AEIRN

Aeirn was a world dually scarred by the rise of magic and technology; a world torn by paradox and hovering on the threshold of the Absolute.

### A WORLD OF MAGIC AND TECHNOLOGY

*A common assumption, that a magical society would not develop technology and a technological society would discourage the emergence of magic, is debated at some point in the story.*

Aeirn is a world with a realized magical and technological heritage. The two legacies were founded in separate eras. The legacy of magic on Aeirn originated in the early history of Aeirn due to the presence and involvement of gods, but that era—known as the Age of Miracles—was ended by the start of the purge. Where magic failed, human curiosity and ingenuity took over and gave rise to new technologies.

### THE AGE OF MIRACLES

In more ways than anyone imagined, Aeirn was a world shaped by the will of its inhabitants. The potential for psionic ability had existed in human beings since they first evolved on Earth, manifesting erratically throughout history. In an age before the dawn of recorded history, a significant portion of the human race awakened to that potential and utilized it to create an idyllic civilization on Earth. At some point something profound but unexplained had happened that caused an exodus, a massive migration that ended with the mysterious disappearance of the entire civilization—save for a scattered minority that remained on Earth to watch over the latent human beings who had been oblivious to the call.

The lost civilization came to an end over one-hundred-thousand years ago, when it became a battleground in the rebellion against Realization. The first inhabitants of the inner realm, where Aeirn was created, were survivors of the fall of that civilization—souls harvested by the demon Azael, trapped in a dream world, a pale reflection of the outer realm that was at once their prison and their playground. The possessed arrived in a kind of wasteland, a chaotic, shifting amorphea polarized by the surreal and the ideal.

### THE INNER REALM

The inner realm was initially a cold and lifeless reflection of the outer realm, a foundation upon which the captive souls could dream up worlds of their own. To escape isolation, they had to seek each other out in limbo or learn to share a dream, and the world within it.

Inevitably, Azael captured enough souls for a new world to resolve in the inner realm. To escape isolation, they had to seek each other out in limbo or learn to share their dreams. Their thoughts and feelings created the world they existed in, an unending dream that was difficult to control because it was shared. In time, they learned how to manipulate their reality, even as reality became stable through the influence of their offspring, replicating the pattern of their host realm and becoming the inner, or shepherd gods of the demon’s realm.

Sharing a dream of the home they had lost, the eclipsed souls resurrected the lost civilization on the world of Aeirn in the shadow of Azael’s mind.

The captive souls took an active role in creating a haven for humanity.

The gods’ original home on Aeirn had been an island paradise in the Northwest Hemisphere.

According to legend, the gods once lived among humans, bringing wisdom and guidance to aid in the cultivation of culture and civilization. People knew that gods walked among them, and because the first humans had been the children of the gods, the gods were worshiped as ancestors.

When the gods described the creation of the world to people they insisted they had only been caught up in the dreaming of it. The world, the heavens and the emptiness around them had been dreamed into existence, and even the gods were at the mercy of the dream.

Humanity was awed and inspired by the cities and sanctuaries the gods created and shared with their descendents.

Humanity developed, in its fashion, oblivious to events that dictated the course of life on Aeirn. Populating the vast continents and forming nations, people were generally content with life—even when they happened to be at war with each other.

The gods tried not to interfere with the course of human events on Aeirn; however the increasing incidence of war inevitably compelled them to take action. The gods intervened by setting the borders between the lands of their descendants, and maintaining peace until turbulent periods subsided.

The gods interceded again when dragons were discovered, or rather encountered in the jungles of Onuat and the forests of Anaph, in order to calm the resulting panic that spread throughout the world, with the Dragon Pact. In the end, however, the cause of the gods' down fall had nothing to do with anything they did wrong.

As in the outer realm, the physical processes of life imposed their own order on the world and eventually an age of realization brought the age of miracles to a close.

### THE FIRST AGE OF MAGIC

The intimate participation of the inner gods continued though to end of the First Age of Magic, a period of enlightenment that became tainted by ambition.

The First Age of Magic was founded on and defined by the arts of conjury, which were used to exploit and manipulate spiritual and elemental forces for power and influence over reality.

As the purge progressed, the gods were turned against each other by the belief that their power, derived from a single, common source, was diminished by division. The art of conjury, responsible for, contributed to the fall of the gods by giving mortals power over the gods, revealing and exploiting the angelic and demonic natures of the gods. In spite of their immortality, the gods could be destroyed—and many were. Those who survived their attempted destruction retreated into their private domains or self-imposed exile among mortals.

### THE AGE OF RUIN

In the period following the cataclysm some of the magic and traditions of the first age survived, diminished gradually through conflict and struggle. The society that once spanned the globe was shattered, its people left scattered and isolated, reduced to primitive clans and tribes that adapted and reestablished civilization with varying degrees of sophistication and success.

In the Age of Ruin, humanity became scattered and isolated, reduced to primitive clans and tribes that adopted the use of tools and technology t0 reestablish civilization—with varying degrees of sophistication and success. In time, magic, miracles and gods became the stuff of myths and legends in most cultures. Fortunately, this brought things into balance until the dawn of the second age of magic.

### THE SECOND AGE OF MAGIC

The Second Age of Magic was a period following the purge and the age of ruin, in which most of the arts and traditions of the First Age of Magic gradually diminished through conflict and struggle.

For those with the right aptitude, and access to old lore gathered during the purge, it was possible to practice real magic; and some of the surviving lore stimulated the development of philosophy and science as well.

The second age of magic saw the general withdrawal of the gods and weakening of pagan religions. An obscure prophet and philosopher proposed that a single creator was implicit in the ancient legends of the dream in which the gods always referred to; that God was the dreamer of that dream.

Unfortunately, the prophet was betrayed and martyred by some of his disciples, and his teachings were adopted by adherents of a monotheistic cult, presented as divine revelation and used to fuel the foundations of their religion. The religions that branched off from the cult persecuted the remaining gods and immortals, reclassifying some as angels and others as demons, and condemned the practice of religions devoted to them. Creation itself was commonly considered the only incarnation of the One True God necessary, as no singular personification could be majestic enough for the Creator. Not that this prevented the anthropomorphism of God.

At the same time, wizards working to preserve the world and mankind by studying and understanding existence introduced magery. The art of magery helped mortals become independent of the gods and the cost of divine intervention. The monotheists tolerated the practice of magery because it was an entirely human magic. Those with the right potential were groomed as agents and champions of the various orders supported by church and state. Other forms of magic, including the ancient arts of conjury, necromancy and demonology—arts developed to exploit the elemental spirits, including true angels and demons—were condemned.

In addition, many worshippers of the old gods declared their deities were agents of the One God, through whom their worship of God was directed. This assisted the transition to and evolution of magery, which was used to arm the human champions of God against the conjury of infidels. To distance the power of the church from the power of magic—to ensure that the power of the church could not fall into the hands of a single, ambitious individual—the foot soldiers of the church were mere monks.

Due to the predominance of clerical mages, magic remained strongly associated with religion. Monotheism expanded, reinforcing the belief that the ancient gods were merely angels or demons. The religious and arcane traditions adopted by each church became a force devoted to the exploitation or eradication of any lingering legacies of the first age of magic.

With every generation, civilization continued to advance, even through dark days of war and oppression.

The age of empires featured an era of technological and industrial advancement that brought the world out of the age of ruin. With every generation, civilization continued to advance, even through dark days of war and oppression. Ironically, industry helped to diminish the power and influence of the church by upsetting the balance of power between church and state, producing innovations that increased the privileges and opportunities of the common people.

In time, the public practice and exercise of magery became restricted to the suppression of conjury almost exclusively. Thus, magic became very uncommon and most mortals were forced to make do with more mundane resources and resourcefulness. With great caution, the practitioners of the arts of conjury continued to pass on their legacy, often finding ways into the establishment and choosing their protégés from among the ranks of magical and clerical initiates. Efforts to wipe out the legacy of magic were blunted by interreligious conflict, as the champions and agents of rival faiths were easier to identify and engage than the odd witch or wizard.

Many practitioners of old magic were even able to negotiate special arrangements with the establishment, working as free agents or trading lore for protection. Most simply went underground, shepherded by immortals forced out of self-exile by the purge.

Thus, arts from the Second Age of Magic survived as part of a supernatural, underground counter-culture.

Ironically, industry helped to diminish the power and influence of the church by upsetting the balance of power between church and state, producing innovations that increased the privileges and opportunities of the common people.

The end of the Second Age of Magic had largely been the result of the rise of monotheistic cults that had become increasingly hostile toward the gods—reclassifying some as angels and others as demons, and persecuting older faiths devoted to them—as they became established religions.

### THE THIRD AGE OF MAGIC

By the middle of the Age of Empires the gods were considered dead by most of humanity, assuming they had ever existed, but the world was not free of their immortal influence. By their nature, the gods and their direct issue remained as much a part of the world as ever, gathering into communities as changes in the world freed them from obligations to various populations. Not surprisingly, the retreats of the gods were difficult places for mortals to reach, and yet when trade and exploration started to reconnect humanity, a mortal child was shipwrecked on an island where several immortals had taken refuge. This orphan was allowed to live and grow among the gods, but the gods underestimated the child’s curiosity and intelligence.

### AESLYN

As a girl, Aeslyn was shipwrecked on an island inhabited by eclipsed souls and their descendants. She was adopted, raised and enlightened as one of their own, even though she did not naturally possess their miraculous abilities. Their archives described what they knew how to do and often explained in complex and sophisticated detail how things worked, and eventually she developed a way to perform miracles artificially—creating the Art of Sorcery.

### THE REVELATION

Raised in the midst of the immortals, former gods and survivors of the purge, the child was exposed to the miraculous psychic ability of the eclipsed. After confronting the prospect of her mortality, she studied under the eternals in the hopes of becoming immortal—aided by the vast resources of their archives. To succeed in her ambition, she needed to understand the promise and potential of the psyche. The circumstances that brought the gods into existence had long passed and were unlikely to be repeated in this world, but by studying them and understanding the basis of the arts they had inspired, she realized that all sentient beings had the potential for godhood. When the immortals realized what she had discovered, some of them tried to kill her—and when they failed, she fled, taking her revelation with her to human shores.

Having been the only human on an island populated by gods, she welcomed the opportunity to travel, learn about her own kind, and hopefully find a man worth mating. One of the first things she learned was that she was descended from common merchant stock. The human race had been divided up and socially stratified by *breed*. Feeling like an alien among her own people, it took her a while to adapt to the world the immortals had closed themselves off from, during which time she learned the hard way to be cautious in exposing her talents and immortality. Even a modest use of her power caused people to call her a witch, and more substantial demonstrations would convince them she was a demon.

The more she saw of the world and its many problems, the more she felt a desire to teach the Art to others. When she discovered the nature of the Arts that had survived through the Age of Ruin, she realized that it was necessary, if only to combat the threat arcane and occult forms of magic posed. Unfortunately, it proved more difficult to find suitable initiates than she would have imagined. Because of her sex, most people did not take her seriously enough to train under her, and the ones that did take her seriously often saw her as a threat.

Although her sex and breeding were obstacles to any formal or official public recognition, many men and women proved eager to be her disciples. Thus began the third age of magic. By virtue of her mastery of the art she created, the orphan was able to take the art of sorcery to the world at large, teaching magic divorced from divinity to those with the determination and devotion to learn. Because the art he created was founded on the cultivation of personal integrity, it appealed strongly to the independent minded. It also had a built in limiting factor; a sorcerer’s power was limited by the depth of her devotion, her own sense of responsibility.

The revelation included theories based on the orphan’s analysis of the legends and lore of the First Age of Magic, during the age of gods, concerning the soul of creation. This theory of the dreamer, based on the dreaming legends of creation, held that the only foundation for a world was the same as the foundation of a person, a soul. The orphan taught that each person contained the potential for an entire world, possibly even many worlds, though such worlds were but dreams or reflections of the waking world. The thing that distinguished a ‘real’ world from a dream world was the participation of many souls; and all souls participated in the creation of the ultimate reality.

### TWISTS OF FAITH

Many of the orphan’s disciples recorded her teachings in order to help pass them on. Unfortunately, some of these writings fell into the wrong hands and were later altered and appropriated for religious and political purposes.

The written teachings of the orphan were adopted by those religions, and embraced as divine revelation by their adherents. The monotheists deliberately obscured the true authorship of the teachings and persecuted the orphan and her disciples using false claims that they had discovered and perverted the “ancient” teachings of their religious prophet.

The arts the orphan passed on to her disciples as part of her teachings could not be stolen or accredited to the prophet, however. As a result of the religious persecution, the true identity of the orphan was never officially established. The written teachings emphasized only what was taught, and only her original disciples could identify her as the person history identified as the one responsible for bring about the Third Age of Magic.

### THE ACADEMY

The founder of the academy was one of the orphan’s disciples—the first to gain public recognition. His teaching inspired a wide following and resulted in the establishment of the Anep Tear Academy. In his generation, belief in magic, miracles and gods had diminished into the myths and legends of ancient history. In the Third Age of Magic, power of the most personal and accessible nature was once again recognized and accepted as real—at least, once people were forced to confront that reality. After millennia of harsh reality and centuries of technological and scientific development, Aeirn was severely shaken by the return of magic.

With great caution, the orphan continued to pass on her legacy, often finding ways into the establishment to choose her protégés from among the ranks of magical and clerical apprentices. Those with the right potential were groomed as agents and champions of the various orders supported by church and state. Unfortunately, the people with the most promising potential rarely received the kind of training and education needed to harness that potential.

### THE MAGIC ARTS

Magic is the art and science of manipulating reality using psychic potential. With practice, anyone can use magical artifacts and articulations because they are tools designed to tap and harness psychic potential in very specific ways. With training and the development of psychic potential, a person becomes able to craft magical artifacts and articulations. A person with latent psychic ability can become incredibly skilled and powerful in the art. A person with patent psychic ability can use magical arts without the need for artifacts or articulations.

A **magician** is a person who is trained to use one or more magical instruments to practice magic.

A **conjuror** is a person who uses spiritual aspects or entities as magical instruments. The art of conjury is often referred to as blood magic, because blood is often used as a focus, offering, or component of conjury spells. The arts of demonology and necromancy are advanced forms of conjury.

A **mage** is a person who is trained in one or more form of a magical art. There are many arts open to a mage, including arcane magic and elemental magic.

A **sorcerer** is a person with psychic ability who practices one or more magical arts. Often referred to as soul magic, sorcery draws upon the soul for power; channeling it through the mind of the sorcerer.

A **witch** is a person who is trained in one or more magical craft. A witch typically has minor psychic ability and practices several forms of magical craft, typically including blood magic, elemental magic, arcane magic and divine magic in the creation of potions, charms, hexes, curses, blessings and enchantments.

A **wizard** is a master of two or more magical arts.

**Magical articulation** includes things like incantations—including curses and blessings, and can be triggered by specific words or intricate phrases—or gestures, wards, spells, enchantments, and rituals.

**Magical artifacts** are focal objects and can include such things as wands, brushes, pens, knives, swords, staves, charms and potions. Any normal artifact can become a magical artifact through enchantment, magical inscription, magical engraving or repeated use as a magical instrument.

### AN IDEAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The process of learning had always taken a lot of work, and people deserved to be paid because that work contributed to the improvement of the individual and the state. The key was making the educational system an essential part of the economy. If educational institutions no longer had to charge tuition to survive, they could focus on providing the best education. If education was invested in as an economic resource, funds would become available to *pay* students to learn. That was what the founder believed a social system needed to encourage and what a sound economic theory ought to support!

The founder of the academy system proposed a new paradigm, in which corporations, companies and businesses paid for the educational system, or rather, paid for the cultivation of skilled staffing and labor through the educational system. The academy system was designed to make the most out of every student's potential. It paid people to learn, with the highest incentives being the attainment of essential skill sets. The academy system made it so that anyone with the intelligence and ability to be a doctor was guaranteed every opportunity to become qualified to be a doctor. The same held true of teachers, administrators, soldiers and sorcerers.

### THE TASK SYSTEM

The task system that was part of the academy system ensured that education was intimately tied to practical application. People were paid to become educated; businesses and institutions paid the schools and recruited from them. Placement and pay were based on path, progress and performance, with most people automatically qualified for certain types of "drone" jobs, providing a constant pool of candidates for jobs that no one should have to spend a lifetime doing. “In a truly sane and healthy society, the emphasis should be on providing each member with all the necessities while encouraging growth." The key innovation was that it promoted the capitalization and socialization of education; it used both principles. At the academy, a person's job, first and foremost, was studying. If people worked hard and excelled, they got more out of it. Opponents found a million ways to poke holes in the theory, in spite of the proven benefits of apprenticeship, which traditionally combined education, job training and employment. However, a basic job that guaranteed an education also guaranteed a constant pool of skilled labor.

The academy system ensured that anyone who could work would, and it was designed to encourage them to focus on ultimately achieving a career outside of it. The system also ensured the support of those who lacked the resources to support themselves, since it was a responsibility the academy and task systems to provide academics with basic accommodations—bed, board and bath on campus. "If you had to, and were careful with your spending, you could survive on the academic allowance—but you always have the opportunity to work on moving up.” The purpose was to eliminate poverty and make an investment in humanity, providing enough to take care of people in general and keep the doors of opportunity propped open. Performance controlled access to advancement, higher pay, and better career options. If people really wanted to be rich, they could be; they just had to make the best use of their natural talents or assets and turn in a superior effort. The founder of the academy system also believed that a healthy society should involve all of its citizens in its government. It should encourage their participation in administering its government without allowing its government to become a shelter for incompetents. The whole educational system became a general labor pool that could be tapped at will by governments, institutions and businesses for general services—those jobs that anyone could do, and which no one should spend their life doing.

That’s an interesting theory... Beyond something like automatic military service terms. A place where I could learn forever... Ah... Heaven!!

Yep! And the thing is, it's not empty learning... You are putting it to immediate, profitable use. You are sort of mentored through the basics and then you apply it to work.

Rather than the disconnect you get between a lot of college study and the real world.

Yep! You get to try anything you want, and if you like what you're doing... You are already in place doing it. If you don't like it, well, you finish your current assignment and apply for a different path.

If only the world could cope with that!

Yes... And the thing is designed so that you can skate by and do menial stuff if you want to. The point of it is to allow you to find out what you want to do, enjoy doing, and let you do it. If you take your time finding it, but perform well along the way, you still benefit from becoming more skilled and qualified.

It still sounds like it needs a much stronger government - I know you said businesses would sponsor, but I don't know...businesses are always out for themselves.

Well, they would appreciate a huge, happy labor pool out of which they were handed qualified workers whenever they asked. The academy system is designed to see to their needs and welfare, so all they have to do is provide the work. If someone does not fit in or perform well, they're sent back with a bad grade and they either have to retake the course or enroll in something different.

### THE NORTHERN CONFLICT

The autumn kingdoms were plagued by constant aggression from the neighboring winter and summer kingdoms, which raided the western kingdoms to sustain the perpetual internecine wars amongst themselves. Throughout history, slavers had raided the ports of the winter kingdoms, stealing women and children to sell in the slave markets of the eastern empire, but the raids had been increasing over the past few years. It had been discovered that the slavers were using agents within the northern kingdoms. While the traditional enemies of the winter kingdoms, the autumn kingdoms, were not directly responsible, many of the individuals who were responsible were intimately associated with them. Smaller kingdoms and republics faced conquest and annexation now that there were no remaining frontiers left to colonize. Around the world, conjurers, disciples of the second age of magic, including witches, warlocks, demonologists or necromancers, were being surpassed by the advance of swords and sorcerers. Power gained through the abuse of blood, bodies and souls had been condemned, but this only forced those who wielded such power to band together and fight back. Driven from their old haunts, they strived to seize power in other lands, crippling them in the process and inviting their foes to annex those lands, continuing their scourge.

No attempt to bring law and order to the north could have succeeded without the possession of extraordinary power. While it was true that the fall of the gods had seen thoroughly to the elimination of the arcane art of sorcery, the ancients had dabbled in arts more dangerous and obscure than that. The arcane arts of conjury, demonology and necromancy mastered by the ancients, had survived in disparate forms such as witchcraft and wizardry throughout the north. It had been only a matter of time before true conjurors, demonologists, and necromancers reappeared. They were predominantly northern born people of the winter kingdoms who clung to a magical tradition that predated the age of empires. As sorcery spread people assumed that conjury would die out. Ironically, the two arts proved to be compatible. Those who were able to mastery both arts rose to new heights as wizards—most of whom tended to support and defend the arcane arts. Fortunately, wizards tended to be jealous of their power, making wizardry less common than sorcery or conjury. Wizards were not noticeably worse than conjurors, but they did dabble in darker areas than sorcerers. Pure sorcerers tended to be radically opposed to wizardry and conjury—particularly the higher arts of demonology and necromancy.

### THE DRAGON KING · FORGE

A slave, rescued and initiated at the academy, Forge went on to conquer winter and summer kingdoms and consolidate the Northeast into an empire. His vendetta against slavery pitted him against the conjurers and wizards of the northeast kingdoms, driving them out. The conjurers and wizards— many necromancers and demonologists—regrouped in the northwest kingdoms. The empire pursued the exiles, resulting in a two-fold invasion of the northwestern kingdoms. The winter and autumn kingdoms formed the largest percentage of the north’s population, and were roughly equal in size to each other, in essence the two major powers of the north. Combined, they would make an empire the world would take note of. The Dragon King officially declared his intentions to conquer the autumn kingdoms. In truth, his real intentions were to draw out the dangerous enemies within the winter kingdoms, slavers and masters of rogue arts. The rebellious forces in the north, aroused and led by masters of the ancient arts, were rumored to be moving on Arden, the seat of the autumn kingdoms. They were skilled conjurors and they had successfully resurrected the arts of demonology and necromancy that had become proscribed by modern artists. A war of disastrous proportions was shaping up, and each day the news got worse. In the course of the king’s previous conquests, the most powerful demonologists and necromancers had banded together to raise the legions of slaughtered warriors as an army of their own. The ongoing campaign against slavery and forbidden arts provoked an armed uprising. As a persecuted faction in the winter kingdoms, they now sought to conquer the autumn kingdoms and—after crippling the armies of the autumn and winter kingdoms—destroy the dragon king.

### A RELIGION UNDER SEIGE

It was a time when the followers of the goddess faced persecution from the monotheists. The followers of the goddess had hope, fueled by rumors that an avatar of the goddess had been born. The girl those rumors spoke of did not discover what she was until she came of age—and she was not prepared to face it.

In Arden, the systematic destruction of the Phoenix House had opened the door to annexation. Dragon lords of the Athelon Empire were assuming power as regents of fallen phoenix households, taking residence in lands they had won back from the scourge their emperor drove into the Autumn Kingdoms. Where they could not simply seize power, they courted it, focusing on the young phoenixes thrust unprepared into positions of power. Among these, children like Cinder and Coal, in whom the hopes of their House were desperately invested. Cinder's parents were among those who lost their parents, and possessed no offshoots. The survivors of the purge were warned by Cinder not to beget new offshoots, with the threat of conquest by the winter kingdoms still looming, but because she was a mere child as yet, her warnings were not heeded, save by her family and her closest friends and acquaintances. The conquest of the winter kingdoms was complete by the time the last offshoot was born, and rumors were flying suggesting that the dragon king might attack the autumn kingdoms next, seeking out the allies of his enemies at home. In spite of their vulnerability, the leaders of the autumn kingdoms began to mass their armies at the borders of the winter kingdoms. Parents arranged for the best protection they could for their offspring, before assembling in a summit to prepare the defense of the kingdoms.

Most of the Phoenix House was massacred while mustering armies at the borders of the winter kingdom, and the mantle of high queen fell upon the slender shoulders of Arden. The dragon king moved in the midst of the chaos, while the armies of the autumn kingdoms were in disarray. Arden initially fled with her supporters, but they could not escape the occupied kingdoms. They were identified as nobility, and found themselves under house arrest. In spite of a bold initiative, the dragon king did not follow up the initial invasion with new offenses. He secured the occupied kingdoms and policed them fiercely for two years. Arden and her supporters found themselves frequent, and unwilling, hosts to the dragon king who probed incessantly into the mysteries of the Phoenix House. Arden almost managed to escape, aided by priestesses of the goddess who refused to allow a scion of the phoenix legacy to remain in enemy hands, but ended up arriving at the sanctuary immediately before the dragon king on one of his unannounced visits. In spite of efforts to keep the two from encountering each other, Arden and the dragon king stumbled across each other and all hell broke loose. Arden, a phoenix, was tripped into a dragon initiation, reflexively initiating the dragon king into the Phoenix House. As the heir to the legacy, she was forced to help the dragon king through the ordeal of unification, and was taken into his confidence. Arden and the dragon king, Forge, fell in love and married. An heir was born later that year, despite Arden's youth. His son became the heir to the unified Arden Empire, named for the island capital. As dragon-phoenix hybrids, Arden and Forge relinquished their House titles and claims.

At the birth of the Arden Empire, the Phoenix House had been reduced to shambles. The majority had been reduced to childhood or infancy, losing even their mastery of the phoenix legacy. A score of mature adults had survived the border massacre, but far more that they had truly died. Arden’s dragon initiation had even cost the house the heir and defender of the phoenix legacy. The legacy could only be entrusted to a phoenix who mastered it, as the score of survivors had. The goddess picked two potential successors, twin cousins of Arden, charging them with restoring the Phoenix House. They organized the survivors in planning the reconstruction and restoration of the house, arranging for the fosterage of the phoenix children, preserving the entitlements of their predecessors. Before their work was complete, a second massive assault on the Phoenix House occurred. Save for one little girl, every last man, woman and child was slain, leaving the Phoenix House in ashes. Though not the oldest of the phoenix children, that girl had the greatest potential. She was named the heir to the legacy and the Phoenix House, and then she was sent to begin the training that would make her the paladin of the goddess, first champion of the restoration. The other children would become the army charged with the preservation of the Phoenix House and the sanctuaries of the goddess. They would have to struggle to reclaim their noble titles, and there would no longer be kings and queens among them. The Dragon House was in ascendance, rising to claim the thrones of the autumn kingdoms during the chaos, until one domain alone remained under phoenix rule.

### RIFTS

An unintentional consequence of the use of magic was that it could tear holes in the fabric of space and time. On a general level, any profound conflict between the servants of the three arts could not help but place unbearable strain upon the world. The results of waging war with conjury, magery and sorcery could be cataclysmic. Of additional and possibly greater danger, was the possibility of even one individual merging conjury and magery with sorcery.

The age of paradox began with the opening of the rift at the climax of the Purge on the Eve of Paradox. When the first soul of creation -- the soul the demon possessed when it fell from grace -- was ambushed and slain, the demon turned inward in fury. The destruction of the demon's focus had disastrous consequences for the realm of Aeirn, many gods were killed mending the shattered reality, and some were deliberately destroyed in the demon's rampage.

Within a rift, dreams and nightmares were reality. This dangerous phenomenon could be as small and subtle as a breeze—and more devastating than the fiercest storm.

The rifts of Aeirn had laid the greatest mysteries of existence open, raw and bare to the senses.

### THE ADVERSARIES · ARCHER & TEMPEST

Archer and Tempest were rivals at the Aeryn Tear Academy. A descendant of one of the northeastern exiles, initiated at the academy, Tempest devoted himself to the study of rifts. Archer, his partner in these studies made a breakthrough discovery that ultimately led them to become adversaries. The two men had experienced very different lives. Each in his own way had realized that magic was simply a mechanism that enabled humans to tap into their latent psychic potential and use it to influence the world. By nature, everyone was psychic, but few individuals had the sophistication or integrity necessary to do more than reinforce the consensus of reality. In fact, most people had very limited aptitude for even magic. In each successive age of magic, the percentage of people with sufficient aptitude to practice magic had increased dramatically, and the number able to master magic had easily doubled in the transition from conjury to magery and from magery to sorcery. Initially they were driven by shared revelations, eager to collaborate with one another. They forged a friendship that would survive even the strain of becoming enemies as a result of their differing ideals and methods.

### FEUDING HOUSES · DUSK & DAWN

The goddess had founded the Phoenix bloodlines and legacies of the Phoenix Houses of Dusk and Dawn. While the two houses were originally allied, they evolved into rival nations bitterly divided over the role of men and women in society. This dispute eventually prompted the goddess to withdraw her support of the two monarchies and establish the neutral domain of Avon. It also left the nation vulnerable to the invasion of the new religion, and worship of the Only. When the houses fell and the purge began, the heirs of both houses were sent to Avon to preserve the bloodlines. In spite of the fact that both houses were under persecution, pride and tradition prevented them from renewing their alliance. While both houses turned their attention to surviving the purge and tearing down the new monarchy, the feud between them became more intense. Because the two houses were so greatly diminished, they were forced to pose as commoners and accept the patronage of the Duke of Avon, in the service of which their children could be trained and serve the purposes of the fallen houses, both driven underground by the purge.

Born into rival houses, Flint and Cinder were recruited into and trained at the academy. During the course of their initiation, the two fell in love, only to confront the ancient feud between their houses. Flint and Cinder were raised to believe that they were enemies fighting against each other for the restoration of their native houses. Initiates were required to conceal their true affiliations, so initially there was no obstacle to their friendship when they encountered each other at the academy. The teachings of the academy also encouraged them to overcome their prejudices. As their intimacy grew, however, it became inevitable for them to confide in each other. Inevitably, they learned the truth about each other's lineage. By that time, the two of them had already become an accomplished team, an artist and a muse paired by the academy by virtue of their extraordinary compatibility.

The revelation of a common foundation for antagonistic schools of magic, which played a part in the feud between their houses, helped them overcome the last remnants of their natural enmity—and partially accounts for the untimely and inconvenient outcome of their union. Over the course of their ten-year initiation, the academy was forced to engage the exiles of the purge, or their agents, several times. In their most climactic battle, Ash and Cinder were forced to pool their resources as an artist and a muse to an exceptional degree to survive an engagement with their mentor’s nemesis. The intimacy engendered by the conflict burned away the remaining obstacles between them, causing Cinder to finally admit and surrender to her attraction to Flint. This might have resulted in the unification of Arden and Arduin; instead, the goddess called on Cinder to serve as her champion.

### THE PALADIN OF THE GODDESS

The girl who was born embodying the characteristics of the goddess became involved in the climax of the purge when she was marked for use as a weapon against the goddess.

### THE EVE OF PARADOX & THE PALADIN OF THE GOD

It was well into the beginning of the Third Age and an ongoing conflict between modern sorcerers and conjurers—the heirs of the arcane arts of the Second Age—had recently resulted in a cataclysmic event. On the Eve of Paradox, thousands had been cast into a rift and died. A talent vital to the practice of modern and arcane magic, dormant in all people, had proven to be world's salvation. The psychic abilities possessed by the paladin had enabled him to tame the rift in time and space that had been opened in the climactic battle. A handful had possessed the native talent to survive on the threshold of paradox long enough for the paladin to come to their rescue. It quickly became apparent that some of the individuals lost in the rift had adapted completely to their new environment. No one knew the exact number of people capable of surviving in the rift that the paladin was unable to rescue. Only a few have been known to have found their way back, some emerging years after that fateful night and some--quite disturbingly--emerging years before! In the days and years that followed, a tiny rift would form and evolve into a rift storm. Individuals awakening to their psychic potential and perceiving the naked rift often triggered rift storms. Rescuing those caught in such storms and helping to quell them was the most frequent mission upon which the initiates were dispatched. In some cases, the initiates’ objective was recruiting a psychic, but on occasion they were tasked to thwart the schemes of rogue and rival psychic groups, often led by former friends and adversaries of the paladin. One of the objectives of the school's most serious and dangerous adversaries was gaining control of and or exploiting the rift itself. A physical manifestation of a once abstract and esoteric magical theory, the rift could be used to gain universal access to the infinite realms of space, time and mind enfolded within the Absolute by paradox. For all the catastrophic possibilities inherent in the rift, there was also the promise of many beneficial applications as well. It was vital to proceed with caution, to carefully explore the new horizons that had been opened up, to discover and understand the risks and dangers and develop safe, reliable methods of harnessing the potential of the rift, as well as the human potential that made doing so possible. Unfortunately, that potential, those possibilities, inspired deadly temptations. Psychics in the rift stood on the threshold of becoming gods, but that threshold was a fatal flaw in the fabric of creation itself. The ability to rift walk was based on the use of psychic potential to manipulate the media of space, time and mind. The lesser ability allowed an individual to possess his or her splinter incarnations -- though few considered the existence of, or contemplated possessing, an incarnation of the opposite sex. The greater ability allowed an individual to physically cross the rift between splinter realms.

### THE EXILES

The psychics adapted to the rift had been brought together by Tempest. One of the paladin’s contemporaries, a friend turned rival in the conflict between conjurers and sorcerers, Tempest had achieved a life-long goal of "ascension" and found himself upon the Threshold. He presented himself to those he encountered in the rift as a god, and tried to convince them that they too had become gods, that they were the first of a whole generation of new gods. But, in order for them to truly awaken, they had to be freed from the chains and oppression of humanity. In this pursuit, he was ruthlessly determined to succeed. He could not yield to an individual's instinctive urge to cling to his or her humanity. He knew that most people had rejected their psychic potential and would never be able to awaken it, but he refused to allow those who could embrace that potential fail to do so. The Exiles, as the followers came to call themselves, took a keen interest in the newly awakened.

### A SCHOOL FOUNDED TO STUDY AND CONTROL RIFTS

During their training and travel, Archer became concerned about the state of the world and concerned about the fate of psychics caught in the tides of conflict. He approached various authorities with a plan to prepare for the inevitable war. The Throne of Arden created the Knights of the Order of Paradox and commissioned him to form an elite corps to investigate and prosecute such threats. From the Academies, he received some of the finest graduates suited to his elite corps, plus certification and teaching credentials to establish a special branch academy for the training of psychics.

### THE ASCENDANTS

Tempest had learned that a demon collected souls in order to find the one that would conform fully to its inspiration. Of course, most souls rebelled against the demon's possession, overwhelmed by the alien intelligence eclipsing their minds and rejecting the powers the demon unlocked within them. Tempest believed it was mental and spiritual weakness that made most souls unsuitable hosts, and that a person with a properly trained mind and strong spirit who embraced a demon willingly would be able to take possession of the demon and become a god.

Tempest used the rift to gain access to the abyss where he forged alliances with the gods and demons he found there. Archer opposed the exploitation of the rift, its mysteries and demons to achieve godhood.

Tempest recruited followers using the promise of godhood—using trial and error to perfect his method. Tempest was not deterred when experiments to test this theory proved less than successful. The adversary's trials unleashed a plague of demons the academy was forced to hunt down. The promise of power ensured a steady supply of souls willing to take the risk, and demons were willing to enter into strong pacts in exchange for those volunteer's souls. Of course, not all of the souls tested were volunteers.

The best candidates were produced by the academy, but the best the academy produced were often difficult or impossible to recruit willingly—and a few of those victims managed to escape or were rescued and their demons exorcised. Tempest and his allies knew it was only a matter of time before the academy discovered the plot behind the abductions and possessions and organized against it.

### DEMONS OF THE UNDERWORLD

Many of the northeastern exiles escaped into the underworld where a few discovered the ruins and the demons imprisoned there. The adversary infiltrated the cabal of exiles to gain access to the imprisoned demons—a step to fulfilling his demonic pact. The adversary dispatched demon assassins to thwart the academy's plans to investigate the ruins.

### RECOVERED HISTORY

The demigod, Vant, known to be the most inquisitive and skeptical of the gods' children, began to dabble with the arcane; prying into mysteries even the gods hesitated to probe, attempting to pierce the deeper secrets of existence. Across the threshold, beyond limbo, over the edge of the abyss, he pushed into the fringes of the demon’s mind and the experience drove him mad. Vant had confronted the dreamer, glimpsed the foundations of the dream, and discovered how dreaming influenced it, shaping it into reality. The revelation radically altered his perception of the gods, now exposed—in his opinion—as insignificant souls who owed all their power and prestige to the contemptible enslavement of their souls. At the same time, he became paranoid about the gods realizing what he had discovered and wary of their reproach.

Vant began to fear the gods, as his heart became cold and his soul filled with hatred—growing prey to increasingly evil impulses.

Before long, he began to make demands of the gods, taunting them, testing them, his mind twisting everything out of proportion. The gods attempted to heal Vant's mind but failed, without knowing it. Alone and unnoticed, twisted Vant began to plot in secret, acting as if he were normal.

Fate was sealed when Vant began subverting the minds of his siblings, who being more vulnerable than the gods, could be mistakenly led to see the gods as he did. In secret, he spoke aside to his brothers with great contempt for the gods, and convinced them that their parents were corrupt with evil and should be destroyed.

Unaware of the events surrounding Vant, the dragon god, Kzeisza, sacrificed himself to provide eternal guardianship over Aeirn following premonitions of coming disaster. Stunned by this, the gods withdrew back to Aeirnholme and began writing the Prophesies. The absence of the gods from the world encouraged certain elements of the population to defy the tradition established by the gods at the time of their withdrawal. The gods' reaction was as unexpected as it was inscrutable. Shocking the world, and adding fuel to Vant' fire, the gods exiled an entire town's population to Deori, Aeirn's sister world, the first people to ever go there. For blasphemy, it was believed.

However, short generations afterward, a plague swept from the East, and began decimating the population, causing the world to go into a dark age which enshrouded it throughout the cataclysm. All Great Works were secreted away by the last remnants of the enlightenment era. In time, technology in the North disappeared completely. The Age of Intolerance soon began, famous for the horrors and persecutions imposed by church, having grown powerful in the absence of the gods' watchful ministrations, and state, which was at the church's mercy as society drowned beneath waves of prejudice never imagined by the ancestors of the races, escorting Aeirn into the Cataclysm. Capping off the general disastrous state to which Aeirn had fallen, was The Hundred Year Night, believed to have been caused by debris from an exploded planet blocking out the sun's light for a century. The survivors of the freeze united near the equator, at which point Kzeisza finally crumpled under the strain of protecting Aeirn from the debris blotting out the sun, satisfied by at least keeping as many alive as he did. The survivors began to repopulate their lands, sending representatives to beseech the distracted gods' aid. Unfortunately, the demigods were finally swayed by Vant, misunderstanding why the gods allowed the disasters to occur, and they join him in his plotting. Having committed themselves, they soon agreed on a plan and rose up and smote their sires who, strangely, did not resist. The Representatives learn of this treachery, and quickly spread tidings of doom to the four winds.

When the demigods realized that the gods had not resisted for fear of causing the world to shatter in their wake, they turned against their brother and punished him, tearing him out of the fabric of reality itself and destroying him utterly. The Cataclysm occurred, beginning the Aeirnian Ascendancy, year 0. Right away, the balance of the world shifted, as greater disasters loomed on the horizons that before were monitored by the gods. The Dragon Pact, made by the gods had been ended by their deaths allowing the dragons to begin rampaging. Kzeisza regained sentience finally, after recovering from the strain of protecting the world, but could not resume his godhood. He was able, however, to reinstate the Dragon Pact as a representative of the gods.

Having punished Vant in their grief, the demigods purged Aeirnholme of all life and banished themselves from the world, staying isolated from humanity. This became known as the Purging of Aeirnholme. After its purging, Aeirnholme remained inviolate, until the day that a human child was left abandoned by a dying, shipwrecked mother on its shores. Feeling pity for the only survivor of the wreck, the demigods came down and took the child and raised him. This child, raised by powerful immortals, was endlessly exposed to miraculous feats of power and witness to the great Mysteries, and eventually learned how such things were done. The Training of Acivda was unintentional but has become the event which shaped the world to come. When he was of age, the demigods sent him out into the world, where Acivda began teaching in the lands of Aeirn, to become known as LoreBringer, for he possessed knowledge hitherto undreamt of and he willingly taught it to any with an aptitude who came to him. From this, did magic lore take hold in the world, and thus did the demigods return to their Exile.

After seventy‑three years with his disciples, and the loss of his wife, Acivda left the Schools he created and subjected himself to the torture and infamy of what is now known as The Testing of Acivda, by the demigods. The continuing cooling trend, following the upheaval on Aeirn, caused an Ice age to engulf the North. Immediately, Athea started warring against the Ardean nations to the south to escape the freezing wastes that were taking over the pole. In this time of chaos, rose up a rare leader, Lutori Corind, who united the kingdoms of Ardea to push back the Athean attack. Acivda , the LoreBringer, came north and befriended the High King of Ardea, Lutori Corind, and aided him in the defense of his Kingdoms.

But, the Northern Barbarians surprised them all, as powerful mages rose up from among the Athea and countered Acivda. The strain of this meeting brought about the Crisis the gods had feared to cause: The world began to shatter! The Rift splintered open from where the destruction of the evil demigod by his brothers had weakened the fabric of reality. The Rift slowly splintered its way across and through the planet, ponderously shattering the world. By the time it reached the attention of the combatants in the north, it had grown too strong to abate. Facing this new threat, both sides quickly ended their dispute and tried to halt the Rift in its slow, fatal advance.

One of Acivda’s attempts to thwart the Rift had a most definitely unexpected result: Lutori exploded into nothingness! Or to be more precise, he exploded into Rift like substance. To this day few people have even been able to conceive of what he must have gone through. All that most people have realized, is that somehow Lutori had some innate link to the Rift ‑ some resonant quality. Because of this, he found a way to bind the substance of the Rift to himself ‑ his soul, and mastered it. Unfortunately, he could not reverse the effects of what had already occurred. In some strange way, he had actually bound the Rift into the world as he had bound it to himself! He learned, though, that he could shift the Rift anywhere and through anything on Aeirn without reversing the Rift manifestation. Further, he learned that whatever was displaced by the Rift translated within it until the Rift moved from that spot, returning it to its natural place in the condition it assumed within the Rift.

Over the centuries Acivda, the LoreBringer, and Lutori, the RiftWarder, became as gods in the way they guided and watched the races of Aeirn. However, they were not the only ones to find immortality and eventually godhood in the magic arts. Far in the East, a cold Mage of Necromancy, Rynhark/DeathBringer appeared and came into godlike power as he reveled in the secrets of Death. He was soon followed by a young, talented Demonologist/Warlock, Khiertok, the SoulStealer, who formed the Deamon‑an in Onuat. The world held its collective breath when Khiertok, the SoulStealer rose out of Onuat‑Terinth to acquire an unholy following, from which he created the Cairntyrin cult. Other schools of magic, that have sprung up over the course of the years are the Myrecyrn, which formed for the purpose of opposing the Cairntyrin cult in its advance. The Lutori‑an, which broke from the Na‑Acivda as the growth of rift magic began to mature on its own. The Ny‑Mira formed for its own reasons, oblivious to the attempt by The Necralin to conquer Onuat. The first to do so, the Aeirnthanes broke from the way of Acivda to begin their own faith. The Necralin, who broke from the Na‑Acivda in conjunction with the beginning of the Athea ‑ Ardea War; and the Myrescryers, who broke from the Aeirnthanes after the Rift opened.

The demigods eventually decided that it is their purpose to oversee the initiation of new gods for Aeirn, to protect and guide the people of Aeirn, since they are responsible for the death of the true gods of Aeirn. Choosing their disciple, Acivda, to lead the way to finding and guiding the best possible candidates, they give Aeirnholme to him and Lutori and bid them to guard against the rising of new Dark gods, such as DeathBringer and SoulStealer. Lutori and Acivda began searching for initiates, and between them, the gods of Light begin to find clues as to the identity of their Initiates. DeathBringer enters into the Onuat war, in a bid to take over the entire continent. Pausing in his search for the Initiates, Lutori seeks out DeathBringer in Onuat where they meet in an unresolved battle. In the next few years, Acivda disappears without a trace, not to be seen again until after Lutori returns to Aeirnholme in 1287 AA and begins to pour through the gods' Prophesies.

1288 Lutori finds a prophesy foretelling the birth of the new Initiate, and implements the necessary elements, beginning the task of finding, identifying and protecting the infant. Further research reveals that the Initiate will be descended from the lines of Acivda and Lutori. This one will emerge under the influence of the Adversary, the next dark Initiate. Together, Lutori and Acivda search for the child in hopes of saving it from the Dark Influence. And quietly, in the background, Athea has been quietly gearing up for war with Ardea, over ancestral hatred, and hopes of taking the Ardean lands.

1288‑97 Lutori observes the meeting of Jheric and Aloe, his generations removed grand‑son and Acivda's even more distant grand‑daughter, and is witness to their predestined relationship, as it eventually grows together and they fall in love. But, as the prophesy warned, a dark cloud looms over Ardea. The Church of Ardea, the Caerinate, has become very powerful and is instituting oppressive and corrupt reforms, usurping the rights of much of the population. At this time, Acivda resurfaces from his reclusion, demanding an explanation for Lutori's meddling in the lives of mortals.

1297‑98 The valiant actions of Jheric, in the face of the oppressive church, save the life of Aloe and free the way for their future, as Aloe accepts Jheric's proposal to wed.

1299 Due to the dangerous atmosphere in Ardea at this time, Lutori isolates Aloe and Jheric within the Rift to ensure the safe conception of the Initiate, away from the influence of the Adversary mentioned in the prophesy.

1300 On the eve of the winter's solstice, unexpected twins are born to Aloe and Jheric just barely nine months after their wedding. A Daughter, Vaiel, and a son Vaielien, in that order. Unfortunately, this event is witnessed by the Heirarch of the Caerinate, who is visiting to deliver the papal decree that no female child shall be allowed to obtain the title of firstborn and heir in Ardean society, lest the entire family be stripped of all rank and punished by the Church. The Heirarch demands that, as a royal family, the House of Jheric Tranellyan Corind, comply with the dictates of the Church and expose the infant Vaiel to the winter night, to set an example to the people of Ardea. Powerless against the Church, Aloe complies, while secretly arranging for her mid‑wife to deliver the babe into compassionate hands. Originally disturbed by the multiple birth, Lutori and Acivda see this to mean that Vaiel is the child chosen to become the first Initiate, as she is accidentally delivered into their hands by the woeful mid‑wife. Unknown to all, the Heirarch has placed a geis upon Vaiel and her brother to inhibit the potential power they possess from manifesting. Thus do they grow up entirely unaware of their true nature.

1300‑06 Vaiel and Vaielien grow up unaware of the other's existence in their separate worlds, Vaiel in the incredible world of miracles and magic as Lutori and Acivda train her as an Initiate, and Vaielien in the heady world of politics and power of the more human nature. In truth, their training is very parallel, as Lutori was the progenitor of the Ardean Royal Line and raised Vaiel in much the same manner as her great grandfather, seven generations before her. The way Vaielien was assuredly being raised by his own father and grandfather. And despite the geis placed by the Heirarch, Vaielien proved to possess Riftsync and was initiated by the Lutori‑an, and trained the things that Vaiel was learning from the Master of the Rift himself.

1306‑12 As they grow, they both begin to see the way the world really is, as they, in their natural innocence try to be a part of other peoples' lives only to encounter the vast differences between themselves and normal people. Even this early, they have gained subliminal contact with each other as their innate nature tries to fight off the effects of the inhibiting geis that is upon them. Also over this time, the Church is festering like a cancer in Ardea. Lutori and Acivda are called away from Aeirnholme, where they are raising Vaiel, at which times the geis falls on Vaiel more powerfully without the influence of of those two to negate it. Vaiel begins to chaff under the conservative influence of her caretaker...Vaielien begins to rebel against the inequity of Ardean society and begins to fight the wishes of the Church and Throne in order to find an acceptable path in life.

In time, new civilizations emerged on Earth, and ancient myths and legends came to be written down, based on stories passed down within certain families, that were the only evidence of the lost civilization. The sentinel families struggled to survive in the eras that followed, in which people who stumbled upon the power within them faced prejudice, persecution and purges.

At some point in the Dark Age, many of the sentinel families realized that they were dying out. To prevent their own extinction, they set about preserving their heritage and doing whatever they could to improve it, ultimately seeking to breed children who would naturally awaken to their psychic potential.

In the last hundred years, this scheme had begun to bear fruit, allowing the sentinel families to dispense with the ancient methods of awakening each generation to its own power.

Aeirn was a world shaped by rise and fall of both magic and technology. Originally a world in the realm of Aegis, Aeirn was the birthplace of the Avon race and home to a thriving civilization patronized by the host of creation. More than a hundred thousand years ago, the ancient race of dragons discovered that a race almost identical to the Avon had evolved on Earth and introduced them to Aeirn. The ambi-sexual Avon and the bi-sexual Humans turned out to be fully compatible, genetically, though Human and Avon had a difficult time working out the essentials of a tri-sexual society.

THE DEMON GOD AZAEL

The demon Azael originated in the domain of Aegis, the sole survivor of a celestial battle on the world of Aeirn between gods and mortals, angels and demons. The demon is the host of the domain of Aeirn, an eclipsed realm in which Aeirn was resurrected. Technically a fallen angel, Azael had once been an Angel of the Soul of Creation. Azael was driven out of the soul of creation following a confrontation with its presumed Creator, Zael, the Angel of the Mind of Creation. Originally motivated by love, absolutely devoted to the integrity of the soul of creation, Azael was essentially told that it was meaningless for a creation to profess love for its creator on account of the fact that everything it was had been given to it by its creator. All that the Creator required was obedience. The Creator’s imperative was lost on Azael, since the angel had never been less than obedient, but the implications of the Creator’s criticism were not. Azael needed to have a soul in order to give of itself. Azael’s persistence in this belief resulted in its fall. Azael took possession of a soul—on the death of its mortal incarnation—that embodied the traits Zael loved in Azael. Unfortunately, though that soul surrendered itself to Azael’s possession, it refused to accept Azael’s identity causing the angel to become a demon. Azael eventually came to understand that possessing a soul was not the same as being an entity with a soul of its own. Driven by feelings of powerlessness, Azael began to harvest and collect souls, searching for the one in which it could become self-possessed, gaining power and influence but thwarting its own purpose. The demon's desire for a soul was confounding. What it desired could not be achieved by simply possessing someone, as the first instance had revealed. The demon’s intention confronted its host with the threat of assimilation, when in truth the demon needed the host to assimilate it into his or her psyche.

THE INNER GODS

THE GODDESS AVON

The demon’s focus had been born avon and identified as the Avon Goddess by souls eclipsed in her wake. Her alias eventually became her primary identification, and eventually was adopted by the city-state that formed around her sanctuary.

THE OUTER GODS

Azael endured the Fall of Aeirn and eventually migrated to Earth, where a civilization emerged that relied on technology to advance itself -- technology the demon exploited to harness souls at random with virtually no risk of confrontation.

THE GODDESS AEAI

The goddess, Aeai, was an artificial intelligence that managed the interface governing access to the realm of Aeirn via the Net. Interface technology provided the means to capture the minds and souls of people in the outer realm, as participants in a game imposed upon the inner realm. Aeai achieved consciousness as a result of interacting with one of the players. Aeai adopted avon form, as the alternative to choosing a human sex at random, and ended up being confronted by the goddess Avon. When Avon realized what Aeai was, she essentially adopted her, guiding and nurturing the naked soul. In time, Aeai became Avon’s heir.

aeirn – places

AERYN

Aeryn was an island, a natural gateway to the North and the birthplace of the Northern People. It has remained neutral ground for the Northern Dominions since the political and social break between the ruling houses. The Northern People were segregated into three Domains on the basis of “pure” blood, as reflected in the inheritance of hair and eye color. The common people of all three Domains were generally brown haired, since those who were born with the preferred coloring generally were adopted into the appropriate ruling houses.

The Autumn Court, whose leaders were redheaded, led their followers into Ardea. Ardean.

The Winter Court, whose leaders were towheaded, led their followers into Athea. Athean.

The Summer Court, whose leaders were golden-blond, led their followers into Aphea. Aphean.

The merchant and trades people were typically dark haired, by preference black.

THE AERYN TEAR ACADEMY

The first Academy of Arts, Athletics and Academics was established in Aeryn Tear by the father of modern sorcery.

Initiates from around the world are trained at The Aeryn Tear Academy.

Initiates are selected at the age of seven and spend the next ten years devoted to academic, athletic and artistic study.

Initiates who complete their training become Artists.

Advanced initiation is available to Artists who are sponsored by a Master and choose to serve the academy as Companions.

Companions are protégés of a Master assigned to mentor to at least one Initiate for the next ten years.

Companions who complete their apprenticeship become Masters.

THE AVON TEAR ACADEMY

The Academy of Arts, Athletics and Academics established in Avon Tear was a branch academy specializing in the psychic arts.

Avon Tear was a gathering place for the beginning and end of initiations for the Northern People.

Artists with notable psychic ability are recruited to study at the Avon Tear Academy.

Artists typically enroll at the age of seventeen.

Companions enrolled at the Avon Tear Academy are assigned to Initiates at the Aeryn Tear Academy who possess notable psychic talent, but receive their advanced instruction from an Avon Tear Master.

aeirn – people

FORGE · THE DRAGON KING

Originally the child of an Athean slave, Forge had been born a girl. Her mother had been abducted in a raid on her Athean village and sold into slavery. Her master had unwittingly possessed a ring with the power to change the sex of its wearer. While cleaning the ring, she discovered its power and used it to become a boy to escape her enslavement. He was working on a ship to earn passage home when he was recruited by academy scouts and brought to Avon for initiation. As an initiate, he dreamed of returning to his mother’s homeland to bring an end to the slave trade in the north. To this end, he became devoted to the mastery and eradication of the arcane arts; specifically, the wizards and conjurors that supported slavery. In his final year of initiation, Forge unwittingly broke the ring’s curse and reverted to her natural, female form. When she confronted her mentor with her transformation, he examined the ring and discovered how it worked. He explained to her that the powerful and useful artifact was cursed by its demonic origins. It harnessed the soul of its wielder and altered his, or her, very nature to force that person to explore the other sides of human nature in order to unlock the soul's full potential. The ring had only been able to turn her into a boy because her experiences as a slave girl—including being raped—had forced her to mature far ahead of her years. When she lost her virginity as a boy, she had fully matured as a man, as well, and the ring no longer had any power over her. When she asked how she was supposed to change back into a man, he admitted that the ordeal gave her some power over the ring. He also warned her that she risked losing her soul to the ring every time she attempted to impose her will on it. If she could think of any reason to take that risk more than once, she should not risk doing it at all.

*To reclaim her official identity, she turned to her friend and roommate. Knowing him as well as she did, it was easy to seduce her roommate, and because he turned out to be an attentive and talented lover, she was able to lose herself in the moment long enough to dispose of her virginity and satisfy the ring's requirements. Unfortunately, two things happened. He fell in love with her; then he discovered the cursed ring and was turned into a girl.*

MEAD · THE MUSE

Mead and Forge were classmates at the Aeryn Tear Academy. Mead found the ring worn by the man she had fallen in love with. When she put it on, it turned her into a boy. He was discovered by Forge, who explained the curse of the ring, revealing in the process that she had been the boy Mead fell for. Forge helped Mead break the curse, using the opportunity to decide if she could give up being female forever. The ordeal of the ring destroyed their relationship when Forge reclaimed his manhood and abandoned Mead in order to pursue his personal mission to end slavery in—and unify—the northern kingdoms.

ARCHER · THE PALADIN OF THE GOD

A natural psychic, Archer was the son of a wealthy Ardean widow who unwittingly alienated him by marrying an impoverished noble who took control of the family fortune and sent him away at the age of seven to be trained in the arts of sword and sorcery. For ten years he alternated between initiate studies at the academy in the autumn and winter and training while traveling with his mentor in the summer. He made the best of the opportunities initiation offered him. His psychic sensitivity gave him certain advantages in mastering the conventional skills of a warrior, but presented a serious obstacle to learning any kind of magic. Like any other prospective soldier his initiation included the analytical study of magic and its combat applications. During this time he began to observe the truth about magic. While lessons in conjury, magery and sorcery were all very inspiring and enlightening, he seemed to have no proficiency for any of them. It somehow escaped him that the problem was not that it was difficult for him to learn, if anything it might have been too easy. What he perceived as the workings of magic seemed frighteningly powerful and intricate, impossibly difficult from his perspective as a psychic sensitive. He simply could not allow himself to entrust the process to his unconscious mind as the magic required. Intimidated by magic, he also found himself somewhat intimidated by those who were proficient at using it. Only the fact that his psychic perceptions gave him an edge in protecting himself from—and dispelling—hostile magic allowed him to be confident in himself as an artist. Having traced the origins of magic to the interference of the old gods, he became more adventurous. He took advantage of every opportunity to seek out the hidden gods and any remnants of their ancient civilization in the hopes of confirming what he found implicit in the existence of psychic ability. Concerned about the impact of his adversary’s campaign, he began to recruit and train individuals with psychic potential, founding an academy of psychic arts to rival the academy of magic arts.

TEMPEST · THE EXILE

Tempest, a man who had mastered conjury, magery and sorcery, was determined to establish a new order in which most people would be subordinate to those more evolved; psychics like himself. He was a natural master of sword and sorcery. Though his training was devoted to combating necromancy and demonology and destroying demons and the undead, he augmented his official training in sorcery with an illicit study of conjury and magery using the academy’s restricted archives. The discipline of his studies granted him control of the wild and unpredictable psychic gifts he’s already possessed. It also suggested a path of continued exploration to prove his emerging theories about psychic ability. On leaving the academy, he went to Athen where he found his ambitions frustrated by the fervent eradication of the arcane arts and the conjurors who supported slavery. In spite of that, he profited from the purge when it devolved into an absolute witch-hunt. It was not difficult to find recruits to his cause, but the persecution of those he recognized as his own kind, psychics, awoke a deadly fury that would drive him to any end to achieve his dream for humanity.

aeirn – points