forests came a tall, dark, stealthy folk attuned to the natural world and deeply suspicious of outsiders. From the plains rose a tribe of friendly but distant knowledge-seekers and city-builders. From beneath the hills emerged a small, childlike people with a fascination for the scraps of industry that survived the cataclysm. Out of the sky sometimes descended tall, almost alien beings with a penchant for magic and a disdainful attitude toward all things of the ground. From across the ocean came a beautiful but perilous people whose eyes and teeth gleamed when they became angry or aroused. From deep to the south came blind warriors and from far to the north came huge, hulking bears with language and weapons, and out of whatever holes they had crawled into, humans emerged again.

Civilization was not as slow to rebuild as one might think: within the first quarter-century after the Hammer, human groups had begun to band together again, most of them seeking to rebuild what remained of the world they knew. Only a few succeeded – the rest slowly began to encounter the strange beings that were





emerging to a world just as unfamiliar to them. But these were better equipped for the new world than their human counterparts – they brought with them knowledge of magic, and of civilizations that had not become totally dependent on machines to function. Some of the humans gave up their quest to reclaim the earth as it was and embraced magic themselves, becoming as much creatures of fantasy as the mysterious beings that taught them the art. And so it was that whether due to mingling between the old peoples and the new, or simple expediency and survival, small nomadic groups settled down and began to form villages, then towns, then cities, then nations.

PROGRESS ENDURES

Our modern world may superficially resemble the fanciful constructions of old humanity's fictionalists, but medieval it most assuredly is not. The common knowledge earned throughout human history dealing with building construction, agriculture, medication, and sanitation has survived. Even though anyone with advanced knowledge to better a technological society was allowed entry into bastions, many people outside still possessed the general knowledge developed centuries before nuclear power, computers, and antibiotics. In addition, many on the outside soon progressed on their own, re-discovering advances their protected brothers and sisters embraced years earlier. A few possessing this knowledge used it as currency to earn themselves entry into bastions. Others realized this knowledge, primitive by the standards of advanced cities, begot more power and influence on the outside.

Of course, any technical knowledge past about the

point when electricity comes into play is rendered more or less useless by surrounding magic, preventing progress and forcing immigration for those wishing to pursue this path. Still, every bastion and even the free cities have sprawling villages outside their walls of people either trying to get in or pandering to those entering or leaving. Outside, the world of fantasy still shares some striking similarities with the world of the past.

BASTIONS

After the massive birth pains of Attricana's opening passed, the aura of enchantment finally subsided to a less chaotic level. Something passing for normality began to reassert itself. With what was left of humanity banding together, those still possessing technology also possessed the influence that comes with it. However, most of these initial communities could not expand that influence relying only on malfunctioning machines, and the majority eventually turned to magic, forgetting their heritage and the bulk of thousands of years of technological development. A few, however, grew fast and large enough to maintain their technological footprint. These surviving cities discovered caches or ruins from Earth's past intact enough to catapult the community to prosperity. The bastion of Sierra Madre discovered a colossal cavern and easily accessible thermal power; with Mann, an entire city pre-built by unknown hands was the catalyst to develop. Of course, the positioning of some bastions defies explanation: nobody, not even its current residents, knows what possessed the founders of Selkirk to build their society inside a mountain within one of the most magically active regions on Earth.

Like a weather map displaying topical zones and low and high pressure isobars, Earth displays regions of heavy and light magical saturation. Low disruption zones allow technology to function with virtually no side effects, although the EDF is always present and certain problems never cease. The more a bastion expands, the larger these dead zones grow. Most bastions have placed their highest technology or R&D facilities as close to the center of their cities as possible, to keep the EDF's effects on them to a minimum. If a bastion was to collapse (which has been known to happen), the background magical saturation would reassert itself very shortly after; and if the collapse was due to an invading enchanted force, the reversion could be instantaneous. Even a single echan in a bastion can cause havoc, if their inherent disruption field shorts out part of a power grid or disrupts a communications line. Some bastions are more concerned about this effect than others: in York, a main road through the bastion allows echans to walk freely to the docks, mingling peacefully with techans (though it is advised they don't linger); in Angel, an entire section of the city was partitioned for the residential echans that helped build the first walls of the bastion; but in other bastions like Selkirk, Sierra Madre, and Mann, echans are strictly forbidden. For some, the prohibition is strictly to protect technology, but some communities have migrated towards bigotry with an unfortunate scientific justification.

Magic shrouds the Earth, blocking both low and high frequency waves. This suppresses cosmic radiation but also suppresses radio signals, preventing bastions from communicating. The rapid expansion of gas and plasma is slowed, preventing explosives from detonating or even combustion engines from running. While theoretically possible to communicate by laser with a satellite outside of the EDF's influence, no individual bastion has the resources to place such an object in orbit or the knowledge to locate any that might still be in operation. Therefore, like human nations of ancient Earth, bastions progressed completely independently from each other, altering their beliefs, their technological profile, and even their language. Even after messengers finally revealed these bastions were not alone in the world, regular communication was still unfeasible. As long as

ACROSS THE SEAS

Few traverse the great Okeanos to visit the lands of Lauropa. The seas are stormy at the best of times, great teeth of ice hinder passage, and I jest not, sea monsters capable of swallowing a galleon whole lurk in the depths. But some of those who have made the crossing speak of bastions – there are bastions elsewhere in the world, of course – that have no fear of magic as our home-grown ones do. Their machines allegedly work, not in concert with magic, but certainly alongside it with few or no ill effects. As a gimfen myself, a creature of both magic and machinery, I see no particular contradiction in this, but if such a place truly exists, it possesses a formidable power that could change the course of all life on this planet.

Attricana remains open, there is no way for the techans' way of life to escape their cities.

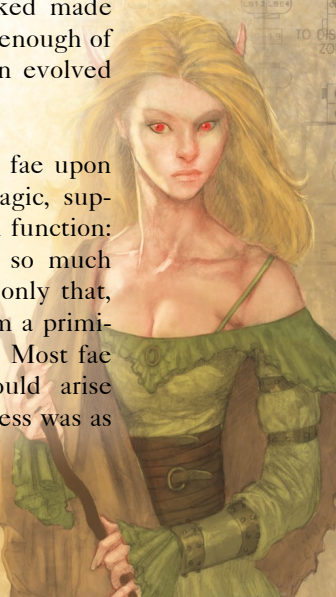
ALIEN SIMILARITY

One of the greatest examples of echalogical influence—the first after the shock of how human-like we fae appeared—occurred soon after the first civilized meeting. It had been widely accepted that Angel was the first city to have contact with the echan world, which makes eminent sense given the age of the bastion. Despite the vagueness of history, there was one known positive initial encounter between the elders of Genai and Ravenar Limshau III when he and his loyal retinue came before the fledgling walls. The human elders were modern and understanding, not obtuse and arrogant about tradition. Ravenar's group was open and thoughtful, despite the language barrier that Ravenar was quick to defeat with his astonishing skill. The Genai hosts opted for vegetarian food, believing it to be the most amicable, and not knowing the damaskans' traditions, presented an assorted selection of cutlery to use. How shocking it must have been when Ravenar Limshau chose the chopsticks without hesitation and handled them with a skill reserved for his mirrors across the table. Many said later the relationship that blossomed between humans and damaskans began in that room. Was he reading their minds? Had he been taught beforehand? No: all damaskans had always used them, as did chaparrans (though theirs were always formed out of living wood), while narros and tenenbri had always used utensils similar to those of the ancient Greeks. In the same way, the narros culture had always borne a surprising resemblance to that of the human civilizations of old Asia, and the more agrarian culture of my people to the agricultural societies of the old British Isles. Even the cleverest scholars were at a loss to explain such similarity between peoples separated by millions of years.

ECHALOGICAL INFLUENCE & CORPUS CONTINUITY

Neither the fae nor dragons questioned their origins or the purpose of life. If Amethyst knew, as many believed he did, he never shared such knowledge, lest he wish someone to share his withdrawn disposition. Even after Mengus arrived, the world and how it worked made perfect sense. For better or worse, they knew enough of the universe to be complacent, something an evolved species like man would never settle with.

The very appearance of man confused many fae upon their return. We discovered that without magic, suppressed rules of nature resumed their original function: species adapt to their environment and do so much slower and less drastically than before. Not only that, but this intelligent new creature evolved from a primitive form – a social animal with bestial ways. Most fae could not understand how intelligence could arise through evolution: our experience of the process was as





12 a spontaneous degradation rather than a steady improvement. Added to that, these creatures looked nearly identical to us on the outside, and layered throughout their history, this species had generated a vast literary canon professing the existence of fabled creatures as such that roamed the world in a time when their own ancestors had been nothing but tiny shrew-like creatures. Mankind encountered their own mystery, barely surviving the holocaust of the Second Hammer only to discover a sudden population appearing literally from nowhere. Not only that, but these 'newcomers' coincidentally resembled creatures from fiction and legends dating back for thousands of years.

Both sides suddenly faced the prospect of reexamining their belief system. Echalogians appeared offering answers and using ancient literature and modern observations as proof. Two new terms entered the lexicon in an attempt to appease the masses looking for an explanation: Corpus Continuity and Echalogical Influence.

Corpus Continuity is an overtly religious perspective, based on the assumption that God created mankind in his own image; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the fae were a previous creation in the same image. As this theological theory runs into a slight difficulty when considering that dragons were the first intelligent life

form on Earth and look nothing like humanity, others prefer the theory of echalogical influence without recourse to an intelligent creator. This theory assumes that the influence of the Terros age was encoded somehow, magically or otherwise, in the genetic memory of the natural species existing at that time; humans, being the only evolved species to reach sentience, were the only ones to unlock that ancient potential. In essence, had lizards or insects become the dominant species of Earth instead of primate mammals, they would still have ultimately evolved to resemble fae and carried that ancient legacy into their mythology. Echalogians often point to spawn races like the kodiaks developing hominid traits such as upright carriage and opposable thumbs as proof of this theory.

FAITH EVOLVED

A common belief in many religions is that the Almighty, whatever form it may take, wrote the rules of the universe everyone must follow. Some say the only way to hear the voice of the divine is beyond the grave. Some also say the Almighty exists in the flotsam that keeps the universe from flying apart. Others think he lives within Attricana, and/or he may be the realm itself. Some others say he is a "they", as hundreds if not thousands of spirits or gods watch us from an identical world on the other side.

There is no right or wrong answer, as far as we can tell. Catastrophes are good for religion, and the wave of enchantment sweeping away the old world was no exception. Religion offers hope and order in a world seemingly on the brink of destruction. It promises a plan stemmed from intelligence – that everything happens for a reason. As Earth falls more towards the realms of magic and enchantment, many have flocked to religion to answer their questions. In this age, miracles occur daily, and worshippers find proof of god everywhere. After more than 6 billion people died following the Second Hammer, the religions that survived found little reason to fight over conviction, and in any case the old holy lands were gone or made inaccessible, their idols and icons shattered into dust. Many smaller faiths died along with those who had once believed in them. When Attricana opened, newer beliefs arrived with newer populations. A few humans embraced these faiths while some fae embraced human ideology.

Given their immense power, it is no surprise that dragons are the focus of many faiths, either as gods themselves or as angels of a god. Those who still profess belief in a less tangible supreme power, though, still have no proofs one way or the other. God or gods remain as quiet and as elusive as before. Atheism is surprisingly rare, even among bastion populations (although bastions have a higher rate of them). Agnosticism is far more common. Almost 60% of all humans in the world, and a clear majority of the bastion-born, don't subscribe to any specific faith though almost all subscribe to some form of spirituality.

Many religions of man survived, though none were unchanged. Most offshoots of major religions either merged or vanished, leaving only a handful. The modern dogma of these faiths rarely resemble their forebears in many or even most particulars, even to adopting certain traditions and conventions of their erstwhile competitors. Although many people embraced religion as an explanation of recent events, an almost equal number abandoned their faith, claiming the destruction of the world was proof of God's nonexistence. This led several splinter religions to claim God created this cataclysm to punish Man, or even (as with the faith endorsed by Baruch Malkut) to cleanse the Earth of the undeserving and bring forth the true Kingdom of Heaven for the survivors. Apocalyptic cults snapped up fanatical followers in the first few years, believing Judgment Day had occurred. As the centuries passed, such zealotry dwindled, leaving only a few begging for attention among the moral majority. Even fundamentalist sects of major religions rarely lasted long, with the sole exception being the bitterly intolerant Abrahamic offshoot endorsed by Baruch Malkut.

The only locations where the faiths of old have remained nearly unchanged are in bastions, which kept their faith as stable as possible (those that still followed it, that is). They still adapted to their environment,

some in positive ways and some not so positive. Outside, in the open enchanted, faiths adjusted quicker and more severely. The Christian-based communities took the longest to accept the new world, as the Christian doctrine had always held that Man was meant to rule over all other beings of Earth. Islam, with its emphasis on submission to the divine and its ready acceptance of mala'ika and djinn as articles of faith, adapted much faster and more cultures rooted in that faith adapted to the new age than any other. Nearly all secular, agnostic, atheistic, and spiritual (but not religious) societies accepted the new world with few hurdles.

MYSTERY CULTS

As you travel the world, you might encounter isolated groups who never reintegrated with society. In the absence of a socializing element, religious tradition has a habit of transmuting into blind dogma, and the more isolated the cult, the more grandiose its opinion of itself tends to become. I myself have been forced to rapidly vacate a village more than once by people who still called themselves 'Christian' and yet practiced barbaric traditions such as the eating of fae flesh during their 'communion' ceremonies, a sacrament which I believe has a somewhat different interpretation in the mainstream.




That night, the caravan was attacked by a swarm of kad-dog filth, a contagion of puggs and a handful of skegg overseers. It is rare to encounter them in damaskan lands, especially along the East Cross, but not completely unknown. One of the caravaneers was carried off by the vermin and messily devoured before our eyes, but the rest were subdued by the valiant efforts of our strong lads and lasses, and either slain or driven into the forest, where no doubt they would be picked off by the nearest defenders of civilization. My new friend comported herself with admirable prowess during the raid, but despite the generous offers of the caravan-master to stay on as a permanent yojimbo, she declined. And so, after several more days, we came at last to our first stopping-point: the whitewashed walls of Limshau.





CHAPTER TWO: PEOPLE



"By Mecha's lost left pinkie toe, gawking is most unseemly! We are seekers after knowledge, my dear, not tourists," I chided Sachenka, who was looking around slack-jawed at the sights around her. We had passed through the gates of Limshau without difficulty – "Any friend of Glengarrie-sensei is a friend of Limshau," said the custodian on the gate as he stamped my passport and Sachenka's temporary pass – and my Lauropan companion was finding her first experience of the city a trifle overwhelming. Well, it usually takes people like that, the first time.

Though it was still very early in the morning, the streets were full of traffic – fae sleep very little in any case, and Limshau specifically caters to the sort of person who would stay awake into the wee hours of the morning reading a book even if they had to work in the morning. We made our way through the streets towards the catalogue address the custodian had scribbled on a scrap of paper, past hawkers displaying wares drawn from every corner of Canam.

"Put that down," I said sharply to my friend, as she examined a string of blue beads. "Plastic. No craft skill involved, but that cheat will ask you three or four times their weight in diamonds just for being bastion-make, for all that he picked them up for a pittance in a York flea market." I waved to a couple of faces I recognized, a pair of damaskans taking a short-cut across a nearby roof. Further down the market street, a couple of narros were getting into an argument with a colorfully-dressed tilen over the price of a bolt of cloth. In the next stall, a sour-looking human was selling jewelry, a chalky-skinned fae with a blindfold over her eyes and a sword at her back standing by as a bouncer. From one of the houses above the bazaar, a couple of half-fae Nihonjin bawds waved and blew farewell kisses to their bleary-eyed customers as they stumbled out into the street. We even brushed past a trio of chaparrans walking the opposite direction, hands clasped nervously around their bows as if they expected someone to steal them.

"Loud place," Sachenka said, clearly discomfited by her surroundings.

"Too many peoples, all different types."

"Yes, I expect Lauropa is a bit more segregated," I said sadly. "Not that there are no places like that in Canam, as well. But here, all those who wish to learn are welcome. This is the great gumbo pot of the world!"

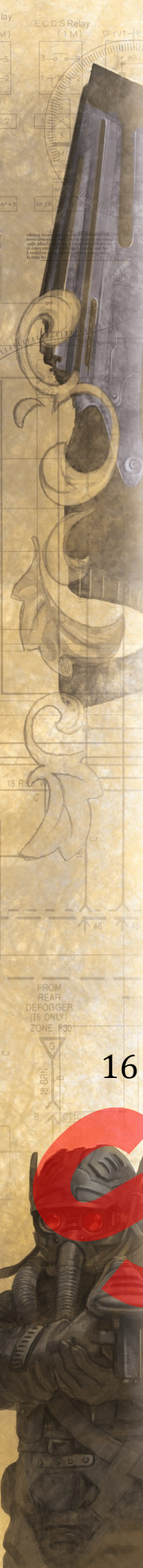
"Gumbo?"

"...a kind of stew. Exceedingly delicious. Come along, let us find ourselves some morning repast before we start our search."

The world of today is home to at least ten major intelligent species and hundreds of less common ones. Though all fae of a given descent share at least nominal cultural similarities, humans are as many and varied as they have always been.

THE LINE OF FAE

No one is quite certain how we fae first appeared. Some insist we birthed from trees while others claimed the sky. Others profess neither, pointing to the soil as the source. Only dragons knew for certain and they regard such things as trivial, not worthy of remembrance. Considering the oldest fae peoples maintain a connection with nature, the exact specifics of their origin seemed inconsequential (though never state that to a laudenian or a chaparran). The word "fae" is another controversial debate. While the etymology points to a simple "touched by magic" description, it shares its root with "faerie."



Echological influence appears in numerous cultures, connecting threads from various human legends and myths to the time of Terros. The fae races would later influence mythologies previously thought unconnected. Though damaskans, laudenians, and chaparrans would fall under a wide range of Germanic elf legends, other distant cousins would appear in Greek or Egyptian lore, with no apparent connection between these influences. Even obscure concepts of Attricana found its way into Chinese and Japanese myths. Most fae are aware how we are represented in human literature. Oddly enough, the traditional prejudices of fantasy tend to match the new reality as well. The more dominant fae – the gimfen, chaparrans, damaskans, laudenians narros, tenenbri, and tilen – look down on our lesser brethren, thinking of them (justifiably so) only as outcasts, uncivilized and primitive offshoots prone to violence.

As fae continue to grow and develop, a rising concern has emerged as the newer races appeared less developed and intelligent than their ancestors. Though some claim a higher status, there is no denying the recent branch species (anathema, we call them – chief among which are the three families of the kaddog) exhibit a primitive mentality, preferring to pillage and devour rather than develop and civilize. Fae wonder if we are all ultimately doomed to devolve into mindless animals while man continues to grow and expand. We take pride in our rich cultures and a growing fear has taken root that it may all bleed away in time.

Then there are the pagus, appearing with the Ixindar migration when the black sun passed over the world and settled in its new home in the previous age. Pagus break most of the rules associated with fae. They are the oldest species without a deviation branch of their own. After Mengus created them, they never changed, as if Attricana stopped talking to them.

In the present, the descendants of the original fae continue their traditions and beliefs with hardly a hiccup from the old time. Tenenbri dig, laudenians fly, narros protect, and damaskans remember. Meanwhile, their new ape-evolved neighbors continue to expand.

RELATIONS AND TRADITIONS

Despite some common ground, there exist major cultural differences between human and fae nations. There is little cultural deviation between fae of the same lineage – even we gimfen, with our penchant for individuality, are ultimately very much like one another, with only the most minimal differences due to geography. When the first fae encountered humans, they assumed the same was true of them – that by understanding one group of men, they could comprehend the entire species. Disastrous initial encounters between fledging fae and human communities in southern Canam soured relations for decades. Early chaparran encounters with

mankind were so dire, it curdled the entire race's opinion of the 'monkey-folk,' a difference that largely persists to this day; as the details of the incident are lost to human history, it seems unlikely ever to be resolved. Laudenians also share a resentful opinion of man after an unfortunate incident with the miners of Selkirk, the only bastion that actively seeks a positive relationship with the fantasy world. Selkirk had already benefitted from a successful first encounter with the narros years earlier. Though the miners were not immoral or wicked in any way, and tried their best to impress the elder elves, the humans' brash and unkempt nature fell foul of the decorous and conceited attitude of the laudenians. They judged the whole of the human race upon that single meeting as offensive and unpleasant, and isolated as they are, the majority has had little reason to change that opinion.

In Southam, where humans were a minority, their bitter opinions of the fae came from constant conflict. With the exception of the narros, most fae in Southam think of mankind as little different from an animal, to be hunted or domesticated like any other. Thankfully, other encounters in the north were not nearly as soiled. Damaskans and narros discovered kindness and loyalty among the humans in their first encounters. They also found to their initial shock that human traditions change with each nation and that time and distance encourage greater deviations. After only a few decades, two separate human societies populated with identical humans would create distinct traditions and even new languages. Unlike the chaparrans, laudenians, and tenenbri, inconsiderate and inflexible in their traditions and their acceptance of other customs, gimfen and damaskans grew to tolerate and even welcome cultural diversity.

Thankfully, echological influence preserved many of the social customs from the ancient past, allowing a certain common ground in basic relations even when there is no other common language. Though each nation has their own cultural standards, there has never been a major diplomatic incident between nations over traditional practices. Hand shaking is understood, though damaskans abhor unnecessary physical contact with strangers despite having no concept of personal space, and gimfen wipe sweat from our faces before shaking hands. Waving one hand to another is a greeting to many human cultures, and in fae nations, though to we gimfen, exposing the palm is considered a rude gesture. The many variations of saluting and bowing are understood and even practiced by several fae races. Narros salute by touching the first knuckle of a clenched fist to the middle of their brow. Since damaskans don't officially recognize royalty (regarding 'king' as a mere job description) or religion, the concept of bending knee or prostrating before a lord or faith is unknown to them, causing accusations of disrespect. Meanwhile, gimfen kowtow to virtually anybody, including our own tools, 'just in case' (considering how close our heads are to the



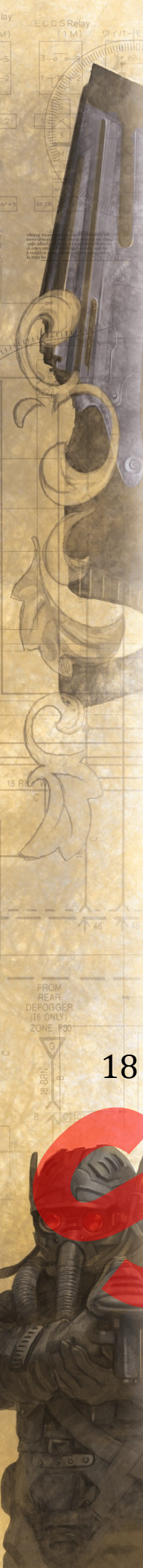
ground, this is hardly an impedance or strain on our backs). Chaparrans will kneel but never bow. Standards of politeness and decorum are also very different from group to group. Tenenbri curse and swear loudly during the course of their daily affairs, while laudenians are encouraged to speak diplomatically even in private. While damaskans are very reserved and frown on direct contact in public even between intimates, chaparrans and tenenbri are generally very exuberant and openly affectionate: chaparrans tend to limit their expressions to hand kissing and the brushing of noses and cheeks, but tenenbri think nothing of open

public snogging. The basic kiss, thankfully, rarely changes and is still a sign of affection with both human and fae nations.

Laudenians never wear undergarments and usually keep to single layers, especially at home, regardless of company entertained; narros like to flaunt their self-mastery by wearing silk in the bitterest cold and layers of wool in the fiercest heat.

These traditions, though many and varied, are not considered serious faux pas when violated; most human





and fae cultures are aware that other cultures are varied and intricate and will not greatly begrudge another for not understanding every nuance of their own (except laudenians, who take politeness very seriously and consider that it is an outsider's responsibility to fit in, rather than theirs to make a guest feel welcome). However, there are many more serious tripping hazards. Holding one's hands up, palms open, is considered a sign of submission or greeting in many human cultures, and is repeated with both damaskans and laudenians. However, the narros take it as an insult, insinuating that one is "raising a wall" in defiance to the other, and of course we gimfen just find it tacky. Other misunderstandings include the use of connecting the forefinger and thumb to form an "O" or the crossing of the index and middle fingers, both considered sexual insults with chaparrans and laudenians, though each sign insinuates opposite slurs between their cultures. To the tenenbri, all silent hand signals are considered rude, akin to talking about someone behind their back; even the most basic manual communication is frowned upon unless joined by a verbal accompaniment. On the other hand, laudenians despise noise and relish silence, thus screaming in joy is considered unforgivably coarse, regardless of the situation. Applause is welcomed among the tenenbri, accompanied by roars and foot pounding, while the laudenians show praise with simple bowing. Gimfen find both methods an inadequate and unsatisfying expression of appreciation, and instead throw money.

Showing only the middle finger is a human insult with no equivalent in any fae culture: however, one of the most bizarre misunderstandings involving hand gestures is the corna, or "horn" sign. This involves extending the two outer fingers from an otherwise closed fist. Though initially considered an insult and a symbol of the devil in many human cultures, it is well known throughout most fae nations as a sign of greeting, often used by fae to display racial pride. It is welcomed from humans, interpreted to saying "I respect you and your species." However, the thumb must be kept closed for this salutation, as extending it out the side indicates a request for intercourse. Since this discovery, some humans have created a variation, where placing the gesture unknowingly behind a human's head insults him or her as a "fae lover," a slur in some communities.

These are a few examples of the many cultural confusions that have arisen when fae mingle with humans. In places with extensive contact between cultures, boundaries tend to erode, although the fae nature is such that usually humans adopt fae practices rather than the other way around, though extended contact will wear away even the most hidebound fae's resistance to change. In Limshau, for instance, damaskans have adopted the practice of slapping the raised hand of another in celebration despite their general taboo on physical contact; this tendency has been exhibited by no other fae as far as anyone knows.

Most humans find the honesty of fae alarming. Damaskans display the tendency most, but all fae find the concept of untruth somewhat baffling (even we gimfen, who have an utterly undeserved reputation as stretchers of the truth, regard all our utterances as at least 'poetically true'). Though we might not answer a question directly or volunteer a secret willingly, we rarely lie directly (not that we are incapable, but it requires conscious effort; the closest thing the fae have to the concept of a pathological liar is called aeshomu, or 'mockingbird' – one who uses half-truths to mislead). The sometimes brutal application of this belief has ruffled more than a few feathers, especially among the noble human houses. This, accompanied by our tolerance for alternate lifestyles and practices among our own people has made us unpopular with fanatical human religious movements. Many fae have been declared corrupt and wicked by church leaders. Some fae are guilty of this as well, considering mankind barbaric and primitive, regardless if he uses magic or technology. Some fae have accused man of being inferior, both in breeding and in brains. Humans have countered with similar accusations, adding that fae are tools of the devil, an image personified in the zealous ramblings of King Darius of Baruch Malkut and his disciples.

And yet, many fae nations maintain a positive relationship with humans in spite of the massive casualties our myriad peoples suffered at the hands of humans in the first century and the continuing capture and enslavement by raiders and evil nations, a practice as prevalent now as it was when it began over 350 years ago. With the fae's long life and even longer history, the intricacies of our cultures are so extensive that the rare humans who marry a fae can take the entirety of their extended lives learning the details and still be surprised at the end.

PROBLEMS WITH COSMOPOLITANISM

Cooperation between peoples is far more common than one might think, given the wickedness of the world, but it is not without its drawbacks. Medicine, for instance – humans often think that all fae are the same, but in reality, a gimfen is as different from a damaskan as a gibbon is from a chimpanzee, and there is no panacea other than magical healing which will affect fae and humans the same way. Then there is the fact that fae do not adapt well to environments outside their traditional milieu, even after generations of living outside it. The anxiety and sense of otherness that this produces often results in even the most open-minded fae largely cleaving to their own communities within a mixed group, which unfortunately gives fuel to the paranoia of those bigots who hate and fear us.



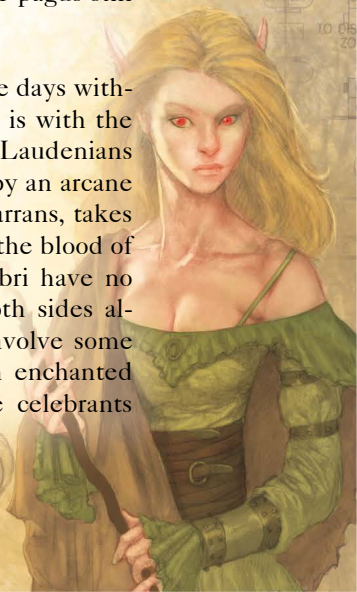
INTER-SPECIES ROMANCE

Each line of the fae is a separate species as classified by human science, and were it not for magic, we would not be genetically compatible with one another. Likewise we are genetically incompatible with humans. Magic, however, enables crossbreeding between fae lineages and even with evolved and spawn races, with varying degrees of success. The first issue in fae-human crossbreeding is time. Fae are generally long lived, imbued with an amazing degree of patience. Most fae gestations take more than fourteen months, and their fertility cycle ranges from one to two years, not monthly as with human females. Additionally, many fae refuse to take non-fae mates not out of bigotry but fear of loneliness. Nearly all fae mate for life and the idea of outliving the short lifespan of their mate by hundreds or thousands of years frightens them. However, a strange side effect does occur in those rare situations where fae bond for life with a shorter-lived species. Throughout all fae species, the process of pair bonding forces both sides to sacrifice part of their soul to the other. The ceremony, differing with each species, can take less than five minutes in a private encounter, to several hours or even days in a public venue. The consequences are eternal. Humans and fae cannot reproduce with each other without this ceremony. The bonded souls push past scientific barriers. Humans may not be born enchanted creatures, but they instantly become one when they bond with a fae. Although bonding is technically not necessary between fae, many frown on married couples not bonding (and it does increase the chances of con-

ception). Though a few have tried, no one has ever successfully forced a bonding in order to extend one's life. Both parties must be willing or the procedure can never finalize.

Unfortunately, there exists one exception to this rule: the pagus. They somehow found a way to mate with anything successfully, bound or not, and they do it often. Pagus can bond for life like all fae, but this situation is extremely rare and reserved for those embracing the path of good (bonding is strictly forbidden in Kakedomania and in any villages ruled by evil dragons, resulting in immediate execution of both parties). The pagus ceremony looks strangely alluring and involves hours of synchronized chanting from the couple and friends. The chants blend into a moan that shakes the ground. Compared to the usual negative views many have of them, this remains one aspect of the pagus still beautiful.

The longest bonding ceremony (taking three days without sleep, exchanging thirty pages of vows) is with the laudenians, who rarely take human mates. Laudenians share magical spirit via a special chant cast by an arcane priest. The shortest ceremony, that of chaparrans, takes less than five minutes: a tree is planted and the blood of both sides drips into the roots. The tenenbri have no ceremony; their bond occurs merely by both sides allowing it to do so. Gimfen ceremonies involve some poetry and vow exchanging, drinking from enchanted waters, and prayers to whatever god/s the celebrants





worship (if any). Damaskans include vows but also exchange colored ribbons, sashes, or scarves (depending on family tradition), which the married couple wear for life. Limshau custodians exchange small blades, not much use in combat, ornately decorated with merging family symbols. Sometimes offering said ribbon or blade is akin to a marriage proposal. Fae never jump into marriage and few fae marriages have ever ended in divorce. Even when elders frown and forbid the pairing, once it occurs, nothing more is said on the matter.

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In the decades after first contact, many suitors attempted to woo fae maidens, some for conquest and others for marriage. This seldom worked: initially, the fae were skittish of mankind, and most initial meetings ended in violence. Eventually, saner minds began to reach out, but the mingling of breeds would not occur for many more decades. In the first century, the entire planetary population of fae-human hybrids could be counted on a single hand. Most of the time the fae refused a human wooer, not because of racism, but because of a fear of being alone for the centuries after their mate died.

There is no record about which species was the first to yield, but the balance of probability is that it was a damaskan. As is usually the case, it probably occurred from shared experiences. Not a single fae people or nation condones arranged marriages, not even within their royalty. Fae establish a connection that overcomes personal beliefs and interests. Most of the time, this remains

mere friendship, though this comradeship can be as resolute as any marriage. Occasionally, it continues to form an intimate sharing of souls, and the two sides bond for life. This surmounts such pesky hurdles as age, sex, or race. As humans and faekind shared their lives, bonded couples began to emerge.

In nations like Laudenia and Dawnamoak, pairing fae with human is frowned upon or outright forbidden (due to simple prejudice in the case of the chaparrans and an ingrained fear of degradation among the laudenians). This fanatical view is most prevalent at the core of their societies: chaparrans (more than laudenians) are often more approachable outside of their nations, and the farther one travels from the labyrinth of Vanaka, the more likely one is to find a tenenbri who appreciates a non-tenenbri partner as anything more than a novelty. Narros' discipline and their preferred environment have made interracial couples relatively uncommon. The same goes for gimfen, but with us, it's our visible age, superficially similar to human children, that turns most humans away. This leaves the vast majority of interracial couples from damaskan blood. Since Limshau permits and encourages mingling races on every level, the kingdom became the hub of romantic voyages. In the end, most suitors encounter failure. Despite being quixotic, fae are skittish to bond, especially damaskans, known for their distant emotions in public. Fae often act alien compared to common human customs. They are all brutally honest and find deception rather repug-

nant. Coupled with their long lifespans and aged wisdom, most woovers are apprehensive to speak up. Fae do not fall in love in a day like humans. For them, it takes time and most pursuers don't have the necessary patience. Those doggedly determined to win the favor of a fae's attention can be rewarded with a prize greater than the trophy of the exotic catch or the years the bond offers.

Because fae are immune to all human disease and without a bond are not capable of producing offspring with humans, females became sought after for slaves. Sexual merchants bought and sold stock from the backs of carriages for centuries. Many governing bodies attempted to close these crime rings, but rumors point to a few still circulating. Baruch Malkut, for example, still employs thousands of slaves. Some believe those are urban legends meant to scare fae from leaving their homes.

BONDING BENEFITS

Locator: Both mates know each other's exact position within 5 miles and general direction within 25 miles.

Life Sharing: The side with the lesser life span lives longer. 20% of the difference between their maximum ages is added to the age of the lesser-lived species. All other age quantities are unchanged. This information is uncommon and few outside of the fae know it. The longer-lived side loses that same 20% quantity from his or her age. It's the trade-off both must be willing to accept. This also applies to different fae species with vastly different age limits: for calculation purposes, assume a lifespan of 5000 years for laudenians. (Example: A tilen female bonds with a human male. The human has the capacity to live to 184 years while the tilen drops to 496 years.)

Whisper: Mates can both whisper messages and receive whispered replies from each other with little chance of being overheard. They must be within a mile of one another or be able to see each other by some means, directly or indirectly. Magical silence, one foot of stone, one inch of common metal (or a thin sheet of lead), or 3 feet of wood or dirt blocks the whisper. The effect transmits sound, not meaning. To speak a message, one must mouth the words and whisper, possibly allowing observers the opportunity to read lips.

Dreamspeak: After two hours of sleep, both sides can carry on a conversation as if they were next to each other. The effect lasts for ten minutes and has no range limit.

Consequences: If one side dies for any reason, not only do all these bonuses vanish (sometimes resulting in the surviving mate dropping dead instantly if their time is up), but they also reduce their Spirit die by one size, to a minimum of a d4. Re-bonding to a new mate does not restore the Spirit die (although it does restore

the other benefits) and another death compounds it. The shortened life of the longer-lived side stays shortened.

Note: A 1st-level character can only begin the game bonded with the GM's permission.

HUMAN MISCONCEPTIONS

Humans have such quaint ideas about sexuality. They esteem themselves according to their sexual roles, prowess, and fetishes – many even impose gender roles on their own languages. They ascribe great value to the bizarre concept of 'virginity,' a word that has no parallel in any fae language. Some even view sex as a means of asserting dominance. Even the most well-adjusted of them tend to view all sexual congress as a serious commitment, instead of a simple expression of affection between friends or a way of staying warm on cold winter nights. Perhaps this is due to the fact that any human liaison has the potential to produce offspring, and in some cases transmit uncomfortable infections (easily cured by magic if only they could overcome their embarrassment to ask for treatment). And paradoxically, despite fashioning their entire society around it, many humans try to act as though sex doesn't exist, or is merely a necessary evil for the perpetuation of their species instead of an instinct hard-wired into their genes. It must be hard to be an evolved creature.

FAE CULTURES

While all fae collectively outnumber humanity by an enormous margin, each individual group is still relatively limited in its scope compared with the dominant evolved species. Only the damaskans come close to how prolific humanity is. This, combined with the propensity for fae culture to be encoded in our basic genetics, makes it fairly easy to generalize about the most prominent non-humans in a way that is not really possible about any one race of humans.

CHAPARRANS

Dwelling in enchanted woodlands, chaparrans closely resemble the wood elves of legend. They have superior senses of sight and hearing, and can run and balance perfectly in the branches, even able to shoot a longbow with perfect accuracy while hanging upside down by their toes. They are skittish of outsiders, although they rarely react with violence unless direly provoked: more often, they simply melt into the trees, bedevil interlopers with traps and enchantments until they flee the forest of their own accord, or ambush them and escort them gently but firmly out of chaparran territory. The largest percentage of chaparrans lives within the great forest of Dawnamoak in southwest Canam, but they can be found anywhere on the continent that the primeval forests have reclaimed.

While nearly all descendants of the original fae believe that they are the true form of the ancient race, chaparrans have about as much justification of that claim as



their laudenian cousins. Their kind date back further than anyone can recall, including themselves, for they keep few records, and almost none of these written - where other fae take pride in their books and scrolls, chaparrans seldom write anything down.

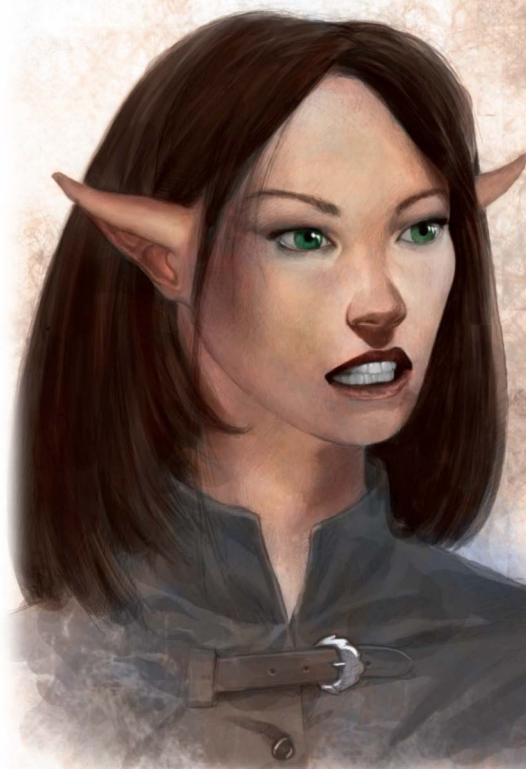
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Most communities are small. With such an obscure people, accurate numbers are impossible to come by. Estimates range from 80,000 to 800,000 chaparrans across the world (even the most optimistic guess falls just shy of a million), scattered among a thousand forests of varying size.

Their outward emotional displays are reflected mostly in their music and dance. They pound beats into fallen logs with amazing speed and augment those sounds with kinetic syllables of phrases strung so fast as to make the words meaningless. Chaparrans' passion for dance knows no equal. A chaparran's heartbeat will increase to virtually that of a hummingbird in the grip of a dance. Bodies move almost violently, with fists pounding and legs striking, only their absolute discipline pre-

venting injury to others. Watching a chaparran dance charges the soul and pumps the heart. Every move denotes a meaning others seldom understand. To outsiders, the dance looks chaotic with thrashing appendages and whirling bodies without care for people or objects around. Those involved in the dance hardly open their eyes, confounding outsiders as to how the dancers don't crash into each other. All chaparrans know this dance and practice it daily. The art connects to a form of martial art called Manora Chaparra, believed to purge the darkness from their souls, allowing them to fight with clean spirits. This form developed after the First War. The majority of the pagus created on the night of migration came from chaparrans and the fae left behind swore an oath to eliminate their cursed brothers from the world. Their obsession continues to this day.

When chaparrans die, tradition decrees that the body must be dropped into a grave without a coffin. After prayers are finished and before dirt pushed over, a single acorn is placed in the mouth. This seed always grows, despite surrounding competition and available



water. These trees grow taller and wider than any grown from nature and many claim the great temples of Jibaro and Libanus emerged from fallen chaparran priests. This tradition extends to wandering chaparrans as well, and travelers across the world always know where one is buried by the massive tree dwarfing all those around. Such lone sentinels have appeared in deserts, atop great peaks, and even in caves, declaring to all those who see it that a chaparran rests there. They contend that their souls will move from wood to flesh every generation. Killing one simply moves their soul to a tree for its lifetime. After an era, the soul returns to flesh.

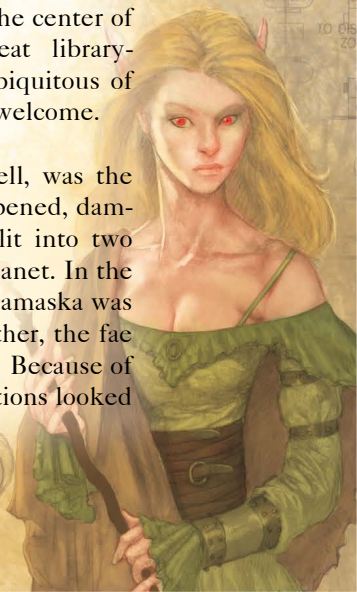
THE WILD HUNT

There is an insidious rumor among some forestside human communities that the fae ride forth from the woods and steal human babies, leaving weak and sickly fae ones in their place, and raise these changeling children to hate their erstwhile kindred and roam the edges of the forests, murdering those unwary humans who venture beneath the leaves. Of course this is patent balderdash to even casual inspection – after all, fae children never suffer birth defects, and in any case the difference between the chaparran and human birth rates makes it doubly impossible. Still, it is no secret that people have a tendency to go missing on the edges of chaparran territory, and not all of them are inclined to be swayed by fanciful tales of beautiful elven princesses.

DAMASKANS

The least alien of the fae, damaskans are one of the few species that not only tolerates humans but willingly incorporates them into their communities. Damaskans are fascinated by knowledge, have nearly perfect memory, can read and write twice as fast as most people, and even the least scholarly among them knows at least three languages and is an expert on at least one field of learning. They also have an almost supernatural ability to traverse virtually any surface, no matter how scant the handholds. They are open and friendly, although they can be brutally honest even by fae standards, which is sometimes off-putting to others; also, they hate being touched, except by very close friends. Damaskans are also the only fae species which does not regard the term ‘elf’ as a racial slur. While the center of damaskan culture in Canam is the great library-kingdom of Limshau, they are the most ubiquitous of the fae, found almost anywhere that fae are welcome.

The first Damaska, before the Hammer fell, was the oldest empire in history. After the gate re-opened, damaskans rebuilt their civilization, though split into two different empires on opposite sides of the planet. In the ruins of the laughably termed ‘old world’, Damaska was remade to mimic its former glory. On the other, the fae erected the empire of knowledge, Limshau. Because of the peculiar homogeneity of all fae, both nations looked



initially similar. All damaskans favor stone or adobe for building, rather than wood. Most of their cities are built into tall mountains or next to cliffs and always facing a major river or body of water. Where they differ is that Damaska's cities expand with abandon across open fields stopped only by water and cliffs, whereas Limshau restricts its cities with stout walls. Damaska's cities scrape the sky with sharp spires—a landscape of porcupine quills—while Limshau's jigsaw of flat, interlocking, and tessellating buildings allow one to sit atop a roof and watch an unobstructed sunset. The Damaskan fae across the ocean in Lauropa wear looser clothes, wield different weapons, and are more open in public, whereas the Canam damaskans are more reticent, with clothing and weaponry largely influenced by the former Asiatic human cultures. Since fae never change unless branching into a new species, this deviation in Canam is solely due to their interactions with humanity, a species almost completely foreign to the Damaskan Empire in the East.

Because of their circulation over the globe, no one can be sure how many damaskans live on Earth, but it's probably between 4 and 5 million, although only about 1.7 million reside in Canam. Narros hold rights to the largest armies, but damaskans claim all other records. Damaskans loathe pagus, as well as the majority of the lesser fae due to their destructive tendencies, but if they encounter a free pagus with no overtly hostile intent they will not distrust him instinctively as another species might. They have a deep mutual respect for dragons. Limshau places its trust in their proven alliances with the gimfen, chaparrans, and humans — specifically with the kingdoms of Abidan and Kannos. They are generally indifferent to other species in general, preferring to judge individuals on a case-by-case basis.

The damaskan written form is substantially different from other fae languages. Damaskans know both the classical cursive and a shorthand variation they invented called sonna-eliano, which has been translated into English as 'orthoglossy'. Every damaskan from both empires knows this writing style. Using orthoglossy allows a damaskan to write five times faster than any other scholar. With some effort, non-damaskans can be taught this writing style, but its intricacies require considerable study to master, and those without a damaskan brain simply cannot manage the mental gymnastics required to write it at full speed.

Damaskan musicians prefer quiet, more subdued music as a rule, and favor woodwind instruments. Their preferences in the physical arts tend, naturally, toward calligraphy, followed by the arts of illustration: drawing, illumination, woodcuts, lithographs, and the like. Lauropan damaskans maintain a certain interest in architecture; Canam damaskans have largely substituted this for an appreciation for the aesthetics of craft and engineering.

When they die, their bodies are burned and scattered to the wind.

SWARM LORDS

It is a sad fact, but the three species of kaddog degenerates that blight the landscape of Canam are all ultimately descended from the damaskan people. While it is likely that the long-lost first progenitors of those cursed lineages were either bred out of existence or consumed by their own children, researchers studying the movements of the pugg swarms of Xixion have noticed certain patterns to their behavior that can't be explained by simple seasonal instincts or population pressures. These trends suggest that there is some sort of intelligence at the heart of the kaddog hives, above and beyond the simple control that skeggs exert over their lesser kin by threat of force. Perhaps some of the damaskans who went feral and birthed the wretched vermin can still be found at the heart of the swarm, directing their vile spawn to greater acts of atrocity. Not that I would believe it myself, but it makes for a good story.

GIMFEN

The peak of fae development, and I do not say so merely out of cultural pride. A small and curious folk, gimfen are the only fae species capable of using technology: the magical disruption field that surrounds other creatures of fantasy not only does not radiate from us, but we actually have the ability to selectively suppress ambient EDF. We are even more fascinated by the world than damaskans are, and approach it with a childlike wonder that matches our appearance. We are the most friendly and approachable of the fae, although some find our ebullience and fanciful imaginations a trifle off-putting — unlike other fae, we have no hard-coded compulsion against fudging the mere facts if the ultimate truth involves a more holistic approach. The majority of gimfen live in large, mechanized underground communities characterized by tall stacks known as 'grind towers', the largest of which is my home city of Gnimfall in northeastern Canam, but some live a more pastoral existence (although they encourage techan tourists, who they mercilessly fleece) in communities such as Salvabrooke, nestled on the eastern side of the Nankani Mountains.

After the return of magic, the first bastions were barely more than a few buildings. They grew slowly under constant attack from the outside. A few collapsed or turned to magic, abandoning the old ways of science. Others remained stubborn and fought against the enchantment. Such was the case with the eastern Canam city of York, under barrage from dragons and pagus. The bastion turned to a nearby growing civilization of gimfen for assistance. The gimfen were welcomed into the libraries to learn everything they could about human technology, sciences of the body, machine, and atom. With the help of our resourcefulness and inven-



tion, York was able to defend itself against predators, and their expansion became reinvigorated. Despite our invaluableity, this agreement with an echan people was unofficial and kept secret: the gimfen were not allowed to live among the population or enter through the main gates. After their usefulness expired, these cultural pioneers returned to their homes leaving only a few behind in the city for maintenance. Thankfully, they did not mind being ostracized, and got a more than fair exchange for their labors: our people now held the secrets of magnetism, electricity, and internal combustion, advances we would likely not have discovered on our own. The neighboring gimfen town, Gnimfall, accepted back its brave pilgrims and the nation flourished.

Currently there are more than three million gimfen in various villages and colonies about the world. We get along well with the narros and damaskans, but our relations with other fae have become strained since, as they claim, we have so often turned away from our stagnant and inflexible 'roots'. Gimfen often welcome humans,

SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION

Obviously, being gimfen is superior to being anything else in this world – I mean, just look at yours truly. Still, it would be nice if we could overcome our deficiencies in imagination, and possibly summon up a little bit more personal discipline. I myself have only managed to keep our species' natural difficulty with attention span in check by constant travel, and rare is the gimfen who can keep focus on a single project for more than a few days without being distracted. I am sure that if we could somehow borrow the dedication shown by the narros or the studiousness of the damaskans, we could exceed the technological heights of the humans that we are hitherto content merely to copy and tweak. We might even be able to finally overcome the problem of the EDF and bring the benefits of Mecha's blessing to all. And my photographs could finally benefit from some of that 'photo editing software' one of my techan friends once told me about.





especially ones with a new toy.

Most of gimfen worship a nameless, neutered god we call “Mecha,” which we believe allows us (and only us) to operate machinery in the presence of magic – the fact that other fae who turn to the worship of Mecha in the hopes of obtaining the same grace do not lose their toxic effect on machinery is explained simply enough as them ‘not doing it right’. Mecha’s symbol of faith lies in a gimfen’s tools, which she prays to every morning. We hold that Mecha, the Machine God, is ultimately responsible for all the devices the gimfen make.

LAUDIENIANS

One of the oldest branches of the fae, they were the first to notice the steady devolution of the fae species as

it spread out into new environments. In their fear of extinction, they retreated from the earth, building the most magically advanced nation the world has ever seen on floating islands among the clouds. They are the most adept at magic of all the fae: while the dragons invented spellcraft, it was the laudenians who first codified its study and were the first to channel the power of the dragons’ language through totems. Their willowy, strangely elongated bodies are impossibly light, and they move with an ethereal grace. Laudeniens are even more xenophobic than chaparrans, literally fearing contact with anything that has touched the ground. All laudenians hail from a network of floating keeps, the capital of which is the massive skycity of Laudenia.

Most people have never seen a laudenian and could not describe one if asked. Laudeniens commonly prohibit

outsiders from entering their keeps. Their land is rich in natural resources and they use these riches to trade with the few other nations they find agreeable, Fargon being the chief recipient of their largesse. Few non-fae ever see these floating keeps. Their single city appears on the surface to be one of technology, but underneath the shine of the walls flows pure magic. Laudenia is a dream to many that swore they saw it.

Laudenians commit to this life because of a fear of degradation. If they truly were the first branch from the original fae, then they have watched helplessly as their children turned into the chaparrans, narros and damaskans. This might not have alarmed them initially beyond the observation that the laudenians themselves were growing fewer. Then the chaparrans started to beget deviations, and then the narros. Damaskans followed shortly behind and with each branch, the emergent race acted more feral, more uncivilized than their ancestors. Fearing a fate similar to the original fae, the laudenians fled to the sky, convinced the magical influence stemmed from the fae's interaction with the Earth. Their theory may have had some merit, for the dwindling of the laudenian population slowed...but did not stop completely.

Today, laudenians number less than 50,000, though some suspect this number is much lower, closer to 10,000. Despite near immortality, their population continues to fall. This is largely the product of the whispering influence of magic from which they cannot escape, resulting in children of lesser quality in their eyes. Laudenians reproduce extremely rarely and their eventual fate appears fixed, ultimately leaving a vast, sprawling empire of empty and forgotten castles in the air. Laudenians rarely mate with non-laudenians, and they strictly forbid bonding with humans under penalty of expulsion from the sky.

Laudenians enjoy the music of strings and their dance often involves slow, subtle movements. Their rituals,

like everything involved in their culture, take several days to complete. One festival, the Kenaz Sky, occurs once every 500 years, lasting six months. The few laudenians that ever die are placed in a gargantuan mausoleum at the base of their city. All laudenians, even the ones that perish far away, always wish their bodies returned to their home. Their faith dictates that is the only way they may find peace.

The laudenians worship a god of the ancient fae, Berufu, whom they believe lives not beyond the gate, but in the shadow realm where the universe was formed. Attricana to them is a source of power but is neither a divine entity nor the gateway to god's domain.

NARROS

Short, stocky, militaristic, and perfectionist, the narros are known as great warriors and crafters. Most narros in the world are concentrated in two nations: the far northern realm of Fargon, whose citizens focus on self-perfection (often through martial arts), and the Finer Fire Pits in central Canam, which produces the most renowned weapons and armor in the land. Narros work hard and play hard, and do not really appreciate leisure in the same way that others do. All are strong and weigh far more than their size would suggest: this makes them poor swimmers, and they avoid any water deeper than their waists as a result.

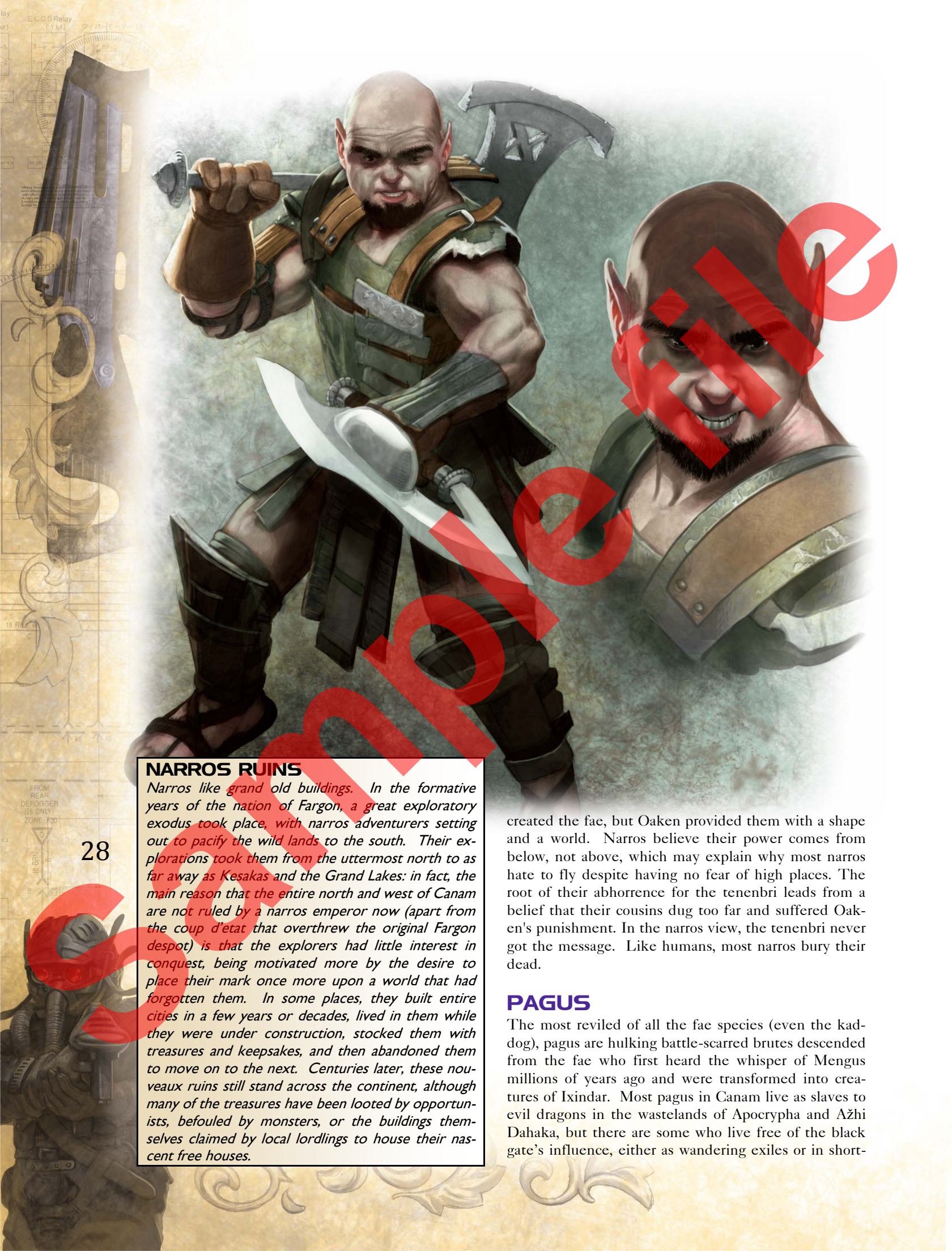
Narros love the horn and drums and their battle marches move to the sound of heavy bass from trumpets and skins louder than the footfalls of a thousand feet. Narros don't dance – they don't lack for physical coordination, but the wild abandon of dancing runs contrary to their cultural precision and discipline.

The narros estimate more than seven million of their kind walk the Earth. Narros live almost exclusively in Canam and Southam and rarely appear anywhere else. Their biggest concentration lies at Fargon in the uttermost north, with another collection in the western mountains of Southam, where the people often clash with the tenenbri over an ancient religious dispute; a smaller colony of about a hundred thousand resides in the Finer Fire Pits in Canam's midwestern region. By sacred law, narros caves never burrow beyond 1.25 miles below sea level. Their mines are like a labyrinth, covering hundreds of square miles. Part of their belief system demands that they climb the highest mountain in their city (every narros city is built around and/or within a mountain) every year to reaffirm their confidence that the sun remains above.

The few narros holy men worship an idol-less god referred to as Oaken – the spirit of Earth. Oaken lives deep underground at the core of the planet. The narros dogma explains that Oaken, originally a fragment of a much larger being, drifted into the Solar System and the Earth formed around him. To them, the white gate

CLOUDLESS SKY

Nobody is entirely sure where the laudenians' homeland is located, although the most reliable sightings have been over the coast mountains north of Seliquam. Still, some have claimed to see it hovering over Limshau or Apareci on a clear day, and there have even been a few Lauropan visitors to these shores who have mentioned a floating city appearing briefly among their mountains and disappearing shortly thereafter. It is theorized that the laudenians maintain a network of sky-cities that spreads across the whole world, but what method they use to hide these floating keeps from ground-dwellers is unknown. Perhaps it is nothing more than a clever illusion... or perhaps their magoi have discovered powerful magics that allow them to displace an entire city in time, so that between sightings it ceases to exist altogether.



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NARROS RUINS

Narros like *grand old buildings*. In the formative years of the nation of Fargon, a great exploratory exodus took place, with narros adventurers setting out to pacify the wild lands to the south. Their explorations took them from the uttermost north to as far away as Kesakas and the Grand Lakes: in fact, the main reason that the entire north and west of Canam are not ruled by a narros emperor now (apart from the coup d'etat that overthrew the original Fargon despot) is that the explorers had little interest in conquest, being motivated more by the desire to place their mark once more upon a world that had forgotten them. In some places, they built entire cities in a few years or decades, lived in them while they were under construction, stocked them with treasures and keepsakes, and then abandoned them to move on to the next. Centuries later, these nouveaux ruins still stand across the continent, although many of the treasures have been looted by opportunists, befouled by monsters, or the buildings themselves claimed by local lordlings to house their nascent free houses.

created the fae, but Oaken provided them with a shape and a world. Narros believe their power comes from below, not above, which may explain why most narros hate to fly despite having no fear of high places. The root of their abhorrence for the tenenbri leads from a belief that their cousins dug too far and suffered Oaken's punishment. In the narros view, the tenenbri never got the message. Like humans, most narros bury their dead.

PAGUS

The most reviled of all the fae species (even the kad-dog), pagus are hulking battle-scarred brutes descended from the fae who first heard the whisper of Mengus millions of years ago and were transformed into creatures of Ixindar. Most pagus in Canam live as slaves to evil dragons in the wastelands of Apocrypha and Ažhi Dahaka, but there are some who live free of the black gate's influence, either as wandering exiles or in short-



lived tribal villages. A free pagus is not necessarily a good pagus, however – they were made for battle, and violence is in their nature. It takes a strong-willed pagus indeed to overcome both his natural proclivities and the (often-justified) prejudice of other species to make his way in the civilized world.

When the black gate was unearthed again at the beginning of the new age, the pagus were the first to emerge, even before the whisper of Mengus could have tainted the nearby humans as well. Five centuries later, the pagus number in the tens of millions with concentrations on every continent.

Pagus have no concept of godhead. The pagus of Kakedomania fear and worship Mengus and the shemjaza as powerful beings much stronger than themselves, and the same with the hordes of Apocrypha for their death dragon masters, but there is no apprehension of divinity in this adoration, merely the deference of a bully for an even greater bully. Even free pagus continue this tendency, holding warleaders and the few pagus elders (usually the two are synonymous) in almost fawning esteem. A few free pagus who fall in with more open-minded fae will turn half-heartedly to the worship of Berufu, but those few pagus who become truly devoted members of a religion tend to favor human religions – usually Islam (the tenet of absolute submission before God being a comforting familiarity for them), but there

have been reports of at least a few pagus Buddhists who, by abandoning all worldly attachment, have managed to abandon the brutality and rage that is the pagus' birthright.

Most travelers upon encountering roaming pagus in Canam immediately assume an impending bloody encounter. This is a proper and entirely warranted assumption. The number of enlightened and peaceful pagus is miniscule, and they are seldom seen wandering on open roads. Every fae people has sworn to their destruction and will not stop to consider whether the target of their ire be redeemed, although those who travel with companions of the 'civilized' fae are usually given the benefit of the doubt. While non-fae like humans

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DOPPELGANGERS

One defining characteristic of the pagus is that, apart from their individual scar patterns, they are incredibly difficult to tell apart. The power that made them acts to keep them as identical as possible. Free pagus often engage in some drastic body modification in order to assert their individuality, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility for some crafty dragon to order a slave to scar or tattoo himself like a free pagus enemy and infiltrate that pagus' circle of comrades, with none of them any the wiser. Of course, this is merely hypothetical theorizing, but it may be in an adventurer's best interests to carefully commit all of her pagus ally's scars to memory... just in case.



and kodiaks don't always reflect this racial hatred, they all know to beware of the pagus. To see one is to assume combat; to see more is a portent to invasion.

In Canam, the vast majority of pagus currently live in the landlocked region of Apocrypha. As creatures of syntropy, they find the overwhelming chaos of nature distasteful and generally avoid mountains and large bodies of water. This has kept them sealed in this region for centuries. Pagus that are found outside this are often raiding bands free from the will of Ixindar. They may also be expeditions seeking a safe route from Apocrypha. The enemies of pagus seldom ask for details. It is unknown how many civilized pagus have lost their opportunity to develop because of this.

TENENBRI

Found almost exclusively in tunnel cities beneath the mountains of Southam, the tenenbri are pale and sickly-looking and congenitally blind, but have compensated for their lack of vision with a tremendous sensitivity to air currents and vibrations. Even a mediocre tenenbri swordsman can slice a butterfly's wings from its body with pinpoint precision from a backward stroke and return their blade to its scabbard faster than the human eye can follow. They can read a person's lie in their heartbeat, which results in roughly half of them being honest to a fault and the other half so comfortable in couching deception in truth (like most fae, they do not really understand the concept of falsehood) that nothing they say can be trusted. They are a profoundly religious species, and have been locked in a conflict with the narros of Southam over the greatest holy site of their respective faiths since before the first Hammer.

The narros are a much older people than the tenenbri, having broken directly from the laudenians, while the tenenbri branched later from damaskans. Tenenbri are in many ways more fanatically religious than the narros and worship the same god, Oaken. However, tenenbri differ on interpretation and several fundamental beliefs, including the approach to daily rituals, the formation of culture and government, and their views of those not sharing their beliefs.

The focal-point of conflict in the previous age revolved around the ownership of the Well of Salvation—a holy monument to all that worship Oaken. The well, a smooth, naturally-formed circular pit 345 feet wide and 1.25 miles deep, was said to have been formed by Oaken to be his voice. He commanded the fae to emerge into existence from this very mouth. Naturally formed steps allowed a long and dangerous trek to the flat and featureless bottom. Only the most devout narros were allowed to make the pilgrimage to its base. The well carried a breath of cold, moist air that continuously spilled from its mouth, felt by believer and unbeliever alike that lined the perimeter. Suicide was an unfortunate common side-effect of the experience (history does not relate whether this was considered a theologi-

cal problem or a sociological one).

The narros, long before the tenenbri had even been formed, forged the great surface city of Antok to serve as the haven for all religious fae that endorsed Oaken as their creator and savior. One of the basic commandments of Oaken passed by the Antok cardinals was that no fae was to dig deeper than the depth of the pit. It was this sin the tenenbri had committed, and had done so willingly and repeatedly. While the tenenbri claimed they had already embraced the darkness when this occurred, the narros contend the tenenbri lost their eyes and their desire for daylight the moment they affronted God.

The smaller conflicts that broke out over minor religious disagreements continued until a tenenbri cardinal, Nihilochrysis, founded the Enos movement—a subset of tenenbri dogma that revolved around the guilt of being cast down by Oaken for the sin of digging too deep. This differed from standard doctrine that claimed the tenenbri were a master race and the only ones with the right to venture into God's sworn land. Thousands of followers of Enos, including Nihilochrysis, marched upon Antok on pilgrimage with the peaceful intent of praying alongside their narros cousins, but the guards of Antok, on orders from the religious hierarchy, prohibited the tenenbri's entrance.

The fall of the Hammer precludes an accurate account of history, but what is known is that this refusal sparked a crusade, despite the peaceful intent of the original pilgrims. When the battles had ceased, the tenenbri were in control of Antok, and some say that they survived the Hammer's fall not by passing through Attricana but by hiding within the Well. By some miracle, the Well also reemerged into the new era, and the tenenbri and narros of Southam are now locked in a bitter struggle over the possession of the holy city of Antok.

The dominant tenenbri faith holds that they are Oaken's chosen people, all other fae having been failed experiments suitable only to serve the tenenbri. Exactly how humans, coming after the fae as they do, fit into this worldview is a matter of some theological debate which most tenenbri resolve by simply categorizing humans as unusually articulate animals. The tenenbri are passionate about whatever beliefs they hold and show their emotions visibly. Their faith, while self-aggrandizing and xenophobic, is neither evil nor overwhelmingly corrupt, but is also rarely seen outside of Southam. The Enos movement, though sparking a campaign that cost thousands of lives, never endorsed the use of violence in aggression, though its tenets do not preclude fighting to defend one's beliefs.

The few tenenbri that don't follow a specific belief system or are not fanatical about their faith are still notorious for being stubborn and close-minded about what they consider to be true. They are demonstrative with

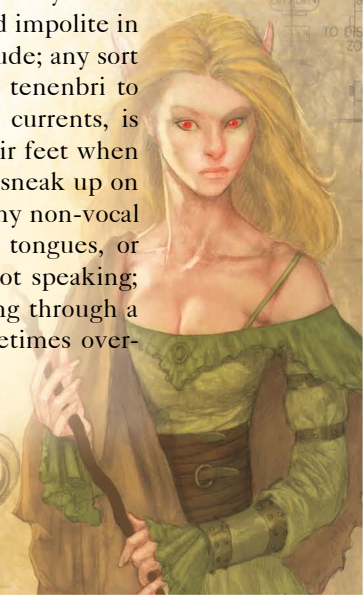


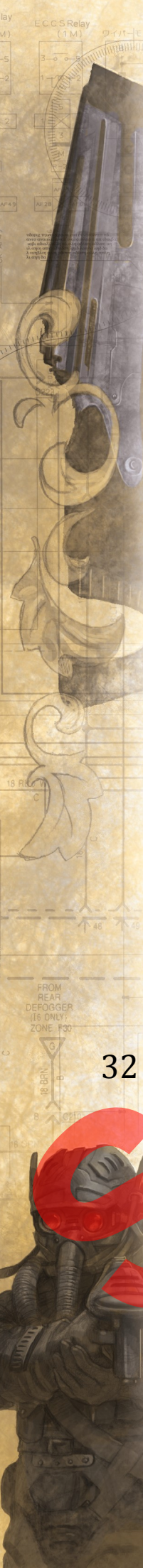
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their preconceptions, and will often volunteer them freely even if not asked. Tenenbri honesty comes from their natural ability to detect deception and hidden emotions in others. Like the narros, tenenbri bury their dead.

Tenenbri are astoundingly selfish most of the time, thinking only of themselves or the group they travel with. While they often go to even suicidal extremes to protect their loved ones, the same individual might callously allow someone unknown to them to perish because it simply wasn't their business. In closed tenenbri communities like the kingdom of Vanaka, bonding and even consorting outside their species is strictly prohibited, although this runs entirely counter to most tenenbri's natural preferences.

Everything about their culture is a consequence of them losing their sight. The tenenbri are far and away the loudest fae one will ever encounter on any continent. Keeping one's voice low is considered impolite in their society, and whispering is downright rude; any sort of hand gesture, though not difficult for a tenenbri to perceive thanks to their ability to feel air currents, is seen as a deliberate snub. They stamp their feet when they walk (as long as they are not trying to sneak up on an enemy) and are constantly performing tiny non-vocal sounds, such as snapping fingers, clicking tongues, or whistling through their teeth even when not speaking; they also indicate that they are still listening through a variety of non-articulate vocalizations, sometimes overlapping with their interlocutor.





Additionally, tenenbri don't rate physically attractiveness the same as those with normal vision. Perfect bodies with perfect skin are boring to them. They find imperfections and physical flaws attractive, especially if they are natural or from accidental injury. Tattoos are worthless to them. Scars from combat or labor, missing digits, or simply hereditary features that are different from the norm are naturally attractive, an aspect the religious elite have been trying to train their people to reject. Since there are few humans in Southam and the majority of non-tenenbri peoples are in open war, it's an easy law to enforce. When the tenenbri escape from their land and venture north into Canam, this often changes. Outcast tenenbri have bonded with a variety of fae and non-fae, from humans and pagus, to oggraks and kodiaks. The rare cases when tenenbri marry outside their race are often described as avidly passionate. Other words to describe them in a relationship are hot-blooded, fiery, and lustful.

No one is sure how many tenenbri there are but estimations place them between three and six million, over ninety-eight percent of which live in the mountains of Southam.

THE GLOOM BELOW

As far as we know, the tenenbri civilization has not spread beyond Southam – but given their tendency to dig deeper than even the narros permit, nobody can be completely certain of that. I had an adventurer friend who discovered a cavern in the mountains southwest of Freeitter, in which lay the remains of a vast pre-Hammer structure of uncertain purpose. He was unable to fully explore before being chased back to the surface by what he described as 'pale ghosts' that seemed to be able to track him by his footsteps. There are plenty of forgotten places beneath the Earth where a tenenbri settlement could hide away from prying eyes, and surface folk would be none the wiser.

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TILEN

During the first war between the forces of magic and syntropy, a group of fae refused to take a side, instead usurping part of the power of Ixindar to try to carve out their own power base in the chaos. These Lords of Death, the undead ghulath, either hid themselves within Ixindar or were eradicated when the gates closed after the Hammer's fall, but many of those that served them survived and were purified when Attricana reopened. The descendants of these elder tilen still retain many of the traits of their vampiric forebears, but struggle against their inner beast. They are a scattered and rare people always teetering on the verge of extinction, and so they tend to seek out mates of other species to replenish their numbers. This, unfortunately, has led them into conflict with the more bigoted humans, particularly those of Baruch Malkut, who view them as demons seeking to corrupt the essence of humanity.

The birth and history of the tilen is marred with pain, suffering, and mystery. How they came to cherish a life from origins steeped in evil points to the tenacity of their spirit. The details of their curse and crusade for redemption are known only to a few, and they rarely speak of the past. Before the time of man, when the war with the dark forces of Ixindar was sweeping the planet, a group of corrupted rebels created a land that refused to follow either path. They embraced the negative energy of Ixindar but believed that death was the true gateway to everlasting power. Among these insurgents appeared the initial lords of decay, the ghulath (creatures of darkness that have gone by dozens of names throughout human history: draugr, vrykolakas, chupacabra, vampire). They created armies of mindless undead and forged a kingdom to call their own. They were despised by both sides. Requiring servants, allies, slaves, and lovers, these initial lords brought others into their fold. These disciples were horribly corrupted to the wicked will of their seducer. Ghulath may be creatures of the night, barred from the land of the living, but they never actually died. Like all the forces of Ixindar, the ghulath lords and their kin hid within the realm past the black gate, waiting for the opportunity to be brought to solid form again. Upon their return, they found a world very different from the last. They claimed their own patch of grass and soaked it with blood, starting the infection known as the Necrosea.

Their devotees followed their lords in their crusade to forge an army of death to even rival Kakodomania. They were expecting neither the white gate to burst open nor the effect of its flood across the world. When the white gate returned, a deluge swept over the Earth. Records are vague on specifics, but the wave changed everything, sending the armies of Ixindar back into their realm of Kakodomania and destroying the undead hordes where they stood. It forced the ghulath to rebuild, but they would do it alone. When the flow of Attricana hit their loyal spawn, those who were not destroyed were forced back into the light. Those minions taken from Kakodomania and the ghulath lords themselves were unaffected, being willingly bound to Ixindar, but a precious few of those taken against their will awoke from their feral existence and remembered their lives. Many died trying to escape the darklands. The remaining survivors vanished from the sight of man or fae, but their determination allowed them to endure. These individuals became known as the elder tilen. They were the most powerful and the most shamed over past sins. Their children would resemble them, but exhibited only a pale imitation of their power. Elder tilen never die, only able to leave this planet through an accident or through the brutality of a deliberate death by another's hands. They are psychologically incapable of taking their own lives. This curse of immortality is not shared by their descendants.

Tilen pairings are almost always childless, with a birth rate of only three percent. This rises another few points if one parent came originally from fae stock and the other from human, and rises to nearly twelve percent



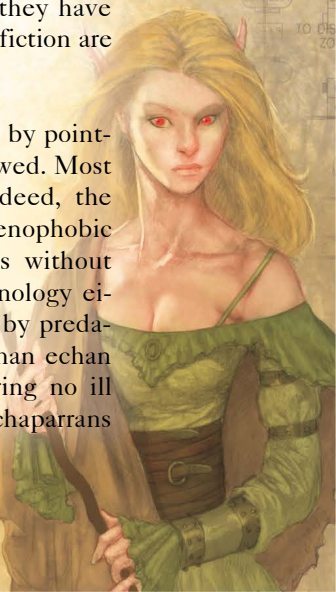
when bonding with a non-tilen (there are no half-tilen: the child of a mixed union is always a pureblooded tilen). Their bonding ritual is a passionate and extended kiss that nearly suffocates the non-tilen partner. There are less than 10,000 tilen in the world but with their appealing nature and hospitality to outsiders, their numbers are beginning to grow.

HALF-FAE

Despite their similarities in appearance, humans and fae are different species, having as much in common with each other genetically as bonobos do with jellyfish. The only way interspecies romance can produce children is by the magical sharing of souls, which is a bond not undertaken lightly by either party. Consequently there are very few half-fae in the world, and most of these are half-damaskans from Limshau, one of the few

places in the world where such matings are actually encouraged. Half-fae are often keenly aware of the gulf between species and cultures that they bridge, but rarely feel isolated or discouraged by it – since out of necessity they are the products of loving families, they have few of the maudlin troubles that half-elves in fiction are sometimes subject to.

When humans first found their world invaded by pointed-eared humanoids, speciesism quickly followed. Most human communities openly hated them: indeed, the oldest may have resulted from just such a xenophobic settlement. But nearly all such populations without sufficient infrastructure to support their technology either destroyed themselves or were destroyed by predators, lacking allies to defend them. Most human echan civilizations that flourished did so by declaring no ill will to their new neighbors. Laudenia and chaparrans



still hold the humans in distrust and seldom communicate, and the Southam tenenbri avoid everyone equally. Only damaskans, narros, and gimfen embraced their new fellow inhabitants, occasionally in more than one sense.

Those born from the rarer species like tenenbri, chaparran, and laudenian often find their lives difficult, as their fae parent is almost always an exile from their native society (or becomes one shortly after the child's birth). Thankfully, this problem does not occur with damaskans, who embrace their children, regardless of who they are, and value individual differences more than most fae (this significantly increased the population of Limshau in its early days, as the lack of stigma resulted in a migration of half-fae of other species to its cities). Nearly all half-fae in Canam reside in Limshau, but that still accounts for a very small portion of the kingdom's population (some say less than a thousand). Gimfen and narros half-breeds do not occur frequently, but when they do, they are treated no differently from their fae parents except insofar as allowances must be made for their height.

Despite a probable pleasant childhood, when a half-fae ventures into the world, she might encounter problems in traveling. Some nations accept those of mixed blood as no different as any other person while others revere or revile them as they would other fae. In locations hostile to fae, their unique heritage may be enough to prevent instant lynching (and, if nothing else, it is a lot easier for a half-fae to pass as a human), but the best they can hope for in such places is immediate ejection. Fae communities that deride mankind consider themselves too civilized for such harsh action, and merely

shun an unwelcome interloper or politely ask them to conclude their business and leave swiftly. Half-fae, for the most part, tolerate this unpredictability.

Despite attempts to quash the use of the term "half-elf" as a racial slur, it still gets bandied about. Many half-fae try to use the term "minaan", which is damaskan shorthand for "gifted from two" or "mesinaan" which is similar, but comes from laudenian as "strengths with differences," though the laudenian term is not used in their language to that effect. Many half-damaskans actually do not object to being called "half-elf," many of them being familiar with human legends in which this was a term of respect. Unfortunately, in many communities, those of mixed human blood are labeled as half-castes or worse, half-breeds, a derogatory slur no "minaan" takes lightly.

SPAWN OF ATTRICANA

Magic is a raw force of life and chaos, but there is also an indefinable intelligence within it. Spells, unless rigidly controlled by their caster, almost have a life and will of their own; creatures born of magic, such as the fae, emerged into the world with fully-developed cultures and languages, without the ages of trial and error that characterized human progress; and when magic seeps into the souls of animals, it often grants them the spark of awareness denied to their purely evolved brethren.

Most of the time, such spawn creatures are of only rudimentary intelligence: they understand basic concepts, can learn languages (but not always speak them), use slightly more complex tactics when hunting, and are capable of basic reasoning rather than being slaves to instinct, but ultimately they are still animals with animal needs and desires. The idea of developing a culture simply does not occur to them.

Occasionally, however, this magical enlightenment takes things one step further. The first creatures thus uplifted may have been the dinosaurs: according to one theory (debated, sometimes hotly, by draconic theologians) the first appearance of Attricana in the Terros age caused the spontaneous transformation of the natural apex predators of the Cretaceous period into the first dragons. With Attricana's reappearance, a few such beings have been similarly blessed with superior intellect, though never to the same extent as the dragons.

KODIAKS

In Canam, the only spawn creatures of note are the kodiaks, descendants of the massive grizzlies of the north who range through the forests that cover the slopes of the northern Nankani Mountains, the land broadly known as Alpinas. They are still a primitive people, having little use or patience for the trappings of civilization, and they exist in a state of constant warfare with the skeggs of the nearby land of Dagron, a war in which the nations of Fargon and Seliquam are only too happy to

LIMSHAU NIHONJIN

Limshau may be the greatest city of damaskans in Canam, but when it was first built, only about half the city's population was damaskan. The rest was made up of humans, Asiatic refugees who returned with Ravenar Limshau when he journeyed to the fledgling bastion of Angel. The greatest proportions of these were formerly of a human nation called 'Nippon,' who found the culture of the Limshau fae comfortably close to their own. The damaskans, in turn, were fascinated by their new neighbors, adopting many of their traditions and styles, and eventually assimilating with them to produce the largest half-fae demographic in the world. Though time and further integration has erased their cultural prominence in Limshau, there is still a core community of humans and half-fae who call themselves the Limshau Nihonjin, dedicated to preserving many of the old traditions that have been lost in translation elsewhere in the world. Nihonjin custodians often leave the city in pursuit of the slightest rumor of a piece of Kodai-Nihongo literature, and their librarians will pay premium prices for any relics of the old culture that an adventurer might come across.

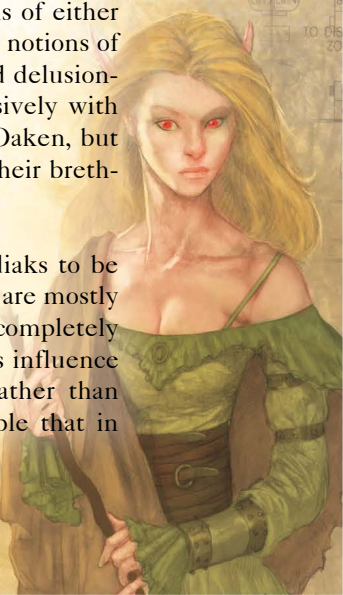


supply them with weapons and training. They have a culture of sorts, albeit a very bestial and violent one, and while most of their natural animal instincts are suppressed and they are capable of abstract thought, they still lack the capacity for boredom that spurred the development of human societies.

It would not be entirely accurate to say that kodiaks are not religious, but they display it in a substantially different way than humans or fae. Their belief system is essentially animist, with everything in nature having a spirit. Where they differ from other animist traditions is that kodiaks do not believe that the spirits should be importuned or even bothered unnecessarily. Where a human tribal hunter might give thanks to the spirit of the prey, kodiaks descend from predators higher on the food chain; if they are able to catch something, that is

proof that they deserve to have caught it, and no thanks to any noncorporeal power are needed. Their beliefs are more a means of explaining natural and supernatural phenomena to a culture that has no traditions of either science or magic, and they find other species' notions of gods and afterlives to be eccentric at best and delusional at worst. A few kodiaks who deal extensively with the narros have converted to the worship of Oaken, but this is uncommon and usually scoffed at by their brethren.

There are only a few hundred thousand kodiaks to be found throughout Canam, however, and they are mostly confined to a single region, being almost completely unknown elsewhere in the world. Attricana's influence tends to be highly localized and specific rather than casting a broad net, and it is entirely possible that in





some isolated part of the continent, or beyond it, one might find a village of similarly intelligent wolves, wildcats, apes, or even dolphins or giant ants. What these new-made peoples might be like, none can guess until they are encountered for the first time.

TALKING ANIMALS

Kodiaks are a substantial deviation from the normal ursine form, and most people assume that should another spawn species emerge, it would similarly affect bipedalism, opposable digits, and the like. But what if this should not be the case? What if the magic affected only the creature's brain and vocal structures? There have been tales of talking animals throughout human mythology, and even our own stories feature them upon occasion (although of course the animals in our most ancient tales were very different). Perhaps, as some humans claim, their cats really do understand everything they say, and only do not reply because they think humans are too dimwitted to waste words upon.

HUMANITY

Modern humans are bitterly divided, no longer by race or religion, but by their attitude toward magic. The majority has either accepted magic into themselves, or at least acknowledged and welcomed its existence as part of their world. A sizeable minority, however, rejects magic as fundamentally unnatural and clings to humanity's technological past, crowding together in isolated megacities known as bastions for protection against the disrupting effect of magic and the vicious monsters it has spawned. Humans can be found practi-

cally anywhere in Canam, but most are concentrated in a few larger city-states or kingdoms, the most prominent being the five major techan bastions (Angel, Mann, Selkirk, Sierra Madre, and York), the respected central kingdoms of Abidan and Kannos, and the hated southern kingdom of Baruch Malkut. Though humanity is still the most numerous intelligent species on the planet, less than 400 million humans live today, most of them outside of bastions.

Humans emerged millions of years after the last magical creatures escaped or fell to dust. Mankind grew from hairy apes to the form that walks with pride today. Since their peak in the age of technology, most of the human population had died off, leaving less than 3% to rebuild. The origins of this disappearance are not fully understood; some claim it was natural disasters resulting from the Second Hammer, others blame the encroachment of Kakodomania in the early days of the gate's reopening, and there are those who believe that mankind had already practically destroyed himself through war, pollution, and overpopulation by the time magic changed the world. Some escaped into bastions while most embraced the ways of magic. Many more were killed in the first few decades. After five hundred years of living on their own, mostly xenophobic of outsiders, the citizens of bastions can sometimes be looked upon in a wholly different light than their magically infused brethren. Techa-folk often fear magic, claiming it steals their souls or changes them irreparably. The use of magic does change a human: he stops being a creation purely of nature, and his mere existence begins to break down the laws of the known universe just as the fae do.

Techa-folk claim this removes them from the human race. Echa-folk claim this is how man is supposed to be. They are both wrong, but that's beside the point. Until magic infuses a human, by embracing it as a mage or accepting its touch in weapon or armor, she has a choice whether or not to let the enchantment into her spirit. Once one does, she is borne along with the tide, and it is very difficult to come down from it.

Mankind emerged into the new dawn with nothing. The old cities were gone; not a shred of pavement remained. No corporations or organizations, no clubs or allegiances, nothing that defined mankind as a species, or anchored them to their fidelity to god or country, endured. Fragments of the old age were few and scattered in the few ancient ruins that somehow endured. Survivors had to set aside their ignorance and stubbornness. Many refused and died praying for a deliverance that never arrived. Suicide took many in the first few years. Later – when the first fledgling communities encountered the first non-humans – hostilities followed.

Many more humans fell under the blade in conflicts they often initiated. A pause in their fear and paranoia resulted in a stay of annihilation, preventing man's second near extinction. Eventually, these first communities grew enough to sustain themselves. Though nations changed, ethnic groups continued to grow. Racism died in the face of other, very real bugbears. Bastions formed with wide spectrums of color and creed. Some cities (like Angel) did separate regions for specific groups, but this usually came at the request of the segregated group, wishing to preserve their ancient cultures against the melting pot. Outside of the bastion walls, any remaining propensities for racism were usually diverted onto other species.

Humans have short memories, and there is nobody alive today who remembers the ancient hatreds and conflicts in times before the second Hammer. Few nations advocate hatred of other humans, although techan humans often act superior to others. Echan human nations respond well to each other with Baruch Malkut being a notable exception. With Darius Konig's doctrine of Sapien Superiority and their murder and enslavement of thousands of fae and humans who don't share their views, no other human echan kingdom will trade with them. Other nations like Kannos and Abidan maintain good relations with their surrounding fae neighbors. Specific diplomatic ties depend on which species are found in proximity to the settlement. Outside of the major human nations, dozens of villages and communities dotted across Canam and even the world practice bigotry against the fae ranging from shunning or enslavement to expulsion or eradication, but there are just as many communities who simply welcome them with open arms.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The one attribute of man that fae find most surprising involves his capacity of adaptation beyond simple evolution. Fae adapt our forms to our surroundings spontaneously, our children assuming a completely new genotype according to the needs of their environment. Place them in darkness and they go blind, learning to see through sound and vibrations. Place us in water and they will grow gills and fins. Our languages and our attitudes alter, and soon we even refer to ourselves as a new species within a generation. Man, conversely, prefers to adapt the landscape to suit his needs. Place him in darkness, and he will make a light. Place him in water and he will build a boat. Humanity is hardly bothered by the breakdown of the processes of evolution, since human ingenuity has the power to trump even natural selection. Furthermore, Man remains Man despite creating a new culture. Language, clothing, diet, architecture, cultural attitudes all may change, and yet they are the same people. Two human nations a distance apart with no means of communication will inevitably create completely different cultures. Yet despite differences in skin tone and minor variations in body structure, humans are still close to being clones, with less than 1% genetic variation between them.

With fae, cultural variation is the same as species variation: identical fae produce identical societies. Gimfen grind towers dot the world with no communication to share information on their construction, but all are nearly identical. The narroni language is the same in Fargon as it is in the Finer Fire Pits, and the same as it was spoken in ancient Terros – not so much as a different accent impedes communication. Even Limshau and Damaska, separated by five hundred years and an ocean and showing the most marked cultural division within a single fae species, have similar beliefs and attitudes. Conversely, the human nations of Kannos and Abidan are separated by only a few hundred miles but have entirely distinct dialects and cultural practices. The bastions of Angel and York both speak English, but with vastly different vocabularies drawn from different outside influences, and neither of them much resembles the language as spoken before the Second Hammer.

As the speech changed, so did values and motivations. Abidan became a bright light of peaceful religious equality while Baruch Malkut focused its energy in the exploitation and slavery of a species they considered inferior in the name of the very same god as Abidan. As these new nations developed, most grew tolerant of their neighbors and the various vices and viewpoints of their citizens, considered taboo or inappropriate in the past. Biases over ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion were subdued and silent. Controversial topics polarizing communities were no longer a serious concern in comparison to the essential issues of food and security. Given this, Baruch Malkut is considered an anomaly, though a large and dangerous one. Some fae and hu-

mans accuse mankind of only accepting his differences in lieu of finding new people to hate.

LANGUAGES

Many human languages died within a few generations of the Hammer's fall. Others merged to create new variations. Now only a handful remain. Surviving vernacular soon divided into regional slangs and patois, becoming recognized languages themselves with distinct lexicons, syntaxes, and phonetic pronunciations. Of the major languages, the only ones that survived more or less intact are English, French, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese, and most of these are relegated to purely academic use in favor of more modern amalgams of a variety of regional languages. Surviving vernacular soon divided into regional slangs and patois, eventually becoming recognized languages themselves with distinct lexicons, syntaxes, and phonetic pronunciations. English surfaced as the only surviving dominant language in Canam, though divided into dozens of regional dialects, coopting vocabulary from upward of a hundred different languages, from the old Latin languages to the tongues of Asiatic immigrants fleeing the spread of Kakodomania, to the few surviving pockets of native tribal speech. Scholars and traders recognize three major dialects, mutually unintelligible enough to almost be considered separate languages: English (the dominant tongue of the western half of Canam), Englo-Lingo (the common speech of the northeastern part), and Onespeak (the only legal language of Baruch Malkut, which dominates the southern quarter of the continent).

LANGUAGE	SCRIPT TYPE	SCRIPT NAME
Argose	Pictographic	Argose
Chaparra	Pictographic	Faen
Damaskan	Logographic	Damaskan
English	Alphabetic	English
Englo-Lingo	Alphabetic	English
Ferran	Pictographic	Ferran
Gutturán	None	None
Ignotan	Featural	Kakkonin
Indic	Abjad	Shahmukhi
Laudenian	Logographic	Faen
Narroni	Featural	Narroni
Old Fae	Pictographic	Faen
Onespeak	Alphabetic	Terran
Paggin	Featural	Kakkonin
Pleroma	Logographic	Adonnic
Romanic	Alphabetic	Romanic
Saeqaar	Logographic	Adonnic
Semitic	Abjad	Aramaic
Sinitic	Logographic	Kanja
Slavic	Alphabetic	Cyrillic
Tenenbra	Logographic	Tenenbra

LOST TRIBES

Humans have a certain propensity for conservatism when it comes to their languages – even though they constantly evolve, there is always a countercurrent. I understand that throughout history, there have even been efforts to legislate the language that people speak to prevent it from changing or taking on outside influences, efforts ultimately doomed to failure but nevertheless remarkably prevalent. I have even heard rumors of isolated settlements of humans that strive to maintain their old languages in more or less 'perfect' form and regard the use of another language as a betrayal of their culture, with dire consequences for the speaker. I myself have made it a point to learn at least a smattering of several archaic human tongues, just in case.

While each fae species has its own distinctive accent if not entirely separate language, fae tongues sound similar to one another, though different enough that a speaker could not fake one if fluent in another. Narros and pagus tongues sound more jagged and sharp, while other fae races sound more fluid and poetic. Even though sounding similar to their languages, humans have found learning any fae tongue extremely difficult.

English: English is not really English, but a mixture of older English with fragments of French, German, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Punjabi, with a smattering of Salishan, Pueblo, Cree, or Algonquian thrown in (depending on the region). The Angel dialect of the language is the lingua franca of the western continent and of York, by dint of their early association with Limshau, and is one of the most frequently learned human languages by non-humans. This language is more heavily influenced by Sinitic and Spanish, to the point that nearly half the classical English vocabulary has been replaced by Asian or Latin equivalents.

Argose: Argose is the primitive language of the kodiaks. Argose consists of growls and mumbles barely distinguishable to the untrained ear from the random noises of an unintelligent animal. The specific patterns are hidden deep in the inflections of those growls, a system few outside of the attuned ears of the kodiaks could even pick up, and which no other species can pronounce due to not having the right shape of vocal cords.

Chaparra: The chaparrans refused to alter their language from their roots and have been obtuse to adapt given the exposure from other cultures. Chaparrans believe their tongue is the closest to the original old language, Faena. Later chaparran branch species have an even more complicated version of this vernacular. Chaparran written form, an elegant and beautiful style known as Faen, has never been adapted or altered. It is also nearly impossible to translate unless one is chaparran. Chaparra is syllable-timed, making the speech sound like lasting poem of perfect rhythm though, un-

like Laudenian, it is filled with hard alveolar and glottal sounds. The written form of chaparra and laudenian are nearly identical.

Damaskan: The language used by the fae of Damaska and Limshau, as well as all gimfen, is the most widely known non-human tongue in the world. More humans speak Damaskan than any other fae language. It is substantially easier to learn than Chaparra or Laudenian, though still presenting some complications, but is far easier to learn through exposure than any other fae tongue. The damaskan language is both compact and fusional, able to express quite complicated concepts in a short span of syllables, akin to old Finno-Ugaritic languages. Being a stress-timed language, the vocalization sounds similar to Sinitic: those fluent with the Asian tongue often find picking up Damaskan easier than English. Modern Damaskan has adapted in the last few centuries, amalgamating elements from Narroni and Sinitic into its syntax and vocabulary. Damaskan is very fluid language with soft sounds and few hard stops.

Englo-Lingo: This bizarre patois popped up around the eastern bastion of York and is thought to have emerged from the bastion of Mann, where it is the national language. Englo-Lingo filters out most of the Sinitic donations that found themselves in modern English and added older French and German slang to create a bizarre phonology that shifts through three different Germanic languages every sentence. Dozens of villages on the east coast insist upon it and York accepts it as their second official language, being different enough from English to make the bastion effectively bilingual.

Ferran: A simplistic version of Damaskan, Ferran is a jagged, rough tongue used by the lower branches from the damaskans like puggs, boggs, and skeggs. It differs slightly with every village, making a proper translation from any source difficult.

Gutturor: Even harder to learn is the sharp dialect of the narros branch species (like chiggoths and oggraks). Since they have no real culture and are extremely phobic of society, their language is chaotic and hard to define. Gutturor as a term is a misnomer since there has never been a consensus of the phonology to define it as a language. It is thought that every group has personalized the language intentionally to prevent even neighbors from relating to them easily.

Ignotan: The native language of all denizens of Kakodomania and servants of Mengus, Ignotan is a simple sounding language easy to pick up but hard to master. Its written form is perfection itself. Completely phonetic, one could learn the basics of its speech in a day. The language is complicated but every phoneme makes intuitive sense. Like all creations of syntropy, it is nearly mechanical in its application, and thus makes for lousy poetry. All shemjaza, typhox dragons, and most pagus speak Ignotan.

Indic: This is an amalgamation of old human languages Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. It is not often spoken in Canam but still pops up from time to time.

Laudenian: There is a seemingly never-ending debate between the chaparrans and laudenians about which species is closer to the original fae. The laudenian language is slightly more askew from its roots, an evolution of the original that would progress into Damaskan later. Their written form, however, is closer to the chaparran system. The language flows beautifully and is extremely poetic and fluid with a strong base in syllable-stress. Only laudenians speak laudenian: they are unwilling to teach it to anyone else, and find the mispronunciations of the few self-taught speakers highly distasteful.

Narroni: The narroni tongue is often confusing to linguists (though surprisingly easy to learn), its grammar being superficially similar to certain old Asian languages but with a sound system like a roughly equal mix of pre-Hammer Gaelic, Russian, and Turkish, despite being constructed out of wholecloth. The original narros' speech was a local patois of Laudenian, but as time went on, they found that the language was completely impractical for their present needs. Modern Narroni was constructed in committee and implemented instantly after it was cleared. As a constructed language, it is efficient and elegant in its simplicity, and is neither hard to learn nor hard to master. It is the simplest echan language to use and thus can be picked up easily, even by techans.

Old Fae: Further chaparran branches continued to degrade the syntax of their parent tongue until finally, the lower species like faeries, sylphids, and dojenn began speaking in a bizarre language of songs and whispers even the chaparrans couldn't understand. Along with the holy language of dragons, Old Fae is impossible to learn by most mortals.

Onespeak: Similar to Narroni, Onespeak is a partially manufactured language devised by Baruch Malkut and imposed on the population. Using a regularized form of classical English as its structure, it borrows heavily from Spanish and Portuguese, and contains thousands of words with no known etymology. This language was devised to unite mankind but it ended up further isolating the kingdom from the rest of the world. It is the only official language of Baruch Malkut, and although the upper classes are usually perfectly conversant in Englo-Lingo, use of any language other than Onespeak by the general populace is harshly punished.

Paggin: This language formed secretly among the pagus that lived out of control of the shemjaza. Pagus in Kakodomania speak Ignotan only. Those in Apocrypha and Azhi Dahaka speak only Paggin unless a shemjaza strolls into their village: any pagus that speaks paggin to a shemjaza is instantly executed (of course, any pagus who speaks to a shemjaza unbidden runs the risk any-



way). Rebellious pagus consider paggin the first mark of an independent pagus culture.

Pleroma: The language of the dragons, called Adonnaais in all fae languages but having no name in its own, is considered the very first language spoken by any intelligent creature on the planet. The language and its written form are intrinsically linked with Attricana and it is thought that the dragon god Amethyst created the world of magic by speaking the correct words. This is the language all spellcasters use when casting magic but even they cannot carry a conversation with it. Only dragons are fluent. The language itself cannot be pronounced by any creature that doesn't have a prehensile tongue and an intrinsically pandimensional understanding of reality, so the intensity of magic with mortals will always be limited.

Romanic: Another language seldom heard in Canam, this merging of French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish is thought to be the lingua-franca of Laupa and the dominant language of the bastion of Porto.

Saeqaar: The mirror of the dragon language, this tongue has the same written form (albeit mirrored) and a similar pronunciation. It is spoken solely by typhox dragons and shemjaza for the purposes of spellcasting. Its actual name is not known (saeqaar being an Ignotan word), and it is probable that like Pleroma, the name for the language would have to encompass the entire language itself. There is no word for the tongue in any fae

language and they refuse to create one.

Semitic: A growing dialect in Canam, this language underwent the fewest changes over the past few centuries. A descendant of Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew, it is a common second language to those in Abidan and its outlying villages. It is often heard in locations of religious importance.

Sinitic: A fast growing language in Canam, Sinitic came into being with the influx of various Asian refugees that appeared on the continent's west coast seeking an escape from the fallout of the Hammer and the growing power of Kakodomania. There, they combined with the already large Asian-derived population gathering in the fledgling city of Angel, and out of necessity their cultures and languages began to merge. Modern Sinitic uses the more regular grammar of old Korean and Japanese, with a roughly equal mixture of vocabulary from Mandarin and Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese. Most of the tonal features of the original languages have been abandoned, though a few remain. Written Sinitic uses a refinement of the old Japanese kanji and hiragana scripts called kanja, but can be written equally clearly in both English and Damaskan orthography. It is the common second language in Angel and a common tongue for hundreds of miles around, including Limshau, where it was a popular choice among damaskans when first learning a human language, and Fargon (due to the inexplicable cultural similarities between old Asia and the narros).

Slavic: An extremely rare language in Canam, Slavic amalgamates Belorussian, Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatia, Slovak, and Ukrainian. There is no village in Canam that uses it exclusively. It is thought to emerge from several echan and techan nations in the similarly named continent of Slav, including the bastion of Krebet.

Tenenbra: The tenenbri (a lesser seen fae in Canam) are the sole speakers of this tongue, which stands clearly as the most bizarre of any fae language. Tenenbra is an agglutinative language that compounds flowing vowels, sibilants and fricatives with sudden and sometimes harsh dental and labial stops, interspersed with whistles, clicks, and chirps. This strange phonetic characteristic came from their voices' capacity to double as echo-location devices. Most words are three or more syllables long, but may encompass concepts that English would require four or five words to express. The phonology also deals with the stress level of voice, implying different meaning depending on the volume of the words. Other than Old Fae, Tenenbra is the hardest for any outsider to learn.

RELIGION

Humans have maintained most of their old religions, but virtually all religious zealotry disappeared when less than 200 million people survived to the new age. They quickly banded together, abandoning old bigotries and conceits from the old world. The holy lands many fought, killed, and died for were gone, and with nearly all of the ancient sacred relics gone with them, most took this as a sign to live for the betterment of all mankind and not die over the buried remnants of forgotten conflicts. Sworn enemies put aside their pasts in favor of rebuilding. Many of them found new enemies, as well as new friends, with arriving echan peoples. In this new world, the big five religions survived: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Chinese Folklore, and Buddhism. They remain the majority by an enormous margin. Smaller faiths – Judaism, Sikhism, Shinto, etc. – appear in certain regions. With 95% of humanity eliminated at the dawn of the new age, the survivors believed that Armageddon either had passed or was yet to come. The majority of man, even within the bastions, is still controlled by rulers professing a faith in an almighty power. With the exception of a scant few, most use this belief to lead the people in wisdom and kindness, not in fear and lunacy. Those embracing echa believe in the gate as a lens of their faith and not necessarily a symbol. Faiths including a heaven believe it sits beyond the gateway of Attricana. Those without a heaven (or even a god for that matter) believe the gate to be either a reflection of nature or a mirror of their own soul.

Before the gate opened, the world was divided on the origin of man, firmly separated between a scientific theory and a religious belief. This all changed when Attricana opened. With this new angle on the world,

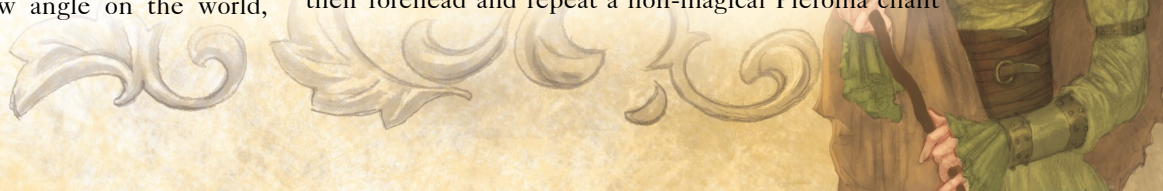
many humans faced new facts: the introduction of the fae and dragons, and a past world and history unknown to them. Some elected to believe their dogma accurate despite contradictory evidence, concocting extravagant theories claiming the previous age did not exist at all, and the new arrivals were demons meant to be repressed or destroyed. Others took these new peoples and their similarities as the final proof of divine creation, still placing man atop this ladder of progressive superiority. Many older religions did adapt and changed their scripture based on the new world. Some still attempted to use fear to suppress their believers while others took this as an opportunity to start over. The vast majority of humanity accepts natural selection as the origin of humanity, whether or not they have integrated it into another belief system.

Despite agnosticism being the dominant philosophy across the world, religion – or at least spirituality – is still a major consideration. After all, the ephemeral world clearly exists; there are powers in the world beyond human kenning, and even dragons can't be sure whether or not there is a god (although most of them would quite happily claim to be one in exchange for mortal devotion, gifts and sacrifices). Religion is, one might say, the only rational response to such phenomena. However, with two notable exceptions, there are no real organized religions left: anyone with a calling can preach their words of faith, and generally find someone to listen – but the same parishioner might just as easily choose to listen to someone else the next day. By and large, religion has returned to its primal state as a personal relationship with the sacred, rather than a dominant social consideration.

ECCHAN FAITHS

Amethyst: Amethyst, the dragon god of the Terros age, fell to dust when the demon armor, Gebermach, plunged the Sword of Dogurasu into the dragon's heart. Many believe his spirit lives in the Gate, waiting for the time to return. In many ways, faith in Amethyst or Attricana is interchangeable, but subtle differences appear in the symbols. Amethyst represents all things good. He believes in creation and life. He frowns on destruction and those who wish to control others. In Canam sits an ancient temple as old as the Second Hammer. Its exact location has been lost to all but a select few. Mentioned in the Gospel of Greka, the temple stands atop a mountain, surrounded by a fortress of stone. Only a few know of the significance of this temple but refer to it as the Temple of Amethyst. Those following the faith hope to eventually locate it. Every decade or so, a crusade begins with as few as five or as many as five thousand to search the continent for this fabled temple. With little to work on, no crusade has ever succeeded.

The symbol of Amethyst is a chunk of Amethyst rock. To pray to Amethyst, worshipers place the stone to their forehead and repeat a non-magical Pleroma chant



four times in different directions. Many fae races worship Amethyst. Amethyst himself never wrote any scripture or preached any gospel. He resented the deification of him or his power, though not of the dragons as a whole – who he always tasked with shepherding all the other souls of the world. One record quoted from Amethyst, “If there is a God, then he is truly infinite, and I am as far from his eternal greatness as any other.”

Attricana: Like Amethyst, followers of Attricana believe in creation and despise evil in all forms. Unlike other religions, faith in Attricana does not presume a divine intelligence. Believing in Attricana translates to believing in a creation beyond science but not necessarily with a conscious design. Attricana followers consider their faith more a study of creation, the closest thing to a science echans have. Other faiths accuse followers of Attricana of being infidels, disbelievers finding a shortcut around faith to explain the new world. Worshipping Attricana proves that faith in an intelligent divinity is not required to rationalize magic.

Some right-wing religious groups have sworn to crucify followers of Attricana for betraying God’s gifts. Across the ocean, an entire culture has developed with a population of Attricana-endorsing theists. When one who follows Attricana gains wisdom or power, he or she believes it derives from an internal source and not from a divine creator. Worshipping would be an incorrect word to even describe it. The Attricana symbol is an amulet of the white star itself. Followers do not exactly pray, but stare at the gate in the morning, studying it, and gaining wisdom from internal meditation. Being of no intelligence, Attricana is simply neutral.

Dragons: Many people worship dragons, the most powerful creatures on the planet. They are immortal, predating all others by millions of years. Most dragons refuse such responsibility, frowning on such beliefs. Others accept and respect such faith but remain humble to their mortal origins. A few embraced the belief and maintain active roles in the lives of their worshippers.

Evil dragons manipulate this belief to create hordes of followers to do their bidding. All dragon symbols resemble the dragon specifically being worshipped. The appropriate method of worship varies from dragon to dragon. Dragons are worshipped across the world.

Berufu: Many fae still follow their original faith in the creator of all things, Berufu – the mother of all fae. They believe Berufu lives in the shadow realm where the universe was formed. Attricana to them is a source of power, but not the home of God. According to legend, Berufu released the fae to hundreds of worlds across the universe through the gates. This view holds that shemjaza are alien fae brought into the world from the black gate, and the Berufu legend explains that both tap into the same resource. Amethyst and Mengus are not gods to them and there is no dark opposite of

Berufu in the faith. The concept of hell is a purely human invention.

Another variation claims Berufu was willed into existence by the god of all matter, Oaken, to be his mate. Together, they would create a species bound of both their strengths to populate the universe. The two gods formed the original fae, seeding billions if not trillions of fae in Berufu’s womb, only letting a fraction upon the worlds they chose. This womb is a spiritual chamber in the ethereal realm known as Otsharus (which may be the echalogical root of the Hebrew word, Otzar). The number of fae souls released from Otsharus is fixed and when it is emptied, the species will no longer expand into new worlds. Nothing is listed in the books on Berufu about mankind except one controversial excerpt that claimed every human born steals a soul from Otsharus and the reason for the fae de-evolution is due to the dwindling souls in the chamber. Only fanatical laudenian and tenenbri priests hold this belief. Shemjaza also use fae souls, another reason why their destruction is paramount with followers of Berufu.

The sacred symbol of Berufu is a string of white pearls wrapped around one’s arm. Praying involves a wide variety of chants in one’s native tongue while rubbing the pearls between open palms. This procedure takes as much as an hour every morning. Every fae descendant culture makes her look like themselves, but all depictions show Berufu graceful and tall for the worshipper’s species.

Helios: The faith practiced in Baruch Malkut strictly speaking does not have a name, as its adherents claim that it is the only true belief in the world and to name it would imply it to be equivalent to the false teachings of others. The damaskans of Limshau, ever-eager to deliver the southern kingdom its comeuppance, named it ‘Helios’ after its holy book, the Helios Codex, and if those elsewhere in Canam have cause to speak of it, this is the name they use. It is a religion specifically constructed and formulated to exert Darius Konig’s control over his people: in it, he is a divine being, a prophet, and the nearest thing possible to God on Earth (the fact that he is apparently untouched by the two hundred years that have passed since his appearance in Canam is taken as proof of divine favor). The core tenets of the religion are that magic is a gift from God to humanity, but it was stolen by the fae, who are demons sent from Hell to mislead humans from the path of righteousness: once the last fae is destroyed and every sign of Man’s adherence to technology (the antithesis of magic) is cleansed from the Earth, a new paradise will grow. Very few of its followers have actually read the Helios Codex, as one of its chief commandments is that knowledge be revealed only to those who are worthy of it, and consequently 99% of Baruch Malkut’s population is illiterate. Even most of the preachers who promulgate the word to the believers cannot read it for themselves, but are taught what to say by rote in government-controlled



schools. The faith has very few adherents outside of Baruch Malkut, most of these being missionaries sent to other nations, more to annoy than to convert.

Ixindar: Opposite of Attricana, Ixindar promotes an ordered, uniform existence, everything under complete control. To believe in Ixindar means to encourage a state where the universe no longer changes. Worshipers obsess about control. They don't preach their faith; they enforce it. Their homes are perfectly organized. Though they may not wish to create a world devoid of life, they do believe a perfect society involves perfect order and absolute discipline without the pesky distractions of imagination, emotions, or independent thought. Like Attricana, Ixindar possesses no intelligence, only an ideal. Worshipping Ixindar, like Attricana, may be incorrect wording. There is no deity, more the disciplined study of the phenomenon. Some of the most loyal followers of Ixindar are scientists, thinking Ixindar possesses a uniform, constant, and stable power source to help retake the planet for techa.

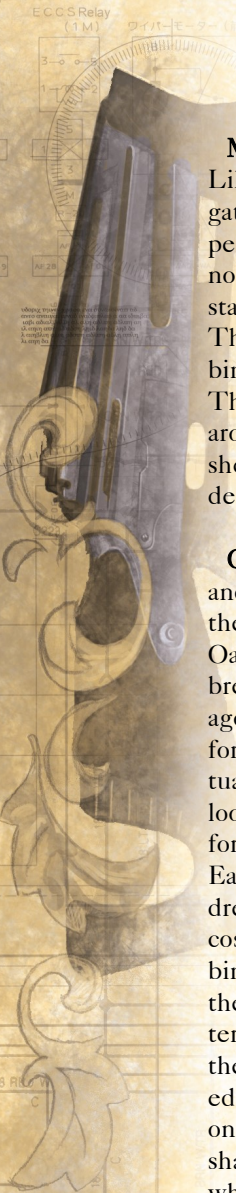
The symbol for Ixindar is a simple black pearl, featureless. Being of no intelligence, Ixindar is simply evil.

Mecha / Machine God: Only the gimfen worship Mecha (or Machine God) in any great number. We subscribe to the idea that the knowledge of technology is passed down by a powerful deity beyond the gate and

only to a precious few. Only by worshipping the Machine God can technology be safely used alongside magic. Some of our learned folk believe that most bastions fight against the word of Mecha and could solve all their problems with simple belief in their almighty. While I wouldn't consider myself less devout than the average gimfen, this explanation does seem a trifle silly to me. If anything, humanity's skills show them to possess great blessings even without faith.

Gimfen hold that Mecha was the firstborn of Berufu and Oaken and became so powerful that it began questioning the form of the universe. The parents forbade their child from giving precious knowledge to the fae, but it did so anyway. In response, Berufu took away Mecha's true name and Oaken robbed it of its gender. Mecha would only be a half-god. Though some devout followers have become eunuchs as part of their devotion, this is not widely endorsed. Mecha's symbols are tools, any tools. Everything the mechanic uses is laid out in the morning and the devout thanks the machine god for the tools and the knowledge, picking up every single item and expressing gratitude for its existence. For gimfen, known to have many tools, this sometimes takes half the morning before any work is done. 'Churches' in our communities are shops where followers can discuss their god and faith and pick up a few items at a divine discount.





Mengus: This spirit still exists beyond the black gate. Like Amethyst and Attricana, Mengus and the black gate of Ixindar are virtually interchangeable. Worshipers of Mengus believe in an overall plan for the world: not merely to reduce the universe to an unchanging state, but one ordered by a single infinite intelligence. Those who worship hope to share in her power, to combine with a greater intelligence and be one with a god. The Mengus symbol is a collection of tentacles curling around each other. Mengus is the sole deity of all shemjaza and typhox dragons as well as any pagus under their control.

Oaken: Narros elevate Oaken above all other deities, and though they acknowledge that Berufu has a place in their mythology, it is always a subordinate position. Oaken's myth claimed he arrived into this galaxy by breaking off a monstrous intelligence billions of years ago. This intelligence had no name but scattered to form all the planets of the universe magic would eventually appear on. The greatest segment drifted into the loose particles around the Sun before the planets were formed and the matter that drifted to Oaken formed the Earth. In this regard, Oaken is not one god, but hundreds, thousands, or even millions scattered across the cosmos. Some speculate Oaken is a hive mind, a combined gestalt of all the fragments. Either one or all of them together created Berufu (a singular entity no matter which version of the dogma) and decided to spawn the populations of the universe. Berufu however, wanted fae to dominate the worlds and Oaken wanted dragons. Eventually, Berufu and Oaken created the Otsharus and deposited the fae across the many worlds, while Oaken snuck dragons onto a few of them as a pet project. Oaken's mythos does not include Mecha except for one or two stories, all written by Mecha disciples.

Though technically part of the same religion, the dogma of the Oaken and Berufu faiths differ drastically and are full of inconsistencies. Both make huge assumptions on other fae species outside of the Earth with no evidence of their existence. Oaken dogma includes Otsharus but claims the souls from this great chamber exit via the black or white gates and thus both fae, pagus, and demons all use them. Man is innocent in this and receive their souls from another power altogether.

Narros and tenenbri (the highest ratio of believers) believe that Oaken tests the fae on his soil. If they don't prove worthy, they eventually devolve to dust. If all the fae eventually die, Oaken will verify to Berufu that dragons were the correct choice (oddly enough, no dragon professes faith or even curiosity in Oaken). The narros mythology contends that Oaken never agreed on the final form of the fae and since Berufu disliked dragons, Oaken eventually created the narros as his favorite children. Because Oaken lives underground, he forbids digging too deep into his realm. Narros believe the tenenbri dug too deep and were cursed; some tenenbri actually agree with this judgment and pray to Oaken for

forgiveness, while others claim that their defiance of divine law was another test that proved their superiority.

Oaken loves picks and hammers and his symbol is each of them crossing against an unrefined rock. To pray involves kissing the soil and chanting straight into the ground, rising back up with dirt on one's lips.

Yok-Ani: Unlike most other dragons, yok-ani accepted and respect the faith granted them. They believe in nothing but balance. The majority believe in endorsing neither good nor evil; or rather, that the mere concepts of 'good' and 'evil' represent a fundamental misunderstanding of the truth of the universe. Despite this belief, yok-ani are kind and benevolent. A few enforce pure neutrality as the only belief, but most preach that their followers must be as a leaf on the river of life, flowing where it takes them without fighting the current. Yok-ani also despise unnecessary violence and believe drawing the sword to be the final solution. Most devotees seldom even see a yok-ani dragon. Most of them live across the planet in the mountains of Kuraukou; one, the dragon Genai, can be found in the massive temple at the center of the town which bears his name in the midst of the bastion of Angel. This enormous pagoda marks the focus of the faith for the entire continent, but few can brave the bastion walls to reach it, and fewer still ever receive an audience with the dragon himself.

Disciples must be able to speak Sinitic, considered by the yok-ani to be the most poetic and philosophical of human languages. The yok-ani symbol is the dragon shape, snaking around a staff or sword hilt. Praying to yok-ani involves striking the sword or staff into the ground and singing, in Sinitic, a poem declaring one's faith.

HUMAN FAITHS

It should be noted that the following pages are extremely brief summaries of extremely complex religions and belief systems. If you choose a real faith, you should research the details of the religion and make sure you understand the demands put forth. Don't insult half the world by not doing your own research.

Chinese Folk Religion: Also known as Chinese Traditional Religion, this encompasses a vast amount of practices including Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It involves the worship of animals, deities, the sun, the moon, and the stars (although the latter has depressed somewhat in recent centuries). This also includes the worship of legends, ancestors, gods, goddesses, and demigods. In all, there are hundreds of different figures for followers to worship. These include the Jade Emperor, Cai Shen, Tu Di Gong, Hu Yi and Zau Shen. The concept states that a mirror of Earth floats beyond Heaven with a social hierarchy in which all these spirits,

gods, and legends live in peace and war. In the past, they often clashed over control of what once was called China. Most modern worshippers believe this double Earth sits beyond Attricana. One must research a path before choosing the right deity. Today, hundreds of temples dot the landscape, and the religion appears across the globe, but the single largest concentration of followers is found in Genai.

Christianity: Once the most schismatic faith on Earth, the Second Hammer put paid to nearly all sectarianism in Christianity; without the bureaucratic organizations that had supported it in the old world, followers of the Cross reverted to a state similar to that of the earliest days of the Church, with only their sacred writings to guide them instead of popes and patriarchs. Which articles of faith survived the transition are unclear, but as a whole, Christians adhere far more to the notions of tolerance and mercy than in pre-Hammer days. Christianity falls into two major camps on modern Earth: Techan and echan Christians. Echans believe the Second Coming has already occurred and this new world of miracles stands as a result of a new design. The existence of Ixindar places the image of Hell back into public acceptance, and many believe the purpose of all life on the new Earth is to crusade against this evil, to finally free the world of sin forever.

Some fanatics still exist. It is believed Baruch Malkut began initially as a Christian kingdom, though its tenets of faith have deviated so far from the original scripture that the only thing it has in common with mainstream Christianity are some of the names. Thankfully, this is the only real exception as most other Christian kingdoms are well respected with kind and fair rulers (like Abidan). The cross symbolizes everything and its placement dominates worshipper attire. Prayers have seldom changed, and morning mass takes just under an hour with a strict progression of prayers and actions. Christianity is found the world over.

Hinduism: One of the oldest religions of man, Hinduism maintains that the soul lives eternal, undergoing a continuous circle of life, death, and rebirth. The beliefs of Dharma, Samsara, Moksha, Jnana, Ishvara, and Karma remain unchanged. They hold Brahman as the eternal and all-powerful spirit to which everything stems and that Ishvara is the only way mankind can interpret Brahman. Several denominations of Hinduism place Vishnu or Shiva as the seat of eternal and omnipotent power. No matter the course, the faith encourages virtue and acts of good, believing that will put a soul on the road to enlightenment, and that evil acts lead to darkness.

A soul's status at birth and their life is determined by their karma. Karma is more than just the sum and balance of your good and bad deeds: it is work or action and the results of that work or action. Karma is cause-and-effect on a cosmic scale. It determines what lessons

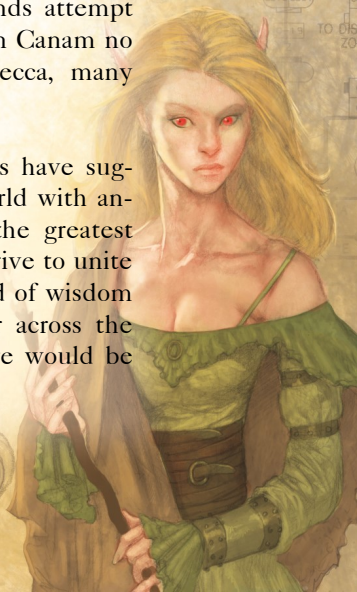
you have to learn in this and other lives and what fortunes will befall you in this and future lives as a result of actions in this and previous lives. Gods and goddesses exist, but according to certain schools of Hindu thought, they are just another form of life, higher than humans but ultimately mortal. They will eventually die (some believe many have died in the intervening millennia). Even after the fall of the Second Hammer, Hinduism remains as much a complex religion as it ever was. Most believers of Hinduism live around the outside of Western and Easter Slav, but like many faiths, it can be found in smaller numbers everywhere there are humans.

Unlike Islam, which frowns on idolatry, Hinduism showcases several examples, the most common being the Aum, a symbol found throughout the faith. Many others embrace the mandala and even the manji (swastika), any last negative connotations of which were wiped away along with the old world.

Islam: Of all the human faiths, Islam has changed the least. Muslims share six basic beliefs: in the god Allah, in the books sent by Allah, in all the prophets and messengers god sends, in predestination, in angels (or mala'ika), and in the day of qiyama (Judgment Day). Sunni and the Shi'a branches (and many others), like Christian branches, amalgamated into modern Islam. They believe in the Towers of Islam (obviously related to the Five Pillars or Core beliefs of Islam), Shahadah (sole god worship), Salah (five daily prayers), Sawm (fasting during Ramadan), Zakat (giving charity), and finally Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca), the final one still mandatory to all Muslims once during their lifetime.

When Attricana reshaped the Earth, much of the eastern Mediterranean coastline sank below the waves, submerging the ancient city of Jerusalem and putting paid to the wars of faith for good. The city of Urtioch (part of the kingdom of Trinitas) sits on the new coastline. Founded by migrating Muslims, the city stands as a shining beacon of religious equality. The trek to Mecca is no longer simple or safe: the Hajj now tests all. No longer safely nestled in city walls, by a miracle of godly proportions, the Kaaba exists atop a mountain simply called Makkah. Dangerous peaks prevent a strong civilized foothold. Every year, tens of thousands attempt the voyage. Since many modern Muslims in Canam no longer know the specific direction to Mecca, many simply pray facing towards the east.

In modern days, some progressive Muslims have suggested that God may one day bless the world with another prophet. Though Mohammed was the greatest prophet of mankind, this new one would strive to unite all species of Earth under a common shroud of wisdom and guidance. This belief is not popular across the world and no one is sure how such a figure would be greeted.



Muslims are taught to reject idolatry, needing no symbol but their own articles of faith. Muslims are everywhere but many live in Arkonnia and Canam. In Canam, the largest population outside of bastions can be found in the city of Taskin-Kada in Abidan.

Judaism: Related to Islam and Christianity, Judaism, involves the worship of one, all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipotent, and everlasting god who created the universe and continues to influence its development. He created the Tora (or five books of Moses), which dictates the laws and commandments (613 in total) of the Jewish people. Following these rules and worshipping God earns merit, rewarding one in the afterlife. This afterlife exists in the Garden of Eden that many believe sits behind Attricana. What this afterlife looks like has never been defined.

Further, even though there are many rules and principles of faith, no official creed or dogma is recognized as fully binding. The common points are that God exists, is all-powerful, has no physical form, is eternal, and is singular in presence. God gave humanity purity at birth with a free will to choose his or her own path. Mankind may atone for sins through sincere acts of redemption.

Followers of Judaism must commit to prayer three times a day, although specifics differ with interpretation. They still recognize the Shabbat, the weekly day of rest, as well as all other Jewish holidays. Like all monotheisms, Judaism also operates temples in Trinitas across the ocean. In Canam, those of Jewish faith fight an unfortunate constant stigma. Since Baruch Malkut uses a distorted Yiddish translation of the term “Blessed Kingdom,” some incorrectly accuse the kingdom of the south as being Jewish, when in fact they follow a hideously warped version of Christian doctrine. Thankfully, the fae – the greatest sufferers from Baruch Malkut’s dogmatic excesses – rarely judge humans on the basis of religion.

Sikhism: Sikhs follow the teachings of the Ten Gurus, dating back centuries before the Second Hammer. Over one million worshippers still live today, scattered across the planet. The followers adhere to the thousand page-plus scripture known as the Guru Granth Sahib. Thankfully, this tome, like the Qur’an and Holy Bible, survived through the end of the last world. The book preaches a simple approach to spirituality, a message directly revealed by God (Waheguru), who is singular and all-powerful. All created by God stand equal in all ways, regardless of race, sex, or religion. After the gates opened, many Sikhs accepted the new races without question, being all created by God. A laudenian priest once spoke highly of the Sikhs and their faith, claiming it made more sense than all other human beliefs. All Sikhs defend life in all its forms, especially those of fellow human beings and fae. They also believe in reincarnation. Followers wake before the sunrise and meditate on God’s name. They must live their life in peace, give

to those in need, and open their doors to all. Sikhs are encouraged to form communities where everyone is equal, and are prohibited from acquiring possessions based solely on greed, acting illogically, or treating any intelligent species less than they would treat themselves.

Shinto: The “Way of the Gods,” Shinto still survives across the world today, often practiced alongside faith in the yok-ani. A few have even combined the two. Once one of the official religions of Japan, Shinto professes reverence and respect for nature and veneration of important spiritual figures from the mythic past of the adherent’s nation. The religion lacks a specific dogma or a fixed way to act. One does not even need to profess a belief in Shintoism, as in many respects it exists purely as a way to express humanity’s need for ceremony. Shinto believes in family and welcomes anyone. Its only simple commandment insists on a simple life unifying one’s soul with nature. Spirits worshipped in Shinto are called kami. There are kami of various orders of power in all things, be they physical, metaphysical, or conceptual, but the most powerful remains the sun-goddess Amaterasu. Some believers claimed they found a connection between the dogma of fae and Shinto. They allege the Otsharus is the realm of the kami, the spirits of the kami are these unbirthed fae refusing to enter our world, and modern fae are, in fact, kami taking physical form in this world. The largest concentration of Shinto worshippers in the world is found in Genai.

MEDIEVAL TRAPPINGS

While every society is keen to claim its own system of government as right and natural, it cannot be denied that feudalism is one of the most enduring social systems ever contrived. As Attricana opened, the entirety of the planet was unclaimed. Those few flaunting influence over land or people took this opportunity to declare what they found as theirs. Calling themselves lords was an obvious next step. Even most fae, even the truly noble and chivalrous ones, would make such declarations on lands they deemed acceptable to build a nation upon, even if those lands were already populated. Generation passed onto generation, and a landowner would pass their holdings to an heir. Some claimed a lordship by simple right of wealth or military power, while a few arrogantly declared their title bestowed by a higher power. Eventually, the old titles returned. Some houses were led by lords, others by dukes, khans, counts, marquises, landgraves, or barons. A few humans even went as far to declare themselves monarchs of the highest order, kings and queens of divine royalty, defended by knights or royal guards.

Several changes did occur with the new age, influenced by the new landscape and people considering themselves “morally evolved.” The concept of designating any gender or ethnicity as second-class citizens had been expunged by the years of travail, when everyone



banded together on equal terms for mere survival. Furthermore, the fledgling aristocracy was of necessity forced to knight local landowners and betroth their children to lesser houses to increase their power. Added to that the fact that anyone could simply claim nobility upon the forming of a town, and the criteria for rulership became much more egalitarian. If the town became a city, the noble would become a ruler of grand stature.

Those human nations not declaring racial hatred to the fae would often embrace or even worship their neighbors as long-lived paragons of all things desirable. Many fae took this idol worship to heart, never having encountered such reverence before. This caused an increase in human-fae half-breeds as fae were often as romantic as the most quixotic humans. Powerful human monarchs sought marriages with ruling members of fae nations, desiring their patronage, their allegiance, and – more importantly – their popularity in keeping their own people loyal. When the positive side effects of human-fae pairing were discovered, many human aristocrats went mad pursuing a noble marriage with a similar classed fae. Alas, fae never bond for reasons other than love and these initial requests were always rejected.

A few nobles would eventually mix their blood with the fae lines, though this occurred more often by circumstance with lower class fae than by arrangement to forge an alliance. Human nobles having a fae spouse or being a half-fae themselves guaranteed respect and loyalty

from the people. The public considered their rulers true royalty, for such long-lived sovereigns must contain stately blood. But to the fae, true royalty could only be bestowed from a higher power, one that could destroy kingdoms with its bellowing breath of fire.

In the history of all the fae and their descendant races, the highest rung of the social ladder was given to those blessed, metaphorically speaking, by a dragon's kiss. A benign dragon would declare the fae of noble heritage, to be one apart from the rest, exhibiting extraordinary charisma and moral fortitude. By such blessing, the dragon would swear to channel wisdom to the members of the family name, even beyond the end of its own life. The royal's family name would be synonymous with that of the dragon. This is not an act done lightly or on impulse: only one or two families in each major species have been so exalted across the world. The laudenians have Elrenar Alkanost; damaskans have Ellenthos Telurian and Ravenar Limshau; chaparrans have Valentiarankerr, while tenenbri have Sharajacypse. Despite some claims to the contrary, no narros or gimfen have been so christened.

This has not stopped several fae from declaring themselves king or queen or the land they control a monarchy, citing the righteousness of their conquests as proof of their royalty. No dragon needs to consecrate them as proof of their sovereignty. Furthermore, the blessing is by no means a guarantee of overlordship: even though Sharajacypse is the only tenenbri gifted with a dragon



on her crest, she is only a lord in Vanaka, ruled by Queen Karellanecrebet in the capital of Vakai. A few nefarious gimfen and humans have fabricated such symbols upon their crest but dragons take forging their blessing seriously. Only archon dragons ever bestow such titles on others, reserving their endorsements to those with the charisma and benevolence to become great and wise leaders. Such titles are not given to beggars or shopkeepers, but to those already exhibiting promise, already leading others in virtue and gallantry. Many are already leading nations, but few ever declare themselves royalty. Assuming such a position guarantees no endorsement. Though most of these fae are appointed by word from a dragon's lips, some are thought to actually have dragon blood running through their veins, inherited from bonded love between crossed species generations ago. Such pairings are known to have occurred but are infrequent, only happening when a dragon takes mortal form and falls for its emotions and urges while in that state.

This knowledge was not known to humans and when the new world took shape, many materialistic and selfish leaders with too much power and too many men declared themselves royal only for the purposes of christening their land a kingdom. The most notable exception was King Savarice of Abidan, the only human in Canam to have ever received such endorsement from a dragon's hand. Savarice's blessing by the holy dragon, Silver River, guaranteed a stature other kingdoms could only dream of. The title did create controversy. Several great fae leaders like Thalagos Gin of Thos Thalagos and Karlis Kronas of Gnimfall expressed resentment for being overlooked and the laudenian archmagos Nacola Falconyr condemned the choice, declaring that the blessing of a human devalued the practice entirely. This view was not felt by Alkanost himself, who immediately accepted the king, further declaring Savarice and his noble line "the first true king of men and the only leader fit to guide his species." Ravenar Limshau agreed with the godly sanction and hoped it would rally a greater influx of immigrants to Abidan and threaten the stability of Baruch Malkut. King Darius Konig, upon hearing of the legend and of Savarice's title, snorted at the notion, arrogantly alleging that God himself—outranking any such blessing from a primitive dragon—hallowed his noble blood. King Darius pronounced Savarice's title a blasphemy, punishable by death. If the Savarice line is eliminated, it is unlikely mankind will be fortunate to receive such an honor again for many centuries. Thankfully, because of the necessity of expanding their control, royalty rarely if ever intermarry. Though some suspect other families of such controversy, no dragon-blessed royal family ever mixed sibling blood. The commodity of their lineage was too valuable to squander on selfish ideals.

DRAGONTouched KINGDOMS

The small nation of Quinox, nestled in the mountains between Selkirk and Alpinas, claims the blessing of a dragon – but their benefactor is no archon, but an elemental frost dragon, who lacks the power to bestow such a benison. There may be hundreds of other kingdoms just like it, who use the patronage of an elemental dragon – or, heavens forfend, even a typhox breed – to elevate their own status. Such claims would be considered patently ludicrous to any fae, but then again, dragons are a mysterious and touchy lot – it may not be healthy to mistreat their pets by overtly ridiculing them.



My companion's evident culture shock and claustrophobia made traversing the library city more time-consuming than it would otherwise have been, but eventually we found a librarian who led us through, and occasionally over, the twisting streets until we came to a large Z-shaped building. The three-storey edifice looked more like a tenement than a center of learning. As it happened, the building was home to four families and a small snack shop dispensing wine and cinnamon pastries to hungry scholars, a facility we availed ourselves of liberally in the days that followed. One of the families took us into their apartment for the duration of our stay, and Sachenka spent a great deal of time sequestered there, away from the hustle-and-bustle outside. Despite her threatening mien, several of the damaskan children took a liking to her, and bombarded her ceaselessly with requests for news and tales of the lands across the waves, to which she at last acceded, albeit with the most bad grace imaginable.

To say that our days passed quickly in study would, I fear, be a monstrous falsehood. It was a terminally dull experience, for the purpose of this structure was to house old entry and exit registers from the gates of every one of Limshau's walled cities. On these dusty scrolls are encoded the details of every visitor to and from the city, together with names (if known), physical description, a summary of the traveler's intent, an inventory of their equipment, the amount and types of any currency exchanges that took place at the point of entry or egress, and other such information as is usually considered interesting only to bureaucrats and genealogists. Through these records we pored, seeking one particular traveler: a human male, tall even for a twiceling, black of hair and equally dark of demeanor, comported as if for a battlefield in plate armor. Sachenka told me nothing else other than this description, and since her comprehension of the Damaskan tongue did not extend to fluency in the orthoglossic shorthand in which Limshau's gate guardians are accustomed to enscribe their records, it was up to me and our helpful philologist to sift through the hundreds of thousands of entries that comprised the last few years' congress alone.

All varieties of people come through Limshau: representatives of every major fae species can be found here, and of every color and creed of humanity, as well as a few creatures even more unusual. Some of us are regular fixtures – I myself spend far more time in this city than in my ostensible homeland of Gnimfall, though I do not maintain a residence here (I make a great many friends in my travels, and most of them are all too happy to put me up for a night or a week should I require it). Many are residents, either born within the teeming metropolis or emigres from all over Canam. But the vast majority are visitors, fortune-seekers, hunters after the lore of treasures, monsters, or magic, or even merely tourists seeking experiences beyond the beaten path. In these scrolls I found thousands of stories reduced to a few words and numerals. I wondered what lay beyond the simple entries, what friends and family these travelers left behind, whether they ever found what they were seeking, or whether their final entry on the ledger of life was to be food for some wild creature. If I had all the time in the world, I would imagine the tales of these people. But I had not such time, and so let such fancies flow away on the warm wind of the late summer.

At last, I found what we were looking for: the man in question had entered the city on the twelfth of August, some six years ago, and departed three weeks later along the northern road into Kannos.

"What exactly are we pursuing?" I requested of Sachenka over our simple dinner of an aromatic dish that I understand the Genai call 'fa', usually followed by some sort of incomprehensible ribaldry.

"Debt," she responded, slurping her noodles. Her technique with chopsticks put me in mind of an emaciated spear-fisherman – although she clearly knew, broadly, how to use them, it was obvious she wasn't going to get much food in her mouth that way.

"Once again, my friend," I replied lightly, "your candor is both remarkable and profoundly unhelpful. A debt of money? Of duty? There are many kinds of debts a person might pursue in such a peril-fraught land as this."

"Honor," came the dour reply.

Of course it would be honor, I said to myself. It always is with these proud warrior types. There is no currency in the world so highly valued and yet so readily squandered. "And are you the debtor or the collector in this case?" I asked.

"Both." That appeared to be all that I would receive.

Sachenka was prepared to leave for Kannos immediately, but I wished to make some more inquiries first. Upon consultation of the traveler's manifest, I found that our traveler had departed with a newly printed copy of a two-hundred-year-old book – all such copies are required to be registered with the librarians upon departure, even if they are private commissions – and I hoped a visit to the scribe might shed some light upon the mystery. I found the place in the south district, a small print shop nestled between a laundry and a purveyor of dried meats. The proprietor was a thin and reedy damaskan with an apparatus composed of multitudinous lenses upon his head, who barely looked up from the frame into which he was shoveling small aluminum stamps, which were borne to

the printing press by his gimfen assistants the instant he completed them.

"Aye, I recall the commission," he declared after merely a glance at a ledger. "A rush job. Customer wanted it within a week, and paid three times my usual fee for the privilege. I told him it would take longer to get the etchings done for the illustrations, and he told me not to bother, that he had them memorized and only wanted the text. Strange accent the fellow had, not one I remember hearing before."

"What was the subject of the book?" I asked. "The title is merely 'Annotations of the Apparecian Antiquities Contained in Vault 53,' which is not terribly informative."

"'Twasn't much," said the printer. "Scarce worth the price, in my opinion, but who am I to judge another person's needs? It was an inventory of items stolen from the titular vault, I assume mostly of a technological nature by the jargon used to describe them. I have no expertise in that field, other than what I need to keep this contraption running." He nodded absently at his press. The two gimfen rolled their eyes and made a hand gesture which all our kind are familiar with – an expression of kindly exasperation at our efforts being appropriated by someone else. Such is the lot in life of those who go about beneath the noses of the twicelings.

"Do you recall anything unusual about the fellow?" I inquired as I slid a chryso across the desk in payment for his time.

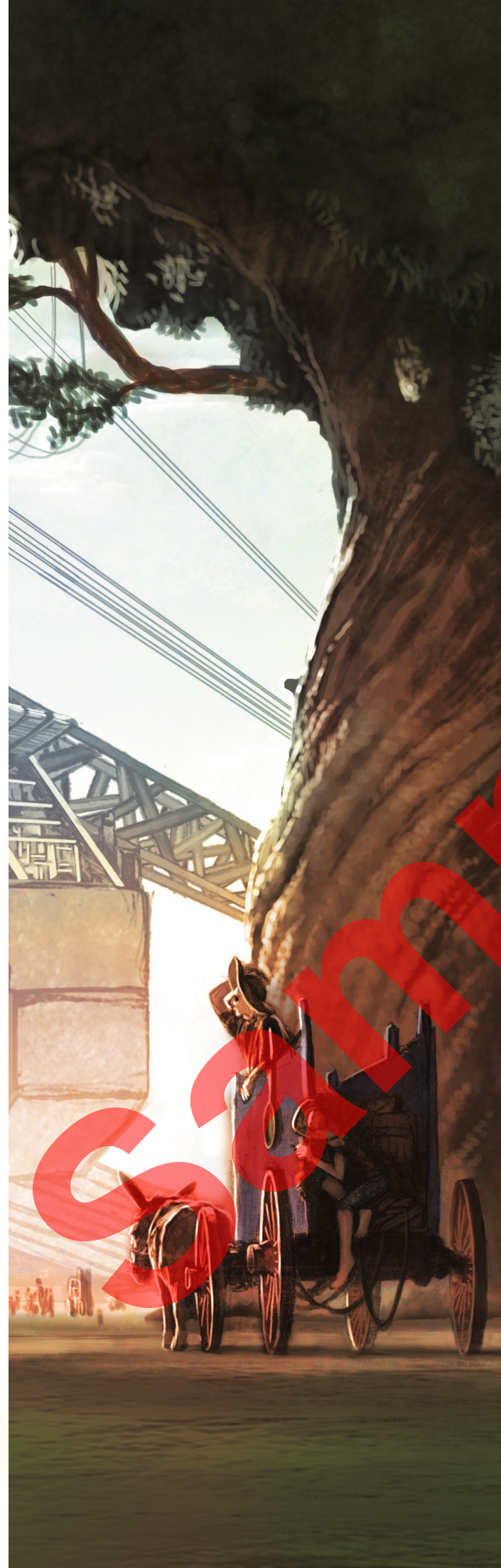
"Nothing much, apart from the accent," my interlocutor replied. "I assumed him to be just another human with his eyes on ancient treasure. I doubt he found anything – the book referred to place-names that the humans haven't used for centuries."

"I see. Well, felicitations upon your shop, and if I ever require a copy of some decrepit old tome, I will certainly offer you fine chaps my patronage," I said, doffing my hat and retreating into the narrow streets. On my way back to our lodging, I stopped to enquire about caravans heading west. I felt there was something we should investigate before we traveled northward.





CHAPTER THREE: PLACES



"Do not like it here," Sachenka muttered as we strolled through a Salvabrooke market. She glared at a gimfen who came forward proffering a tray of cinnamon buns. The hapless baker shrank back in the face of the Lauropan woman's displeasure.

"You haven't liked anywhere we've been," I chided her. "A more unpleasable human I have never before encountered. This place isn't dangerous – well, it is, but not in that way. Keep your hands off your weapon and on your money belt if you want to avoid trouble here."

"Why we are here?"

"There's an old friend of mine I think you should talk to. She may be able to help." I spotted the tent I had been looking for and beckoned Sachenka to follow. "Just... don't offer her any money."

"Offend?"

"No, but she'll haggle you down to your smallclothes."

The tent was of bastion-make, an expensive PVC fabric with a fashionable, by Salvabrooke's eclectic standards, print pattern of moons and stars, which its occupant almost certainly had obtained at a substantial discount. I pushed open the flap and ducked inside, followed by my towering companion.

"Ah, good'den, gentlefolk," the tent's female occupant said in an outrageously affected accent. "Do ye seek the mysteries of the future, the past, or the present?"

"Greetings and felicitations, Bonnie-Brae," I replied with a smile.

"Glynn!" she exclaimed, dropping the accent. "I didn't recognize ya with them sideburns. And it's 'The Great and Powerful Luna Lassimore' these days, thank ya very much." She glanced up at her other guest.

"Who's yer friend?"

"A visitor to these shores with a peculiar need," I told her. "I hoped you might have heard word of it upon the wind."

They say travel broadens the mind. Adventurers are uniquely fortunate in that we get to experience far more of the world than most. Though modern society is far less restrictive of travel than I understand humanity's medieval past to have been – and by and large, the roads are better – still, the vast majority of people never travel more than a day's ride from their homes. You are more likely to find a tourist from a bastion at far remove from home than an echan farmer or burgher, and even knights and nobles stick to well-traveled roads between major settlements and rarely, if ever, leave their own nations. But a well-traveled adventurer like me has seen this land from sea to shining sea, and comes away a better person for it (in my not-so-humble opinion).

TRAVEL

Most fantasy worlds in human fiction present a world of expanding beauty but short distances, or else mystical means of traveling between far-flung locales. The real world is no less fantastical but far less forgiving. Travel time is a problem. Roads are few and far between, and overland travel between distant locations can take weeks or even months. Even on the Continental Cross, the only highway and reasonably maintained road in Canam, it takes just under a month to reach Limshau from Angel by horse, and another six weeks from there to reach York – assuming that travel is not marred by bandit or wandering monster attacks or the more mundane depredations of toll-booths and competing tax and excise collectors from the various free houses along the road. Most travelers who must traverse long distances, therefore, prefer to do it by air.