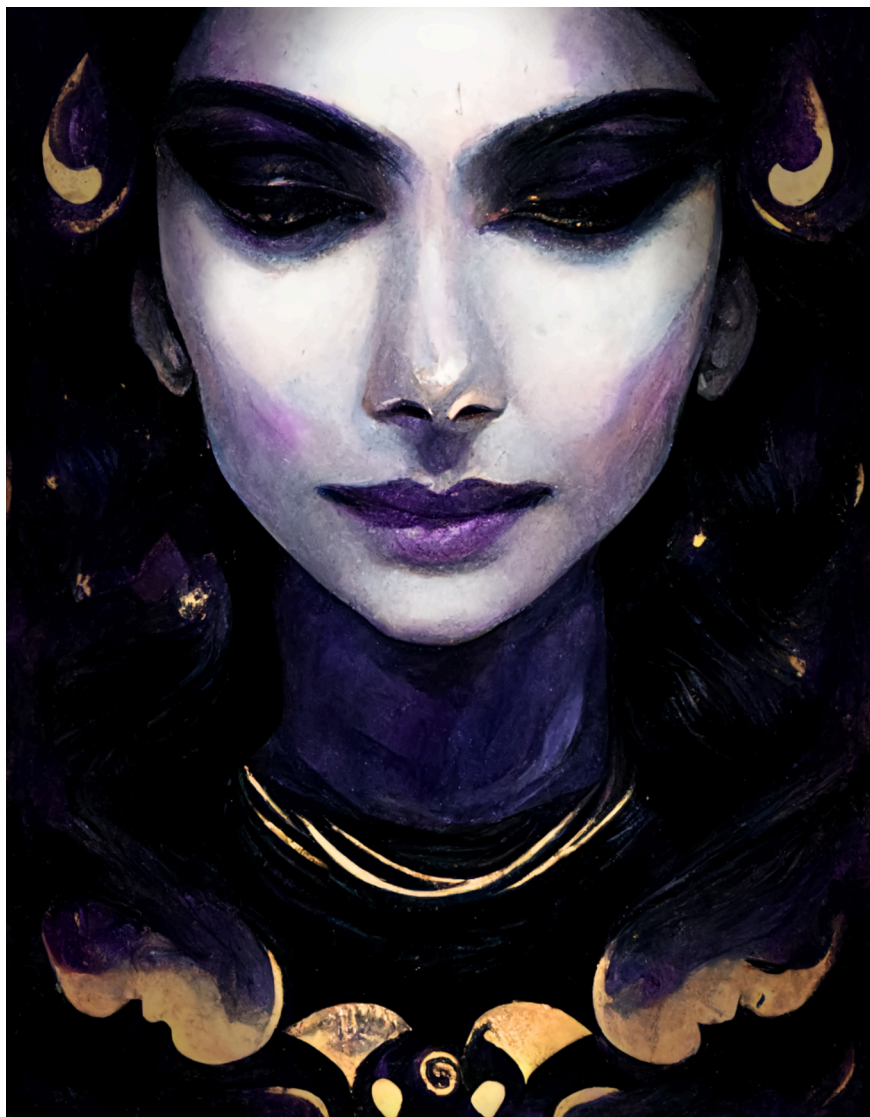


VEILED AGE



AN OPEN CULTURE FANTASY SETTING

The High Fantasy Gestalt

The Veiled Age is a take on the traditional high fantasy setting: a loose template started by Tolkien and, I'd argue, completed by Gary Gygax, who mixed in the ideas of other seminal fantasy authors like H.P. Lovecraft (cosmic horror) and Robert E. Howard (sword and sorcery). The result is a picture considerably more expansive and weird than Tolkien, often containing the following things:

- Multiple humanoid races
- Low-tech society with magic
- Dangerous wilderness with monsters
- Ancient ruins and lost artifacts (dungeons and treasure)
- Supernatural threats, such as undead and demons
- Cosmic themes: gods, outer space, planes, etc.

While some dislike the very notion of “standard fantasy”, setting a story in such a world has some advantages.

First, since it doesn't revolve around a singular premise or location, a wide variety of fantasy scenarios can be placed here, making it particularly suited to roleplaying games and ongoing fantasy series.

Second, classic tropes have endured for a reason. A “standard fantasy setting” comes ready to express timeless themes like exploration, mystery, danger, good and evil. Such a setting represents something like a consensus about the type of world particularly suited to the adventure genre.

Third, it's familiar and well-loved. Often, people pick up a fantasy story or game for the same reason they'd order a pizza: they have a particular craving. The main goal of the Veiled Age is not to subvert or reinvent fantasy, but to satisfy the craving for it without being totally flavorless or generic.

The Setting in a Nutshell

The Veiled Age is a classic high fantasy setting designed to support a wide variety of fantasy stories, including heroic adventure, horror, intrigue, or comedy. Its biggest inspirations are D&D-adjacent settings like Forgotten Realms, The Age of Lost Omens, and Planescape.

Edil is an earth-like planet with magic, monsters, a late medieval to early renaissance technology level, and multiple sentient races including Humans, Elves, Dwarves, and more.

The first mortal race, the Naga, are now extinct due to an ancient cataclysm. Their mysterious ruins are global and mostly underground, referred to collectively as Oldworld.

Edil is watched by three gods: Genos, the holy sun god who created mankind; and Modus, a lawful evil, devil-like figure, and Nox, the mysterious night goddess who created the planet and the other two gods.

The political landscape contains a round table of five nations: Arvel, a prosperous multicultural empire; Tophet, a ruthless kingdom with demonic contracts; Yoba, a desert nation of displaced nomads; Nor, a snowy mountain region ruled by dwarves; Amloth, an ancient forest ruled by elves.

Beyond Edil, there are other planes of existence: the heavenly Mirador, the demonic Spiral of Modus, the chaotic yet wondrous Astral Sea, and the nightmarish Abyss, feared by even the gods.

COSMOLOGY

Edil

The planet, home to the mortal races and their kingdoms.

Note: There is intentionally no world map, nor an exhaustive list of countries. Authors are encouraged to invent a location that suits their story.

Oldworld

Deep underground lay the sprawling ruins of the first mortal race, the Naga, who are now extinct. As the Naga were a comparatively advanced civilization with a mastery of arcane magic, expeditions to their ruins yield powerful artifacts and lost secrets.

Spiral of Modus

In the deepest depths of Edil, far below Oldworld, lies the Nine-Layered Hell called the Spiral of Modus. Once called Axiom, it is the domain of Modus, the evil god of Law. Its nine layers are stacked in an inverted hierarchy, with Modus' personal domain at the very bottom.

Astral Sea

Far above Edil's sky, the Astral Sea is a realm of demiplanes: contained, finite realities, each with its own peculiar laws and landscapes. These demiplanes can be seen from Edil at night as pinpricks of light – the stars. It's said that the further out one travels, the more the environment is shaped by ideas rather than matter.

Golden Veil

The outer boundary of the Astral Sea, which shields all known creation from the Abyss. It was fashioned by Genos

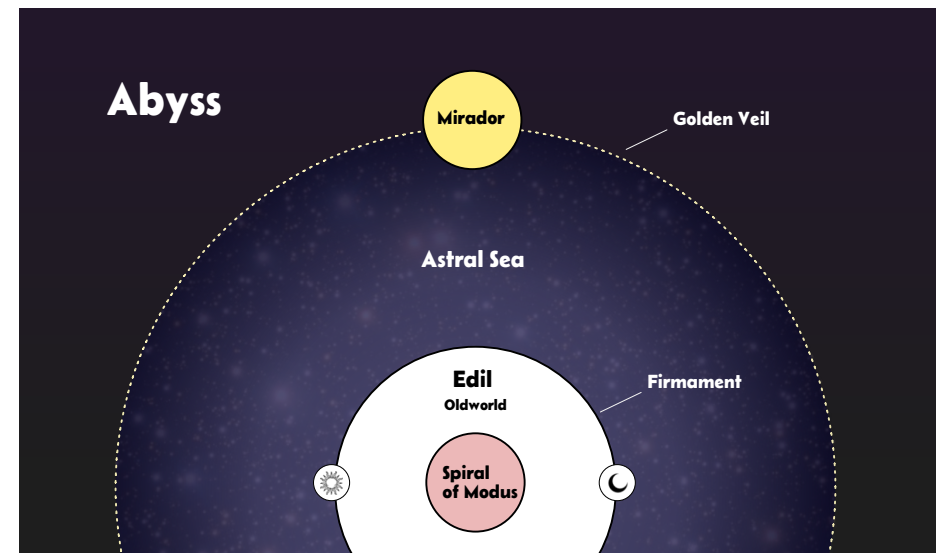
as a gift for Nox, and is depicted in religious art as a veil over Nox's head. On clear, dark nights, it can sometimes be seen as a faint golden shimmer behind the stars, which wavers like fabric in a cosmic wind.

Mirador

A great mountain set upon the Golden Veil, where Genos dwells at its peak. Mortal souls go here after death to seek enlightenment, unless Modus has claim to them.

Abyss

The vast, possibly infinite realm of chaos and unfathomable nightmares beyond known reality, feared by gods and mortals alike. Its touch corrupts both the living and the dead.



AGES PAST

Age of Creation (??? BD)

In the beginning, there was only the Abyss: a vast, possibly infinite writhing chaos, hostile to all order and life as we know it.

Then, the goddess Nox was born within it. Her presence created a stable domain: a quiet void called the Astral Sea. Nox possessed a tranquil spirit, which gave her the desire to create permanent things.

First, Nox created countless tiny worlds, each with peculiar rules, dotted across the Astral Sea as points of light. Then, at the center, Nox created the Prime Material world, Edil. To give it greater order and stability than these first experiments, she birthed a god of Law to dwell in its center. His name was Modus.

Modus created laws to govern the clockwork of the Edil - the ticking of time, the cycle of seasons, laws of motion and the like.

Pleased with this ordered world, Nox created the first mortal race to inhabit it: pale, coldblooded humanoids called the Naga. Modus saw the Naga, and petitioned Nox for the ability to create a race of his own. But Nox refused, seeing the selfish ambition in his heart.

Twilight Age (approx. 6000 - 4000 BD)

The Naga explored Edil, which was a world of perpetual twilight, where stars blanketed the sky without sun or moon. In their travels, they became enlightened, and saw that all points in creation were connected. They built the

Serpent Gates, which could connect distant points in a single step.

Suddenly, they ceased their explorations, hid or destroyed the keys to their Gates, and withdrew beneath the earth. For some reason, their explorations yielded a fear of the sky so great that they no longer wanted to look upon it. Thus they burrowed underground. Here, they prospered and built a vast subterranean civilization spanning much of the world.

Calamity and the Godpact

One day, a massive object from the Abyss pierced the Astral Sea, wounded Nox, and dug into the heart of the Naga civilization, birthing a plague of madness and mutation, leading to the fall of the Naga civilization and possibly their extinction.

Faced with the destruction of her creation, Nox sought Modus' help. With his Lawful nature, he could aid in banishing the object.

Seeing an opportunity, Modus remembered his ancient petition, and suggested he would only help if he obtained the power to create his own sentient beings, over which he could have direct rule. The two reached a compromise, and formed a pact: Modus would banish the object and vow to work against any Abyssal incursions in the future. While Modus would still have no powers of creation, he would have jurisdiction over a portion of future mortal souls - the "less valuable" ones tainted by evil. He would also have license to make a binding agreement with any sentient being, which he uses to aid his ambitions to this day.

Age Before Dawn (3000-0 BD)

With order restored to creation, Nox created two equal and opposite new races, using parts of the mortal world itself.

From the forests, she made the elves. From the mountains, the dwarves. She then rested to prepare for a final creative work.

In the fullness of her time, Nox birthed an infant god, Genos, who she saw as a more trustworthy source of order than Modus. Genos was a Lawful being, but he also possessed a nature of justice and mercy, and shared his mother's compassion for the mortal races, unlike his devious and calculating elder brother.

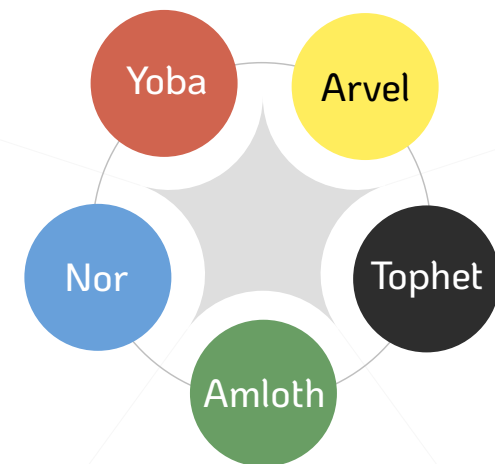
Veiled Age (0-1022 AC, present day)

After a thousand years of silent contemplation, Genos created the Golden Veil, which covered his mother's wound and protected creation from the touch of The Abyss. Within this veil, he created Celestia, his own realm, where mortal souls go to seek enlightenment after death—unless his brother has claim to them. Finally, he created mankind, an ambitious race meant to be the successor of the Naga.

Thus, began The Veiled Age. A stable world floating in the Abyss, shielded from without by Genos, and guarded from within by Modus.

NATIONS

In Arvel's capital city of Zenith, a round table occasionally meets with representatives from the five major nations on the continent. There are no doubt other continents with other countries not detailed here.



Arvel, The Golden Empire

Infernal Theocracy of Tophet

Amloth, The Great Forest

Nor, The World's End

Shattered Yoba

Arvel, the Golden Empire



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

Arvans value ancient history, with many scholars dedicating their studies to the great Naga civilization, which perished in the Twilight Age. They primarily worship Genos, the Daystar, who created mankind. Thanks the empire's sprawling trade routes, Arvan language is now the common tongue across the continent, and its calendar is in common use as well.

Flavor notes: Early Renaissance Europe, Neverwinter

Tophet, Infernal Theocracy



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

Tophan society revolves around making infernal contracts with devils and 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 growing at a frightening pace.

Though officially part of the round table of nations, Tophet is at odds with Arvel and especially Yoba. Yet its shared history with Arvel goes a long way to prevent outright enmity.

Flavor notes: Demonic Gothic Medieval London, Cheliox, Duskovol

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.

Their culture is known for its expressive character. While Arvans and Tophans are comparatively reserved, the Yobani more freely show their emotions and have elaborate customs around them. Words like "grief" or "happiness" have many variants in their native tongue. The stereotypical Yobani is prideful and standoffish but artistically sensitive, inclined to painting or dancing.

Flavor notes: Persia, Turkish Nomads, Roma Caravans

Amloth, the Great Forest



A vast, ancient forest whose inhabitants seek harmony with nature. Since the Age Before Dawn, the forest has been the domain of elves. They consider the forest sacred, and permit deforestation only in isolated patches. As a result, the nation consists of many settlements connected by trails.

Travellers are warned not to deviate from the marked trails. In the deepest mists, the woods are haunted by fey, and paths seem to shift of their own accord. To aid navigation, each major settlement has a beacon in its center. At night, they can be seen through the trees as distant lights in a dark wood.

The elf capital is here, built at the base of an ancient tree that would shame the tallest towers of man. Amloth is also home to the druid circles – tribes of humans who have turned away from both church and state, seeking enlightenment from observing nature in relative solitude.

Flavor notes: Lothlorien, Grimm's Fairy Tales

Nor, Bones of the World



To the distant North is a ring of snow-capped mountains with a volcano in its center. Here, the dwarves rule from their mountain holds. Their main industry is exporting artisan goods; the finest weapons and tools are made in forges powered by subteranean heat.

Outside on the surface, the land is a cold wilderness tyrannized by giants and dragons. But there are also human cities and settlements well adapted to the cold. In addition to farming, hunting, and trading with dwarves, the men of Nor have taken to astronomy. The clear skies of the region offer an opportunity to study the movements of the Astral Sea. Some even hope to commune with the beings that dwell there.

Flavor notes: Nordic myth, Vikings, Inuit, Art Deco

Calendar

There are 6 lunar cycles over the course of the year. People refer to these “six moons” rather than four seasons or twelve months. And “tendays” instead of weeks. For the sake of convenience, the year length is the same as earth, with each moon corresponding to two months on earth.

Moon name	earth equivalent	days	“weather” in Arvel	cultural significance
Lamplight	march-apr	61	light returns, frost thaws	birth of genos, new life, hope
Featherbloom	may-jun	61	late spring, flowers bloom, bird mating season	youth, affection, innocence
Redmoon	july-aug	62	hot summer, blood red moon	revelry, romance, passion
Goldentide	sept-oct	61	leaves turn and fall, crops are harvested	planning for the future, industriousness, duty
Frostfall	nov-dec	61	last harvest, first frost, snowfall	quietness, family, elders
Darkveil	Jan-feb	59 (60)	no sun, superstition, madness, icy cold	Dione, mystery, mortality, reflection, penitence

Languages

- Arvan - the common tongue, which almost everyone speaks.
- Elvish - elves and fey
- Dwarvish - dwarves
- Infernal - devils and their contracts
- Naga - dead language of the first mortal race
- Many regional human languages, including Yobani
- Creatures of the Abyss do not use language of any kind, due to their chaotic nature.

Magic and Mages

Despite the table below, The Veiled Age does not have a hard magic system with science-like mechanics of its use. Magic is mysterious, and people may come upon it in different ways: it could be an inborn trait, or learned through training and study, or bestowed by a powerful being. How spells are cast can likewise vary depending on the spell and the person casting it.

What's described here are the five sources of magic and their thematic qualities, to give a sense of how magic fits into the cosmology, culture, and narrative tone. Each is most powerful in the realm associated with its source.

Magic Type	Primal	Holy	Arcane	Infernal	Occult
Source	Nature	Genos	Nox	Modus	Abyss
Alignment	Neutral	Lawful Good	Chaotic Good	Lawful Evil	Chaotic Evil
Realm	Edil	Mirador	Astral Sea	Nine Hells	The Abyss

Primal Magic

While most mages look to the gods, those close to nature have learned to harness the energies of the planet itself. Such power is wild and elemental, connected more deeply with emotion than thought or language.

The druid circles of Amloth pass down its practice while teaching reverence for nature. They build settlements along magical ley lines of Edil.

Holy Magic

Holy magic is Genos' gift to the mortal races. It consists mainly of healing, protection, divination, and the destruction of undead. It visually manifests as white or golden light.

The Church of the Daystar professes a twofold purpose: the practice of Holy magic for the good of the people, and to spread the teachings of Genos. The priesthood has many orders dedicated to healing the sick and wounded.

Arcane Magic

The goddess Nox is the source of Arcane magic. Arcane magic is complex and has a wide variety of effects, and is the subject of academic study.

Arcane schools dot the lands of Arvel and Nor. Such schools often double as observatories which gaze upon the Astral Sea with telescopes, in hopes of discerning deeper mysteries of magic from their patterns and movements.

Infernal Magic

Infernal magic is rooted in Modus, and it inherently contractual. That is, devils make agreements with other beings, granting power for a price.

Infernal magic is openly practiced by the government of Tophet, which uses magically binding contracts to maintain order.

Occult Magic

The Abyss is the source of Occult magic. Its essential feature is the corruption of mortal creatures: turning sound minds to madness, transmuting living flesh into strange abberations, and turning the dead into the Undead.

Occult magic is outlawed in all the countries of the round table. It's only practiced by secret heretical cults, who believe the Abyss should have never been separated from the rest of creation.

AFTERWORD

The Veiled Age was started by Justin Mulwee, intended as a collaborative, open culture worldbuilding project. Discuss and contribute at forums.magehand.ink

It is the setting of the browser-based interactive fiction game, Mage Hand (magehand.ink).

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