Brief History:

Not too long ago, Xanthia used to only have one Mage’s guild, the Royal Academy of Magic. Its primary headquarters was in Solaris, at the seat of the Chalcis Empire. The Chalcis Empire consisted of the majority of explored Xanthia, except for the land of Sarvik and the Formorian Badlands, two places where very few people lived. Rylan, the Archmage of the Royal Academy of Magic invented the means to magically reconstruct a wizard in an object by investing a portion of their soul and Gift. Altars reconstructed you at the age you constructed them, and so were a means to immortality for wizards. These altars were typically large structures, and the wizard would have to stay within a couple mile radius for the Altar to be effective. This led to wizards only travelling when they felt safe, or when they could bring their Altar with them.

While it was possible to destroy a wizard’s altar and thus destroy his immortality, a wizard could always construct a new Altar. People also rarely had any reason to hate wizards, and only Emperor Theseus had enough power to order the execution of a wizard, which he almost never did without permission from the Archmage. Wizards rarely quarreled: the Royal Academy did a good job of resolving all differences.

However, some mages had differing ideas on what role the Royal Academy should play in the governance of the Chalcis Empire. The Royal Academy of Magic served as trusted advisors to the Emperor, and in turn, received a lot of funding and lenience from the government. While most were loyal to the royal family, others felt they should overthrow the current government and rule directly. This led to three factions starting: the Loyalists, the Revolutionaries, and the Isolationists: those who thought mages shouldn’t play any role in politics at all. The Revolutionaries knew without the help of the Loyalists and the Isolationists, they would have a difficult battle to fight to take control, however, especially if the Loyalists intervened on behalf of the royal family.

Events started to accelerate when a powerful wizard by the name of Knaltref discovered a theoretical magical ritual. The idea of the ritual was simple: with enough magical power, wizards could tear a rip into the Aether, the source of all magical power. Wizards were unconsciously able to manipulate a tear in the Aether in order to manipulate reality. Working together, a large number of wizards could link their power and rip a much larger hole to draw even more power. However, most of the wizards thought the ritual was much too dangerous: enlarging any hole that a single wizard accessed could annihilate the host, and opening a new hole could have unintended consequences for the entire world. No holes in the Aether not used by a wizard were believed to exist. In fact, it was popular, albeit unverified, belief that wizards were born to guard tears in the Aether. While no such beings were confirmed to exist, many wizards felt that there were horrible creatures lurking on the other side that wizards prevented from crossing to the world they knew.

Knaltref, however, was the de facto leader of the Revolutionaries. He convinced the Revolutionaries to try the ritual with only their numbers: they wished to create a tear that all of them would share, linking their fate together. Unfortunately, with their few numbers, they were unable to maintain control over the ritual. The rip expanded too fast, letting in unconstrained magical power. This tore the flesh from their bones and incinerated them en masse. Normally this wouldn’t be a problem, as their souls would just return to the Altar for rebirth. However, from the tear being so large, their souls started to leak through it and into the Aether, where they’d be lost. Knaltref was able to stop the expanding tear while he still lived, but his comrades were mostly bones and ashes.

However, Knaltref was a magical researcher, and his specialty, unbeknownst to his comrades, was the dark arts. He could feel their souls and their Gifts through the shared tear, and so he knew he still had a chance to save them. He performed another ritual that was considered too dangerous by most of wizards: he transferred some of his remaining life force to the others in order to bring them back from death. This left them all with a ghastly appearance, but the ritual had worked: they had obtained the power they needed. From then on, they dubbed themselves the Necromancers, for they had used their magical power to accomplish a resurrection in a way that no one else ever had.

The Necromancers awed at their newfound power, decided it was time to strike. First, as a precaution, they had some of their number stay behind to destroy many of the Loyalists’ Altars if a fight should break out. The rest of their number, through their newfound power, and destroyed the Solarian Palace in a spectacle: they were able to call enough magical energy to leave a ten meter crater. Emperor Theseus and almost the entire royal family was slain in an instant.

The Isolationists knew this moment was coming. Masriel, a young magical researcher who had been petitioning for years for the wizards to be less involved in politics, had formulated a contingency plan. For as long as the wizards were willing to cooperate in their decisions, the Isolationists would stay, for they benefitted greatly from the research of others as well. However, Masriel, and the Isolationists at large, did not have much interest in politics within the Royal Academy. They certainly did not want to fight a war over who would rule the Chalcis Empire. Upon seeing the beginnings of the conflict, they left for the Formorian Badlands. There, outside of the Chalcis Empire, they knew they could have peace to pursue their research without getting caught in the middle of a power struggle. The Formorian Badlands were a rugged existence, but they were determined to be independent. They built the Ivory Tower of Magic, to teach any young wizards who thought magic should be learned for the sake of magic, not as a tool for petty politics.

The Isolationists prediction was exactly right. Upon discovering what Knaltref and the Necromancers had done, Rylan expelled them from the Royal Academy. Furthermore, much to Knaltref’s chagrin, he declared Emperor Theseus’s nephew, Percy, a boy of eight, was the next heir to the throne by the royal succession. Solaris itself turned into a battleground as Necromancers and Loyalists killed each other on the street. The Necromancers’ preparations paid off, and many Loyalists were slain. However, the Loyalists outnumbered them ten to one, and the Necromancers were eventually routed. They fled to Sarvik, a place that was considered entirely uninhabitable by people: full of poisonous plants, marshes, and dangerous animals that somehow survived on a diet of other dangerous animals and poisonous plants. However, the Necromancers were no longer people, and from the marshes they raised a Necropolis and founded the College of the Dark Arts: a school of magic for people who wanted to learn things the Royal Academy didn’t teach. Knaltref vowed to destroy Rylan and rebuild the Royal Academy of Magic as the dominant political force on the continent.

Rylan knew the remaining Loyalists were in a predicament: their numbers were decimated and the Necromancers would return, potentially with more power and with greater numbers. While they had no interest in pursuing the Necromancers into Sarvik, they also knew they needed to take precautions for the Necromancers’ eventual return. Rylan, desperate, declared that the rest of the Royal Academy would perform the same ritual as the Necromancers. However, they had the benefit of hindsight, and they could see how the ritual destroyed the Necromancers. The Loyalists decided to transfer their sentience to magically fashioned bodies so that they would not be destroyed by the ritual. This allowed them to match the Necromancers power, proving for a more fair fight in the next battle.

However, they decided to go a step further. Masriel had previously posited that life could be created through the use of magic. Masriel’s key research area was the nature of life, and he had shown that the process could be emulated by magic. Rylan had previously forbidden further research into that area, because he was afraid of the consequences. Now, caught in an all-out war, he decided to take Masriel’s research to the logical conclusion. He and the remaining Loyalists successfully created intelligent automatons imbued with magical life. Unexpectedly, the process they used to create these clockwork automatons gave them the Gift of magic as well.

When the Necromancers returned, the Steampunks, as they were affectionately called by their creators, proved to be far too much for the Necromancers, and they quickly fled back to Sarvik to regroup. Knaltref was furious, for without access to the Royal Academy’s resources, the Necromancers were at a serious disadvantage. He and the rest of the Necromancers stopped referring to those still at the Royal Academy as the Loyalists now. Who were they to be loyal to? A boy of eight? Instead, they adopted the title the Steampunks used to refer to their creators: the Engineers.

The overwhelming power the Engineers displayed ended the war in a truce: the Necromancers could not take Solaris, and the Engineers had no interest in taking Sarvik. The Engineers had gained a servant race, which they began to rely on for many of their more mundane tasks. Eventually, through some process unknown to the Engineers, the Steampunks started to gain sentience themselves. This, like the Gift of magic, was completely outside of Masriel’s conjectures.

At this point, the Engineers became divided amongst themselves: some thought they should give the Steampunks equal footing within the Academy, and others thought that the Steampunks just appeared sentient: they were still only an emulation of life, and so there was no reason that couldn’t just be an emulation of sentience as well. Unfortunately, this debate ended when an unhinged Engineer decided to attempt to destroy the Steampunks because he thought they were going to doom them all.

The Steampunks fought back, killed him, and destroyed his Altar. Rylan, and indeed most of the Engineers, were terrified by the Steampunks unilateral violent action. Deeming them a threat to peaceful people everywhere, he ordered the Steampunks dismantled. Fighting broke out, with several Engineers and Steampunks dead. However, while the Engineers had Altars in place, the Steampunks were not granted that privilege. The Steampunks fled Solaris for the Formorian Badlands, in hopes of taking refuge with the Badlanders, as the Isolationists had come to be known.

Masriel initially welcomed the Steampunks. He recognized them as the product of his own research. However, upon realizing what they had done, and how they had killed an Engineer, Masriel saw that the Steampunks had already become a player in a political game he wanted no part of. The Steampunks, however, had nowhere to go. They were afraid that for as long as they were in the Chalcis Empire, the Engineers would find them and destroy them. In their desperation, they attacked the Badlanders to try to drive them out. However, they were once again routed.

The Steampunks fled into Phesus, a city of the Chalcis Empire occupied primarily by industry. Phesus was a remote location, containing only a tiny garrison of the Imperial Army. The Steampunks quickly destroyed the garrison. The citizens of Phesus fled, and the Steampunks let them go. The Steampunks finally found a place that looked like home: industrial plants, full of brass and machines. There, they formally become known as the Steampunk Collective: they were new to their independence, and their decisions thus far had been without regards to any individual. They have created the Clockwork University to teach the less experienced members how to do magic.

The Steampunks primary motive is survival, and while they knew about the construction of Altars, they never learned how to reproduce. They now war with the Engineers to force the secrets of their creation from them. However, realizing that the Engineers would never make a truce while they occupied part of the Chalcis Empire, they also war with the Badlanders, in the hope of creating a permanent home for themselves. The Steampunks also suspect that they could get the secrets of their creation from Masriel, since he was responsible for the original research. Knaltref, upon seeing the Engineers lose their ally and gain a new enemy, have jumped at the opportunity to start a new war. Now all four factions wrestle for supremacy.

In order to fight in these various arenas, the Steampunks invented the Citadel, a customized fortress made out of magical materials that can be easily teleported, and are especially resistant to spells. This allowed them to bring their Altars with them, adding a whole new dimension to the conflict. The other guilds quickly copied this technology, and soon, a free for all war developed.