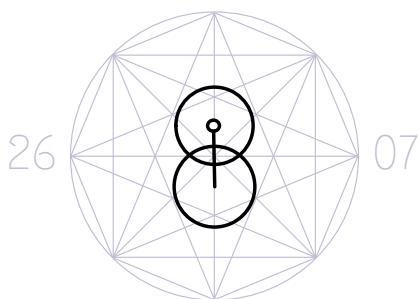


VEILED AGE

Cosmic Medieval Fantasy



Make Something.

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Foreword

I'm Justin. I'm a writer, software designer, and jack-of-all-trades creative type. In this document, I'd like to introduce a community project: a high fantasy setting that is free to use for almost any purpose. But first, let's address some common questions.

Q: What kind of setting is this?

A: 70% classic medieval fantasy, 15% cerebral sci-fi, 15% cosmic horror.

Q: Is this setting actually free, even for commercial use?

A: Yes. You don't even need anyone's permission (see previous page).

Q: Can I contribute to this setting?

A: Please do. That's kind of the point.

Q: Was any of this written by AI?

A: No.

With that out of the way, let's begin.



First, we'll talk logic. Think holistically.

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Later, we'll take deeper dives into the lore, divided into five thematically and geographically connected sections.

- 4  Of elven forests, dwarven mountain fortresses, and the dual-natured earthen deity who created both races.
- 5  Of humanity, its golden empire, its creator who dwells in the Arc of Heaven, and its church, which gives refuge from the touch of the Amalgam.
- 6  Of a long-dead civilization, its crumbling ruins and abandoned servants, and a nomadic diaspora who reveres its Hethian teachings.
- 7  Of an altered race, a dark kingdom, and the machinations of the divine demon from Brimora, the Last Star.
- 8  Of the Abyss, the Deep Ones, the Amalgam which corrupts the living and the dead, and the mad cults who worship it.



Contemplations

Musings on the traditional elements of high fantasy settings, and why a Creative Commons fantasy setting is worth exploring.

Chapter 1

The Case for Open Fantasy

The Solo Worldbuilding Dilemma

I sometimes imagine that whenever an elderly nerd dies, their loved ones find a secret notebook full of fantasy worldbuilding notes for a story they never got around to writing.

This is a tragic fate, but it's understandable. Outlining a plot involves hard decisions; you must trim away the endless possibilities and decide what events you really need to happen in what order. Likewise, writing a scene summons a stressful sense of quality control, as you struggle to render immersive descriptions and compelling dialog.

By contrast, worldbuilding is inherently nonlinear and endless. For lore-loving personalities especially, it offers procrastination in its most seductive form: busywork.

At the same time, a fantasy writer can't escape the necessity of decent worldbuilding. Even in a character-focused story, context is key. A sailor needs a sea, a priest needs a religion, a misfit needs norms to buck against.

The Benefits of a Shared World Setting

Typical strategies for solving this worldbuilding vs storytelling dilemma boil down to time management. Our agenda is to facilitate an alternative strategy: write your own story, but share the worldbuilding burden with likeminded creatives.

This strategy has two main advantages:

1. A world with greater depth and detail, despite consuming less of each author's time.
2. A shared audience and a fellowship of writers. In a word, community.

The Trouble with Fanfiction

Multi-author sci-fi/fantasy universes are actually quite popular, but they are typically owned by corporations, which makes them of limited use to the aspiring writer.

Most of us will never be hired as writers for our favorite IPs, which relegates us to fanfiction – an ugly word which separates the “fans” from the “real authors” who are allowed to publish books and make money.

Fanfiction can be a good way to get into writing, but as our writing matures, we usually want to move beyond fandom and actually own our work.

But perhaps we can have it both ways. If the details of a compelling fantasy setting have a highly permissive public license, writers can enjoy the benefits of a shared setting while retaining all their creative rights.

The Wonders of Folk Fiction

Fortunately, the concept of a fantastical world with many authors was never exclusive to megacorps. When we examine folklore, we see this instinct to create new stories within a familiar framework actually predates the printing press.

Greek mythology, Grimm's Fairy Tales, Arabian Nights – these were collections of stories that arose organically from their communities. They used shared assumptions like fairy forests, genies, or a familiar pantheon of gods. Stories were often short, as these common elements didn't need to be explained each time.

And in the internet age, new folklore continues to emerge -- not just familiar tropes, but *named* creatures, places, and plot devices that replicate memetically among countless storytellers. Perhaps you've heard of Slenderman? The Backrooms? Truck-kun? The SCP Foundation? Maybe folk collections are a timeless norm, and corporate franchises are the anomaly.

Let the corps have their corporate IPs, then. The rest of us shall continue to gather on janky internet forums or any other dark alley where we bums can huddle around a burning trash can and tell stories.

To that end, this document describes a particular kind of burning trash can for the rabble to gather around.

High Fantasy as a Cumulative Tradition

While Veiled Age has some unusual elements in its world premise, it also embraces medieval fantasy tradition to a significant extent. The enduring popularity of medieval fantasy might suggest it requires no explanation or defense. But to give context to our worldbuilding project, I think it's worth reflecting on how medieval fantasy has evolved over time and what it brings to the table.

An Oversimplified History

We all know that Tolkien is the father of modern fantasy. But it isn't as if he ever claimed to invent the genre. Part of Tolkien's genius was his ability to combine established fantasy terms, such as elves, dwarves, wizards, ghosts, and dragons, into a cohesive world that seemed to have its own fully realized history, geography, and languages.

If Middle Earth became the template for fantasy, I'd argue this template was completed by Gary Gygax and Ed Greenwood, who created Dungeons & Dragons and its main setting, Forgotten Realms. They took a Tolkienesque medieval world and shamelessly mixed in the ideas of many other authors, including H.P. Lovecraft (cosmic horror) and Robert E. Howard (sword and sorcery).

The result is a picture considerably more expansive and weird than Tolkien, where elves, gods, wizard schools, pulp sci-fi elements, monsters from practically any mythology, and other seemingly mismatched wonders somehow blend comfortably.

To see how well this can work, consider the recent fan and critic favorite *Baldur's Gate 3*, set in the Forgotten Realms. A vampire, an innocent half-demon, a brainwashed elf priestess, an alien warrior lady, and some other weirdos team up to fight an invasion of brain-eating parasites in a medieval setting. Not exactly something Tolkien would write, but mixing elements like this is not too out of bounds in today's fantasy landscape. In a way, D&D just took Tolkien's mythology-mixing to its logical extreme, while mostly preserving its medieval feel and its focus on a traveling band of adventurers.

Over in Japan, D&D inspired Yuji Horii to basically start the JRPG genre with the video game *Dragon Quest*, which then inspired *Final Fantasy*. Today, video games seem to be the main flagbearers of fantasy. The gaming industry is bigger than both the book and movie industries now, and for many people, "fantasy" first calls to mind names like *Final Fantasy*, *Elder Scrolls*, *Zelda*, *Dark Souls*, and *Baldur's Gate*.

Writers can of course take their fantasy worlds in any direction. After all, fantasy is imagination-based by definition. Still, if we imagine the fantasy genre as a sprawling tree, the tree has a main trunk: a tradition that has evolved from old European folklore, to *Lord of the Rings*, to *Dungeons & Dragons*, to both eastern and western video games.



Today, writing medieval fantasy is not so much an attempt to imitate Tolkien as it is partaking in a folk tradition with a life of its own. While Veiled Age has some original concepts in its premise, it ultimately embraces this folk approach to fantasy: weaving together and building upon familiar and beloved concepts.

Key Ingredients

The lineage described above has yielded a loose world template -- a sort of “standard fantasy setting” with certain features, like these:

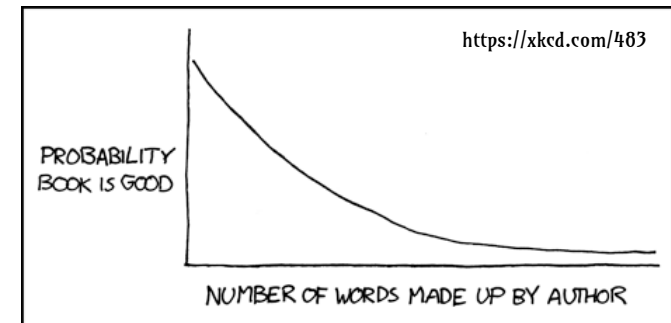
- Distinct trappings of medieval europe, like castles, horses, knights, and hereditary monarchy.
- Magic as a thing people generally know about but is outside the abilities of the average commoner.
- Multiple fantasy races that coexist with humans, including elves and dwarves.
- Ancient ruins and lost artifacts (dungeons and treasure).
- Emphasis on monsters, including supernatural ones, such as undead or demons.
- Prominent religious themes: gods, temples, clerics, and cults demonstrating a supernatural powers.

Perhaps you can think of others. I believe we have good reason as writers to use these instead of chasing originality for its own sake. Let's examine two.

Advantage #1: Familiar terms are more elegant than lore dumps.

By relying on the reader's background knowledge of fantasy, we could open a story with “There once was an old dwarf who hunted vampires with his cursed axe,” and there would be no need explain these ideas. A picture is worth 1000 words – and the reader has pictures of dwarves and vampires in their head already. Why not leverage them?

Familiar elements show kindness toward your reader. You value their time, and you approach them as a fellow fan (of vampire slaying, for instance). Conversely, trying too hard to invent fantasy terms and factoids can have the opposite effect: asking too much mental labor from the reader when the story hasn't earned it yet. And a critical reader will see this for what it often is: a veneer of creativity to mask a bland story.



"THE ELDERS, OR FRA'AS, GUARDED THE FARMLINGS (CHILDREN) WITH THEIR KRYTOSES, WHICH ARE LIKE SWORDS BUT AWESOMER..."

Don't get me wrong. When we get to Veiled Age lore, you'll see I enjoy making up words, like chime acuity, Heth, and coldbloods. But I want them to pull their weight. The deliciously weird icing on top of the familiar fantasy cake.

Advantage #2: Familiar elements have survived literary natural selection.

The elements of the “standard fantasy setting” have undergone a kind of darwinian selection. You can probably assume this about any cultural institution which persists over multiple generations (The Hobbit was published almost 90 years ago). But I think we can easily see some advantages of these settings from a storytelling perspective.

Let’s look at the time period as our main example. The medieval era is just modern enough to have recognizable societies with big cities, politics, international trade, impressive craftsmanship and architecture, fabulous fashion, and so on. At the same time, it lacks any of the conveniences that tend to suck the mystery and danger out of adventure. For instance:

- Exploration is enhanced in a mysterious world without detailed maps.
- Suspense is stronger without easy communication or information (telephones, google).
- A journey only feels epic if it is physically exhausting (no vehicles).
- Political plots are simpler and more dramatic if they have kings and queens to hinge on.

Such limitations can be contrived in a modern setting, but in a medieval one, they are normal. From a design perspective, the form (medieval societies surrounded by wilderness) suits the function (fantasy adventure).

Our World Design Goals

My number one rule when creating the bones of the Veiled Age setting was to create the *last* fantasy setting I would ever personally need. I wanted something I could trust to support whatever fantasy scenario my future self might invent. And since my tastes already veer toward classic tropes and archetypes, I believe such a setting will be useful to others.

Goal #1: Support a Wide Range of Fantasy

My main career has been as User Experience Director and product designer at a software company. One lesson engrained by such a job is this: when designing something other people will use for their own purposes, try not to force the user to do things in your own hyper-specific way. In our case, writers are independent and creative people, and a shared setting shouldn’t go out of its way to block their ideas.

Allow Normalcy. Starting with the mundane, here is one litmus test: the setting must permit us to write a relatively normal sentence or scene, like “One sunny morning, Isaac walked his dog through the apple orchard.” Sounds simple, right? Not if the whole setting is a desert planet or a post-apocalyptic wasteland, or every animal is a crustacean, or the world is too alien to have apples, or if every character must have names like Yyrkoon or VJ-23X.

Support Classic Scenarios. As we veer into the fantastical, I want a setting which can support classic fantasy adventures with minimal adjustments. Clever children outsmart a forest witch. Knights defend a castle from a dragon. A cleric puts undead to rest. A wizard browses an arcane library. Settings seeking pure originality fail here, as do settings that run on restrictive magic systems.

Go Beyond European Fantasy. Tolkien was British, and I appreciate how Britishness contributes to that nostalgic fantasy atmosphere. At the same time, I am a mixed-race American who plays D&D, reads Arabian Nights, watches anime, and simply enjoys a varied fantastical diet. I would like to have it both ways, creating a world that nods to classic roots while branching out into something more globally inspired.

Carefully Make Space for Sci-Fi Elements. Like many fantasy fans, I also love sci-fi. Outer space, aliens, futuristic tech, wormholes, you name it. Ideally, I'd like a fantasy setting to carve out a proper place for these kinds of things so that they can make an appearance in a story without overwhelming the medieval norms of the setting.

Get Weird! Lastly, I like *high* fantasy, and I sometimes feel let down when I'm deep into reading an acclaimed fantasy novel and nothing particularly wild or bizarre ever shows up. Where are the mutated beasts, the fey tricksters, the time-travelling assassins, the portals to pocket dimensions, the immortal evils sealed in the belly of the earth, the insanity-inducing cosmic horrors from the great beyond? Just as I want a world where a boy can go apple picking, I would like that same world to have room for the truly bizarre.

Goal #2: Provide Logical Underpinnings

Our second goal lives in tension with the first. They are yin and yang. If the first goal comes across as passive and accepting, the second goal involves clarity and decisiveness.

The tension arises from the following question: Is creating a world with the versatility described above hard or easy? That depends. It could be trivially easy if we don't care about the setting as a whole making sense. But that's cheating. Are we trying to create a world here, or just a disorganized junk drawer? We need some ground rules.

Fortunately, wild variety is neither unrealistic nor against reason. In fact, the real world can seem rather mismatched and random when pitted against the comparatively narrow and gimmicky worlds of fiction. It would take a truly insane fantasy writer to dream up volcanic eruptions, blue whales, carnivorous plants, and the duck-billed platypus, all on a planet ruled by hairless monkeys who can build spaceships. Yet here we are, and there is a reason for everything. Every object is subject to the same laws of physics. Every event flows from prior events.

That is what I want in a fantasy world, too. Even the strangest things should be explainable from the world's first principles (even if a story itself doesn't explain them). This does not necessarily mean magic must be systematized in academic detail. What I'm looking for is a step further back: a few underlying principles that could underpin a great many fantasy tropes, from spellcasting to zombies to divine beings.



Foundation

The general concept of the Veiled Age universe, its atmosphere, and the metaphysical rules underpinning its fantastical elements.

Chapter 2

Cosmic Medieval Fantasy

Veiled Age is a medieval high fantasy setting with prominent cosmic themes. As a general rule, we shamelessly embrace traditional fantasy elements like elves, wizards, monsters, demons, undead, ancient ruins and lost artifacts.

From there, we venture into grand ideas beyond mortal grasp: outer space and aliens, deep time, planes of existence, eldritch horror, and divine beings. Religion, astronomy and philosophy blend together into themes of cosmic mystery and numinous awe.

Yet, daily life remains grounded in the medieval era circa 1200 AD. Technology is simple. Books are rare. Outside major settlements, civilization feels sparse and fragile, surrounded by uncharted wilderness. Most people are farmers who have never been more than 20 miles from home.

Illustrative Vignettes

- A farmer finds a Holy stone among the turnips, just fallen from the planet's rings. Overjoyed, he sells it to the church, who can use it to heal the sick.
- A desert nomad lights an oil lamp while his emu-like steed sleeps beside him. He resumes hand-copying a tome about an ancient race which fled a dying world long ago.
- A priest and a demon share a rustic stew over a campfire. Despite mutual mistrust, they are temporary allies on the run from a murderous cult which seeks a lost portal gate to a dark dimension.

Setting Highlights

- **Various species and cultures.** A golden empire, a vast elven forest, a snowy dwarven kingdom, a demonic theocracy, a nomadic diaspora, and artificial beings awoken from cryosleep.
- **Ruins of a lost civilization.** Explorers seek ancient-yet-futuristic artifacts from the ruins of a long-dead race.
- **A pantheon of 7 gods.** The gods don't speak directly, but they created the mortal races and their miracles inform their cultures.
- **Cosmic horror!** Even the gods fear the writhing chaos beyond the veil. Its touch corrupts the body and mind, the living and the dead.

Inspirations

Main inspirations in order of how much they influenced the setting: Lord of the Rings, Forgotten Realms, H.P. Lovecraft, Stargate, Planescape, Elden Ring, Death's End.

How the Universe Works

The fantastical elements of Veiled Age all share a related theoretical underpinning: the universe has extra dimensions. In addition to the usual 3 dimensions of space and 1 of time, the Veiled Age universe has a dimension of being (where things can occupy higher lower planes of existence) and a dimension of altnernity (which contains alternate timelines).

In the dimension of being, the universe can be imagined as having three layers, called planes. The material plane, the realm of matter and mortals, is the middle plane. Above it is The Dream, a realm of pure thought. The Dream is filled not with matter but with aether, which is raw consciousness. It is occupied by spirits, including gods and the souls of mortals.

In this way, the Veiled Age universe operates on substance dualism -- matter and aether are the two fundamental substances of the universe. They exist on different planes, but they constantly interact. Using aether to manipulate the material realm is the basis of magic and miracles.

Below the material realm is the deepest layer of existence: the Abyss, a dark void beyond understanding. It is thought that the Abyss has no native substance at all. Furthermore, in the Abyss, all the other dimensions seem to lack distinction. Thus, the Abyss can be used to travel faster than light, go backward in time, or cross between parallel timelines. But such ventures risk contact with the Deep Ones: the incomprehensible native beings of the Abyss.

Aether Fundamentals

Aether, an immaterial substance in a higher realm, provides a metaphysical underpinning for many classic fantasy elements, including magic, spirits, and gods. The goal is to strike a balance. Magic and gods aren't exactly unexplained. At the same time, since aether is invisible and thought-based, it doesn't shoehorn the fantastical into a restrictive system or aesthetic (such as pre-dividing all magic into four elements, or cluttering every story with glowing crystals). Thus, use of magic in a story can largely conform to the writer's needs and tastes without contradicting the general theory.

The Dream

Leaving the Abyss aside for the moment, the universe has two layers: the material and the Dream. The two layers can be conceptualized as overlapping planes with a shared geometry. What happens in dream-space can affect a corresponding area of physical space, and vice versa.

Aether

As matter is the substance of the material, aether is the substance of the Dream. Aether is pure consciousness, and it makes up all immaterial objects. Thus, matter and aether are the two fundamental substances of the universe. Aether and matter both have a gravitational pull, even on each other.

Spirits

Spirits are the native beings of the dream: purely conscious, immaterial beings made of aether. Within the Dream, spirits absorb aether over time. Spirits can expend aether to alter the material realm according to their own thoughts.

Gods

Spirits of immense power are called gods. They can alter the material on a larger scale. Such an act is called a miracle. This ability is not limitless, however. The greater the alteration (the greater the size, scope, and conceptual deviation from the original state of affairs), the more aether is expended. This is why the gods tend to intervene infrequently and in small ways, and why they seek mortal devotees to help accomplish their ends.

Magic

Material creatures can also use aether to alter the material by channeling aether through their soul. This is called magic, and its practitioners are mages. Mages have various methods for manipulating aether. A scholarly wizard may use magic through careful study, while a fairy may have an innate power it barely thinks about.

Souls & Anchors

Immaterial objects have a tendency to anchor themselves to material ones. For any corporeal living thing, its body is the anchor for its soul, an ethereal object in the Dream. The soul is the source of its consciousness.

For spirits, an anchor makes it easier to manipulate the material realm nearby. It may also help the spirit maintain its sense of identity. Dryads, for example, are the result of a fey spirit anchored to a tree. A ghost, on the other hand, is usually anchored to something from its prior life, like its old house, its buried bones, or a cherished locket.

More powerful souls tend to anchor to larger objects or areas. A great spirit could be anchored to a whole forest, manipulating it at will. True gods tend to be anchored to incredibly large objects, like planets or moons.

Life and Death

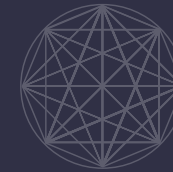
When a living creature dies, its soul disperses into raw aether, which will drift through the Dream, dissolve, and eventually become a part of other beings, analogous to the body decomposing. As the priests of the Aurum Ecclesia say: "aether to aether, dust to dust."

While this is the natural fate of all living things, there are various ways this cycle can be delayed or subverted.

Demiplanes of The Dream

A translucent mist permeates The Dream. This is Aether. It is like an ocean of silvery-gray fog with hints and glimmerings of every color, ebbing and flowing.

Though this is an incorporeal realm, it develops what seem like solid islands -- isolated realms floating in the mist. These realms, possibly born from the thoughts of great spirits or the subconscious activity of mortals, can sometimes have their own peculiar rules: a warped, yet consistent logic that governs the realm. These places are called demiplanes. Technically, they are pieces of the Dream plane, but it is not so easy to travel from one to another, and their nature may differ wildly from one to another.



Planet Edil

A brief journey through space and time, offering a zoomed-out view of planet Edil's history and surroundings, the birth of its gods, and the creation of its mortal races.

Chapter 3

An Abridged History

Long ago on planet Edil, a technologically advanced reptile race called the Oryth found a way to physically travel to the Dream. This led to the creation of the Serpent Gates, a network of portals which connect distant places on the planet by passing through The Dream.

In time, The Oryth found a way into the lower plane, the Abyss. This unwittingly allowed a Deep One to emerge into the material plane, corrupting reality in the vicinity of the whole stellar system. They called this being "The Amalgam," and it quickly destroyed their civilization. The last survivors fled the system on a spaceship, while the Amalgam remained.

Eventually, another Deep One emerged from the Abyss: a being called Nox. Unlike the Amalgam, Nox had a tranquil nature. She created a protective bubble called Mother's Veil around the inner solar system to shield it from the Amalgam's influence. Then, she birthed new gods to create and protect new life on Edil.

Today, Edil is populated with various mortal races created by these gods. They have a medieval technology level based on 1200 A.D., with the exception of rare, ancient-yet-futuristic artifacts excavated from Oryth ruins.

Due to Mother's Veil, today's races have never seen the stars. But the Veil won't last forever. The Amalgam's influence grows year by year, as does the influence of obscure cults who worship it.

The Stellar System

The title "Veiled Age" refers to a place and time within a broader universe. The place is the inner solar system of a main sequence yellow star, like our sun. The time is the period where this inner solar system is sealed off from the rest of space by an opaque barrier called Mother's Veil. The Veil, created by a Deep One called Nox, protects these planets from The Amalgam, a cosmic horror entity from the Abyss which destroyed the ancient Oryth civilization.

Two planets orbit here. Brimora, the smaller planet closer to the star, is the anchor of Modus, the god of demons.

Edil is an earth-like planet further out, in the stars goldilocks zone. Edil also has a moon called Pelagia, which is home to a race of naiads.

Brimora

This planet closer to the star is the anchor of Modus, the god of demons. It is a small, dense planet with heavy volcanic activity. It is mostly made of ferrus rock. Its surface is pockmarked with asteroid impacts.

Edil

An earth-like planet in the star's goldilocks zone. The main setting of Veiled Age. The length of the days and years are the same as earth. Unlike earth, Edil has planetary rings, which the inhabitants call the Arc of Heaven.

The Arc of Heaven

Edil is encircled by a narrow band of planetary rings, which in the common tongue is called the Arc of Heaven. These rings are the material anchor of the god Genos.

Pelagia

Edil's ocean moon, home to a race of naiads. Edilites and Pelagians have yet to make contact.

Mother's Veil

An opaque sphere surrounding the inner solar system, blocking view of the stars. While almost pure black, it has a subtle moving texture, like silk rippling in a gentle wind. This divine bubble is the only thing keeping The Amalgam from overwhelming the mortal races of Edil.

Astronomy from Edil's Perspective

When the people of planet Edil look up at a clear night sky, they see the golden Arc of Heaven, the silvery moon behind it, a lone star in the distance, and a starless blackness beyond it all.

The Arc of Heaven

The most prominent feature of the night sky is the planet's rings, called the Arc of Heaven. The rings circle the equator, and have a different appearance based on the observer's latitude. If you were near the equator, you would see a bright line that went from one horizon to the opposite horizon, dividing the sky in half. From the city of Zenith, in the middle of the northern hemisphere, you'd see wide bands dominating the bottom half of the sky. From the north pole, the rings would be a barely visible bright area on the southern horizon.

The planet's shadow passes over the rings throughout the night, from one side to the other, making it easy to tell the approximate time by glancing at the sky.

The size of the planet's shadow changes with the seasons. The summer solstice would mark the rings looking most complete. Then, the shadow gets wider and wider until winter solstice.

Due to the rings, the four seasons are somewhat more extreme than earth. In the summer, the rings reflect more sunlight, making days and nights

warmer and brighter. In the winter, the rings would partially block sunlight, resulting in cold, dark winters.

The Spheres: An Incorrect Geocentric Model

Like Medieval humans, the predominant cosmology believed on Edil is an incorrect geocentric model, where other objects are in concentric spheres with Edil at the center. To their understanding, the spheres from inner to outer are: Edil, its rings, the moon, Brimora, Mother's Veil, and finally, the Lost Empyrean -- the outer realm of stars.

The Starlit Age

Rise of the Oryth Race

The first mortal race on planet Edil evolved there under the guidance of a god called The Great Serpent, who was anchored to the planet.

The Oryth were cold-blooded reptiles. Their lower bodies were snake-like, growing longer with age. The head torso and head were humanoid, albeit twice the size of a human's. An Oryth had four arms, each with a long three-fingered hand ending in sharp claws. Their faces were almost elf-like in their delicate beauty.

The Oryth built magnificent works, with radial symmetry and fractal design elements as common features. Being cold-blooded, the Oryth concentrated in deserts and tropical climates. Some also built settlements near sources of geothermal heat. Less commonly, they spread elsewhere, especially as indoor heating methods improved.

Creation of their Coldblood Servants

The Oryth bio-engineered the humanoid race now called coldbloods, who became an integral part of society as a servant caste. While the relationship between the Oryth and the coldbloods was not without friction, it remained relatively stable until the end, for two main reasons. First, the Oryth were larger and stronger than their servants, as well as quite different in physiology, which reinforced the norm that they naturally had a higher place and purpose. Second, Oryth culture held that cruelty was the product of an unenlightened mind. Heirarchies were almost sacred, but by the same token, every creature in Heth had its place and should not be mocked. A miserable or unhealthy coldblood was seen

as something like an abused pet -- an indictment on their Oryth master.

Invention of Serpent Gates

The Great Serpent was a restless god with an ill-understood ability to traverse space and time. It bestowed some measure of this insight onto its children, the Oryth, who used it to create the Serpent Gates. These gates allowed transport to the Dream, and from there to any other gate on the planet. After exploring the planet, the Oryth used the gates to colonize their moon, Pelagia.

The Oryth shared their creator's wanderlust. Culturally, they were obsessed with the mysteries of distant places. Sophisticated astronomers, the Oryth studied the stars and longed to visit them. When their technology permitted, they developed a space program.

In time, gate travel shaped the main religion among the Oryth. Their worship of the Great Serpent merged with the concept that "Everything Is Connected." The distance between any two things, they argued, was clearly an illusion.

At the heart of the Oryth faith was the concept of "Heth", which roughly means everything: the totality of the universe including all places, all planes, all existence, and the paths between these points. It was their belief that exploring Heth was the key to understanding the Aseity -- a hypothetical entity derived from their philosophy, an infinitely wise being which must be the source of all existence, including the Great Serpent.

Discovery of the Abyss

As the science of gate travel advanced, the Oryth postulated that just as the universe had a higher plane in the Dream, it must also have a lower one, hidden in the depths of the 5th dimension. By carefully inverting the

polarity of certain gate components, a gate was constructed which could transport a person from the material world to a deeper place.

This place appeared at first as a vast nothingness. But here, all the dimensions of space-time seemed to converge. This nowhere-place could, in theory, be used to travel backward in time and between parallel material universes. This layer would later be called The Abyss.

But traveling to the Abyss seemed to deteriorate the mind. But the Oryth were not deterred. By transporting materials through the gate, the Oryth built a shelter in the Abyss, which served as both a shrine and a research outpost. It provided a way for a mortal to carefully transition into the Abyss without losing oneself.

Invasion of the Amalgam

Unfortunately, it worked both ways. The Abyss was not entirely empty. A native creature – an inherently chaotic, seemingly malevolent, godlike entity – used these Oryth constructions to travel upward into the material realm. It became a growing parasite on the material realm and its conscious creatures. It subtly warped reality on Edil and the solar system. It began to change the nature of other creatures, corrupting both the living and the dead. This horrific alien presence, which seemed to absorb all it touched into an interconnected chaos, was named The Amalgam.

Thus came the end of the Starlit Age: plagues of madness, mutation and undeath all but destroyed the Oryth civilization, forcing them to flee the solar system on an ark spaceship. They abandoned their doomed planet, leaving even the coldbloods behind in cryosleep.

Dawn of the Veiled Age

Nox Emerges from the Abyss

After a time, another being emerged from the Abyss gate. This being, called Nox, possessed a tranquil spirit and desired stability, unlike the chaotic Amalgam.

First, she created the Veil: a divine barrier around the inner stellar system to protect Edil from the Amalgam's presence. Then, she gave birth to the gods to govern the planets and seed it with new life. After creating the gods, she was not heard from again.

Yuva brings life to a dead world

Nox's first child anchored itself to the planet, and developed the ability to shape it. Through its miracles, the dead world was slowly terraformed. This deity had a dual nature, often depicted as twins: the goddess Yulethyn and the god Valdyr.

Yulethyn was the first to create life, seeding all that grew upon its surface. Seeing this, Valdyr created the beasts, the first creatures with minds of their own. In time, he created greater beings, like the giants and the elementals. Impressed by these animate forms, Yulethyn created the fey, who were cunning and beautiful, but fragile and fickle.

Though the world teemed with life, it was not yet complete. Yuva saw that the world needed wiser races who could build upon and govern the world for themselves. Contemplating their previous works, Yuva's two aspects set about their task. Valdyr created the dwarves, while Yulethyn created elves.

And so it was with all they did; for though the two were one, they were

nothing alike, and their creations were contrary. The twins and their creations often squabbled, but they proved allies in times of trouble, as it is to this day.

Genos creates humanity

The protection of the Veil was not absolute. At various times and places, the touch of the Amalgam was apparent. A more active vigilance was needed. To that end, Nox birthed Genos.

Genos anchored himself to the planet's rings, called the Arc of Heaven. With his presence, the light of the arc

Genos, observing the elves and dwarves, created the youngest of the mortal races: human beings. Though they had a shorter lifespan, humans have a high birth rate and are resistant to the Amalgam.

Phalora, the Pale Light

Finally, Nox birthed Phalora, who dwelled in the moon. From the perspective of the people of Edil, Phalora is seemingly silent and distant, like her mother.

Five Nations

The main setting of Veiled Age is the continent of Valmoria. In size, it is approximately 6000 miles from its arctic northern edge to its hot and sunny southern tip.



In the north, **elves** and **dwarves** founded neighboring nations long ago.

- **Ur** is the native land of the dwarves, the first of the mortal races to arise. It has a mountainous geography and a predominantly subarctic climate.
- **Amloth** is a massive island covered in lush forests, ruled by elves. This nation is somewhat more reclusive than the rest.
- In between these two nations are many islands, some of which serve as neutral territory.

The southern subcontinent consists of three **human** nations:

- **Arvel**, the "Golden Empire", has the greatest economic and military power of the five nations. It is the center of the continent's trade. While its royal family and main population are human, all races intermingle here.
- **Tophet** was once a part of Arvel until it broke away some time ago. It is home to many **demons** as well as humans, and it has a comparatively aggressive and nefarious government.
- **Yoba** has a predominantly tropical climate. Humans here coexist with a rare minority of **coldbloods**. Most settlements lay on its elongated coast, while nomads roam an interior desert dotted with **Oryth** ruins.

In the center lies the **Heart Sea**. It is warm, salty, and abundant in marine life. It occasionally features deadly storms, but most of the time it reliably facilitates trade among all five nations.

Languages

Arvan. The native tongue of Arvel and Tophet, and the common trade language across the continent. It is a second language for most educated people from Amloth, Ur, and Yoba. For convenience, it can be presented as English.

Elvish. Spoken by elves and fey. Written in elegant script. When inventing words, imitate Tolkien's *Sindarin*, or Gaelic.

Dwarvish. Spoken by dwarves, and carved into weapons and tools for enchantments. Written as neat, angular runes. When inventing words, imitate Old Norse.

Yobani. The native language of humans toward the continent's south. It predates Arvan and might have roots in the first human language. Written in a blocky script. When inventing words, imitate Arabic or Sanskrit.

Brimorian. The language of demons and their contracts. A common language in Tophet alongside Arvan. Originating from the planet Brimora, it is alien and grating, yet curiously melodic. Writing looks like sharp, angular runes.

Oryth. The language of the ancient, highly advanced reptile people who once inhabited the planet. Written as simple abstract glyphs which each represent a single word. When inventing words, imitate Nahuatl (Aztec) or Hebrew.

Pantheon

Each deity is discussed in their matching lore sections, but here we give a brief overview for reference.

1. **Nox.** A mysterious Deep One from the Abyss, who spawned the earth-deity Yuva and the sky-deities Genos and Phalora.
2. **Yulethyn.** Yuva's feminine aspect. Created plants, fey, and elves. Celtic pagan cultural flavor.
3. **Valdyr.** Yuva's masculine aspect. Created beasts, giants, and dwarves. Norse cultural flavor.
4. **Genos.** Creator of humanity, who dwells in the arc of heaven. Directly fights the Amalgam. Associated with golden light and white birds. Cultural flavor is vaguely Roman Catholic.
5. **Modus.** A scheming god of demons and magical contracts from the neighboring planet, Brimora. "Lawful evil" vibe. Vaguely satanic aesthetic. Unrelated to Nox.
6. **Phalora.** A mysterious goddess who dwells in the moon. Themes of water, night, and subtle insights. Represented as a moth-lady whose wings form an elegant dress.
7. **The Great Serpent.** A serpentine dragon with a space-time theme. The planet's "old god" before Yuva. Created the ancient Oryth race. Has seemingly departed the world.
8. **The Amalgam.** A god? You wish. An unstoppable cosmic horror; an insidious blight from the Abyss; a threat to all conscious life. Corrupts the body and the mind, the living and the dead.

PART TWO

ASPECTS



Primal



Heavenly



Shattered



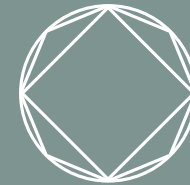
Infernal



Abyssal

The remaining chapters are deeper explorations of the setting, divided into five sections. Each section is thematically and geographically connected.

You are hereafter encouraged to skip around and read whatever aspects of the setting interest you most.



Primal Lore

Of elven forests, dwarven mountain fortresses, and the dual-natured earthen deity who created both races.

Chapter 4

Dwarves

On average, dwarves are about a foot shorter than humans of the same sex, but about the same weight due to their stout physiques. With abnormally strong constitution, dwarves are resistant to sickness and poisons. Dwarves can see clearly in dim light and have a keen sense of smell, especially for metals.

Though somewhat insular in their mountain holds, dwarves trade extensively with other peoples and nations. Much of the metal used by humans across the continent is sourced from dwarves, who mine and process ores from their mountain homes. Dwarven weapons and tools are coveted everywhere for their craftsmanship. But as they are produced with patience and exported in limited quantities, they demand a high price.

Culturally, dwarves are traditionalists. They value family ties and clan affiliations as their main source of social bonds and status. A dwarf typically has extensive knowledge of their own ancestry and of the social dynamics of their clan. They value multi-generational bonds of loyalty. They are slow to trust and make friends, but then value those friendships deeply. Conversely, they hold long grudges.

Ur, The World's End

To the distant North is a ring of snow-capped mountains with a volcano at its center.

The dwarves rule these lands from their mountain holds. Their main industry is exporting artisan goods; the finest weapons and tools are made in forges powered by subterranean heat.

Outside on the surface, the land is mostly untamed wilderness, as the dwarves have limited interest in developing these cold above-ground lands.

Quite a few humans have settled here, however. In addition to farming, hunting, and trading with dwarves, the men of Ur have taken to astronomy – such as it is. Though the stars are long gone, they study the subtle ripples of Mother's Veil.

Elves

The face of an elf tends toward delicate beauty, framed by slender pointed ears that stick out a good six inches from their heads. Elves are about the same height as humans, but lighter, physically weaker, and with more slender features overall. What they lack in strength, they make up for in fine muscle control; it is said the archers of Amloth can hold a bow perfectly still as they draw the string.

Full-blooded elves age very slowly. They typically live to about 400, but the oldest ever recorded was over 900. For most of their lives, they look like young adults. Perhaps for this reason, elves are notoriously cautious. With long lives and low birth rates, a life cut short by violence or illness is a great tragedy. Births, on the other hand, are cause for extended celebrations among family and friends.

Most elves can be found in the island nation of Amloth, but in recent centuries they have spread across the world and often intermarried with humans.

Amloth, the Great Forest

This vast woodland has been the domain of the elves since the dawn of the age. In its center lies a sacred capital city, built at the base of an ancient tree that would shame the tallest towers of man.

But the Great Forest contains little else a human would call a city. As deforestation is only permitted in small patches, and the elder trees cannot

be cut, most of the nation consists of countless small villages nestled among the trees and connected by winding forest roads. Beyond these roads, travelers are warned not to explore carelessly. In the deepest mists, the woods are haunted by fey, and footpaths seem to shift of their own accord.

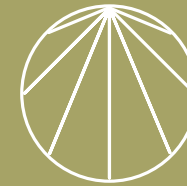
Yuva, Twin Soul of the Planet

Nox's firstborn deity, Yuva, is anchored to the planet. It is the planet's primary nature deity, with two distinct aspects. Valdyr is masculine, stoic, enduring. Yulethyn is feminine, charming, whimsical. These contradictions hide a deeper truth: a dynamic yet harmonious balance of nature. For while they seem to quarrel, they are neither enemies nor lovers. They are inseparable halves of the same whole.

Among the druids, the two aspects of Yuva are depicted as twins: a male dressed in furs, with a silver horn on his forehead, and a female clothed in ferns and flowers.

Earthshaping

Yuva's miracles typically involve shaping the planet's surface or influencing its flora and fauna. Just as Yulethyn and Valdyr terraformed the planet and created life at the dawn of the age, they occasionally make small-scale alterations to the planet, especially for the protection or benefit of their created races: elves and dwarves.



Heavenly Lore

Of humanity, its golden empire, its creator who dwells in the Arc of Heaven, and its church, which gives refuge from the touch of the Amalgam.

Humanity

Humans are the youngest of the mortal races, created by Genos a mere two thousand years ago. Their distinguishing feature is their comparatively high birth rate, which has enabled them to spread across the world quickly. Today, they are the most numerous of the mortal races.

Strangely, humans seem to be slightly more resistant to the effects of the Amalgam. Perhaps this is fitting for the offspring of Genos, who was born to hold the Amalgam at bay.

Arvel, the Golden Empire

The world's greatest empire once spread by the sword, but today it is a peaceful constitutional monarchy. With fertile lands and impressive cities, it is prosperous, ethnically diverse and cosmopolitan.

Thanks to the empire's sprawling trade routes, the Arvan language is now the common secondary tongue across the continent, and its calendar is in common use as well.

Its greatest city, Zenith, is a center of international trade. It is situated on the Heart Sea, which borders four other nations.

Political Structure of Arvel

The Emperor. Power ultimately rests with the emperor, who lives with his family in a royal palace overlooking the city of Zenith. While succession is typically hereditary, the emperor must still be officially elected by 7 seats: the three dukes, the three lord mayors of the Free Cities, and the head priest of the Genotian church.

Dukes and Counts. The kingdom is divided into three regions, called duchies, each led by a duke or duchess. Duchies are further divided into counties, each led by a count or countess. Dukes and counts generally maintain a castle and are responsible for the military protection and justice systems of their county dwellers.

The Free Cities. The three great cities of Zenith, Vantith, and Avarran are officially outside the noble structure of dukes and counts. Instead, they make their own laws and elect their own lord mayors. Ultimately, the Free Cities answer to the king directly.

The Grand Council. The Grand Council is Arvel's legislative body, with responsibility for setting domestic policy, especially tax and trade regulation. Every mayor is a member of the Grand Council, and every county elects itself a delegate to the council as well.

The Sacred Charter. As a constitutional monarchy, Arvel has a sacred charter laying out certain rules and citizen rights, which even the emperor must abide by. Two important rules distinguish it from its rival, Tophet: slavery is outlawed, and any sentient being may own property.

The Aurum Ecclesia

Mankind's Church

The Aurum Ecclesia is humanity's primary religious institution. It is tasked with cleansing the effects of the Amalgam. Its clerics heal the afflicted, while its templars hunt what cannot be saved. Great cathedrals are central locations in cities, but even remote towns have a simple chapel. These buildings are consecrated ground, where unclean creatures cannot willingly enter. While the church is based in Arvel, it is acknowledged across the world, and especially in places where signs of the Amalgam have appeared.

In certain places and under certain leaders, zeal for rooting out the Amalgam's influence can lead to prejudice and paranoia. And like any sprawling and powerful institution, there will be those among its ranks with selfish motives. But more generally, the Aurum Ecclesia is an unironically good faction, with temples serving as cultural centers, healing houses, and bulwarks against the Amalgam.

Genos, the Heavenly One

The church primarily worships Genos, the Heavenly One, who created mankind. Genos is anchored to the Arc of Heaven, and is thus culturally seen as a sort of 'sky god' in contrast to Yuva, the earthen deity. The words 'holy' and 'heavenly' usually imply reference to Genos. The conventional symbol of Genos is a dove with six wings. The more elaborate depiction is a idealized man with six angelic wings.

Phalora, the Pale Light

Phalora is the youngest of Nox's offspring is Genos' little sister, who dwells in the moon. Her interactions with the mortal races seem comparatively faint and rare, but it is said that of the gods, she is most like her mother, Nox, and that she will one day drive away the Amalgam once and for all. Thus, she is a less often discussed, yet revered figure in the church's teachings.

Heavenly Stones

The church collects "heavenly stones": meteorites fallen from the Arc of Heaven, infused with a faint trace of Genos' power. These stones are used by clerics to heal the sick and by smiths to craft holy weapons for templars.

Relations with Other Gods and Religions

While the Aurum Ecclesia focuses on Genos, it also honors Nox as the mother of gods, the Twins who make life on Edil possible, and Phalora, who they believe will one day help Genos destroy the Amalgam. It is suspicious, however, of those who worship Modus or the Great Serpent. Modus preaches naked ambition, hedonism, and survival of the fittest -- almost a direct mockery of the Aurum Ecclesia's ideals of moral virtue. The Great Serpent is said to be a foolish god who caused the Amalgam to escape the Abyss. Neither are fellow children of Nox, and their comparatively alien influences should not be trusted.



Shattered Lore

Of a long-dead civilization, its crumbling ruins and abandoned servants, and a nomadic diaspora who reveres its Hethian teachings.

Chapter 6

Shattered Yoba

The desert kingdom of Yoba declined Arvel's invitation to join the empire, cherishing their independence. This proved to be their downfall when Tophet siezed their capital by force. Today, some live in their homeland under Tophan rule, some as refugees in Arvel, and still others as nomads or settlers of the wilderness. Though they no longer have a functioning government, the Yobani still share a sense of solidarity. Their diaspora has been collectively labelled "Shattered Yoba" -- a dark term perhaps, but many among them have adopted it without shame.

The Yobani always had a nomadic subculture in rural areas, but its influence is growing due to migrants fleeing war and subjugation. The nomadic subculture includes a reverence for the Oryth. In the story of the Oryth, the Yobani can see shades of their own struggle. These ancients, who traveled the world through their portal gates and were in the end displaced from their own planet, were the ultimate nomads.

The Hethian Faith

This belief system often found among Yobani nomads, but it is ultimately a continuation of the Oryth religion. At its core is a belief in the grand unity of the universe.

Hethians revere the Great Serpent, the original soul of the planet Edil in the star-lit age. This nameless deity above all sought to explore and to find enlightenment through its travels through space-time.

The Hethians believe the will of the Great Serpent lives on in Oryth artifacts. As evidence, they point out that artifacts sometimes exhibit temporary oddities or glitches, which to the open mind suggest an intention.

Oryth Ruins

Ruins of the Oryth dot the entire planet. However, their civilization was originated and remained concentrated in the Yobani desert. Thus, their ruins here are more abundant and older. Some are little more than standing rocks, remnants of buildings all but erased by centuries of sandstorms. Others have an entrance on the surface but stretch for miles underground into mazes of well-preserved chambers.

Expeditions to Oryth ruins sometimes find functioning artifacts: ancient items of advanced, mysterious technology. These can be of great value, and thus the land rights to explore these ruins are coveted worldwide.

These ruins are one motive for Tophet's recent invasion of Yoba. They seek to plunder these ruins for themselves, rather than having to trade with Yoba for them.

Oryth ruins feature an abundance of smooth, white stone. Spirals, circles, and triangles predominate. For visual inspiration when writing, imagine a subtly futuristic, yet Aztec-inspired artistic sense.

Coldbloods

Abandoned Servants

Coldbloods were bio-engineered by the Oryth to be their servants. When the Oryth left the planet, they left them behind in stasis. Many were discovered and revived from cryosleep by spelunking dwarves. Coldbloods are uncommon: most people are aware of them but have never met one.

Appearance

Coldbloods are humanoids with gray skin and golden eyes. Their hands feature three long fingers and a thumb. Aside from these features, coldbloods look like humans. Their hair is typically white or blonde, but may be other colors if they have enough mixed human heritage.

Mesothermic

Coldbloods are partially cold-blooded. They produce and retain a small amount of heat, but not enough for survival. They have a few odd traits related to this:

- Through their pale skin, they absorb radiant heat from the sun or from fires.
- They also can quickly transfer heat through their hands, absorbing it from or transferring it to other creatures.
- Coldblood physiology is uniquely compatible with the cryo-stasis pods invented by the Oryth.

- When they are extremely cold or hot, coldbloods become more animalistic: less rational, more aggressive.

Stoic and Analytical

Like any other race, coldbloods differ in personality and intelligence from one to another. However, they are engineered with a disposition toward calm and analytical personalities. The Oryth reasoned that a thoughtful race not disposed to violent passions would make better servants.

Despite popular belief, a coldblood's emotions run just as deep as a human's. The Yobani have a saying: the less a coldblood speaks of their affections, the deeper they run.

Production and Reproduction

Coldbloods were originally grown in pods. Many living today were discovered and revived from cryosleep by spelunking dwarves or other explorers.

Coldbloods can also reproduce sexually and are strangely compatible with humans. The majority of coldbloods today were born naturally. Coldblood genes are strong, so that the offspring of a coldblood and a human is almost indistinguishable from a 'pure' coldblood.

Imprinting and Fixations

If a coldblood is given a repetitive task in its youth, it develops a lifelong innate urge to do similar tasks and feels a subtle pleasure in doing so. This is by Oryth design: their initial "chores" are carefully chosen to make the coldblood suited to its intended role. This education process is called **imprinting**.

This urge is not irresistible, and many coldbloods today pursue careers or lifestyles that have nothing to do with their imprinting, but they almost invariably have hobbies or ticks that echo their imprinting. For example, a coldblood imprinted to be a weaver might find themselves knitting or mending clothes to relax. Such activities are often called **fixations**.



Infernal Lore

Of an altered race, a dark kingdom, and the machinations of the divine demon from Brimora, the Last Star.

Chapter 7

Tophet, Infernal Theocracy

What was once a fringe group of heretics within Arvel has become a theocratic kingdom of its own, worshiping Modus, the god of demonkind. In this, they consider themselves industrious and practical, worshipping the only god who offers clear benefits.

Tophan society revolves around people making infernal contracts with each other, and they convert neighboring nations by violent conquest. They value strength and utility, but above all, they revere cunning strategy in all its forms. Compared to Arvel, Tophet is small, but it grows at a frightening pace.

Though officially part of the round table of nations, Tophet has recently invaded Yoba, counting on its shared history with Arvel to prevent outright enmity.

Blood Contracts

Modus specializes in magically binding contracts. To take effect, a contract must be written in the Brimorian language and then willingly signed in blood by all parties.

How willingly? They must of their own free mind decide to sign it, while knowing that it is a blood contract. In practice, this "informed consent" requirement can be paper-thin -- for example, kidnapping someone who can't read Brimorian and telling them to sign the contract or be killed. While such egregious coercion is forbidden even by Tophan law, the contract magic itself ignores the moral nuances of consent.

A significant portion of Tophet's economy revolves around writing and interpreting the wording of these contracts.

Slavery

In Tophet, things we would consider "human rights" are more like special privileges granted by the government or by contracts. Tophet is the only nation of the five where slavery is considered legitimate. In fact, Arvel's sacred charter forbids it explicitly, which is one reason for the split between the two nations. This evil practice is the inevitable consequence of two factors: Tophet's might-makes-right cultural values, and the widespread use of contract magic.

Modus, the Divine Demon

In the Star-Lit Age, Edil was not the only inhabited planet in the system. Closer to the star was the planet Brimora, where a god named Modus dwelled. There he created a race called Brimorans. Modus was the beloved tyrant over the Brimorians, unifying the planet under his theocratic rule.

When the Amalgam came to the system, the planet was ravaged, just as Edil was. Unlike the Oryth, the Brimorans had no means of escaping their doomed world, and were ultimately consumed by the Amalgam.

But Modus was not like the restless Great Serpent. While the Serpent abandoned its world and fled to the stars, Modus waited. For Modus is nothing if not patient.

When new life arose on Edil, Modus turned his attention to this remade world. He sought to create and rule a new race there. He reached an uneasy bargain with Yuva: Modus' influence on the planet would be limited to his agreements with individual mortals.

Modus is evil in that he is a tyrannical and vainly ambitious god with a desire for world domination. However, he values order and seeks a functional civilization to dominate, full of conscious mortals to make deals

with. This means, like Edil's own gods, he recognizes the threat of the Amalgam and is invested in the preservation of Mother's Veil. Overall, his behavior is devious, patient, self-absorbed, and practical.

Demons

Demons are a mortal race created by Modus as a result of bargaining with other mortal races, such as humans, elves, and dwarves. For example, a human could promise his soul to save his child's life. Then, when the human died, his soul would be used to forge a new demon. This demon would bear a resemblance to the original human and retain some fragmented memories, and would typically be under a lifelong contract of servitude.

This is how the first demons on Edil came about, and how they sometimes come about today. But as the race is now somewhat established, most demons today are born through mating with other races. Such demons are not born "under contract". Since it is not externally obvious what contracts a person is bound by, demons must contend with a general mistrust toward them outside of Tophet. This becomes an incentive to sign a contract; if people are going to believe you serve Modus anyway, why not benefit?

Goblins

Once, a prominent elf made a contract with a great frog-like demon, who was a high-ranking official in Modus' heirarchy. The elf violated the contract, resulting in his bloodline being cursed to resemble the demon. The descendents of this elf are known as goblins.

Goblins are somewhat smaller than elves, with green skin and sharp teeth. They have a somewhat twitchy, clumsy disposition, as if to mock the graceful beauty of their elf kin. Goblins have a normal intelligence and are not particularly evil, but they tend to live on the fringes of society,

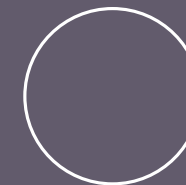
especially shunned by elves as a cautionary tale about bargaining with Modus.

Brimora, the Last Star

The planet Brimora remains the material anchor of the god Modus. It is visible in Edil's night sky as it reflects sunlight, appearing as a lone, pink star in an otherwise starless sky.

Brimora is small and dense, with a large iron core and heavy, metallic soil. It has a thin, surferous atmosphere. On its surface are many volcano chains and pock-marked with meteor impacts.

Brimora's biosphere is not exactly dead. It contains the remnants of beings that were twisted and ruined by the Amalgam before Mother's Veil appeared. This includes the "old demons" which were once the planet's original Brimorian race. Fortunately for Edil, these nightmares have no way to leave their ruined world. Or do they?



Abyssal Lore

Of the Abyss, the Deep Ones, the Amalgam which corrupts the living and the dead, and the mad cults who worship it.

The Abyss

The pigeon speaks:

Ages ago, in some far-flung corner of Heth, on a world with a yellow star like our own, there lived a scholar named Goethe, who is said to have glimpsed the Abyss without harm to his sanity. He described it thus:

“Something that only manifested itself in contradictions, and therefore should not be comprehended under any concept, still less under any one word. It was not divine, for it seemed unreasonable, not human for it lacked understanding, not devilish for it was beneficent, not angelic for it often displayed malicious joy. It was like... chance, for it pointed to no consequence, it resembled providence, for it indicated connection and unity. All that hems us in seemed penetrable to it. It seemed to dispose at will of the inevitable elements of our being, contracting time and expanding space. Only in the impossible did it seem at home, and the possible it spurned from itself with contempt.”

Another there spoke more succinctly, with the wisdom to avoid the fool's task of describing what it is, and instead offering a simple warning.

“When you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”

- Nietzsche

I believe he spoke here not truly of the Abyss itself, but of the Amalgam within it, or some other Deep One there. I, at least, have had the misfortune of glimpsing the Amalgam itself. Afterward, I could only describe it thus: an amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity. Naturally, my words were taken as fiction. Perhaps that's for the best.

A Featureless Void?

By all accounts, if the accounts of damaged minds are to be believed, one who travels to the Abyss will first see only a featureless blackness. Yet, one does not exactly float, but instead walks upon a smooth, solid surface, like an obsidian floor extending infinitely in all directions.

It is difficult to say whether the Abyss truly has a size. Instead, it is said that all dimensions converge to it, or diverge from it. The distinction between any two dimensions of space-time seems dubious.

The higher plane, The Dream, can be used to travel between material locations at the speed of light (as implemented in the Serpent Gates). But the Abyss could in theory be used to travel at infinite velocity, since the dimensions themselves are strangely indefinite.

As any physicist on earth will tell you, traveling faster than light would seem to violate causality, and you could arrive somewhere at a time before you departed. Thus, backward time travel is possible through the Abyss. However, this is all theory. If it were possible, surely Edil would have been visited by time travelers from the future by now... right?

Deep Ones

As the gods dwell in The Dream above, something dwells in The Abyss below. Little is known about these beings, except that they may be even more powerful than gods. Only two have been discovered, but the fact that there are two instead of one suggests they may be a whole category of being. Scholars have classified them as "deep ones".

The first, called the Amalgam, is responsible for the destruction of the Oryth race, and still lurks beyond Mother's Veil. The second, Nox, is the mother of Edil's new gods.

The Amalgam

The Amalgam is a Deep One – a being native to the Abyss, which escaped into the material realm due to the Oryth's expeditions into the Abyss. No one is certain how to classify it. It would be blasphemous to call it a god, as it is not from the Dream. But the gods fear it. It is a writhing chaos which lurks beyond Mother's Veil. Where its influence peeks through, it corrupts the living and the dead.

Aberrations (Tainted Ones)

When a living creature suffers the touch of the Amalgam, its nature can begin to change into something chaotic and alien. The body changes, and the mind with it, as the person slowly loses their sense of self and becomes merely a part of the Amalgam. Scholars call such beings Aberrations. Such creatures are hunted by the Genotian Church, to put these "tainted ones" out of their misery and prevent the spread of the Amalgam's influence.

Undead

The Amalgam is the cause of all undead. Normally, a living body is animated by its soul, an aetherial object in the Dream. When something dies, this connection is severed and both body and soul dissolve into their elements. But the Amalgam can form similar connections on its own. It can connect to dead bodies, resulting in mindless undead. Worse, it can form a connection between a creature's body and soul, producing more powerful, intelligent undead.

Night Sickness

There is a short-term ailment familiar to all conscious being on Edil. It is analagous to a cold in that everyone comes down with it periodically, about once a year.

Symptoms

- Nightmares with an especially bizarre and alien quality. This is always the first symptom, thus the name of the ailment.
- Mild hypothermia. The afflicted must rest up and keep warm.
- Cold sweats accompanied by nausea.
- Unusual bouts of anxiety, especially fear of the dark. In more severe cases, this veers into paranoia and intense existential dread.

Treatment and Recovery

Most people will recover on their own in a few days. In the mean time, mundane treatments can ease suffering and shorten recovery time. The Genotian Church recommends the following.

- Stay warm with blankets, hot drinks, and sleeping near the hearth.
- Stay in bright lights. This will reduce dread considerably.
- Familiar company and creature comforts can ease the anxiety.

Causes

Night Sickness is caused by exposure to the Amalgam, which is toxic to the soul. Touching an aberration or undead, or sleeping near sites of necromancy are known causes. But as Mother's Veil thins, it has become increasingly common to contract it for no apparent reason.

Nox

Nox, the silent mother of gods, is revered by practically all religions on Edil. She is the grandmother of living things. She is the black canvas that preceded the colors of the new creation. She is the blanket which shields the world from the horrors beyond it.

The existence of Nox is only known through contact with Genos, Yulethyn or Valdyr, who all acknowledge her as their mother.

Nox is from the Abyss, but this is unknown to the people of Edil. While scholars toiling in obscurity may have deduced it, most people would refuse to believe it, as the Abyss is associated so strongly with the destructive chaos and horror of the Amalgam.

By contrast, Nox is associated with silence and darkness, and even distance and absence. In this nothingness, this absence of struggle and noise, there is tranquility. There is space for creativity.

The gods may dwell in The Dream, but if a being from the Abyss can create them, this calls into the question the nature and origin of gods. Are the gods themselves the creations of the Deep Ones?

There are some whose faith is dedicated to the worship of Nox primarily, rather than her children. These adherents are known as Noxians. They are generally considered an odd and obscure sect, albeit generally harmless. Since Nox does not seem to speak, perform miracles, or grant the use of magic, she is usually a secondary figure in religion.

Noxians are mainly noticed only because of their strange customs, such as wearing dark veils to represent Mother's Veil or taking vows of silence out of reverence for the silent mother of gods.