AMETHYST

UNTAMED

WORLD GUIDE

OFFICIAL SAVAGE WORLDS LICENSED PRODUCT

Amethyst

UNTAMED WORLD GUIDE

Dias Ex Machina

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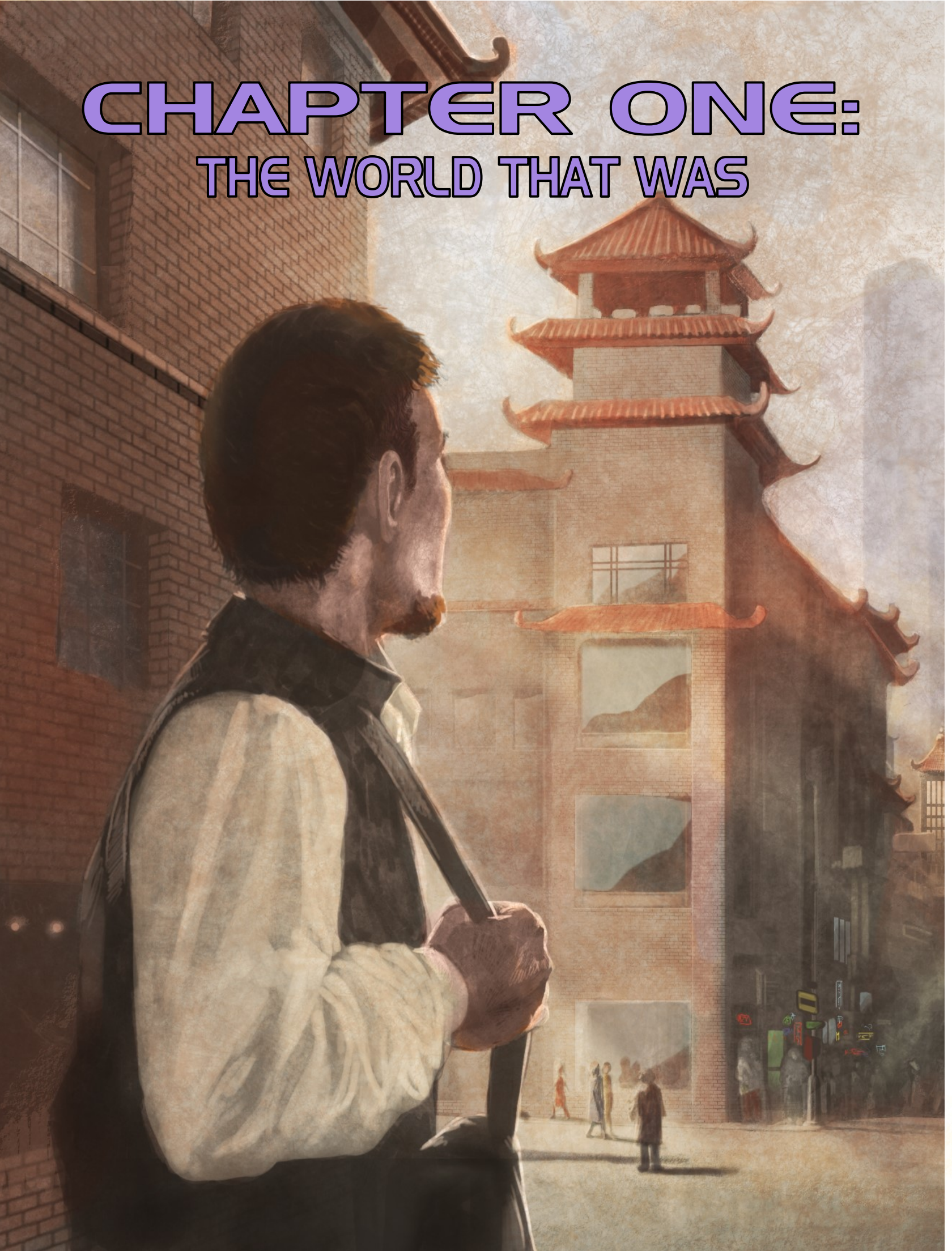

CHAPTER ONE:
THE WORLD THAT WAS

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 Semiiya?"

"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

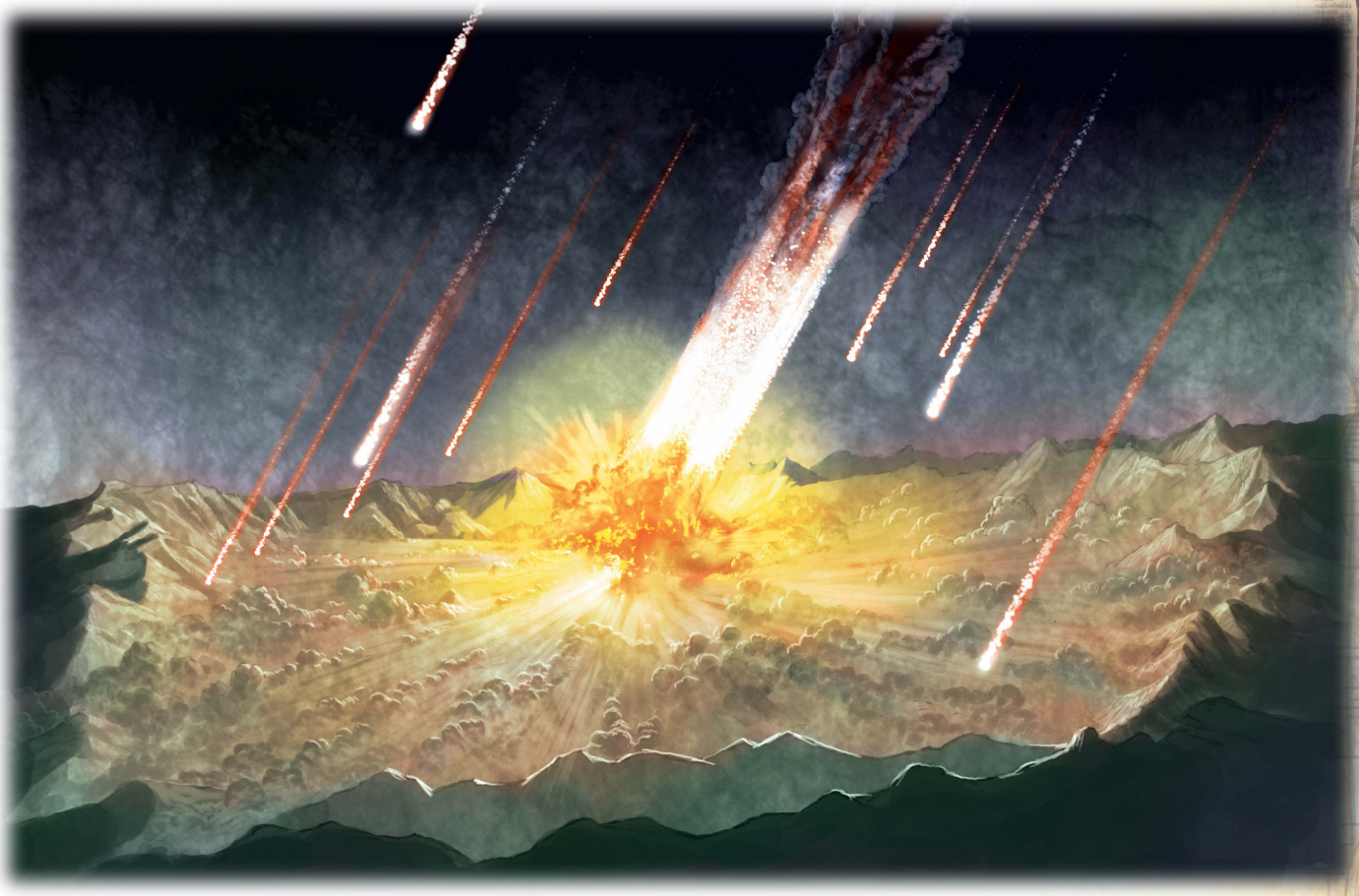
World history is what the humans would call a 'crapshoot' at the best of times, all the more so when it traverses several geological eras. Much of what really happened is forgotten, or becomes distorted by legend or propaganda. Even the fae, disposed as we are to uttering only the untarnished, unvarnished 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 Attricana, 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 beneath the waters of Lake Nioba, or the bottomless pits of Arx-Cis from which no explorer has ever returned? 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, rediscovering 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 Attricana remains open, there is no way for the techans' way of life to escape their cities.

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.

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 then 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

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' coincidently 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 kaddog 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."

Echalogical 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 then 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, echalogical 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 conception). 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 Kakodomania 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.

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 wooers 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.

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 preventing 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 that 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 offputting – 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.

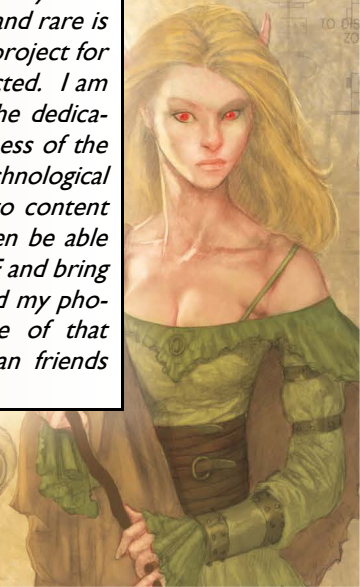
After the return of magic, the first bastions were barely more than a few buildings. They grew slowly under constant attack from the outside. A few collapsed or turned to magic, abandoning the old ways of science. Others remained stubborn and fought against the enchantment. Such was the case with the 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 invaluability, 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.

LAUDENIANS

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. Laudenians 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. Laudenians 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 then 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.

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 Appareci 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.

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

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 kaddog), 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.

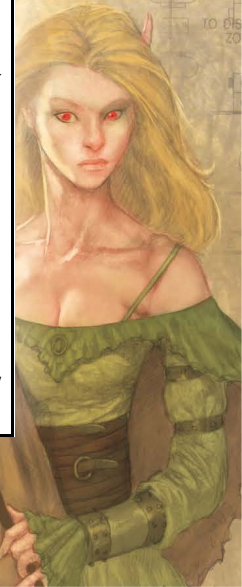
When the black gate was unearthed again at the beginning of the new age, the pagus were the first to emerge, even before the whisper of Mengus could have tainted the nearby humans as well. Five centuries later, the pagus number in the tens of millions with concentrations on every continent.

Pagus have no concept of godhead. The pagus of Kakodomania 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

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 theological 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

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.

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.

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.

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 to happy to

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 practically 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 fledging 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: Anglish (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
Guttoran	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.

Anglish: Anglish 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 Anglish. 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 Anglish 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.

Guttoran: 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. Guttoran 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 to 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 Ažhi 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 Adonnaisis 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 Lauropa 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 outlining 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 echolocation 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.

ECHAN 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. Worshiping 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. Worshippers 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. Worshippers 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), Sawn (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 Tellurian and Ravenar Limshau; chaparrans have Valentiarankerr, while tenenbri have Sharajaclypse. 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 Sharajaclypse 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."

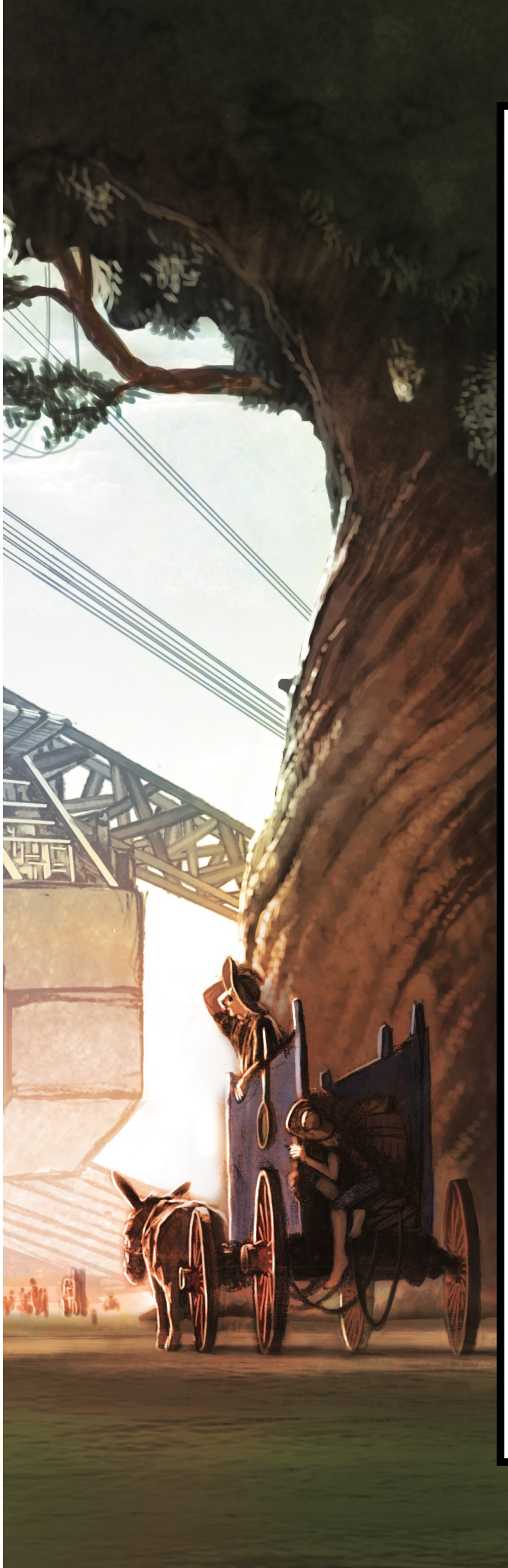
"'Twasn't much," said the printer. "Scarce worth the price, in my opinion, but who am I to judge another person's needs? It was an inventory of items stolen from the titular vault, I assume mostly of a technological nature by the jargon used to describe them. I have no expertise in that field, other 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 tollbooths 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.

The architects and engineers of the tower of Dromos across the sea designed and mass-produced an enchanted flying craft for use in the southern lands of Arkonnia, but a lack of population and financially viable investors prevented wide distribution in their homeland. However, when they reached Canam, the Dromos enchanters sold off all their stock and filled backlogs for two centuries. The dragonflyers resemble oversized ancient Asian boats referred to as "junks" with large eagle wings made from marble or limestone extending from the sides. They don't flap and appear to have no purpose other than cosmetic, but the boats cannot fly without them. Each one can hold between six and twelve people though a few larger ones have been known to hold up to a hundred. Most of them only require a single controller. They don't travel anywhere near bastions, Apocrypha, Ažhi Dahaka, or Baruch Malkut and severe winds prevent travel to or through Alpinas. They seldom accept charters to unknown destinations. In the century since the introduction of the dragonflyer, a network has formed in the skies over Canam, though most of the traffic is still comprised of thermals.

The most common aircraft by far in echa is the thermal, a slang term for all buoyant, lighter-than-air aircraft. The term refers to their common attribute of using heated air instead of helium or hydrogen to supply lift. Before the Second Hammer, the progress of these aircraft was halted in favor of faster, mass-produced winged vehicles, but even in areas of increased magical disruption, hot air still rises in an atmosphere. Though a helium dirigible would be more stable, the gas is hard to come by in the modern day, and advances in thermal designs have offset the disadvantages of hot air. Their moderate flying altitude allows more people to see them in use and their presence in echan cities and even some bastions is relatively common. The mooring towers for thermal ships are easy to spot. Where there are thermal towers, dragonflyers often sit nearby, though flyers are more often employed for charter bookings, leaving the thermals for regular city-to-city travel. Thermals rarely travel to locations without a mooring tower, although exceptions can sometimes be made for the right price.

As the Moon was pushed into a closer orbit by Attricana, the swells and waves in large bodies of water increased in severity. This, along with Attricana's encouragement of ocean storms, has thrown atmospheric sciences out the window. Air currents constantly shift, making meteorology and climatology useless. Chaotic pressure systems have generated the largest oceanic storms ever recorded, separating the continents behind walls of weather. This maelstrom is continuous through every ocean and they dissipate only slightly when approaching shore. Massive coastal docks like those at York and Angel have installed immense breakers to halt the assault.

Nations from both techa and echa tried for centuries for a safe route across the water. The only real option was to travel above the clouds; Porto's Sail Galleons and Beluga carriers easily accomplished this task, but the altitude required was unrealistic for thermals and dragonflyers are not designed for such distances without the ability to restock supplies. For the longest time, therefore, contact with bastions across the ocean was sparse at best, and communication with distant echan empires was practically nonexistent. This lasted until only recently when the first wavecrasher appeared at the docks of York.

The sea is rife with monsters. Some grew from evolved oceanic behemoths like sharks and whales while others were unique creations of Attricana, grotesque or beautiful. Some were timid while others were hostile, swallowing anything they could wrap their impressive maws around. These leviathans were initially hunted for their meat or other resources. Short-range boats braved the weather to harpoon the mammoths and drag their hulks back to shore.

With the application of moderate magic and clever trapping, several of these goliaths were captured alive. Their wills were broken and they were trained to carry a load. This weight eventually turned into an entire vessel, built around the creature. Not a single wavecrasher looks the same, from monstrous sea turtles to whales larger than villages. The vessels dominate the waves by rolling effortlessly over or diving underneath them. Even with these audacious designs, the majority of wavecrashers seldom survive more than a dozen journeys before finally destroying the creature or the boat built around them. Some of the beasts near retirement are demoted to following coastlines, where they become shorerunners. It is thought there are less than a dozen of these beasts of burden roaming the oceans. Apart from the rare docking at York, they frequent only echan ports and rarely appear on the west coast of Canam, running exclusively across the narrow strip of Okeanos.

ACROSS OCEA

There have been few vagrant travelers from across the western sea since the great migration of Asiatic peoples fleeing from the expansion of Kakodomania in the first century post-Hammer – and they were guided by a dragon! Some say that an entire nation of dragons can be found somewhere across the great sea, a kingdom of the sky surrounding a mountain that stretches past the skin of air that surrounds our planet, perhaps even ruled by the legendary Lazarus of Grace. Others tell of a place where humans have blue skin and anywhere between four and ten arms, where tigers talk and walk upright like kodiaks, and those who fight against Ixindar's armies do so from the backs of thirty-foot-tall hairless elephants. It sounds fascinating, but I fear the dangers involved in the crossing are too great to go and see for myself.

BASTIONS

The bastions of humankind are few in number, but distinctly varied in culture and character. While as a gimfen, I have the power to walk among humans without fear of disrupting their technology, I regret to say that my experience of the inside of the bastions comes mostly from the reports of my traveling companions – for the lifestyle of the bastions is ultimately founded upon fear of the outside world and everything in it.

ANGEL

Kieran looked at his watch. He was going to be late for school again, even though he'd taken the early train. But Xiu-lin wasn't here yet, and he wasn't going to leave without seeing her. He tapped his foot impatiently, looking idly across at the illuminated billboard on the other side of the highway. This close to Genai, the lower corner of the LED display always flickered in the wrong colors. The owners of the fireworks factory just across the way claimed that their work was entirely mundane… but Kieran was at a loss to explain the amazing shapes that they formed in the sky when Xiu-lin took him to the festivals, trees and flowers and twisting, snakelike dragons in the sky.

He sighed, remembering, when a soft voice behind him spoke up. "I didn't keep you waiting, did I, Kieran-kun?" He turned, a little too abruptly, his face bright red. Say what they would, the vision before him could not be considered anything but magic.

Population: 55 million (Angel); 2.5 million (Genai)

Tech Level: 1 and 2; Genai is mostly TL0, but some TL1 technology can be found within it.

Angel is the largest bastion in Canam, is usually the image outsiders picture when they think of the techan cities. From a distance, it resembles an oversized fortress, hundreds of miles across.

Layout: Angel's central governing buildings stand in the center of Tower Park. The primary avenues spread out from this, intersected by thousands of circular streets. Fragments of the older walls can still be seen, circling the city like tree-rings. Genai resides in the southern corner, against the seaward wall. Outside the city are over a dozen satellite villages, home to hundreds of merchants and shops allowing visitors to buy horses or black market goods from echa or techa.

Unlike Angel, organized and methodically laid out, Genai is scattered, jumbled, and cluttered. Occupying 500 square blocks of Angel, Genai's roads split into dead ends, major walkways loop around onto themselves and buildings rise and fall weekly. Most buildings are constructed using traditional methods due to a scarcity of supplies, with the result that Genai's cityscape looks a thousand years out of date. Asian influences are dominant – Genai is the last lingering shred of anything anyone remembers from China, Japan and the south Asian peninsulae before the Hammer. Not a single building stands more than four stories, dwarfed by the skyscrapers all around, except for the Great Temple of Genai at the center, set atop an eighty-foot-tall

stepped pyramid. A traditional torii gate, painted a bright crimson with two supports and two curving crossbars bordering the realm of the mundane to the magical, greets those preparing to climb the massive flight of stairs. Atop the long climb is a five-storey iron and red brick pagoda with eaves stretching out to shadow the base of the pyramid. The pagoda itself is hollow, as a double-helix spiral staircase orbits around a massive shaft leading one deep into the pyramid. Within the depths, it is said, the yok-ani dragon slumbers, though few have ever ventured into the pit to confirm this and none have ever spoken of what they found there.

Entering Angel from outside is not easy. Only techan humans can pass through the main door. Outsiders must prove they are free of enchantment and that they have some useful skill. Echans are only granted provisional entrance on a case-by-case basis due to extant treaties with Genai, and even this depends largely on knowing someone with clout on the inside. Such visitors are carefully shepherded from the gates to the echan enclave with all due expediency. Several secret passageways are said to lead from Genai to the outside world, forgoing the gates of Angel.

History: Angel's development was the most troubled of all the Canam bastions. Setting up on a shoreline rich in the necessities of life and devoid of neighboring contested territory, its population grew quickly, but it was unable to maintain a high technological standard for that population. When Angel erected its first buildings hundreds of years ago, bogg raiders emerged from the surrounding forests, and sporadic attacks and supply raids kept Angel struggling for more than fifty years, until the immigrants arrived from across the ocean. Arriving as if by miracle, in a makeshift fleet ranging in size from rowboats to tankers, came a legion of displaced humanity fleeing the no-man's-land that had overtaken the far east in the wake of Ixindar's opening. They had fled from the mainland to the large archipelago off the coast, and from thence across the perilous ocean, braving horrifying typhoons and ravening sea monsters in the certain knowledge that what they left behind was worse. When they arrived, they found another human population equally desperate for survival. Needing workers desperately, the governing body of Angel made a decision, controversial to this day: they welcomed the settlers despite the taint of magic that some of them carried, and offered them their own protected piece of land within the walls in exchange for a labor force. With this influx of manpower, Angel expanded to three times its original size and built a bastion wall worthy of the name.

Soon, the boggs found themselves incapable of harming the massive castle-city, but the lesser kaddog are not noted for their intelligence and they still frequently launch assaults against the walls, though all they can hope to achieve now is to rustle a few head of cattle from the outlying villages; the city's crack snipers and quick-response VTOLs make short work of any concerted attack. Angel's population grows each year and plans have been put in order to build a larger wall several miles out, doubling the effective size of what is already the world's largest bastion.

The unique aspect of Angel is not the city itself so much as it is Genai, the settlement within. Built by its own residents, Genai cares nothing of its isolation. Legally, Genai is a separate reserve within the city of Angel: it has its own government, its own infrastructure, and its own laws and traditions, but shares certain civic responsibilities with the surrounding bastion. Citizens of Genai are also citizens of Angel, and are issued government identification cards when dealing outside the township, but many residents are born, live, and die having never stepped foot outside Genai. Their heritage insists on recording their history as well as the names of all of those who have died in the construction of the great wall. But the greatest legend of Genai is the source of its name and the identity of its most illustrious resident. It is said the pilgrims could not have survived the journey across the sea and made their way safely to the land of techans without the protection of a great dragon, almost as old and as wise as Amethyst himself: the yok-ani, Genai. Whether true or not, the story holds that this beneficence resides inside the colossal pagoda temple at the center of the district. Only the good and righteous are allowed to enter in hopes the rumors are true and that the great dragon lives inside, out of sight from prying eyes.

Angel is surrounded by major deposits of magic. With enchanted forests on every side, Angel suffers from radiant disruption, and wandering monster attacks, more than any bastion in Canam despite its massive wall.

Government: Democratic republic. The ruling council sits at the center building of Tower Park and seats six people. Alan Miller holds the current Head Chair. He holds the power of veto but not the power to push legislation through on his own. Genai has no formal government, but is represented by the most respected community elders, with local neighborhood organizations keeping order in most of the district.

Military: Angel prides itself on how small its army is. Its distance from other bastions and from any significant echan community, combined with its great wall, make a large standing army unnecessary. Angel's military and police force are one in the same. The Crimson Starlight tower in the western side of Angel houses the aerial division. The police force is comprised of volunteers and trained professionals, working by choice to defend the walls. 95% of the armed forces on Angel patrol the outer perimeter. Internal crime in Angel is shockingly small for a community of its size and density, with fewer than fifty violent crimes being reported each year, but as the punishment for any violent offense is banishment, few are willing to risk repercussions. The Crim-

son Starlight Armed Forces (CSAF) operates mostly fanjet powered assault shuttles. In Genai, a volunteer police force using primitive weapons (and often, unusually fearsome martial arts) keeps the peace. Angel security only crosses the threshold when a serious crime is committed or when a public crime is seen from their positions at the edge of town.

Religion: The majority of the population is not spiritual, but Christianity and Judaism are highly respected even by atheists. The people of Genai are, if not actively religious, at least willing to give lip service to their ancestral faiths (Buddhism, Shinto, Chinese Folk Religion, and yok-ani worship) and even those that profess no religion are highly superstitious. Dozens of Shinto temples provide for a myriad of festive events throughout the year, in which all residents of the district (even those with no Japanese ancestry) partake.

Relations: Angel has virtually no regular contact with other bastions, being isolated at the uttermost west of the continent. Communications to and from Selkirk amount to little more than a page of script every year, and though travelers to and from York are not uncommon, they rarely carry the weight of an official embassage. Unofficially, Angel maintains hundreds of spies and isolated outposts as near to rival bastions as possible, in the hopes of poaching some useful technological development from them. Angel often trades supplies via Porto Beluga Carriers which arrive once every five years. Genai has no formal relationship with any outside bastions, though the elders do exchange communications with Limshau as often as possible, but even their relationship with Angel itself seems distant at times; Genai prefers to remain as self-sufficient as possible and does not trade with the bastion if they can avoid it. Genai merchants accept gold but not (usually) uc. A few will trade even though their exchange rates can be atrocious. Almost any echan goods, including a few basic enchanted items, can be found in Genai's markets (legitimate or not), but attempting to bring these goods into Angel proper is usually stymied by tight customs controls.

Organizations: Angel's society does not actually discourage involvement with open echa, because it doesn't need to – the massive city walls and labyrinthine bureaucracy necessary to get permits to leave (and the even more difficult requirements to get back in) do that. A few groups have a less restricted time of it, however. A military police unit, the Crimson Starlight, can operate anywhere in the city and out of it without restriction, and while they mainly keep to the walls they sometimes make expeditions beyond to ferret out particularly troublesome monster nests. The Iron Sons mercenary company technically does not operate within the city, but from a small office just outside the main gates – but still, its operatives seem to have no difficulty entering and leaving the city. The enclave of Genai also maintains its own unofficial diplomatic corps, and any Genai citizen on an errand from one of the elders is usually allowed to pass the gates with minimal trouble, together with their escorts. In addition to these semi-official channels, there are also a dozen-odd travel companies who transport curious techan tourists from Angel to the relatively safe haven of Salvabrooke and back: these corporations usually maintain a private security force to defend their caravans, rather than relying on the caprice of mercenaries.

SECRET PASSAGES

It's an open secret that there's a passage leading under Angel's walls into Genai – I can confirm that much, for though on my one and only visit to the bastion I went in through the front gate, circumstances (beyond my control, I assure you) required me to go out that way. But some say that there's more to it than that, that there's a whole network of tunnels beneath the city's foundations – buried remnants of old Los Angeles, perhaps, or a mystical labyrinth where pale-skinned elves lie in wait to kidnap naughty techan children and turn them into goblins. A few even speak of the fabulous hoard which the yok-ani Genai-Dilong must be hiding in a subterranean lair – personally I doubt this, for I have not heard tell that yok-ani gather treasure with anything near the rapaciousness of other dragons.

MANN

Adolphus should be here. I keep worrying I may to say the wrong thing to these abominations. Adolphus knows how to talk to the filthy beasts without giving the game away. We have been out of the bastion for a month now, and he still has not told me what our true mission is. I wonder if he even knows. I feel myself tainted by our contact with these creatures, so like humans and yet nothing like us. Yet it troubles me even more to think that all my family, my friends, my comrades must think me a traitor to my own species.

Some days I wonder if I will ever see them again – whether my interaction with these inhuman things will forever mark me as an undesirable. Adolphus assures me that our work is for the greater good, and I must trust in him. I feel my purpose more strongly when he is nearby. When he is gone, I begin to doubt. Glory to the Covenant, I pray – Glory to the Covenant. Yet some days, it does not seem as though I really mean it.

-- A friend of the highway I knew only as 'Gustave'

Population: 12 million

Tech Level: 5

Whenever anyone looks upon the City of Mann, they blink—like staring into a great void. No one is sure how old the city is, only that it predates its neighbor, York. The most popular story tells of humans arriving to the east coast and discovering an island fortress standing empty, waiting for someone to claim it. Someone built it. It was erected for Man.

Unlike Angel, bristling with lights and life, Mann looks dead and deserted. The only time movement is ever evident upon its outer wall is when it fires on approaching targets. No one outside knows how the city was built, how it sustains itself with no external trade, or how the residents inside developed such a technological level surpassing all others on the continent. Those who leave it never speak of such things, out of terror that some day the city's masters may track them down and silence them if they reveal the bastion's secrets.

Layout: Mann sits upon an island and rises as a dark blemish on an otherwise colorful horizon. The construction mimics old human techniques, but to extremes. The buildings sport few windows and rise thousands of feet into the sky. A massive wall, taller than any other bastion, surrounds the island. The city includes a massive self-sustainable hydroelectric system requiring little service. Mann covers nearly every square inch of the island it rests on, enclosed by a massive wall bordering the edge of the water. Each building within stands at least a thousand feet, with the tallest towering almost a mile overhead. The blocks run uniform and everything fits to a perfect metric unit. The entire city represents a mathematical perfection unseen anywhere else in the world. The buildings all stand at a height of prime numbers to the tenth power. Leaving or entering Mann is difficult: there are no land approaches, no doors, no docks anywhere along the perimeter, and every square millimeter of the wall is defended by high-powered lasers. Stories abound of infiltrators somehow pushing back the rapids and sneaking in through the hydropipes, but these accounts are unlikely.

History: The first residents of Mann concluded that the city must have been built soon after the Hammer's fall by the initial survivors, but these had died off, possibly from a plague or echan army. This does not take into account that the city was left behind with no bodies or records.

Regardless, the humans living in the city found themselves isolated both from the outside world and from each other. As the centuries trudged on, the native population grew more xenophobic and paranoid of the world beyond the walls. Few have ever left – few have even expressed even the merest curiosity about what lies outside. The majority of the population of Mann believes everything outside to be blasphemous and immoral. They abhor all magic in any shape and the use or presence of magic within Mann carries a death sentence, not only for the practitioner but for anybody unfortunate enough to witness it lest they be tainted by the experience. No non-humans are allowed to enter for any reason; they receive broadcast warnings to stay away as they approach the shoreline, and pulse lasers are put through their heads if they do not make a move to depart within thirty seconds. Even the wall is rumored to be covered in sheets of fae iron.

Government: Theocratic oligarchy. Mann's ruling body is known as "The Ghosts." They dictate all laws

but no one is sure how many there are or their identities. They walk among the population as normal people but meet every day at random locations to decide policy. Their numbers have been guessed at between eight and sixteen. When one Ghost dies, another is brought it to replace him or her. No one knows how the selection process works. Three Ghosts appear in a judicial court every day to pronounce judgment: while one would expect that rulings would be handed down by majority vote, all three always render the same verdict in unison, without apparent consultation.

Military: The Kir protects Mann from anything that appears hostile. Trained for defense rather than assault, the Kir patrol the outer wall, tracking every moving object above, below, or on the water. The Kir uniform is black as the city they live in, and their duty is to kill any echan found in the city or anyone possessing magic without hesitation. They have created technological machines capable of detecting not only magical devices but magical effects as well. Behind the wall, for emergency reasons only, several large cannons have been built against York in case their neighbor falls too far into chaos. The majority of the weapons patrolling outside the walls are automated machines. Rumors of a clandestine organization operating outside the bastion, dedicated to assassinating those who reveal any of Mann's secrets to outsiders and destroying any technology that falls into infidel hands, are unsubstantiated (and to ensure that everybody within the walls knows about it, discussing the rumors is high treason).

Religion: The entire bastion population follows a single state religion, though its details are known only by its residents, and are extremely vague even to them: even members of the Covenant, the secretive inner circle of the faith, would be hard-pressed to explain most of it without lapsing into pseudo-scientific mysticism and technobabble. Based on Abrahamic roots, its central tenet is that the entire world of magic, without exception, is the corruption of demons trying to bring the world into a dark age of damnation. The only solution is the utter extermination of all magic, those who use magic, and those that associate themselves with magic users.

Relations: Mann seeks no relations with any other bastions. Only Sierra Madre is more isolated, but for Mann, isolation is by choice. They refuse contact with Angel and consider York and Selkirk anathema for maintaining friendly relations with outsiders and even allowing echans to enter their borders. York prepares for an inevitable invasion that may never arrive. Even though a few Porto aircraft have been seen entering Mann, no official relationship has been formed with the utopia across the ocean. Though they share with Baruch Malkut their hatred for non-humans, the southern nation is just as sinful because of their endorsement of magic. The loathing is mutual.

Those who leave Mann are not permitted to return without a signed permit from a "Ghost": otherwise, they are warned away like echans and shot if they do not comply instantly. The longer the resident stays outside, the less chance he or she will be allowed to return. All citizens' DNA imprints are encoded in the Mann supercomputer and are the only form of identification used within the city. It may be possible to temporarily place a DNA recorder that confuses the sensors to make a person register as someone else, but where someone with the knowledge to perform this can be found inside or outside of the city remains a mystery.

Organizations: Not much is known about the secret society that oversees the smooth functioning of Mann's society. Named 'the Covenant,' after the central tenet of Mann's esoteric religion, they serve any function set them by the Ghosts, though how these directives are handed down is unknown. Their most common roles are as secret police or intelligence agents, ensuring that disruptive elements within the bastion are swiftly and quietly excised, and that any of Mann's secrets that escape the walls die along with the idea thieves that stole them. The Covenant has access to the most advanced technology in Canam, but are prohibited from using it openly unless they are certain to leave no witnesses. The Kir are the only other organization permitted to look beyond the walls, and they never leave the ramparts. Within the city, however, they are occasionally mobilized to deal with the more public incidents involving the 'infected' – those who have somehow been exposed to fantasy influences and which must be purged to protect the masses.

THE DARK CITY

The few Mann escapees I've had the chance to speak to talk as if the city itself is alive, and can read the minds of its residents – and even rewrite their memories to conform to the proper way of thinking. There are no construction or maintenance workers: the city itself sometimes changes its configuration overnight, and everyone either pretends that it was always that way – one can't improve perfection, after all – or actually can't remember when it was any different. Some of the more paranoid have suggested that the central supercomputer itself has achieved sentience and is playing with the residents, or that the city is being run by aliens performing some inscrutable experiment on humanity. It's my opinion that these people have been watching too many bunraku plays.

SELKIRK

"C'mon! Call that a try? My old mother can make a better score than that!" the foreman shouted from the sidelines. "That's not the only kind of score your old mother's made!"

Jersey shot right back. "Why don't you come out here and put your money where your mouth is? When's the last time you won a championship?"

The foreman took off his cap and stamped on it. "Shut yer gob! I took fifteen points against the stonebones not two years back!"

Jersey's teammates laughed. "Yeah, and then they put you on the ground for a forty-wink penalty when you tried to tackle their mater around the chest!" they heckled their manager. It was all good-natured, but there'd probably be a fight in the locker room later. Good – this team needed to work off some steam before they went back into the mines.

They'd lost two men in a cave-in just two weeks since, and tempers had been flaring on the line ever since. A good match should get things back to working order before they went back on military rotation. Even if they ribbed each other in here, they would need to be tighter than the foreman's sphincter to survive the bag of foulness that was Outside without a canary.

Population: 8 million

Tech Level: 3

No one remembers when or how Selkirk erected itself on such an unstable precipice. The bastion is located in the midst of the most magically active terrain in all of Canam, carved into a towering mountain surrounded by equally impassible peaks. Although they have access to the pass of Dianaso, to reach it requires going through a jagged section of rock and would be virtually inaccessible but for the bastion's magnetic tram lines – which none can now remember being put in place. Selkirk's strength lies in its goal of continued expansion and wealth. Their loyalty is to the almighty shilling. Holding onto ancient ways, Selkirk represents a massive mining consortium. Internally known as TERMINAM – TERran MINing AMalgamated – the bastion's entire population works in service of the syndicate. Everyone works. Everyone serves. Everyone has a share.

Selkirk is the smallest bastion in Canam, sports no walls, and is not paranoid of its neighboring nations. They don't obsess over expansion or political domination like other techan nations. They only work to live and survive.

Layout: Selkirk sits half inside and half outside the mountain it was built upon. Large open areas sit under artificial lighting. Many of the mining levels supply minimal illumination, relegating some members of the population to perpetual darkness for nearly their whole lives. As one climbs higher, the construction appears more thought out, brighter with larger spaces. Colors blend in and the areas are more sanitary. The vibrations of the air circulators rumble through the whole mountain, the only real sounds until one dives into the catacombs, thousands of miles of tunnels where automated machineries buzz. Workers follow behind and dig up the treasures found by the mining machines. "Mags" are the primary method of transportation – vehicles of varying size that travel along iron-core beams that criss-cross through and outside the mountain. A massive lattice of rails covers the eastern face, the side most exposed. The magnetic vehicles don't connect to the "roads" but float alongside, allowing many vehicles to cross along a single rail. Some wealthy administrators utilize sports-car style single person speeders while the majority of the population runs on the magtracks (multi-segmented trains). One single bar travels miles from high in the mountains to the town of Gateway below.

History: Selkirk's farms, bountiful as they were initially, lacked the resources to supply the entire population when it grew past their initial estimates, so they opened negotiations with the narros to the north in Fargon. The Echan Trade Authority (ETA) was soon formed to regulate trade between the narros of Thos Thalagos and the miners of Selkirk. Surplus foodstuffs and exotic mined goods travel down the pass in armed caravans or loaded aboard a steam-powered armored train that makes a single run through the pass every month. The supplies are offloaded in the village of Gateway at the base of the pass: no echans, not even gimfen, are allowed to board the Mag-Trains to Selkirk. In return, the narros gain access to the massive gold and coruthil deposits under the Range of Rock. The ETA maintains the trade agreement and shipments usually arrive every week. Since the early days, ancillary treaties have been struck with the scattered echan settlements that grew up in the Seliquam river valley, ensuring that Selkirk will never lack for food and is defended against incursions by the puggs and boggs of Xixion, though these attacks grow more and more savage year by year. The agreements are beneficial to all sides and none has any reason to break this profitable exchange.

Government: Socialist corporation. The entire mountain is governed by a single amalgamated corporate entity, but the workers banded together more than two centuries ago into the four core unions: The South East Moles, The South West Rakers, The North West Boilers, and the North East Strykers. Each one competes with the other and often takes out their frustration on the field, playing a sports game reminiscent of rugby. Shop stewards lead their unions with the understanding that no one strikes or prevents the flow of goods: as everyone has a stake in the corporation, there is rarely any need to do so in any case. The supervisors monitor the lower levels of administration. The high levels of administration are run by chief superintendents, finally culminating in the main board of twelve with the president of the colony, currently Tyler Norton. The miners take up more than 95% of the population even though the majority of them don't appear in the top fifteen levels of the city.

Military: Selkirk has no dedicated military force. The miners volunteer for service lasting three months to a year, allowing them to work on higher levels and even outside the walls. Few of them ever see action, as no sizeable force can easily approach the bastion and the raids that beset the lowlands and occasionally reach the Dianaso caravans are mostly driven off by the echans who live in the surrounding lands. The military operates a variety of hidden turrets and hard points along the outside walls. Most of the time, they perform escort duty when carry-alls are required to travel north to Fargon.

Religion: The bastion is driven by the principles of an ancient economic philosophy which holds a distrust of organized religion, believing it to be too easily swayed into a tool of worker oppression. Consequently, there are no churches or temples in Selkirk, and any spiritual beliefs a miner may hold are purely on their own time. Most would say they are far too busy to worry about such things.

Relations: If Selkirk were to vanish off the planet, it is possible no one far beyond the Dianaso pass would hear of it for several years. Isolated, the city barely appears on the radar of the other bastions. Selkirk's isolation works for and against it. It is the only bastion never directly attacked by any outside force with a chance of overtaking it. A one-time conference resulted in a modest technology trade with Angel, a relationship that has since dissolved from Selkirk's lack of communication, though according to that ancient treaty each bastion is bound to aid the other in dire need. Selkirk has a more productive relationship with echan civilizations. The continued trade with the narros of Fargon and the confederation of tiny nations in the Seliquam river valley keeps Selkirk alive. Occasionally, gimfen from the south are welcomed for their expertise and curiosity. Selkirk wishes to be more in touch with their neighbors, but their location prevents it. Other than their paranoia over disruption, Selkirk and TERMINAM do not hold the revulsion for echans many other techans exhibit. Since Selkirk primarily deals with narros (which basically look like short versions of Selkirk miners) and gimfen (who do not disrupt technology), the population has no reason to hate them.

THE HELPFUL DEMON

I've always been a bit curious about the name the Selkirks gave to their special forces, OROBAS. So the last time I was passing through Limshau, I looked it up, and found that it was actually the name of a goetic demon in ancient times, which always speaks the truth and not only never attempts to deceive its summoner, but informs him if any other malevolent spirit is lying to him. Decidedly helpful, as demons go, although from what I've heard of shemjaza, they never lie either – either don't have the imagination, or just don't see the point. Now, this is just me being luridly imaginative, you understand… but a creature bound to the black gate could theoretically go unnoticed in a bastion, possibly for years, since their dark magic doesn't affect technology the way my elder kindred do. Just saying.

Organizations: Selkirk mandates cross-training among all its citizens, both for more skill-set diversity and to ensure that factionalism does not set in and divide the insular community. For that reason, while there are quite a few permanent organizations in Selkirk, their membership tends to be fluid. Guilds exist for every facet of TERMINAM, but a person belongs to whichever guild that deals with the job they are doing at the moment, and when they change jobs, they change guilds as well. The ubiquitous sports teams are maintained by the guilds as well, so there is no special loyalty to the 'colors'. Pretty much the only group with a more-or-less permanent roster is the intelligence and special forces unit, OROBAS. OROBAS deals with anything having to do with the outside world, including liaising with the gimfen of Gateway and planning joint operations with Seliquam's Train Guard. OROBAS agents are always considered on-call for the unit, regardless of what other guild they currently belong to, and all members of an OROBAS fireteam are kept together as they rotate through guilds.

SIERRA MADRE

"In my homeland, we have no poverty, no hunger, no prejudice," Marco said smugly. "Everyone has everything they need and is free to pursue their own self-perfection. I honestly cannot see why anyone would prefer starving, dirt roads, those horrible furry things with the teeth, and throwing crap out of the windows over safety, cleanliness and plenty for all."

Roka snorted. "You can see the sky, for one thing," she replied.

Marco grimaced. "I hardly call that a benefit," he said. "It is unnatural, living without a ceiling over your head."

The burly bodyguard raised an eyebrow, scratching the back of her head with her spiked club. "And yet, here you are," she remarked.

Population: 15 million

Tech Level: 4

Sierra Madre enjoys its isolation but does not hate and fear the outside world as some do. Tapped into massive geothermal energies, the population of Sierra Madre lives with unlimited power and limitless promises for the future. Unlike many bastions, gripped in fear of the outside world and the encroaching magic, the people of Sierra sleep safe at night. Armies could walk over them, completely unaware of the city underneath. With the Gloam to the south, few people travel needlessly within the region, so there is little chance of accidental discovery. Sierra Madre, like Porto across the ocean, strives forward with reckless abandon to develop new techniques and new advancements. Clean power and virtually no crime gives the bastion a virgin mindset. Those who leave are more unprepared than any other pilgrims into echa for the harshness outside. The majority don't outlast a month, dying in the wastelands between civilization or fleeing back to their homes.

Layout: The entire city is built throughout a single gigantic cavern. Unlike Selkirk, no conspicuous mountain marks the bastion's location, and there is no sign whatsoever that a thriving civilization exists beneath the ground. There are few exits to the surface, most being hidden service elevators. Without natural light sources, the bastion glows with a constant light of civilization. Over a controlled geothermal vent and blessed with an underground river, it continues to live off boundless energy. The presidential palace doubles as the power center and the focal point of the entire militia, small that it is. Every major street expands from that center, winding through the cavern and its branches. Sierra Madre's cavity is the largest enclosed space on the planet, stretching for more than 50 miles from one end to another with nearly a dozen sub-chambers radiating from that. The palace sits in a gigantic stone column almost a mile across. This makes the layout vulnerable, as the Column is also a major supporting structure for most of the bastion. Its destruction would not only cut the power of the bastion and send hazardous volcanic gas into the city; it would most likely crash more than ten square miles of roof above. The death toll would be catastrophic. Luckily, nothing short of a nuclear blast has the capacity of inflicting enough damage to compromise the stability of the column.

History: Sierra Madre could be the oldest bastion on the planet. Some believe it could be older than the new age, surviving the Hammer's fall, though how that can be considering the geological damage to the planet when the gates opened is unknown. It is believed Sierra Madre was originally some ancient vault or military base from Earth's past. The massive cavern the bastion was built inside may have formed later from magical influence, as it is simply too huge to form naturally and not collapse. The bastion made a point to reinforce their ceiling despite showing no signs of weakening.

Being isolated from all external contact convinced the population they were the only survivors of the last age. When they emerged from their vault, they found a wilderness populated by monsters with no other refuge in sight save for the caverns behind them. A few expeditions only confirmed their fears. A frightening fog covered the south and nothing lived for nearly a hundred miles north that didn't immediately attack upon seeing prey. It would be centuries before anyone from Sierra Madre even knew of other human survivors. When it was finally confirmed, they expressed delight at the prospect, and then promptly returned to their city. They were self-sufficient and had no capacity for sustained trade over such long distances; the knowledge that civilization was not utterly lost was enough for them. Underground and out of sight, they remain safe, which no other bastion can boast. The city continues per the status quo, hoping their solitude will continue until it is no longer necessary.

Government: Hereditary dictatorship. The Column houses the single ruling family. They are not considered royalty, but the rulership is nevertheless passed on from parent to child. If no heir apparent is available, a new family takes control. The current family is the Valterras who have ruled for more than 75 years. It is uncertain how long this method of government has persisted. Sierra Madre has the fewest codified laws of any bastion, and the rulers rarely abuse their power.

Military: Sierra Madre prides itself on having the best trained but smallest military, perfectly specialized in operating underground. The standing force is less than 1000, but with massive numbers of ceiling-mounted automated weaponry, to fight the Madrians on their home turf would be suicide. There are no surface patrols, as the bastion prefers invisibility to armament.

Religion: While the bastion's population has by and large abandoned faith, they have not turned aside from spirituality. Most embrace the power of the individual, channeling one's energy and maximizing their potential in society. Many embark on meditation and personal quests in order to fulfill their spirit. This philosophy is an incongruous mix of old-world Buddhism and Epicureanism, though neither term would be familiar to a Madrian. The updated expression they employ is "Spherist."

Relations: Sierra Madre sits below the radar of most bastions. With no exports and no communication with the outside, other bastions that know about Sierra Madre don't really care. However, with massive energy deposits and hardened workers, Sierra Madre could make a useful ally if anyone could find them.

CONVENIENT GEOGRAPHY

While the general consensus is that the cave is a natural feature expanded by an influx of magic (similar to the way that mountains rose higher in the wake of Attricana's opening), it is awfully convenient that a rocky embolism of such size and comfortable amenities should open so close to what I'm told was the largest city in old Canam, right at the time that they needed a refuge. Some people theorize that the cavern was created by an advanced ancient culture predating the immediate pre-Hammer civilization, and that other such inhabited underdarks may, nay must, exist elsewhere in Kesakas. While I personally regard these tales as mere tavern speculations, when I consider the local mythology that the native peoples of the land first emerged by climbing up through a hole in the earth, I do start to wonder.

Organizations: The people of Sierra Madre rarely leave the bastion – they have little reason to, with their every need being provided for by the Madrian system. As for the outside world, they are content to know that it exists, and have no particular urge to see it for themselves. For those few with insatiable curiosity, an outlet exists in the form of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs,

the inoffensively-named agency largely dedicated to unobtrusively stealing other bastions' technological advances and returning them home for reverse-engineering. Publicly, this institutionalized industrial espionage masquerades as either diplomatic embassies or simple tourism, and as yet the MFA's targets have not realized the organization's ulterior motives. A subgroup of the Ministry specializes in studying and mapping the labyrinth of Kesakas and the paleolithic creatures that call it home, to better avoid its dangers or manipulate them to defending the bastion should the need arise. Within the bastion, one notable group is an order of 'monks' dedicated to the principle of 'full artistic expression' – transforming themselves and their environment into living avatars of the manifold concept of beauty. This order has no official name, as they believe that to label a thing limits its expression, but their fellow citizens know them by the nickname of "los efímeros" (Ephemerals).

YORK

Blue light flickered across the nearby buildings as Gerard knelt over the body. Damaskan female, dressed in a pilgrim's dust-caked traveling cloak, but beneath which was hidden that distractingly tight leather armor those Limshau library ninjas wore. No signs of violation, which was good – there had been a rash of echan rapes and murders some months back, but the creep who did it was locked up tight. Still, best keep this one quiet. The last thing the department needed was another moral scare.

Gerard looked more closely. Actually, there weren't even any signs of struggle – the elf's fingernails were undamaged, a short curved sword at her back hadn't even been drawn, and the way she was laying suggested she had been walking along and then had suddenly fallen: the body didn't appear to have been moved, even. He pulled out a flashlight – dead fae don't disrupt anything – and looked for a gunshot wound.

Sure enough, right between the shoulderblades – the entry point of a high-powered rifle bullet, probably fired from the upper floor of one of the abandoned warehouses at the back of the alley.

"So the first question is," the policeman murmured to himself, "what was an elf doing so far from the Broad Way?"

Population: 35 million

Tech Level: 0-1

With no city walls to keep the outside where it belongs, the people of York welcome tourists and travelers. However, tolerance of magic does not equate to acceptance of it. Due to the prevalence of passing magic users in York, most residents neither fear nor loathe the echans: they just prefer living their lives with air conditioning, elevators, and parking meters. Unlike some bastions, which discourage even talking about the existence of magic, York's residents see it passing through the city to the docks every day. They have gotten used to not voicing their opinions of the world outside, even if they privately bemoan the enchanted world and what it has sullied man into. Other bastions look at York with distrust, believing one false step could send a massive ED burst throughout the city, demolishing the brightly

lit bastion and causing it to crumble into the madness of magic.

York relied on old technology and building techniques to recover the lost glory of mankind. The second largest bastion after Angel, York never constructed a wall, despite the threat of the pagus and evil dragons of Apocrypha and Ažhi Dahaka. Thankfully, with Limshau, Gnimfall, and Abidan as their strongest echan neighbors, York has never had to worry about invasion from a superior force, and can easily repel attacks from the pitiful local bogg tribes.

Layout: York resembles a city of Earth past. Old style construction sped development and allows for quick expansion. The only clear sign of advancement is near the coastline, where the tallest and most advanced buildings stand. The coast also sports the largest dock in Canam and the tallest techan structure, the tower of Shinar (at 7000 feet). Beyond that, the western half of the city is somewhat disjointed and unorganized. Most tourists get lost in the jumble of roads and highways. A single eight-lane freeway passes in a more or less straight line through the city to the port, with a wide verge separating it from buildings on either side. Those travelers that generate the most EDF are gently encouraged to restrict themselves to the innermost lanes and not to linger within the bastion.

History: Like Angel, York relied on echan means to build their city, but where Angel coopted the hard labor of human refugees, York turned to the technical services of the gimfen. A self-repairing robotic force known as zeros run all of York's hard labor and defenses, a system designed and built in concert with my Gnimfall forebears. In the earliest days of construction, York and Gnimfall signed an agreement whereby York would supply we gimfen with precious raw materials and knowledge of the advanced sciences which mankind had acquired over the centuries, and the gimfen would use our ingenuity to apply that knowledge to the problem at hand, advancing York and helping them build a power system based on tidal energy. This required the construction of massive generators deep underground that, according to rumor, still contain gimfen technicians, living for hundreds of years without ever seeing the light of day. Many in York's hierarchy refuse to acknowledge our connection, insisting human expertise single-handedly built the city; Gnimfall does not care whether we are given credit or not, since we have already been amply paid for our services.

With no walls to hem them in and no serious threats from outside, York expanded quickly but could do little to resist the constant magical influx into the city from other races and magically endowed humans. With the largest port on the east coast, York became the mouth of the vital corridor between Canam and Lauropa. As a result, the bastion's progression became severely hindered and could not advance as quickly or as consistently as other techan cities. The only notable exception to their technological footprint was the zeros, which being derived from gimfen designs remained somewhat resistant to disruption.

Government: Judiciary democracy. York does not separate its legislative, executive, and judicial processes, the entire city being governed by a High Court, headed by an elected President who governs with no fixed term until recalled by a vote of no confidence. Any citizen has the right to argue a case or propose a motion before the High Court, and any citizen can be chosen to serve on it by appointment from the President or by garnering enough signatures on a petition. All motions are carried by a simple majority. Laws are enacted by judicial precedent and can be overruled by the Court with sufficient justification. The ruling body battles constantly with the problem of crime in the city. The current President's priority is keeping the populace stable and on ways to minimize the city's dependence on its robot workforce.

Military: The York Self Defense Force (YSDF) is tasked with defense of the city and is the largest standing techan army in Canam: however, 85% of the law enforcement in the city is robotic. Should the YSDF ever be called upon to operate extensively outside the bastion, they would find their manpower seriously reduced as the zeros do not work reliably far beyond the periphery.

Religion: Various. York is the only bastion with cathedrals dedicated to echan faiths. These churches are permitted as long as no magic is performed within and no illegal acts are witnessed. Beyond this, virtually any human religion has a representative in York, with the various Abrahamic faiths dominant due to the bastion's proximity to Abidan.

Relations: The relatively low technological level has allowed some mingling of magic and science, although relations between the two groups have never been smooth. York exhibits the widest variety of attitudes toward echans, some decrying them as defilers of humanity's destiny and others accepting them as signs of Earth's progress, with the majority remaining guarded but noncommittal.

Paranoia lingers between Mann and York, and many fear armed conflict is inevitable. Besides Mann, York's other relations are strong, though many other bastions look down on them for their tolerance of echans within their borders and the commensurate limits this has placed on their technological development. York maintains good relations with Gnimfall in spite of downplaying my people's role in the construction of the bastion, remains on reasonably good if somewhat distant terms with Limshau, and while they have no official relationship to the other echan settlements nearby, they neither interfere with them nor prevent their entry for trade or

transport. Unfortunately, racism and crime often follows those non-humans who enter unless protection is provided.

Non-residents must purchase a day pass to enter and remain in York. The fee is nominal for non-magical humans, but four times higher for non-humans and mages. Those found without a pass or resident identification is politely escorted to the bastion's borders and instructed to go through proper channels for entry.

Organizations: The York Self-Defense Force fulfills the functions of both army and police force within the bastion, and unlike most similar organizations in other cities (where cross-training and generalization are the norm), YSDF units tend to be highly specialized according to the needs of their particular 'beat'. While they will call in help from another unit if a situation lies entirely outside their area of expertise, each beat tends to be highly insular and jealously defends their right to investigate and protect anything that falls within their home turf. Apart from the units whose beat covers the outlying fields and the perimeter fence, the most organized techan group operating beyond the bastion is the Iron Sons, who operate several business offices in various parts of town but are forbidden by law from actually mobilizing within city limits. The Sons must have training facilities and equipment stockpiles somewhere in the region, but nobody (except the local cell leaders) seem to know where.

RIPPERS

There are often stories told in taverns of fae travelers kidnapped off the streets of York, the YSDF finding their bodies in back alleys miles away from the Broad Way, covered with mysterious wounds. Rumor is rife with possible explanations, ranging from sexual predators to back-alley surgeons stealing fae organs to implant into human clients in search of the secret of eternal life. I have never heard any suggestion that these are anything other than lurid broadsheet fictions. Still… best to keep an eye out, hmm?

THE WORLD BEYOND

While bastions represent beacons of humanity's ancient legacy, they are not the dominant forces in Canam. The majority of what would commonly be considered civilized life on the continent falls under the dominion of several major kingdoms, communes and confederations. Because of the great distances between them, diplomatic and trade relationships between these nations are sporadic at best, but by the same token open warfare between them is also rare. Most of the major nations are connected by tributary roads to the Continental Cross and thus are relatively easily reached by travelers, but a few are isolated by hostile wilderness, only safely traversed by thermal flyer.

ABIDAN

The bucket chain ran from the fountain at the center of the courtyard, up the steps leading to the crenellated wall – a line of mostly townswomen, passing the water from hand to hand to put out the balls of flaming pitch that flew over the Bulwark, keeping their husbands, brothers, sisters and children on the wall safe from fire to focus on holding the line. Two days ago, the fountain had been abuzz with chatter and laughter. Today, the chapel bells tolled the alarm, and every citizen of Janoah was either safe indoors or lending what help they could to defend the city. God willing, in another two days only the burn marks would indicate that there had been a battle here – and there would not be many new crosses scratched into the wall's unyielding stones as silent memorials to the fallen.

Abidan, land of faith and chivalry, is located in northeastern Canam in the crux between the Grand Lakes and a yawning gulf leading out to the sea. It guards the land bridge of Tethuss, the only safe route into the civilized lands of southern Canam from the darklands of Apocrypha. Its capital Janoah is a massive fortress stretched across the bridge's entire breadth, whose doughty knights man the Bulwark keeping the pagus armies at bay.

The nation was founded by the Christian Paladin King, Vincent Savarice, who gathered fleeing refugees throughout the north and personally oversaw the guard of the city until his death at the ripe age of 134. It is said his longevity was due not to any magic, but to divine purpose – one of the few individuals in history to have this claim almost universally acknowledged.

History: Savarice's true origins are lost to legend. According to the tales, he washed ashore on the eastern seaboard, battered and bruised from rapids and rocks, his armor rusted, cracked, and falling off his body. He offered the salvageable pieces of refined steel to a nearby forge in exchange for nothing more than a loaf of bread and a lump of cheese. The fragments contained pieces of a symbol, a great crest of a house of prominence from across the ocean. The man cast them aside easily and watched the seals melt in the fire. Then he traveled north along the shore, never lingering more than a day at any dock or village. He lived simply, not wishing to impose and accepting only the barest fare he was offered, always insisting on paying for even this largesse with his own labor. He wore rough clothes, simple boots, a rough, uninspiring metal shield at his back, a notched and pitted blade with a wrapped leather hilt his only weapon, yet wherever he went his charisma shone out like the kings of legend. Wherever he walked, he spoke, and crowds gathered to listen. He spoke of nobility and truth. His tales told of bravery and kindness. In a land of slavery and spite, his words resonated with people praying for dignity and chivalry. Though a cross hung from his neck, Vincent never preached his faith and contended that kindness from

the heart surpassed any grace from heaven. He spoke simply of kindness of the soul and the capacity of civilized men to rise above what the animals inside told them to do.

Followers followed, as followers do. Savarice refused to call himself their prince or even their commander, but did not turn away any who came to him with chivalry in their hearts. These few men and women remained at his side as they made their way up the coast. The King's Caravan, as it came to be known later, was hardly any legendary ride: merely a dozen-odd warriors in mismatched armor on mismatched steeds, leading a great refugee camp away from lands wracked by slavery and intolerance. Among them were such storied names as Nobah Kohein, a brave holy warrior from another faith, and the Monster of Mauron, an enormous gladiator with a gentle soul, forced to fight until Savarice freed him. The caravan clashed with slavers and defeated monsters both mythical and modern. They freed the oppressed and championed virtue and honor to those in fear. In one town, outside of York, Vincent would meet Devorah Miller, a steel-eyed woman of fierce will and his future wife, though they would not marry for many years.

Throughout this journey, Savarice never accepted any title from his followers, despite the legends that have grown in the subsequent centuries. Besides, a king needed a kingdom and Savarice had only people, not yet a nation. But as his caravan grew to the hundreds, Savarice felt a calling. He knew a destination waited at the end of his unnamed crusade. When the caravan, after many years, at last came to the lands surrounding the mouth of Tethuss, every fiber of Savarice's soul told him this land was to be their home. Here was a land empty of settlers, but showing all signs of being rich in natural resources. A kingdom needs growing land, mineral wealth, stone and timber more than faith. It also needs allies, but these Savarice's caravan had earned in plenty with their good and selfless deeds. From Limshau and Finer, he hired carpenters and engineers, miners and architects. The Bulwark on the southern side of the bridge was erected in less than a year, though it would undergo extensive renovations over the next century. Behind the fortress wall, the town (later the city) of Janoah grew just as quickly. Though Savarice insisted the homes and agricultural networks of the realm be built first, his closest friends and most loyal subjects put pencil to parchment almost immediately to design a great keep for their new ruler, named after the wall.

It was not until Savarice and his order of knights, the Line of Abraham, took it upon themselves to rescue a Limshau caravan attacked by a superior force of boggs, however, that the king's legend was spread throughout the continent. Though the Line suffered losses, the fae were freed and carried back to Janoah for tending. When they returned to Limshau, they spoke of the courage and charisma of the knights and their Paladin King, the first time Savarice had been referred to by

such a title. Several well-regarded librarians traveled to the city to record the many tales of the knights' bravery, which they later edited into a hefty book that found circulation across Canam, Accounts from the Caravan of the King. The book became a prized possession of many libraries and found distribution among thousands of shops and bibliotheca across Canam. A copy of this book eventually came to a powerful holy dragon, whose name was never revealed and would be further referred to as Silver River, on account of his long mane of burnished hair.

Silver River arrived dramatically at the bulwark and informed Savarice that, whether he wished the honor or not, his actions had earned him the grace of blood royal. The dragon claimed to speak for Lazarus and placed a seal upon Savarice's palm, which would forever render the human immune to any disease, natural or magical. Silver River then decreed since the paladin had no heritage he could recall, the holy dragon would adopt the human as its child, making the name of Savarice a symbol of power and faith. The dragon's proclamation echoed throughout the skies of Canam, and Savarice, though ever humble, could no longer deny the title laid upon him. The Kingdom of Abidan was born in truth. Within a few years of its founding, the kingdom expanded to encompass more towns and thousands more people. Immigrants to Janoah ballooned to such an extent that even a few nearby communities with no prior connection to the blossoming nation raised Janoahn flags, voluntarily annexing themselves to the new kingdom. Savarice and his Line of Abraham were inundated with requests for patronage and blessings.

The king died as he had lived: not from old age, but defending his people on the Bulwark against the death dragon Laban of Miserere. Laban, critically wounded, his army wiped out, fled into the uttermost north and was never seen again.

Culture: On the surface, Abidan is much like any other echan kingdom, though it has a distinct old-world feel to it reminiscent of the pre-Hammer classical romances – a characteristic, incidentally, very rarely found in modern Lauropa. Some cynics have suggested that the only reason the country sustains its 'fairytale kingdom' aesthetic is because of how clean it is, and such commentators would not be far off the mark. Abidan has a strong tradition of civic service, and consequently is a great deal cleaner and better tended than a truly medieval kingdom would be. Streets in the towns are well-maintained – some are even paved – and public parks and gardens are plentiful. The old Abrahamic traditions of constructing great edifices to the glory of God are very much in evidence throughout the nation. Every major city contains at least one great cathedral or mosque, usually both (often situated on the same square and designed by the same architects); the city of Taskin-Kada also bears an impressive Hebrew temple modeled after the long-lost Temple of Solomon.

Because of its alliances with Limshau and Gnimfall, Abidan is also a center of learning and progress. Its people push the boundaries of what is possible in a world saturated by EDF. The larger farms use horse-drawn combine harvesters to bring in their crops, and even smaller homesteads boast early industrial conveniences. The cities even maintain a rudimentary sewer system and coordinated public sanitation. Unlike many echan nations, Abidan maintains a public school system, free to any citizen, where the kingdom's youths are taught to read and learn at least the basics of mathematics, literature, the arts and sciences. Though some nobles hire private tutors for their children, all royal scions attend the same schools as the children of burghers, merchants, and farmers, and so most of the nobility follows their example. Dozens of faith-based schools exist as well to educate their followers on the finer points of their own, and neighboring, religions.

To this day, the kingdom remains strong. Its current king, Claudas, prefers his knightly duties than his kingly ones, but his siblings maintain the image of complete authority and wisdom. Other noteworthy towns in Abidan other than the capital of Janoah include Clarvus, Pilbara, Sclavia, and Taskin-Kada, this last being home to the largest Islamic and Jewish populations in Canam and the center of operation of the Watchers, the closest thing Abidan has to a secret service.

Religion: Though its founders variously followed the three Abrahamic faiths, and many of the immigrants also professed one of these religions, the king insisted that no single faith be allowed to dominate: Abidan would be a haven for all faiths and philosophies. All its ruler demanded of his people was kindness. Savarice, a devout holy man, also believed in logic and his teachings, although derived from old Christian books, promoted more flexibility and acceptance of new ways and theories on life. That said, other human and fae religions do not have a strong presence within the kingdom. The advantage of the Abrahamic triad is that they are founded on the principle of the Word of God, and their doctrine is revealed through holy texts which have been reinterpreted and debated by scholars for millennia. Such religions naturally lend themselves more to the philosophical and scholastically-minded people of Abidan than ritualistic animist faiths or contemplative spirituality.

Relations: Abidan's nearest neighbors are the human kingdom of Kannos, the gimfen of Gnimfall, damaskans and humans of Limshau, and the narros from the Finer Fire Pits. Abidan has a strong relationship with all of them, with oaths of brotherhood with Kannos and Limshau. Baruch Malkut, however, is anathema to all their traditions; the so-called 'Blessed Kingdom' placed a price on the head of the Paladin King during the march of the Caravan, and the rulers of Abidan have always considered the southern nation to be the greatest threat to peace in Canam, not the pagus and dragons

of the north. Kannos and Abidan have shared noble blood, but in keeping with the fae traditions of the blood royal, the kings and queens of Abidan have never matched for political purposes. Abidan is strong in farmland and livestock, but is nowhere close to Kannos. They have rich mines but nothing compared to Gnimfall or Finer. Abidan is only extraordinary in the wills and dedication of its people and the goodwill of its allies; should open war ever erupt in the south, Abidan's knights will be there to defend the innocent.

Organizations: In addition to its tradition of knight-errantry, Abidan supports a number of formal knightly orders. The most eminent of these are the Knights of the Wall, considered the modern equivalent of the Round Table, who defend the Tethuss bridge against the hordes of Apocrypha. Before being welcomed into these august ranks, a squire must usually travel throughout the world on a personal quest.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Despite its utopian reputation, there are worrying rumors coming out of Abidan. It's said that some of the nobles are stockpiling weapons and hiring mercenaries – allegedly in case of open war with Baruch Malkut – but conducting maneuvers nowhere near the southern borders. Recently in Janoah there was a massive panic when a townsperson fell into a disused salt mine on the outskirts of town and thought that he had found a pagus tunnel under the Bulwark. And then in Sclavia there was a series of murders in which the victims allegedly were exsanguinated, leading to the formation of an unruly mob bent on expelling every tilen from the city, until the city's bishop was forced to use mind-control magic to make everyone calm down. Then there are tales of betentacled horrors slumbering beneath the surface of Lake Noa, a colony of fish-people who come ashore from Lake Jura to steal babies, and dark spirits haunting the ruined spire that rises above Lake Nioba… fanciful tales to frighten unruly children, no doubt, but many are the Abidan fisherfolk who cast wary glances toward the waters at the end of the day.

BARUCH MALKUT

Caleb sneered. "You be thinkin all siesta on ta verandah, sippin mint juleps, lookin out atta diabos toilin inta fields and zappin they wita lightnin wand when they get stroppy, no?" He spat. "You be watchin too many puppet shows. Ta be nothin like tha, even for ta ricos. You plain never had sleep hip-deep in mud, hopin ta heat don kill you before ta mosquitos do, prayin your toes don get chomped by thievin caimans, thata chaparrans won come take your head off while you sleep, and thata succubus won steal your caralho in your dreams. Tha what real life be like. An our bastardo of a king has ta bolas to call it ta 'Blessed Kingdom'—though he slept rougher in his time if you believe ta legends." Instinctively, he looked shiftily back over his shoulder. "Anta worst of it be," he went on in an undertone, "me own mãe'd probably turn me in jus for sayin all tha."

The greatest threat to Canam, and maybe the known world, is the growing fanaticism of the humans of Baruch Malkut. A prosperous nation in the midst of swamps and saltwater marshes, dependent on slave labor to work its fields while its populace indulges in the twin national pastimes of luxury and bigotry, Baruch Malkut is a land held in the iron grip of a seemingly ageless prophet, who uses his peoples' religious ardor as part of a scheme to rule the world – a world of magic, in which only humanity has a right to exist.

History: Southam is not a hospitable terrain for humans. Between the ravening monsters that suddenly populated the jungles and rivers, and the more civilized monsters who viewed humans as just another strange animal to be hunted for food or sport, those humans who stayed after Attricana's opening were almost wiped out. A few managed to find respite with a few narros and ogre towns, but these were rare occurrences. Thousands attempted to migrate north, but many failed attempting to cross the Gloam, and others were devoured by sea monsters attempting to follow the shoreline by boat. However, four hundred years ago, a small population reached the shores of southeastern Canam. Exhausted, unable to travel farther, they settled into the swampy lowlands and began the slow work of recreating a civilization.

Then Darius Konig arrived.

Legend tells that Konig came from Southam or at least near the border of the Gloam almost two centuries ago. He gained a few avid followers, captivated by his charisma and physical discipline. With life dangerous for humans, Konig and his people (the Cloth) immigrated north through the Gloam. They passed through the darkness, but only half survived the journey. Few reports tell of Konig's disposition before the pilgrimage but many tell of the fanatic that arrived in Canam. Konig believed himself the new prophet of God. During his eastward trek, he wrote the Helios Codex. The book does not teach followers virtue or kindness, but preaches a rabidly xenophobic view of the world. According to Konig, God deemed technology a sin no longer welcome in His kingdom, rejected man's old ways and brought the Rapture. To those that remained, He granted the secrets of magic, but also brought forth inhuman demons from Hell to test Man's faith.

As they entered the southeast of Canam, Konig and the Cloth were welcomed into the small echan town of Faustis. The people there lived in the shadow of a small bastion called Sebring. Sebring resembled Angel in many ways, although smaller, with less than 150,000 residents. They lacked advanced technology, being like York limited to the most basic of conveniences. Even though Sebring never harmed or suppressed the people

of Faustis, Konig created a feeling of fear and hatred towards the techans. Zealots and fanatics flocked from surrounding villages. Sebring never realized how large this force had grown, and did not even anticipate an attack until magical bombardment brought the short walls of Sebring down in less than three days. The armies of Faustis ravaged the bastion, taking no survivors and showing no mercy. According to one report, Konig demanded the city be burned to ash, with the surviving population inside. Anyone trying to escape was crucified and their bodies posted around the bastion as a message to others. By the time the last flame died out three weeks later, a thousand grisly crosses surrounded the gutted bastion of Sebring. This fanatical hatred spread quickly through the land, the zealots founding new towns or subjugating existing ones. When all the land of the marshy peninsula was under his sway, Konig appeared once again to the masses. He revealed a new vision from God: the world still belonged to magic, but it also belonged only to Man. Fae creatures were nothing less than Hell-spawned demons, and only when the last fae had been exterminated would the Kingdom of Heaven come to being on Earth. The frightening pace on which Konig swayed the masses alarmed non-humans already living in the kingdom. Half-breeds were exiled or lynched. Pure blood fae were murdered wherever they were found, or captured by slavers and brought south to work the humans' lands as beasts of burden. Of all non-humans, Konig despised the tilen above all else, labeling them succubi dedicated to co-opting the pure blood of humanity. Tilen were never taken as slaves; whenever they were captured, they were marched to the sea under the blazing sun and ceremonially drowned. Within a century, the Blessed Kingdom claimed all the land of southeast Canam, from the Great River to Okeanos.

Culture: Though the kingdom can no longer expand its borders, its population continues to grow and it boasts some of the most fertile crops in all of Canam, tended exclusively by enslaved fae. Though Konig preaches the eventual extermination of all faekind, he is unwilling to overlook the economic potential of exploiting them, though he prohibits breeding of fae slaves within his demesne. He also personally despises fae indentured prostitution, declaring it a sin against God and Humanity – however, there are no actual laws against it, and even if there were it would likely not stamp out the thriving trade in fae bordellos. Almost all towns, save for Itinera and Nassau, use and sell slaves though the prime exports emerge from Matronis and Tobias. They hardly refer to them as elves or even slaves, preferring more dispassionate, but equally merciless terms like merchandise, property, goods, or furniture. The Malkut slave markets move the most gold in a day of any place on Earth, which helped secure the kingdom as one of the most stable and successful in the world. Because of this, although few who live there would realize it (education being somewhat discouraged within the realm in favor of mass indoctrination) Baruch Malkut's way of life fairly closely mirrors that of the region's distant colonial past in the old Age of Man.

Noteworthy cities in Baruch Malkut include Archytas, Faustis, Itinera, Karum, Kavus, Maskell, Matronis, Miynos, Nassau, Orlov, Sykar, Tobias, and Vallis.

Religion: Baruch Malkut is, in some ways, more dominated by religion than Abidan – for that matter, more

than any other state in Canam except Mann. Their entire way of life is dominated by the strictures of the Helios Codex – not that most of the population can actually read it, but they are told what it says by the kingdom's fanatical priests and missionaries in services that everyone attends at least once a week. The zealotry that characterized the early days of the Blessed Kingdom has largely died down, replaced by a low-key simmering callousness for all non-human life and a casual assumption that followers of Konig's way are inherently superior beings, but the spiritual atmosphere of the realm is such that Konig or his followers in the Cloth could easily whip the populace into another religious frenzy should it become politically expedient to do so. Baruch Malkut missionaries also travel extensively throughout Canam, preaching human superiority, the sinfulness of technology, and warning of the retribution to come if the local population does not submit to Darius Konig before his armies come for them. Other than these itinerants and other agents of the Kingdom, there are no followers of this religion outside of Baruch Malkut.

Relations: As Konig closed his grip on new lands, his eyes turned to nearby territories like Tranquiss, Laurama, and especially Limshau. The first delegation from Limshau was brought before Konig who had them executed on the spot, their books burned and the ashes sent back to the fae. The custodians of Zorahn (who sent the delegation) swore to avenge their brothers and books: a few small clashes have occurred in the following century but an official declaration of war has never been announced. Limshau remains alert to the Malkut threat, and is backed by powerful allies in Abidan and Gnimfall. Meanwhile, the armies of the Blessed Kingdom have been unable to stage a successful attack on Laurama, and Tranquiss demoralizes any army that looks upon it. Konig refuses to let such a setback hold him and swears Malkut will cover all of Canam in his lifetime.

Time has refused to claim Darius Konig after these years and the dictator continues his maniacal crusade against technology and non-humans, despite being more than two hundred years old. Not a stupid man, Konig has recently allowed plans to be set in motion for a traditional rail network ridden over by stream powered trains (steam power being, according to Konig's proclamation, the limit of God's acceptance of technology). Though it is estimated this effort will take fifty years to complete, Konig hopes the rail network will ferry troops and supplies to outer towns, allowing him to finally overcome the stalemate and subjugate Limshau once and for all. Limshau, in turn, hopes that over the next few years or decades, as society progresses united past Baruch Malkut, the native population would overthrow the man responsible for retarding their civilization's potential. Furthermore, many believe the kingdom's fanaticism will die with its king, though as Konig is over 200 years old and shows no signs of age, unheard of in any unbonded human, no one knows exactly how long they may wait for this deliverance.

Names: The official language of Baruch Malkut is Onespeak, which has a strong Portuguese component thanks to the most common background of its populace, but it also contains many terms with strange or completely invented etymologies. Names with a religious significance are particularly common.

Examples: Abel Medeiros, Carla Danassan, Eneas Ferreira, Fabia Albeirao, Henrique Araullo, Nathalia Victoris

CRENSA TA ASSASSINOS

Darius Konig's loyal inner retinue inspires nightmares throughout Baruch Malkut – everyone from the lowliest commoner to the greatest lord quakes in fear at the prospect of a red-robed figure in a golden mask appearing out of nowhere to end their lives on the merest suspicion of heresy. But for an order of supposedly invincible assassins, the Cloth's activities outside of Baruch Malkut have been surprisingly infrequent. Furthermore, for a nation hell-bent on world domination, the Blessed Kingdom's attempts at expanding its borders have been slow, even glacial at times. Tales of a shadow war between different factions of the Order of the Cloth have reached my twitchy ears, although as a fae, it would be exceedingly hazardous to my health to attempt to venture into the country to confirm the rumors. Perhaps the Order is not as unified in its support of the king as it appears – or perhaps Darius Konig's paranoia leads him to pit even his closest allies against one another to forestall any chance of betrayal.

CONTINENTAL CROSS

"Wen y'caravaan beferren?" the man asked.

"Morgens, tomorrow," I told him. "Thirty…dreiten carmots to ferren mit us to Limshau, 'less'n you fancy yojimbo work." The man stared blankly, and I racked my brains for the right Englo-Lingo word. "Leifgarde – protecting, fighting den strikerovern. Tenanfive carmots off, demi-costen."

The man nodded and opened his duffel bag to reveal a large sword with a cloth-wrapped blade. "Ya, mia tu behelven," he said as we shook hands.

-- My kamerade Xavier Siene, caravaneer, on the importance of bilingualism

Many individuals are raised in a stable environment, dependant on reliable income from parents that are always present. Crossroad drifters are not usually among these lucky people. If they actually had a family, they were nomads or merchants, and more likely they were raised by a caravan as a whole rather than their parents. Because of slow travel time and the long distances between locations, thousands of children are born with no real home to speak of. They learn to walk early in life and never stop moving. They keep few ties: their loyalty is to their caravan or traveling companions. Their home is a temporary bed, wagon, or stable rental. Cru-

sades, causes, or jobs they take on are often considered peripheral, and they never believe them obligatory. Drifters refuse to be tied down to rules or by the laws passed down by some egotistical government, despite any veneration of its rulers. They outlive their welcome early as they don't consider diplomacy a useful talent. If feathers are ruffled, they simply pack up and move on.

History: Technically, the Continental Cross does not completely cross Canam, as the road proper begins in York but ends some distance short of Angel: nevertheless, the common conception is that it stretches from coast to coast, and for most practical purposes it does. The Cross is also not a single highway, but a series of roads inconsistently maintained and patrolled by the nations that it passes through. Were it not for the substantial trade custom it brings, many free houses would not bother, for much of the Cross (particularly the western end) passes through difficult and dangerous territory, prone to monster attacks and bandit ambushes. The largest portion of the road passes through the Kingdom of Limshau, where it is most consistently guarded and maintained, and is even paved for most of the way with smooth paving stones in the western reaches and asphalt as one draws nearer to Gnimfall. Beyond Gnimfall the road is fully paved all the way to York, but through the fields of Halyc maintenance is lax – due to the expense, it is only repaved once every two years. Nobody knows for sure who originally began construction on the road: York likes to claim the credit, but it is far more likely to have been a joint endeavor by Limshau and Gnimfall to ease travel to York's docks and from thence to the Lauropan empire of Damaska.

Culture: In addition to the large merchant caravans that use the Cross, there are thousands of nomads, expatriates, free companies, and wanderlust-bitten tourists such as myself that travel the road, settling down on the fringes of a community for a short time to look for work or to trade news and then moving on. Although these people come from every corner of the continent (and sometimes beyond) a kind of unified crossroad drifter culture has grown up. Travelers on the road learn to be wary of potential threats. If a traveler or caravan on the road meets up with another going the same direction, it is common for wayfarers to fall into step as far as they are going together, there being strength in numbers. Dozens of languages are spoken along the road, but somehow everyone who travels it is able to make themselves be understood by their fellows. You could hear many of the same campfire stories being told by itinerant thespians from Antikari and mercenaries from York, at opposite ends of the Cross. Of course, not everyone adheres to the unspoken code of the common good, but those who develop a reputation for flouting it often find it more difficult to get work at the various ports of call along the way.

Religion: Crossroad drifters can belong to any religion, or none. Nobody they meet along the way is likely to pass judgement on them for their beliefs, though individual communities along the road may have preferences; even Baruch Malkut's so-called 'missionaries' keep their vitriol largely to themselves while traveling. One never knows when one might need a fellow-traveler's help, and it does not pay to offend anyone unduly.

In addition to whatever religious beliefs they may have, crossroad drifters tend to accumulate a large collection of situational superstitions, some rooted in fact and some wholly fantastical. Passing near known enchanted forests, it's common practice to place a saucer of milk just outside the firelight; travelers who speak the name or title of a dragon while on the road are generally expected to throw a pinch of salt over their shoulder or walk to the rear of the line for the rest of the day, regardless of whether the dragon is thought to be good or evil (or even to truly exist); when reaching one particular bend in the western road overlooked by a particular mountain, one is supposed to stop for exactly two minutes and offer a salute to the peak. Even techan travelers adhere to some of these superstitions, though few would be able to explain why.

Relations: There is a general agreement that travelers of all nations are permitted to use the Continental Cross, regardless of the patrolling nation's relations with their homeland. Sometimes exceptions are made for obvious displays of military force, but usually such actions are detected well before they reach the borders and various means are used to ensure that a battle does not take place on the road itself. Some suspect that there is an enchantment laid over the road that ensures its neutrality, but the truth is far more prosaic – the fact is, the Cross is the only major trade route through Canam and virtually every nation is dependent on it remaining open. Although many nations, especially free houses, charge tolls for travelers along the stretches they maintain, very rarely is anyone actually turned away from the road: most toll stations are quite willing to take a trade of goods or favors, or even news, over coin.

Names: Because of the diversity of the Cross, pretty much any sort of name can be found among the drifters. The Continental Cross is the point at which common English and Englo-Lingo meet, and because of the number of cross-continental romances that reportedly spring up along the way, it is not uncommon for children born along the road to end up with a name derived from two or even three cultures, even non-human ones.

Examples: Anansitael deWitt; Claude Lo; Megumi Rosch; Salamander; Terry Mehzenta; Zazie Midnight

THE ROVING RIPPER

No caravan crossing would be complete without campfire ghost stories to while away the twilight hours. One particular story has always stayed with me: they say that a traveler appeared in a caravan one night (from whence and to where the band were traveling varies with the telling), bleeding from multiple shallow cuts to her arms and legs. She told the tale of being attacked as she walked just after sunset, seeking a place to camp, by an assailant whose face she never saw – only the bright flash of metal in the moonlight. The caravan's resident chirurgeon attempted to bandage her wounds, but they continued to seep through the cloth despite all efforts. Fearing some deadly beast or enchantment, the caravaneers kept the fires burning and stood guard all night, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Yet, the next morning, though no-one knows how or when, the wounded traveler had completely vanished – and one of the guards was stricken with the same incurable wounds, and either died in agony or vanished into the darkness the very next night. I have heard this same story countless times across the Cross, many claiming to have seen it with their own eyes (as many who tell ghost stories claim), but sometimes in the teller's eyes I see a flicker of unease, as if recalling a painful memory.

DAWNAMOAK

Looking down from the balcony, her reaching hands draped over the polished railing that grew from the living wood of the tree, Valakkinye's keen eyes could pick out the newcomers even from this distance, despite the intervening tree canopy. From up here, the visitors' horses looked like ants, and the men themselves like grains of sand. "Why are they here, chichya?" she asked her father as he stepped out into the evening sunlight beside her. "They are here to study," he told her. "They want to know about our ways." The girl's brow wrinkled in confusion. "But Mistress Kalkirrin says that the monkey-folk are brainless yahsor—" Her father rapped her sharply on the head. "We do not use that word, even if Mistress Kalkirrin does," he said firmly. Valakkinye pouted and rubbed her scalp as he went on. "And it is true that humans are an ignorant people, but a few of them are just wise enough to realize that they know nothing. That is what brings them here – to learn a better way. With diligent teaching, we may grow them into better creatures before their brief time on this world is over."

Dawnamoak is the largest chaparran civilization in Canam and what most outsiders – at least those who have ever heard of the place – think of when they envision chaparrans. Spotting the great forest of Dawnamoak is easy. The fields of grass and bushes stop abruptly, replaced by wooden behemoths. The trees of Dawnamoak stand many times taller than other forests. Many of them stretch more than 80 feet across at their base and tower a mile up, and yet even they are dwarfed by the Towers of Jibaro at the center, trees grown from the graves of the wisest elders. A fortress graces each peak, grown directly from the wood. Although most believe the trees to be oak, the majority are actually conifers, specifically cupressaceous variants like giant sequoias and dawn redwoods. While in a traditional forest, the lack of sunlight resulting from such a dense canopy would starve out lesser trees, a side-effect of magical saturation also allows smaller deciduous flora to survive and flourish beneath the huge cedars, and even a few grasses and wildflowers below them. Search hard enough and one could even find a coconut palm, a flowering cherry, or any one of a dozen species of flowering and fruiting trees not indigenous to the region (or even to the prevailing climate).

History: No-one knows whether the forest came before the chaparrans or the chaparrans before the forest. The woodland fae do not keep extensive historical records, and although there are a few chaparran elders who could probably remember, they consider such questions not worth worrying about. Certainly, if someone were to tell any human of the neighboring territories that the land where Dawnamoak now stands was once desert and scrubland, they would be met by disbelief, for the enchanted forest gives off the sense of unimaginable age, far older than five mere centuries. How long it has been inhabited, none can say. There are many human settlements just beyond the fringes of the forest that are not even aware that the woods are the chaparrans' demesne. Some time within the first century after Attricana opened, humans sent a delegation into the forest to make contact with its reclusive residents. What happened at that exchange has not, alas, been recorded, but the humans were soon thereafter escorted out of the wood and warned never to return. Since then, the fae of Jibaro have resisted any efforts by outsiders to involve them in the affairs of the outside world.

Culture: Dawnamoak is the heart of the chaparran civilization, not only in Canam but the whole world. The definitive chaparran culture is exemplified by the woodland nation. The three towers are the geographic and cultural center of the wood: Strongwood, Berustar, and Larenoak. Berustar is the heart of the chaparran religion, with their highest priest, Sylvanakassus, governing the tower and its inhabitants. The tower Larenoak holds the chaparran scroll library and the Darawren academy, with Ramankasagranthos maintaining order. The last, Strongwood, is home of the military and governing body. From here rules the highest chaparran and leader of Dawnamoak: Valentiarankerr. No one is sure how many chaparrans live in the forest but numbers guess between 35,000 and 65,000.

A strange attribute only seen by the chaparrans of Dawnamoak is their family attachment to specific trees. Every child born in the forest is given a tree to care for. Although this is not uncommon for all chaparrans across the world, in Dawnamoak specific species of trees seem to equate to specific chaparran ethnicities: those with

the darkest skin tones always bond with the sequoiadendrons, while the lighter tan chaparrans always choose giant pines. There are more than a dozen other connections made between the various families of chaparrans and specific species of trees.

Chaparrans become more agreeable to the outside world the farther away they are encountered from the three towers. Although those residing in the towers claim all forests they see as theirs, there are dozens of smaller villages hidden in the woods that claim no loyalty to them. Their beliefs can often be different than those in the capital. Noteworthy villages include Koanas, Kerrana, Ulknas, and Widdig.

Relations: Visitors are not automatically turned away, but they will find no welcome unless they speak chaparra (even if they know another language, the residents will not speak anything else). Those who speak the proper language may stay… for a short while. This is not to say that outsiders are entirely unwelcome, but they have an uphill struggle ahead of them. In 355 A.E., the human wizard Sugi Gantilanna entered the great forest in hopes of establishing a sociable relationship with the fae, something no human had ever succeeded in doing previously. Though the chaparrans of Dawnamoak still regard mankind as a whole with mistrust, Sugi struggled against the stereotype for many months and eventually earned acceptance. Despite sending occasional correspondence, Sugi would never leave the forest in his lifetime. During the following fifty-five years, Sugi found a greater respect offered to him than to any human before or since.

THE WILD HUNT

One of humanity's oldest fables about elves and fairies involves the fae of the woods riding forth at the turning of the seasons, mounted upon white stags and presaged by the baying of ghostly hounds, to deliver nature's retribution to unwary travelers and stealing human babies. While my chaparran acquaintances assure me that this fanciful image has no basis in reality (though there are some, particularly the sombra of Laurama, who dearly wish it were so), it is such a persistent legend that among the settlements bordering the forest, unexplained disappearances are frequently misblamed upon the forest's residents. Hunting parties sometimes enter the forest to exact revenge upon those the poor misguided folk believe responsible for their loved ones' vanishing… and they, too, are often never seen again, or sometimes emerge from the forest decades after entering it, unaware that any time has passed for all that their hair and beards have grown grey in the interim. Let that be a lesson to us all – poor communication can kill, or worse.

FARGON

Lorrask grunted as he pulled himself up onto the ledge. It wasn't that he resented the obligation of climbing the mountain – if nothing else, it got him out of earshot of his younger sister, who talked like a tenenbri and had about as much tact as one – but he had been perhaps overly dedicated to his last piece of work and had ended up putting off the pilgrimage until the middle of winter. Narros were supposed to be hardy folk, but sometimes Lorrask secretly suspected that this was partly an act that his people put on to impress the other fae with their dedication, and had made the mistake of buying their own hype. His sister would say that he was a disgrace to the family for thinking so, and the thought of her disapproval made him feel warm again. Only a little further to go. He gritted his teeth and climbed to the next ledge and then the last few feet to the worn pinnacle of the mountain. Balancing atop it, he exhaled into the thin air and looked about him, just as the sun rose over the eastern horizon. Moments like this made it all worthwhile – the whole vastness of Fargon spread out before him, from the mountains to the tundra to the sea, the rooftops of the great temples further down the mountainside flaring red in the morning light. He gave a sniff of satisfaction. Now, to climb back down…

History: When the fae returned to the world, each lineage appeared in a place that suited their kind best, whether by some subconscious desire or merely by fortuitous chance. Most of the narros in Canam fell in the north. They must have wished for isolation, as they landed in an area that virtually locked them off from the rest of the world. Being stalwart and rugged, they easily could have crossed the Nankani Mountains and joined their cousin fae in Southam, but they chose to remain and gladly planted roots in a land still chilled but no longer wracked by permafrost, slowly made more habitable by the influence of magic. By the end of the second century, half a dozen cities and twice as many villages had emerged. This land was still far from being entirely hospitable, however, and every city contains a monument to the thousands dead in the building of their nation.

Despite the isolation of their distant country, Fargon narros can be found everywhere in Canam. They find pesky obstructions like rivers and mountains a welcome challenge rather than an impediment. A featureless desert would be more of a barrier to narros expansion than a mountain range, though no more difficult to circumvent. Their first contact with outsiders occurred shortly after their largest and most southern city Thos Thalagos was formed. After Thalagos Gin finished erecting his castle, he sent a dozen pilgrim convoys to search for allies or treasure. Travelers east found kodiaks, who wanted little and had less to offer, and also boggs and skeggs, who wanted exterminating. West found nothing but rivers and rumors. South stumbled into a safe crossing of valleys and plateaus later called the Deep Pass at Dionaso, and followed it until they reached the fledgling bastion of Selkirk. After sharing knowledge and company with the resident humans and discovering the unfortunate side-effect of their nature on technology, the pilgrims returned to Thalagos with

something better than treasure: a trade agreement and a firm alliance that has never faltered in the intervening centuries. Eventually, these narros would push past Selkirk to finally encounter fellow fae in Limshau and Salvabrooke. As they traveled, they would build waystations to mark their passage, some of which grew into small settlements centered around some monument or temple, and yet when their exploratory phase was concluded most of these were abandoned by their creators, to be filled by humans or fae stragglers of other species. Sadly, the greatest of these structures now lie under the thrall of Xixion, their stately halls defiled by puggs.

Culture: The harsh environment created a people of unshakable will. The narros of Fargon are the most relentless in the application of whatever path they embrace. They work hard and play even harder. Unlike those in Finer, living their lives in the mines and getting dirty with the spoils of hard labor, Fargon narros are far more spiritual, taking pleasure in a cold breeze or a frigid waterfall with no other noises to distract them. They are also a proud folk even by narros standards, quick to anger and slow to forgive.

Narros don't dig and mine only for the sake of mining: they are builders as much as they are warriors. Although they use wood, they do so only when stone cannot be employed. Narros were bitter at the lack of artifacts and ruins from the previous age. Of all the nations, the narros are most obsessed with leaving their mark upon the world. Narros cities are the greatest of all the fae. They boast perfection in construction. Every corner is a sharp edge. Every line is without fault. Every building is a mark of mathematical precision. Every tower is an avatar of the narros' faith in their own skill. Narros fortified themselves and created a nation of stone.

Noteworthy cities in Fargon include Hardstone Sig, Mag-Farg, Majed, and Thos Thalagos.

Relations: In addition to the treaty with Selkirk and informal agreements with Salvabrooke, the Fargon narros maintain regular diplomatic relations with the Seliquam Confederation, most of the nations of which (at least the human and damaskan ones) sprang up in the wake of the narros' explorations, moving into abandoned narros camps and deciding to expand on them. Narros ravnorra train the elite warriors of Seliquam, and often travel with them on expeditions into Xixion to explore or cleanse narros-made monuments of the kaddog's filth. They maintain less frequent relations with the kodiaks of Alpinas, although they are happy to fight beside them against the boggs and skeggs who infest north-central Canam. They have few trading relationships with the rest of the continent, as the southern nations find the Finer Fire Pits more convenient. Their sworn enemies, the pagus, dare not approach the northern lands unless they arrive in the thousands in preparation for war. All narros mines in Fargon feature thermal mooring towers but no dragonflyer posts.

THE DELVING DEAD

The narros respect their ancestors more than any other fae species, but as space is at a premium in excavated mountains, only the most prominent families have their own crypts to honor their dead: everyone else is interred in the deep catacombs, just above the limit that Oaken's faith permits the narros to dig. Recently, dark tales have emerged from the more westerly settlements in Fargon of the narros dead rising spontaneously from their graves and continuing to dig past the forbidden depths, attacking any who attempt to stop them and return them to their rest. What they may be seeking, none have been able to say. Though these reports have yet to be confirmed, it could presage the creeping power of Ixindar finally passing the sea that separates Fargon from the dark realm of Kakodomania.

THE FINER FIRE PITS

"So, can you make it for me or not?" I looked back at the human through narrowed eyes, not stopping my work.

"Oh, I can make it for you. But it comes with a price."

He frowned. "I already said money was no object—"

I shook my head. "I ain't talking about money. The properties you want placed on this thing – you must be hunting some pretty big game. Big, scaly game by the look of it." I hefted my hammer, the forge-fire glinting in my eyes. "I want a piece of that action."

-- From The Chronicles of Hammergin Marv, a popular Kannos adventure serial

The narros from Finer fit the stereotype of their fictional parallel. The city's founder, Garach Glim, desired an underground kingdom to rival anything found in Fargon. When he stumbled upon an astounding treasure of unmined minerals in the Finer Vallis, he knew his search was over. Three centuries later, Glim can still be found in any one of the thousands of miles of tunnels that branch off the colossal Finer Cavern, a single chamber large enough to fit the entire city of Limshau. From there, huge smelters constantly burn, laying heavy deposits of grime and heat over everything inside. Over a hundred thousand narros call this gargantuan underground metropolis home. In total, twelve forges are found within the cavern, each as large as a human castle, dwarfed inside the colossal cavern that has never fallen despite a lack of supports.

History: The founder (and still ruler after four centuries) Garach Glim still digs alongside his people. He has shown no signs of senility or exhaustion. When asked why he put down roots so far from Fargon, Garach's answer was simple: "I hate cold." Huge deposits of coruthil and titanium can be found in the Pits, along with practically every other mineral necessity in the modern age.

Above the mines, the narros settlers carved out an immense cave, miles across with the only exit being a single massive staircase leading to the surface. This massive construct, more than 300 feet wide, descends for almost a quarter-mile before finally reaching the Fire Pits. A consistent and uncomfortable red glow radiates over the cavern, which the narros continue to hollow out. Inside, ovens a dozen stories tall work overtime constructing materials and smelting precious ores. The city grows from the walls and roof of the cavern as well as from the ground. In the dark, with only the slight glow of the smelters, the city resembles a Christmas tree turned inside out and spread across every available surface of the cave. Ugly, utilitarian box-shaped buildings grow down, up, and out. Many live out their whole lives without ever seeing the sun, in spite of the strictures of the narros faith. Despite four hundred years of constant digging, the pits continue to be fruitful and were the most profitable narros mines in the world until a recent windfall at Thos Thalagos. Though many in Fargon look down on the Finer Fire Pits, Thos Thalagos is the exception, with Thalagos himself expressing admiration for the tenacity of the narros of the Pits, though also expressing concern that the name is false advertising (the forges are called 'Finer' not because they are in any way superior to other narros cities, but because of the local humans' name for the valley from which the Pits were excavated).

Culture: A narros from Finer often looks distinct from those from Fargon. While Fargon strives for self-perfection, Finer permits the occasional personal flaw, on the assumption that this frees the individual to focus on their work rather than themself. That said, few narros are disposed to take advantage of this mentality. Given a choice, most narros would prefer to remain isolated with their brothers and sisters in Fargon, and if the Pits weren't so profitable, the entire system would collapse. The Fire Pits maintains its success not so much because of its rich veins, but because of the diversity of its neighbors and the trade goods they can provide in exchange for Finer's metal and craftwork. They are able to bring in goods that narros in the north envy.

Traders, however, do not like to stay in Finer itself. The forges work nonstop and are built without adequate insulation, keeping the average temperature of the entire complex at 46 degrees Celsius, with only a 5-degree drop during the winter. Though the resident population is acclimatized to the severity, visitors are greeted by a wall of heat that hits like an ogre immediately upon entrance. Many of the few non-narros residents are opportunistic hedge wizards peddling heat resistance spells to the narros' customers.

The Fire Pits house the largest repository of narros weapons and armor: only narros gear are kept in storage, while other goods are crafted to order. Though finding magic items can be a chore, many mages from across the world seek out the Pits – not for items or armor – but for Sagard Galla, the famous spellcaster and her well-known Open Library for Arcane magic. Galla loves entertaining visitors even though she seldom gains the opportunity to share her wisdom with other casters.

Religion: One of the personal imperfections that Finer tolerates in its residence is a looser approach to spirituality and faith. While all narros give at least token credence to the worship of Oaken, many of the associated traditions of the faith are laid by the wayside by the necessities of life in the Pits. While thus far there has been no occasion to violate the narros' ultimate taboo of delving too deep, some have come to believe that given a rich enough vein, Garach Glim would not hesitate to dig below the proscribed depth. Whether his workforce would continue to support him in that event remains to be seen.

Relations: Most caravans travel through the Limshau city of Kodex before continuing north to the Pits, and few other allies take alternative routes. Even Kannos, their nearest and most profitable human ally, transports their supplies from Warraqeen to Kodex before traveling north. Most of the visiting population is damaskan though a few humans have appeared time and again. Many of those are either independent merchants or wanderers looking for work. Since the narros here never developed a tight bond with humans like Thos Thalagos, the Finer populace considers humans another non-narros people best avoided when there is no business to be done. The Fire Pits feature a dragonflyer flyer service but no mooring towers.

THE BLACK PIT

Some who work the deepest parts of Finer have told tales of hearing unintelligible voices coming from below their feet. Oaken's forbiddance prohibits them from digging deeper to find out the source of these sounds, and in any case, independent observers have never heard them. It is widely believed that these are merely auditory hallucinations brought about by isolation or exposure to gas pockets in the depths, but more fanciful theories abound: everything from there being a cavernous cyst within the earth in which an ancient dragon has slumbered since the Terros Age, to there being a massive titan's road beneath the earth between mythical Selmana and some equally fictitious city elsewhere in Canam or Southam.

FREE HOUSES

The baroness tapped irritably at the arm of her throne as the querents loudly argued their cases. "All right, quiet!" she snapped at last. "So all three of you claim to be this child's mother, and not one of you can prove it. Well, there's only one thing to be done, then." She nodded to her seneschal, who stepped forward and picked up the basket. "None of you can have him. This boy is now a ward of the state, and will be raised not to annoy his baroness with foolishness. Now begone." As the guards

escorted the protesting women from the courtroom, the baroness sighed. Such was the life of a ruler.

Canam's most distinct feature lies with its large number of independent houses. Lauropa's larger empires quickly absorbed every spare inch of land, brushing borders within decades of Attricana's opening. With Canam, more than a century passed before any nations encountered others. Those with slightly more power absorbed smaller adjacent villages, usually by oath of betrothal or by threat of violence, forming the first feudal principalities. But much of Canam remained unclaimed, and without the ability of the larger kingdoms to patrol and hold vast fiefdoms, many villages could declare themselves free from alliance or external obligation.

Hundreds of small villages dot the land, though most are tied to a larger house. Most free houses control one small town and perhaps a half-dozen villages, bonded to the ruling house because of a need of protection or by forced hands. Large nations usually don't directly border each other, most being buffered by several such small nations. Many of these houses are short-lived, especially if a larger nation sets sights on them, but even then, such empires rarely have the manpower to maintain their conquests and they often break away again within a few decades. The majority of the rulers of free houses (sometimes also referred to specifically as "free-lords") are human. Their culture, relations, and diplomatic standings are varied but seldom extreme. Those that follow are only the most noteworthy: there are dozens, if not hundreds more scattered across the continent.

ANTIKARI

Antikari is a small house, consisting of a single keep (more of a manor house), a small but relatively wealthy town surrounding it, and a few dozen outlying farms. What raises it above the inconsequential is its proximity to Angel, at the mouth of the only relatively safe road between the Continental Cross and the bastion. Most of the residents of Antikari believe anything non-human is responsible for man's fall from grace: while they will trade with non-humans (gold is gold), they make no bones about their prejudices and will usually run a fae visitor out of town if they linger too long. Many in Antikari wish to enter and live in Angel, but their lack of useful knowledge prevents it. Antikari has a thermal mooring tower, but the nearest outpost for dragonflyers is a small hut 50 miles north run by Abin Rhunefellow.

OGIUM

Ogium, like Abidan, is a nation ruled by faith – but unlike Abidan, there is no room in Ogium's faith for tolerance or dissenting views. Centuries ago, the heir of the Ogium family, a devout fundamentalist Christian, was convinced by his holy patriarch to overthrow the king and establish his capital as a new Holy See: a series of catastrophes in the wake of the usurpation resulted in the death of every immediate heir to the throne, after which the Patriarch claimed the reins of government himself and declared the Ogium line extinct. While he proceeded to rule the house in name until his death at the age of 95, his power never extended beyond the capital: upon news of the line's extinction, fifteen lesser royals of the Ogium line each claimed the throne and began a bloody struggle that continues to this day known as the 'War of the Cousins'. Ogium now consists of several independent city-states, all of whom pay spiritual lip-service to the Patriarchs in Santachis but refuse to accept that he (or any of the other contestants to the throne) have any political authority over the House.

THEOCRACY INACTION

There have been a great many theocratic houses in Canam's relatively short history, but few have lasted longer than a generation or two. Many in the early days were dependent upon a 'miracle-working' founder (or figurehead) whose ability to inspire awe faded as the existence of magic became more accepted in the common mind. These days, the few theocracies that have managed to survive put less emphasis on the miracles and more on the military.

ORCHIS

The "sand-castle," as it is often mocked, can be first spotted on the horizon, flapping into vision from the waves of heat from dried desert soil. The Orchis family prefer the term "Desert Flower." The towering glazed walls look grown from the sand. Legend holds that the castle was born from dragon's breath and given to the human Orchis family on condition that none who bore the family name ever leave the limits of the castle, not allow it to deteriorate or be taken by enemies. They have kept the promise to this day, with the result that their keep is uncomfortably overcrowded. Several of the Orchis family have forsworn marriage to serve the house's unique religious order, a strange variant of the fae Berufu faith. Many lesser free-houses in Canam have an Orchis princess somewhere in their lineage. Beyond the castle itself, a handful of surrounding villages and ranchlands give fealty to Orchis. Cattle and cactusfruit are the house's principle exports.

PLICATO

The land that now belongs to House Plicato was once a minor damaskan duchy, seized by a human warlord centuries ago. In those days, fae slavery and concubinage was far more commonly accepted than it is today, and the Plicato family was known to partake of such pleasures liberally. However, a century and a half past, the king's favorite concubine agreed to bond and marry him, and produced many half-fae children over the years, and subsequent intermarriage with other damaskan free houses has made Plicato's rulers fully damaskan once more. The general population of the kingdom is split fairly evenly between human and damaskan, with a sizeable half-fae population and a few

chaparran communities. Despite its elven roots, Plicato has a poor reputation for magic, but a strong tradition of archery – unusual for damaskans, but understandable considering the house's proximity to Dawnamoak.

QUINOX

For centuries, mankind took pride in his independence from magic. Being evolved creatures, humanity was especially resistant to dependency on enchantment. Though humans can allow magic into their being, they have been resilient against branching into subspecies. The people from the House of Quinox may be a sign of a future to come. Their own history is a muddled mess of conjecture and flamboyant myth, but what is known is that they appeared out of the far north, chased south by weather and starvation. During the journey, their bodies became supernaturally immune to cold, and their spellcasters (of which there are more per capita than any other human kingdom) developed an affinity with the power of ice. The Sheridan family rules Quinox from their ice palace nestled within the Nankani Mountains, and the holder of the Winter Throne has the privilege of riding the frost dragon Rochka of Rime, an elemental dragon who vehemently opposes the grouping of her kindred with the typhox order and arrogantly proclaims the Sheridan line equivalent to the blood royal (although she lacks the power to grant such a blessing).

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY?

Though the Winter Children of Quinox are the only magic-touched human subspecies that I am aware of, one hears stories. In Seliquam they have a tale about a lost tribe who settled in the lands around Mount Hel before it began belching smoke into the sky, and whose affinity for the mountain protects them from the ash storms that keep the kaddog at a distance. Kesakas is full of rumors of people who formed mystical bonds with the dire beasts and ride or hunt alongside them, communicating telepathically with their companions. Of the variations that may exist beyond our continent's borders, I have heard too many wild accounts to relate here.

SKYROSE

Damaskan lord Rojjen Skyrose never felt comfortable declaring himself royal, and thus the House of Skyrose is technically considered a duchy in human terms. With such esteemed pedigree, the Skyrose line was sought after for alliance for centuries, but Skyrose, for a damaskan enclave, exhibits a surprising level of xenophobia: no member of the Skyrose line is allowed to marry any non-fae (even the alliance with Plicato that ultimately resulted in replacing a human lineage with a damaskan one was only permitted because the heir of the house was half-fae). Their pride in independence has also prevented them from forming an alliance with Limshau, despite the advantages such friendship would provide against slaver incursions by Baruch Malkut. Culturally, Skyrose resembles Damaska across the ocean far more than its neighbor Limshau, being a land of soaring towers and wondrous color.

TORQUIL

Torquil, on Canam's rocky southwestern coast, is a house in decline. It has suffered under kaddog attacks for many years and lost much of its holdings in the last few centuries. It was once the oldest and richest free house in Canam, perhaps older than Angel: Torquil gold was practically the common currency of the westlands. The most traditional of the neo-feudal houses, Torquil's fields were worked by serfs, and slavery was condoned (though not openly encouraged) by its rulers. In time, however, Torquil's burgeoning empire fell to internecine squabbles and bogg and skegg invasions from Crax, and its once-impregnable keeps were divided up among the aristocracy, mostly descendents of the Torquil family line. The ruling family still holds the ruined Holace keep, all but destroyed centuries ago and never fully rebuilt, but the house's power in the region is almost completely broken. The royal line attempts to leverage its antiquity by practically selling its scions to younger aristocratic lineages, but this has never resulted in the kind of powerful alliance the house's rulers hope for.

FALLEN KINGDOMS

From reading human literature, one might get the impression that five hundred years is hardly long enough for a kingdom to rise and fall so completely as to leave nothing behind but ruins and long-forgotten heirs. This proves only that fantasists have no sense of scale. There are few enough in this world who care enough for history to remember the tale of every little free house, and all it takes for a great monument to become a crumbling ruin is a local farmer who needs the stone to repair his sheep paddock. A kingdom could rise and fall in a single generation and nobody outside of its immediate territory would notice the difference.

GNIMFALL

"Sure, I got a variable phase oscillator. You need the negative feedback loop or the diothermic exchange unit?" The gimfen plopped his ridiculous hat back on his head and went rummaging around inside a machine that occasionally made worrisome toots and springing noises.

"I need my tank to work," I said levelly. The mechanic popped his head back out.

"Sure thing, sport," he declared, picking up a tool that looked to me exactly like every other tool on the bench and carried it, along with a cylindrical object with numerous unidentifiable protrusions all over it, over to the defunct vehicle. He rolled underneath and began fiddling noisily with the undercarriage. Occasionally there was a loud banging and a metal plate would be rapidly ejected from beneath the tank.

"Hey!" I called out. "How long is this going to take?" The gimfen stuck his head back out. "Hmm? Oh, not

long, I imagine. Couple minutes?" He went back to his fiddling as he spoke. "The thing about these old models is that they're incredibly prone to overheating, you see, so if you just keep the main block—" There was a huge bang and a cloud of smoke emerged from beneath the treads. The mechanic stuck his head back out, his hair standing on end and his face covered in soot. "Half an hour," he said lamely. "At least."

--The complaint of a techan I shared a passable jug of whiskey with on the cold fields of Halyc.

If it weren't for the "Grind Towers," most travelers would trek over the gimfen capital and not even notice. Even if one were to miss the mechanical spires, their noise exuberantly announces them. These narrow but tall spires rise from the soil, often lean to one side and a few look crooked or nearing collapse. Grind towers feature exposed gears and machinery, ticking and spinning and groaning and thumping every moment of every day. There is no attempt to cover these mechanisms and most of a grind tower's machinery is exposed: amazingly, they never seem to suffer from disruption. They serve many purposes. For one, they expel the pollution from the underground factories. They also dispel heat, house the upper class, and operate as watchtowers to the surrounding hills. Their height also allows every single tower to operate as a thermal mooring post. The towers also carry the racket from the underground tunnels along with them.

History: Gnimfall wasn't always the cacophonous jungle of rusted plates and belching steam that it is today. While its origins are lost to time (we gimfen have no real appreciation of our own history, alas), it may have begun as a settlement much like Salvabrooke – a bucolic community nestled just the other side of a mountain pass leading to the fields of Halyc. Somehow, our pastoral forebears encountered the fledgling settlement of York and offered their expertise to the primitive bastion in exchange for the accumulated scientific knowledge of mankind. When these earliest engineers returned from their clandestine arrangement with the techans, they set to work, and shortly thereafter Gnimfall began to take on the beginnings of the form we know today.

The two-dozen or so towers scattered over two hundred square miles are all connected by an underground network. More than 1,000- 3,000 gimfen call each tower home. Another 95,000 live underneath. Guests are offered rooms in the towers (which, happily, are soundproofed). Underneath, gimfen work within the limits of the ambient EDF to create whatever technology we can make to function. Several deep levels forbid magic, where we explore avenues previously denied to us until our deal with York. While York officially denies that such an agreement ever took place, we gimfen don't care: we did our work, we got our pay, and now we are free to play with the proceeds.

Culture: All life in Gnimfall revolves around technology. The settlement features elevators, non-enchanted illumination, and ground transportation, usually run from salvaged human batteries or our own steam-powered plants, the limit of our current technology in

the field of power sources, and with which we continue to struggle. Technology able to generate electricity is the most vulnerable to EDF, and despite our best attempts, we cannot seal out all the harmful effects of the world. Therefore, only steam power has hitherto been available and despite the whimsy of many writers with untapped imaginations and no grasp of reality, one cannot power a robot from steam.

This proven steam power system, fed by magical fires heating water funneled from a nearby lake, has expanded through the city, running various machines, including the huge mining engines that do the bulk of the city's excavation. Natural gas-fed lamps burn with a nearly inexhaustible supply. But none of this would be possible without the accumulated knowledge gleaned from the humans. In the Terros age, the greatest advances we gimfen had been able to master were the printing press and the pedal bicycle. Because we are all too aware of our limits regarding true invention, humans, especially those with even the slightest bit of technology, are invited in, entertained, and lavished with gifts, all in hopes of learning something new that could benefit the gimfen. Often this knowledge is held tightly by the one offering the bribe or favor, to be taken back to the family, which can then be used to raise the stature of their name. For humans entering Gnimfall, it very much feels like a beggar city, as every single attentive gimfen around will flock for even a glimpse at the smallest trinket in the hands of a newcomer. Some humans have developed this into a successful trade, bartering money and rewards for the retrieval of new and interesting technology. Gnimfall cares little for those humans not in possession of such gifts and many humans from echan cultures have accused us of being selfish. Though this is not exactly true, we are often one-dimensional in our pursuits.

Religion: Gnimfall does not have an 'official' religion, if only because the entire concept of 'officialdom' is alien to the gimfen mindset. However, nearly all of Gnimfall's residents worship Mecha, the machine god of our people. There are no formal churches or priests of this religion: every gimfen merely prays to her tools every morning, asking Mecha to manifest itself within them and continue to grant the blessing of technology. Humans often find this worship irrational, to which we reply that if it were rational we wouldn't need to do it. Other fae also find the practice laughable, to which we reply that this is why they can't use machines.

Relations: Despite being publicly snubbed by York, we still wish to develop good relations with all humans. For one, gimfen are well aware that the humans possess an imagination and an aptitude for technology all fae, even those as ingenious as ourselves, lack. The gimfen can replicate most technology we find and study, but we can't create anything really new. Only in the past few centuries has exposure to mankind vaulted the gimfen to levels only previously fantasized about. We can adapt quickly but mankind still flies past us despite the gimfen working day and night with no sleep trying to keep up.

Although we trade often, Gnimfall gimfen care little about the political events within Kannos or Abidan, or even Baruch Malkut (although our trade relations with the northern countries include provisions for military assistance should open war ever break out with the Blessed Kingdom). Echan nations have little interest for us. With other species, Gnimfall maintains very good relations. We respect and enjoy a successful alliance with Limshau, Salvabrooke, and several narros communities. We admire the damaskan elves of Limshau for their pursuit of knowledge, and have offered some of our engineering expertise to such pursuits as are unlikely to be significantly impacted by EDF – asphalt roads, some limited plumbing, semaphore towers, and the like. Some gimfen even claim the Limshau capital, from which all other Limshau cities are based, was designed by a gimfen (alas, this is not true since accurate records in Primmer clearly point to the architect being a half-damaskan). Gnimfall's engineering experteers are also happy to offer their services to any nation that can pay for them, either in coin or in an exchange of information.

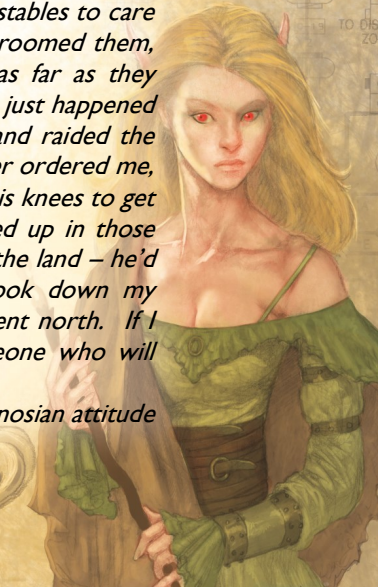
FALLOUT

Shortly after the first towers began to rise, my people underwent a great pilgrimage to seek out more sources of technology. Most returned empty-handed, but a few returned with excited reports of vast underground vaults full of still-working devices hidden deep in mountain caves. These brave pioneers went back with other hopeful engineers and began building grind towers near the spot of their supposed find. However, after a few months, nothing more was heard from them, and those who went to investigate discovered only scattered scraps and a polluted landscape where the towers were supposed to be. What really happened, I suppose no-one will ever know. Certainly, the vaults the early explorers spoke of have never been found again.

KANNOS

My master was too fat to ride a horse, yet he owned dozens. He never even came down to the stables to care for them – that was my job. I fed them, groomed them, mucked out their stalls, exercised them: as far as they were concerned, they were my horses. He just happened to possess them. Then the skeggs came and raided the ranch, and took the horses away. My master ordered me, then pleaded with me, then begged me on his knees to get them back for him. All his wealth was tied up in those horses, and without them he'd have to sell the land – he'd be ruined. Instead, I gave my notice, took down my grandfather's halberd and chainmail, and went north. If I find them, I'll take them back… for someone who will appreciate them. Finders keepers.

-- A typical Kannosian attitude



Kannos, along with Abidan and Baruch Malkut, are the three largest human-dominated echan kingdoms in Canam. Kannos and Abidan have approximately the same population, though Kannos claims nearly double the land area, with the same strengths in numbers and weakness in magic. Kannos is somewhat more cosmopolitan than Abidan, though not nearly as much as Limshau, and not nearly as obvious because of the kingdom's low population density.

History: Kannos formed from the remnants of a failed bastion, Appareci. Now the kingdom's capital, more towns flourished in the lands around and became steadily absorbed into the greater whole. The name 'Kannos' was offered by the damaskans of Limshau, meaning "Iron Will" in their tongue. The king at the time approved and adopted it as the name of his proto-empire. Despite their territorialism and proud cavalry traditions, Kannos has yet to be involved in any major war. As all of its civilized neighbors are staunch allies of the kingdom, the largest engagements occur between lance companies and swarms of puggs, boggs and skeggs threatening outlying towns, and the encroaching evil of the Sana Marsh to the south.

Though humans are on average weak with magic, Kannos is proud to name one of Canam's most powerful wizards as a past resident. Kereptis Rifts claimed a keep in Sarnathi, and even though that town was not absorbed into the kingdom until after Rifts' death, Kannos has given him posthumous citizenship (despite rumors that Rifts was a vile tyrant and that Sarnathi's people celebrated upon his death). Downplaying the rumors as baseless, the city of Sarnathi now cherishes the name of Kereptis Rifts, or rather the booming tourism industry that name brings in the form of adventurers tempted by the tales of treasures in the labyrinthine and treacherous tunnels of the Kereptis Catacombs.

Culture: Kannos is rich in land and precious materials, but lacks the population to properly maximize its potential. The kingdom's greatest treasure is its livestock. With rich farmland but without the military presence to defend it against migrating pagus from the east and boggs from the north, Kannos developed a profitable breeding program for a more mobile form of agriculture: cattle, pigs, chickens, and especially horses. Horses are more abundant than dogs in Kannos, with many children given a young steed as soon as they learn how to walk. These horses are treated as equals within the family. The kavaliers, Kannos' elite mounted warriors, spend the majority of their lives training their mounts and develop a bond with their steeds bordering on the telepathic. But despite their proud cavalry traditions, Kannos has yet to be involved in any major war. As all of its civilized neighbors are staunch allies of the kingdom, the largest engagements occur between lance companies and swarms of puggs, boggs and skeggs threatening outlying towns, and the encroaching evil of the Sana Marsh to the south. Like many horsemaster nations of humanity's past, Kannos generals glorify

combat, but rarely have the opportunity to indulge in it; jingoism is thus a common failing of the Kannos nobility, and many have expressed a hope that Baruch Malkut does eventually invade Limshau so that they can be called upon to defend their damaskan allies. Compared to Abidan, trained in defensive warfare and the use of shield walls and castle bulwarks, Kannos considers the best defense to be a devastating cavalry charge, trampling down their foes and sending them screaming back to their lands.

Because raising livestock requires vastly more land than farming, wealth and nobility in Kannos are tied directly to how much land a person can control. The first lord of any given city is the one in possession of the most physical acreage and the beasts to go with it. However, the economy is run by the farming and manufacturing industry, which landowners are not allowed to involve themselves in: they can only rent out a property and possess the land. Thus, business owners have the wealth while the landowners set the policy. Despite such a strange arrangement, the "kingdom" of Kannos continues to function. The established ruler of the nation is determined by the family with the largest claims to property, despite not being even close to the richest. A royal family can remove themselves from power by selling their land and going into business, forfeiting their claim to the throne but acquiring amazing wealth—something which has occurred more than once.

The established king or queen is prohibited from altering the constitution: only a conclave of twenty-seven leading landowners with very specific and sometimes bizarre qualifications can alter the ultimate law of the land (the one time a king tried to usurp this power, his reign did not last very long). Currently the throne, as well as the most land in the kingdom, belongs to the Nezekin family of Appareci, and there has not been a significant threat to their seat of influence in 150 years. The kingdom's aristocracy is often considered very homespun and provincial by other kingdoms, as fine clothes and ostentatious jewels are considered lesser status symbols than good horseflesh and plentiful grazing land. Furthermore, Kannos values bloodlines more in its breeding animals than in its nobility, so a sufficiently wealthy merchant or businessman can simply buy himself a sizeable plot of land and a landgrave or count's title to go with it. Kannos has such a small population relative to its borders that often, an aspiring investor only needs to purchase unclaimed acres from the royal charter. Less scrupulous investors may build a ranch or even a free house beyond the border and request, or most likely bribe, the reigning monarch to appropriate the claimed land into the charter and expand the borders of the kingdom.

This has occurred several times in Kannos' history, but no major land grabs have occurred recently, as Kannos is reaching the limit of what it can safely annex: with allied nations to the east and hostile wilderness encroaching on its remaining borders, there are currently only three such houses awaiting the protection of the Kannos Kavalry, with as yet no royal word if their petitions will be accepted.

Notable towns in Kannos include Appareci, Golana, Jairus, Sarnathi, and Xiphos.

Religion: One aspect of a modern nation a traveler won't find in great abundance are temples, churches, or synagogues. For reasons that, alas, only historians like myself find fascinating, a rational "naturalist" movement swept through the kingdom in its fledging decades, supported by the king of the time, Tarazed Matvala, who declared God to be "unnecessary". There is no state religion and those who establish centers for worship are forced to pay taxes as much as any business. This has resulted in many religious centers branching into business or folding altogether. Religion and worship still occurs in Kannos—just because there are no laws supporting it does not mean there is any particular stigma or legislation against it—but its rarity is a shocking occurrence even by modern standards.

Some outsiders, especially in more xenophobic communities, believe the fae population of the kingdom is the reason for the notable lack of religion in Kannos. Fae tend to be private about religion, assuming that they have one at all, and those that do pray do so without ostentation. The human population follows suit; even those that are openly atheist or agnostic do not make a big deal of the fact, regarding other peoples' beliefs to be none of their business. The kingdom's mixed population and perceived atheism makes them an avowed enemy of Baruch Malkut, but Abidan counts them as one of their closest allies, even more so than Limshau and Gnimfall.

Relations: Kannos is on good terms with all of its civilized neighbors, although this stems not so much from the goodwill of its population as the wealth that comes from profitable trading partners. Like many horsemaster nations of humanity's past, Kannos generals glorify combat, but rarely have the opportunity to indulge in it; jingoism is thus a common failing of the Kannos nobility, and many have expressed a hope that Baruch Malkut does eventually invade Limshau so that they can be called upon to defend their damaskan allies. Of all the united nations of the north, Kannos places the most pressure on the others to preemptively declare war on Darius Konig, despite never having sustained an attack from the rival kingdom.

Names: With its nearest neighbors being Limshau and Salvabrooke, the dominant languages in Kannos are common English and Damaskan. Due to freely absorbing minor houses and smaller kingdoms in their formative years, there is little ethnic consistency within the kingdom, but their preoccupation with mercantilism and the record-keeping that goes with it has resulted in

some idiosyncratic modification of the common alphabet, ostensibly for more efficiency (most immediately notable in the firm distinction between 'C'—now a 'CH' sound—and 'K'). Most common names reflect these changes.

Examples: Adryin Kesig, Karl Waldun, Kordylya Harkos, Sesily Mondavé, Shon Makavoi, Wilma Shyn

THE IRON QUEEN

Kannos' present monarch is Queen Bodika Nezekin, a woman with a manner as steely as her hair, who openly supports the war hounds calling for a preemptive strike against Baruch Malkut but cannot yet persuade those who hold the kingdom's purse strings to finance such an action. Perhaps not coincidentally, she has called no fewer than four Great Hunts—Kannos' long and glorious institution of monster extermination—during her reign, offering fabulous sums in prize (supplied by the landowners and business leaders). Those who claim their rewards, however, have a tendency to disappear in mysterious circumstances, ostensibly at the hands of disgruntled rivals. Far be it from me to imply where the money really ends up. I am, after all, merely a humble student of history.

LAUDENIA

Lannik goggled at the sight of the enormous tower, held in the sky by nothing more than a wish and a prayer. "Stop staring, boy," the wizard chided. "You are already attracting enough attention to me. Acting like a tourist makes it the worse."

The boy hurriedly shut his mouth, but he still continually shot wide-eyed glances around him as they walked among the floating island, across white bridges draped with crimson like inverted sunsets. All around the pair, the graceful figures of the city's inhabitants passed by, very pointedly not noticing them—save for one; as they approached the tower, a willowy laudenian came forward and greeted the wizard with a bow.

"You have returned, Temmosus," she said. "But why have you brought this groundling here?" The wizard returned her bow, his expression unchanging.

"Lannik will be my apprentice. I am not inclined to explain my reasons. They will become clear in time."

The woman did not look shocked, but her porcelain features became even more masklike. "The council may demand those reasons of you," she warned.

The wizard gave an imperceptible shrug. "And I will give them the same answer."

Deliberately isolated from almost every other culture and guarded by enchanted shrouds, those few ground-dwellers who claim to have seen the city are often dismissed as dreamers or madmen. Its location is vague, floating among a hundred different mountains in the Nankani range, never appearing in the same place twice. On the surface, Laudenia resembles a city of technology, a marble-white floating bastion of towering skyscrapers; but underneath the shine of the walls flows pure magic. The city floats on air, connected to whichever mountain it currently anchors on only by a bridge of solidified cloud. The *Alkanost*, the massive dragon-shaped flagship the laudenians arrived in, floats atop a river of enchanted air alongside the city. The Council of Six runs Laudenia. Elrenar Alkanost, the oldest fae descendant alive and nominal king of Laudenia (although laudenians do not have the same concept of royalty as ground dwellers) still sits at the head of the council. Nacola Falconyr, the most powerful fae mage, also holds a seat.

History: Laudenian arrogance refused to die when they lacked corporeal forms, and has only grown stronger in the centuries since they were restored to them. After their arrival, they utilized their greatest magic and built a mighty city atop a mountain in the west. When they emerged from the gate, the laudenians found the land below remote and hazardous, an ideal place to build their floating city away from prying eyes. Laudenia was raised in a single day, using the combined magical power of the entire laudenian people, the city emerging right from the mountain stone smooth as polished marble. They ensured all surviving laudenians that did not arrive with the *Alkanost* migrated to the same point to help in rebuilding their society. Because laudenians have the most spellcasters of any species besides humans, and their magical prowess far surpasses that of other folk, they never endured many of the hardships suffered by other races. Anything they wished for formed itself from thin air before their thought could finish. Looms wove cloth by themselves; food and drink sprang forth from magical cornucopiae and endless fountains; crystals projected illusory images from one place to another, so distant friends could speak to each other as though they were in the same room; and for what they could not simply create, the laudenians built giant quicksilver golems to go down to Earth and mine and harvest what they needed.

Once their new capital was built and the ship's population disembarked to their new home, the Alkanost departed to begin the long journey of exploring the skies and the wilderness underneath. During this time, the magoi traveling aboard began forming the network of floating keeps. Applying the same power that made their city, the laudenians harnessed the ambient magic found in rare stones that enabled them to disobey gravity and elevated them above the clouds, laying down the foundation of an expanding empire. When they wandered too far east, they were turned back by increasing dragon attacks; traveling north or west, they struck an impenetrable wall of wind; and they possessed enough wisdom to turn back rather than brave a passing over the Gloam. After three centuries, the *Alkanost* returned to Laudenia and moored itself, having completed its work of building castles in the air across the whole breadth of Canam. The keeps peer down from high above, out of sight of most ground-dwellers, never offering the hand of friendship to anyone, rarely lifting a

finger for those in need. The laudenian belief professes that to help would offer false hope to the needy, for they themselves are too few to offer any sort of reliable aid. They must choose their battles carefully, only rising to the call when they feel the time is suitable. Some would say that this is merely an excuse to justify the laudenians' fundamental distrust of the ground and all that live upon it, but the laudenians don't care what the earthbound think of them.

Culture: The city of Laudenia shines with its own inner light. Even at night, the towers glow with a soft white shimmer emanating from the polished stones themselves. The inhabitants have no need of torch or candle, and can control the light wherever they wish with the simple wave of the hand. As the sunlight refracts through the atmosphere and shifts the sky to different hues, the city often echoes those same changes. As the sky turns orange to red, the city's exposed stone flushes to a rosy tint. Beyond this, the glimmering white stone is carved to precision to build every step, every bridge, every building, and every vase: no cracks nor mortar foul the sheer, smooth surfaces of the fantastical structures. Flowers and fruit grow freely in the public walks and gardens that line the roadways and many of the roofs. Each building in Laudenia supports itself on its own floating island, connected to one another via stone bridges. Seen from above, the city resembles a spider's web with buildings at the intersections and hundreds of bridges and roads connecting them all. The buildings range from short, expansive coliseums to thin and soaring towers scaling nearly as high as the city is wide. Red banners are the most common adornment of the walls, growing in complexity with the height of the building: the peaks of the greatest towers dangle tapestries of intricate designs or wave flags longer than a dragon's wingspan. Inside, the buildings reflect dozens of colors depending on the artistry of the designer, though white brick with red fabric remain the popular choice. There is no need of window glass, as no rains fall or winds blow except when and where the Council wishes it so, nor any need of doors, for there are no thieves nor vagabonds in Laudenia. No pollution from noise bothers anyone over the tinkling of endless fountains, the chanting of priests and sonorant utterances of magical ritual, and the clanging of bells in the cathedrals. Not a single piece of woodwork can be found in the city: close inspection of the flowers and fruiting trees reveals them to be magical constructs, hewn from the same stone as the buildings. Throughout the city, the white stone is carved with waves, circles, and inscriptions many forget to admire. The markings swirl

like water through the supports and pillars, across the arches, and even through the seamless walks. Many of the designs flow towards the centre of the city-web, to the tallest tower of Elsius which spears through the cloud cover, dwarfing the highest skyscrapers. At the peak, the tower blossoms like an oak tree to a half dozen platforms and pedestals where the Council meets and the *Alkanost* docks. From here, the panorama offers little of the city through a veil of clouds. The city floats perfectly calm without threat or thrill.

Relations: Laudenians commonly turn those who do find their land away without even bothering to learn their business. The only culture they find even tolerable are the narros of Fargon, with whom they infrequently trade the rich resources of the western Nankani Mountains for those few commodities they cannot obtain themselves. Even then, the laudenians insist on bringing the narros traders into the sky with them and alter their memories afterwards, so that no ground-dweller has a clear idea of the skyrealm's true nature. Visitors are thus not only extremely rare but practically unheard of, and those who enter must adhere to a strict code of respect for the inhabitants: make fewer waves and an outsider's presence may go unnoticed by those who do not want her there. No evil acts are permitted within the realm of Laudenia, with 'evil' being defined entirely at the discretion of the laudenians (who are, thankfully, fairly discerning when not being knee-jerk reactionaries). Voluntary isolation does not prevent those looking for rare items, both magical and not, seeking out the floating city.

With a city of such majesty, the laudenians seldom wish to show it off to anyone but themselves. A massive artificial cloud shrouds the periphery of the capital. From high, only the peak of Elsius is visible. The inhabitants appear to those they wish, usually reserving such an honor for the greatest dragons and the most powerful fae leaders. Those who leave only do so for one reason: to alleviate the unending boredom of living in a city without dangers, adventure, or responsibilities. Such malcontents are few and far between.

OR MAYBE NOT

I myself have not actually ever seen Laudenia—though not for lack of trying, I assure you. The information above is merely a best-guess, mostly compiled from the sketchy accounts of the few laudenian traveling companions I have had the pleasure of meeting over the years. These may be poetical exaggerations of a species notorious for touting its own accomplishments at the expense of ground-dwellers. Though I am personally prepared to attest to at least the existence of both the city and its network of satellite skykeeps – I believe I saw one once in the distance when traveling back to Gnimfall by airship – your guess is as good as mine when it comes to the true nature of Laudenia's celestial cities.

LIMSHAU

The city looks very different from above than it does from below. Down there it's all mazelike streets, where you might find the walls beside you suddenly replaced by bookshelves at any moment; hawkers, harlots and storytellers vying for your attention from a hundred alcoves, librarians listening to travellers' tales and writing everything down, and overwhelmed tourists desperate to find a place to lose their money; intermittent areas of noise and silence, a crushing crowd only a corner away from a completely deserted street. But up here on the rooftops is a traceur's paradise: a wide open, boxy landscape of stone and adobe, criss-crossed with ropes, ladders, staircases leading to open patios, makeshift bridges across the crowded streets… it looks chaotic, but consider who built it. The drone of the city below filters up only dimly, and you can be free to ponder whatever mysteries you choose as you climb and jump. You could just run from one end of this city to the other forever and never get bored.

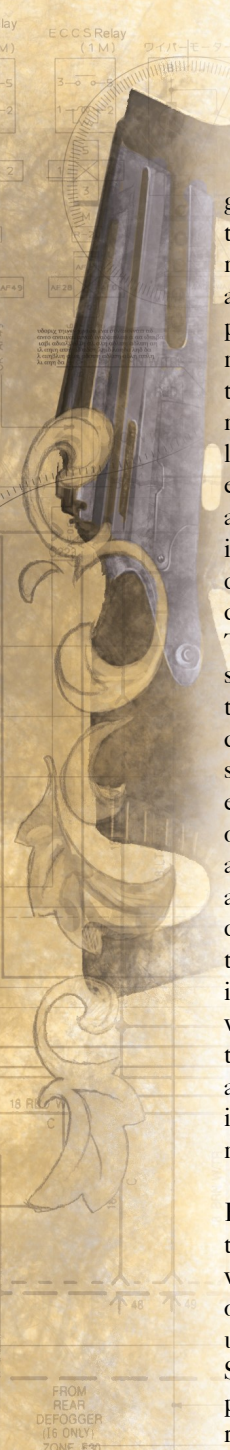
Fae exist everywhere, and central Canam accommodates the oddest branch of them, the Limshau damaskans. They erected great academies and training facilities and then did something no fae expected: they invited others in – humans, narros, gimfen, anyone willing to teach and to learn. The Limshau librarians thus became the keepers of the largest repository of knowledge on Earth.

History: These damaskans first appeared on the vast field of Serapea, home to plentiful food stocks, verdant plains, wide rivers, ample supplies of limestone and the raw materials for adobe, and less violent wandering monsters than those that graced the forests and mountains. The leader of the damaskans, Ravenar Limshau III, left most of his followers behind to build the new capital while he himself traveled westward with a small embassage. He had many adventures in his perilous journey (now referred to as the 'Crusade of Knowledge'), and none are entirely sure how far he traveled, for these crucial records were lost, along with their transcriber, in the first major assault on the city. What is known is that he eventually came before the fledgling walls of the bastion of Angel, and there met with the elders of Genai. Upon his return to the plains, he brought no promises of alliance, but hundreds of Angel humans, mostly of Japanese descent, as loyal followers of a new age. The empire grew quickly upon these foundations. Ravenar, the oldest damaskan and one of the oldest living fae at the time, looked upon the new world and understood that a new path awaited him. He told his thousands of followers, both human and fae, to think of this new kingdom as the utopia all other future civilizations would look upon for reference. They would welcome all outsiders and respect their beliefs and laws. The realm would be bound by reason and compassion, with an eye towards knowledge, for in their eyes, knowledge separates the civilized from the barbaric.

Assisted by magic and enhanced by the perseverance of its population, the town's progress was unstoppable. Hundreds of kilns fired thousands of pale-white bricks every day, laid down while still warm. The roads spread out from the center, intersected by streets and avenues. The humans' planning gave the city structure and precision: the fae gave it personality. They painted tiles and mosaics across plain white walls and topped the tallest buildings with the grandest sculptures. At their root, the city would be a storehouse of all knowledge. Every wall in every house would support shelves for books. Where other settlements might have a central market or a grand bazaar, Limshau built the Central Stacks, the most expansive public library in the world, open to the air, protected by magic from the elements, and hosting at least one text on every subject known to man or fae as well as a catalogue of all other books to be found anywhere within the growing empire. Citizens were encouraged to donate works or words to the collections for all to share.

The number of books and scrolls arriving eventually proved too extensive for one town to handle, and Ravenar decreed that more cities be built, with each satellite city dedicating itself to a specific field of knowledge. A few towns expanded to a dozen by century's end. Ravenar did not share the paranoia of other fae and encouraged the uniting of the peoples, not only culturally but by blood. Limshau was not the first city to birth half-breeds between fae and human, but it did eventually possess the largest ratio of them. The humans were attracted to the fae's beauty, grace, and wisdom and the fae were attracted to the humans' spirit, determination, and enthusiasm. More than a quarter of the first human settlers took fae mates, and though this ratio dropped into the single digits after the first century, the human breeding cycle and the fae long life generated a massive population boost.

In response to the first concerted attack against the city by a large force of unusually organized boggs, Ravenar's successor, Ravenar Limshau IV, formed the custodian order, devout disciples of knowledge. The protectors of paper, these scholar-warriors would defend the walls and the words inside. With cities and an army, the sovereignty of Limshau was official, though Ravenar refused to be called a king despite being chosen by a dragon. Even today, publicly referring to the Limshau family as royalty is a serious faux pas within the kingdom, though in private nearly everyone calls them such. Ravenar IV has no official title, being referred to informally as the 'First Citizen' in public and simply 'Limshau' on formal documents; he is not even the head librarian of the Central Stacks, only of an admittedly extensive collection of historical texts located in his large and central but otherwise ordinary residence. Should the Limshau line ever become remiss in their duties, no doubt another family would displace them in prominence, but thus far none has ever challenged them.



Culture: Ravenar encouraged his fae brothers to mingle freely and accept his new human friends. Although the process took time, eventually a cosmopolitan community grew from the first seeds. Of all the fae, damaskans are most physically similar to humans, and their peculiarly Asiatic features meant that the earliest human immigrants to Limshau were not that different on the surface from their new fae neighbors. These humans were carpenters, architects, hunters, smiths, tailors, bricklayers, plumbers, doctors, teachers, and civil engineers. They brought vital knowledge the damaskans quickly absorbed. Despite the fae's superior skill in art and song and their renowned mental and physical discipline, they were astounded by the breadth of applicable knowledge offered by the short-lived humans. Together, they truly believed their new nation would set an example for others to follow. As a community, they would learn from each other and strive to create a civilization based upon the freedom of choice and speech, uncorrupted by religious bias or corporate preference. Churches were not permitted within the walls of Limshau (though its citizens could worship privately as they wished), nor were merchants and shopkeeps allowed to expand into a chain. Ravenar promoted freedom with laws designed to protect those from others that victimize them, but otherwise did not impede the individual. If a vice caused no harm to society at large, it was permitted; if it could be controlled and regulated by the government to minimize or prevent harm, it was also permitted. Although such decisions mired the city in controversy for many years, the necessity of such measures was ultimately recognized.

Every Limshau city contains both a thermal mooring tower and a dragonflyer dock. Though Limshau is filled with hundreds of small villages, there are only a handful of walled library-cities. These are Abarbanel, Athenaeum, Enchridia, Escorias, Kodex, Limshau, Primmer, Serapea, Warraqeen, and Zorahn. Every city has its own proud division of librarians and custodians, save for Zorahn, which only has custodians.

Relations: Damaskans were and are known for being fearless and approachable. They neither fear change nor the unknown. They offer the courtesy of respect even to their enemies and expect the same regard in return. They welcome outsiders, but expect them to pull their own weight. Relations with other fledging nations took time to develop, as most grew much slower than Limshau. The first foreign ally was the failed bastion of Appareci, visitors from Limshau even giving the newborn kingdom of Kannos its name. Despite Limshau's stance on religion, they still opened a dialogue and forged a profitable alliance with Abidan. Damaskans and gimfen have always been friendly, and Limshau soon made allies of both Gnimfall and Salvabrooke. However, later clashes with Baruch Malkut stained the continent in blood, although instead of openly engaging in a costly conflict, Ravenar suggested to his people that they take refuge in the cities, whose fortifications rival the walls of Angel for security. Many fae chose to remain in their villages and often suffer at the hands of Malkut slavers, though fewer since the construction of the city of Zorahn to guard the border. A few fae now and again still vanish, especially from the free villages south of Zorahn. Ravenar is still unwilling to commit to open warfare, despite strong pressure from Kannos and promises of support from Abidan and Gnimfall. They all understand that, even though a conflict may result in a short-term victory over the outer towns and villages of Baruch Malkut, the marshlands and swamps of the south could only be taken after a long and costly war of attrition.

Despite being at the center of what may be the greatest brewing conflict between man and fae, most damaskans are trusting of humans, if for no other reason than that a large number of them are related to a human at some point in their family tree. Thanks to this multiethnic influence, a uniquely Limshau culture formed away from the other damaskans across the ocean. Damaskan culture had always had superficial similarities with the cultures of old Asia, but these influences became more pronounced in Limshau, to the point that many Sinitic terms completely displaced the native Damaskan words for similar concepts, particularly in the fields of cuisine, weaponry, and fashion. The Asiatic propensity for reservation and propriety, interspersed by short periods of intense revelry, resonated with the Limshau fae, who became quieter and less disposed to levity than their brethren in Damaska. All damaskans, of course, abhor public physical contact, but the fae of Limshau also began to resist being referred to by their personal names except among close friends and relations. Most unusually, Limshau damaskans will voluntarily eat fish and certain kinds of meat, while those of Damaska and other fae nations are strictly vegetarian. At present, Limshau is the only place on Earth that a fae culture has altered so significantly without a corresponding species shift, and thus far nobody is able to propose a suitable theory explaining this.

Names: While damaskan naming traditions are fairly consistent with the rest of their species, placing the given name before the family name, due to the influence of Asian immigrants Limshau fae are less likely to use their given name than their family name in public (assuming they do not adopt an 'open name') and using a person's given name without their permission is considered rude. Limshau fae frequently draw their open names from old Japanese history and mythology. Limshau humans have tended to retain their original family names (Japanese-derived names still dominate by a large margin despite later immigration from elsewhere in Canam), but have adopted the fae naming sequence, and in the modern day there is no cultural consistency with given names: a Limshau human is just as likely to have an African, German, or Welsh given name as a Japanese one, or even use a fae-style open name as their given name. Limshau's gimfen popula-

tion, of course, is as idiosyncratic as ever. Limshau residents do not usually use honorifics in general practice, with the exception of 'sensei' (which they apply to artists and researchers as well as teachers, doctors, and the like). Regardless of their cultural extraction, everybody born in Limshau learns to write their name in Damaskan rather than whatever writing system it originated in.

Example Human Family Names: Oda, Miyamoto, Nakamura, Suzuki, Yamada, Watanabe

Example Open Names: Enma, Grasscutter, Juubei, Raiden, Shinobi, Tetsubo

BLACK LIBRARIES

Limshau is a nation founded upon the free exchange of knowledge. Every book in every city is, at least in theory, accessible to any citizen and any visitor who seeks it in good faith. Nevertheless, there are rumors of a hidden government archive, where certain sensitive materials are secreted away from prying eyes. What these might be varies with the telling – blasphemous tomes penned by unspeakable cults, scientific treatises that promise ways to end the division between technology and magic (or even close the gates altogether), or even just really, really bad vampire fan fiction. Ultimately, the exact nature of the contents does not matter – if such a thing truly existed, it would represent a serious affront to the social contract of the kingdom and severely undermine trust in its leadership.

SALVABROOKE

I remember reading about this constructed amusement park in Earth's past where people would pay to interact with fairy tales, where magic was a fabrication of strings and electronics. You could ride wooden dragons and play fantasy with actors in rubber suits. This is just like that… only the fairy tales are real.

The dragons are still wood, though.

A lone oak tree that never changes with the season stands like a centurion to mark the gateway to the land of light-hearted gimfen, a huge expanse of spreading homes and villages. One seemingly continuous expanse of civilization spreads to the corners of the massive valley. Mountains line the perimeter, making the entrance marked by the Lone Tree the only safe passage to the inner fields.

History: As a whole, we gimfen don't really believe in the concepts of past or future, and as life in Salvabrooke generally follows the same pattern year in and year out, its residents see little need to record their history. What is known is that the settlements of Salvabrooke predate the more famous grind towers of Gnimfall and elsewhere by at least half a century, but whether we first appeared in the place that the pastorals now call home when the gate reopened or whether they migrated there from our true place of landing is a mystery.

Culture: The population of the entire valley is more than 150,000 with houses spread thin along a flat land with dimensions that seem to vary according to the needs of the population. There is no centralized government, leaving each patch of land under control of a clan elder or sheriff. The population shifts so much in the valley that naming the individual clans and their townships is pointless. Every year, all the headgimfen meet to discuss affairs. Little is actually accomplished at these meetings; most motions (particularly ones involving large and expensive construction projects) are proposed, planned, and then tabled until the next year, at which point everyone will have forgotten about them because nobody bothers to take the meeting minutes. The most powerful ruler is Lora Longfellow, peacefully running a community of more than 3,000 gimfen in the area closest to the Lone Tree and whose judgment represents the norm followed in the rest of the valley.

The farming soil in Salvabrooke is extremely fertile and fresh water flows from nearby mountains to large clean lakes, as close to a natural paradise as one may find, corrupted by as little technology as possible. The majority of the local gimfen wish to keep it that way. Celebrations are central to Salvabrooke's life, with revelry and festivals occurring every week. Salvabrookers welcome outsiders and treat those who enter as kings or queens with hopefully deep (but easily accessible) pockets. Crime is quite low across Salvabrooke, although this is due in part to our cultural predilection for not considering anything a crime that can be dismissed as a harmless prank: pickpocketry is an epidemic across the land, with the culprits happy to return their stolen goods with a laugh and a wave if they happen to be caught (none of our kind considers this in any way illegal). They adore human exports, but they adore even more the propensity for humans to buy cheap knockoffs of those same exports in the name of tourism. In the larger communities, huge open markets begin business at the crack of dawn, peddling shoddy imitation trinkets to anyone interested. Tourists drifting through one of the many walking streets in a gimfen village should expect to be accosted by no less than a dozen different wandering merchants attempting to vend designer clothes, imitation gadgetry, or on occasion, legitimate pieces of folk art, though not of gimfen culture (since our culture, I will freely admit, consists of wholesale robbery of other peoples' ways of life). All prices are negotiable and begin at an outrageous markup, since haggling is perceived to be part of the fun. There are a few respectable merchants, but these are not the ones harassing passing non-gimfen. What law enforcement a community might have (which usually amounts to only a couple of stout lads with shillelaghs) attempts to keep the dishonesty in check, but most of the time, the enforcers just break up the fights and shift the few homeless from the streets to maintain a positive image.

Relations: Salvabrooke is a common destination for echan tourist trips by techans. It's echan enough to

shock them but safe enough to keep them at ease, and since most of its merchants are happy to take payment in barter, they don't have to find some way of turning universal credits into gold. Since such tourists rarely approach by land, they remain blissfully unaware of how precariously close Salvabrooke is to the ravening hordes of Xixion, and nobody in the valley is going to disabuse them. Salvabrooke features a thermal mooring tower and a dragonflyer flyer service.

THE BRANCHING TREE

Some folk speak in whispers about a guild of gimfen assassins allegedly called 'the Crimson Leaf.' While there is no concrete proof that this organization exists, the fact remains that those who commit crimes against the gimfen of Salvabrooke have a remarkable tendency to become the victims of convenient accidents. Even more remarkable is the fact that occasionally, these accidents have befallen the offender in places where no gimfen could possibly have infiltrated – including within the walls of Mann, or even inside Darius Konig's own palace. Either fate has a keen sense of justice, or the vigilantes have taken to recruiting outsiders to deliver retribution across Canam on their behalf.

SELIQUAM

Lelan looked nervously behind her. The shrieks and squeals were getting closer. "Hurry up!" she hissed to the third member of their band.

"Nearly finished," Mescalos called back, calmly fiddling with the chalk. The damaskan had drawn a complicated series of lines from one end of the nearly hundred-foot-wide bridge to the other, and was now running down the length adding finishing touches. Lelan held her rifle at the ready, really wishing at that moment that she were a chaparran and could see the swarm coming in the dark.

By the time the puggs entered the circle of light that was the limit of her vision, it would be too late to stop them. Of course, at that point the vermin would have overwhelmed Kobur, on guard at the bridge's entrance, so there wouldn't be much chance left for either of them.

"All right!' Mescalos shouted. Lelan didn't wait before running to join him. "Kobur, get over here!" There was a scream, a sickening ripping sound, and out of the darkness lumbered a huge kodiak, half of a pugg still grasped in his hand.

Wordlessly he threw the carcass over the rail and carefully hopped over the line. Ten steps behind him, the swarm descended, crowding so close onto the bridge that many were forced over the edge into the deep waters below. Mescalos shouted a word that tried to force Lelan's brain out through her ears, and the puggs crashed against an invisible wall, piling up against each other, crushing and suffocating the beasts in the lead. "Good, but it will not hold them forever," Mescalos said with an impish grin. "Now, shall we see what lies on the other side?"

Though most travelers are quick to characterize the central west coast of Canam as a monster-infested wilderness due to the inhospitable expanse of Xixion, this is not entirely accurate. Amid the forested highlands of the northern mountains, the peninsula to the south, the islands that dot the coastal sea protected from typhoons by high cliffs and twisting fjords, and the fertile valley of the river that flows through the Pass at Dianaso can be found dozens of tiny tribal nations, minor houses, and small fiefdoms. These nations live in an uneasy truce with one another, having little in common except the threat of Xixion to the south and the covert support of the bastion of Selkirk to the east. Collectively, they are known as the Seliquam Confederation.

History: During the narros' explorations south from Fargon, they found the lack of impressive buildings to be galling, so as they went they built superb structures, which they then simply abandoned as they moved on. Many of these monuments found themselves inhabited by squatters, mostly descendants of human survivors from the region who had banded together into small neo-tribal groups out of mutual need, some turning to magic to survive while others held on to as much of their technology as possible (it is possible that the founders of Selkirk were one such group that got lucky). Many of these settlements were joined by lost damaskans and gimfen who had appeared separately from their kindred, and even by a few wandering narros who, for one reason or another, elected to leave Fargon permanently. In time, these camps coalesced into communities, counties, even a few moderately-sized cities, but limited numbers prevented any one nation from ever growing powerful enough to impose its will over the entire region. However, the growing pug and bogg raids on the settlers' farming and hunting lands eventually forced them to make common cause. Unfortunately, the strength of that alliance is far less strong than similar treaties elsewhere in Canam have proven.

Culture: The peninsular rainforest holds little of interest for the puggs, and by and large they leave it alone but for the occasional raid. More than twenty small tribes—mostly chaparran, but with a few human and mixed-race, even several kodiak bands—inhabit the peninsula, living largely by hunting and fishing, and trading with (and sometimes thieving from) their neighbors. Settlements in the rainforest tend to be seasonal rather than permanent – there are a few large, rooted towns (usually quite literally, as it is far safer to live in a tree than on the ground even for non-chaparrans), but for the most part each tribe maintains a summer and a winter camp, with certain grounds—such as the shellfish flats at Shiwoos, home of the largest kodiak settlement west of Alpinas—held in common between them. Though hardly on the level of the great forests to the south, the rainforest is home to several unique and highly valued creatures and plants. Legend has it that a guardian dragon sleeps beneath the mountain at the peninsula's core, but evidence of this is sorely lacking.

The central islands, home to some of the most impressive narros monuments, were once heavily populated by humans, but the growing strength of the pugg 'city' of Seelanus eventually drove them north to the coastal islands. Here, free as they are from the threat of a Xixion invasion (puggs do not like to swim and build no boats), can be found the most proud and carefree of the member nations. Consisting largely of free houses, pirate ports, and militant tribal groups, they trade their military prowess for food and finished goods from the mainland, although 'extort' might be a more apropos term in the case of some.

The valley of the River Seliquam, which flows from the mountains bordering Alpinas to the sea, is one of the most fertile farmlands in the west. Many believe the river itself to carry a potent enchantment that keeps the pugg hordes very firmly on the southern bank, but magical scholars have thus far found little evidence of this. As this region is at greatest risk of invasion, those living there have largely opted for a feudal lifestyle, but as they still greatly value their independence, the result is a motley collection of small baronies. Practically every hill worth the name hosts a castle, with a handful of tiny ramshackle villages huddled around it. Every year in the midst of the harvest season, the puggs swarm into the valley to plunder. Every year, the inhabitants gather their crops as hurriedly as they can, take what possessions they can carry, leave their homes to be burned by the horde, and travel upriver to the Redoubt at the city of Last Hope, a massive fortress wall built, with narros expertise, across the approaches to the mountain passes. The wall is manned by soldiers sent by every member nation of Seliquam, the central tenet of the treaty binding the confederation together. Last Hope is the one place where all of Seliquam stands united. The unofficial representatives of Selkirk are also in attendance, trading bastion-engineered goods, weapons and armor (including a limited supply of masterwork bolt rifles and revolvers) for the valley's surplus harvest and the assurance that the defenders of the Redoubt will continue to keep the puggs far, far away from the bastion.

Impressive as the Redoubt is, it is a mere fence compared with Abidan's Bulwark or the city walls of Angel, and it cannot completely hold Xixion at bay – there are far too many tunnels and lesser passes through the mountains to block them all off. The military order known as the Train Guard make regular patrols of the passes, exterminating any pugg bands and other predatory monsters that they come across. Though the order's training regimen was designed and perfected by the ravnorra lords of Fargon, only a fraction of the Guard is made up of narros (for all that they are often commanders) – in fact, the largest demographic are kodiaks, who make up fully thirty percent of the force (humans making up a quarter, and the remaining forty-five percent being roughly equally divided between narros, chaparrans, and damaskans, with the occasional laudenian and gimfen). Joining the Train Guard is considered a highly prestigious career for all the people of Seliquam, but the high mortality rate of the membership keeps their numbers from growing too strong. Puggs may be no real threat in small groups, but they are hardly the only dangers of the region.

Each nation within the Seliquam Confederation has its own method of government, from tribal councils to rough democracy to feudal fealty, but each member nation sends a delegation to the Grand Council, which meets once a year, alternately in Last Hope and the floating city of Victrix on the Island. Ostensibly the purpose of the Council is to discuss the business of the

whole confederation and to resolve grievances brought by one member nation against another, but in practice it is a hotbed of suspicion and corruption as councillors finagle and make backroom deals to advance their own nations at the expense of long-standing rivals. The people of Seliquam may stand united against Xixion, but they have a long history of raiding and swindling one another, and each nation clamors for a bigger share of the limited supply of bastion-produced goods. To prevent this hornet's nest from being completely ungovernable, the seven most prominent nations (Last Hope, Victrix, Shiwoos, Gwaii, the Abbey, Vanguard and Squalmos, plus Gateway as the unofficial face of Selkirk) set up the Inner Council, which enforces the few laws that hold over the entire confederation and appoint the commanders of the Redoubt and the Train Guard. Currently, the most influential people in the confederation are Elder Hogon of Shiwoos, an ancient kodiak who some say trained in magic at Jibaro in his youth; Lord Sorannik Mogh, a narros ravnorra and the current Lord Commander of the Train Guard, who has an ebullient enthusiasm for the techan vehicle known as the 'motorcycle'; and Castellan Leanna Graythvan, seneschal of Last Hope, a dour and unapproachable woman who distrusts both Fargon and Selkirk.

Victrix and Last Hope have thermal mooring towers. Most transport between the major regions of the Confederation is by boat, but most watercraft must hug the coastline to defend against storms.

Religion: Each member state of the Confederation has its own traditions, but the dominant religion in the region is a cult known as the Draconian Trinity, which mixes High Church Christianity with dragon worship and elements of local mythology. The Trinity holds that dragons are God's true angels, and that the most powerful of them are actually incarnations of the Holy Spirit: the religion makes no distinction between good, evil, and neutral dragons, believing that all are part of some divine plan. The headquarters of this religion/mystical movement is the fortress known as the Abbey, which has never been assaulted by any force from Xixion – a fact that its leaders attest to divine providence. A little over one-fifth of the total population of Seliquam adheres to the Draconian faith.

Names: Non-humans in the Confederation use their traditional naming systems. For some reason, the upheavals of Attricana spared much of the aboriginal human culture of the region, and while the actual original languages are long since extinct, the Seliquam dialect of English is liberally peppered with terms derived from Salish and Haida roots, including a disproportionate number of personal and place names (even though few remember what they actually mean anymore).

Examples: Bella Mallaquin, Gwenlitu Hosten, Kallumi Brown, Mahcut Rowan, Robert Jacks, Teqmut Caseway

AN OBSIDIAN FIST

Seliquam's greatest strength is its diversity, but this is also its greatest weakness. I have heard tell of undercurrents among the nations who believe that only by truly unifying the confederation will there ever be true peace and security in the Seliquam Valley. While their goals may be admirable, what I have heard of their methods are less so. Reports of sabotage, assassination, kidnapping and other forms of domestic terrorism are par for the course in Seliquam, but of late the efforts have seemed to be more coordinated, and none of the usual suspects have taken responsibility. Amidst all this chaos, only one group speaks openly of unification – the Obsidian Order of Victrix, an arrogant and domineering college of mages who conduct secretive studies in the very heart of the floating city. If there is ever any real attempt to unite Seliquam by force, it is likely to begin with the Obsidian mages.

THE WILD

Even wrapped in furs, Tyson shivered in the bitter chill. He glanced at his companions. It made sense that the kodiak was not bothered by the cold, but the pointy-eared amazon across the fire was wearing barely more than a sarashi and loincloth, and she didn't even have goosebumps. Did elves even get goosebumps? he wondered. It wasn't fair, he moaned inwardly for the thousandth time since throwing in his lot with this pair. He shifted closer to the fire. Ogrun looked at him and snorted.

"Pinkskin is cold, yet thinks he better than us. We 'primi-tive.'" He rumpled his muzzle in the way that Tyson had come to recognize as the kodiak equivalent of a grin, and leaned closer. "But fire was made for you, pinkskin. We no need it. Should just stand in it, be plenty warm then."

Canam has no specific borders between its nations. Kingdoms patrol as much territory as they think they can hold, but wide expanses between their territories prevent most conflict. Dozens of villages claiming no allegiance fall between them. This creates more of a wide blur instead of a defined line. The only way to know if one enters a specific kingdom is to ask the citizens of a village. There are no border markers or sentries on many of the trodden paths, though well-patrolled roads such as the Continental Cross and its tributaries leading into the major nations will maintain border guards, especially those along the roads controlled by the house of Skyrose and eastern Limshau because of their nations' proximity to Baruch Malkut. This leaves tens of thousands of square miles unclaimed, a sea of wilderness in which islands of civilization flourish. Many of these would dangerous locations in which to settle, thanks to the presence of magic or monsters.

The easiest way to check if a forest is enchanted is to look at the variety of trees growing. If the trees are of radically different species, growing in the same region without regard for light or temperature (conifers mixing with fruit trees, or cactus growing on mountain slopes), it is a forest populated by magic. Oftentimes, the creatures that inhabit the forests spill out into the surrounding scrub and plains, making open space only slightly safer to traverse than the paths under the trees. The upheavals caused by Attricana's opening also opened many spaces beneath the mountains and under the ground, into which less than savory new life-forms quickly descended. Some of these chasms even swallowed up artifacts of the old age, so it is not unknown (though hardly common either) for a dungeon delver to descend into a natural cave system and find an expanse of steel and concrete inside. These unchecked areas of the world feature the most dangerous life forms. Some rumors claim the largest percentage of chaparrans in the world is spread over the unclaimed forests in Canam. Beyond chaparrans, not known for their hospitality anyway, these forests, plains, and mountains showcase the greatest ratio of magically endowed life, from dire and elemental animals to monstrous beasts of ill will.

ALPINAS

The eastern slopes of the northern Nankani Mountains are covered with thick conifer forests that stretch far out onto the central plains, jutting up against the icy tundra of Ashur in the north. Even though kodiaks control this area in force, they have never formed an organized nation; instead, hundreds of villages and roaming bands dot the landscape for hundreds of miles. No town lasts more than a few years before being broken up or destroyed. The few open plains are cold and windswept, forbidding travelers from making roots. No one is sure how many kodiak camps there are. Few bands sustain a population of more than a hundred. The largest and only permanent settlement, over 1500 strong, is Makniculsh, ruled by Raknash.

Though animalistic and tribal, the kodiaks prefer to keep to themselves. They have a devotion to nature many other species admire but skeggs in particular do not share. The kodiaks of Alpinas are considerably larger and more savage than their kindred in Seliquam, and remain disdainful of the trappings of civilization which some of the southern lines have come to embrace. Nevertheless, many now wield weapons forged for them by the narros of Fargon to aid in their endless war against the skeggs of Dagron. This may eventually cause problems in the future if the kodiaks finally overwhelm their enemies; the narros hope the trading relationship will eventually civilize the northern kodiaks before their newly acquired weapons can be turned against their benefactors.

THE UTTERMOST NORTH

Alpinas' northern 'border' terminates at a massive wall of glacial ice over a hundred meters tall. The kodiaks regard it with superstitious awe and never approach, and nobody else who has braved the ice face has ever returned to tell what lies beyond it. And yet, the rumors surrounding it are incredibly specific – virtually every tavern wag with a tale to tell about the North speaks of the fabled titan city of Selmana, a place even more legendary than Laudenia and infinitely more mysterious (at least we know for a fact that laudenians exist). Nobody alive today has ever seen a titan, and even those long-lived fae who vaguely remember the Terros Age believe that they are mythical. How, then, can the myriad accounts of Selmana's crystal towers be so consistent and specific?

HALYC

The western plains from York stretching almost all the way to Gnimfall were given the broad name of Halyc. While nominally York claims this territory as part of its domain, in practice it leaves most of it alone. Most of the plains are untamed grasslands leading up to mountain foothills, turning to dense forests in the north leading up to the Gulf of Tethuss. More than thirty small chaparran villages call the forest home, and defend it vigilantly against intruders of all sorts. Independent farms and villages along the road between Gnimfall and York sell to both echa and techa, with those nearer to York receiving the blanket of protection offered by the YPF. Most military patrols in this region are mere formalities to guard against the possibility of pagus crossing the water or to clear the road of wandering monsters. Less dedicated patrols roam the southern border, as York has never considered Baruch Malkut a serious threat.

KESAKAS

The isthmus of land between Dawnamoak and the Gloam is a twisting labyrinth of mountains, deserts, mesas, scrub plains and savannah. Few people live here, as it is home to innumerable savage beasts. With the advent of magic, the land regressed to the Pliocene epoch. Dire animals of every description hunt each other through the canyons and grasslands, and most settlements in the area are either itinerant or perched precariously on and within the sides of cliffs. The bastion of Sierra Madre is located somewhere underneath this dangerous terrain, the terrors of which serve to protect the techan city far better than any artificial defenses could but which make excursions from the bastion a harrowing experience that discourages casual tourism.

LAURAMA

The chaparrans occupy a great forest and mountain range. Unlike their western cousins, the fae of Laurama are extremely militaristic – not surprising, when you consider their neighbors. To the north, they are bound-

ed by the pestilent forest of Tranquiss; to the west, the holy but perilous wood of Skepsis; and to the east, the despoilers of Baruch Malkut, with whom the chaparrans have been engaged in an ongoing guerilla war since the first Malkut slavers came to their lands in search of fae flesh. Even before the Blessed Kingdom began to encroach upon their borders, the chaparrans lived in constant dread of the infection spreading from Tranquiss, and this fear altered their attitude towards life. No longer being content with patience and relaxation, they grew increasingly aggressive with each other and other surrounding lands. Their already reduced magical aptitude virtually vanished save for a few unique adepts and savants, most of which end up traveling to Jibaro to study due to the lack of avenues to learn at home. They do not grow cities, but spread their community out to cover a wider footprint within the forest. Their presence is quiet and looming, more hidden than even the fae of Dawnamoak. Many travelers through Laurama have no idea that a chaparran kitarri lurks in the trees above them, watching their every movement for the slightest sign of aggression. Laurama fae are intensely distrustful of humans more than any other chaparrans: Malkut slavers are usually killed on sight, and any others that the chaparrans even suspect of harmful intent never leave the forest. Even innocent travelers have been known to be attacked, stripped of their armor and weapons, and dumped at the borders of the forest, a clear sign that outsiders are not welcome in Laurama. Other nations do not acknowledge Laurama as a sovereign power – even Jibaro considers them a satellite colony of Dawnamoak – and so their open declaration of war against Baruch Malkut has thus far brought no allies.

EL DORADO

I am told that the largest city in the world before the Second Hammer was located only few days' ride from the entrance to Sierra Madre. Not a single sign of it remains, not even ruins. Strangely, the remains of an even older city, of the type that humanist scholars call 'Pre-Columbian,' lie only a few dozen kilometers further to the northeast, and these stand in such remarkably good condition, one might expect to find people still living there. Having compared my photographs of the place to the few ancient records that exist in the Limshau archives, the condition of the so-called Lost City has improved, rather than decayed, with the passage of time, as if the ghosts of ages past have restored their ancient masterpiece.

NANKANI MOUNTAINS

A huge mountain range dominating western Canam, the Nankani Mountains stretch from Kesakas to Fargon, bisecting the western third of the continent. Several tributary ranges lead into it, particularly in the north, where the highest and most dangerous peaks sprout between Selkirk and Thos Thalagos. While many isolated ecahn settlements and even techan atolls can be found among the peaks and valleys, the most populous species within the range are puggs and boggs, who claim large cave systems and build ramshackle 'cities' inside them, where the strongest of the kaddog rule over their lessers with fear and violence, and send them out on raids into the lowlands to take food, treasure, and slaves. Dire wolves roam the forested slopes, and many a rogue dragon has been sighted among the peaks. The only safe path through the mountains is the Continental Cross, kept clear of monsters by the various free houses that claim portions of the road. The mountains are also full of ruins, including monuments from the days of the Fargon expeditions, as well as older structures locked away within the earth, some full of remnants from the last age of humanity.

ARX-CIS

Wanderers pass by this plateau and continue without concern. Anyone who lingers begins to feel uncomfortable and uneasy. Humans who tarry in this place too long grow sick, and even we fae avoid it, for it reminds us of a graveyard. Searching the landscape reveals several large concrete cylinders sitting in the ground, almost overgrown by surrounding grasslands. These half-dozen open pits drop a hundred feet each. All machinery is missing and few people know the purpose of this location or the meaning of the name. An ancient entry in a book in Limshau contains one note: "Arx-Cis, once a fortress, remains the fragments of mankind's last stand."

WASTELANDS

'I thought I was a tough sonofa – twelve expeditions into Sana under my belt, lost count of how many big-ass monsters I've killed in and out of the swamp. But that was before I teamed up with Ghrom. There's me, creeping up slowly and carefully on a steelshrike before it could get a chance to peck out my liver, and the big grey bastard just walks up to the damn bird and wrings its neck.

"You scared?" the pagus mocked me afterwards. "Of that piddly watering hole? Where I come from, we go for a morning swim in worse.'"

-- The memoirs of Kyle Zhao, Death Hunter

The wilds of Canam are full of many dark and dangerous regions. No goodly folk live in such places; they are the preserves either of monsters or wicked creatures whose 'societies' are born of violence and malevolent will. Often, a nameless and shapeless evil will infest a portion of the wild, turning into an unhallowed land of danger and death. Travelers learn to avoid such places, or tread carefully if they have no choice but to cross them.

APOCRYPHA

After the puggs, the largest individual fae population in Canam is the pagus. They control a massive expanse of land dubbed Apocrypha by humans, or Sollasum by many fae. Most of the pagus armies on the continent fall under the control of typhox dragons, which brought

them across from Kakodomania when the dragons discovered an unspoiled land across the polar ice and resolved to spoil it. Separated from the darklands by thousands of miles of ice and tundra, the dragons could enslave and ravage as they willed without needing to answer directly to Mengus. The recent arrival of several shemjaza in Canam threatens to disrupt the dragons' monopoly. The pagus are bound in their souls to follow the orders of the generals of Kakodomania, who outrank the dragons, though so far the shemjaza have not attempted to exert their authority on a grand scale. There is a growing number of pagus that have thrown off the influence of their masters and attempt to live free in the inhospitable wastes.

Pagus with their souls bound to Ixindar are not necessarily tied to its control. With the dragons killing and enslaving them to the east, the pagus must look elsewhere to expand. Cold and water awaits them to the north. Mountains, skeggs, and kodiaks sit over the horizon in the west, leaving only the narrow land bridge of Tethuss to the south, guarded by the Janoahn Bulwark. This great fortress of man has never fallen, even when a dragon lord attempted to storm the walls and was only repulsed at the cost of the Paladin King's own life. Since pagus fear the natural elements of earth (mountains, winds, water), they prefer to continue to slam against the Janoahn wall, plummeting to their deaths into the churning gulf when they cannot retreat. Though a massive land with rich potential, Apocrypha will, within 500 years, no longer be able to support any life thanks to the despoilment of dragons and pagus.

The best-known tribal leaders are Mennos, Nemis the Gatherer, Saemus, Amon the Nomad, Arrenna, and Kallis the Monster, leading camps named after themselves. The biggest issue with these camps lies with the pagus' short lifespans: since even the eldest seldom live past forty, most of the villages are equally short-lived. Their successors seldom follow the same ethics (or lack thereof) as their antecedent, and the village often tears itself apart in very uncivil wars with few survivors. Only a few rare exceptions have allowed certain villages to survive past a generation, and these mostly where power is maintained by a loyal cadre of the toughest warriors.

THE FREE PEOPLES

It was generally believed that most of the surviving human population of the Apocrypha area migrated south and west to Abidan and Halyc when the area was overrun by the pagus, but as I have learned, humans are nothing if not stubborn. Some wasteland adventurers report meeting tribes of warlike humans, some pureblood, some interbred with free pagus, who continue to inhabit their ancestral lands. The language of these tribes is allegedly a guttural creole of old French and paggin, and their cultures are reported to be proto-feudal at best, completely feral at worst. What powers they use to keep the dragons and their minions at bay, no-one knows for sure.

AŽHI DAHAKA

The greatest typhox dragons, the Ažhi seven, claim this region under their direct control, though most of them are never seen, living out their lives in solitude within self-proclaimed kingdoms deep in the northern regions, leaving their lesser brethren to impose order and terror on the land. Pagus followers give most of their own food as offerings, or risk being snatched up as food themselves. There is no border between Apocrypha and Ažhi Dahaka; any land that falls beneath the shadows cast by the winged monstrosities is the evil dragons' domain. The only thing stopping the dragons from launching a full-scale invasion of Canam, other than their relative small numbers, is the lack of any centralized control of the region. No typhox dragon will bow before another, despite victories proven by scars, age, or size. Though they may respect and envy the power of their elders, they will not rally to any common cause.

The seven dragon lords of Ažhi maintain keeps of varying strength across the land, and none can be entirely sure where they roost at any given time. These dragon lords are rarely seen, but are known across the continent through tales to frighten troops and children: Baenis of Gorge, who forces his slaves to raise exotic beasts, feasting on them as he sees fit; Balaur of Debauch, who captures free pagus to engorge his numbers and maintain the high population of his slaves; Goch of Wrath, one of the surviving dragon kings who, with no citadel of her own, wanders the lands taking what she wills (though stories tell that she once gutted and claimed a laudenian sky keep as her throne); Lindis of Avarice, who keeps her storehouses of treasures hidden and never lingers in any one place for long; Lotan of Scorn, whose massive citadel, built around an entire mountain with walls as high as its peak, lies mostly empty due to constantly driving his pagus to war; Verkelen of Spite, who despises and distrusts all the other dragons and never reveals his location to anyone; and Zilant of Indolence, who is far too lazy to do anything other than lie on a bed of treasures brought to him by his fearful followers, and occasionally eat one of those followers who doesn't show sufficient deference to his majesty. Though each of the seven claims to rule the entire land, they do not fight each other for control of it except by proxy, sending their pagus slaves to massacre and plunder the slaves of the others.

CYON

Though not enchanted and tall like chaparran woods over the horizon, Cyon is still equally massive, encircling the entire northeastern wall of Canam. In their fledging first years, Angel clear-cut most of the landscape in their frantic construction, but the trees returned as dense and stout as before in barely a generation. Each time the trees were felled, they grew back just as strong, until the branches began to brush against the Angel wall; there are rumors that a few saplings have begun to spring up inside the walls themselves,

but the Crimson Starlight suppresses these whisperings in the name of public morale. On their own, the trees don't appear to be magical at all, but they do radiate an ambient EDF far above that of the surrounding lands. Other than boggs, no other intelligent species are known to inhabit the woods, though the Angel snipers who patrol the outer wall pass locker-room stories that tell otherwise: not just boggs but puggs, skeggs, and even rumors of a chiggoth once. Along with the horrors, there are tales as well of the more obscure fae anathema like faeries, dawnlings, and sylphids.

DAGRON

Over two hundred years ago, the kodiaks of Alpinas, trained and supplied by the narros of Fargon, drove a large swarm of skeggs out of the central Nankani Mountains into the unclaimed wilderness to the east. They adapted to the bitter cold very quickly and grew in size and numbers. They formed several large communities both underground and on the surface, and their disposition grew colder than even their brothers to the south. They became known as the "Bugbears of Dagron," making regular raids south into more temperate human lands and attacking travelers and undefended communities, even those of their erstwhile brethren. They leave few survivors of these raids, stripping their victims of valuables and taking them back as slaves, destined for the cookpots when they can no longer work. Only two villages are believed to have survived more than a few years: one, Lilecrog, is ruled by the despicable Numak; the other is Silcroge, ruled by Omerogroge, resting at the entrance of a large dungeon filled with stolen treasure. Despite their prosperity in their new homeland, the skeggs have not forgotten their defeat by the kodiaks and wage endless war against them, the longest sustained conflict in Canam's history. The skeggs' superior numbers and greater intelligence might have doomed the Alpinas kodiaks long ago but for the support of others; Fargon continues to supply the largest kodiak bands in the north, and many of the kodiak majority among Seliquam's Train Guard have kindred fighting in the ancient feud.

The skeggs are not alone in their land: trolls and various ice monsters also rampage throughout the region. Further north, in the frostlands of Ashur, frost dragons control and rule over a small fae population. The largest known frost dragon in Canam, a creature known only as "The Snow Devil," resides here, but its exact location is unknown. Above the tundra lies the great glacier Chronzia, worshipped and feared by all the denizens of the north, and somewhere beyond that the mythical titan city of Selmana.

SANA MARSH

A perpetual and permanent fog has spread for hundreds of miles in the land once called the Kingdom of Kardia. The Marsh is the single most dangerous place on the continent. Beasts shuffle into the black and vanish, waiting for an unsuspecting foe. Rumors tell of a terrible evil that lurks in the castle once controlled by King

Saran Sana, gathering the power of the Marsh towards it.

Legends tell of one of the first kings of man in the new age, and how his arrogance and naivety reduced his empire to eventual damnation for him and his people. The legend claims that King Sana ruled over one of the first kingdoms in Canam after the opening of Attricana, Kardia. Older than any other surviving human realms, Kardia expanded to dozens of villages while Limshau was still building its first walls. Kardia used knowledge gleaned from the first bastions to create a stable, growing empire with well-paved roads, a reliable underground sewer system, plentiful crops and powerful magic. It is even said that the master mage Kereptis Rifts originally came from Kardia.

Sana, however, grew troubled over his own mortality. Unlike the bastions, afraid and xenophobic, Kardia embraced the new world, almost to a fault. As the fae and half-fae population of the kingdom continued to grow, with much of the population obsessed with magic and the elder folk who had mastered it, Sana came to realize that his own lineage was threatened with obscurity. Though already married, with two sons, he began seeking a fae bond – at first not for gift of long life it would bestow on him, but so that his heirs would receive the adulation that the merest peasant could command as long as their ears were pointy. However, every one of his invitations was rebuffed, and not long after, both of Sana's young sons given to him by his innocent wife fell to a rare infection, taking them quickly and painfully. Without heirs, Sana became paranoid about losing his lineage and set his wizards examining any avenue that might extend his life or grant him the fae bride he desperately needed. Finally, in his declining years, a great dark dragon with decayed skin, perforated wings, and a near-barren skull appeared at the gates of Gothas. The creature promised to return the empire to power and vowed to force the arrogant fae to kneel to true immortality. Though tempted by the offer, Sana had no desire for immortality, only the endurance of his lineage. The dragon then offered him something else: his long-sought bride.

Her name was Umala. A tightly wrapped silk bandage covered her eyes, though she could still sense her surroundings with ease. She possessed the ears of the fae but little else Sana could recognize as chaparran, gimfen, or damaskan. The dragon declared its own blessing was proof of the fae's noble blood. Umala even possessed a great book of magic claiming to hold a power the gods feared to offer man. Though Saran's first wife objected to the pairing, the king agreed to the bonding. The events that followed have fallen into obscurity; even the libraries of Limshau do not hold an accurate account. The public was not permitted to see the concubine of the king. Though elderly and near senility, the thrust of Sana's manhood returned. His old and faithful wife was cast aside quickly in favor of virginal pleasures. After Sana's lust was satisfied, one story claimed Sana would bellow a great exhalation of soot and smoke which would settle and float about the kingdom. A similar account, less popular but likely more accurate, claimed that the very citizens of the empire would fall asleep to awaken aged to the point of death, their bodies expelling a great darkness upon their demise which refused to evaporate with the morning dew. More people fell to dust, replaced by the growing mist, which wafted about the living, whispering dark thoughts in their ears, turning some to madness and violence and the rest to dull servitude. Little food grew in the mist-wracked land, and those who ate what what did grow turned into monsters and fed on those who remained. The castle of Gothas became infested with sourceless shadows. Where Sana walked, they followed, they watched, yet never revealed themselves. As more of his people died, the shadows increased; the fog thickened. Sana's forgotten bride perished in the empty halls, along with all who had once been loyal to him. Years passed into decades, finally leaving only a few souls lingering in the darkness, unable to change their fate. The fog seeped into the soil and salted the earth. Contaminated water rose from the depths. The castles and manors of the great houses collapsed to rot and ruin, until only the tower of Kardia-Gothas remained. The shapeless forms roamed the landscape as an army, raised from the ashes of withered corpses. A few soon spread from the dark shroud into the outer lands, encouraging others to enter the Marsh with similar promises of immortality and magic, knowing protracted stays ensured another meal for the king and the demon at his side.

THE LICH KING

It is said that Sana lives still, twisted and aged but refusing to die, an empty shell of a man driven by the twin curses of boundless sorrow and unquenchable desire. Umala, unchanged in those years, refused her husband's undying appetite unless new souls entered the Marsh. Those daring to breach the cursed land should exercise caution not to stir the attention of the mistress of Sana or her king, lest they fall victim to their lust.

TRANQUISS

Twisted with evil, blackened with corruption and cloaked in darkness, Tranquiss is, after the Sana Marsh, one of the most dangerous territories of Canam. It began with the infection of a single tree but soon spread to others, then dozens, and then hundreds. The trees lost their leaves and the sap turned to blood. Hairlike tendrils grew from the bark which gravitated toward living flesh, and anything they touched was sucked dry of its energy and left as a desiccated husk. The wood can neither be burned nor cleansed of its infection by any known magic. Even the most powerful spells only halt the spread temporarily rather than cure it. The plague known as Trendance covered hundreds of square miles

before any even realized the threat. The canopy of the central hive of the forest is so tightly packed with long, sharp branches, no creature has ever successfully found the first tree which started the calamity. Though some believe destroying this tree would cure the entire forest, there is no evidence for this.

The infection has taken most of the natural trees and now threatens both Skepsis and Laurama. Much of Laurama has already been taken though not enough to threaten the chaparrans there. Some believe enemies of the fae created the deadly forest in hope the infection would suffocate or consume them.

The only creatures that reside in Tranquiss are unnatural monstrosities that carry the infection with them like a symbiote, and the cancer dragons, one of the most notorious of which is Carcin of Pathos, a despicable creature known to belch living tumors that slither across the ground to attach and infect victims with their plague. Carcin is even more insane than most cancer dragons, and only a lingering sense of self-preservation keeps him from blindly attacking Laurama or Limshau directly. Cancer dragons feel welcome in the pestilence of Tranquiss and fear the holy, healing power of Skepsis, dreading that the fabled Skepsis Tree, with its power to cure all ills, might free them from the diseases wracking their immortal forms. Every year Tranquiss grows another few meters, spreading its claws about Laurama and Skepsis.

XIXION

Puggs, even more than pagus and humans, are the fastest-growing intelligent species on the planet. They broke off late from the damaskans and are considered one of the least civilized of all fae races. They have little culture of their own, preferring to steal and corrupt the trappings of it from their more civilized neighbors, and reproduce at an alarming rate. Puggs spread across the globe quickly, though the highest concentration remains where they first appeared, on the central west coast of Canam. Their elder brethren, the more intelligent boggs, found that they could use their own size to subjugate the smaller kaddog and use their strength of numbers to amass great wealth and power, though most puggs live a feral life beholden only to the strongest of their swarm.

The pugg-infested region known as Xixion covers almost half of the land west of the Nankani Mountains, but no roads cross it. Their growing armies push ever to the north, south, and east, encroaching on the bastions of Selkirk and Angel and the lands around them. A brief siege of Angel resulted in the total annihilation of the attacking army, and they have not attempted it again. With the bastions' official policy of non-involvement in the realms of magic, it is left to the

echans to keep the pugg population down, though both bastions have been known to offer covert support. In the north, the Seliquam Confederation formed to combat the menace, while in the south the various free houses and independent settlements take arms against the swarms' incursions. Narros and damaskans are particularly fierce in clearing out large concentrations of their evil little cousins wherever they occurred. To the east, the onward push is stymied by the unpassable evil of the Sana Marsh and a strange power that somehow prevents them from simply swarming over the mountains protecting Salvabrooke. Instead, they pushed south throughout the Nankani Mountains, burrowing into holes and filling them up with stolen treasure, piles of decaying garbage, and more puggs. Passing travelers in the lands surrounding Xixion still need to contend with raiders, but otherwise the 'nation' lies quiescent but for their annual invasion of the Seliquam river valley, where they batter their oversized heads against the Redoubt at Last Hope for a few weeks before returning to their holes. This may turn out to be a sleeping lion, as their frantic reproduction continues.

Puggs do not coordinate or plan, only rage. They have no talents for strategy or stealth, and no appreciation for the things they steal. They are a mass of living death – a humanoid locust swarm that ravages terrain and then moves on. The central areas of Xixion are barren and lifeless. Even the trees have been stripped of their bark and burned. Several years ago, a bevy of custodians and librarians attempted to analyze the patterns of the pugg swarms and managed to distinguish four different masses of puggs, which all continually shift positions and are slowly approaching civilized neighbors. The Etaraki ('Cockroach') swarm comprises of 70,000 puggs while the Eletharius ('Grasshopper') swarm has 100,000 and the Ephesia ('Cicada') swarm has 50,000. But all these together are a mere pint in a gallon in comparison to the pugg 'city' of Seelanus ('Millipede'), dug into the crater of a slumbering volcano in the north coastal Nankani range and which, at last count, had nearly 1,200,000 puggs.

Puggs viciously attack anything that doesn't look like them, and if nothing immediately presents itself, they turn their violence on their own kind. They are one of the most primitive species and what many higher fae fear all faekind is destined to devolve into. Puggs paint no pictures, write no poetry, and carve no sculptures, though they will gladly carry such things off, deface them, and use them to adorn their foul pits (or, more often, use them as toilets). Their towns and villages are nothing more than huts of logs and mud, holes in the ground, or cliff faces strung haphazardly with rotting timbers and ropes. They despise farming and prefer to hunt or steal. If they run out of prey, they eventually turn on each other.

LEGACY OF THE NARROS

The northern ranges of Xixion were once home to the Narros pioneers as they explored southwards, built cities and just as rapidly abandoned them. Some say that the explorations were driven, not by a natural desire to re-stamp their mark on the landscape, but by a royal imperative to find something specific: perhaps an artifact of the Terros Age, buried for eons, or perhaps something more mundane like a fabled vein of metal. It would certainly explain the narros' reluctance to permanently settle in these lands, which had yet to be encroached by the kaddog. Most of the structures are now crumbling ruins, befouled by pugg nests. However, roughly halfway between Vanguard and Shiwoos, a large tower rises from the waters offshore, with a narros-built bridge leading out to it. The kaddog never approach the bridge or the tower unless provoked. What power repels them, no-one knows; the few adventurers who have approached the tower have always returned empty-handed.

"I see," 'Luna' said pensively after we had related our errand over a nice cup of Southern Caravan tea. "Quite a puzzle, that. Ah, well, we might as well see what the auspices have the say."

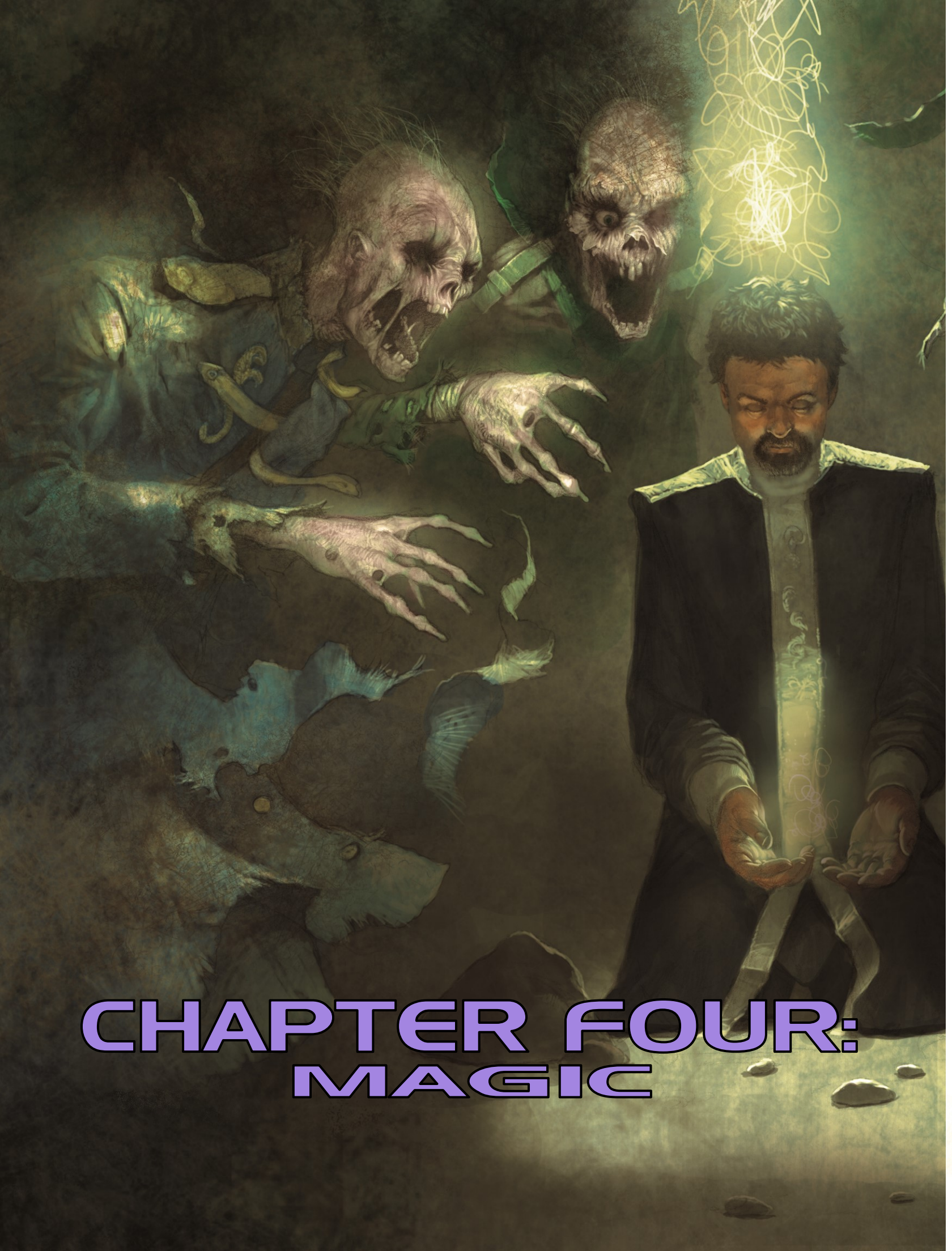
Sachenka looked sidelong at me. "What do?" she whispered.

"My friend is a mystic," I explained. Sachenka looked blank.

I wracked my brains for the appropriate word. "Soothsayer? Witch-woman? Vorozheya?" The Lauropan scowled, and I gathered I had hit upon the right Slavic term. "Now, don't scoff," I warned her. "Her predictions may not be 100% accurate, but they are invariably useful. Beside which, she also maintains the most extensive network of informers in the West Cross."

The twiceling didn't seem entirely convinced, but allowed my friend to take her teacup. 'Luna' didn't bother to make a big show of her divination as she doubtless would for her more gullible customers - instead she simply stared at the leaves, allowing her eyes to go unfocused and roll up into her head. At last, she shook her head and put down the cup.

"Not much to see, I'm afraid," she said. "It's pretty damn dark where yer going. Ya may want to stock up on caffeine pills, too."



CHAPTER FOUR: MAGIC

"You didn't mention anything about THIS!"

Despite the hasty purchase of a pair of gimfen-sized hip waders and several layers of all-weatherproof clothing, the cloying swamp was seeping seemingly into my very bones. The cold and wet was bad enough, but worse than either was the unnatural silence. No birds, no croaking amphibians, not even a a buzzing insect broke the stillness – only the 'glumph-glumph' of our footsteps through the mire. Every now and then Sachenka would put out a hand to arrest my forward progress, and then gesture to follow a particular path through the sludge that to me looked no different than any other way. I learned quickly to stick exactly to her footsteps when I almost fell into a sinkhole, and was only saved by a fortuitously placed tree branch.

There was barely enough light to see by. I had once attempted to snap a photograph using a bastion-made disposable camera I carry for situations where my silver-albumen rig is too unwieldy, but after the first flash revealed some psychologically unsettling imagery in the shape of the tree trunks (and fried the internal electronics to boot) I made no further efforts to document the journey.

There are many stories told about the Sana Marsh throughout Canam, but none really prepare the unwary traveler for the reality of it. Nothing lives here. Even the flora is preserved in a state of half-death, like the flesh of a zombie. There is a constant charnel stench that claws at the nose and attempts to crawl its way down the throat to choke you from within. Worst of all, you constantly see things out of the corner of your eye that vanish as you turn to look at them, and throughout it all is the teeth-chattering impression that you are being watched by malign entities that wish nothing more than your absolute extinction. The important thing to remember is that this is not your imagination.

I have no doubt that similar environments must exist in Lauropa, for Sachenka passed through the swamp seemingly without fear, but with a healthy wariness. "Do not sleep," she had cautioned me as we made camp the first night.

"Why not?" I asked, although I hardly needed the injunction – I was too unnerved to sleep.

"Wake up different," was all she replied.

We had a harrowing encounter with some bat-like things covered in suppurating pustules early on the second day, of which in the interests of good taste I will spare you the details. I relied on Sachenka's sword-arm to keep me safe – I am not a fighter by inclination, although I have learned the efficacy of a well-placed cantrip globe in discouraging predators, intelligent or otherwise.

Late in that day, we came upon our destination: what appeared to be a ruined shrine to some long-forgotten deity, a pool of fouled water set upon a pedestal. Beneath the pedestal was the desiccated body of a man. Despite the dampness, the corpse was completely mummified. Sachenka knelt beside it, and I noticed with interest that the designs on the dead man's armor matched those of my companion's pauldron. She muttered a few words I could not recognize in her guttural native language and then began stripping the body. Lastly, she took a triangular amulet from around the corpse's neck and looked at it carefully, then placed it over her own head.

"We go," she said to me, and strode away from that place without a backward glance.

Our world is shaped and driven by natural forces, but the intrinsically chaotic force of magic overlays it like a cloak – or, more aptly, a flood, ebbing and flowing like the tide but constantly present. Everyone, even the bastion-born, at least dips a toe in the swirling waters, but only a few have the perspicacity to be able to perceive the currents within it.

THE GATES

Many scientists who have dedicated their lives to the study of Attricana ascribe to the theory that the white gate is a tear in the fabric of space connecting our universe to another. This other universe has rules of chemistry and physics abnormal to our own. Radiating from this tear is an unquantifiable aura where the clashing of two universes results in the bizarre repudiation of scientific laws currently infecting the globe. Authorities on the side of magic refute this, arguing that the white gate does lead to another world, but not another universe: a realm reserved for gods and/or those who pass on through at the ends of their lives. Still another argument goes that the white gate leads to outside our universe, to the flotsam our cosmos floats in, a literal infinity impossible to comprehend or even quantify in our reality.

Despite these argument, physical laws change within the wake of this white gate. These changes are not always constant and often change with little to no warning. Because of this chaos, the principles of natural selection and evolution are rendered ineffective, as they cannot compensate fast enough for the changes in reality. Mutations that do occur create huge deviations that are systemic through a species, changing many suddenly but all in the same way. Interestingly, magic tends to suppress harmful mutations in any body it affects; while defects may still exist within a magical creature's genome, the influence of enchantment usually prevents such traits from becoming manifest (as is the case with the tenenbri and cystic fibrosis).

In the Terros age, the fae—being the only beings to achieve intelligence after the dragons—never tried to define the rules of Attricana. Since we had no concept of any previous world, there was no frame of reference to define the differences. Humanity on the other hand, was able to differentiate which rules were unchanged and which were altered. For one, no matter how many scientific laws the white gate modifies, none are altered to such a degree as to prevent any existing form of life from continuing to live. Many of the laws concerning biology and chemistry are amendments rather than wholesale alterations. These allow greater variations of life without voiding existing ones.

The laws of physics are more varied and inconsistent. Certain principles are fixed and have never shown any signs of changing. Magnetism works the same as ever, as does electricity, although the conductivity of any material other than gold is severely reduced in the presence of EDF. Other laws work mostly the same way, but with varying degrees of inconsistency depending on the strength of the local magical field. Gravity is particularly susceptible to alteration by magic, and it is suspected (though not confirmed) that the range of the electromagnetic spectrum has expanded (researchers take as proof of this the fact that creatures subjected to invisibility magic can still see, when by all rights they should be rendered blind). Pressure and kinesis are problematic: while on a basic level they work the same as they did before the gate reopened, in closed systems above a certain complexity, the laws of thermodynamics suddenly take a vacation as mechanical systems simply lose their built-up energy, causing pumps to void and gears to seize spontaneously with no indicator of where the lost energy has gone.

One group of intrepid scientists believed they found the secret to understanding the chaos from Attricana. They referred to it as the "Flow of Everything," a massive cause-and-effect chart of millions of entries of data that connect with other entries via 2 to 2000 different yes/no questions. These scientists became obsessed with explaining all the altered rules and the conditions causing one to go into effect in one moment and then do the opposite in the next. With the millions of different factors involved, all the original scientists died before ever solving even 1% of the entire system, without even discovering proof that it worked. Though subsequent experts have picked up the torch, modern disciples of flow theory accept that even if every single altered rule is explained and connected, it would not make the slightest bit of difference. One echalogian dismissed the entire escapade as pointless, as the number of factors actually needing to be observed was implausible. Some point out that this is exactly the same approach that echan wizards take to the study of magic, but such commentators are rarely given credibility.

In locations saturated with magic via casters and monsters, the overall influence of Attricana increases. Observations have proved that more spawn creatures appear in regions populated by other magical beings or in populations where magic use is prevalent. Magic also appears to be drawn to life; in areas where life does not exist, magic does not follow. In light of this discovery, several techans have proposed moving to Antarctica, or even to the moon (if some way of overcoming the ambient EDF long enough to get an orbital vehicle out of the atmosphere could be found).

Inversely, humans – being natural beings graced with intelligence and thus capable of potentially affecting the disposition of quantum states – can actively suppress the influence of magic if enough of them refuse to accept it into themselves; it is not necessary to deny the existence of magic (thankfully, as there is enough evidence to the contrary to convince even the most determined skeptic), but the human mind can seemingly tell magic that it is not wanted here, and it appears to listen. However, magic is constant and though it can be reduced, it can never be fully suppressed.

Most animals wandering the wild, despite being evolved creatures and theoretically resistant to magical influence like humans, eventually succumbed to its power. Though not every member of every species

turned into some kind of monster, every major genus (even plants and bacteria) has produced at least one species begotten of magic. Some grew massive in size or reverted to a more primal stage of their evolution, such as the dire beasts of Kesakas, while others were able to channel great energy previously untapped. Given time, a few of them developed rudimentary intelligence of their own (kodiaks being a prime example).

Unlike animals, in the 500 years mankind has been exposed to magic, there has been virtually no major alteration to human physiology. There are incidences of a few minor aberrations occurring in northern Canam and across the world in Lauropa and Slav, but overall humans seem resistant to the whims of the wave. One popular theory states that, if a species is intelligent enough to handle magic, they can prevent its total dominance. Dumber animals become slaves while smarter ones become masters. We fae, of course, are not an evolved species and thus not factored in to this theory.

Almost all magic in the world is from Attricana and finding sources of Ixindar magic is difficult except in Kakodomania, the heart of its power. The black gate of Ixindar corrupts rather than creates. Where Attricana is the embodiment of chaos and spontaneity, Ixindar codifies order and structure, allowing it to mimic many of Attricana's spells, though without its spark of life. The source of corruption has been hotly contested. Does Ixindar lead to hell or to a universe at the edge of death? If Attricana is every possible permutation, would it be also every type of dimension, and if so would Ixindar then be a doorway to nothing? If Attricana is infinity, then Ixindar would be zero. Magic from Ixindar radiates stasis, and therefore does not disrupt scientific laws. The creatures do not radiate EDF, nor do their spells. Instead, Ixindar fills the minds of those using its power with the conviction of perfect order: with every use, the wielder becomes more and more rigid in their thinking and set in their ways.

IXINDAR AND TECHANS

One would think that techans would be practically itching to get their hands on some Ixindar teachings or artifacts, but in fact, most are even more revolted by the black gate's power than by Attricana's. It embodies what most not-so-secretly believe about all echa – that it is evil spawned from the pits of whatever hell they believe in. Of course, it is always possible that a lone nihilimancer or even an entire cell could operate within a bastion with impunity, given a sufficiently subtle approach. I have my own suspicions based on what escapees from Mann have told me about their seemingly psychic leaders, but of course I have no means of finding proof.

ATTRICANA SPELLS

Most spells originate from Attricana. One can be an evil caster still bound to Attricana; she just can't cast Ixindar unique spells. Unique Attricana spells are those blessed enchantments exclusive to the white gate: spells that manipulate immaterial energies alien to this world, or inherently creative spells such as those that summon living beings (monsters are not actually summoned—they are created at that moment by will of the spellcaster, happy to return to the chaos of Attricana once that purpose is fulfilled).

All spells drawing upon Attricana appear alive when cast: they exist with enough intelligence to accomplish their task along with the drive to succeed at it. To fail would be worse than death, even if that death occurs anyway moments later. From dancing lights to lightning leaping from fingers, every spell carries some indication that an intelligence other than the spellcaster is at work. Some wizards, particularly of the Koana schools, nurture this intelligence, while others constantly attempt to refine their spell in an attempt to minimize the apparent outside influence – with only limited success.

THE PRINCIPLE OF FIVES

There are few general principles that apply universally to magic, but one tendency that occurs with too much frequency to be coincidental is the principle of fives. Dragons, who created Pleroma, are theorized to exist in (at least) five dimensions, and their written language is thought to only be fully visible in five dimensions. Exactly fifty-five of such characters form the common building blocks of all spellcasting. The conception of the world used by both dragons and fae has five cardinal points, not four (north, south, east, west, and center). Alchemical reactions are strongest when five components are combined (one of the reasons why gold, otherwise a completely magically inert substance, is often added to potions). Most obviously from the average spellcaster's perspective, traditions of natural magic follow five 'elements,' and the scientific study of magic theorizes five essential schools into which any spell can be classified.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS

The old Aristotelian model of the universe theorized that all things in creation were made up of different combinations of four essential 'elements' – air, fire, earth, and water – with some philosophers envisioning a fifth element, 'quintessence'. Asian thinkers held similar views, except that instead of describing material composition, the five elements represented changes in state or attitude. Pre-Hammer science noted the similarity between the classical elements and the various state changes of matter – solid, liquid, gas, and plasma, with the breakdown of conventional notions of physics at the subatomic or quantum level representing the

'fifth element'. All of these conceptions can be seen as echalogical interpretations of the art of spellcasting. Modern mages (even those who do not adhere to a naturalistic form of wizardry) recognize the existence of five magical elements, known by their more mundane names of aether, air, earth, fire, and water.

AETHER

The 'quintessence' sought by Western philosophers and alchemists, or the 'void' professed by Eastern mystics, what modern magical philosophers call 'aether' represents the interconnectedness of all things. It is the raw power of life, of infinite variation and unbridled creativity, the power that lies at the very heart of magic. It touches almost every other application of the craft to a certain extent, and on its own is concerned with the drawing out of an object's natural essence – the truth of its being, the source of its power, and the laws by which it is bound to all other things in creation. Common aether spells involve manipulating living tissue (including the mind, the blood, the body, and the vital power of organic processes); controlling how an object relates to the electromagnetic spectrum; allowing one object to occupy two different places at once, or two objects to occupy the same place; and adjusting the degree to which the target of a spell reacts to the laws of physics. Being affected by aether makes a subject more (or less) of itself. A bodybuilder who can, with effort, lift a quarter ton unaided might be made to lift that same quarter ton easily with one hand, or be cursed with withered limbs unable to lift more than a feather. A stealthy thief might be made totally invisible; a village wisdom skilled at predicting the weather might spot a hurricane brewing a thousand miles away; a damaskan who can read a long book in an hour might traverse an entire set of encyclopedias in a minute.

AIR

In the classical traditions, air is associated with energy, spirited feelings, and freedom of action. In scientific parlance, it represents the high-energy gaseous state. It represents fluidity without direction, the ability to transcend natural limits – but it is a purely transformative, not creative, power. Air can only move things about and change a person's perceptions – anything actually made by it is intangible and impermanent. In most magical traditions, it is chiefly associated with powers of illusion (creating or magnifying perceptions of sound or image) and movement, as air traverses all and is bounded by naught. Common air spells involve manipulating elemental air to boost or hinder someone's movement; creating or muffling sounds; creating or concealing visual stimuli; controlling electricity, most frequently in the form of directed lightning; spells of speed, balance and flight; and the piece de resistance, weather-controlling magic.

EARTH

Soil, stone, and metal are considered the epitome of solidity, and so Earth represents the solid state, the condition of permanence and inviolability. A subject affected by earth remains in the state it is placed until

something else acts upon it to change it. While its most obvious application is in the creation and strengthening of barriers and fortifications, it is equally applicable to more esoteric disciplines: healers, for instance, value it as a means of sustaining (rather than restoring) health, and of preserving a wound without causing further harm until more efficacious treatment is available. Common earth spells involve controlling and summoning elemental earth, stone, and metal; creating and strengthening walls and other impediments; fortifying the body with health, stamina, and stability; and animating earth constructs. While it can also be used to great effect upon creatures of the natural world, such as trees, it affects only the crude matter of such things: the energy that animates them is more easily affected, and falls under the element of aether.

FIRE

The element most associated with both creation and destruction, fire is concerned with transformative energies. Unlike the living energy of aether and the motive energy of air, fire represents volatile energy, balancing on the cusp of violence and more often than not, passing over it into pure destructive force. In science, it represents the plasma state, as close to 'pure energy' as it is possible to get. Fire is a dangerous power, but it is also useful: while it can be used to sear and immolate, it can also be used to cook food, change one kind of rock into another, boil liquids, harden wood, and burn away diseases. Some mystics see the transformative chaos of fire as a literal hotline to the future, and read fortunes in the crackling flames or inhale smoke to put themselves in tune with the universe. Common fire spells involve summoning and commanding elemental fire, in the form of raw flame or burning liquid; spells of violence and consumption (unfortunately, by far the most common application – the ever-popular fireball); and manipulating the body's energy, both to maintain health and to push it beyond its normal limitations (what the wuxia types call 'chi energy').

WATER

Water, as the most abundant substance on Earth, stands in for all liquids in the common consciousness. Its associations are many and varied. Daoist philosophy views all of life as a river, the flow of which directs the individual who surrenders to it safely around and through all obstacles. Water is thus a force of dynamics and motion, but only within certain parameters – the river cannot simply decide to burst its banks without outside intervention, but within those banks lies much opportunity for variation. Water is the element most associated with healing, due to the association between water and cleanliness: clean water equates to a clean body and a clean mind, and thus immersion in water is a frequent component of advanced healing spells. But water comes with a dark side as well – as living creatures consist primarily of water, the powers of water can be used to take command of a creature's very blood and cells, directing its actions and even thoughts, creating distempers as easily as a more ethical mage cures them. Common water spells involve affecting and summoning elemental water or ice; the aforementioned healing and cleansing; spells of fluidity and motion, especially with water-related movement modes such as swimming or skating (and while speed and flight are traditionally seen as the domain of air, water can manage them just as easily); and for some, farseeing, as water ultimately touches all things of this Earth.

ELEMENTALISM

My understanding of the principles of arcane philosophy is limited at best, but as it has been explained to me, the evidence for the elemental basis of spellcraft is twofold: first, in the elemental traits of dragonkind, and second in the prevalence of incarnates (or 'elemental tuners') among those born with gneolistic powers. Such individuals outnumber the next largest group of supernatural talents by nearly two to one, presumably because their abilities attune to a more primal level of magic. Although still phenomenally rare in comparison to the general population, a disproportionate number of the mystic hermits that adventurers may occasionally encounter practicing austerity on mountaintops possess such powers.

THE FIVE SCHOOLS

The Five Elements represent, depending on who you talk to, either a more primal or a more philosophical approach to magic theory. For theoretical magecraft, they are an indispensable discipline – however, when it comes to practical, hands-on spellcasting, most mages prefer something a bit more defined. The few formal magic colleges therefore tend to organize their prospectus according to the kinds of effects magic can produce, rather than the fundamental principles behind them. The five elements are still a part of all formal study, but they take second place to the hands-on applications of spellcraft, as divided into the five schools of Calling, Energies, Phantasm, Scrying, and Transfiguration.

CALLING

The school of Calling deals with the creation of material objects and substances, or the transportation of objects from one place to another. While the name suggests that teleportation is a common feature of the school, it is (I am told) fiendishly difficult to make anything larger than, say, a two-handed weapon travel to or from a precise point in space more than a few miles distant – the variables are simply too complicated for non-dragons to be able to calculate on the fly. Calling more often involves summoning raw magical energy from Attricana and shaping it into the desired form on the spot. Creatures summoned with calling spells are therefore unique to each casting – even though the summoner might create an identical being to the one she brought forth the last time she cast the spell, it would have no history or memory. Banishing creatures with

teleportation is infinitely easier than bringing them to you, as (most of the time) the caster doesn't particularly care where the target ends up so long as it's far, far away. In addition to these basic conjurations, calling spells also include defensive wards against living (and unliving) dangers.

ENERGIES

The study of the elements of magic in their rawest state, students of Energies tend to be flamboyant and hasty. Energies is the easiest school to learn the basics in, although one of the hardest to achieve full mastery. It focuses on controlling and creating energetic elements; affecting temperature and energy levels; energy attacks; spells of defense against the elements; and telekinetic force. Energies spells are usually unsubtle and involve very few Pleroma characters – often they can be evoked with single utterances. It is limiting the extent of those effects that takes study, discipline, and more in -depth ritual practice.

PHANTASM

The school of Phantasm deals with powers that affect the mind and the senses. It covers illusions both apparent and mental, although purely psychic illusions are preferred for conservation of energy (it is far easier to convince someone that they see purple elephants everywhere than it is to create even intangible images of purple elephants) as well as spells of befuddlement and psychic influence, and all variety of mental attacks and defenses. It overlaps somewhat with the school of Scrying, but the two have a distinctly different focus: phantasm is concerned with limiting or focusing perception, while scrying spells are concerned with expanding it. There is a healthy debate among practitioners of both schools as to which the myriad telepathy and mind-melding spells properly belong to. Phantasm is surprisingly uncommon among formally-trained wizards, since the most prolific universities, Limshau's Koana colleges, largely disdain mind-affecting magic as being tremendously impolite.

SCRYING

As mentioned above, the school of Scrying is related to extending one's own perceptions. The most obvious application of this discipline is farseeing, perceiving other places and times, usually through some sort of medium such as a pool of water, a flame, or a crystal ball. It also deals with spells of lore and understanding, allowing the practitioner to comprehend more information than is apparent to the regular observer and thus draw more accurate conclusions. Spells of communication are also the purview of scrying, such as carrying the caster's whispers on the wind to a recipient miles away, or beaming words or images directly into someone's head (although the school of Phantasm also holds that this falls under its heading). Scrying and Phantasm also frequently come into conflict on the subject of privacy, as scrying masters are also adept at hiding themselves and others from outside observation and influence.

TRANSFIGURATION

The school of Transfiguration is the material counterpart to Energies, dealing with the alteration of physical properties such as color or density. It is the discipline of choice for both shapeshifting and healing magics, which (from a theoretical perspective) are not that far removed from one another. Transfiguration is taught by all good wizarding schools, but the foremost experts in the discipline are found in the towers of Jibaro in Dawnamoak: the darawren of that land are such adept practitioners of the art that they can turn themselves into all varieties of animals as the mood takes them, much like the great dragons themselves.

ENCHANTMENT

As the famous quote passed among wizards goes, "Anything you can think of thinks for itself." Attricana is about life in every possible combination, breaking rules that nature declares incontrovertible. A creature or force derived from these broken rules emanates that same chaos. Since technology is based on the principle that a given procedure will produce the same result every time, machines and magic cannot long commingle. This created a chain reaction 500 years ago, forcing all remaining fragments of working technology into the bastions. Although all fae are slaves to magic, humans have a choice, being born via the normal rules of biology. They can choose to accept the world of magic or remain disciplines of science. There is no good or evil in this conflict. There is only opinion, and there is no wrong answer. However, the choice is often permanent. By wielding that magic sword or by casting that spell, a human ties his soul to Attricana, becoming one with the world of magic, and disrupting technology just as an elf would.

IXINDAR AND MENGUS

For as long as anyone cared to remember, Mengus has not been referred to by any other name; no mistranslation or even spelling error has ever marred the name of the embodiment of perfect order. No creature has ever claimed to have seen Mengus and everyone accepts that she no longer possesses a physical body or lacks the capacity to form in the real world. A few dragons suggested Amethyst and Mengus are two sides of a single metaphorical coin – a balance the world requires. Perhaps they were one god-like creature split into two, and Amethyst retained the body. Yet in the Gospel of Lazarus, page 956, paragraph 10 verse 5, Lazarus was quoted as saying, *"I once allowed Mengus to peer into my soul. I do believe she flinched. Not all can be corrupted."* Lazarus never explained this passage, but whatever the case, the gender assignment stuck.

Because Mengus could only look outward from Ixindar, when Amethyst buried the gate, her influence was fro-

OPTIONAL RULE: SATURATION POINT

For most player characters, being techan or echan is a choice, determined by choice of species and the Echan and Techan hindrances. If a GM wishes to make becoming echan a potential problem for techan characters, the following optional rule can be employed.

Human and pagus PCs can become saturated with magical energy and become EDF-generating echans by using magic or magic items (gimfen only start generating EDF by taking the Arcane Background edge). At the end of each session that you are subject to one of the following conditions, the GM makes a roll against a target number of 2 + your Spirit die type. The die type is given below, and the GM rolls one die for each event (if there are multiple events, roll multiple dice, but only keep the highest result regardless of die size).

d20: You are brought back from the dead.
d12: You study the arcane arts prior to taking an Arcane Background (per day).
d8: You wield a magic weapon in combat (per minute).
d8: You wear magic armor (per hour).
d8: You drink a potion.
d6: You benefit from other magic items in your possession (per scene).
d6: A beneficial magical effect (including magical healing) is placed upon you.

This roll functions like a damage roll, except that instead of Wounds, you increase your saturation level by one step. Your saturation level is applied as a penalty to Charisma against techans, and also has an effect on unshielded technology in your immediate vicinity until your saturation level is reduced. Saturation levels 'heal' at the rate of one per week, so long as the character is not directly exposed to magic at all during that time: you can also spend a Benny to remove one saturation level per session.

Saturation 1: Minor effects – EDF patches trigger, batteries wear out twice as fast, electronics briefly glitch but otherwise continue to function.
Saturation 2: Moderate effects – clockwork randomly seizes, electronics freeze or shut down but function normally for a while after restarting, batteries wear out five times as fast.
Saturation 3: Major effects – machines just stop working randomly, batteries lose charge without warning, and minor or moderate effects can target technology greater than a short distance away from the character.

If you take more than 3 saturation levels, you automatically gain the Echan hindrance for no points (which replaces the Techan hindrance if you had it): you begin to generate EDF, and continue to do so until you buy off the hindrance.

zen and locked inside. Nevertheless, some echalogians have theorized that the great acts of barbarism that have marred human history were due to the whisper, and the continual fear of hell and demons emerged from her playful manipulation of mankind's nightmares. Even now, despite the great force of the second hammer, Ixindar is still not completely free: Mengus must strive towards her ambitions of godhead through her proxies the shemjaza and typhox dragons, and through the subtle influence of the whisper spreading secretly across the world from Ixindar's resting place in Kakodomania.

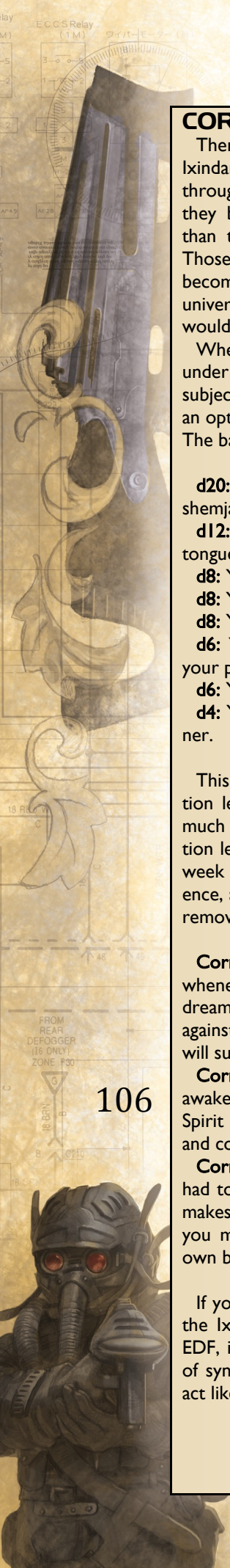
It is a common misconception, fed by the religions of many cultures, that Ixindar is the physical manifestation of Hell. Such proponents point to the demons that emerged from it as clear proof. Yet Ixindar, for all its malice, is not a force for chaos but for order – absolute, unyielding, incontrovertible structure. Its drive, more a natural law than a goal, is that all life must end or operate in service of order. When Ixindar corrupts, what it really does is subvert any originality in a subject. Its form of order results in degrading the real world to a constant level. This would not be the null background radiation the universe may be fated to reach but a collective consciousness possessing a power only described as absolute and divine. Another way to describe it would be that of a hive or overmind—to unify all thought and to make that thought able to control the universe.

SAEQAAR

The deified language of Pleroma has a dark counterpart, brought to this world by Ixindar and Mengus' whisper. This tongue is both the metaphorical and literal mirror of Pleroma, but draws its power from the black gate instead of the white, further reinforcing the theory that Pleroma is not the language of dragons at all. The symbols of this corrupted tongue resemble that of Pleroma as seen through a mirror, and are able to replicate similar results, but it only imitates the might of Attricana without the energy of chaos behind it. Ixindar does not spontaneously create anything; it must infect and convert what it finds to its side. There was originally no accepted name for this language; as with Pleroma, the name of the thing is the thing itself. Later it received its own sobriquet, saeqaar, a word with no meaning that can be rendered in any human tongue. While Pleroma utterances can be colorful and dancing with life, saeqaar words when spoken are sonorant and uniform – those who have heard them and lived to tell the tale speak of them as sounding like the tolling of funeral bells, with only their disturbing harmonics distinguishing different words. Appropriate, then, that the typhox dragons found in this language the tools for creating the most corrupt of the magical arts, necromancy.

IXINDAR SPELLS

Ixindar has many exclusive spells. These are vile spells with few redeeming qualities. Spells related to death, necromancy, negation and null energy states are unique



CORRUPTION

There can never be a moral spellcaster bound to Ixindar; eventually, the syntropic energy coursing through their bodies stratifies their worldview, and they become convinced that no perspective other than their own can even exist, let alone be valid. Those drawn too far down the path of corruption become perfect narcissists, convinced that the entire universe exists only for their benefit, or even that it would not exist without them.

When you use magic tied to Ixindar, you will fall under the influence of corruption. All characters are subject to corruption, and unlike saturation, it is not an optional rule, although it uses the same mechanics. The basic conditions for falling under corruption are:

d20: You are subject to mind-affecting magic from a shemjaza, typhox dragon, or the whisper of Mengus.
d12: You study the arcane arts of the corrupted tongue of saeqaar.
d8: You wield an Ixindar weapon (per minute).
d8: You wear Ixindar magic armor (per hour).
d8: You drink an Ixindar potion.
d6: You benefit from other Ixindar magic items in your possession (per scene).
d6: You are within a corrupted area (per minute).
d4: You act in an excessively callous or selfish manner.

This roll deals corruption levels instead of saturation levels. The effects of corruption are generally much less obvious, but no less dangerous. Corruption levels, like saturation, recover at a rate of 1 per week if the subject is not exposed to further influence, and you can spend a Benny once per session to remove a level of corruption.

Corruption 1: You can hear the whisper of Mengus whenever your mind is not focused (and in your dreams), and you take a -1 penalty to Tests of Will against the whisper (making it more likely that you will suffer more corruption later).
Corruption 2: You can hear the whisper even when awake and concentrating. You take a -2 penalty to all Spirit rolls, and you become noticeably more distant and colder even to close friends.
Corruption 3: The whisper is so loud that you've had to internalize it to avoid it distracting you. This makes it hard for you to empathize with anyone, and you must be reassured that any request is in your own best interests before you will attempt it.

If you take more than 3 corruption levels, you gain the Ixindar-Bound hindrance and cease to generate EDF, if you previously did. You are now a creature of syntropy, a walking manifestation of evil – try to act like it.

Supernatural edges are inherently tied to Attricana. However, their wielders are as susceptible to corruption as anyone else; as they lose their connection to Attricana, Ixindar subtly replaces it with a corrupted imitation. A corrupted innate caster has the option to change any abilities related to channeling positive energy to channeling negative energy (healing spells become harmful spells, etc.). A innate caster who loses her connection to Ixindar may or may not regain her Attricana-based powers, as determined by the GM.

If you ever become undead, you automatically switch to Ixindar: you cannot switch back under any circumstances until you cease being undead (usually by being re-killed and raised from the dead by Attricana magic).

to Ixindar and thus are not available to casters bound to Attricana. Otherwise, Ixindar casters can use any spell except summoning/creative spells and those with overtly good trappings. Casting Ixindar magic also locks the caster's thinking into the ways of the black gate, corrupting them eventually into an agent of absolute order. Corrupted magic has no flamboyance in its casting. There is no life behind anything emanating from a corrupted spell. However, the corruption of saeqaar does allow a spell to be bottled in, preventing the eruption of magical disruption. Like all energy from Ixindar, saeqaar does not disrupt technology. Instead, it prefers to disrupt the very soul attempting to control it.

FORBIDDEN MAGIC

These 'schools' draw their power from the black gate of Ixindar: they are not cast using Pleroma, and their use does not disrupt technology, but they are also abhorred by all right-thinking wizards and their use is grounds for summary execution even in enlightened societies like Abidan and Limshau. Even Baruch Malkut will not countenance their presence.

Necromancy: Imbuing false life in dead matter; extracting knowledge from the dead; inflicting disease and decay.

Nihilimancy: Unnaturally affecting entropic states; bringing matter or energy to an end; instant-death spells.

ALCHEMY

No longer the domain of mercury-addled mystics searching for immortality or ways of turning lead into gold, alchemy is a respectable, even scientific practice. Just as is the case with arcane metallurgy, certain chemical compounds when mixed in exactly the right proportions produce magical effects. One does not need to be able to perform magic in order to be an alchemist – all that is needed is knowledge of the correct formulae. In some communities, alchemy is a cottage industry, with good coin flowing in from passing adventurers buying copious amounts of restoratives. Potions are not always

suspicious liquids in bottles, either – many alchemists fashion their consumables into candy or pastries, or infuse them into aromatic leaves to be made into tea, or smoked by those with the inclination.

SUSPICIOUS SUBSTANCES

Despite being a more or less legitimate profession for echan practitioners, there are still plenty of hucksters willing to take advantage of gullible folk with fraudulent concoctions. The difference between these and the 'snake oil salesmen' of yore is that often enough, their potions do work, but rarely do what their creators claim, or have unfortunate (but not usually lethal) side-effects. A vial of something effervescent from a roadside vendor might restore your stamina after a long day's travel… or it might turn all your body pigments green, or turn you into a goat for a few hours. Caveat emptor.

MAGIC ITEMS

Magic items are uncommon at best, except in centers of arcane learning or magically saturated locales like Laudenia. Basic enchanted weapons and armor are not too hard to come by for the dedicated adventurer, as such items are part and parcel of the narros' standard trade; potions, as well, are fairly common, as mixing them requires no innate magical talent (although it can't exactly be done by unskilled labor). Wizards frequently use single-use spell scrolls to supplement their prepared spells. But few major magical items exist without a reason. Major items are difficult to locate and magical weapons and armor beyond basic enchantments cannot be casually bought (although some can be specially ordered for a character, given the right smith or merchant).

The items described in the companion volume *Amethyst: Untamed Player's Guide* are basic magical items, the kinds that can be bought from skilled alchemists and arcane crafters, or can be created by any individual with training in the skill of alchemy. Despite the relative ease by which these items can be created, they are still not common, as the only real market for them are adventurers – who are not actually as common as these texts would seem to indicate. Consequently, it should be stressed to those of a mercantile bent that they can't actually get rich making magic items instead of going on adventures: especially if those items transcend the limitations of the basic magic items.

CREATING ITEMS

Advanced items are always unique and made with a specific user and function in mind, so rather than having a complicated menu of possible options, it is best for the GM and the player to work out exactly what the item should do in game terms, and then rather than setting a cost, the GM sets the party a quest for the materials necessary to make it. Any spellcaster can make magic items as long as she has the right raw components and knows the spell to be infused in the item: if no PC spellcaster is available, one can usually be hired from a center of magical learning such as Limshau.

ARTIFACTS

These special items carry great significance for our world, and according to legend tend to appear only as the focus of a major quest.

THE BIBLE OF DRASAGO AND THE ARCHON GOSPELS

When the dragons emerged from Attricana, Lazarus (the oldest and most powerful of the survivors) went about commissioning tomes of knowledge from the other dragons. He picked one representative from each lineage and exhorted them to write in their ancient language a gospel of all that they believe in and imbue it with the very power they possess. These books chronicle all their knowledge and tell about the history of Terros through their ageless eyes. To read a gospel of Drasago is to peer into the very soul of a dragon.

Those who read such a tome are never the same, assuming they can find one in the first place. These books are extremely rare: only three or four copies exist of each gospel and the complete Bible of Drasago itself is owned and protected by Lazarus. Excerpts from these books have been found all over the globe. A reprinting of some passages translated into damaskan can be located in Limshau and Laudenia, but they lack the magical impact of the originals; only fragments have ever been translated into English, and these are often too cryptic to have any value even as proverbs. Dragons often share these books with each other, though never gaining the abilities from them. If a non-dragon skilled in Pleroma reads this book, which takes a total of 48 hours over a minimum of six days, he gains a special ability determined by the book. Once the book is read, the knowledge will always be present to that reader. A reader can only be affected by one book in their lifetime, no matter how many they read, and can only be thus affected once no matter how many times they read that book.

The books are very large, embossed with real scales sacrificed by the writer. They are laced with platinum and silver and gilded with gold. Surprisingly, they are all quite light and will float upon water if dropped. The books are locked with fragments of a dragon's talon and cannot be opened without their key, nor can they be destroyed by any means other than the breath of the dragons that authored them.

THE GOSPEL OF THE HOLY

Written by Aurannis of Dust and Greka of Babel

Leave it to holy dragons to write such a massive book, by two members as they couldn't agree who would write what. Only Greka's portion carries the gospel's enchantment; Aurannis' chronicle, while complemen-

tary to it, exists as a semi-apocrypha and is technically considered a separate book. Greka's book requires 72 hours to read over 8 days compared to the other books. It's a long, slow read, bouncing between subject matter and often diverting into seemingly boring and superfluous tangents. The holy book can be identified by the mirror-polished feather affixed to the cover. The book displays no artwork and the typeface is small and harder to translate than normal. A full quarter of the book is dedicated to the flight dynamics of holy dragons in comparison to other breeds.

After being read, the book grants the reader the power to speak and understand the tongues of animals, to endure extremes of the natural elements, strengthens her body against claws and blades, and enhances her knowledge of fire and phantasm magics.

Call the Fire: Choose one fire-based power (or one power with permanent fire trappings applied). If you do not know that power, you gain it and enough power points (modified as below) to cast it three times. The cost per use of that power is reduced by 1, and you do not need your totem in hand to cast it.

Wyrmtongue: Using mind-affecting powers on the same turn as you take another action does not incur a multi-action penalty.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GUARDIAN

Written by Kelto of the Guard

Kelto, a battle champion of a thousand engagements, refused to die despite losing an eye, two claws, and the end of his tail. His claws were severed by an unnamed and forgotten cursed blade which he later destroyed. His eye was plucked and stolen as a prize when Goch and Kelto dueled over the skies of old Terros thousands of years before the First Hammer. Goch keeps it still, hanging the undamaged orb from his neck, unknowing that Kelto can still gaze through it as long as the injury remains unhealed. Not even the book goes into details on how Kelto lost his tail tip. Despite these injuries, Kelto is still one of the more approachable dragons, seldom taken to pomposity. The book, marked by a bright orange/red smear of Kelto's own blood, details the arrival of the guardian dragons and their crusade to defeat the armies of darkness. Guardian dragons are warriors, champions, and knights of the oldest order, and consequently the book details many battles. The accounts are exhaustive, graphic, and not for the squeamish, for Kelto and his guardians have seen the very darkest creations of evil.

After being read, the book grants the reader the ability to see in total darkness and track those around her by changes in air pressure and ground tremors, makes her more durable and resistant to electrical shock, and gives strength to her arms.

Dragon's Claws: You gain one combat edge of your choice. You ignore all trait and tier requirements for this edge, but you must meet other requirements (such as other edges).

Dragon's Scales: Your Toughness increases by 1.

THE GOSPEL OF THE NOBLE

Written by Lynissa of Essence

Lynissa's family and the responsibilities they have taken on are far more interesting than the noble dragons as a whole. As nobles are considered the intellectual leaders of the dragons (the holy being the spiritual leaders), one would expect the book to detail their administration of dragon culture as well as their structure of authority. Thankfully, Lynissa intermixed this with anecdotes about her family line and their connection with the humans and elves of Akoya (in Euras), which is far more interesting. Euras possesses only one human line of blood royal, the Lamontaes of Akoya. This endorsement came from Lynissa herself, passed down to the first Lamontae, Raymonde. The silver hair of all the royals and their offspring regardless of the appearance of their consorts encourages rumors across the land that Lynissa the Essence dipped into the royal line herself, siring a child while in human form with the king at the time. Such a pairing is not technically forbidden, though extremely rare and difficult to propagate (dragons must bond just like fae in order to reproduce with humans, although the side-effects of bonding for the human are unpredictable and often dangerous). If she endorsed the Lamontae line before or after the coupling is not known but Lynissa and her dragon offspring from the Terros Age all live within the kingdom, swearing to its protection. The diplomatic and noble landscape of Akoya is featured heavily in her gospel. Alas, the majority of the book still details the history of the noble dragons, and their arrogance and condescension about their intelligence does show through the words.

After being read, the book grants the reader an aura of calm certainty that strengthens her own mind and bolsters the morale of her allies, as well as giving her total confidence (bordering on arrogance) in any social situation (The reader and all allies within earshot of her gain +1 to Tests of Will).

Aggressive Negotiations: As an action, you can summon a sword of light to your hand, equivalent to a long sword affected by the smite power (d8+Str+2 damage). This does not require a totem or even to cast a spell,.

THE GOSPEL OF LAZARUS

Written by Lazarus himself, this tome does not go into any details about general dragons but more into Lazarus's own life, as the most ancient living dragon. He talks about his feelings about the world and the fall of Amethyst. This book is extremely hard to find outside of the realm of dragons.

Of all the books, the Lazarus volume is by far the most cryptic. The words and speech meander from normal vernacular to poetry, with messages and meanings only revealing themselves after days, months, or years of contemplation and meditation. It is not an easy read to be sure. After appreciation of the words is finally reached, his thoughts and feelings carry through in clarity. Those finally understanding the book and its meanings often feel melancholy afterward, sharing with the author the curse of knowing too much. Though Lazarus does not impart many secrets, he does express his dissatisfaction about knowing them. After reading the book, one truly begins to understand the mentality of dragons, the immense responsibilities they carry, and the knife-edge they balance between wisdom and corruption. Lazarus knew the world the longest, and his book speaks of times known to no others, including the stretch of time between when Amethyst called the first dragons into being and the arrival of the fae.

After being read, the book grants the reader the power to see through illusions and immunity to mind control, as well as strengthening her knowledge of healing and weather control magics. Additionally, she gains the right to call upon an archon dragon to aid her once a week, and once a month if she is killed, she spontaneously returns to life within a day.

Healer's Word: If you do not know the *healing* power, you gain it and enough power points to cast it three times. The power is not limited to the golden hour. If you already know the power, you gain the *greater healing* power. If you already know that power, the cost of all healing powers you use is reduced by 2.

THE CHRONICLE OF AURANNIS

The *Chronicle of Aurannis* is a single tome separated from the rest of the Bible of Drasago. It holds the knowledge of Amethyst, the shards of his crown, and the artifacts forged around them. It also details the history of echa, the fall of the great dragon and by what means. It mentions Gebermach and the other gospels of Drasago. The book is quite well written in comparison to Greka's tome and is an easier read despite the ancient tongue. Thankfully, unlike other books, there is a "Rosetta-stone" translation matrix on the back cover, though some trickery in magic has concealed it unless someone knows it's there. The matrix lists the same first page in laudenian and in damaskan. With this knowledge, one can translate the words but must still understand Pleroma to fully understand the content. Rumor has it that a complete English translation of this work exists somewhere within Genai, inside the bastion of Angel; regardless of whether this is true or not, any translation would have none of the special powers of the original.

On its own, the chronicle has no particular effect other than the advancement of knowledge, but it does glow brighter when an Amethyst relic is within 1 mile in any

direction. Also, the chronicle, when finally read (after 72 hours to read over 8 days compared to the other books) imparts a permanent mark of power on the user, protecting her against potentially dangerous accidents (she becomes instantly aware of any casual danger, but not deliberate malice, that may result in her injury). Afterward, the book vanishes from the user's possession and returns to Aurannis' side, where she either keeps it or sends it off again to find another reader.

THE STAFF OF KERIF

Many of the rumors involving Kereptis Rifts are false, conflicting with other tales spoken at the same table about his greatness. Was he a savior or a scoundrel? Was he a philanthropist or a villain? Many agree he had a temper, but no one contested his power or the loyalty he gathered because of that power. He is credited with numerous discoveries and creations, some later proven inaccurate. The one item everyone agrees came from his hand was the Staff of KeRif.

When Kereptis reached Ramkava, their behavior and triviality sickened him and he stormed away, unfulfilled. As he left, he discovered a piece of one of their heads that had broken off in an engagement with a death dragon. With this, he managed to gain their attention an unprecedented second time. After this second audience, Rifts took the shard back with him. He constructed a normal oak quarterstaff and topped it with the grayish shard of rock. The KeRif staff looks boring and only reveals its power with the testing of magic.

The staff empowers its wielder to command the attention of Ramkava, as well as allowing them to access a portion of the heads' mystic wisdom no matter where they be. It is unwise to consult Ramkava too often, even through the staff's power; though they are more willing to give up their lore every few days or so, constant demands for their attention will only make them more and more cryptic.

Additionally, when someone brandishes the staff while speaking, no-one who can hear her words can interrupt her in any way until she reaches a natural break in her speech.

THE EIGHT SHARDS OF AMETHYST

The eight are the most powerful relics on the planet. Before Amethyst died, he cast a stream of white flame to heaven. It reflected back to drive Ixindar deep underground and solidify the Earth around it. His body turned to vapor soon after. Amethyst was gone and all that remained was a great violet crystal that shattered upon striking the rocks below. They scattered across the world, lost after the Hammer's impact. Despite a few shards surfacing throughout history, most of them remained quietly buried for millions of years. The fragments were of all different sizes and shapes – with some smaller than a pebble, others longer than a leg. Some were spherical while others held a razor's edge. One can imagine stumbling upon such a gem. It would not be fastened to rock and no amount of force and commitment could lay a scratch upon its surface. Despite their unusual properties, any that were found never received attention during the time of man before the Second Hammer, being indistinguishable, apart from their durability, from unremarkable quartz. Discarded and ignored, they stayed inconsequential for centuries.

After the gate's return, by some unexplained factor, the crystals all rose to the surface, regardless how deep in the earth they rested. Unlike before, their brilliance and power were impossible to deny. Before anyone knew of their potential, their fate, or their true origin, they had been sold, traded, and killed over. Armies clashed for their control despite knowing nothing of their history.

Those with wealth and weight of authority felt their power would be amplified if said crystals were imbued into ordinary items. Very soon, these items emerged with their own local legends, wielded by warriors and kings both noble and wicked. After their existence reached erudite ears, but before anyone could act, they vanished again. Some were stolen; some were taken as trophies when their wielders were slain. When the virtuous and mighty discovered the fragments of Amethyst had returned, they scoured the planet to locate them. Like an unnamed curse, the original owners, all of those that had created the artifacts, had lost them or died, often both at once. The relics fell into obscurity, passing through further hands until the trails and clues had faded. All that remained was the hope they would emerge again.

Paranoia and silence by the oldest races conspired to keep the knowledge of Amethyst and his shattered crown secret. Factor in a small portion of arrogance and many of those who knew the truth never bothered to seek out these relics. Despite the calls for their retrieval, some individuals honestly thought they were best kept buried, unaware of their vital significance in future events.

How Aurannis of Dust managed to write about them in her Chronicle has never been revealed, but the elder dragon disclosed specific details of the fragments, the items they were implanted into, and their potential power as a result. Though it does not give their locations, the Chronicle of Aurannis is a vital read to anyone seeking the power of these relics.

Though there are known to be eight artifacts of Amethyst, only three can be found in Canam. All the artifacts exhibit the same violet glow, growing intensely when other artifacts are brought closer. Their power increases as well, making them the few magic items that can grow along with the group questing for them. It

is thought that when placed near each other, their total power would almost equal that of the original dragon. If that were to happen, perhaps he could even be reborn. To increase in power, the gems must all be within 100 feet. Out of that range, the bonus abilities are no longer applicable. The items do not have to be wielded or carried by the same person. Any corrupted creature that carries one of the artifacts loses a level of corruption each day.

Because of the age and the history of the artifacts, they often go by different names and many cultures worship them without knowing what they truly are. Their stats are listed with their individual abilities and whatever abilities are boosted with additional nearby fragments.

The gems CANNOT be destroyed by any means. No spell or weapon cracks them, and even the strongest techan lasers and drills will blow up before they make a mark, assuming they do not instantly disrupt.

PUSHING THE PURPLE BUTTON

One interesting facet (pun most assuredly intended) of the Amethyst relics, as I am led to believe, is that they are only selectively disruptive to technology. They have even been known to repair previously ruined technology. However, nobody has managed to analyze any of the relics, as its resistant properties inevitably fail when exposed to scrutiny. Even the normally flexible and chaotic 'rules' of magic have no explanation for this contrariness. Some things just work, some things just don't, and there's no rhyme or reason to any of it. It is possible that if all the relics were brought together, it would reveal some means of rejecting the effects of EDF – or, equally plausibly, of completely suppressing our ability to use technology at all.

THE AMULET, STORMCAGE, THE EYE OF GOD

The amulet of Amethyst fell originally to Torfin Gendron, across the ocean. The mighty wizard stumbled upon the circular but jagged stone by accident, pulling it from the sediment of a shallow river he was walking alongside. Believing the stone a sign, he continued upriver and discovered the outcropping rock that would later be the home of Torfin's great library and school of magic, Kirjath-Sepher. He never bothered to create a great device to channel the power of the crystal. Torfin forged a simple frame and hung it from his neck, and those years found the halls blessed with a newfound wisdom unseen in any human at that time or since. Torfin continued his work for years, as a nearby castle watched with fanatical and envious eyes. The fortress was Myre, a zealous order of knights committed to keeping magic from mortal hands. To them, magic was destined for a select few (themselves, of course, being among the few). Wilhelm Myre believed Kirjath-Sepher to be the greatest threat to the world and had ordered his knights to raze it to ash if the keep didn't willingly hand over all magic. Torfin and his loyal disciples refused.

To prove his piousness and dedication, Myre challenged Torfin to open combat, spell against sword, with no limits. Torfin agreed, and the Manora Vallis of Lauropa became the site of the greatest magical duel in history. Hundreds watched as the landscape erupted. Hours passed and the two were nearly exhausted, but neither accepted defeat. In the end, a final heedless charge brought Myre close enough to impale his sword into the heart of Gendron, but Torfin's retaliation struck lightning and fire from the heavens. Though his heart had stopped, the blade still skewered in his chest, Gendron remained precariously standing. The amulet slipped from around his neck and fell into his hand. He lifted his palm to the sky, and an eagle promptly swooped down to snatch the crystal.

The order of Myre and the mages of Sepher returned with their lords' bodies, declaring no further conflict would occur that day. The crystal vanished from the minds of both armies, and passed from hand to hand until it was found among the treasure hoard of a group of boggs annihilated by a patrol from Porto and taken back to the bastion for study.

The intellectual elite of Porto poked and prodded the crystal but could not understand its mysterious properties. This item, unlike other echan artifacts, generated little disruption in comparison to its power. In a final attempt to unlock its secrets, they surreptitiously contacted an echan expert in another bastion, David Chen from Genai. However, while it was being transported there, a wandering dragon attacked the flyer, sending it plummeting to earth in the midst of the forest of Crax and scattering the cargo for miles. To the best of anyone's knowledge, the amulet was never recovered.

The amulet grants its wearer a certain degree of prescience and resistance to physical and mental harm (+1 to Toughness and to Tests of Will), as well as clearing her mind and improving her ability to reason and remember (+1 to Smarts and Knowledge rolls). When brought together with three or more other relics, it also forms a metaphysical barrier against magical effects (bonus to defend against all magic equal to the number of artifacts). Otherwise, its only overt property is to cast a bright purple light.

THE BRACERS / ARMS OF TRUTH / THE PRESENCE OF RHINFORGE

The great dwarven city of Thos Thalagos was actually built atop the ruins of a previous smaller narros mine called Rhinforge, though few remember this. The tiny village of Rhinforge was the wealthiest mine in the north. Storehouses had to be built to hold the treasures they had unearthed. The mine's leader, Rarikon Baxs, refused to share this treasure with neighboring camps, with plans to use the money to hire an army of swords to conquer all of the land that would eventually be called Fargon. It was during this time that Baxs discovered the amethyst shards, two long, wide and flat pieces, just slightly shorter than a forearm.

To his amazement, Baxs realized the shards could not be cracked by any weapon in his arsenal and ordered them to be set within his cuirass, but this ended up not being feasible and he later had them placed within a set of forearm protectors in hopes they would improve his bowmanship. This they could not accomplish, but he found that they did protect him from harm. Near invulnerable, Baxs took it as a sign to crusade, to finally take the land as his own.

To prevent the formation of a corrupted empire, all the surrounding camps banded together. They struck Rhinforge before mercenary reinforcements could arrive. The combined might broke the back of the city's lackluster militia and Baxs was forced to flee south, his hands and pockets bursting with pilfered gold. Considering him too dangerous to allow free, the commander and now ruler of the mine, Thalagos Gin, placed a hefty bounty upon Baxs' head. The despot was finally located and chased up the face of Mt. Tirocinia, an active volcano. To deny the prize of his opponents, Baxs hurled himself to the flames and was engulfed by the molten rock. Thalagos Gin had the mining town renamed and decreed that none should ever speak Baxs' name again, excising this dark period from the narros' history.

More than 200 years passed before the bracers resurfaced, having somehow traveled another 450 miles south to wind up under Mt. Selkirk, eventually appearing intact from the back of a mining machine operated by the techan humans of the new bastion. Finding the discovery unusual, the miners brought them to their supervisor, who immediately ordered them locked in the company vault, where they remain in hiding to this day.

The bracers harden the wearer's skin against physical harm, projecting a magical carapace that defends against any weapon (+2 to Toughness). When brought together with two or more additional relics, the wearer is immune to fear and resistant to mental assaults (bonus to Spirit rolls and Tests of Will equal to the number of artifacts).

THE BUCKLE / THE BELT, BOOTS, or BRACELET OF DRAGONKIND

The only group or individual more obsessed with locating powerful magic than the Order of Myre is Darius Konig, king of Baruch Malkut. The kingdom has always been magically underprivileged: therefore, the king ordered all items of any significant power belonged to the kingdom and required them to be handed over to prolocutors trained to categorize and quantify their powers. Konig also demanded any texts or records of such items be tendered for examination. The prized trophy he sought was the manifest of Myre, the massive tome detailing all which lays within the Castle Myre vaults, be they magical or remnants from the old age of man. Darius coveted these artifacts and any others with the promise of power.

It was in their fervent pursuit that an Amethyst crystal was found, worn as a belt buckle by the noble of a small village called Eathar, who claimed the item was found on the corpse of a slain elvish princess. In truth, he had stolen the buckle from its former owner, but upon its discovery Konig insisted such treasures belonged to the kingdom and appropriated it for himself.

The amethyst gem had a longer history than that, having been forged into its present form by a mage from Laurama, Rhuunazodaeus. Rhuuna was not a powerful caster but did have a reputation amongst the other chaparrans of the forest. She stumbled upon the amethyst crystal in the most fitting way for a chaparran, finding it within a tree. A lightning strike during an unusually intense storm cracked an old conifer from tip to root. As Rhunna examined the char, she found the violet crystal embedded in its bark. This specific tree had predated the chaparrans' arrival and was dubbed the "Mending Tree" by their holy order for its ability to repulse the Tranquiss plague. Realizing the purity of the tree lay in this crystal, Rhuuna took it and fled back to her village. The Mending Tree was dead, but the crystal took on its name initially, as the Mending Sap. Rhuuna, in hope of channeling the crystal's power, affixed it to a buckle and tied it around her right wrist, believing she could channel its energy into her knowledge of Pleroma to cure the plague. She would not have her chance, as she was taken by slavers shortly thereafter, her ultimate unfortunate fate a mystery. The buckle, its true powers unknown, was passed through many owners over the intervening years, appearing at various times mounted as a bracelet, a belt buckle or a boot buckle by various dignitaries of the Blessed Kingdom.

Regardless of how it is worn, the gem improves the wearer's speed and reaction time (draw twice for initiative and take the better result). Additional powers come only with the addition of more amethyst relics:

+2 Relics: Boots—The boots will always grip on a slippery surface, and improve the wearer's leaping ability. Belt—The wearer becomes more resilient to damage (+1 to Toughness). Bracelet—The wearer can wield any weapon in the bracelet's hand as if they were a master of it, even if they have never touched such a weapon before (gain one combat edge of your choice related to the weapon, ignoring all requirements, but only so long as the weapon is in hand).

+5 Amethyst Relics: Boots—The wearer no longer touches the ground while moving, hovering an inch off the ground. They can cross any surface (water, mud, etc) and never leave any tracks. Belt—The wearer cannot be Shaken (but can still take wounds). Bracelet—Any weapon wielded in the bracelet's hand deals +2 damage.

+7 Amethyst Relics: Boots—The boots can also walk or climb on any surface, regardless of hand or foot holds (including ceilings). Belt— The wearer cannot take more than 1 wound from any single attack. Bracelet—Any weapon wielded in the bracelet's hand deals +4 damage.

Mecha protect us from overconfidence. Scarcely had we reached the edge of what I will, for lack of a better word, call the clearing around the shrine, then we heard a noise behind us, a sharp metallic noise like the draw of a blade across a stone. Sachenka turned rapidly, and I lifted the lantern. We were both shocked, but I regret to say, not surprised to see that the body we had come in search of had vanished. All around us, we could hear the scraping, clicking noises – though the source of the sound confounded me, for there was no stone beyond the shrine, only cloying swamp.

A noisome scent filtered into my nostrils – another anomaly, for it was a dry smell, like that of mildewed manuscripts preserved in some desert archive thick with dust, coupled with the unsettling bouquet of the reptile house.

While I am reasonably sure my people are not descended from small animals as the humans claim to be, nevertheless a primal voice at the back of my brain was instructing me in very strident terms to stay very still in the hopes that whatever unseen threat lurked beyond the light of our lantern would leave me alone.

"Stay close," Sachenka murmured. "Control fear. They want your fear. Makes them stronger." Her hand tightened on the hilt of her sword, while the other slipped quickly into her belt pouch.

"What are they?" I hissed back. I still could see nothing but shadows beyond the petrifyingly small circle of light.

"No-things," she replied. "No-shapes. Steal shapes, long enough to kill. But while they have shape, can be killed too. Hate light – makes stolen shapes seen. Stay close, move together, keep light high."

We began to move slowly back through the muck. With as much presence of mind as I could effect under those circumstances, I rummaged in my pack with one hand and came up with the telescoping stick I occasionally use to take self-portraits, affixing the lantern to the hook at the end and raising it high over our heads to extend the circle of light, even incrementally. Many hours passed this way, slowly creeping back the way we had come, our hearts in our throats as we passed over stretches where treacherous roots and low-hanging branches and vines lurked to trip us up and entangle us.

I recalled a passage from a pre-Hammer tome, in which a doughty hero was almost turned into a quivering wreck by the presence of a spectral army—one that was ostensibly on his side—following him unseen for days through a dark passage. I do not feel any kinship with this character as a result of this experience – for one, I am not a doughty hero by any stretch of the imagination. For another, wading through a swamp is an entirely different experience from traversing an underground necropolis. And to

round it out, I was absolutely assured that the things that were following us did not have any interests in common with us, except possibly in the potential mobility of our mortal frames.

We rested infrequently, and only as necessity allowed. Though I knew it would haunt me later, I popped an entire handful of caffeine pills to avoid falling asleep on my feet, hoping against hope that the inevitable crash would not hit me until we were back in the relative safety of Jairus.

The worst times were when the lantern flame began to run low, and we were forced to break out one of our dwindling supply of glowsticks while I replenished the oil. The sickly green glow scarcely illuminated a fraction of the area of the lantern, and the light glistened oddly in the shadows, reflecting brightly from what I would swear were silver claws that crowded near, just outside the edge of sight.

At last, hours or perhaps days later, we came upon a single ray of hope – the trees above us must have been thinning, for through the canopy we spotted a shaft of moonlight. Our relief was short-lived, alas: for no sooner had we sighted our silvery savior than clouds rolled across it.

In that same moment, a tree root which I could have sworn was not there a second before wrapped around my foot and sent me stumbling, the lantern on its pole falling from my grasp. The light flared and then went out. I heard a sound as of a bodiless sigh as I quickly fumbled in my pockets for a glowstick, and then a shout from Sachenka.

"Eyes shut!"

She scarcely needed to tell me, for my eyes were half-prepared to weld themselves shut with terror in any case. Suddenly there was a thwack of metal on metal, and a bright flash that arced up into the trees. I opened one eye and saw what looked like a fizzing star lodged in the crook of a branch, a shower of sparks falling from it like a waterfall, and Sachenka with her huge sword held over her shoulder like a baseball bat. Around her were a cluster of indistinct forms – I could make out only their white eyes, long arms tipped with silver claws, and the hissing maws that shrieked soundless obscenities at us.

While I stood rooted to the spot, Sachenka sprang into action. With the creatures seemingly weakened by the bright but flickering light of the firework, she took a step forward and swiftly brought her sword across the space where the creature's neck might have been.

There was a blood-freezing screech and the thing fell in two pieces, the shadowy form evaporating into the swamp. This seemed to rally the monsters, and they struck out with their claws, their arms seemingly elongating even as they backed away towards the shadowy treeline. Sachenka's blade flashed, cutting away the silver claws from the shapeless hands that bore them. One of the claws raked down her steel pauldron, leaving behind deep score marks.

She snarled and returned to the attack, leaping forward and bisecting the monster from shoulder to hip, if it even had such joints to measure by. I found myself still unable to move, unable to do anything but watch this deadly dance. Though outnumbered, Sachenka fought like a cornered wildcat, and to my astonishment I saw the creatures being driven away by the force of her fury. Then the sparking globe suddenly went out, and all I could hear were the wild shrieks of the shapeless beasts and the clash of metal.

Then I felt my ears begin to twitch and the hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up. I heard a sound, like a hissing chuckle, or like the sand running out of an hourglass, seemingly coming from within my left ear, and felt the sharp prickle of a claw reaching for my shoulder. I know not what instinct guided me in that moment, but I spun around, drawing my hand forth from my pocket and thrusting it at the encroaching presence. There was a bright, blinding flash, followed by a skirling wail, and the creature simply vanished, whether disappearing into the darkness or destroyed by the sudden brightness, I do not know. I stood there befuddled until I realized that Sachenka had retrieved and relit the lantern.

"Gone now," she said. "Good work."

In amazement I looked down at my hand to see the disposable camera, now little more than a blackened husk. I have said it before, and will say it again – it is good to be a gimfen.

CHAPTER FIVE:
MONSTERS

After the horrors of Sana, one might think that a trek through the wilds of Xixion would be a mere ramble in the park, but somehow I was even more nervous. Part of my discomfiture was due, no doubt, to the fact that I was now required to take the lead in our little expedition. We had been unable to find a guide for the meager sum of gold available to us, and as of the two of us I had the most practical experience of Xixion, I was therefore called upon to recall my experiences of ten years past, when I had last come this way with a caravan of techan safari enthusiasts out of Angel. The difference being, that time I had been riding on top of an ETV with a dozen humans armed with high-powered hunting rifles, whereas this time my only companion was a hot-headed Lauropan woman in patchwork armor.

Something heavy fell on my shoulder, and I nearly jumped out of my skin, but it was only Sachenka's huge hand. She motioned for quiet, pointed at the clearing up ahead, and began moving forward stealthily. I took care with my footsteps as I followed her, and we crouched down behind a fallen log. Sachenka gestured, and we peeped over the rotten wood.

Before us was a huge equine, the size of a carthorse, but without the great galumphing hooves: its proportions were as if one had taken a large pony and stretched it, enlarging the legs to slightly alien lengths, much like the limbs of a laudenian. Its coat, mane, and tail were pure white, and seemed to sparkle in the sunlight. From the center of its forehead sprang a horn, nearly half a meter long and spiraling like a seashell. It seemed to be cropping the grass, until it raised its head, revealing a red bloody maw filled with sharp teeth that had been intently devouring the mangled flesh of a bogg – which, I noticed to my revulsion, was still twitching and occasionally letting out a giggle. The unicorn twisted its head almost completely around, testing the air with a long tongue, forked like a snake's, and its gaze finally fell upon us. It let out an angry snort and turned to face us, pawing the ground with its forehooves and lowering its head, the sharp horn pointed at us like a lance.

"Um… Sachenka," I whispered, eyeing the nearby trees for avenues of escape. But the warrior woman was not listening to me. Instead, she had taken a length of rope from her pack and was twisting it into what I realized with horror was a lasso. "You're not seriously going to try to capture that thing?!" I blurted out.

"Travel faster, need horse," was her heart-sinking reply.

Earth was, and always shall be, a dangerous place for those who venture into shadow. Across the entire world, no valley, mountain, forest, or town is immune to the influence of magic. Where humanity did not take root to at least moderately direct the land's development, the flow from Attricana would saturate it, giving birth to the truly bizarre, fantastic, beautiful, or revolting. Classed together as spawn creatures, the majority of these beasts possess no culture and many never develop an intellect that can be measured or tested. A scant few have broken from these primitive and primordial bonds to stake a claim as a species worthy of respect.

90% OF STATISTICS ARE MADE UP

The rating system used in the following pages is one of many used by the custodians of Warraqeen to catalogue potential threats. I am not entirely sure how such determinations are made, or how accurate they may be in specific instances, as the effects of the magical ecosystem tend to distort creatures both familiar and unfamiliar. In short, take nothing you read in this chapter as gospel and always be ready for anything in the wilds.

FAE ANATHEMA

When magic first flooded the world, the saturation of enchantment began to reshape the animals and landscape. The dragons arose in imitation of the shape of the dominant life-form of the time, and an indeterminate amount of time later, well after the dragon kings had spawned their own descendant races, a new species appeared without warning from the forests. These new creatures resembled nothing that had come before. They were intelligent and beautiful, with the power and will to form a civilization while the other creations of chaos could only hunt and reproduce. Communities formed, towns were built, and cultures flourished.

The elder fae had emerged.

These creatures were tiny in comparison to the dragons, but reproduced a hundred times faster and were just as ageless and deathless except through unhappy accident. They spoke a single tongue, looked the same, and their traditions were mirrored in every civilization they founded. Yet, though creatures wrought of magic and able to imitate a fraction of the powers of dragons, they were not masters over magic. One day, without warning, every new fae child began to be born as a completely different species. They resembled the original fae in only the broadest ways. This first branch was seen as a deviation or worse, an abomination. They instinctively rejected the ironclad traditions of their elders: even their speech was slightly different. Most of these children were cast out of their communities, and soon began to seek each other out. They shared similar beliefs and in time, they developed a culture aberrant to that of their parents, their idiosyncrasies of speech developing into barely-related languages. As more and more came into the world, the original fae realized a drastic shift in their species was occurring. The members of this first offshoot had sprouted from the fae communities formed in plains and valleys. Shortly thereafter, the fae that took the forests as their home spawned their own unique subspecies. Fae in the mountains formed another.

This entire process took less than a thousand years, but by the next millennium, only one child in ten thousand was born a 'true' fae, and by the following millennium the original species was completely stillborn, the entire culture slowly becoming extinct as accident or quarrel claimed them one by one. Three young species rose to replace them: the laudenians, chaparrans and narros. Unlike the original fae, these three branches were shorter lived and took pride in cultural distinctions from their cousin races, though identical within their own communities. Narros built underground empires and cities atop of mountains while laudenians erected vast and expanding empires in valleys. The chaparrans vanished in the dense forests that birthed them.

These new fae were settled and complacent, but in less than half the time the original fae had reigned on the planet, the laudenians suffered another deviation. This new branch was shorter, with larger ears and a frenzied desire to learn and record what they knew. The laudenians became petrified at the prospect of vanishing like their ancestors. Believing the earth itself was the cause, laudenians employed their power of magic to uproot themselves and take to the sky, leaving their ground cities to their children, the damaskans.

The narros and chaparrans were not immune, and soon started to branch their own deviations. Through this chaos, there did appear a pattern to these mutations: they emerged more often in areas bountiful with life, and regardless of where the parent species settled, as long as the environment was similar, the offspring species was identical across the world. In the time it took the damaskans to emerge as a distinct people, chaparrans—the most varied and widest-ranging of the new fae—spawned not one, but three different distinct subspecies, each bound to a specific element of the forest (water, earth, and air). Later, these lines broke off still further, amalgamating animal and insect parts into their physiology. Many of these subspecies grew smaller, more isolated to their particular niche, and were harder to categorize and define by outsiders. There were other odd idiosyncrasies. The chaparran branches produced fewer and fewer males with every iteration, with the youngest species being over ninety percent female. The narros, due to their homogenous environment, produced descendant races less frequently, unchanged for millennia before branching to the ogres, which themselves mutated almost immediately thereafter into variations with one eye and two heads. As the chaparran branches became smaller and overwhelmingly female, narros were becoming larger and predominantly male, with the monstrous chiggoth towering over them all. The most devolved creations became known as the fae anathema.

Building upon the foundations of the fleeing laudenians, the damaskans grew fast. They became the most populous of all fae, helped along by their increased reproduction cycle and social structure. While the chaparran anathema vanished into their woods and the narros in their mountains, the damaskan anathema spread quickly over the globe. The first were the skeggs and boggs, then finally the puggs, a locust swarm of fairy vermin that had no purpose beyond eating, rutting, and pillage. But not all the damaskan branches were entirely uncivil; a portion of their population had vanished under the ground, lost their sight and became the tenenbri. Another group begot the gimfen, curious and playful creatures which thus far has not spawned a devolved species of our own, a fact that most of us take as proof (together with our lack of technological disruption) that we are the final form of fae to inherit the planet (I myself withhold judgement on that subject).

The Fae

Chaparrans

Laudenians

Narros

Sibharil

Neirryd

Damaskans

Changelings

Sylfaen

Faeries

Hag

Dopplegangers

Satyrs/Fauns

Harpies

Gimfen

Tenenbri

Ogres

Dawnlings

Dojenn

Trolls

Centaurs

Sylphids

Skeggs

Cyclops

Ettin

The Fall

Kythix

Oggrak

Boggs

Pagus

Tilen

Puggs

Chiggoth

Setting aside these last, newer fae branches always emerge less civilized and more perilous than their ancestors. The chaparrans thought they had escaped this, believing their future awaited them in the trees and that the faeries and nariisa were a preferred fate, until these almost angelic creatures descended into harpies and hags and finally the dojenn, one of the ugliest creatures on the planet, appeared from the watery depths. The ultimate narros anathema, a fate feared by even the ogres, is the dumb and massive chiggoth: the builder folk's descendants are fated to grow large and stupid, smashing down the mountain keeps the narros spent their empire's span building. Tenenbri have pushed their dark side into the crevices of their underground labyrinths, but as these subterranean fae begin moving north, their secret has begun to move with them, the kythix. Damaskans, alas, cannot bury their descendants in dungeons or in the depths of oceans. The skeggs are large and mean, but of limited and controllable numbers, but their descendent species of boggs was more intelligent and more numerous, and these in turn have been displaced (when they do not rule over) the growing mass of puggs, an unstoppable feeding frenzy of animalistic fae.

Then there are the tilen. With a complicated history of emergence, this young people has never branched into a descendant species. Tilen always produce pure tilen even when they breed with other species, even the never-changing pagus. Since the tilen look the most like the original fae (according to their claim), their existence may be the solution the fae need to maintain their heritage and prevent the madness of a chaotic future.

MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH

I should at this point stress that these deviations are just 'as far as we know'. As fae branch in response to a change in our environment, it is entirely possible—indeed, more likely than not—that there are parts of the world with unique fae subspecies the likes of which we can only guess at. I've heard tales of 'snow elves' in the tundra far to the north who die of heat stroke if subjected to temperatures more than 10 degrees above zero, 'sea elves' said to inhabit the deeps offshore the islands of Seliquam, even fanciful tales of fae with eagle wings who make their homes in mountaintop eyries. These tales are just as likely to be true as they are to be inventions of a fevered imagination.

THE FALL

The exact date was never recorded, though assumed to have been thousands of years after the emergence of the fae. Darkness washed across a starry night. There was no fire or brimstone, no oracle to herald the end of days, no trumpets blown, no seals broken. A gloom settled with the passing wind and a million fae walked from their homes and families, following an undeniable temptation. They were no longer slaves to whimsy, no longer products of chaos. They embraced a way that would ensure the stability of their lives – an order of things, never changing; masters instead of slaves to enchantment. They were corrupted by the Fall – the arrival of Mengus. This influence could only corrupt what Attricana created, and an army of followers emerged in a single day, a stream of pilgrims to the shores of a distant land, a growing expanse of black glass where the dark star settled. Of all the fae, the chaparrans were the

hardest hit. Many years passed before these corrupted fae returned as the pagus, their bodies transformed into identical, perfect killing machines, their might unleashed upon their unwitting former kindred. Unlike the fae birthed from Attricana, those from Ixindar never changed, neither devolving nor evolving. They simply were, are, and will forever be. While Ixindar cannot encourage spawn races, it can twist any existing life to its own purposes. The most feared of these transformations is the dark mirror of the elder fae, the shemjaza. Like the old fae, these creatures were tall and beautiful in their own ways, but obsessed with control and order rather than dance and play. They put forward methods of war while their opponents pondered and argued over celebration and joviality. Mankind now calls them devils or demons, and there is more than a little justification behind those titles.

SPAWN

Most monstrous creatures of the wilds are, of course, ultimately not of fae extraction, but are results of Attricana's influence on the world's natural flora and fauna (and, occasionally, the natural elements themselves). The most common effect of this influence is to expand the creature to tremendous size, similar to the dire beasts that flourished in the epochs prior to the ascent of Man, but occasionally a creature is subjected to some particular magical mutation which gives it unusual supernatural powers. A few rare animals are gifted with limited intelligence in this way, though few have yet developed any sort of civilization or culture. As any mutation caused by magic is invariably passed on to the monster's descendants, over the centuries many of these initial sports have produced true-breeding subspecies. They are usually far more dangerous than their animal forebears, as they have no intrinsic fear of humanity and will not hesitate to attack people when they feel hungry or threatened (or, in the case of some of the more intelligent species, when bored).

MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES

The following is a non-comprehensive list of the creatures of myth and legend that can be found in Canam. Such beings seldom completely resemble the creatures of fiction, but are close enough that humans commonly refer to them by the names passed down through history and literature. All creatures are categorized either as natural creatures, spawn, magical constructions, fae, or Ixindar corruptions. Only natural and Ixindar creatures do not generate EDF.

Barghest (spawn)
Basilisk (spawn)
Centaur (fae, chaparran branch)
Changeling (fae, chaparran branch)
Chimera (spawn)
Cockatrice (spawn)
Cyclops (fae, narros branch)
Dire/giant animal (spawn)
Dryad (fae, chaparran branch)
Elemental (spawn or magical construct)
Ent (spawn)
Ettin (fae, narros branch)
Fairy (fae, chaparran branch)
Gargoyle (spawn)
Ghost (Ixindar)
Ghoul (Ixindar)
Golem (magical construct)
Gorgon (spawn)
Griffon (spawn)
Hag (fae, chaparran branch)
Harpy (fae, chaparran branch)
Hippogriff (spawn)
Homunculus (magical construct)
Hydra (spawn)
Kraken (spawn)
Lycanthrope
Manticore (spawn)
Minotaur (spawn)
Mummy (Ixindar)
Naiad/Nereid/Nymph (fae, chaparran branch; commonly known as 'neriisa')
Ogre (fae, narros branch)
Pegasus (spawn)
Pixie (fae, chaparran branch)
Roc (spawn)
Satyr (fae, chaparran branch)
Sea Serpent (spawn)
Shadow/Spectre (Ixindar)
Skeleton (Ixindar)
Sphinx (spawn)
Tarasque (Ixindar)
Troll (fae, narros branch)
Unicorn (spawn)
Vampire (Ixindar; commonly known as 'ghulath')
Warg (spawn)
Wight (Ixindar)
Wraith (Ixindar)
Wyvern (spawn)
Yeti (spawn)
Zombie (Ixindar)

BOGG

Boggs are not the most numerous of the kaddog (as the major damaskan anathema are colloquially called), but they are by far the most disturbing. Before the puggs emerged, the boggs were considered the largest growing threat in Canam. They were numerous enough to be a hazard on their own and just smart enough to realize stealth and numbers prevailed against smarter and tougher enemies. Although it is believed boggs came from the larger harrier skeggs, there have been reports of boggs emerging directly from damaskan roots. Skeggs are often chiefs among bogg tribes, especially when a bogg mother has not been established, and individual boggs have in turn been known to set themselves up as the leaders of pugg swarms. The common trait of a bogg is its perpetual smile and hideously distended

mouth. With three times as many teeth as a human, the bogg can show nearly them all when it grins, and does so often. Boggs' pain receptors are wired differently from other species, releasing a flood of endorphins and adrenaline when the creature is hurt. This may explain their giggling laughter even when impaled upon an enemy's sword.

BOGG LORE

Boggs delight in both giving and receiving pain, and the saying 'that which does not kill us makes us stronger' is particularly apt when applied to them. Any physical harm that does not kill them outright makes them more dangerous.

Each bogg nest contains at least one bogg mother. This grotesquely obese female bogg is pregnant one hundred percent of the time, with between four and six uteri and an incubation period of twelve weeks. Each pregnancy produces between four and six bogg whelps or puggs (puggs born to bogg mothers are usually eaten, but a few are allowed to live as slave labor).

BOGG SCABB

Boggs don't bother much about strategy. Their preferred method of fighting is to launch themselves at the enemy and attempt to tear it to pieces with their claws and teeth, although they will at least make some attempts to maneuver in combat, unlike their pugg cousins. While they are in no hurry to die, pain is no deterrent to them – in fact, it makes them fight with even more ferocity.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Stealth d6
Pace: 5; **Parry**: 5; **Toughness**: 5
Gear: Rusty knife (Str+d4)
Special Abilities
Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Masochistic Response: The bogg cannot become Shaken from damage. Instead, it gains +4 to Fighting rolls. A bogg that takes a wound immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.
Size -1

BOGG THROWER

Bogg throwers are larger and smarter than the average scabb. They achieve this from puberty, which is a sudden and uncomfortable affair. A bogg thrower will let the scabbs or puggs (if they have them) run into combat first, approaching cautiously while hurling its axes at any target available. If forced, the thrower will join melee combat but only if there are a few other boggs there first.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d6
Pace: 5; **Parry**: 5; **Toughness**: 5
Gear: Throwing axes (3/6/12, Str+d6)
Special Abilities
Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Masochistic Response: The bogg cannot become Shaken from damage. Instead, it gains +4 to Fighting rolls. A bogg that takes a wound immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.
Size -1

BOGG RAKE

While other species develop the art of stealth as a means to avoid getting devoured by something meaner than them, the bogg rake uses it as a tool to satisfy its urge for torture, sneaking up close to an enemy and then stabbing it with daggers coated in (usually) the bogg's own body effluvia. The bogg will then stick as close to the victim as possible and giggle while the poison goes to work.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Stealth d8
Pace: 5; **Parry**: 5; **Toughness:** 5
Gear: Poisoned knives (Str+d4, plus poison)
Special Abilities
Foul Concoction: A target struck by the bogg rake's knives is subject to weak Venomous [+2] poison.
Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Masochistic Response: The bogg cannot become Shaken from damage. Instead, it gains +4 to Fighting rolls. A bogg that takes a wound immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.
Sand In Yer Eye!: +2 to trait rolls to perform dirty fighting maneuvers.
Size -1

BOGG SPITTER

Bogg spitters are mature boggs like rakes. Spitters continuously find new and even more revolting substances to coat their weapons in. A bogg spitter wastes no time in firing poisoned and diseased darts at its target, preferring fluids that cause dizziness or loss of balance to make it easier to keep their distance.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d4, Shooting d6, Stealth d6
Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5
Gear: Blowgun (4/8/16, d4 plus poison)

Special Abilities

Foul Concoction: A target struck by the bogg spitter's darts is subject to weak Paralysis [+2] poison.

Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Masochistic Response: The bogg cannot become Shaken from damage. Instead, it gains +4 to Fighting rolls. A bogg that takes a wound immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.

Size -1

BOGG MOTHER

Bogg mothers, much like ant queens, spend most of their lives immobilized and pregnant. Their psychotic children have the responsibility for keeping them fed and clean, which means that most of the time they are ravenous and filthy. A bogg mother is adept at grabbing the nearest vaguely edible-looking thing and swallowing it in one gulp – puggs and unwary adventurers are a common victim of this casual carnivorism. Despite having no actual maternal instincts whatsoever, bogg mothers have been known to go into a berserker rage when witnessing boggs or puggs killed by hands other hand their own.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d4

Pace: 1; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 10 (+8)

Special Abilities

Gnaw: The bogg mother can take an action to inflict d6+Str damage on any creature she has grappled, without making an additional roll.

Ham Hands: Str+d6 and the target is automatically grappled.

Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Masochistic Response: The bogg mother cannot become Shaken from damage. The bogg mother adds double her wound penalties to her Pace and trait rolls instead of subtracting it (so a bogg mother with 2 wounds has a pace of 5 and adds +4 to all trait rolls). If the bogg mother becomes incapacitated, she immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.

My Babies!: If a bogg or pugg is killed by an enemy within sight of the bogg mother, she can immediately move 3" and make a Fighting attack with her Ham Hands. If she already has a creature grappled, she can make a Gnaw attack instead.

Size +2: Bogg mothers are huge and corpulent.

DOJENN

Chaparrans were proud of their pedigree. Their descendant races were not massive ugly monsters with stone appendages or feral rodents devouring everything they could wrap their grotesquely oversized mouths over, but became beautiful, angelic creatures sought after by lustful mortals. Even when taking on the attributes of their environment, these descendant races had flair and artistry in how they expressed these features. Their echalogical echoes were represented with respect and worship, called centaurs, nymphs and faeries. This aspiration died when the dojenn appeared, rising from the depths of rivers, lakes, and oceans to feed upon drowning victims before the water claimed them. Dojenn are the dark reflection of everything the chaparrans had hoped to become.

Another noted difference between the dojenn and their cousin races is their appearance. Dojenn are one of the most feared creatures to look at in the world. They have lifeless eyes over a jaw of needle-like incisors. They can disengage their jaws and swallow creatures twice the size of their own head, and have been known to do so to live prey, using their long teeth to keep food from escaping. As time progresses, these monsters are appearing more and more, migrating farther inland, following rivers deeper towards established and unsuspecting nations. They have already started attacking Baruch Malkut and York, striking during the night and pulling dock workers before an alarm can be raised. Like all fae anathema, the dojenn are fated to be the ultimate legacy of the chaparrans unless something even more monstrous should emerge.

DOJENN MATARK

Dojenn prefer quick strikes to pull prey into their environment to continue the attack. When in the open, they don't conceal their presence, attacking openly and visibly, letting their revolting forms dissuade enemies from establishing a defense. The dojenn immediately rush into combat with the first creature they see and attack viciously, pulling enemies deeper with their

DOJENN LORE

Dojenn prey on the innocent and complacent, and take joy in the terror of others. They have no qualms in devouring both fae and humans, with marked preference for their own cousin races like faeries and nariisa. It has been suspected that the dojenn have eliminated several faerie branches, forcing these innocent creatures from their waters and woods.

Dojenn scales ooze a toxic secretion which burns the flesh of dryfoots on contact, but it evaporates quickly in air and washes off just as quickly in water.

The dojenn are an offshoot from an earlier chaparran deviation; a merfolk-like aquatic fae species called the jeilynn. The dojenn systematically destroyed each jeilynn home, and the vast oceans now contain little intelligent life other than scattered dojenn tribes and the occasional spawn creature. Rumors still persist some jeilynn have survived, hiding from their progeny. All dojenn most ever see are female. The males may still be visible as tiny, remora-like parasitic creatures that attached themselves to the female's underside and merge with her for life.

feeder tendrils and drowning or strangling them while their toxic jelly eats away at the victim's flesh.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Swimming d10
Pace: 10; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6
Gear: Harpoon (Str+d8)
Special Abilities
Aquatic
Caustic Excretion: The dojenn automatically deals Vigor+d4 damage to any creature it hits with a melee attack or grapples in its Feeder Tendrils.
Feeder Tendrils: +2 to grapple attempts. Up to three creatures can be entangled at once.

DRAGON

The most iconic symbol of fantasy, when the world of magic swept over the globe, dragons became a confirmation more than a realization, the final evidence that fantasy had invaded reality. Unlike many other fables, legends of dragons can be found in every corner of every nation in history, the symbol of both the greatest wisdom and the greatest evil. Across the globe, they took many shapes. Some walked upon two legs, some four, or even six. Many twisted in coils with snake-like bodies through the clouds while others slumped across beds of gold, silver, and skulls like lumbering cows. Winged or not, most dragons of legend could fly. Some devoured maidens, staving off a greater appetite for villages offering the sacrifice. Some fell to lances wielded by saints or squires while others died by the hands of their own tricks, fooled by clever wizards. Throughout the legends, dragons were either dumb lizards or keepers of great knowledge and magic. Some brought fire and disease while others water and plentiful crops. The sight of a dragon in the skies rained fear on everyone below. Their deaths heralded both ages of wisdom and despair. Their images upon coats, crests, and colors signified a country's dominance over the monster or their reverence for it.

Modern dragons were exultant over the respect they had received in their absence, regardless of the source. They were shocked at the amount of detail that had survived and the accuracy or liberties taken both condemning and glorifying them. Some were especially surprised at the singular attitudes dragons would take dependent on the nation. Rarely would dragons be represented in different lights within a single culture, causing no end of disagreement regarding their actual nature – how their bodies moved, what powers they controlled, or even how many toes they had. Nevertheless, to many people, defacing an image of a dragon regardless of its character was considered insolent and unlawful. The dragons' elevation to godhood was an obvious transition to some. Most dragons insist that such worship is undeserved, but even the noblest dragons have a streak of vanity in them, and few despise the adulation they receive. In one form or another, almost every dragon from human literature is represented on Earth, from the grotesque soot-belching eaters of the young, to the erudite masters of fire and water. Even the aberrations with many heads and tails and legs can be found, though somewhat rarer. Their origins are uncertain, even to themselves; it is suspected that Amethyst, the first and greatest dragon, created them from the dinosaurs who roamed the ancient Earth, but this is by no means confirmed. Initially, four dragon kings emerged. Each controlled a section of Earth. Lazarus of Grace, controller of the West and Shaka of Dawn, ruler of the East, remain the only known surviving dragon kings, though Goch of Wrath, one of the seven Azhi lords, claims to have been a dragon king at one point. Lazarus believes, although he omitted such a conclusion in his book, that Jahada of Glass is that fourth, taken by Amethyst as a mate. Her fate remains a mystery.

Soon after the kings appeared, many more dragons emerged. The Yok-ani, born from Shaka's will, were the first, though with their slow reproductive cycle, they quickly became the fewest (only nine exist in the modern day). Over the rest of the world, holy, noble, and guardian dragons fell under the umbrella title of 'archons'. Later, corruption from Ixindar claimed its first victims; from Goch came (whether as her offspring or her corrupted minions, none are sure) the Seven Lords of Ažhi, the first fallen dragons. Soon after, more dragons of hideous disposition appeared, including the cannibalistic death dragons and the cursed cancer dragons; these were feared and cursed by the name of 'typhox'. Many dragons, including Lazarus, believe that it was a beacon from Goch that originally summoned Mengus to Terros, and that the despoiled dragon king has within her hearts an evil not claimed by Ixindar.

DRAGON NAMES

All dragons, regardless of their affiliation, are vain and self-important, and adopt grandiose and arcane titles as part of their given names, such as 'Baraus of Rose,' 'Thyrsaz of Lightning,' or 'Lethe of Rivers.' Most, with only a handful of exceptions, actually believe they are the divine beings that lesser creatures claim them to be, and incorporate these titles into their names so that people know how to worship them, the title reflecting the portfolio over which the dragon claims dominion. Most also have special abilities or unique spells related to their chosen domain. Even those who eschew claims of godhood, such as Lazarus, have such titles granted by those who worship them regardless. A title is an essential part of a dragon's identity, and to fail to use it properly and with due respect is a mortal insult that the insulting mortal usually does not long survive.

CLASSIFICATIONS

There are three types of dragons: archon ('good' dragons, although by a dragon's definition of 'good'), typhox (corrupted or cursed dragons bound to Ixindar), and

neutral dragons (elemental dragons, who largely serve their own interests, and yok-ani dragons, who take no sides in any conflict on philosophical grounds). All have decidedly different roles and cultures, but all of them are proud: any truly ancient dragon should bear a title appropriate to their nature. Among these three types are several unique individuals of great power who stand out from the rest. The dragon kings stand above even these. Any dragon given a name and title is generally so powerful that it could wipe the floor with any puny adventurer that dares to challenge it.

All dragons bear more than striking resemblance to dragons in literature, both modern and mythological. The background enchantment permeating through history influenced later myths and legends to describe the creatures, all the while fooling those writers into thinking they created something original. Imagination holds no bounds and many descriptions departed often from the reality of the true creatures living millions of years earlier.

DRAGON STATISTICS

Dragons are unique creatures. While different lineages have certain elements in common, differences in age, knowledge and intrinsic strength make for vastly different creatures, even for those hatched from the same clutch. While the statistics provided in the Savage Worlds bestiary are a fine starting point for a basic dragon, each dragon encounter should be individually customized and possess one or two unique abilities related in some way to the dragon's name and title. More powerful dragons are generally beyond the scope of an adventurer to handle, and are not generally interested in fighting in any case.

ARCHON DRAGONS

The title of 'archon dragons' applies to the three broad classifications of holy, guardian, and noble dragons – categorized not by their powers and nature, but by their role in draconic society. Holy dragons are the keepers of draconic faith and mysticism, a complex discipline of which lesser beings are fundamentally incapable of understanding more than a fragment: their wisdom is great, but frequently cryptic to mortals, and they are renowned for being long-winded. Guardian dragons are the warrior class, defenders of the dragon way of life and the lower creatures under their care: they are all expert strategists and deadly combatants in both body and spell. Noble dragons are administrators and adjudicators, the bureaucracy of dragonkind: they all have formidable minds and are more focused spellcasters than the holy dragons, but they have a tendency to focus on their own areas of interest or expertise, which is not a problem for dragons but may be difficult for the rare mortals they interact with.

CANCER DRAGONS

The ugliest of them all, cancer dragons live their lives wracked in agony. They cannot die from any disease but have no way to defend themselves from any infection. They are receptive to any ailment afflicting any

CANCER DRAGON LORE

Cancer dragons are among the most revolting, loathsome creatures to walk the earth. Their enormous bodies are carriers for every malady known to man or fae, and the oldest of their kind have complete and utter mastery over the maledictions that afflict their enemies. A cancer dragon's breath is a disturbing mixture of bone shrapnel, diseased fluids, and gas, most part of the cancer dragon at some point before expelling them.

It is a common misconception that all cancer dragons are Ixindar-bound creatures; they are not. They were originally desert dwelling elemental dragons that were cursed by Goch. They are still Attricana-bound creatures, only suffering from a curse from Ixindar. Simply being in an area where a cancer dragon is or has been is hostile to a creature's health. Vegetation withers, animals grow tumors, and the ground oozes with rot.

Cancer dragons live in hot climates and seldom in areas that are cold or damp. Their skin carries a natural bluish tint often marred by scars and lesions. A few cancer dragons, old and near decrepit, have killed enough and infected enough that they have finally vanquished the pain in their bodies, but they remain infectious and their blood is as toxic as ever. Avoid any attack from a cancer dragon which can penetrate skin; an infection will surely set.

On a few rare occasions, a few sympathetic souls have used intense magic to cure a cancer dragon of their afflictions. If they survive the ordeal, the pain passes and the contagious blood purifies, allowing them to vanish and live peacefully in solitude from then on. Few cancer dragons have undergone the practice and even fewer have survived it: most will go to any lengths to avoid the treatment, fearing change more than pain. Those that emerge healthy find a new zeal for life. The stains of their sins remain, however, and those cancer dragons turning away from darkness have few allies on either side.

creature. Acid and poison courses through their very blood, their eyes are bloodshot and ooze puss. Many archon dragons sympathize with these pathetic creatures unable to rest or even sleep. This constant suffering has turned the dragon's disposition bitter and spiteful, wishing only to inflict their pain unto others. The only time the misery subsides is when the creature transfers disease or poison to a victim.

Cancer dragons breathe a fetid cloud of disease. Additionally, their breath and touch have the potential to afflict others with the horrible maladies that beset them.

CANCER DRAGON (generic)

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d12+9, Vigor d12+4

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 20 (2)

Special Abilities

Armor +2: **Scabrous hide.**

Claws/Bite: Str+d8.

Fear –2: Anyone who sees a cancer dragon must make a Fear check at –2.

Plague Breath: Cancer dragons breathe disease using the Cone Template. Every target within this cone may make an Agility roll at –2 to avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d10 damage and must make a Vigor check to avoid contracting a short-term debilitating disease. A dragon may not attack with its claws or bite in the round it breathes plague.

Flight: Dragons have a Flying Pace of 24" and Climb 0.

Hardy: The creature does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.

Huge: Attackers add +4 to their Fighting or Shooting rolls when attacking the dragon due to its massive size.

Improved Frenzy: If the dragon does not use its Plague Breath ability, it may make two Fighting attacks with no penalty.

Level Headed: Act on best of two cards.

Size +8: Dragons are enormous.

Tail Lash: The dragon can sweep all opponents in its rear facing in a 3" long by 6" wide square. This is a standard Fighting attack, and damage is equal to the dragon's Strength –2.

DEATH DRAGONS

Despite many assumptions, death dragons are not undead. They embraced Ixindar and dedicated their souls to its power, pursuing its ability to decay rather than create. When Mengus ceased to have any interest in necromancy, the death dragons – until then thought to be her favored children – were outcast. They possess astounding negative energy. They can control undead and cast necrotic spells. This effect decays their flesh and rots their souls. Death dragons look thin, with barely an ounce of fat and thin muscles hanging off their bones. Even their wings are pitted and frayed: however, the unchanging power of Ixindar keeps them as strong and deadly as they were in their prime. They cannot consume any food unless it has been dead at least a week. Anywhere death lurks in abundance, you will find them.

Death dragons breathe a miasma of necromantic magic that atrophies limbs and drains the target's will to live.

As a creature of Ixindar, neither their presence, their magic, nor their attacks cause disruption.

DEATH DRAGON (generic)

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d12+9, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d12, Spellcasting d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness**: 20 (4)

Special Abilities

Armor +4: Scaly hide.

Claws/Bite: Str+d8.

Fear –3: Anyone who sees a death dragon must make a Fear check at –3.

Necrotic Breath: Death dragons breathe necromantic energy using the Cone Template. Every target within this cone may make an Agility roll at –2 to avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d10 damage and must make a Vigor roll: those who fail are paralyzed for 1d4 rounds as the life force is leeched out of their body. A dragon may not attack with its claws or bite in the round it uses its breath weapon.

Flight: Dragons have a Flying Pace of 24" and Climb 0.

Grave Call: If the dragon does not use its breath weapon or attack, it can use the zombie power on every dead creature within 10". This does not cost the dragon power points.

Hardy: The creature does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.

Huge: Attackers add +4 to their Fighting or Shooting rolls when attacking the dragon due to its massive size.

Improved Frenzy: If the dragon does not use its breath weapon, it may make two Fighting attacks with no penalty.

Level Headed: Act on best of two cards.

Size +8: Dragons are enormous.

Tail Lash: The dragon can sweep all opponents in its rear facing in a 3" long by 6" wide square. This is a standard Fighting attack, and damage is equal to the dragon's Strength –2.

DEATH DRAGON LORE

Death dragons will always be near areas with high concentration of undeath, as simply being near the dragon acts as a catalyst for nearby carrion or the corpses of the creatures the dragon kills to rise and obey their master.

Of all the typhox dragons, the death dragon is the most magically adept, if only in a single form. Though the dragons did not create the discipline of necromancy, they are now, undoubtedly, the masters of it.

ELEMENTAL DRAGONS

Many dragons rejected the whisper of Mengus, but neither did they adhere to the side of Amethyst. Most were concerned only for their own affairs, maintaining strict neutrality in the conflict except when it spilled into their own domains. These dragons exhibited every conceivable shape and power, but the majority reflected in some way a connection to the natural elements of the world. There are dozens of unique lineages among the elemental dragons, most with only two or three members across the world. They exhibit no particular moral proclivities, beyond their typical draconic arrogance and self-centered nature. Only one lineage, the frost dragons, has been particularly prevalent in their interactions with the mortal world, and unfortunately they tend to have some of the nastiest dispositions: many lower beings classify them with the typhox dragons, which frost dragons find supremely offensive.

Elemental dragons' breath weapons are as many and varied as the dragons themselves, but the most common are fire, frost, lightning, and poison. They are all adept spellcasters, usually focusing on magic related (however esoterically) to their elements. Otherwise, they can be represented by the same statistics as the standard Savage Worlds dragon.

FALLEN DRAGONS

Most dragons of legend slain by brave knights or braver squires tell of fire dragons. Their scales are either dark blood-red or green as ancient bronze, and they bellow smoke and flame with every breath. The closest match to them in the modern age is the fallen dragon. The fallen were the first corrupted dragons, loyal followers of their greatest, Goch of Wrath. Unlike the repellent death and cancer dragons, fallen dragons are beautiful, with uniform scales and proud manes of gold or silver. Their teeth interlock without a gap or chip and they never display a stain or smudge upon their skin. They are the parallel of holy dragons, equally as ravishing to the eyes. Their voices are deep and commanding. They refuse to sully themselves by acting like undomesticated or uncultured monsters. Indeed, they believe themselves to be fair in their actions and just in their role as the most powerful creatures on the planet. They consider themselves to be the highest authority and superior to all others – a responsibility not to be taken lightly. A fallen dragon will gladly accept the worship of an inferior being and feel perfectly entitled to it; and when these followers march to war, they are the only force on Earth that can say without a doubt that god is on their side.

Fallen dragons rule over Ažhi Dahaka in Canam and often fight with the shemjaza for control over the pagus. Because of this rivalry, few of these dragons live near Ixindar, preferring to stake their claims elsewhere. They strive for dominance, resulting in more attacks from fallen dragons on civilized lands than from any other typhox. They prefer controlling land to dungeons or keeps, and will rarely be found underground or hiding behind castle walls. Fallen dragons will attempt to control everything they can see. That which they cannot outright command, they will destroy.

All fallen dragons breathe fire, although the color of the fire is not always uniform – the oldest and most powerful do not even breathe visible flame, but merely open their mouths and incinerate anything in front of them.

FALLEN DRAGON (generic)

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d12+9, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d12, Spellcasting d10; any Knowledge specialty d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 22 (4)

Special Abilities

Claws/Bite: Str+d8.

Fear –4: Anyone who sees a mighty dragon must make a Fear check at –4.

Fiery Breath: Fallen dragons breathe fire using the Cone Template. Every target within this cone may make an Agility roll at –2 to avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d10 damage and must check to see if they catch fire. A dragon may not attack with its claws or bite in the round it breathes fire.

Flame Master: Fallen dragons are completely immune to fire. Furthermore, the dragon can magically take control of any natural fire or fire effect by making a Smarts roll.

Flight: Dragons have a Flying Pace of 24" and Climb 0.

Gargantuan: Attackers add +4 to their Fighting or Shooting rolls when attacking a dragon due to its massive size. The dragon can only be harmed by Heavy Weapons, and its attacks count as Heavy Weapons. The dragon adds its Size to the damage of stomp attacks, but subtracts the Size of its target.

Hardy: The creature does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.

Heavy Armor +4: Scaly hide.

Improved Frenzy: If a dragon does not use its Fiery Breath ability, it may make two Fighting attacks with no penalty.

Level Headed: Act on best of two cards.

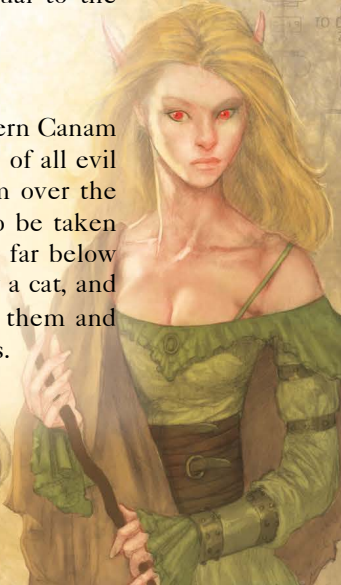
Sibilant Whispers: If the dragon does not use its Fiery Breath ability, it can use one of the following powers on its turn with no penalty: confusion, mind reading, puppet, or slumber. This does not cost the dragon power points.

Size +10: Fallen dragons are even larger than most of their kindred, and never stop growing.

Tail Lash: The dragon can sweep all opponents in its rear facing in a 3" long by 6" wide square. This is a standard Fighting attack, and damage is equal to the dragon's Strength –2.

THE SEVEN LORDS OF AŽHI

These powerful fallen dragons rule northeastern Canam with iron claws. They are the most powerful of all evil dragons. Many have attempted to slay them over the centuries: all have failed. They are never to be taken lightly. Even a 'standard' fallen dragon is as far below the Ažhi Seven in power as a mouse is below a cat, and no-one has ever survived an encounter with them and returned to make a record of their full abilities.



FALLEN DRAGON LORE

Fallen dragons have absolute control over flame. Where they go, mundane fires flare to follow them, and dry kindling may burst into flame of its own accord. The ground beneath their massive bodies is scorched black. Mages beware to use fire spells where a fallen dragon is, for fear that the wyrm will turn the magic against its wielder.

Pagus in Canam are almost always under the direct control of a fallen dragon, and only rarely are led by their own unbound chieftains. The fallen will usually dominate every living creature in a massive area around its lair.

The fallen were the original typhox dragons, and have always been the most powerful. They loathe the shemjaza for some long-past transgression but will rarely face them directly, choosing more subtle means to dispatch them.

Baenis of Gorge: Baenis sits bloated on his treasure, growing fatter on the rich livestock his pagus followers bring for him. Baenis is huge, but also slow and cumbersome. He stopped being able to fly long ago. He gorges on food every day with an insatiable appetite. In his prime he feasted on elves, giants, and even other dragons. Today, if his pagus don't feed him, Baenis will feast on them.

Balaur of Debauch: Balaur follows neither logic nor reason. It is hermaphroditic, capable of shifting its sex and preference on a whim dependant on daily desires. It only acts out of passion and instinct and never out of rationale. Balaur desires continued physical gratification and the desire for external stimulus. It craves destruction and lusts for beauty. Balaur enlists slavers to capture those of beauty of various sexes from various species and often has its way when assuming their form. Balaur is even rumored to have sent emissaries to purchase slaves from Baruch Malkut (without their knowledge as to the source of funds). It lusts over the youth, the striking, and the otherwise unattainable. It cares not for emotion and prefers only personal indulgence. These slaves never live more than a year before Balaur grows bored and slays them in the most violent ways possible.

Goch of Wrath: Goch feeds on violence, fear, and anger. Goch, the oldest and most powerful fallen dragon, prefers to allow enemies to destroy each other. Using her unique complement of abilities, she can inspire rage and violent actions in others, corrupting them to commit the most despicable acts. Goch is far older and powerful than the other Ažhi Seven but is often lumped in with them, a categorization she despises.

Lindis of Avarice: This fallen dragon spends every moment searching for more treasure. She ravages narros mines, attacks wandering travelers, and ambushes mage towers. She considers the taking of wealth of higher importance to causing destruction, and Lindis will often be very selective in her attacks, even sparing the lives of her victims in exchange for all their magic and wealth, especially if her attack may blemish or damage possible loot. No matter how much Lindis acquires, it is never enough. She is not arrogant as Verkelen and has the most guarded lair of any dragon known. Her dungeon is littered with symbols of varying magical potency with layers of multiple traps over many levels.

Lotan of Scorn: Lotan is vainglorious. His overinflated ego often nets him trouble as he brazenly strides into enemy lands, where he is often forced to retreat from greater foes. Legend claims Lotan lives in a great castle, though its location is a mystery. From a bed of gold, he commands others to do his bidding. He believes himself too important to go into combat, but will if a single enemy challenges him. Several opponents have tried but none have succeeded, increasing Lotan's already bloated self-image.

Verkelen of Spite: This dragon hates all other dragons and intelligent creatures and covets all they own. Verkelen assumes the world belongs to him and takes whatever he wishes. He is the last creature anyone wishes to make deals with, as he never keeps his side of a bargain. Verkelen keeps a large cadre of creatures as personal servants.

Zilant of Indolence: Zilant is a lazy beast. He wishes to do nothing but sleep and eat. He believes he has done enough for the cause of evil and wishes just to be left alone. Every single time he closes his eyes, he sleeps for a century. When he awakens, he finds quick and easy prey for a feast. His dungeon supports an array of defensive battlements, making him difficult to slay. He never initiates an attack, believing it uses far too much energy, though will still defend his lair from assault. He also sleeps with one eye open and as light as an elk. He may be too lazy to commit evil acts but finds good acts an even greater waste of energy.

YOK-ANI DRAGONS

The yok-ani were the first dragons born after the dragon kings, and bore more than a passing resemblance to the four that came before them (and indeed, to Amethyst himself). They most closely resemble the dragons of Asian mythology: wingless and sinuous, swimming through the air like snakes with no obvious means of support. Their scales are usually bright and colorful, and their mane-like crests resemble jeweled crowns. They are among the most powerful spellcasters ever seen upon this Earth, in either age, surpassed only by the dragon kings. Unlike other dragons, yok-ani do not claim titles.

Only nine yok-ani were ever born, and none has ever been killed or subverted by Ixindar. The only reason they are not classified among the archon dragons is their

strict adherence to neutrality. They count themselves as the world's ultimate diplomats. They even believe if the dark gate and its denizens remained in their own land, they could be allowed to exist in peace. In wars, yok-ani refuse to take sides, preferring to maintain the peace when finally forced to intervene; this they only do when an ongoing conflict (such as that between the narros and the tenenbri) becomes so bitter and protracted that genocide becomes a very real threat. When this occurs, the dragons use their magic to stop the fighting and force the warring leaders to a truce. Breaking such a peace treaty brings immediate and conclusive, though rarely terminal, retribution.

Of the nine, only one yok-ani dragon resides in Canam: Genai-Dilong, after whom the echan township within the walls of Angel is named. It is said that it was by his power alone that the refugee fleet was able to make the crossing across the turbulent ocean to the shores of western Canam, and that he now resides somewhere within the temple at the center of the town; there have only been a handful of confirmed sightings in the intervening centuries, however. For a mortal to see a yok-ani once in their life is thought to be a sign of the greatest good luck: two sightings are considered a sign of lifelong blessing. No lesser being, not even the eldest laudenian, has ever seen a yok-ani three times in a lifetime.

Yok-ani dragons' breath weapons are not fixed and can be any element, substance, or energy imaginable: most simply exhale pure magic. All yok-ani dragons are too powerful to be meaningful opponents, even if one could be forced into conflict. If attacked, they have enough magical power at their disposal to halt the aggressor in their tracks with the merest glance, or to teleport them to the far side of the planet if they persist.

HAG

Unfortunately, the image of witch and hag are often mixed. Where one can simply be a user of magic with a connection to nature, the other is a descendant species of chaparran, which has a renowned distaste for company and personal hygiene. The discovery of these creatures was not made immediately, and their origin is still disputed. As only female hags have ever been sighted, nobody knows what a male's abilities are (or even what they might look like).

BABA YAGA

Another piece of folklore, baba yaga is a forest spirit almost as devoutly connected to the woods as nymphs, though not being bound to any specific location or tree. Although not pleasant to look at, she has been known to impart some wisdom to travelers who come upon her, though she is just as likely to kill the one asking. However, baba yaga will not immediately kill all that approach her. If they have a talent she can exploit, she may impart her wisdom at a steep cost (and may still attempt to kill the querent afterwards). Legend has it, the only way to ensure survival when dealing with baba yaga is to maintain proper manners, be as polite as possible, and not wince when looking upon her face. Though folklore believes there is only one baba yaga, there are several scattered in various places throughout the world. The first common sign of their appearance is the small hut formed of natural wood that sits atop four footlike living trees. One account claims the trees can uproot, allowing the cabin to move on its own accord to a new location.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: All knowledge specialties d12; Fighting d8; Spellcasting d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

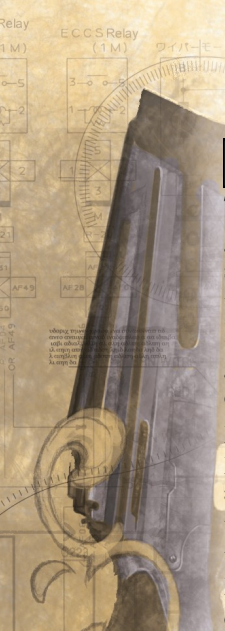
Gear: Various useful magical items that might be loaned to sufficiently polite adventurers.

Special Abilities

Armor +2: Baba yaga's skin is partly composed of tree bark and lianas.

Foresight: Baba yaga always goes first on the first round of initiative (do not draw a card) except if someone draws a joker.

Spells: Baba yaga has 50 power points. She knows the following powers: *barrier, beast friend, blind, boost/lower trait, burrow, confusion, damage field, deflection, detect/conceal arcana, divination, drain power points, elemental manipulation, entangle, environmental protection, farsight, fear, greater healing, growth/shrink, havoc, healing, invisibility, light/obscure, mind reading, pummel, puppet, slow, slumber, smite, speak language, speed, stun, succor, summon ally, telekinesis, teleport, wall walker, warrior's gift.*



BANSHEE

Traditionally, banshees, or bean nighes, were harbingers of death, but seldom assisted in the shuffling of souls to the afterlife. They appeared as omens from the underworld or otherworld (depending on the source). Like many myths, they were corrupted by other religions to be portents of evil. In reality, they appear as enchanted singers with melodic voices when an important chaparran is about to die. They have also appeared among other fae nations when significant figures are near to passing. The more banshees that appear, the more eminent the death. Because of their wisdom, they are often sought after as oracles, though their knowledge is limited to the moment and circumstances of a person's death, and they are loathe to divulge this information to any (and will never divulge it plainly to the person in question). Banshees appear in various clothes in various states, with long and short hair, as ugly hags or as beautiful faeries, hidden and reclusive or open and hostile. As their mythology is so varied, so are their abilities.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12, Spirit d12, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Knowledge (Heraldry, History) d12, Persuasion d12, Spellcasting d10

Pace: 6; Parry: 2; Toughness: 4

Special Abilities

Divination: The banshee can use the divination power at will. It does not cost power points. It can only reveal information pertaining to or tangentially related to the death of someone other than the banshee or the person asking the banshee's counsel.

Foresight: The banshee always goes first on the first round of initiative (do not draw a card) except if someone draws a joker.

Gatekeeper's Curse: Anyone who kills a banshee is afflicted with a lingering remnant of its magical essence. For seven days, at the start of each day, the killer must make a Spirit roll with a -2 penalty. On a failure, her Parry is reduced by half for that day. On a success and a raise, the curse is dispelled and she no longer has to make a roll for subsequent days.

Swansong: When attacked, a banshee can make a Spirit roll opposed by the attacker's Spirit. On a success, the attacker takes Spirit+1d10 damage (+1d10 additional damage per raise) and loses the will to fight until she succeeds on another Spirit roll.

SHEELA-NA-GIG

These are often seen guarding gates and protecting areas of powerful magic. When guarding something not belonging to them, they do so out of some undisclosed obligation. Though many are twisted in how they protect their territories, not all are absolutely evil, just inherently selfish. They have insatiable sexual appetites and will often change shape into just about anything to satisfy their urges. They adore appearing as beautiful creatures to trespassers, tempting them to their death.

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

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Persuasion d12

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Special Abilities

Armor +2: The Sheela-na-gig uses her shapeshifting powers to strengthen her skin against superficial wounds.

Claws: Strength+d6.

Frenzy: The Sheela-na-gig can make two claw attacks on her turn without penalty.

Shapeshifting: The Sheela-na-gig can use the disguise power at will. It does not cost power points.

IRON SONS COMPANY

The Iron Sons is the largest techan free-company in Canam and possibly the world. Very few people outside of the Iron Sons' ranks knows how old the company is or who originally founded it, although it is believed that the current operating general is not its first commander or even its second.

Though virtually every community apart from Angel and York thinks of them as a terrorist organization, the Iron Sons take contracts from all bastions and – occasionally – from echan nations. They don't care who pays, and their success rate is extremely high. The Iron Sons continue to spread their fingers across the land, operating independent cells in several bastions and in nearly two dozen stationary and roaming bases across the continent. Their membership is wide, comprising of humans from every walk of life. Though many members would prefer taking assignments that allow them to act like heroes, all of them are willing to swallow that preference for a steady paycheck. Most of them have contempt for the fantasy world and believe what they are doing is patriotic for the human race.

IRON SONS CORPSMAN

The corpsman is well aware of his fragility on the battlefield and will keep as far from melee combat as possible, firing his assault rifle as close to long range as he can. If enemies close to within charging range, the corpsman is likely to flee.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Gear: Light combat armor, caseless rifle (30/60/120, 2d8, 3RB) , combat knife (Str+d4)

Special Abilities

Armor +1: Iron Sons personnel favor light combat armor.

IRON SONS GRENADIER

Like most techans, the grenadier wishes to avoid close combat, preferring to use his grenade launcher on clumps of enemies, his assault rifle on individual targets.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Gear: Light combat armor, caseless rifle (30/60/120, 2d8, 3RB), combat knife (Str+d4), grenade launcher

Special Abilities

Armor +1: Iron Sons personnel favor light combat armor.

Grenade Launcher: If the Iron Sons Grenadier doesn't attack with his caseless rifle, he can make a grenade attack (2d8 damage) against a Small Burst Radius within 30".

IRON SONS SERGEANT

The sergeant is prepared for combat, with spare clips and a weapon reinforced against disruption. He is there to back up his men and ensure their survivability. Like all techans, he wants to remain out of melee combat but will not run from enemies unless his men have also broken off. Even still, he's not an idiot and will always keep his soldiers in front of him.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Gear: Light combat armor, caseless rifle (30/60/120, 2d8, 3RB), combat knife (Str+d4)

Special Abilities

Armor +1: Iron Sons personnel favor light combat armor.

On Your Feet, Soldier!: When an allied non-wild card Iron Son takes a Wound, the Sergeant can make an Intimidation roll to negate the Wound and keep the extra in play. The Sergeant can only do this once per combat per target.

IRON SONS LORE

The current general of the Iron Sons is a man known only as Chauk. He has personally commanded several contracts and possesses such high-level intelligence on bastion technology and knows so many of the bastions' darker secrets that the same bastions which hire him have also posted bounties on his head. As such, he has not been seen outside of his inner circle in several years.

KODIAK

Kodiaks are one of the few spawn races to emerge in modern Earth with any semblance of a culture. They began as simple folk in the frigid north, slowly developing a social structure, farming skills, and the first signs of a spoken tongue. Their massive size encouraged a preference for violence and a brutal first encounter with the skeggs affirmed it. While a few communities have grown in size and civility, others have degraded back to feral ways, retaining enough intelligence to plot their attacks on the unsuspecting. The region in which a band originates determines its proclivities. Most live wild, ignoring the outside world and ignored in turn. Those kodiaks bordering on Fargon forged a trading relationship, bartering animal hides for weapons and education. The narros dealing with the kodiaks also hoped their civilized neighbors would beget a safe border and an eventual host of unstoppable warriors ready to rally if the narros were called to battle. Unfortunately, some of these kodiaks took this knowledge of weapons and went to war immediately against their own brothers as well as the skeggs. After the skeggs were pushed back by the modernized mass of muscle and steel, the victors continued their blood rage until they were killed or ran out of food. A few bands, smaller and less savage, moved west of the mountains as far south as the lands bordering Xixion, where they have become

KODIAK LORE

Kodiaks have wide, trunk torsos but are still humanoid and easily differentiated from the bears they came from. Few people can tell the males and females apart. Kodiaks don't need to hibernate but they do eat massive amounts of food, nearly four times any other creature.

They have no table manners.

There are three distinct subspecies of kodiak. The best-known are the hulking brutes that most resemble the natural Kodiak grizzly bear after which the species was named. A smaller variety, more akin to the smaller coastal brown bear, is found primarily in the Seliquam valley and peninsular rainforest. The least known is a tiny population of throwbacks who are barely distinguishable from the animals they spawned from, and are revered as the closest thing the kodiak religion has to saints. The eldest of these, said to be as old as the present age, is rumored to reside atop a mountain somewhere in the far east of Canam.

Kodiaks have developed a culture in their short span of time. Little is known about the kodiak religion. They worship several gods unique to them. Their

major deities include Fressen, the maiden of winter and slumber. She attempted a mortal life with a kodiak shaman and was punished for her actions with the death of her lover. She birthed Chronzia, the kodiak devil, creeping from the north in the form of a colossal glacier. Fressen returned to her realm to rejoin with her other half, her twin brother Kwuoia, who is always silent and spends the entirety of his existence planting and growing trees

almost civilized. Although kodiaks have rarely been seen southeast of Quinox, the rumors of their migration grow each year. They are often sought after as bodyguards, thugs, or as savage warlords on the battlefield. Regardless of their role, they stand the tallest and instill the greatest fear on those that see their eyes.

KODIAK BRUTE

The kodiak brute is a fairly typical warrior-hunter. Kodiaks do not appreciate subtlety in battle, preferring to charge and attempt to put down the enemy with a single bite or claw attack, and resort to weapons and fighting maneuvers only if this fails. Against particularly tricksy opponents, they may lose patience and go into a berserker rage, attacking anything that gets within reach without regard for their own safety.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Tracking d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Gear: Heavy iron chains, massive battleaxe, or thick wooden club (Str+d8)

Special Abilities

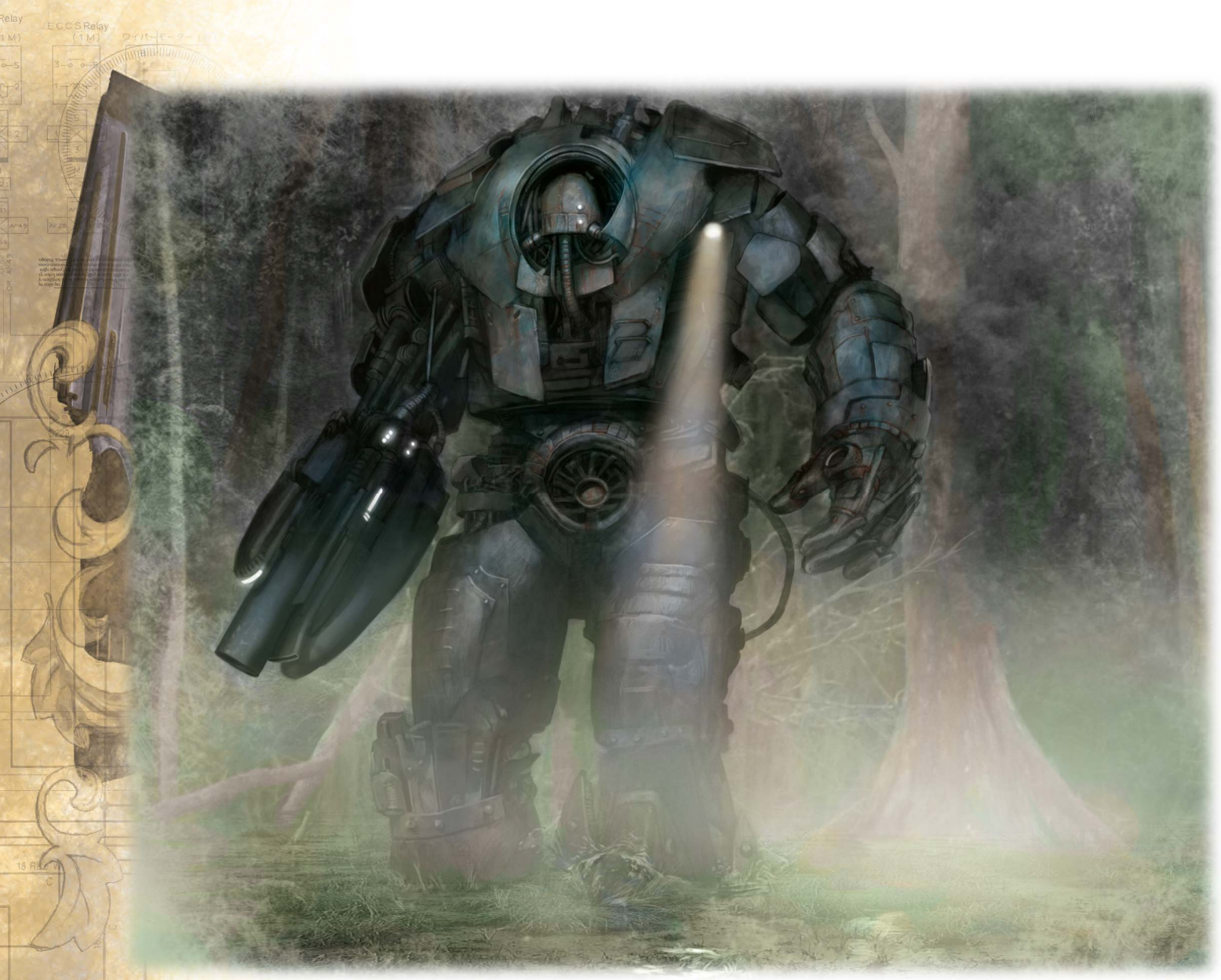
Bite/Claws: Str+d6

Expert Runner: When running on all fours, the kodiak has a Pace of 10" and ignores difficult ground from uneven terrain or light undergrowth.

Hardy: If the kodiak is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a Wound.

Size +2: Kodiaks are not as big as actual bears, but are pretty damn close.

Unstoppable Onslaught: If the kodiak is able to move its full four-footed Pace before making an attack, it can make two bite/claw attacks without penalty.



M.A.X.

Mobile Anti-ɛchan ɛXoskeleton

The appearance of this armored figure is rarely reported, as few ever survive the encounter. Despite the rumors and accounts, no one knows what its goals are, its origin or destination, or if more than one even exists. It resembles an oversized exo-armor, but with no apparent openings to accept a pilot. Its body is black without any insignia, and its arms and legs are as thick as the torsos of similar sized enemies. MAX possesses rudimentary intelligence and problem solving skills. Its low, deep voice demands obedience and its sympathy is nonexistent. No bastion in Canam has claimed its construction. It is never found with anyone else, has no marks of origin, and has never been found as wreckage to be salvaged. It seems to be on a mission and is singular in that purpose, never resting, never stopping until it has completed its objective—after which, it vanishes until another assignment is downloaded into its memory banks by its faceless masters.

M.A.X.

MAX relies on its durability for defense and goes on full assault whenever it chooses a target. It will use its rockets on the most lightly armored targets first, using its targeting system to light up as many enemies as possible. However, it completely ignores any creature that its onboard computer does not designate as a target: what criteria it uses to assign targets is not known.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d12+4, Spirit d4, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12+4

Skills: Fighting d10, Shooting d10, Tracking d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 17 (7)

Special Abilities

Armor +4

Burrowstrike Rockets: 30/60/120, 2d8, AP15. Instead of making a Shooting attack, roll to lock on (with all normal modifiers). If no lock is achieved, M.A.X. does not fire: otherwise, the attack automatically hits unless the target can evade. The target has one round per range category to evade the attack by making an appropriate maneuvering roll at -4 (Boating/Driving/Piloting if in a vehicle, Riding if mounted, Climbing/Swimming or Agility otherwise): appropriate technological or magical countermeasures that stymie the guidance system negate the penalty.

Construct: +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage; does not suffer from disease or poison.

Fearless: M.A.X. is immune to fear and Intimidation.

Reliquary Plasma Caster: 30/60/120, 2d10. If M.A.X. gets a raise on its Shooting roll, instead of inflicting an additional wound, compare half the damage roll to the Toughness of one additional target within 2" of the original target, as if it had been hit as well. M.A.X. can only do this once per attack, no matter how many raises it gets (but can apply extra raises to either target if both would be Shaken).

Size +3: M.A.X. is larger than the largest kodiak.

Subroutine R8.2 Targeting Array: M.A.X. halves penalties for range and darkness, and can make three Burrowstrike Rocket attacks without penalty.

Subroutine Z0.0 Reactor Meltdown: If M.A.X. is destroyed, it explodes, dealing 4d8 fire damage to all creatures in a Medium Burst Radius that fail an Agility roll and ensuring that none of its components are salvageable.

MERFOLK

As these chaparran descendants lived their lives on and under the water, they eventually replaced their legs with fins and a tail. It is believed these fae branched around the same time as other nymphs, specifically water-based ones like nereids and naiads. Being so tied to nature, and thus the world that reflected the power of Attricana, they were especially vulnerable to its effects. The few fae legends that speak of them refer to them as jeilynn, but many modern fae are unaware that such a creature ever existed; it was only their substantial consistent inclusion in human mythology that verified their existence in the previous age. They kept to themselves for thousands of years in the ancient world, and in the modern one they are virtually invisible, having been hunted close to extinction by their children, the dojenn. As it stands, sailor tales are the only evidence of their continued survival. The legends claim the females are as beautiful as the men are revolting—as close to vicious animals as can be before they stop being fae altogether.

Despite many fairy tales, there has never been a factual record of a bonding between any land creature and a jeilynn. Though human sailors seem fascinated by the idea, there are obvious physical hurdles popular fiction seems to ignore on a regular basis, which require fairly substantial magic to overcome (since bonding does not grant either partner the power to survive in their mate's hostile environment). Though they are classed as mammals and reproduce the same as dolphins, this is as close as they come to being related to other fae or humans. Another unfortunate misconception insinuates that eating the flesh of a jeilynn grants one immortality. This is false but has led to some barbaric attempts to test the theory.

JEILYNN

Jeilynn are skittish creatures. They will generally avoid contact unless they are certain that the person means them no harm. Even jeilynn without actual spellcasting abilities can magically control water to a limited degree, often using this ability to speed their swimming while slowing down pursuers.

Attributes: Agility d12, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Knowledge (local waters) d8, Survival d8, Swimming d12

Pace: 12 swimming, 2 on land; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5

Special Abilities

Aquatic

Water Magic: Jeilynn have 15 power points and know the *bolt, elemental manipulation* (water only), and *slow* powers.

NERIISA

This offshoot of the chaparrans is really several classes of nature spirit, technically distinct but displaying so many tendencies in common that they are usually thought of as a single species. They became known to human mythology as 'nymphs,' and their variety birthed many other names across many cultures: dryads, selkies, kachina, nereids or naiads, kurupi, fairies, kappa, narfs, kitsune and changelings. Their unifying characteristic was in how they intensified the chaparran tendency for reclusiveness and introversion by bonding with a particular element of nature: a single tree, a particular stream, a grove or grotto, even an animal. This bond is so intimate that the neriisa can actually merge their bodies with or transform themselves into their chosen element. It may be because of this that neriisa became strongly associated with fertility, and consequently highly sought after by those seeking a faerie bride, but like the nymphs of legend they are very skittish and do not bestow their affections lightly.

Most neriisa are bonded to inanimate objects or locations, and rarely move more than a few miles away from their host. Even changelings, who bond with and transform into animals, do not often move outside their chosen territory. However, there are notable exceptions. Many of the human legends of shapeshifting trickster spirits are reflected in curious neriisa who venture forth from the forests in humanoid form and transform into their animal shapes to escape the consequences of their often dangerous pranks.

PAGUS

Ixindar cannot create, only transform. Within a single night, as the black star fell from the sky, a million fae walked from their homes and vanished into the night. Many of the unfortunate victims came from the chaparrans that lived in a large forest near the land later called Kakodomania. When they returned a century later, they were completely unrecognizeable: not only had they been transformed to be physically identical regardless of their original species, but their carefree hearts had been replaced with dark, destructive purpose. Ixindar's corruption caused their skin to become thin, cracked and veiny. They lost all their hair from head to toe and their once slender forms bulged with slabs of corded muscle. After centuries in darkness, only their ears remained the recognizable feature from the old fae, around the same length as chaparrans. An oddity of modern pagus is that some survivors of their attacks have reported pagus with naturally round ears, though there has never been an explanation for this.

All other fae descendants have disowned this breed. Chaparrans and narros have sworn to their annihilation. Alas, the most unfortunate side effect of the pagus' corruption is their reproductive system. Unlike other fae species, pagus females enter into season every two weeks and gestation only takes three months. Worse, pagus do not require pair bonding to breed outside their species, causing their numbers to increase at an inconceivable rate. Pagus know how to forge their own weapons and beat their own armor from an early age. They are taught every facet of war and the quickest routes to success. Pagus warbands rarely fail in their goals, if only because their innumerable hordes can simply overwhelm all but the strongest opposition.

By the time the First Hammer fell thousands of years later, pagus outnumbered all other fae combined. While Amethyst reduced most to ash in his death throes, when the black gate re-opened, they returned with an obsessed fervor. Thankfully, Ixindar lost control over most of them as the pagus spread throughout the globe. Kakodomania found itself without much of an army, forcing Mengus to reconsider her plans and wait for their numbers to replenish. However, she is nothing if not patient. Without the dominating whisper, the unbound pagus went wild. Some pagus claimed freedom from Kakodomania but most followed the dictates of the corruption implanted in their souls hundreds of generations prior. Raiding bands appeared across the globe. Evil dragons took control of many to form their own personal guard, claiming lands in Canam for themselves. Many of those that were left became nomadic. Their hatred for the other fae never died, and they found new enemies aplenty in this new time. Oddly, every year, more and more pagus are trying to better themselves. The further they are raised from Ixindar, the greater the chance for redemption, but first they must somehow escape from the self-destructive tendencies of their kindred and find their own place in the world.

The human mage Kereptis Rifts calculated that more than six million pagus walked the earth in his day, and with their rate of reproduction (even considering their high mortality rate) that number must have easily doubled or tripled in the modern day. Their communities never grow larger than a few hundred before internal

PAGUS LORE

Pagus are militaristic to a fault. Each pagus whelp is trained harshly and vigorously from a very early age to become a vicious warrior. When in combat, the pagus are regimented and single-minded, unlike the riotous skeggs or the often solitary oggrak. The pagus take pleasure only in death, not in torture, and as such they are very quick in dispatching any opponents remaining after a battle. Pagus don't believe in much other than what they see and feel. They act on instinct and seldom with reason. Because of their skewed disposition, their intuition endorses violence and an unwavering dedication to the one they consider their leader. When pagus mark an individual as their chief, they swear untiring loyalty to that authority. For thousands of years, that fidelity was firmly tied to the forces of Kakodomania. No matter how powerful a pagus chief was, she always answered to a shemjaza, dragon, or occasionally the direct whisper of Mengus. When freed of that authority, pagus wander wild. Uncontrolled, they follow their last directions—to kill anything that opposes Mengus. Unfortunately, pagus must be told to stop fighting and, without those instructions, their path of blood will continue unabated.

Pagus think forward, never backward. They desire what they see and rarely plan ahead. They were created to kill and do so very efficiently. Unlike the shemjaza, pagus seldom play with their kills. They dispatch as quickly as possible, razing villages and eliminating its population before moving on. If they have carnal desires, they commit them quickly in order to resume their regular duties. Pagus are impatient and easy to rouse. They will take to war over a morning meal with no preparation from the previous night. They are decisive in action and when ordered to commit or if taking a quest by choice, pagus are narrow-minded in their fixation. They cannot be distracted and have been known to refuse sleep for days in their obsession. Crossing a pagus is unwise and in battle, opponents are warned never to leave pagus alive. If they survive, they will remember who wounded them and will think of nothing but vengeance. Pagus don't taunt opponents, and they never cheer. On the battlefield, they are silent, cold-hearted machines. They march forward and mark their targets. When a rival sees a pagus locking eyes upon him, that opponent must be ready, for that pagus is coming to kill them.

conflict splinters them. Their culture does not predate the present age, for they were neither permitted nor interested in expressing themselves while under the influence of Ixindar. This culture is noteworthy for what it lacks: they have no independent writing style (unnecessary, as they keep no histories and the only tales they tell are braggartly retellings of their battle exploits), they don't play music (excluding war drums), and they never dance. Since they were created for war and reproduction, the society that developed indulges in such actions.

One notable development of this is a festival of procreation called San Lossom ("The Founding"). All sexually mature pagus in the community divide by gender, and the males challenge the females to single combat; the women may wield weapons in this battle, the men may not. The males must disarm their opposites to earn the right to mate with them, while the females resist with deadly force. After the highest-ranked couples have concluded their private duels, the festival degenerates into an orgiastic grand melee. All the while, the war drums beat rhythmically, no different from any other battlefield. Because female pagus are as large and dangerous as the males, there is no separation of gender in their day-to-day life. Females have as many rights as the males and if a female reaches the rank of chief, she is expected to never be defeated by challengers; most female chiefs have already birthed a dozen or more whelps in their lives, so this is rarely a problem for them. Most shemjaza and dragons discourage the pagus forming their own culture, but a few have tolerated the San Lossom as it accomplishes two tasks: weeding out the weak and ensuring continued pagus stock.

Pagus were created to be perfectly obedient armies: separated from Kakodomania, their barbaric tendencies intensify because they no longer have a clear authority to follow and turn to the simple expedient of obedience to the strongest. As it is hard to dispute the physical superiority of dragons, this makes the winged gods natural choices for leadership. Sympathizers believe that, if instructed in ways of peace and given a benign figure of respect, pagus could civilize. Evidence of this has already been seen in Apocrypha.

Pagus are despised by every single race, even the ones that rule over them. Shemjaza think of them as hounds,

dragons as cattle. All other races swear to their destruction. Only a small number of nations and rulers have permitted pagus to exist within their borders, and only when it has been conclusively proven that they do not live under the influence of Ixindar.

Pagus are a dominated race. The shemjaza and typhox dragons have held them under their thumbs since the fall and ruthlessly murder any pagus that begins to chafe under the yoke of Ixindar's rule. There are few pagus in Kakodomania older than twenty years of age. As a pagus ages, it doesn't become weaker and decrepit as do other races. A pagus continues to grow larger and larger until the day it is killed. However, the mental health of the pagus, unless strong to begin with, degrades until little is left aside from an insane monster. Most of these creatures are killed by the shemjaza before they can destroy the settlements they inhabit, but some are enslaved and brought from battlefield to battlefield in chains. These pagus are called the shaitar – the breakers. The pagus strong-willed enough to avoid this horrible fate find their mental agility increasing, rife with thoughts of free-will and culture.

PAGUS STRIFEBRINGER

The pagus strifebringer has one role in the armies of Ixindar: to charge the enemy head-on and do as much damage as possible before being killed, opening the ranks for the next strifebringer. Strifebringers hurl themselves into combat as quickly as possible, while still maintaining a cohesive battle line to protect any outrunners.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6 (1)
Gear: Long cleaver (Str+d6)
Special Abilities
Armor +1
Focused Aggression: The first time in the battle that the pagus would normally become Shaken, it can make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus to avoid it.
Infravision: The pagus halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Ixindar: Pagus do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.

PAGUS BATTLESWORN

Pagus battlesworn choose an enemy at the beginning of combat and never take their eyes from their target. Battlesworn never switch targets until the first one drops.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d10
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)
Gear: Long cleaver (Str+d6)
Special Abilities
Armor +2
Focused Aggression: The first time in the battle that the pagus would normally become Shaken, it can make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus to avoid it.
Infravision: The pagus halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Ixindar: Pagus do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.

PAGUS OUTRUNNER

The pagus outrunner fires crossbow bolts into opposing ranged enemies, taking down one opponent at a time until engaged in melee. It moves quick due to its light armor, which makes it less durable than its fellows in close combat, but it does not shirk melee regardless.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Shooting d10
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Gear: Heavy crossbow (15/30/60, 2d6), long cleaver (Str+d6)
Special Abilities
Armor +1
Focused Aggression: The first time in the battle that the pagus would normally become Shaken, it can make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus to avoid it.
Infravision: The pagus halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Ixindar: Pagus do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.

PAGUS JANNISHAR

Jannishar are the elites of the pagus horde. The jannishar will choose an enemy at the beginning of the combat. It will do everything in its power to close with that opponent, entrusting its jannishar plate-mail to protect against attacks from other enemies. Jannishar never switch targets until the first one is dead. A jannishar always uses lethal force and never accepts surrender: if one sets its sights on you, your only recourse is to kill it before it kills you.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9 (3)
Gear: Spear (Str+d6, reach 1), Jannishar plate
Special Abilities
Armor +3: Jannishar plate is surprisingly good quality for such a savage species.
Focused Aggression: Whenever an enemy inflicts at least one wound on the pagus, it can immediately make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus to avoid being Shaken. This is addition to the normal Spirit roll it can make on its turns.
Infravision: The pagus halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Ixindar: Pagus do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.

PAGUS UNBOUND CHIEFTAIN

The unbound chieftain is usually an elder pagus, often one with a weaker bond to Ixindar or who has completely thrown off the influence of the black gate – while they may still serve Mengus (and not all do), they often do so in their own ways. The chieftain leads from the front, staying close to its allies, and like most pagus chooses a primary target to vent its aggression upon.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8 (2)
Gear: Spear (Str+d6, reach 1)
Special Abilities
Armor +2: Pagus chieftains usually only wear piecemeal armor, but their hides are so tough from years of scarring that it hardly seems necessary.
Focused Aggression: Whenever an enemy inflicts at least one wound on the pagus, it can immediately make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus to avoid being Shaken. This is addition to the normal Spirit roll it can make on its turns.
Hardy: If the pagus is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a Wound.
Infravision: The pagus halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
Ixindar: Pagus do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.
War Howl: The pagus chieftain and all other pagus within 15" are immune to fear and Intimidation (except Intimidatoin performed by the chieftain). Pagus within 30" gain +2 against fear and Intimidation.

PAGUS SHAITAR

The pagus shaitar, colloquially known as the "breaker." is relatively simplistic. It will charge into combat with the first enemy it sees and pulverize it into dust with its twin morningstars. Its brain is so wracked with pain that it is literally incapable of thinking about anything other than swinging its weapons at whatever gets in the way.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12+4

Skills: Fighting d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 11 (3)

Gear: Dual morningstars (Str+d6, ignores Shield Parry and Cover bonus)

Special Abilities

Armor +2: Pagus shaitar are immune to the pain of mere combat damage, their hide is so thick and conditioned by years of torture.

Dual Strike: The pagus shaitar can make two morningstar attacks without penalty.

Hardy: If the pagus is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a Wound.

Infravision: The pagus halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Ixindar: Pagus do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.

Size +1: Shaitar are even larger than most pagus.

Unfocused Aggression: The shaitar ignores all wound penalties. If it takes a Wound, it can make an immediate attack with one morningstar against the creature that wounded it (or the nearest soft target, friend or foe, if the attacker is out of range).

PUGG

Unlike other fae descendants like the chiggoth, kythix, and dojenn, the puggs are not difficult to find. Collectively, they are a massive, destructive organism quickly advancing beyond nuisance to real threat, a danger to nearly every nation on Earth. In some areas, they are a random and uncontrolled pest, amounting to little more than a handful of rock-throwing, blunt-spear-jabbing animals. While not dumb beasts, they have no avenues for directing their intelligence and when not given clear and explicit commands (backed up by the threat of force) they generally default to the most destructive action they can perform. However, they have proven to be domesticable, and when raised in a culture that doesn't promote thievery or deception, puggs can sometimes be raised to live normal lives as servants. Whenever someone hears the term "house elf," it is usually a pugg that is being referred to. For every chaparran or damaskan captured or broken in the slaver markets, there are ten puggs that are processed and forgotten. Domestic puggs are usually bred in pens like pigs, as the feral ones are too difficult to re-educate, but many slavers will still capture wild puggs to replenish their breeding stock. They are trained for simple chores, hard labor, and occasionally cooking. Sad to say, they still live longer and happier lives than if they had been born into a bogg or skegg encampment, or even one of their own swarms. Freeing a house elf is no kinder than throttling it in its sleep, as even when they retain their feral instincts, they lack the brutal experience necessary to survive on their own. In open echa, when left to their own devices, puggs are inevitably savage and destructive. In history their likenesses have been attributed to several fantasy creatures like boggles, brownies, leprechauns, and various other malicious sprites.

PUGG LORE

The lowliest of the kaddog, puggs have no aspirations, and only desire the freedom to eat and kill whatever they want. They have no self-control and only stop eating when their stomachs are too full to fit anything else. Their bodies can process any organic substance they can wrap their jaws around, and many will cheerfully attempt to eat inorganic matter as well. The two most common causes of death among puggs are choking on something too big to chew and being crushed or suffocated in a swarm.

Puggs can be found anywhere on Earth but are especially prevalent in western Canam where they grow at an alarming rate. Female puggs can produce a litter of two to four offspring every three weeks, though only one in five hundred survives the eight months required to reach maturity (the rest usually being eaten by their siblings and occasionally their parents). Estimates indicate that every square inch of the planet will be covered in puggs within a thousand years if drastic measures are not taken.

Slavers often capture puggs to sell as house pets to human owners. The puggs often don't even realize they've been captured, as they are beaten less under human care than under the skeggs'. Small groups of puggs have been known to wander into slaver camps and give themselves up for the promise of food, especially if they don't have numbers to overwhelm their enemy. On their own or when in small numbers, puggs are absolute cowards.

PUGG

An individual pugg is only a threat to children and small animals: any reasonably ornery housecat could see one off. However, they rarely appear individually. A 'swarm' is the term used to describe any number of puggs between 'five' and 'too damn many.' They have no tactics – they just charge, possibly crushing their own front ranks in the process. Puggs are cowards at the best of times, and refuse to attack unless they have overwhelming numbers on their side (or are so hungry they forget themselves, which is more common than not). They will gang up and swarm one enemy at a time, biting, scratching and kicking until it comes down.

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

Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d4

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 3

Special Abilities

Bloody Innumerable: If the pugg and its allies outnumber the opposition, it gains +2 to attack rolls and Toughness.

Claw Claw Bite: Str+d4.

Infravision: The pugg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Poor Oral Hygiene: A creature that takes a Wound from a pugg's bite must make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus against Knockout poison.

Size -1

SATYR

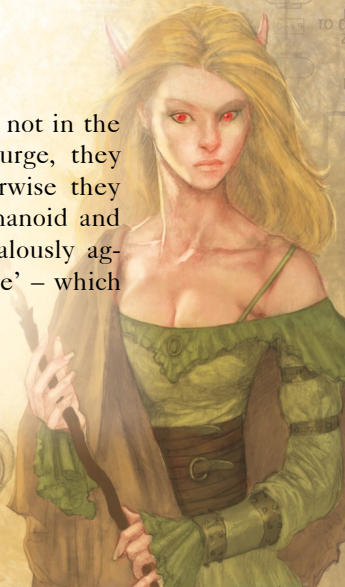
Satyrs, called scians by themselves and other fae, were represented somewhat accurately throughout human history. They are one of the earliest chaparran branches, eventually leading to centaurs. However, satyrs are not the peaceful skittish creatures the centaurs are. While less feral and animalistic than puggs and boggs, they are still wild creatures, and additionally are hypersexual, orgiastic, and hedonistic. The neurochemicals which in humans cause happiness and satisfaction instead produce an adrenaline response and a strong hallucinogenic effect in satyrs. They quickly crash from this high and must immediately seek out new pleasures or lapse into a dull fugue, during which they are easily provoked into mindless, wild rages. Satyrs are also incapable of bonding with any creatures, and thus can only breed with their own kind. Because their conception rate is the lowest of any fae, satyrs engage in as many sexual encounters as possible. However, the species has a strong sexual dimorphism, with female satyrs (also known as maenads) being virtually indistinguishable from human women, albeit with slightly pointy ears and profoundly unstable minds. Male satyrs are not generally patient enough to determine their partner's species beforehand, preferring to seduce first and not bother asking questions. They are incredibly charismatic and never take a lover by force, although their passions have been known to result in broken bones.

Satyrs seldom get involved in combat and are considered by many of the other races to be cowardly. They hide in forests the same as chaparrans and centaurs, though keeping away from both. Because of the increasing population of humans and their heightened sexual drive, many satyrs have migrated to nearby human communities to persuade passing locals.

Satyrs should not be confused with fauns, a very miniscule later branch from satyrs. Fauns are smaller, less cowardly, equally as hedonistic but in different ways, preferring drink and song as their pleasure of preference.

SATYR

Satyrs are not good at friend/foe analysis. If not in the throes of a serotonin-induced adrenaline surge, they behave evasively toward everybody. Otherwise they act amorously toward anything vaguely humanoid and female, or either exuberantly friendly or jealously aggressive toward anything that isn't 'their type' – which approach they take is largely random.



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

Skills: Fighting d6, Persuasion d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities

Charisma +2

Euphoria: When flooded with serotonin (GM's determination), the satyr gains +2 to all Fighting, Agility, Strength, and Vigor rolls, and to Persuasion rolls for seduction.

SHAPELESS WILD

Many opponents swear these creatures are undead, while others claim them to be shadows, but they are neither. They are born from the death throes of lost souls within the Sana Marsh but are neither ghosts nor wraiths. They breathe, but have no faces; they have claws but no hands or arms. They throw no shadows but seem to emit darkness, concealing their true shape (if they even have one). Only illuminated white eyes and dripping silver claws twice the length of human fingers emerge from a mass of blackness. Their sole purpose is to protect the Marsh and follow the commands of their demon mother. They have recently been seen outside the Marsh, attempting to drag victims back to the darkness to increase their numbers.

SHAPELESS WILD

Shapeless wild will always attempt to ambush, or otherwise take their victims by surprise. They teleport between shadows, keeping the enemy off guard and always reacting. When possible, the shapeless wild will try to gain an advantage through flanking with one another. As creatures of Ixindar, shapeless wild do not generate EDF, nor do their attacks disrupt technology.

SHAPELESS WILD LORE

One must take the tales told by tavern drunkards with a grain of salt. Though many stories of formless beasts beyond the bogg-controlled forests are told, no one worth the price of a pint ever recounted a reliable tale. Some described the shapeless as living shadows, as if the shade they cast peeled from the walls and enveloped them. Others proclaimed them to be smooth-skinned creatures with nary a hole or wrinkle in their bodies save for a pair of white eyes floating in their featureless skulls. A similar story adds claws of silver sticking from black fingers. Because of the lack of definition, all one can see is a pair of glowing eyes looking out from a black void, and vicious talons whirling about it. Some claimed the creatures were cursed fae, maybe tenenbri or some offshoot of nymphs turned to shadow, while others insisted they were rejects of death, raised to inflict their rage upon the living.

The shapeless are thought to be moving beyond their marsh and attacking nearby villages, or reaching far beyond to entice distant rulers with similar promises of immortality that drove the king of Kardia to madness and evil. The Torquil town of Barbecallis is rumored to have fallen to shapeless hands, but in that case, it was because the two lords in charge of the keep had rejected the advances of the demon succubus as they had already taken each other as lovers.

Attributes: Agility d12+2, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Stealth d12+2

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Special Abilities

Armor +2

Creature of Darkness: Shapeless wild treat darkness as if it were bright light and bright light as if it were darkness for purposes of determining penalties.

Fear -2

Hidden Ways: Shapeless wild can enter a shadow and instantly move to any other shadow within 30".

Ixindar: Shapeless wild do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.

Madness Given Form: If a creature fails its Fear check against the shapeless wild, the next attack it makes against the shapeless automatically fails.

SHEMJAZA

The greatest departure from legends, the modern commanders of the dark armies of Ixindar don't wield pitchforks, have cloven hooves and spiked tails, or sport horns, though they do have pointed ears. They resemble the oldest fae races, but are not fae: they are the pure manifestation of the power of syntropy, given the form of the ancient fae by the intelligence of Mengus. The fact that they closely resemble tilen gives credence to the claim that the tilen are the nearest to the original fae form, but has not helped the tilen's desire for peace with the various nations of the world. Their appearance

SHEMJAZA STATS

Shemjaza are all unique creatures with capabilities and powers tailored for a particular role in the armies of Ixindar. There should never be a point at which shemjaza are a pushover for player characters, and so no game statistics are provided for them. They should either be so powerful that taking them on would be obviously suicidal, or customized to ensure that they remain a challenge for even a powerful party. Every shemjaza has at least Fear -2, and also has a broad, thematic ability, such as immunity to certain kinds of damage or the power to walk through their enemy's nightmares. Such abilities should have vague or imaginative names but be interpreted as absolutely literally as possible in an encounter.

was uncommon in the time of Terros and unseen in Canam until only a few years ago. The shemjaza are usually the ones leading armies and committing secret tasks bestowed by their lords or god. Each one is worth a hundred pagus.

They stand much taller than any fae, growing in stature as their power increases and have solid black eyes with no differentiation of the pupil, iris, or sclera. They feel nothing except for physical and emotional extremes. Everything must be pushed to an excessive limit, even pain, a sensation they are fascinated by and go out of their way to inflict on both themselves and others. Some intentionally mutilate themselves to keep their sensations constant. Despite their size and the intimidating aspect of their eyes, they are described as being astoundingly attractive and charismatic. Another misconception claims they are all sadistically evil, which is not entirely true: what they are is the epitome of amorality. The concepts of good and evil are meaningless to them, and even chaos and order confuse them as philosophical notions. All they understand is obedience, and unlike the pagus and typhox dragons, they do not need to be prodded or threatened to obtain that obedience. To a shemjaza, fulfilling the interests of Mengus and Ixindar are as natural as breathing. They

are permitted the greatest latitude of any of Ixindar's creatures, for they regard freedom as the greatest evil in the universe. All pagus in Kakodomania are controlled by the shemjaza, and a few have even appeared in eastern Canam to usurp the dominion of the typhox dragons. Shemjaza still number quite few even in Kakodomania, though they are by far are the most dangerous servants of Mengus.

SKEGG

The skeggs share the boggs' desire to achieve satisfaction through violence. However, they are not capable of the boggs' casual masochism, and so direct all their energy into harming others. Since they have no talent for building large communities, they must raid for food and supplies. On their own, they attack caravans and hamlets but rarely towns or villages unless they have enslaved boggs or puggs to wear down the enemies.

SKEGG LORE

The skeggs consider themselves the ruling caste of kaddog and will always assume control over boggs and puggs whenever they encounter them. Both skeggs and boggs look upon their descendant puggs with contempt, offering them no rights or privileges, throwing them in front of a battle line, assigning them the hardest labor, occasionally using them as furniture, and even breeding them as a food source.

Skeggs will not breed with boggs and will oftentimes keep a bogg mother in chains to maintain order over a nest. Skeggs also have a basic knowledge of weapons and armor and enough intelligence to appreciate treasure and the affectations of culture—skills worth their weight in a chained bogg mother. Pugg-drivers occasionally sell some of their stock to human traders.

Skeggs are the smartest of the kaddog, just intelligent enough not to rush head strong into a fight, driving the lesser castes up first. They have a love/hate relationship with the boggs, but feel nothing but disgust for puggs, which they regard as little better than useful vermin.

SKEGG THUG

Skeggs are crafty fighters in comparison to their lesser kin. Their preferred method of combat is to force the enemy into a position of disadvantage (ideally one from which it can't fight back at all) and then bludgeon it to death as painfully as possible.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6
Gear: Club (Str+d6)
Special Abilities
Infravision: The skegg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

SKEGG INCITER

Skeggs feel pain as much as anyone else, and don't find it pleasant like boggs do. Whenever possible, a skegg leads from behind, usually throwing boggs or puggs into battle in front of him and only wading in to the fray for the satisfaction of finishing off a weakened enemy. Their battle strategy may be poor, but where maintaining the integrity of their own skin is concerned, the skegg inciter is usually tactically sound.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)
Gear: Spear (Str+d6, reach 1)
Special Abilities
Armor +1
Infravision: The skegg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.
You're Not Finished: The skegg can make an Intimidation roll when an ally is taken out of combat to allow it to make one final action immediately before being removed from play.

SKEGG PUGG-DRIVER

A skegg pugg-driver is the master of the band's pugg slaves. Their strategy consists of 'point puggs at enemy; beat them if they face the wrong way'. Their most common weapon of choice is a 'pugg-prodder,' a long pole with a two-pronged claw on the end, covered on the inside with an array of vicious spikes, which they use most often to catch puggs by the neck and fling them bodily at their foes.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Gear: Pugg-prodder (Str+d6, reach 1)

Special Abilities

Armor +1

Infravision: The skegg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Nice Throw, Boss!: The skegg pugg-driver throws a pugg at an enemy up to 15" away. The pugg then makes a melee attack at +4.

THORNSHROUD

In the darklands, there is a complex hierarchy, which not all of Mengus' minions care to follow. Shemjaza, typhox dragons, and other powerful evil creatures engage in an intricate dance of dominance and deference. In theory, shemjaza overrule all other subjects of Ixindar, but in practice they often have their own concerns and feel no compulsion to enforce their will, enabling other overlords to take power. None of this mattered when Thornshroud arrived.

Thornshroud is a construct of living armor with the head of a human grafted onto it. The head is withered and decrepit but still conscious and aware. Negative energies keep the psyche intact, though twisted by whispers from the darkness. When Thornshroud arrived in Canam, he swayed any forces he approached. Pagus, shemjaza, and dragons wilted under his will. Instead of corralling the masses of evil behind him in an assault on Canam, this armor vanished on a mission no one else was aware of, one he wouldn't share with his subordinates. He told them it came from the highest authority, orders from the greatest voice of all.

Thornshroud takes joy in the torture and suffering of those he deems inferior, which includes every living and unliving creature on the planet. Unlike a pagus, Thornshoud wears his emotion visibly, laughing at the pain he inflicts, taking trophies of those he kills, brandishing pelts and skulls as marks of this glory. His ears are round, proof that such depravity could only come from a human. Not even he knows his own age or where on the planet he fell under the shadow of corruption.

THORNSHROUD

Thornshroud's sword is black as Ixindar itself and crackles with negative energy. Thornshroud will throw itself into the middle of as many combatants as possible, taking full advantage of its extra actions to try to inflict as many injuries as it can. It does not hesitate to pump up its attacks with advantages and paid invocations, knowing that it can easily escape if it loses the fight. If it is defeated, Thornshroud's head detaches from its body, grows four spidery legs, and attempts to flee.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d12+6, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d12, Intimidation d10, Tracking d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 13 (5)

Special Abilities

Absolute Articulation: Thornshroud can take two actions without penalty.

Armor +4

Bindings Macabre: As long as it does not make a Holocaust attack on its turn, Thornshroud can attempt to grapple targets up to 6" away. It can attack any bound creature with corrupting energy (Vigor to attack, Vigor+d8 damage) and take another action without penalty (this stacks with Absolute Articulation). Only one target can be grabbed this way at a time. The target is automatically released if Thornshroud makes a Holocaust attack.

Fear -4

Holocaust, Blade of the Reaper: Str+d8. Whenever Thornshroud inflicts a Wound with this blade, it gains a Benny.

Size +1

Structural Integrity: Thornshroud's head can detach and move on its own if the body is defeated. The head has Pace 6, Toughness 8, Parry 5, and is Small (-2 for larger creatures to hit).

WEREBEAST

Contrary to popular belief, one does not contract the disease of lycanthropy by being bitten by a werewolf. Most werecreatures are born that way, either to fae (mostly chaparrans) or humans unusually susceptible to magic. Afflicted lycanthropy is not a disease, but a deliberate curse, usually inflicted by a particularly invidious spell. Throughout human history, therianthropes have been described as being tricksters, villains, wise shamans, or faithful lovers. There is no distinct therianthrope culture, though the condition passes along family lines and may influence local traditions. Natural werebeasts are believed to have originated when one of the rare spirit-bonded grew so close to their spirit animal that the two became merged. As with most magical mutation, some of the traits of the now hybrid being would have passed on to its progeny. Of course, this theory does not account for the number of such creatures relative to the rarity of spirit-bonded, and it is possible that other forms of magical shapeshifting may contribute to the phenomenon. The therianthrope condition has also been seen in reverse. Though magic usually creates a dire creature, occasionally a normal animal may develop a level of intelligence equal to or higher than humans or fae. The darawren believe that when such an uplifted animal develops a connection with a humanoid, it can eventually discover how to take their form, though rare is the animal, even an intelligent one, that can pass for a hominid without any tells. Regardless of its source, the transformative condition is only passed on to the werebeast's offspring about half the time, even when they bond with another werecreature.

A therianthrope usually (but not always) has three forms: their birth form (usually humanoid), their secondary form (usually the animal), and a hybrid of the two that combines the stature and flexibility of the humanoid shape with the senses and instincts of the animal. In their two natural states, the werebeast isn't substantially different from an unaltered member of the species: the two-legs has marginally better senses, the four-legs is slightly less hobbled in the area of abstract reasoning. In the hybrid form, the therianthrope has not only all of the strengths of both forms with few of the weaknesses, but the strength of the hybrid increases proportionally with the animal's size (although this is actually a detriment to certain werecreatures: werebears, for instance, are smaller and therefore weaker in their hybrid form than in their bear form, although they have far greater dexterity than the similar-looking kodiaks).

Natural-born werecreatures are not predisposed to any morality, although the majority have an at least semi-feral lifestyle and live in their hybrid and transformed state almost as often as their original form. Those cursed by magic often turn into psychotic monsters, as their minds are unable to handle the shock of the first transformation and crack under the strain. However, it is not unknown for a werecreature's mate to voluntarily accept such a spell, and while such folk tend to be more capricious than most due to not having the psychology of shapeshifting ingrained since birth, they are no more disposed toward antisocial behavior than a natural therianthrope.

WEREBEAST STATISTICS

The statistics given for Werewolves in the Savage Worlds rulebook are sufficient for most werebeasts, minus the Infection ability. These statistics apply only to werebeasts in their hybrid form: as long as they are not exposed to moonlight they can freely switch between human, beast, and hybrid form by making a Vigor roll. Exposure to moonlight, regardless of the phase of the moon, automatically triggers hybrid form.

If you have any romantic notions about riding a unicorn, forget them. They are big, ornery bastards who reek of decaying meals, and your every moment astride them is spent avoiding becoming another meal. They toss their massive heads trying to dislodge you, and only the constant pressure of some sort of weapon on their jugular is conducive to getting them to go where you want them to.

They're intelligent, too – the whole thing is a game to them. And do not get me started on the difficulties of dismounting. After some considerable effort, Sachenka managed to drive the horrible creature away, and we surveyed our new surroundings. Ahead of us rose a massive expanse of stone, which even in this late summer heat was capped with snow. I do not know what name the humans once gave to this mountain, but it had an ominous look, as if it were staring at us and warning us away.

"We go," said Sachenka, and headed towards it.

"Of course we do," I muttered, and followed. After a few minutes' brisk walking, we arrived at a clearing, from which the faint signs of a path, very overgrown but still passable, could be made out. Above the path, the mountain loomed.

It was a most picturesque image, despite the threatening aspect of the peak, and I decided that come hell or high water, I would photograph it.

"What doing?" Sachenka hissed at me as I unfolded my rig from my pack. "No time for games!"

"This, my dear, is important historiographical work. I'm not accompanying you into this mad wilderness just for the sake of friendship, after all." I pulled the priming chemicals out of my pack, noting with satisfaction that the bumpy unicorn ride had not spilled them. "Won't take more than ten minutes. Go ahead and scout around. If I require rescue at any point, I shall shout as loud as ever I can, and then climb that tree." I pointed at a large conifer with branches just low enough for one of my stature to get a purchase on.

She scowled, then wandered off down the path, hand on sword. I set up my equipment, took my shot, and was just disassembling everything when I heard a shout from down the path. I quickly grabbed my gear and ran in the direction Sachenka had taken, to find her rubbing her nose with one hand and flailing her sword-hilt at the air with the other. As I approached, I noticed that the sword was rebounding from the very air, as though striking some invisible surface.

"What's this?" I inquired, repacking my camera before running my hands over the seemingly empty space.

"Something there!" she growled. "Something in the way!"

She did appear to be correct. The obstacle did not repel like a technological force field would, nor spark and crackle like a magical one. It had a definite texture, not quite like concrete, not quite like metal, and not quite like plastic, but by the angularity of its surfaces, it was clearly machined. I worked my way up and down, but it seemed to extend for quite some distance in each direction.

"This is fascinating," I said to Sachenka, who was pacing up and down like a caged leopard. "It's clearly of techan make, and yet whatever science is keeping it invisible hasn't disrupted in the ambient field. It's a shame we don't have a damaskan with us, we might be able to see if a targeted effect—"

Sachenka let out an exasperated noise and stomped off into the bush, returning a few moments later with a small, green-skinned creature with wings squirming in her hands.

Without ceremony, she flung the pixie at the invisible wall and it bounced off, fluttering high into the sky and letting out a spray of incomprehensible invective, as well as urine, at us. Upon the obstacle, the creature's impact

seemed to have had no effect.

"There was no call for that," I chided her, but my mind was already turning to the problem at hand. Of all the sciences, chemistry is my forte, and the fact that the material did not respond to a disruptive influence suggested that its invisibility was a part of its essential physical properties rather than some external force. That gave me an idea, and I rummaged in my pack, coming up at last with an aerosol can of matte grey paint that I normally use for reducing glare. I shook the can and sprayed a spot on the obstacle, then wiped it away with a rag. For a moment, the surface remained grey, then slowly took on the colors of nature once more.

"Aha!" I declared. "Some sort of conditioned, photoreactive camouflage. This is probably a building of some description."

"Enough talk," Sachenka growled. "If building, find door."

"But of course," I smiled, and began to walk along the length of the structure, spraying it with a long line of paint as I went. At last, my makeshift solution hit upon what we were seeking – a clear doorway recessed into the wall. Further spraying indicated that it was clearly of techan-make, for the door was controlled by an electronic lock, which, unlike the phototropic material, had long since disrupted. With Sachenka's strength and the aid of a branch cut from a nearby sapling, we were able to lever the door open.

The light did not change as we passed through the door, indicating that the structure was merely an enclosure. What lay beyond was a ruinous parody of a military encampment – ancient vehicles and semi-permanent structures so overgrown by weeds that they were almost swallowed up by the landscape.

Despite this, it astounded me that it was as in as good condition as it was. I went and scraped some moss off the fender of one of the boxy vehicles. "This is pre-Hammer technology!" I exclaimed.

"How has it lasted so long, out in the open like this?" Sachenka did not appear to care, but strode straight towards the mountain.

Shaking off my curiosity, I hurried after her.

As we passed through the encampment, I saw that it was not entirely as untouched as it appeared. The windows of the prefabricated buildings were, of course, long since smashed in, and through a few of them I spotted a variety of crates, covered with dust but clearly having been opened by those with intelligence, not the wild abandon the kaddog show toward everything they find. Most were marked with a red cross, which my studies indicated that they had likely contained medical supplies. Perhaps this was a staging area for relief efforts from the cataclysms that would have followed the Hammer? I wished I had time to document the find, but my companion's haste brooked no argument.

She held her sword in front of her as she walked, no doubt to avoid another concussive encounter with an invisible wall.

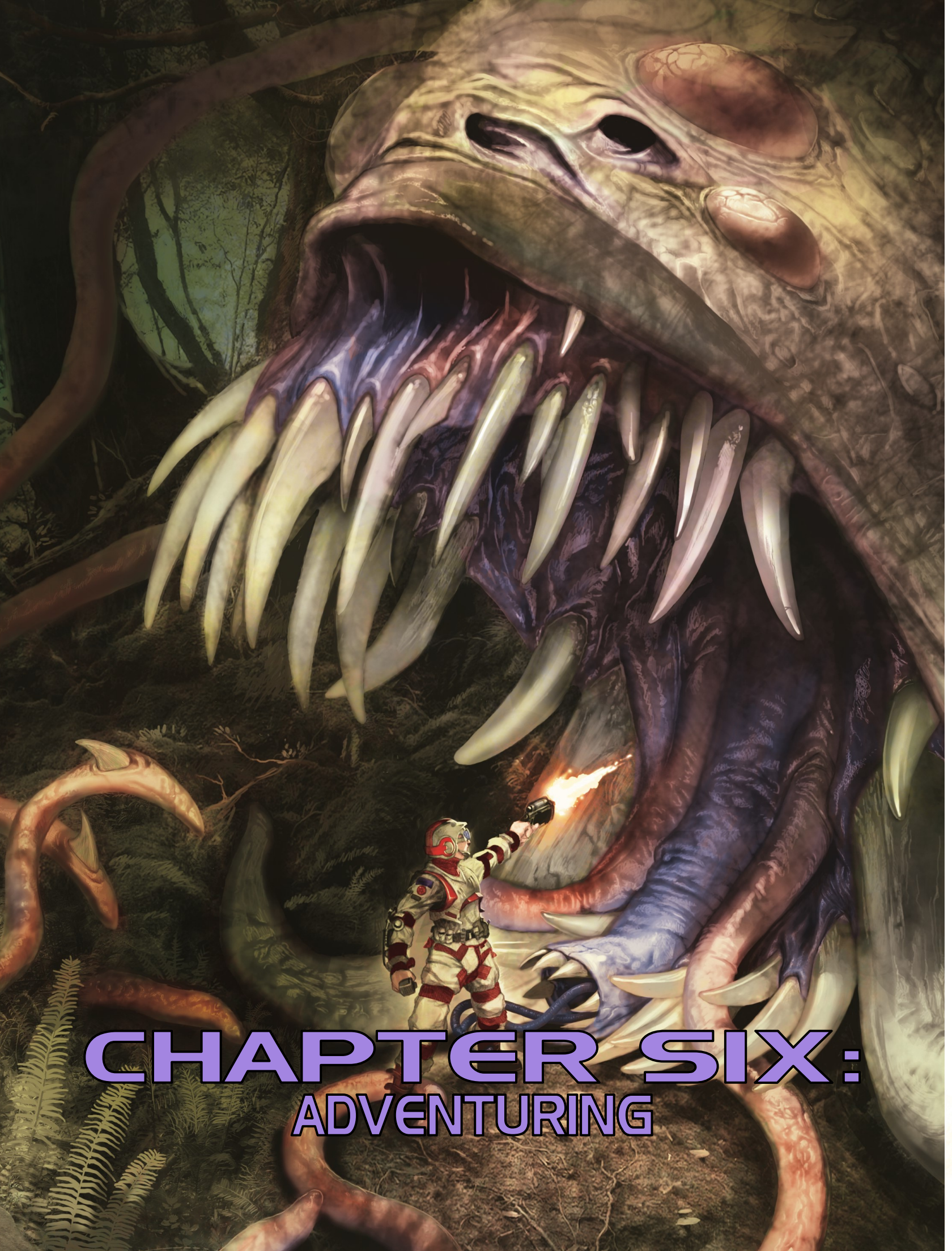
At last we came to another such obstruction, and by following the layout of the encampment, we were able to locate our means of egress. It led to a stretch of paved road, also miraculously preserved, with only a token amount of overgrowth. I wished we had brought a wizard with us, for all Sachenka's insistence that we avoid magic. I felt that anything capable of preserving a site like this virtually untouched for five centuries brooked investigation before we ventured further.

The road traversed the approach to the mountain, so we followed it. It made for easier going for the first hour or so, until at last we came to a point where an ancient rockslide had buried the path beneath an impassible barrier of large stones.

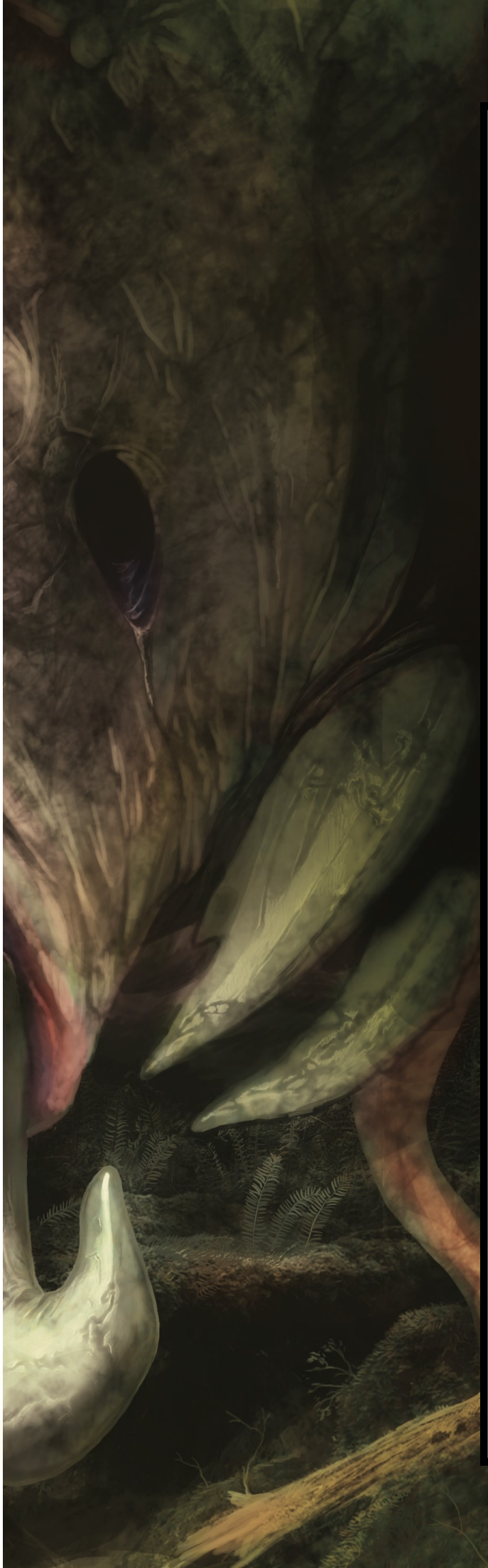
"Now what?" I asked my companion.

"Now, climb."

I will admit, there are times when I wish I were a giant.



CHAPTER SIX:
ADVENTURING



Above us the mountain rose, its peak capped ominously with black clouds. I was tremendously glad we did not need to ascend as far as the summit, although when considering where we were going, this seemed small comfort. I mentioned my worries to Sachenka, who scoffed.

"Most fearful, for world traveler."

"Normally I travel with a substantially larger entourage," I muttered as we edged along the narrow mountain path. Thankfully, this area of Xixion was out of the main migration zones for the swarms, so there was little chance of us being picked off by puggs as we climbed, but a hungry thunderbird might yet decide we would make a tasty aperitif. Not to mention, there was no guarantee that the kaddog had not taken up residence inside the mountain. I recalled an episode from a pre-Hammer fantasy novel I had once idly perused, and shuddered. If we got into trouble up here, there would be no wizards coming to our rescue.

After many hours of climbing, Sachenka touched my arm and pointed. The escarpment ahead looked like little more than a broken rock face, but she slid inside the crack with ease and motioned for me to follow. I fumbled about in my pack for a light stick and cracked it in half, releasing the melange of phosphorescent chemicals. The faint bluish glow revealed that beyond the rock face was not a natural cave as I had expected to see, but a long – and plainly excavated – tunnel. The stone that had covered the entrance had apparently been placed there, by heavy machinery, giant hands, or magic, and then been worked to look like part of the cliff face until natural weathering had cracked it open.

"How did you know about this place?" I asked.

"Ancient book. Heirloom. Ancestor came from before-Canam to before-Mossokev, brought book and amulet. Says where to look. Thought would need tools, explosives to get in. Lucky."

"Not so lucky if this place has become a monster lair," I cautioned.

"Keep that sword handy, will you?" She sniffed at me for stating the obvious as we continued down the passageway. As we passed by, I peered at the writing on the walls, in the bold block printing of Old Institutional English. "Top-Level Armory… Barracks… Freight Elevator… is this a military base?" I asked. Sachenka did not respond. We passed by a room with a steel door rusting off its hinges. A plastic placard that had plainly fallen from the wall some time ago read 'Armory'.

"This?" she said.

"Weapons," I replied. "Probably looted or rusted to uselessness long ago. We want 'Elevator,' I think."

Eventually we found the elevator shaft, and stared dully for a moment at the fallen doors and broken cable. There was, of course, no car waiting, nor any power to carry us down if there had been.

"Ladder," Sachenka pointed. "Climb."

My publisher proposed this chapter as a means of reaching out to our techan friends, to introduce them to the fantasy world through… less immediately dangerous methods. To that end, I have a modicum of advice to give to those who wish to experience Canam second-hand through the medium of a roleplaying game rather than diving headlong into the real experience.

Ultimately, what distinguishes our world from the fantasy worlds of fiction is the contrast between the familiar and the alien. Merely the act of looking at the map and seeing the broad outline of North America cements the idea that an adventure is taking place in a familiar world, even if it has no other elements in common. Those more familiar with the world as it was will approach it with their own precon-

ceptions drawn from their own real experiences, and want to integrate those elements into their play.

THEMES

This world is one where the definition of reality has become so subjective that clinging to an irrational ideology and rejecting anything that conflicts with that worldview is a matter of basic survival rather than political difference. The overarching theme of the setting is 'lines between extremes'. The line between fantasy and technology is the most obvious, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. People draw lines between themselves and those unlike them because of a deeply rooted and often fully justified fear that unless they cling tightly to their traditions, they will simply be swept away by an uncaring universe. Thus there are the lines between humanity and the fae peoples, and the discrimination that often results therefrom; the lines between the religions that better the believer and those which subjugate the outsider; the lines between civilization and wilderness, and the difficulty each has in coexisting with the other.

What is most important is the way in which these lines manifest. At first, it is appropriate, even encouraged, to represent them as dividing lines: partitions between extremes, and never the twain shall meet. Over time, however, they should evolve to represent a continuum, as the characters' experiences with the world beyond their preconceptions cause their ways of thinking to change. Not just the characters' attitudes, either – player characters are dynamic and powerful individuals capable of making a global impact. The actions of the party should have the potential to change the world, even if only one small corner of it.

Where most fantasy worlds start from an exotic basis and grow gradually more familiar as the players are exposed to them, ours should start from a basis of familiarity and grow more and more outlandish. The modern-style techan, with his day-to-day conveniences that roughly equate to the player's everyday life, is thrust into a realm of floating stone heads, trees the size of skyscrapers, teleporting wild cats, and impossibly beautiful and graceful near-immortals. The staid librarian is forced to leave her peaceful stacks in pursuit of a lost tome, and begins to experience the things that once she only read about. The miners who have never left their underground tunnels must venture out into the daylight and fresh air. In every case, no matter how jaded the character may claim to be, these experiences should be presented to them as the greatest of wonders. The one dividing line that underpins any adventure is the line between isolation and experience.

CONCEPT

Virtually any adventure concept can fit into our world; the basic dungeon crawl; the epic quest; the noir mystery; the war story; the fairy tale; psychological or body horror; even sports stories have their niche. The only thing necessary to give the adventure the right 'feel' is to emphasize any contrast between familiarity and otherness, injecting symbols of modernity into fantasy and symbols of fantasy into modernity.

The foremost manifestation of this theme is the conflict between magic and science. Even if they never leave the bastion, a techan party has to deal with at least a low-level of disruption, not to mention the consideration of why they're in a bastion in the first place. Even if they never encounter techans, a fantasy party likely has some synthetic equipment or would give up a large chunk of a treasure haul to obtain some. Regardless of the adventure concept, therefore, the first decision to be made when planning an adventure should be whether the party will be echan or techan. Some adventures will only be possible with one type of party, while others can easily switch between the two, but the choice will inevitably impact the way the players approach the adventure.

An adventure with the same locations and the same monsters can often have radically different approaches, outlooks, and outcomes depending on whether the party follows the path of technology or fantasy. The characters themselves will have different motivations. A traditional fantasy character adventures to make a name for themself, to acquire wealth, or because they are called by a higher power (whether a personal moral calling, a command from a superior, or an indefined sense of destiny); an echan party tends to have a variety of individual motivations and approaches the adventure with much less focus as a result. A typical techan character is part of a unit, often paramilitary, and thus pursues the adventure's objective more single-mindedly because it's their job. A techan party will usually play through an adventure in a more linear fashion, even if the details of the adventure are unchanged.

ORIGIN

The choice of path also determines the physical starting point of the adventure. For fantasy games, the old expedient of 'you all meet in a tavern', while cliché, is nevertheless a viable option. Fantasy characters are presumed to be capable individuals, can come from virtually anywhere in the world, and have no real need to know their companions prior to the start of the game. A fantasy party will usually be broadly diverse, with characters more often created according to the whims of the individual player rather than the needs of the group. While most groups tend to cover as many of the tactical bases as possible (rare is the party that will set out into the wilderness without a healer, for instance), sometimes this will require the adventure to be tweaked to accommodate a deficiency in the group.

Techan parties do not have the luxury of individuality. As outsiders in the fantasy realm, without ready access

to the means to repair and resupply, they only have one another to rely on for support. As such, they should know each other extensively before the adventure begins. Techans who meet over a brew and decide to take on the world tend to have their bones scattered across the wilderness in very short order. A techan group is usually part of an organization. They are accustomed to hierarchy and uniformity, their equipment is issued to them rather than found or crafted, and with very few exceptions, they all come from the same bastion. The bastion is the default starting point and 'home base' for a techan party, and the group will have to periodically return to it to restock their batteries and ammunition, to convert their unenchanted loot into the means to upgrade their equipment, and to indulge in the luxuries that they are fighting to preserve. As part of the techan experience is dealing with the fantasy world on its terms with often-inadequate equipment, even if there is a hole in the team's strategic makeup, the adventure should not be adjusted to compensate unless the disparity between the capability of the party and the power level expected by the adventure is too great.

RELATION

The techan group should define its perspective on the fantasy world before starting play. If dragon attacks are threatening bastion and village alike, this is usually merely a matter of flavor – whether the techans look down on their echan allies as ignorant bumpkins, are uneasy around them for the effects they may have on technology, or are even fascinated by their seeming exoticism, they do not require any additional motivation to make common cause. When offered a quest, however, a party that despises echans is probably going to demand some pretty hefty compensation in exchange for interacting with them. On the other hand, a group that is curious or even sympathetic to fantasy (but not enough to want to give up refrigerators and microwave ovens) is just as likely as any echan adventurer to help a dragon-ravaged village out of the goodness of their hearts (and for the less philanthropic, the lure of the dragon's hoard applies as much to techans as it does to unlikely heroes out for adventure). As the techan game lends itself strongly to military or paramilitary groups, those with no opinion one way or the other may be content to simply follow their orders. Regardless of their motivations, though, techans tend to view all echans as essentially the same, until they are confronted by the realms of variation throughout the world. A techan adventure, despite being very focused, should take care to accentuate both the common and the epic fantasy elements: these are all new and unique experiences to the characters, and even if they try to shut them out, they cannot help but be affected by the novelty.

An echan group does not need to define its position relative to the bastion-born, but each individual should consider where they come from and how that background relates to the world at large. An ex-slaver from Baruch Malkut is going to relate very differently to a Limshau damaskan than a knight of the Bulwark. A party from Limshau and a party from Seliquam might be equally cosmopolitan, but the one comes from a background of cooperation and cultural exchange while

the other comes from an untrusting, cutthroat society. Additionally, while echans are broadly more experienced with the wonders of the world than techans, most are just as isolated, having never traveled more than a few miles from their homes, or ventured off the beaten paths if they are habitually nomadic. They are used to the standard elements of the fantasy world – the diversity of peoples, the idea of magic if not necessarily all its implementations, the dangers of the wild – but they are also aware that there are many things in the world that they have not seen yet. An echan adventure should accentuate the differences between the characters' home experiences and what they encounter on the road, or the strange similarities that can arise despite very different circumstances.

TALENT

Techan and echan parties each have some things they can do that they other cannot. Obviously, the techan group cannot perform magic, and while some may have access to sufficiently advanced technology that can replicate some of its effects, that technology must be carefully guarded and rationed. An echan party has more reliable access to efficient healing, large-scale damage effects, powers that boost individual prowess, and spells and items with the potential to change the way they think about obstacles. An adventure for such a group must take into account the possibility that someone can fly over a wall to open a gate from the inside, or use magic to read a hostile courtier's mind and devise a counter for his arguments the night before their audience with the king.

A techan team, while lacking the ability to affect the world in such profound and unusual ways, has a slightly broader base of power. They are better able to compensate for one anothers' deficiencies. With very few exceptions, any techan can use any other techan's equipment, so very rarely will the outcome of a plan depend entirely on one character's special abilities: techans have more latitude to adapt as a result. As their abilities focus on improving the ability of the group rather than the individual, their damage output and defensive ability are more consistent than an echan party, and while they do not have ready access to instant healing, they do have fortress-like vehicles that they can retreat to when the going gets tough. An adventure for a techan group should account for their ability to take down large numbers of low-powered enemies without much difficulty, their ability to amplify their effectiveness with concentrated fire or explosives against more potent threats, and their power to overcome or simply demolish physical obstacles, depending on what means of transportation they have access to.

ADVERSITY

The most crucial consideration for any techan party is the threat of disruption. Sooner or later, all their nifty toys are going to break, and oftentimes their survival depends on their ability to either repair them or find some way to do without them. As a result, techan parties rarely venture far from home, as it is too difficult to find replacement parts far from their bastion of origin. Techans will never find useable treasure in the hordes of the monsters they dispatch. Any technology they might find would have been disrupted and rendered

MIXED GROUPS

Though the game separates fantasy and technology by default, the dominant theme of the setting is the interaction rather than the segregation of the two. While normally this applies on a macro-scale, it can just as easily apply to interactions within the party. Mixed groups have hurdles, but this has never stopped them from trying. All that is required is a suitable justification for why echans and techans would be working together. The biggest consideration from a gameplay perspective is the impact of disruption on the team dynamic. The GM should monitor this situation carefully: if the party is getting constantly tripped up by the default disruption rules, consider adopting one of the less punitive variants in the interests of the group's fun.

In a standard group, the most common mix is the inclusion of a single outsider. Perhaps techans have allowed a fantasy character in their fold to help them with diplomacy and regional expertise. Maybe a techan has fallen prey to the lure of enchantment. As not all 'echan' humans actually generate EDF, the inclusion of a single non-mage human may not actually impact a techan party at all. A mage or a fae (gimfen aside) would be a different matter, as consideration would have to be made for their effect on the group's technology. Furthermore, as many techan adventures promulgate the cause of technology over magic, a truly echan character would have to be highly unusual to hold similar goals.

A lone techan amidst fantasy characters would have more difficulty. Most techans leaving bastions on their own are tourists looking for a temporary escape into enchantment. They keep to the main roads like the Continental Cross, never witnessing the hardships of those living under fear of pugg or bogg attack. They travel to a secured and safe echan nation like Limshau or Salvabrooke, have a happy little adventure among the elves, and return thinking they have gone rugged and tackled the harsh world. If forced to endure for long in that world, their equipment will start to fail, and unless they have the expertise to maintain it on their own (or can make friends with a gimfen mechanic) they may soon have to become echan themselves if they want to survive. Mixed echan-dominant groups are therefore more likely to contain two techans than a single one. If a lone techan joins an echan party, it may be reasonable for the game master to create an non-player party member with the necessary technical skills that the player character lacks.

useless after such long-term exposure, and the only value magical items might have for such a group is the paltry amount they would be able to sell them for at the nearest village, since the prolonged exposure to EDF required to find a suitable buyer is rarely worth the risk. As a practical consideration to ensure the characters do not fall behind the curve expected by the game, treasure drops for techans should rarely include magical items unless those items have major plot significance (and that importance should be made obvious at the time). When fighting techan monsters (Iron Sons, MAX, etc.), this is not an issue, and salvaged technology can be a viable reward. Even if the enemy carries nothing that can be retrieved whole, it would be reasonable to award the group with an appropriate value in widgets a character with the Engineer skill can use to resupply and upgrade the group's equipment.

Another inevitability that techans must contend with is their own attitudes toward echa. With a few exceptions, most techans have no idea how to relate to echans, and constantly risk causing offense with their perceived superiority complexes. They intrinsically view fantasy as something that doesn't belong in the world – a view which echans do not hold of them in turn, and which they will have to come to terms with in the event, increasingly likely with prolonged exposure, that they become saturated with magic and are unable to return to their home.

As much as techans do, echans must contend with the fact that the world at large is a dangerous place, and unlike techans they have less reliable refuges to retreat to. Echans as a whole do not have the same sense of solidarity that the bastion-born do, and the variety of peoples and attitudes throughout the civilized world, let alone the wilderness, means that they cannot be certain of how they will be treated from one settlement to the next. While the ability to freely use magic is a great help in defending against the unknown, the unknown can often use it right back, frequently with more expertise. Furthermore, while anyone in an echan party can benefit from magic, only a few can actually use it, and if those few are somehow incapacitated, the group's collective effectiveness is substantially reduced.

Closeness with the fantasy world can be a double-edged sword, because the problem with magic is that it is inherently chaotic. Familiarity breeds contempt, and that can be deadly when one expects to easily dispatch a clutch of mindless puggs and instead falls into a pit trap contrived by one of the few wily ones. Forejudgment is a particular problem for fae, who are accustomed to homogeneity within populations: even a Limshau damaskan would have difficulty understanding that challenging the tough but good-natured barbarian to an arm-wrestling contest, despite being certain to lose, would be a better way to get information out of a group of rival adventurers than defeating his touchy wizard companion in a battle of wits. An echan group must be constantly made to realize how much they don't know

about their own world, preferably in the most inconvenient way possible.

PATTERNS OF LANDSCAPE

In fiction, the focus of the quest is the journey rather than the goal. The lands that they pass through should take up more of the party's attention than what awaits them at their destination. In order to retain the sense of familiarity versus otherness, Canam's regions are only broadly defined, allowing the game master to populate them with wonders as the adventure requires. Over the course of a single adventure, the party should travel to between one and three locations: even if they remain within the same region (or even the same city), every adventure should involve going somewhere amazing and seeing something fantastic. The following general descriptions can aid the game master in converting adventures from other sources to our world.

ABIDAN

Abidan is a civilized and well-populated country with little excitement to offer adventurers beyond those serving on the Wall. Though not as safe as Limshau, Abidan is blessed with friendly neighbors and a solid infrastructure, albeit one constantly under threat of pagus attack (only really a consideration for the inhabitants of Janoah – most others feel themselves perfectly safe). Unlike Limshau, Abidan is more like a traditional fantasy kingdom – it actually has a king, for one thing, and knights and priests as well as wizards. Its strong basis in religion but lack of a single state-sponsored church makes it less prone to corruption than other nations, with such occurrences being largely limited to the outer fringes. Abidan is most suitable as a homeland or base for an echan party, the destination for a delivery or escort quest, the site of a great battle between forces of good and evil, or merely as an example of what Man is capable of if the best parts of his nature are indulged.

BARUCH MALKUT

Konig's kingdom would less likely be a passing diversion and more appropriately a major element of a larger quest, if not the catalyst of the quest itself. The rich live in fabulous mansions and employ every type of magical convenience, their wealth ensured by the slave-tended fields. The poor are crowded into cities with inadequate sanitation and amenities, denied the ability to read and better themselves, and conditioned to accept the word of the theocracy as fact. Thieves and assassins lurk in the shadows. The swamps that surround the cities are rife with bandits, slavers, and other examples of human monsters. Chaparran and damaskan guerillas striking back against their oppressors are unlikely to distinguish would-be heroes from Malkut mercenaries, and may attack without asking questions. Players venturing into Baruch Malkut must always be on guard against everything around them.

BASTIONS

Bastions are launching points and home bases for techan groups, but rarely quest goals. Each bastion has a slightly different attitude toward echans, but all ultimately want to keep them out. Nevertheless, an echan party might be forced to penetrate bastion defenses on a retrieval or a rescue mission; a techan group might defect from their own society or infiltrate an enemy bastion, and have to use stealth to evade the authorities or steal away secrets. Non-humans will have the most difficulty in a bastion-based adventure, as their physical traits immediately give them away: pointy ears are a lot harder to disguise than just wearing a wide headband, not to mention that their mere presence shorts out high-tech equipment, making them fairly easy to track. Angel and York are the most obvious bastions for an echan party to infiltrate, whereas Mann is the most exciting and dangerous option for anyone to try to sneak into: the other bastions are simply too hard to actually get to for the purposes of most adventures.

ENCHANTED FORESTS

Dawnamoak, the triad of Laurama, Skepsis and Tranquiss, the forests to the north of York, and the various other mystical woods of Canam are perilous places even for those with a right to be beneath their eaves. The traditional role of a forest in a fantasy quest is as an obstacle that must be passed through, and the denizens of the woods do not make this easy. Chaparrans value their privacy and will attempt to hinder those who approach lacking their blessing, and outright attack those who come with hostile intent. The beasts that inhabit the woods are liable to treat any adventurer they come across as food, and some of them are intelligent enough to set traps for the unwary. Even the trees may resist onward passage. Traveling through a forest should be as dangerous, if not more so, than traveling through the mountains. Rarely will any of the chaparran settlements within the woods be the destination of a quest, but they may be a waypoint where a party stops to gain knowledge of how to proceed.

FARGON

Myth and literature are full of tales of the wonders of the dwarven underground halls, and many a quest has such a citadel as its terminus. The reality is slightly less impressive, as most narros living spaces are very dimly lit and tend to be somewhat claustrophobic for taller species (it being somewhat impractical to build high vaulted halls when you have to contain your city's entire population within a single mountain and your religion forbids digging too deep). That said, virtually every mountainside and peak in Fargon is replete with wide-eaved temples, as if all the architectural wonders of the Orient were crammed into a single mountain, and even the isolated, unpopulated regions are home to fantastic monuments. Fargon is a relatively peaceful place as narros aren't known for being bandits or thieves. However, the constant warfare between skegg and kodiak forces has upset the tranquility of the nation, and the farther east characters travel, the greater the threat: furthermore, dragons and beasts of cold claim mountains the narros dare not touch. Fargon is the most remote of Canam's civilized lands, and is most likely to be seen either as the homeland of a wandering echan party or as the destination of a quest, perhaps to craft a particularly potent magical item, to study an ancient magical or martial technique, or to slay some ancient monster of legend.

KANNOS

Assaults from the Sana Marsh, with boggs and skeggs approaching from the north and waves of puggs shifting from the west, means that no caravan is safe in Kannos. All merchants have mercenaries guarding their interests. Lost merchandise needs to be reacquired. Burnt wagons are an often sight on Kannos roads, and sellswords never go hungry. The larger cities have rarely suffered attacks, but they have dangers of their own: opportunistic businessmen, arrogant nobles itching for a fight, the organized crime that comes with a highly capitalistic society, bored mercenaries between jobs, and inconstant attitudes towards outsiders make for an interesting, if not necessarily a dangerous sojourn. Along the roads between the distant settlements, opportunities for side-quests are plentiful. Kannos is perhaps the most typical of all the human kingdoms, showcasing neither the best nor the worst of humanity in a neo-medieval world, but plentiful elements of both the bad and the good.

LAUDENIA

There are any number of reasons for adventurers to travel to Laudenia, but actually getting there is difficult enough to be the focus of a quest on its own. Most people are only dimly aware of the existence of the laudenian capital and fewer still know anything about the network of floating castles that criss-cross the continent; most non-laudenian airships don't fly high enough to encounter them, and magic cloaks the keeps from idle scrutiny. The only ways of reaching the sky realm are by accident or by enlisting the aid of a laudenian willing to overcome their species' scruples for a good cause or good cash. Once there, the challenge becomes not being kicked straight back off again. Laudenia can be the ultimate destination of an adventure, or the party may travel there in search of powerful magic or secret lore, but whatever their reason, they will never be just passing through.

LIMSHAU

Limshau is urbanized and safe. Travelers can pass from town to town with little fear of being assaulted by anything other than merchants. The walled cities are well guarded, with little bureaucracy and therefore little corruption. Every city is also a library and an academy, and whenever the party requires specialized knowledge to complete a quest, this is likely where they will go to

find it. The outer villages are more typical fantasy fare as might be seen in any other setting – or would be, if they were not the only place on Earth that such settlements are common. Nowhere but Limshau are you likely to encounter settlements with at least a few members of every civilized species. Limshau is the Constantinople of the new world, the hub of trade between the urbane peoples of the continent, and the place where every adventurer will find herself eventually, even if just passing through.

SALVABROOKE

The agrarian gimfen settlement is somewhat unique in not being often a destination nor a home base for a party. It is more of a waystation, an opportunity to stock up supplies, gather intel, possibly meet new friends, take in the majestic beauty of the lands within the ancient caldera, and generally play tourist in a relatively safe environment. It is fairly easy to get to from anywhere, for all the various threats in between, and may serve as a staging area to reach more inaccessible regions of the continent.

SELIQUAM

While collectively as cosmopolitan as Limshau, Seliquam is a political viper's nest of conflicting interests and cultural grandstanding. Mixed communities are common, but usually no more than two or three species at a time, and homogenous settlements still outnumber them. Despite the fact that this is the only place in Canam where one can see a kodiak walking down a town street and nobody will bat an eyelid, where castle ramparts are patrolled by riflemen, and where ancient narros monuments can be seen without the long trek to Fargon, most Seliquam communities are intensely suspicious of outsiders, and adventurers must earn their welcome. Thankfully, there are plenty of opportunities to do so: the lands to the north and the south are replete with ruins and treasures waiting to be explored and cleaned of their monstrous filth. A quest from one end of Seliquam to the other would pass through every type of fantasy cliché, and even a few venturing beyond fantasy.

WASTELANDS

It is ill-advised to linger in such places. There are few settlements of any kind and those that do exist tend to be hostile to outsiders. Most have been uninhabited since the Hammer fell, and so any ruins or dungeons of interest are few and far between. More vicious and unusual monsters can be found in the wastelands, making them of greater usefulness for monster hunting quests, and caches and artifacts of the last age of Man tend to surface more often in such places, having had fewer adventurers survive the process of picking them over. Of the great wastelands of Canam, only Xixion provides much general adventuring opportunities because of its location and proximity to the ancient centers of civilization: the other lands are far more remote and hazardous to travel in, and are more likely to be the focus of a more epic quest.

THE SINGLE STONE

The following short example adventure, drawn from true events recorded by the historiographers of Limshau but slightly… embellished for gameplay purposes, can serve as the group's introduction to the fantasy world, or serve as a campaign seed for a more experienced group. It involves travelling to different locations, researching the history of the setting, and fighting off some truly fiendish foes. Simultaneously, the party will involve themselves in a conspiracy that may take them across the world and involve enemies singular and powerful as well as numerous and influential. They will find evil parading in the light and allies hiding in shadows.

This is an adventure for four to five starting characters of either echan or techan origin; the specific events do not change, though certain obstacles along the way may. Although this adventure can serve as the starting point for a campaign focused on the Amethyst relics, the party is under no compulsion to follow this path at the adventure's conclusion. Where they go after this is for you and the group to decide.

SUMMARY

Greedy or generous, techan or echan, the group of heroes stumbles upon or is sent to investigate the rotting carcass of a crashed transport plane. No one is sure where it came from or where it was going, but apparently its sole purpose was to transport a small item a great distance: the Amethyst amulet. Little does the group know that they are not the only ones aware of this crash, for a rival organization has been tasked to take the amulet for themselves and eliminate any obstacles.

ECHAN INVOLVEMENT

The characters are on their way to Limshau, but before they arrive they are asked to escort a merchant caravan along the Continental Cross. When a band of kaddog attack and make off with a rare piece of treasure, the players will give chase and stumble upon the plane wreckage, starting their quest.

TECHAN INVOLVEMENT

Regardless of which bastion the players are from, they should be around the bastion of Angel when they are dispatched to a specific set of coordinates and investigate an aircraft from another bastion that crashed on its way to Angel. This may be a normal mission for this group or their first outing from the walls. The story begins just outside of Crax in Antikari.

SECTION I: THE CARBON CRUCIFIX

If the players are chasing the kaddog, they will encounter them at the following location. If they are travelling here intentionally, then they will be ambushed. As the heroes press through the forest, read or paraphrase the following:

> *You push through the heavy foliage and come upon a tree stouter than the others. The sheen of its silver skin glints in a fading sunset. Only two branches reach from its peak, spreading its arms to the sky. Jagged roots have sliced into the soft dirt, an invader among its neighbors of wood.*
>
> *The towering centurion left a scar of ashes and death behind it when it fell from heaven. This was not some great hammer of god cast to Earth but a machine made from the hands of men. Where once it obeyed undeniable rules to allow its flight, now a carcass rests to prove the chaos of a new age. From dirt to sky, it stands taller than most trees.*

This is the tail section of a very large aircraft. Over 100 feet tall, it's still only a small section of the monstrosity it once was. It plainly does not come from anywhere around here.

Knowledge (History or Technology): The craft comes from Porto—the utopian bastion known to prosper far across the ocean. How it got here would be an obvious question without a speedy answer. Though Porto has been known to send flights as far west as Angel, they rarely send more than one a decade. To find a wreck would be a rare prize indeed. Porto flaunts the greatest technology of the planet, though the chances of any of it still working by this point would be slim.

CONFLICT: BOGG NEST

If the characters are chasing the boggs, they only have a few brief moments before reinforcements arrive. If not, the group is ambushed by a horde that has been using the towering tail of the aircraft as their chief's hut.

SKEGG INCITER

Skeggs feel pain as much as anyone else, and don't find it pleasant like boggs do. Whenever possible, a skegg leads from behind, usually throwing boggs or puggs into battle in front of him and only wading in to the fray for the satisfaction of finishing off a weakened enemy. Their battle strategy may be poor, but where maintaining the integrity of their own skin is concerned, the skegg inciter is usually tactically sound.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Gear: Spear (Str+d6, reach 1)

Special Abilities

Armor +1

Infravision: The skegg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

You're Not Finished: The skegg can make an Intimidation roll when an ally is taken out of combat to allow it to make one final action immediately before being removed from play.

BOGG RAKE (x2)

While other species develop the art of stealth as a means to avoid getting devoured by something meaner than them, the bogg rake uses it as a tool to satisfy its urge for torture, sneaking up close to an enemy and then stabbing it with daggers coated in (usually) the bogg's own body effluvia. The bogg will then stick as close to the victim as possible and giggle while the poison goes to work.

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

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Poisoned knives (Str+d4, plus poison)

Special Abilities

Foul Concoction: A target struck by the bogg rake's knives is subject to weak Venomous [+2] poison.

Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Masochistic Response: The bogg cannot become Shaken from damage. Instead, it gains +4 to Fighting rolls. A bogg that takes a wound immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.

Sand In Yer Eye!: +2 to trait rolls to perform dirty fighting maneuvers.

Size -1

BOGG SCABB

Boggs don't bother much about strategy. Their preferred method of fighting is to launch themselves at the enemy and attempt to tear it to pieces with their claws and teeth, although they will at least make some attempts to maneuver in combat, unlike their pugg cousins. While they are in no hurry to die, pain is no deterrent to them – in fact, it makes them fight with even more ferocity.

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

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Stealth d6

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Rusty knife (Str+d4)

Special Abilities

Infravision: The bogg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Masochistic Response: The bogg cannot become Shaken from damage. Instead, it gains +4 to Fighting rolls. A bogg that takes a wound immediately makes an attack against one creature within melee range (even an ally, if no enemies are available) before being removed from play.

Size -1

The chief, although a skegg and thus of superior stock, wasn't bright enough to understand the distinctiveness of his metallic keep. He stacked crates and used them to form a throne without bothering to attempt breaking them open, not that the steel reinforced plastic boxes would have yielded to his simple tools. The locking

mechanism is intricate and far beyond his limited intelligence.

There are three boxes, two larger ones the skegg used as armrests and one small one he used as a seat. The security on each box is a mechanical but complex disk tumbler lock, making it difficult to break. An unlocking spell will open it instantly: any other magic used on the box will cause the lock to fuse and require brute force to open.

Each box requires a Strength check with a -2 penalty to break.

BOX LABEL	LOCKPICKING DIFFICULTY	CONTENTS
1-Large Security	-2	4 disruption patches, 3 sets of handcuffs
2-Large Emergency	-2	1 standard techan adventurer's kit
1-Small See below	-1	See below

The small box carries the label, ***"Open under controlled conditions—Disruption Hazard"*** but no other indicators. It also appears the lock has suffered some damage and may be easier to pick. Upon opening it, read or paraphrase the following:

> ***Echan:*** *Your hands roll through fluttering pieces of snow that feel neither cold nor wet and refuse to melt in the warmth of your hand.*
>
> ***Techan:*** *Your fingers rifle through the packing foam. You can see a faint violet glow through the packing. You reach in and curl your fingers around the light, and from the box you pull a strange purple jewel. Four pearlescent silver dragon's claws are clamped around the outer edges of the unrefined, almost jagged gem. The fingers of the lizard coil around back, not to a hand, but across to other fingers. Two golden loops could support a chain if one were so inclined to flaunt the amulet from his or her neck.*

If any of the players attempt a closer look, read or paraphrase the following:

You notice movement within, as glints of light jolt through the imperfections in the jewel, like lightning bolts arcing from one side of the gem to the other, following the sharp angles of the stone. No outside light source reflects in it, but it does reflect your faces perfectly in the glossy finish. It also gives off its own light; visible only when staring past the arcs of sparks, into the heart of the rock itself. This is unusual even for magic.

At night, this item glows much brighter. Though magical, no one can identify its properties or origin. No spell can discern any information about it. Its oddest property is that for some reason, the item does not disrupt technology.

Techans have no chance of identifying the item on their own, and echans will find it difficult without access to a library. Either way, Limshau is the obvious next destination.

Knowledge (Arcana): Obviously a magical item, this relic was likely forged by a wizard of great power: the Pleroma lettering running down one side of the setting proves that. But enchanted jewels never glow with an internal furnace like this one. This is a natural enchantment that someone later set into an amulet. One of the Pleroma letters has been marred by a gash, possibly from a powerful sword strike. Further, this is most likely created by human hands: chaparrans would set it in wood; tenenbri wouldn't have used only one metal, and narros would not have used one as mundane as silver; gimfen have few competent wizards and none of this caliber; and neither damaskans nor laudenians would have allowed such an artifact to become lost in the first place. This leaves a human mage, but there have been very few of those on this continent of any significant power.

Knowledge (Religion): There is a faith based around the dragon god, Amethyst, but this is not a symbol of faith (though it is obviously made to resemble one). The markings on one side are Pleroma, indicating it was made by a mage.

Knowledge (History) (only if both the above checks succeed): To cause a gash on a magic item of this magnitude would require a powerful enchanted weapon. The only notable account of a duel between a powerful mage and an equally adept swordsman comes from Lauropan history, and the mutual destruction of the mage Torfin Gendron and the fanatical knight Wilhelm Myre.

SECTION 2: BY THE BOOKS

When the heroes arrive at Limshau, read or paraphrase the following:

> *They call them the White Walls of Limshau—a maze of dense stone and adobe walls dozens of miles across, radiating from a central archive. It holds the combined knowledge of a hundred nations, modern and extinct. One could find the rhythmic dance rituals of the chaparrans or the spastic drum beats of the narros. Look further and one could even stumble across tomes smuggled from the human bastions. Diligently, the damaskan fae and humans of Limshau maintain their city. Ten storeys tall and virtually uniform in texture, the white walls encircle the entire library, every branch, every building. The wall twinkles in the orange sun. The marble facing of*

the granite walls seem fragile at first… until you realize how thick the barrier really is.

When the heroes pass through the gates, they must check their weapons with the storehouse. Only custodians and the militia are allowed weapons in the city. Clever deceit or sleight of hand may allow smaller weapons to cross but anything bigger than a short sword would be confiscated. The guards provide detailed receipts for everything before passing the party through.

When the heroes enter the city, read or paraphrase the following:

Limshau is orderly, calm, and beautiful. Hundreds move without a shove in the streets. The various buildings blend together in uniformity. Footbridges pass overhead, connecting higher buildings. As you wander deeper, the city grows taller, bridges criss-crossing over each other as the levels climb. A pair of leather-clad custodians with katana at their backs chats with merchants. An orange-haired gimfen stands atop his cart, selling various silks gathered from his village to the northwest. A few legal tall-eared scarlet women promote their pleasures from a second level window.

A huge form eclipsing the rising sun bathes the street in shadow. You glance up to see the silvery-white skin of a 1,200-foot long airship floating over the walls with hardly a whisper. Only a small cabin hangs underneath the perfectly smooth untarnished body, with most of the crew and passengers resting comfortably inside the superstructure. Propellers bigger than men spin as the vessel slows towards the mooring tower at the city center.

Limshau is enormous and the heroes may feel somewhat confused on where to start. If they have never been to Limshau before, this is a perfect opportunity to get lost and pick up some local color while they search for the arcane history stacks. If they do not wish to wander, any passing librarian or custodian can direct them to the appropriate branch. Once they begin searching around the branch, they can introduce themselves to the local chief librarian, a human female named Inara Setinga, and the custodian assigned to this branch this week, a damaskan male, Baelin Stonesthrow. Both will help the best they can.

The players may reattempt the above checks, with a +2 bonus each. Succeeding on all three checks allows the group to discover a book giving a rough history of the amulet, identifying it as Stormcage, Torfin's most prized magical possession. The book does not go into detail about the amulet's powers or history, only that Torfin found the indestructible amethyst stone and created the setting to place it into.

If asked about further avenues of research, either Baelin or Inara will volunteer the following:

"There is someone that might be able to help. He's an expert on lingering legends and relics that refuse to be buried. A very devout man, too, but we won't hold that against him. His name is Filipe Paraerra-sensei. You'll find him in the Philosophy branch of the University."

FILIPE PARAERRA

Filipe Paraerra is not an old man with worn and weary eyes, pinching his nose when his heavy glasses strain his head, but barely into his forties, 230 lbs. of toned muscle. He is not about brute strength but total physical perfection. As an athlete, he could outrun the stoutest of knights even without their laden steel. He is also a Buddhist. When the heroes enter his classroom, they find thirty students of various ethnicities, ages, and races squatting straight-backed upon mats placed erratically about the room. The desks have been pushed to the walls. No one pays the heroes any mind, regardless of how they enter and how they look. They find Paraerra at the head, wrists resting on his knees, addressing the room.

"Does the pursuit of truth without finding it have purpose?" Paraerra asks slowly, almost at a whisper. "You will find evil if you chose to seek evil. You will find faith if you chose to seek faith. But do not seek truth. A drive to find a truth will lead to faith, and will be perceived only in your eyes as fact. Truth…is what you find along the way of seeking. Truth…is stumbled upon, never fought for. The same it is with the salvation of the soul. The harmony we establish within ourselves, the love we accept, comes along the path, never at the end. Faith, belief, are yours to claim …truth is for all of us." He looks over the group, then rubs his palms together. "This week, pick one of the following books. Have it read by the end of the month. We'll then discuss them at length, including the possibility that I may have wasted your time in the assignment. Fear & Loathing by Soren Kierkegaard, Prophetic Fragments by Cornel West, Novum Organum by Francis Bacon, or The High Cost of Death by Marikama."

The class files out, passing the heroes looks ranging from curiosity and confusion to annoyance, leaving Paraerra alone. He makes one passing glance at the heroes and says, **"By your presentation, I assume you're not nihilists."**

The heroes can present their information and what they have learned. If they have not solved the previous overcome checks by this point, he'll answer the riddle for them, giving the heroes any information they may need about the item. It may take him a few minutes and he

would have to see the artifact, but he will be successful against all the skill checks required. Beyond this, he confirms the unique powers of this item.

"It's as powerful as a foundation spell but apparently requires no sacrifice for its use. It's also possible it gains in power with its owner. The markings on the inside suggest that. You have in your possession a powerful relic that binds the arcane with faith, a declaration even I must acknowledge is more than a little incongruous. There could only be one other explanation, but that answer does not lie with me."

<Response>

"If you'll permit me a momentary indulgence, I believe I know where the answer rests."

<Response>

"As with everything else in Limshau, this truth rests in the pages of a book."

Although there is a library branch dedicated to the history of relics, there is also another smaller one doubling as a museum, dedicated to the study of the relics themselves. Paraerra believes what the heroes seek is there and decides to help them look for it. The book in question is the *Chronicle of Aurannis*. The chronicle was once part of the great Bible of Drasago, the holy book written by dragons, but was removed due to its length. Unlike the other gospels, Aurannis' collection does not enchant the user if read but is still magical itself. Paraerra flipped through it once and could have sworn to have seen a relic like this amethyst among its pages.

When the group arrives at the specific branch, Paraerra questions the librarian, an attractive damaskan elf wearing vanity bifocals named Chenai Pagekeeper. She has some unfortunate news as she leads them to the location in the branch the book was kept: it has been stolen.

"I hate to say, we lost that tome recently. It even carried a marker to prevent theft, but obviously they found some way around that. The book was taken not more than a few days ago. Interesting that nothing else was stolen."

This is obviously not coincidence but who would take it is a mystery. If the heroes ask the significance of the amulet, Filipe answers with, ***"From what I remember reading, if the fragments of his heart are brought together at place of his death, Amethyst can be brought back … and then the armies of order will have no hope against the power of his will."***

Filipe doesn't know how many fragments there are or how powerful they have the potential to be. All of that was in the book. Limshau will also offer a 2,000 chryso reward for the book's retrieval.

TO FIND THE CHRONICLE

The *Chronicle of Aurannis* was stolen by thieves belonging to a techan mercenary company known as the Iron Sons, a cell-based organization and one of the largest and most successful free companies in the world. This cell operates out of the crumbling kingdom of Torquil, and is currently heading back to wait at their rendezvous in the abandoned keep of Zellis.

If the players inquire about the theft, Chenai is very forthcoming.

"The last people to look at the book were a pair of techans, judging from the way they were dressed. At least, they were wearing techan-style combat fatigues. One sported a badge on his arm—a sun dipping below a line with a solid sphere of wrought iron below. They just flipped through the book briefly, then left without a word."

Knowledge (History) (-2 for echans): This is the symbol of the Iron Sons. They operate across the continent, but most bastions technically classify them as a terrorist organization, so they operate like a secret society, soliciting contracts privately rather than advertising their services. Rumor has it that a major cell is operating out of Torquil.

If nobody is able to make the above check, they are directed to the lead custodian in charge of the investigation: a human, Robin Hataori. While he suspects the Iron Sons to be responsible, he is unable to track them beyond the city gates, having ascertained from the gate guards' registers that a group of five arrived in the city four days ago and left again the next day, heading west. Among their equipment were several disruption muffler bags, which any techan in the party realizes could be used to shield the chronicle against magical alarms and scrying. Hataori presently lacks the manpower required to track the Iron Sons and has been engaged in research to try to narrow down their possible destinations: if the heroes offer to help, he can be invoked on the above check. On a success, Paraerra-sensei suggests that Zellis keep is the most obvious destination, as it is the closest. On a failure, Hataori is only able to suggest that the heroes may be able to pick up the trail again in Antikari.

If the heroes note that it seems odd to entrust the recovery of a valuable tome to a bunch of perfect strangers (especially if they are techans), Hataori tells them that he has perfect faith in their abilities and trusts to their word and the offer of the reward to bring them back once they've found the thieves. After they leave, he also dispatches two custodian apprentices to follow them secretly and make sure that the book comes back to Limshau. These shinobi are too well trained to be noticed by the heroes and will not intervene overtly: their only purpose is insurance (and to take over the mission should the heroes fail).

SECTION 3: SHADOW OF TORQUIL

From Limshau to Zellis is two weeks by horse, one week by ground vehicle, and four days by air. If they are certain of their destination, Hataori will commission a thermal to transport them to Antikari: otherwise, Paraerra will offer to hire them horses and sufficient stores for the journey (if they have their own transport, the offer of supplies still stands). If they are tracking the group via ground travel, the journey is much longer but would be an opportune time to insert one or two random encounters.

THE JOURNEY

If traveling by land, the group keeps to the Continental Cross for most of the journey. The cross is a beaten path that connects the bastion of Angel, through House Antikari and House Orchis, and finally to Limshau. The highway is inconsistently paved, being little more than a wide dirt road in some places, gravel in others, even asphalt in a few, depending on the resources available to the house or kingdom that maintains that stretch. The road is commonly used by thousands of people. A traveler can count on at least three encounters with fellow wayfarers or caravans every day. Wandering shops sell trinkets from the backs of wagons. Some carts stay together for protection, creating nomadic markets that roam the road, never straying apart. The most well known is the Arciducha, a caravan of 35 wagons selling fine clothes, rare foods, and even protective lodging between Antikari and Gnimfall, usually staying near Limshau borders, where the road is patrolled more frequently. When the group reaches Antikari, they easily pick up the trail of the Iron Sons, which requires them to break from the road and push through Crax.

CONFLICT: PUGG RAID

Swarms of puggs storm from the forest in waves. There are about 40 altogether, spread across 4-5 waves.

PUGG

An individual pugg is only a threat to children and small animals: any reasonably ornery housecat could see one off. However, they rarely appear individually. A 'swarm' is the term used to describe any number of puggs between 'five' and 'too damn many.' They have no tactics – they just charge, possibly crushing their own front ranks in the process. Puggs are cowards at the best of times, and refuse to attack unless they have overwhelming numbers on their side (or are so hungry they forget themselves, which is more common than not). They will gang up and swarm one enemy at a time, biting, scratching and kicking until it comes down.

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

Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d4

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 3

Special Abilities

Bloody Innumerable: If the pugg and its allies outnumber the opposition, it gains +2 to attack rolls and Toughness.

Claw Claw Bite: Str+d4.

Infravision: The pugg halves attack penalties (round down) for bad lighting.

Poor Oral Hygiene: A creature that takes a Wound from a pugg's bite must make a Vigor roll with a +2 bonus against Knockout poison.

Size -1

After three days through Crax, the group pushes through an opening into a huge valley, where they can see the majesty that once was Zellis Keep.

THE TOWER OF ZELLIS

Read or paraphrase the following:

> *The peak holds just enough room for the keep constructed atop it. Many of the battlements overhanging the cliff point down rather than across. The outer walls and towers curve at every corner to deflect siege works, though no ballista, catapult or trebuchet could reach this height. Only cannon could breach these walls. Battlements circle the keep with three rows of embrasures atop each other. Hundreds of arbalests could rain straight down with gravity as their ally. Buttresses from the sides of the mountain rise up to join the walls of the castle. Most likely, the same construction of the mountain catacombs was employed in the building of the fort. The blackness of the entrance is reflected in the outer wall of the keep, formed of huge slabs to prevent handholds. The construction must have taken the kingdom a king's lifetime to complete. Those who planned its construction never lived to see its completion. Now, moss and weeds have crept up the sides and breached the indestructible walls. Grass pushes from arrow slits. Most of the castle has crumbled into ruin.*

As the group reaches the base of the tower, read or paraphrase the following:

> *Though the wood rotted a century ago, the massive opening still remains, three storeys tall. The main door sits at the back of a thirty-foot corridor into the side of the mountain. The lintel above, carved from polished limestone, took an army to lift into place. It stretches from the doorframe, across the ceiling, sticking out of the entrance just far enough for a pair of weathered soapstone dragons, no bigger than a man,*

to perch, greeting those who entered. Their wings have long since broken to stumps, the gems encrusting their eyes stolen. Both walls around the architrave are divided by intersecting lines, opening squares wide enough for a man to reach to either end with his fingertips. Several engravings fill a few openings. At least two show bears, one foraging on all fours, the second rearing back to ward off enemies. Another image is of a great spread-winged eagle. A few others show animals lesser known, spawn species finding form after the wave of magic swept the globe: short, squatty puggs, flightless cockatrice, and various boggs.

There is significant damage to the entrance door, having broken from all but one hinge, opening the inner chamber to the light outside. As the players enter the keep's entrance, they spot three fresh corpses. Everything of value from weapons to gear has been stripped.
Healing or Survival: A close examination reveals deep slashes across their chests, most likely from a talon rather than a knife. What remains of their clothing indicates a techan origin but anything more than that is a mystery.

There is a shaft of light coming from up ahead but the passage between entrance and light is long and dark. When the heroes reach the shaft, read or paraphrase the following:

You reach the light. Cylindrical and wide enough to fit an adult dragon, the shaft carries up through the entire mountain to an opening to the sky. There might have been glass or shutters at the top, but no longer. Unfiltered daylight glints off the embedded crystallized chips within the granite. The bouncing bands are visible through floating dust. Stone and wood beams run across the shaft, climbing up the sides all the way to the light. The sound of sporadic rain dapples to the ground level. A spiraling pathway orbits the tunnel to the top. The path is wide enough for a two horse-drawn carts abreast.

The crossing beams of wood and stone form part of a complicated pulley system, connecting by sprockets and chains to a warped wooden gondola suspended halfway up the shaft. The system is surprisingly well maintained and complicated, using the pulleys as a way to lift the gondola instead a bulky counterweight. It even appears automatic, requiring no slaves to strain in its use. If anyone attempts to use it, the entire construction will fall apart, raining wood and steel to the base. Everyone underneath must make an Agility roll or take 2d6 damage.

The collapse ricochets and reverberates through the entire mountain. Unfortunately, the heroes must climb all the way to the keep above.

THE KEEP OF ZELLIS

Timetable: The climb is lengthy. No matter what happens as they ascend, the group arrives at the peak near sunset.

AREA 1: GARDENS

As the heroes reach to the top of the passage, read or paraphrase the following:

To slowly crumble through centuries is not a fate fitting for such a keep. The granite stone of the castle will take eons to fall to dust. The potential for recovery still lingers in its foundation. Yet, no one has come to claim its prize. The fragments of House Torquil have enough problems maintaining their keeps in the south; other free houses are too far east. Not to mention, the new tenants would also need to act graciously to the chaparrans of nearby Dawnamoak. But even considering the costs of maintenance, it's still quite the treasure in itself, rivaling

anything stolen from its coffers since the empire's collapse. The surrounding lands are plentiful, and once cleared and secured the keep could be a stout defensive post. All one would need is ambition, masses of loyal indentured workers, and an army large enough to daunt neighbors.

When you burst into the late afternoon sun, you are greeted by a moss- and weed-plagued court. There had been glass covering the shaft at one point, and thick shards still jut from the sides. This beautiful court would have been covered with flowers and short grass surrounding a glass -covered pit where one could peer down into the bowels of the nation. Around the perimeter of the court, which fills half the peak, several broken windmills shudder rather than spin in the breeze. Across the field, you can see what remains of the keep itself.

Your attention, however, is diverted elsewhere as more than a dozen figures on the other side of the pit notice you and begin to approach. They wear loose mail and old blades but their cloak of velvet black appears cared for. Up the path to the keep, a roar bellows like a trumpet out of the entranceway. Under the shade of the keep, you see only the massive torso of a form twice the height of any of you.

Zellis is one of many abandoned castles and forts in the failed kingdom of Torquil. This one fell into darkness when a shemjaza attempted to seduce one of its two lords. Rejected, the demon set loose the shapeless wild upon the population. Most died in the carnage, others rose up as shapeless as they slept—a side effect of the curse the shapeless bring with them. Cultists followed, believing everlasting life awaits those that allow the shadow to embrace them. They are led by a necromancer, Katho Kovacs, who believes he has found a way to control the shapeless in the shemjaza's stead. Many of the shapeless are still here, hiding until night falls. Kovacs had been waiting outside the keep for sacrifices and found them when the Iron Sons arrived on their own business. Most of the Iron Sons have already fallen victim to the cultists.

The beast at the entrance to the keep is a kodiak the cultists have tortured into servitude and now guards the keep.

CONFLICT: SHADOW CULTISTS

The cultists are west and south of the pit. While most engage the heroes, at least one will run north to free the kodiak. The cultist requires two rounds to free the kodiak, though he is killed immediately after by the beast (only Kovacs can control it). It enters combat the following round.

DISCIPLE OF KOVACS (x16)

All the cultists are human. They wear black robes that slightly restrict their movements and wield ritual daggers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Skills: Fighting d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4
Gear: Ceremonial dagger (Str+d4)
Special Abilities
Martyrdom: Whenever a Disciple of Kovacs is defeated, the next Disciple to act gains +2 to their action.

The cultists hope to take the group alive, and tie them up until night arrives. Shapeless don't attack those sleeping or restrained, preferring to let their curse produce more of their kind. As the victim sleeps, their soul is devoured by a shadow that withers the body to dust and emerges fully formed as a shapeless. The cultists wish to join this order, believing their souls are reborn as immortals. Their leader believes he can control the wild and is hoping to create an army of shapeless under his control.

All this information can be retrieved by careful interrogation of a captured cultist. These cultists are loyal to Kovacs but are apprehensive about dying, since this will prevent them being reborn as shapeless. If the fight goes badly and the disciples are unable to break the kodiak free, they will attempt to push past the kodiak and alert their master.

AREA 2. GATE GUARD

Read or paraphrase the following (ignore the second paragraph if the kodiak entered combat in the first encounter):

The massive oak gate doors lie slightly ajar, creaking in the wind. A portcullis has long since rusted and fallen to broken bars upon a granite path. The doors do not sit at the top of the stairs but a distance underneath an overhanging round archway thirty feet up. Unlike the rest of the keep, this construction has survived time with every impost still standing. The painted white stone has flaked from weather, creating a speckled finish. Two doors, nearly the size of the main entrance, stand to your left and right.

The beast you saw before waits for you to step closer. A tortured kodiak hurls phlegm from a tongueless maw, rough and jagged. Its grey and black fur covers every inch, right to its black claws. Still primitive, many kodiaks have been exploited by more intelligent beings for their strength and brutality. This creature has been scared and tormented, broken and brainwashed into serving its captors. The once-proud warrior that could rise to its hind legs and hold onto

tools with its claws has been reduced to nothing more than vicious guard dog.

CONFLICT: GUARD BEAR

The kodiak can move within reach of every door but not beyond the archway. Every round it is injured, it can make a Strength check to break its chain. If it does, nothing will prevent it from trying to kill everything it sees.

BROKEN KODIAK

The kodiak has been tortured and broken: it is now barely more than the beast from which it descended. If it breaks its chain, it charges mindlessly and attempts to take out its rage on anything within reach.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Tracking d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9 (2)
Gear: Heavy iron chains (Str+d8)
Special Abilities
Bite/Claws: Str+d6
Expert Runner: When running on all fours, the kodiak has a Pace of 10" and ignores difficult ground from uneven terrain or light undergrowth.
Hardy: If the kodiak is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a Wound.
Size +2: Kodiaks are not as big as actual bears, but are pretty damn close.
Unstoppable Onslaught: If the kodiak is able to move its full four-footed Pace before making an attack, it can make two bite/claw attacks without penalty.

AREA 3. ATRIUM

Read or paraphrase the following:

The influence of magic has had its way with the unmaintained plants of this garden. The atrium's glass roof has long since shattered and fallen to sharp fragments upon the stone floor. Four stone trellises in the room are overgrown by weeds and hanging ferns. On the opposite side of the room, it opens to the outside where you spy a moss- and algae-covered fountain.

The horticulturist that saw after these gardens grafted together several bizarre species and had others imported from all over the world. Unmaintained for all these decades, they crossbred and basked in the chaos of Atricana and now have turned into a mass of killing writhing thorns that lash out to anyone trying to cross.

CONFLICT: NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS

The mass waits until the group is between the trellises before surrounding the group. There is one for each trellis. They drag victims to their trellis where they can be devoured slowly with caustic juices.

TRIFFIDS (x4)

The triffid is a poisonous, mobile carnivorous plant. It feeds by injecting its victim with a paralytic enzyme that immobilizes the target, enabling the triffid to digest the creature with its poison-coated roots.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d6, Stealth d6
Pace: 2; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6
Special Abilities
Camouflage: The triffid looks like a normal plant at rest, requiring a Notice roll to avoid an ambush.
Fearless: The triffid is immune to fear and Intimidation.
Spines: Str+d4
Poison: A creature that is Shaken or Wounded by the triffid must make a Vigor roll against Paralysis (-2) poison.

The fountain beyond is open the sky, outside of the keep. It is covered in mold and moss and the water is slick and sickening. A Notice check will reveal one of the following (roll 1d6, each result only occurs once):

1: A pouch with 4 gp, 10 sp, and a fingernail
2: A jade pendant worth 10 gp
3: Triffid poison (Paralysis [-2]), 3 uses
4: A leather scabbard
5: A skeleton with 4 gold teeth (1 gp each)
6: A healing potion (50 gp)

AREA 4: STABLES

Read or paraphrase the following:

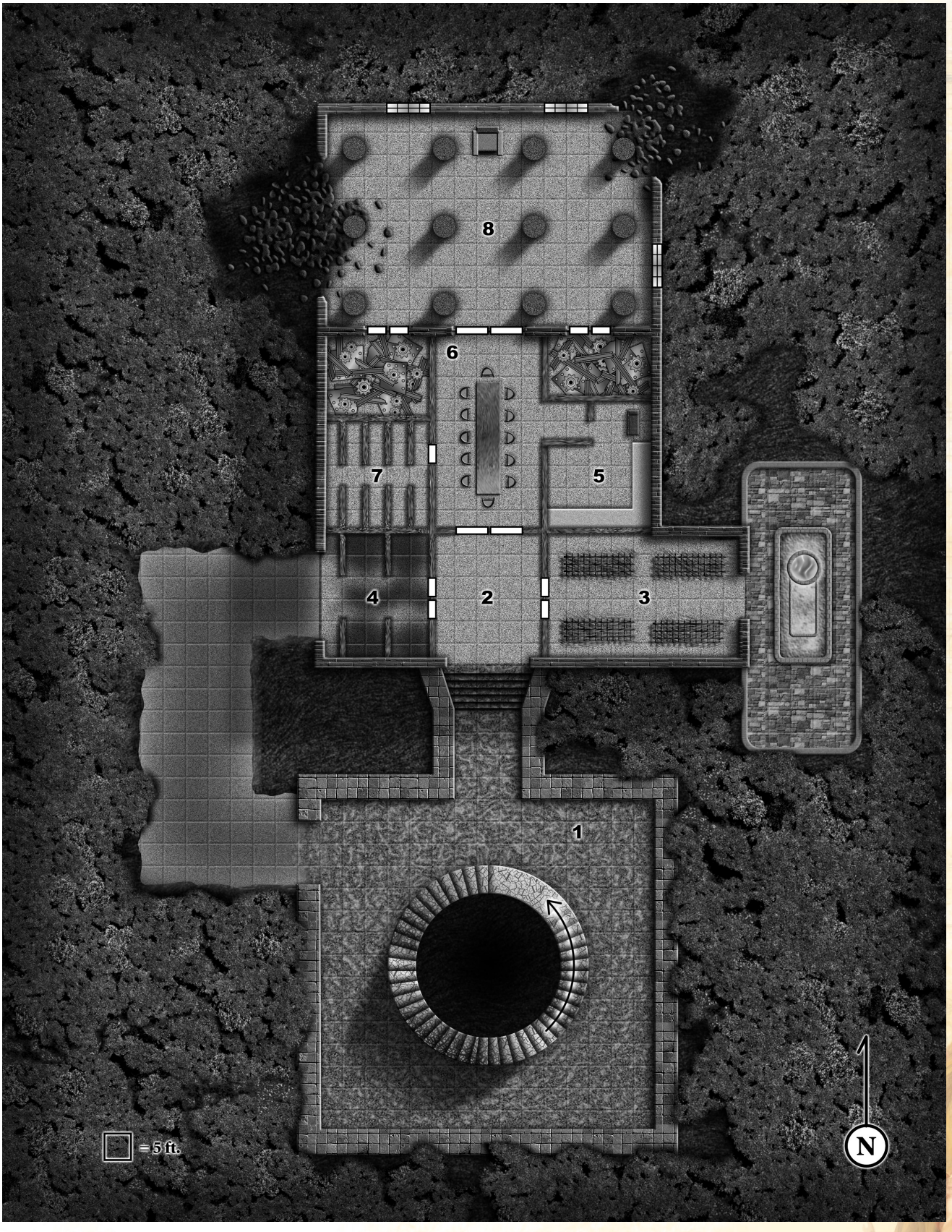
The dozen horses the cultists had brought were once tied safely within the stables. Their bodies have been torn apart by the dark shape that refuses to show its form despite the light coming from the open stable door beyond. The shapeless form shifts and weaves under the bands of light cast through breaks in the wall. The creature casts no shadows. Its arms seem to vanish when covered by its body. Its eyes cast their own light, reflecting off matte silver claws.

CONFLICT: NIGHTMARE FUEL

This is a shapeless wild that has woken early. Shapeless wild don't convert basic animals, only those with high intelligence. It immediately attacks. On round three, two more rise from a pile of hay.

SHAPELESS WILD (x3)

Shapeless wild will always attempt to ambush, or otherwise take their victims by surprise. They teleport between shadows, keeping the enemy off guard and al-


8
6
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ways reacting. When possible, the shapeless wild will try to gain an advantage through flanking with one another. As creatures of Ixindar, shapeless wild do not generate EDF, nor do their attacks disrupt technology.

Attributes: Agility d12+2, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d10, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Stealth d12+2
Pace: 10; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)
Special Abilities
Armor +2
Creature of Darkness: Shapeless wild treat darkness as if it were bright light and bright light as if it were darkness for purposes of determining penalties.
Fear -2
Hidden Ways: Shapeless wild can enter a shadow and instantly move to any other shadow within 30".
Ixindar: Shapeless wild do not generate EDF or disrupt technology.
Madness Given Form: If a creature fails its Fear check against the shapeless wild, the next attack it makes against the shapeless automatically fails.

Characters checking the horses notice the excessive level of violence inflicted on the poor animals. A Notice check will locate the pouches and saddlebags the horses had when they were killed. In one, they find 30 silver coins; in another, a fine black powder used in some more nefarious rituals. There is food in two bags, although it has been saturated by horse entrails. Further searching will find a silver chain worth 5 gp, a diary detailing the obsessive desire to convert to the shadow of one Ennis Carson, and a single holy dragon scale (worth as much as 200 gp to the right buyer, but an interested party may be hard to find). A raise on the Notice check will find a crushed silver goblet worth 50 gp under one carcass.

There is an exit here that proceeds down a small dirt path, all the way around the keep, to the pit stairwell.

AREA 5: KITCHEN

This is the main kitchen of the banquet hall. Read or paraphrase the following:

A large stone counter jutting from all the walls of this kitchen rests under a coat of dust. An open oven still has its spit and a thick layer of char and burned bone. Blackened chairs sat at either side of the spit for unlucky servants to spin. Anything else in the room has long since been stolen save for a few broken steel bowls and a hanging rack of cast iron cookware, black as oil and slicker than ice. At the far corner sits a pile of old bodies, withered and dried like raisins.

The characters will have passed the chef's office (so he could check and double-check all the food that came and went). His papers are scattered, faded, and worthless. There are eight bodies in the corner, all naked and mummified to such a degree as to prevent any identification. They are decades old. Under the charcoal, a character can make a Notice check to find a small black lockbox amidst the ash. It has a simple lock and inside, the characters will find two gold wedding rings and a silver pendant, collectively worth 150 gp.

AREA 6: BANQUET HALL

Read or paraphrase the following:

Instead of leading into a royal chamber, this keep opens directly into the banqueting hall. A long stained wood table extends for 25 feet down the length of the room. Worn but sturdy chairs surround the room. A large serving hatch connects the hall to the kitchen. A hallway beside the hatch leads to the head chef's office. Another door is closed on the opposite wall from the kitchen. Across from the entrance is an equally large set of oak doors, leading into the receiving chamber. Empty metal bars once held tapestries, and the nails in walls once hung paintings, but anything of value has been stolen. This makes the three bodies tied to chairs at the table all the more alarming.

Despite being bruised and bloodied, these match the descriptions of three of the five Iron Sons thieves. They are not dead, only deep asleep, suffering from the curse of the castle. They cannot be awakened in any way, not even if they are injured. When night falls, the bodies will wither and shapeless will emerge. If they are aware of this, the players can kill the techans to prevent an ambush later, but it is too close to nightfall to get them out of the castle in time to save them. There are score marks in the floor, indicating the table has been moved often.

Treasure: The techans' gear is all still here and both echan and techan players can take what they like. The techan gear is still functional. Two machine pistols (15/30/60, 2d6, ROF 3, 3RB, with 30 rounds of ammunition), three battery flares, one electric torch, one lighter, two two-way radios, three sets of spare combat fatigues, and 10 uc from various bastions.

A Notice check discovers a loose stone beneath the pile of gear. Under the stone is a pouch filled with 20 silver coins and 50 copper coins and a letter written in English:

If the sun sets, stay awake, lock yourself in. Bar the doors. Light torches about the room. Avoid the darkness. The shapeless will scrape and claw to get in. By day, defend the keep. Cultists want their offering and will kill those that try to leave. Only half of us sleep every morning while others fight. If you find this, look at the light.

You live as long the sun still shines. By nightfall, be somewhere else. Don't bother praying for salvation. We tried.

AREA 7: SERVANTS' QUARTERS

Read or paraphrase the following the moment the characters open the door:

Echan: *Three loud bangs like thundercracks echo from the room as you open the door. Instinctively you pull back behind the frame. You noticed two humans inside but you couldn't see what weapons or magic they might have brought to bear. Three holes explode from the open door. This room seems to have been the servants' quarters and these poor souls appear to have been locked within for who knows how long. They don't appear in the talking mood.*

Techan: *Three loud gunshots echo from the room as you open the door. Instinctively you pull back behind the frame. You noticed two humans inside, both armed with assault rifles with an obvious intent to use them. They don't appear much better equipped than you, but you don't know how much ammunition they have. This room seems to have been the servants' quarters and these poor souls appear to have been locked within for who knows how long. They don't appear in the talking mood.*

CONFLICT: IRON SONS SURVIVORS

These two men, David Stone and Martin Wood, represent the surviving members of the Iron Sons cell that stole the Chronicle of Aurannis.

IRON SONS CORPSMAN

The survivors are sleep-deprived and well past the point of panic. They fire their assault rifles blindly at anything that moves, only stopping when they run out of ammo or the weapon disrupts, at which point they struggle on with combat knives, fingernails and teeth. They must be subdued in order to get any sense out of them.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Gear: Light combat armor, caseless rifle (30/60/120, 2d8, 3RB) , combat knife (Str+d4)

Special Abilities

Armor +1: Iron Sons personnel favor light combat armor.

If either survivor is taken alive, the following information can be gleaned. He's obviously traumatized, but more importantly, he appears sleep deprived, which doesn't help matters in the slightest. They were probably ambushed in the receiving room or banquet hall. Given that his friends have yet to turn to the shapeless, he's only been locked in here for a day or so. Perhaps these two locked the other two out when the fight became too severe and they made a decision which cost the team. He isn't physically wounded beyond the sleep deprivation, which appears to have been going off and on for the better part of a week. The heroes are able to stabilize him, but he needs sleep to properly recover. His lucidity may only be temporary. The heroes are not properly equipped to determine the long term psychological effects.

Healing or Persuasion: The heroes are able to try to talk him down; assuring him they mean no harm. The heroes' appearance must have been initially alarming, but an offer of food and water helps greatly. Seeing the light outside has also helps.

Through his frantic speech and hyperventilation, he says the following: ***"It-it-it was just a j-j-job. Taking the book was ea-ea-easy. Cake walk, good money, low risk, no w-w-weapons. They said h-h-here—wasn't our idea—they said here. Ok, w-w-why not."***

"I don't know. The general set it up. He got the c-c-contract. Whoever they were, they c-c-c-can't handle magic for very long. They said they were c-c-c-coming here to pick up the book. I-I-I c-c-can't fall asleep. They t-t-took it. The hoodoo and his flock, p-p-p-preparing for tonight. Don't be here. G-G-G-Got to g-g-get out."

No amount of diplomacy will convince the survivors to stay and help in the fight. If allowed to depart, they will flee without looking back, not even stopping to try to help their comrades.

AREA 8: RECEIVING ROOM

Read or paraphrase the following:

How magnificent this receiving hall must have been hundreds of years ago when two great lords welcomed anyone willing to trek up the mountain to request an audience. Now only fractured brick and decayed wood remains. The two thrones, once carved from oak and gold, sit in tatters, the wood rotted away and the gold long since been pilfered. Only stone feet, barely a foot high and embedded in the floor, remain. Tiles of jade checkered with marble have cracked with time and abuse. The thrones are not elevated. A stone table, shaped like a cres-

cent moon, curves around the two chairs. Here, knights, businessmen, and landowners would convene to discuss affairs of the day. The room stretches a fair distance to the wooden doors at the entrance. Broken pillars occupy the remaining empty space in this dilapidated room. In front of the table, a dozen cloaked figures – the same as those you killed before – silently kneel before a taller man gleaming in silver and platinum plates. His complexion is perfect, his smile charismatic. He appears like a noble, beaming with allure and chiseled features, but his eyes give away his lack of virtue as he looks across the room to you. This is no knight, but a human monster.

"Do you grow restless, my children?" he asks. "You wish to waken anew. Cast off your mortality. All that is required is your desire. No bloodletting, no sacrifice. Just the will. Sit with us."

When the characters refuse, he concludes, ***"Then the shepherd must cull his flock."*** He then motions his followers to attack.

"Alive if possible, let's be merciful." Of course, his brand of mercy involves forcing victims to slumber for the oncoming curse of the shapeless.

CONFLICT: COME JOIN THE FUN

The cultists will not attempt to kill the characters if they are taken out. If all the characters are defeated, then the cultists will stabilize and immobilize them. Characters may make a +2 overcome check after 10 minutes to rouse before the curse sets in, but their weapons will be removed and they will still be restrained.

KATHO KOVACS

Kovacs is human, technically, but his mind is so tainted by Ixindar that he is completely impossible to reason (or even really communicate) with. He wields no weapons, preferring his dark magic.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d6
Skills: Intimidation d10, Spellcasting d12
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5
Special Abilities
Nihilimancy: Kovacs can take an action to slay one of his disciples to either recover 5 power points or remove up to two wounds from himself.
Spells: Kovacs casts nihilimantic spells (which do not cause disruption). He has 30 power points and knows the following powers: *armor, blind, bolt, boost/lower trait, confusion, damage field, dispel, fear, havoc, healing, puppet, stun, warrior's gift, zombie.*

DISCIPLE OF KOVACS (x16)

All the cultists are human. They wear black robes that slightly restrict their movements and wield ritual daggers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Skills: Fighting d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4
Gear: Ceremonial dagger (Str+d4)
Special Abilities
Martyrdom: Whenever a Disciple of Kovacs is taken out, the next Disciple to act gains +2 to their action.

The cultists will rush in to attack and protect their master. Apart from the furnishings already detailed, there is a pile of gear and treasure in the corner of the room, pilfered by the cultists as well as the other bandits and mercenaries that have frequented this keep.

Treasure: Although there is substantial treasure here, every piece retrieved takes an action. The most accessible are: one suede pouch with 50 gp, two linked gold rings worth 70 gp, four short swords in sellable condition, one random magic item worth no more than 500 gp, and the *Chronicle of Aurannis*.

PREDATOR AND PREY

Once only three or fewer cultists remain, or if Katho Kovacs takes two wounds, read or paraphrase the following:

All remaining natural light bleeds from the room. The shadows begin to grow long and fill the entire chamber. A few formless shapes rise from the casting blackness. Illuminated solid white eyes glint off the silver sheen of razor claws which slide and dance in the blackness, making you unable to see arms or shifting legs. As they emerge from the crevices about the room, whatever light still lingers refusing to reflect off them, they quickly close in.

Four shapeless wild emerge from each corner and go about attacking both the characters and the cultists. Their first attack kills one cultist instantly, to impress upon the players that this is not a fight they can win. Every two rounds after this, one more shapeless emerges. This will continue until the heroes make their escape or are all killed. Kovacs will attempt escape through the rubble in the west. If he makes it to the edge without pursuit, he escapes. None of his followers will survive. As the group passes through the banquet hall, the restrained techans transform into shapeless and attempt to block the escape. If the shapeless in the stables have not been killed, they emerge when the players pass that door.

When the heroes emerge back into the courtyard, read or paraphrase the following:

The sun has fallen and what few stars can fight against the glare of Attricana poke out from the curtain of night. Splinters of a few clouds thinly stretch out to the horizon. The black silhouette in the sky at first appears part of the night as it carries stars down with it.

The vessel is taller than it is long, longer than it is wide, hovering just under the clouds and just over the trees. As a floating centurion, it dwarfs the mountains and the keep perched atop them. The Moon and Attricana bare their light through a temporary break and the glisten of the shape's metallic skin begins to twinkle. The top looks like inverted boat bigger than any ocean vessel ever seen. Underneath expands into gaping maw. The vessel is daunting in its profile—an overturned boat settling on a dragon's skull. Bumps and divots pepper the hull. No smoke escapes from the exhaust, no glow from idling engines. It hangs as if on wires suspended from heaven. Metal boarding ramps reach out; too thin to sustain weight at that distance, but without supports, the bridge doesn't bow, even as the first figures cross it.

Six shapes under the shadow of the vessel scurry over, taking the keep in no time. The technological level of this group appears far beyond anything the characters have seen before. As their weapons dispatch the shapeless quickly, the players should make their escape. If they approach the interlopers, they will be fired upon. The first shot will miss and vaporize a nearby statue. Next round, if the characters have not taken the hint, fire a real shot (d12 Shooting, 4d10 damage). Any attacks by the heroes fail to do any damage even if they hit their mark: this is not a fight the characters should have a hope of winning.

As the players race down the tunnel, at least two shapeless will emerge behind them. As they reach the base of the shaft, two more shapeless will emerge below. The characters can fight or continue their escape. If the players had horses, they are still waiting outside. The shapeless will not pursue outside the keep if the heroes continue their escape. When the heroes have reached the edge of the valley, read or paraphrase the following:

The monstrosity pulls slowly away from the keep. It begins to lift to the sky, pushing through the threshold of clouds. Before the bottom jaw finally vanishes above, a small prick of light leaps from its point. It moves with precision to the keep. A brilliant flash strikes the landscape an instant before the wave of thunder reaches you. It shatters the peak and splinters the mountain as a hammer to a sand sculpture. Smoke and cinders covers what remains under the moonglow. Shards of grass fly like knives past your skin. The first trees lose their needles.

The blast is not radioactive, only a destructive concussion wave. All characters must make an Agility or Vigor roll or take 2d6 damage from the blast. The blast continues all the way to the forest, where it strips the needles and leaves off the trees. The keep, as well most of the rock tower, has been destroyed. Dust and pebbles are all that remains. If the players have not acquired the book, they can search through the debris.

Notice (-2) (one check per hour): The *Chronicle* is the only thing undamaged in the explosion, lying in the cleft of two shattered rocks that from a certain angle resemble a dragon's claw.

CONCLUSION

Even if they did not kill Kovacs, they receive a 1000-crown reward for his defeat if they return to Antikari. If they also recovered the book, the heroes can return to Limshau and deliver the book for the 2,000-chryso reward, or they can take it directly to Paraerra-sensei before rendering it up to the librarians for the reward. He will open the book and read the following:

"Before the First Hammer, the greatest dragon—he of violet and lavender scales—gave up his soul to stop the encroaching darkness of Ixindar. It was Gebermach that wielded the demon blade Dogurasu, plunging it into the dragon's heart, ending the mortal life of an immortal soul. In his final scream of defiance, this dragon of violet and lavender scales brought down a mountain upon Ixindar and orphaned the world to science. The impact that followed closed the world from magic. Before that instant, the crown of this dragon fell upon the ground. It was shattered, scattered, and forgotten."

"Amethyst was the living deity that forged the first world before it was our world. Before the Hammer. Before science had its reign. And there are others … all infused into artifacts by owners since passed and forgotten. As they bond to their owners, or as they are brought closer to other fragments, their powers amplify. Eight they are in number. They have earned names across various kingdoms.

"Amethyst opened the first gate, or maybe he was inescapably connected to it. To control them would be to control the fate of this world, and the fate of his soul. According to myth, to bring them together at the point of his death would allow one to call him back to life. And, in that moment, he could save the world. The power to open or close the gates is contained in these items. With Attricana gone, Earth would fall back to science, leaving man unhindered in

his pursuit to retake it, but for Ixindar of course. Some of techa insist the gates are connected and with one goes the other: perhaps they are right, though reality is rarely so simple. Where these artifacts rest, dark souls converge. Those bound to science wish a normal world while those bound to darkness wish only to see it burn. It is to be hoped that those reading this are more moderate in their desires.

"To find the other artifacts means to seek out those brought to their knees by overwhelming evil. Seek out the greatest temples, the tallest towers, and the deepest dungeons. Seek out the vaults closed tight. Seek out the obsessions that drive men mad. The answers have been recorded. Somewhere, at some time, someone noted their presence ... for they have already all been found. And no one would give up such power willingly or without compensation regardless of their motives. Bank on greed as your bitterest enemy and staunchest ally."

LEADS

Where the players go from here is up to them and you. They may continue this quest or continue with their lives. If they choose not to take on this responsibility, then Paraerra will offer an additional 2,000 chrysos for the relic and insist that the amulet stay in the city (if they refuse, it is stolen from them within a week of leaving Limshau, by high-level custodians who leave no sign of their presence and are not detected, regardless of how good a watch the party keeps). This would be the opportunity to plan out the campaign with some clues … or leave the quest hanging for now to allow the players the chance to develop their characters with other adventures until the quest calls upon them again.

As we descended the ladder, we realized that a faint glow had begun to illuminate the shaft below us. The lighting fixtures lining the chute, which initially had been as dead as the other electrics, flickered faintly as we passed, growing stronger and stronger the lower we got, casting uncanny blue shadows across the walls. By the time we reached the bottom, we found that the small lights at the corners of each turn in the corridor were emitting bright blue flares that stung our eyes.

"How is this possible?" I wondered, pushing the elevator button. "The main power is still off, but this… this must have been an emergency lighting system. How can it still be in operation, after all this time? Even without EDF, these emergency generators usually worked on fossil fuels – there is no way such a system could still be functioning after five centuries."

"Hush, niziołek," Sachenka put her hand on my shoulder. "Not alone here."

I stopped my tongue and opened my ears. There was something – a faint pulsing, not so much a noise as an absence of noise in a long, rhythmic pattern. It was not a mechanical sound, but neither was it a living one.

"Dragon?" I whispered. I would not have put it past a dragon to claim such a place as her lair. Sachenka shook her head and beckoned me to follow as she set off slowly down the corridor, sword in hand.

As we went along, the air grew thicker and more oppressive. I realized with a sudden start that this was not merely my imagination – as my eyes became accustomed to the actinic glare of the emergency lighting, I realized that the very dust was hovering in the air, unmoving, and that our passage left behind a trail of empty space into which no floating mote intruded. Sachenka motioned me to caution as we approached an open door: I flattened myself against the wall as she nudged it open with her sword and peeked in. Then she sniffed dismissively and moved on. I poked my head in and saw that the room appeared to be a kitchenette. My nose twitched at the inexplicable scent of hot coffee. Motioning for Sachenka to wait, I crept inside and pulled a chair over to the counter. As I had thought, there was a mug of steaming hot coffee sitting on the formica surface, the steam hanging in the air as motionless as the dust. Next to the mug was a spilled sugar packet, as though someone had dropped it half-way through pouring. It was though time had simply stopped in this room, but duration had continued. I glanced around the room and saw that the remaining chairs were in a state of disarray, as if the area had been abandoned with haste.

"What do you imagine happened here?" I asked my companion, who shrugged. "Move on," she said. "Getting close."

At last we came to a massive metal door that sealed the passage onward. A sign, spray-painted on the door in yellow stencil print, read 'Quarantine Zone,' and below it were several symbols I did not recognize. Above the door, a yellow light slowly revolved in its housing, the shadows its blinking visage cast making the corridor appear particularly sickly.

"Must open," Sachenka muttered, banging on the door with her sword hilt. I examined the workings. Electrical systems are not my particular expertise, but I had studied enough about ancient structures in my travels to make a guess. "I don't think it's possible," I said. "Something like this would have been on a 'deadman switch' – that is, it would require power to stay open. When the main power was interrupted, it locked these doors forever."

"Want power, I give power," growled Sachenka, reaching into her pack and pulling out a fist-sized glass ball. Before I could shout a warning, she hurled the cantrip globe at the door. There was a bright flash and then a sudden wave of thunder as the trapped spell escaped from the shattered sphere, ball lightning arcing from the door and every fixture surrounding it. In the area immediately around us, the dust began to swirl again. There was a creaking sound, several thumps, and then a scream of tortured metal as the door slowly dragged itself upward.

Half-way up its progress stalled, there was a loud thud, and it began to rapidly descend. Sachenka, with a sudden prodigious strength, ripped a metal rack that had been bolted to the wall free of its moorings and shoved it underneath the falling door. There was a crunch, a billow of dust and a sudden explosion of screws and bolts that forced us to dive for cover. When we looked up again, it was to find the door barely propped up by the twisted frame, a mere half a meter from the floor.

"I am not entirely convinced that this is a stable means of egress," I commented drily, earning a dull glare from my traveling companion. Nevertheless, with the aid of her sword and a large wrench I found in one of the nearby rooms, we were able to lever some large metal pipes from the nearby wall and jam them underneath the door as additional insurance. Drops of blue liquid fell from the ends of the pipes as we pulled them down, then froze in mid-air after a few seconds. The dust that had swirled up from the floor when the door opened had once again stopped moving, the curiously static curls resembling nothing so much as a field of ethereal mushrooms. Holding on to the wrench more for the sense of security than for any hopes of using it effectively as a weapon, I slid under the gap, Sachenka squeezing awkwardly through after me.

The stasis around us was starting to get to me. I had encountered a few instances of magic powerful enough to freeze time before, but such powers were almost always limited in scope and not nearly as selective as this effect seemed to be. Not to mention that a spell with such strength could only be the province of a very powerful caster or a dragon, which did nothing to curb the increasingly powerful fear of the unknown that awaited us in the sporadic darkness ahead.

"This book you were talking about," I whispered as we approached another door, this one secured by bolts, chains, and several heavy padlocks. "Does it explain exactly what's down here?" Sachenka nodded as she examined the locks, then pulled a flask of something euphemistically labeled "scoundrel's tonic" from her pack. She liberally poured the acid over the padlocks and chains. "Care to relay that information to your long-suffering camerade?" I said irritably.

"No," she said, as she stared fixedly at the dripping impedances, before launching into a stream of words that I shall not relate here, for although I only understood a few of them, I am certain they are not suitable for the more sensitive of my readers. "Acid not work," she finished lamely. "Power is too strong here."

"What power?" I asked, fiddling around in my own pack. Eventually I produced a bottle of one of my photographic chemicals.

"Not-change," she said, waving her hands angrily in the manner she had adopted when she could not find the appropriate Damaskan word. "All-things same-stay."

"I think I understand what you're getting at," I said soothingly. "In short, the laws of thermodynamics are on the fritz in here. But," I mused, "some basic chemical properties are obviously still at work, otherwise all our own metabolic processes would have stopped when we entered the area. So, in theory, if I combine the acid with this stuff," I poured some of the bottle's contents over the acid-drenched metal, "all the energy that is being suppressed will have to go somewhere… ah, we may want to stand back." We threw ourselves backwards, but this time there was no explosion: instead, the chains simply glowed white-hot in an instant and flowed into steaming puddles on the concrete.

Sachenka looked at me with sudden respect. I myself was surprised that it had actually worked. When the laws of the material universe start breaking down around you, even basic chemistry might as well just be technobabble. I was starting to understand what techans must feel like, all the time.

Beyond the door was a large room full of banks of machinery. Red lights stared lazily from most of the stacks, except for a handful which still glowed blue. Whiteboards covered with incomprehensibly arcane diagrams covered most of the walls, and several tables were covered with reams of flimsy paper. At the far end of the room was a large slanted window above a long console. As we approached the viewport, I spied a distortion in the air near the center of the expanse, and put out my hand to arrest Sachenka's progress. Picking up a pencil from the floor, I lobbed it toward the embolism: it arced through the air and then suddenly stopped short as it encountered the sphere.

"Let us avoid that particular space, shall we?" I suggested. She nodded and we edged around the spot and looked down.

Below lay a large chamber. The main power seemed to still be on within, for the area was brightly lit by several floodlights situated at regular intervals around the room. In the center, upon a large pedestal flanked by various furiously blinking machines, was a chunk of obsidian rock about the size of a tall gimfen. An array of multicolored cables ran away from the base of the monolith to the attending mechanisms. The power emanating from the fragment tugged at my hair, fingernails and teeth like a strong magnet on dental fillings.

"Oh," I said quietly. The sneaking suspicion that had been percolating in the back of my mind for the past hour was making its way into the living room of my forebrain and making a beeline for the wall safe of my certitude.

"That's—?"

"Shell of black gate," Sachenka confirmed. "Piece landed here after Hammer fell. Ancestor part of army group, found it, brought here to study as old world ended. Brother found book in Mossokev, her diary. They planned to use black gate as a weapon. Almost worked." Her eyes tightened in determination. "I come to destroy before anyone else finds."

"You come in time/too late," came another voice from behind us. The words seemed alien to my ears, and yet I understood the meaning with perfect clarity. Slowly we turned. Behind us stood a towering figure, more than two full meters tall. Although I would have thought its head should have been scraping the low ceiling of the room, space seemed to distort around it to allow it to stand at its full height. In form and visage it looked very much like a very tall tenenbri, with pale skin almost snowy-white and long ears that came to points even sharper

than chaparran's, but it had no hair at all upon its head and its eyes, instead of being milky-white like our subterranean cousins', were matte black. The contours of its body were androgynous, and its mask-like face bore an unwavering expression of mixed amusement and contempt. When it spoke, it did so with a voice like a melody performed by a machine, technically perfect but devoid of all soul and fire. I had never seen such a creature before, and it is a wonder that I survived to relate this account, for the monster was certainly that which the old tales refer to, if they do so at all, as 'shemjaza,' a demon formed from the dark imagination of the power that once stood against Amethyst.

"Long do we search/find this seed," the fiend spoke. The meaning behind the alien words was clear, but oddly tenseless, referring to all moments of time as the same moment. "Beneath the earth it lies, behind the man-insect's walls and shields. They think to hide it from us, but we smell it across the leagues and ages. So we send our thoughts into the infestation, and it opens the way for us."

I was rooted to the spot with terror, but Sachenka rallied at the creature's words. "Who you?" she demanded.

"We are Patient, For All Moments Are As One," spoke the shemjaza. The way the words arranged themselves in my brain, I understood that this was not only the demon's name, but a statement of its purpose as well as an indelible statement of the reality of the world. I felt in that moment that the entire course of the past and future led to this one point in time, and that any attempt to change what was to come would be not only futile, but pointless to even attempt, for it had already happened. "Walls are gone/never be," it said, "and stands the earth open to the seed, which grows/covers the land. Our instruments are reward with absolute stasis."

A tiny flare of defiance arose in my heart at these words. In my soul, I am a historian, and a historian's calling is to document the changes from one age to another – the very concept of the eternal, unchanging world this creature wanted to create was antithetical to my very being. Besides, whatever the powers of my species to hold back the disruptive influence of Attricana, I am still a child of the white gate, and I determined in that moment that if I must fall prey to the Great Enemy, I would not go quietly into the dark.

"Hey there, missy," I called out, moving my arm with effort into a side pouch of my pack. "Smile!" And with all my strength, I lobbed a packet of my photographic flash powder at the shemjaza. The creature put up a hand up in a lazy gesture to intercept the missile, and the instant it touched the packet, every moment of that powder's lifespan occurred at once, from the chemical reaction used to create it to the ultimate goal of its existence: a bright, blinding explosion of light. The demon reared back, momentarily disoriented, and in that instant the future of possibilities returned.

"Friend!" shouted Sachenka at me as she tossed the amulet she had taken from the corpse in the Sana Marsh through the air to me. "Slot behind you! Turn on 'trzy'!" I saw that she had turned to a section of the controls at the other end of the panel, where a similar shaped piece of metal was already slotted into place. "Jeden!" she called in Slavic. I jammed the amulet into the triangular slot. "Dwa!" Behind us, the shemjaza gave a shriek that sent shivers down my spine and foretold immanent doom to someone. "Trzy!" I twisted. The amulet turned like a key in a lock.

"Inevitability!" screamed the shemjaza as it ran at me, but Sachenka intercepted it, sword raised. The instant it encountered the demon's flesh, it too experienced every moment in its existence at once, flashing hot as the forge in the same instant that it crumbled into a pile of rust. Sachenka cried out in pain as the red-hot metal burned her hands, and that might have been the end of both of us had not we all heard at that moment a rumble from beneath us. An anemic electronic voice began to bleat: "Self-destruct activated. All personnel evacuate. Two minutes to detonation." The shemjaza seemed to forget all about us and rushed forward, placing both its hands on the console. Around us, the equipment began to spark and flash. The pencil fell to the ground as the sphere of no-time contracted. Dust began to swirl in the air again, first

slowly, then faster and faster in waves down the corridor as whatever syntropic leakage from the monolith was absorbed by the demon and concentrated back into the control panel.

I stumbled over to Sachenka and with difficulty, lifted her arm over my shoulder. "Go," she hissed at me. "Leave me. I destroy this one."

"Don't insult me, mon ami," I said. "To leave a friend behind would be ungentlegimfenly." Yes, I know, but danger does strange things to one's vocabulary.

Together we ran trippingly from the room. The electronic voice came in distorted spurts as we ran back through the corridors, the countdown terrifyingly inconsistent. We occasionally heard the rumble of explosions, followed by an inrush of air as though the explosion were being absorbed into itself. When we reached the propped-up door, we thrust ourselves under it just in time, as the toxic-looking sludge that filled the pipes burst from its containment and flooded across the floor, before halting and flowing backwards, then repeating the procedure.

We reached the elevator shaft, out of breath. Sachenka looked at her burned hands. "Can't climb," she said. "You go."

"We don't have to climb," I said. She looked at me strangely. I pointed to the panel where I had pressed the 'up' button, what seemed like days ago. The button was glowing white. "The demon is trying to preserve the entire base in a single moment in time to prevent the self-destruct," I said breathlessly. "But because there is so much to concentrate on, it can't handle everything at once." There was a 'ding' as the empty metal box rose from its place at the bottom of the shaft. "Quickly, get onboard," I urged my companion. "Who knows how long it will last before nature resumes its course."

The elevator car began to rise, and rise, and rise. I judged we were nearly three-quarters of the way to the surface before the lights began to sputter and the car drew to a halt, the gears grinding and sparking on the cable as the fail-safe cut in. Below us, we heard a worrying rumble.

"Quickly," I said. "Have you a healing potion in that pack?"

She shook her head. "No magic but globes," she said. "No want to break key."

"Globes… of course!" I shouted triumphantly. I thought back to that moment of despair in the Sana Marsh, when my camera flash had miraculously worked again before burning itself out. From the bottom of the shaft we heard a loud explosion, and the car juddered. "Hold on to something," I yelled over the din, as I put my hand over the elevator controls. I am not terribly religious at the best of times, but I tossed off a quick silent prayer to Mecha, just in case. I tried to remember how I felt in that desperate moment. With every effort of my will, I ordered the machine to push back Attricana's power, to work, to fulfill its purpose just one last time.

The lights flickered again. There was a squeal of metal, and then the elevator car shot upwards at breakneck speed. "Be ready to jump!" I shouted to Sachenka as I watched the numbers flying by on the display above. "Now!"

We flung ourselves out of the door as the car continued upwards, smashing itself to bits when it hit the top of the shaft. A moment later, a gout of flame shot upwards from the bottom, and then pulled itself backwards as time rewound itself again.

On this floor, we could see that the power of nature was taking hold rapidly. The signs and metallic doors which had been in near-pristine condition when we came in had developed spots of rust, and cracks were forming in the concrete. "I think we had best abandon this place forthwith," I said as a large fissure appeared in a nearby support strut. "I don't think its influence extends up here any more."

Bruised all over, clutching extremities that hopefully weren't broken, out of breath and out of time, we limped towards the exit. It would be needlessly dramatic to say that the entrance fell in as we crossed the threshold – in fact, it was a good three minutes after that we heard the collapse, and dragged ourselves back to avoid a sudden rockslide.

"Is done." Sachenka panted.

"I don't think it will ever be done, actually," I said. "But the entrance is sealed, and if I read it rightly, that thing will remain below forever, exerting all its nature to prevent the self-destruct. It will have no power to spread the black gate's influence beyond this mountain now. I suspect your debt is satisfied."

At the bottom of the cliff, we could see the outline of the invisible encampment becoming rapidly overgrown by grass, moss, and trees, until pristine forest remained where the camouflaged structure had been. "Like Attricana's birth in miniature," I mused. Beside me, Sachenka collapsed, exhausted. I too wished I could simply lie down and sleep the sure-to-be-short remainder of my life away, but something kept me on my feet. "Here," I said, digging inside Sachenka's pack for a first aid kit. "Let's get you sorted out, and then it's back on your feet, my girl. We have a long trip ahead of us."

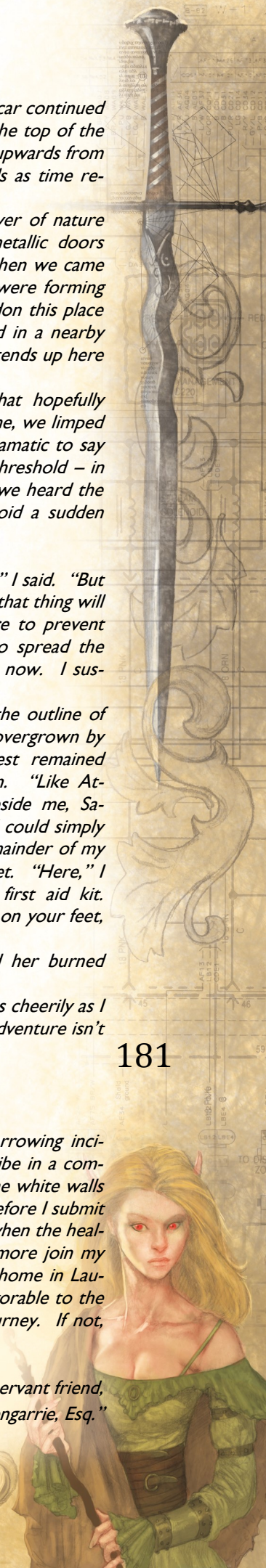
"Where?" she said weakly as I bandaged her burned hands.

"Why, back to Limshau, of course!" I said as cheerily as I could. "Remember, I am a journalist. This adventure isn't over until my article goes to press!"

* * *

And so it was that after several more harrowing incidents, the details of which I may later describe in a companion volume, we made our way back to the white walls of Limshau, where I write these last words before I submit this chronicle to my editors. In a few days, when the healers have finished with us, I intend to once more join my friend upon the road as she returns to her home in Lauropa. May the gods, if they exist and are favorable to the endeavors of all lifekind, smile upon our journey. If not, well… what is life without a few adventures?

I remain, your ever observant friend,
Glynn Glengarrie, Esq."



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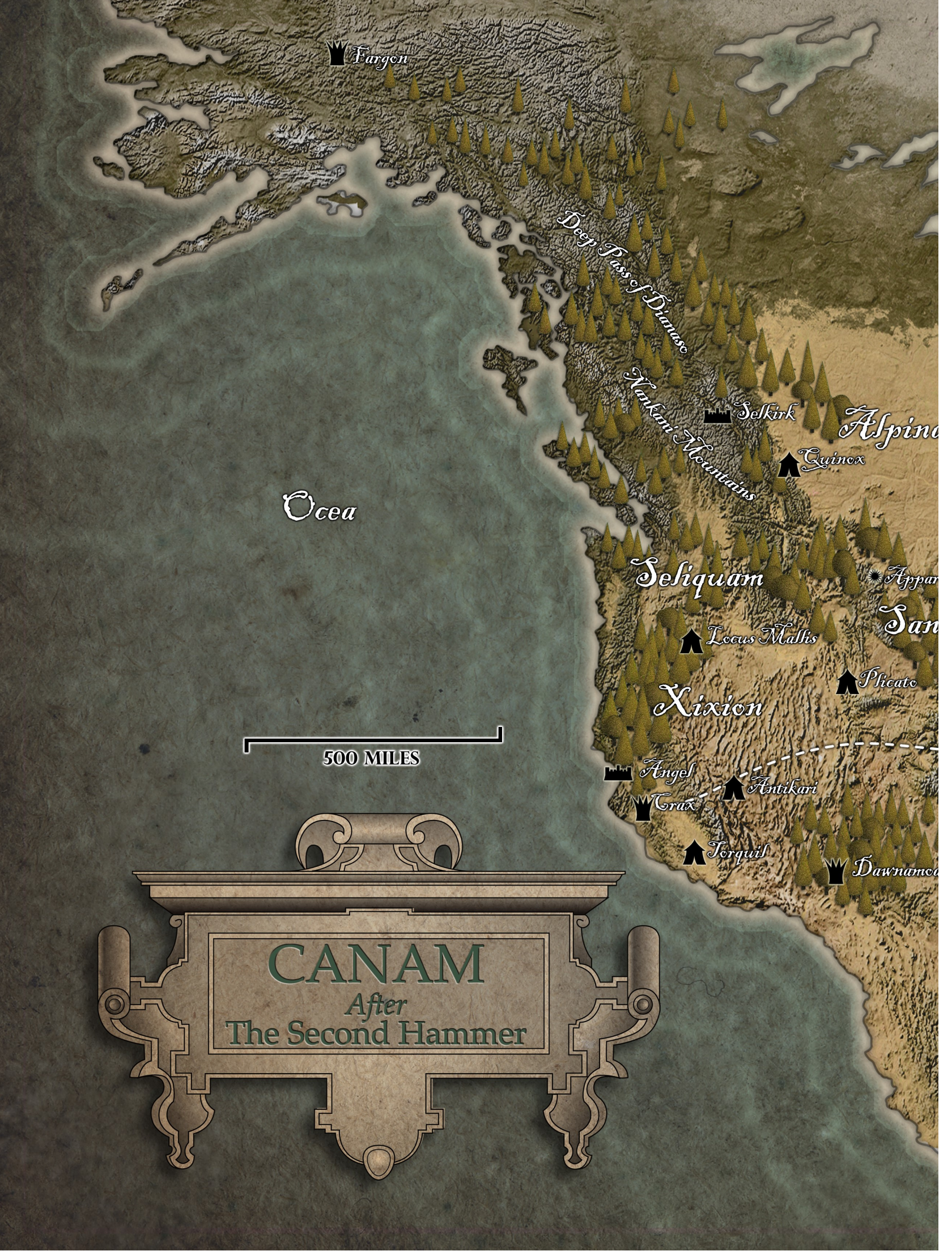
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