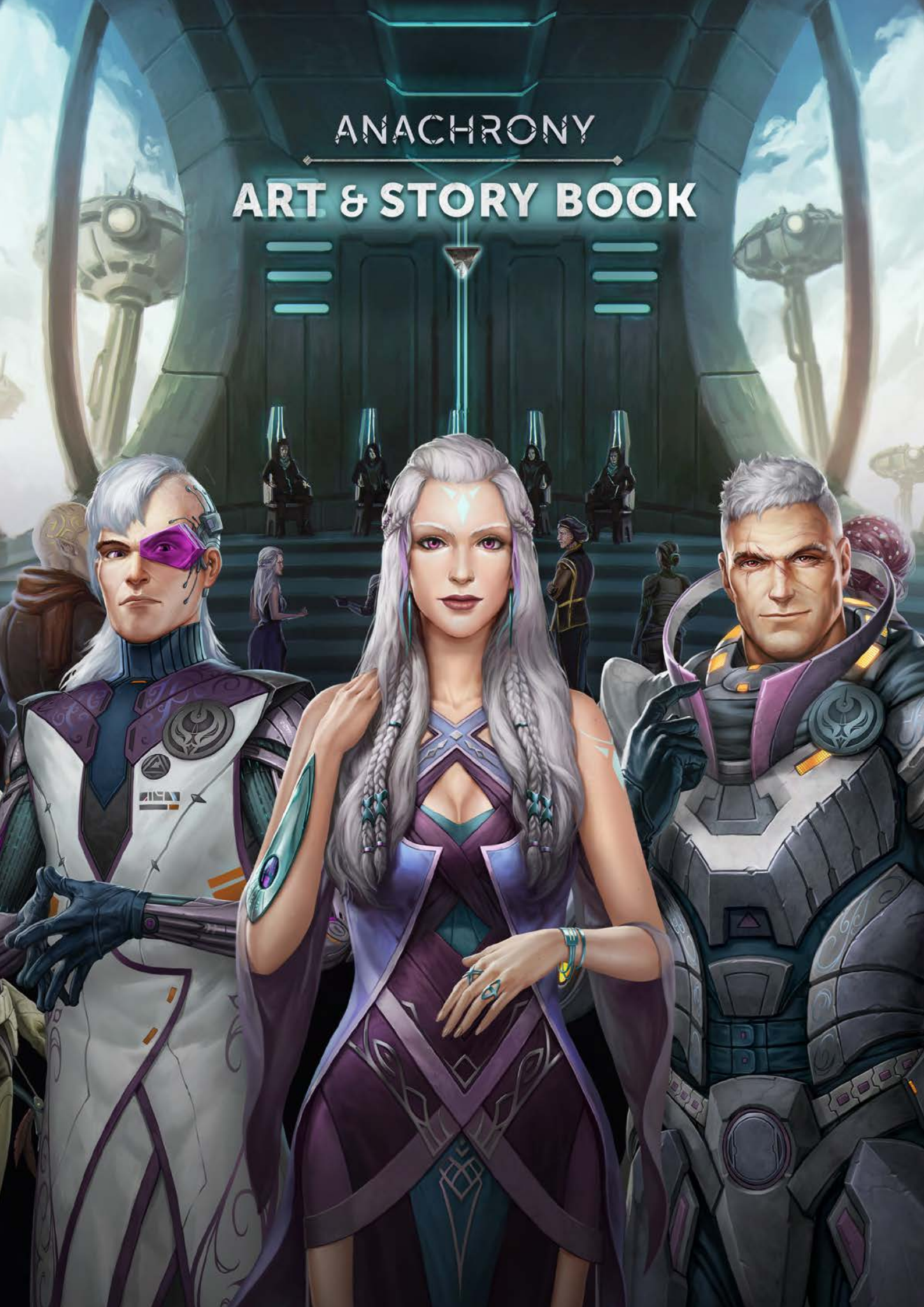


ANACHRONY

ART & STORY BOOK



INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO NEW EARTH, LEADER!

The book you are holding in your hand is the second edition of the Art & Story Book of Anachrony, expanded with the lore and the artwork of the Fractures of Time expansion.

May this book serve as your guide to the world of Anachrony. It will help you immerse yourself in the game's setting—unveiling the story of the Paths, their Leaders, and the Exosuits they use—and also show you the paintings and illustrations our artists have created to breathe life into New Earth.

Exploring the universe of Anachrony will be a long and exciting journey, and we sincerely hope you will enjoy it as much as we enjoyed creating it.

— the Mindclash Games team



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HISTORY

0 PP

THE DAY OF PURGATION

"I felt the impact of the shockwave like the ringing of a doomsday bell. If you find this, we are gone. I loved my family. I was here."

From an epicenter in a desolate region of South America, an unforeseen, cataclysmic event tore through the planet. The resulting tectonic fissures, tsunamis, and storms warped the Earth's surface into an uninhabitable wasteland, wiping out most of the population in a matter of weeks. The explosion's origin would remain unknown for generations to come. A new era begins.



20 PP

SUN'S BREACH

"I cried when I saw that first sunbeam. My daughter screamed and said it burned her eyes."

The dust clouds blocking out the Sun begin to settle. Around the world, survivors emerge from their underground shelters in search for any habitable areas, especially those with access to fresh water.



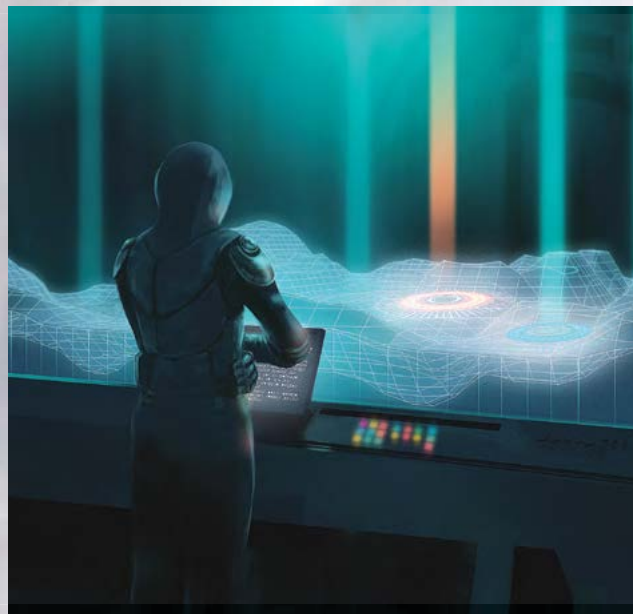
77 PP

FOUNDATION OF THE CAPITAL

"There are skeletons of cities with buildings reaching high above the Earth. I cannot imagine the noise of them, after hearing the chaos and squalor of the Capital."

Earth's largest colonist group, well over ten thousand in number, form the Scions' Fellowship. With hard work, they develop a basic water purification system, and mine supplies for building materials. This gives them a foothold along the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean and they set the foundation of New Earth's first city, which eventually becomes the World Capital.



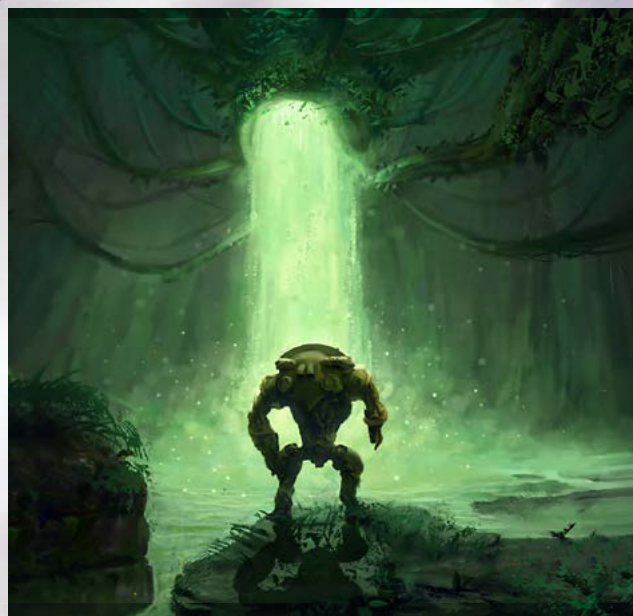


120 PP

EXPEDITIONS ON NEW EARTH

"We were connected as a people once, and we can be again. Together, we will rise."

As the Capital nears completion, the Scions' Fellowship organizes into a functioning society. Its governing body, called the World Council, declares that the Fellowship's primary goal is to unify the people of New Earth. They launch expeditions to the remains of the cities of the Old World in search of salvageable technology, hoping to find a way to communicate their presence to those who are scattered across the Outback and rally them to the Capital's safety.



144 PP

DISCOVERY OF WELLSPRING

"After a lifetime of desolation, such lush beauty was overwhelming."

In an area protected by a volcanic mountain range, an expedition team discovers flora and fauna that had survived the Day of Purgation unscathed. Naming it Wellspring, they report back to the Capital with its location. Through word of mouth, Wellspring becomes a highly coveted, mythical paradise. A separatist group, called the Harmonists, led by the commander of the scouting party, declares that humanity's only hope is in becoming one with nature. They begin planning their migration to Wellspring.

151 PP

THE CONVOCATION

"We reach back through the darkness of the past to pull forth enlightenment."

The expeditions unearth incredible technologies from the Old World. One of them, a functional prototype of an anti-gravity field generator, allows for the construction of huge, floating platforms for the expansion of the Capital. Another, a satellite system, provides a means for the Council to initiate the Convocation Project: a broadcast message to people around the world.



160 PP

RISE OF THE SAVANTS

"It is curious to me that anyone would want to leave us open to the dangers of the world. Do we leave the gates to the city unlocked as well? Do we throw our arms wide open in the face of a man with a knife?"

A small group of Scions, declaring themselves the Savants, obsesses over the Old World technology. They insist it should be used for the Fellowship's own advancement instead of searching for more survivors.



172 PP

THE MIGRATION

"I remember the sound of wind in the leaves. The rustle calls me like a siren song, more dear than the memory of my mother's sweet lullaby."

The Convocation Project attracts survivors in much greater numbers than the Council had anticipated. It also catches the attention of the Redeemers, emissaries from a mysterious group of survivors, who have remained in their underground shelter since before the Day of Purgation. This group begins preaching their religion to the citizenry.

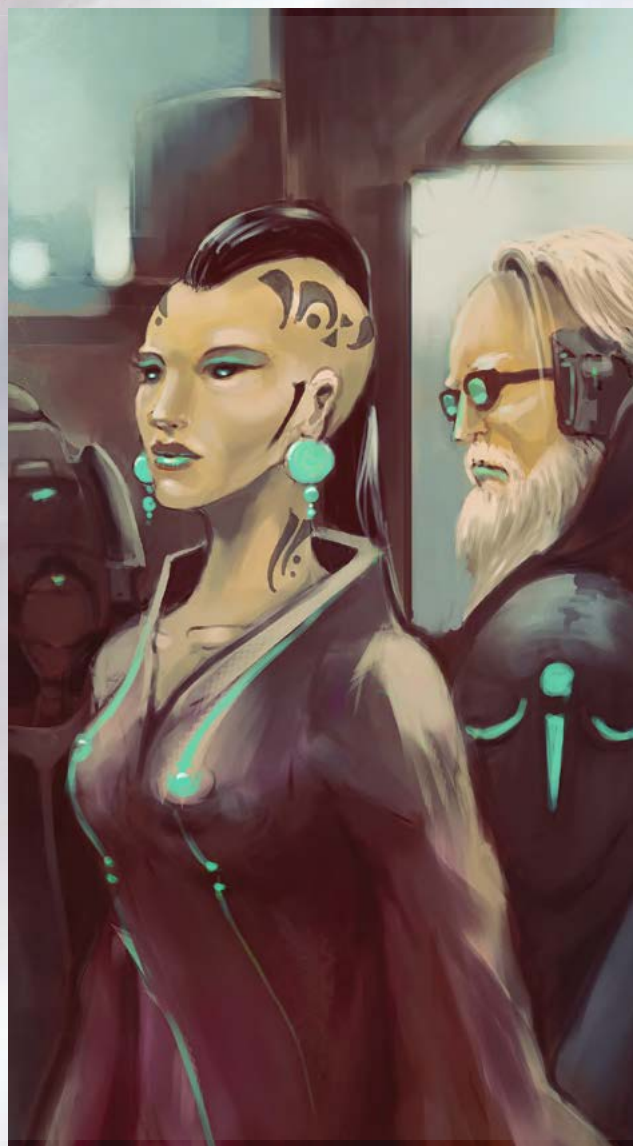


179 PP

THE ATLANTEAN'S ARRIVAL

"A floating city of warriors, that's who they've invited in!"

A second group answers the Convocation broadcast, arriving by battlecruiser from the Atlantic Ocean. It becomes clear their intentions are hostile. With armed conflict between the Capital and the Atlantean erupting, the Council decides to abandon the Convocation Project. The war between the two powers ends in 181 PP with a stalemate, leading to an uneasy truce and dozens of Scion hostages remaining on the Atlantean.



185 PP

THE EXODUS

"I looked back at the city and the ocean behind it. I wondered if I would ever return."

Overpopulation, attrition, and internal dissension push the Capital's society to the brink of a civil war. With mankind's future at risk, the Council organizes a summit with the captain of the Atlantean and the leaders of the Harmonists, Savants, and Redeemers. They conclude the only way to solve the current crisis is to let all factions walk their own path, independent of the Council's authority. The factions agree to repeat the summit annually, each having influence over the Capital's future. Powerless to reject their demands, the Council agrees.

The Harmonists finally set off to Wellspring, their "promised land," becoming the Path of Harmony. The Path of Dominance sails off on the Atlantean in search of new settlements to plunder. The Savants, composed of the Capital's finest scientists and engineers, leave the city on one of its floating platforms, carrying advanced Old World technology. Finally, the masses converted by the Redeemers begin their journey to their new underground realm, ready to walk the Path of Salvation.



190-240 PP

THE AGE OF PROSPERITY

"It is odd to think that the world we live in was once torn apart by strife and rage. Sitting here, in my home overlooking a city square, I see only the shining example of humanity's potential."

In their separate realms the four Paths flourish. The Capital recovers from its civil crisis, and the World Council reclaims its position as a global peacekeeper between the four Paths.

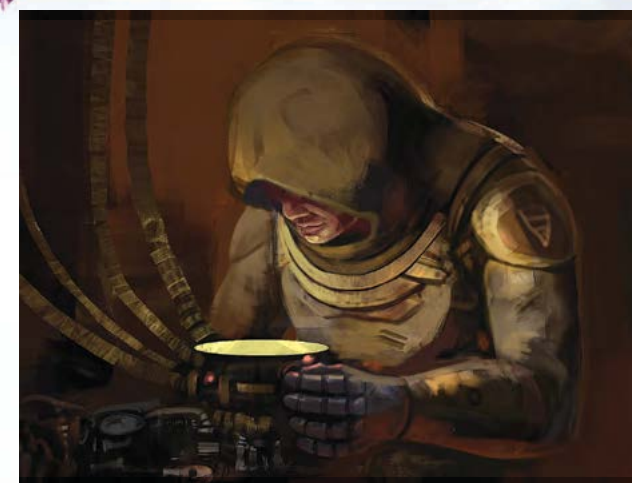


246 PP

DISCOVERY OF NEUTRONIUM

"We expected that after the impact the Earth would still bear the scar. But we didn't know the wound would seal itself!"

Centuries after the Day of Purgation, it is finally deemed safe enough to send expeditions to the desolate Ground Zero site. The biggest discovery is the thick layer of an unknown but light and extremely durable material left by the explosion. By applying energy, such as heat, scientists discover that its atomic structure changes and it becomes extremely malleable. Now called Neutronium, this new substance becomes widely used as a building material for the most prestigious projects.

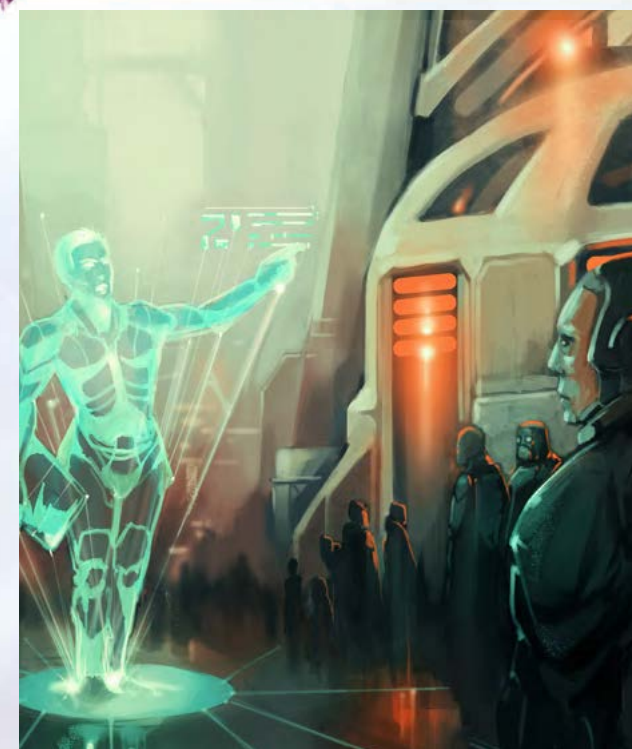


293 PP

CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONUMENTS

"In the end, the design had to reflect our commonalities, rather than our differences. That's what we needed the population to think on."

The Council orders the construction of five Monuments, one for each Path plus one for the Capital itself, to commemorate the upcoming 300th anniversary of the Day of Purgation. These monuments, constructed entirely of Neutronium, represent the Paths' common origins, regardless of their differences.

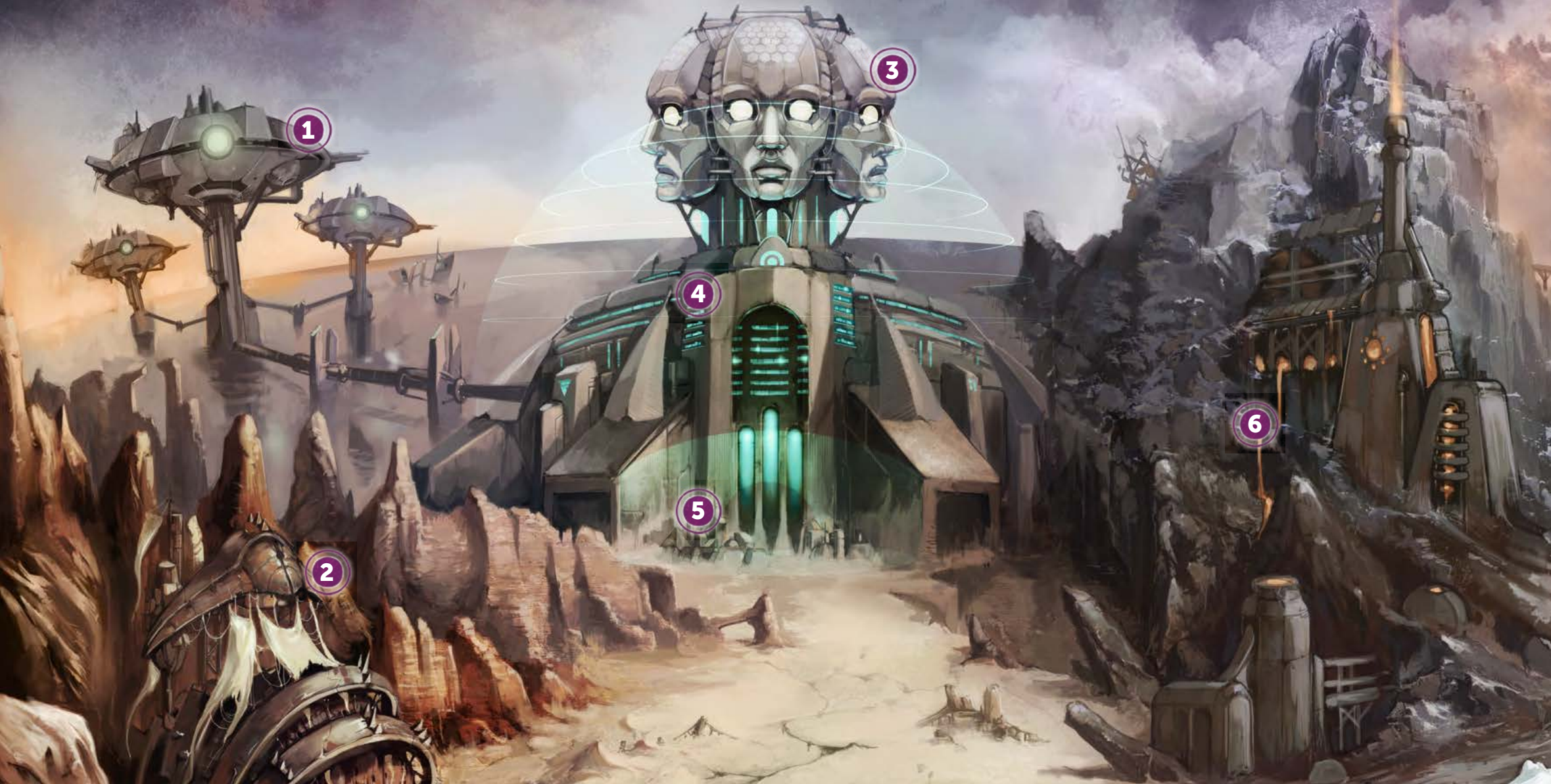


300 PP

DAY OF REMINISCENCE

"The air tasted of copper, like before a rainstorm. And then with a flash of light, reality tore itself in two, and nothing was ever the same again."

In celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Day of Purgation, delegations of the four Paths gather at the World Capital. Instead of remembrance, they witness humanity's most life-changing event since that fateful day. Time Rifts from the future open on the monuments, revealing the true power of Neutronium to create wormholes. A grim message from the future comes through the Time Rifts, explaining that the Purgation was the result of the first wormhole. It transferred the blastwaves of the future impact of a Neutronium asteroid. The collision not only devastated the past but also the future. With such a threat on the horizon, the Paths realized that they must do everything to prepare—and survive.



THE WORLD



1. THE THREE PILLARS

In the wake of the Day of Purgation, most of the world's rivers and lakes either evaporated or became contaminated. As a result, the most treasured commodity on New Earth is drinkable water. Each Path has their own methods of decontaminating water, but none compare to the World Capital's massive purification system, the Three Pillars. A testament to human ingenuity, the Pillars use a complex combination of chemicals and filters to purify hundreds of liters of saltwater per hour, which supplies the Capital via an extensive network of pipelines.

2. THE NOMAD SETTLEMENTS

Two constants of the human condition are the desire for community and the unwillingness to submit to authority. Even after the Day of Purgation, these traits have not changed. Those who disagree with the Paths' philosophies and refuse to submit to the World Council's control, reside in small settlements across the Outback. They live in constant danger from the environment in exchange for total freedom. Some of these nomadic tribes possess Neutronium, adapting it to shield themselves from the Outback's radiation. Representatives of the Paths occasionally make contact with them to trade for valuable resources, including Neutronium.

3. THE COUNCIL TOWER

Dominating the skyline above the Capital, this gargantuan tower is home to the World Council. The Tower's four faces symbolize the four Paths—four different views of the world, all from a common origin. An emissary from each Path presides on the Council, with its presidency rotating among them. In addition to the Council itself, the Tower's luxurious suites house the Capital's oldest and wealthiest families, most of whom can trace their roots back to the original Scions.

4. THE INNER CIRCLE

In the beginning, the gigantic, bunker-like dome, known now as the Inner Circle, used to be the Capital itself. However, due to the vast number of survivors flocking to the city, expansion

became necessary. Overpopulation quickly led to an unprecedented crime wave, and, after riots broke out, the Council decided to establish the Rim. The Inner Circle is now a safe and relatively peaceful place, full of state-of-the-art institutions dedicated to science and engineering.

5. THE RIM

While life in the Capital is highly sought-after by most refugees, few ever make it past the Rim. Getting past the checkpoints to the Inner Circle takes a feat of brilliance or a personal invitation. Even though the Capital's force field does offer protection from severe weather and radiation, life in the Rim is by no means luxurious. Littered with huts, houses, outdoor markets, gambling parlors, brothels, and even prisons, it is a chaotic environment

where one must always watch their back. It is hoped that, one day, the Council will unify the Rim and Inner Circle, but the reality is that it has practically no authority beyond its walls.

6. THE MINE

In a monumental joint effort almost two centuries after the Day of Purgation, the Paths and the World Council initiated a massive mining operation in the mountain ranges encircling the Capital, supplying them with a reliable source of Uranium, Titanium, and Gold. The Paths are free to use this strictly de-militarized mine, but as it becomes depleted, their competition becomes more tense than ever, especially with the rumors of Neutronium existing deep within the surrounding lakes.

7. THE OUTBACK

The cataclysm on the Day of Purgation initiated a deadly chain of ecological events that eventually transformed most of the Earth's surface into the desolate wasteland it is today. The devastation had profound effects over the entire planet that are still felt in this era. Today, centuries later, it is still ill-advised to traverse the deadly Outback without adequate protection. With pockets of radiation, and open to the violent storm systems that still ravage the planet, only the Nomads, the absolute fringe of society, dare to live in this hellscape.



PATH OF HARMONY

CAPITAL: **WELLSPRING**

LEADERS: **Matriarch Zaida**
Patriarch Haulani

EXOSUIT MODEL: **SEEDER**

BACKGROUND

THE BEGINNING

Contrary to popular belief, not all of Earth's flora and fauna was wiped out on the Day of Purgation. Deep in a volcanic mountain range, a few resilient plants continued to thrive in their new, hostile environment. This unnatural growth was centered around a mysterious spring, which gave life to a wide range of strange, new plant species. To the first human explorers who discovered it, it appeared as a lush oasis, nourished by the very source of life. Accustomed to the dry, desolate wastelands and the ruins of the Old World, they saw hope for a new beginning. News of this paradise spread quickly throughout the Capital as an exploration party formed.

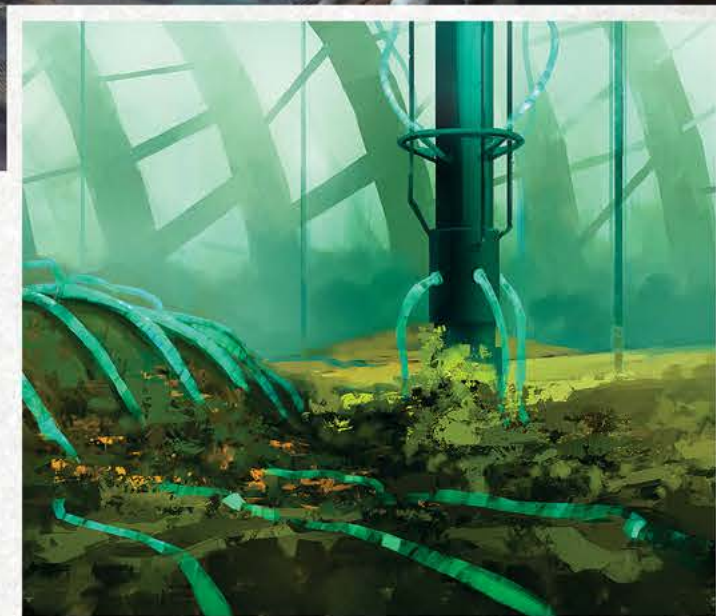
They called themselves the Harmonists, a group driven by the hope of restoring the state of nature to how it once flourished across the planet. The Harmonists rapidly grew in numbers and, during the Exodus, they seized the opportunity to leave the Capital and migrate to the fabled paradise. The first inhabitants built a society on the ideas of all people being equal, living in perfect balance with nature, and respecting other forms of life just as much as their own. The Path of Harmony would grow from these beliefs, rooted in their new city of Wellspring.



BOTANICS AND BIOENGINEERING

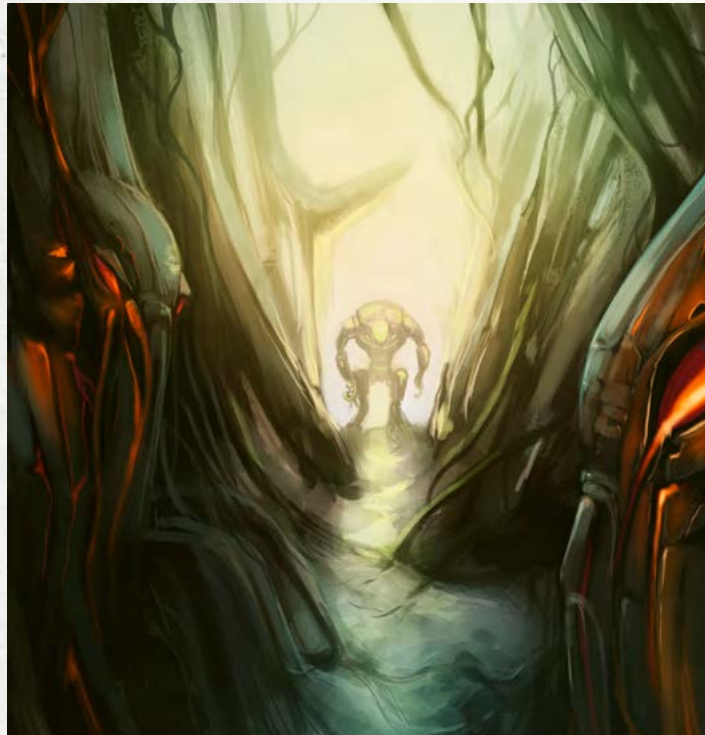
These ideas of equality created a nation that lived in symbiosis with extraordinary plants cultivated from the autochthonous flora. As the biologists could find no record of the species of plants that grew around Wellspring in the Old World texts, they believed that they were new forms of life. Fascinated with the speed of these adaptations, the cult of Mother Earth was reborn.

This belief grew stronger as the Path's scientists learned more about both the nature of these plants, and their potential. Even though it would require decades to turn Wellspring into a haven, breakthroughs in both botany and bioengineering would increase their progress exponentially as they genetically modified these plant species for their own benefit.



TALMA

The foundation of the Path of Harmony, Talma grows over a trellis dome stretching over the city. This is an effective, natural protection from the harsh outside weather conditions and the toxic atmosphere. Though Talma has grown enough in strength and intelligence to no longer require the human-made scaffolding, some of the original trelliswork can still be seen. In fact, she grows in tandem with the expansion of the Path of Harmony's living space, expanding the city with its population. Her intelligent growth is a necessity in order to keep up with the Path's growth.



Thanks to the Path's lack of birth control and active sexual lifestyle they practice, they keep Talma busy. Due to their strong sense of family and their deep kinship among their community, they hold each member of the Path as their own blood, and the Talma watches over them all.

THE MATRIARCH AND THE PATRIARCH

Though everyone is considered equal in their society, their Leaders are still held in high regard. The Path is always led by a couple, the Matriarch and the Patriarch, serving as the proverbial mother and father of the people of Wellspring. Chosen by Mother Earth herself, their authority is unquestioned. In the sanctuary built upon the overgrown spring that once fostered Wellspring, the Path's Leaders are chosen during a mysterious election ceremony. All candidates enter together into the Hall of Life and Death, a special chamber within the shrine; most do not return.

The details of the ceremony are shrouded in secrecy—some believe that the lost candidates wander off into the wilderness at the heart of Wellspring, while others believe that they are presented as sacrifices to Mother Earth in return for her generosity. In the end, only two candidates, the Matriarch and Patriarch, emerge from the shrine, each with a symbiont connected to their body.



THE NEYA PLANT

This symbiont, the Neya Plant, is the symbol of the Path of Harmony and is depicted on their flag. It provides incredible strength, vitality, and health to its host—it is even capable of functioning as an exterior lung if the surrounding air is not safe to breathe by linking its vines with the host's lungs, providing the oxygen needed for survival.

The blessing of joining with the Neya plant is a privilege afforded to only Leaders, and the Cultivators (the pilots of the Path's Exosuits, the Seeders). Cultivators earn the chance to join with the Neya Plant through exemplary service in their duties as explorers and emissaries. Highly regarded Cultivators are responsible for keeping order in Wellspring (which is rarely required) and venturing into the Outback to gather resources.

THE SOCIETY

The people of Wellspring have no fear of death. They accept it as a part of life, and many welcome it as a chance to truly become one with Nature—they believe they all originate from the source of life and that death returns them to that source.

Wellspring has no market economy. Instead, all citizens receive a centrally determined share of goods that can be exchanged among each other.

They have very few personal belongings and strive to consume as little energy as possible. Their way of life strives to be the antithesis of that of the Old World's consumer society, which they deeply despise.

News of the asteroid's approach has deeply shaken the people of the Path of Harmony. While they firmly believe that Wellspring has grown powerful enough that, with Talma's protection, they will survive the blast wave, they are concerned for all life on the planet, not just their own; therefore, they will do everything in their power to protect and save as many lives as possible..



EXOSUIT MODEL: SEEDER



SYMBIOTIC CONTROL

Temporary connection with Talma allows the control of the vines as though they were part of one's own body

EXTENDABLE ARMS

Talma vines can extend to up to 3 meters, and are able to firmly grasp objects

PLATE ARMOR

Made entirely of polished titanium pieces

TALMA VINES

The Seeder's chassis is held together and operated by the mysterious Talma vines

SPEED & MANEUVERABILITY

The Seeder's efficiency far exceeds what can be achieved with mechanical servos

SPEED

CONTROL

UTILITY

COMBAT

Matriarch Zaida

— “Growing a Brighter Future”

Zaida’s steps wavered as she reached the edge of town. She looked down at the village, smaller and more precious than she remembered. Drinking in the unexpected emotions, she smiled at her own nostalgia, “I am home,” she whispered.

As a child Zaida hadn’t wanted for love or comfort. As she traveled the familiar path, she remembered a picnic in these hills. She and her brother Tymlin delighted in the warm sun and freedom. After playing, she collapsed on the blanket and grabbed the dark purple fruit her mother had packed. “Take more than fruit, Zaida,” her mother murmured, her tone distant and her eyes on her brother. That quickly, the happy day was cold and empty. Zaida felt guilty and sad. She did not understand why she felt so alone with her mother right next to her. Later, when she discovered the adoption papers in her mother’s office, she had felt the betrayal. They had lied and made her doubts seem meaningless. But there was joy as she packed her things, “I can find my path, Tymlin. I can see who I am!”

In the five years since, Zaida had looked for her destiny. Her ancestors before her had all been planners, often working for the village, and she had been expected to follow in their path. Those first months were terrible. Then she found a halfway home next to the hospital. They took her in as a ward while she worked at the hospital, reading to the infirm, comforting the truly ill. She realized people opened up to her, and found comfort in her advice. Her skills were meant to help and inspire others. It was with this revelation she was ready to come home.

Caught in the memory Zaida didn’t notice the pull at first. But as she neared the heart of Wellspring, the aching to go into the sacred wood, became undeniable. Drawn to the heart of the wood she found Talma, its vines wrapped thickly together, towering over the other plants. It glowed, and her mind filled with thoughts that were not her own. Zaida reached to touch its leaves, feeling the very soul of Wellspring reach out to her, and she immediately understood everything—her history, her destiny, and her very existence had one purpose: to lead the Path of Harmony.

Finally, the empty feeling that had been with Zaida all her life was gone. It was a hard journey to become a candidate in the next election ceremony, but with her unwavering determination and the belief that she was Mother Earth’s chosen one, nothing could stand in her way. When she eventually emerged as the Matriarch of the Path of Harmony, she discovered the chosen Patriarch, Haulani, was more of a dreamer and an adventurer. At first Zaida worried that they would not be able to work together, but her lessons with her family, her dedication to service, and the knowledge that she was chosen by Mother Earth meant she knew she would come to an understanding with Haulani. In truth, Haulani was happy to cede to her control of Wellspring’s politics. Secure in her role, she settled into her role of a wise and fair Leader that had the support of her people.

Patriarch Haulani

— “Balance Grows Peace”

Haulani blinked at the naming ceremony. He had come, like the others, to hear the names of the new nominees for Matriarch and Patriarch. When Zaida’s name was called, no one was surprised. She had worked diligently among her people and had proven dependable and capable, even at a young age. As she stepped forward to enter the heart of Wellspring, Haulani heard his name called. The crowd held their breath in silent confusion. At 16, he had not even considered becoming the Patriarch. He began to shrink back, but his father clasped his forearm firmly. “Mother Earth knows your heart, Haulani, even better than you. Do not hide from this honor.” His shaky steps took him into the chamber alongside a frowning Zaida; the whispers of his community echoing in his ears that he was lacking in wisdom and life experiences, the most important virtues within the Path of Harmony.

The breeze carrying the smell of plants and soil calmed him. He walked the twisted path, slightly behind Zaida following its mazelike progression. His subconscious took over, and it may have been hours before Zaida hissed in frustration. “You are not helping! We will be lost forever and I will miss my chance. You should not be here!” He opened his mouth to agree, when suddenly they heard Talma inside their minds. “No, he is my champion for reasons he does not know yet. Patience my sprouts. You will both serve me in your way, Zaida with the love of your people, and Haulani with his love of the land.” They emerged, agreeing it was best Zaida would take the lead in governing the community, and Haulani would help from afar...seeking out adventures, exploring the Outback, and piloting a Seeder.

Years later, Haulani burst into the chambers where Zaida sat working. “What is this I hear that you are thinking of removing the emergency health stations at the outliers of Wellspring!?”

“They are a costly expense, Haulani, the hospital in the city center needs a new—”she was cut off by his outburst.

“You can find the support elsewhere! Those emergency stations are for the Cultivators! You know the work we do is dangerous, and the rewards are invaluable. If we die, you cannot seed. I know I am gone from Wellspring for months, and you think I do not know what happens here, but I read every update you send. I know the struggles of our people! You must appreciate every citizen’s struggles as well. All of them, Zaida! Balance as well as harmony are our cornerstone!” The force of his argument caught her off guard, but there was no denying the ripple of approval from Talma that connected them. “You are right, Haulani. Your work with the Cultivators has made you a hero, but more than that, it has brought you a wisdom I have neglected. Perhaps it is time you return to Wellspring and help me keep the balance our community needs. It seems I have underestimated you for too long.”

“I suppose you’re right, it is time. As long as I can still take my Seeder out—to observe progress of course—we should continue to walk our paths in harmony together.”





PATH OF DOMINANCE

🚩 CAPITAL: **THE ATLANTEAN**

👤 LEADERS: **TREASURE HUNTER SAMIRA**
CAPTAIN WOLFE

🦑 EXOSUIT MODEL: **OCTOPOD**

BACKGROUND

THE ORIGINS

300 years ago, at the time of the original cataclysm, the Atlantean was a state-of-the-art battleship in the world's most powerful military organization. During the cataclysm, it coordinated with civilian and military vessels to evacuate citizens from the doomed cities. During the search for new, habitable lands overseas, the Atlantean was the most vital vessel of the fleet, having been equipped with food, supplies, and a prototype water purification system. It had a single mission: to transport the greatest minds of humanity to safety.

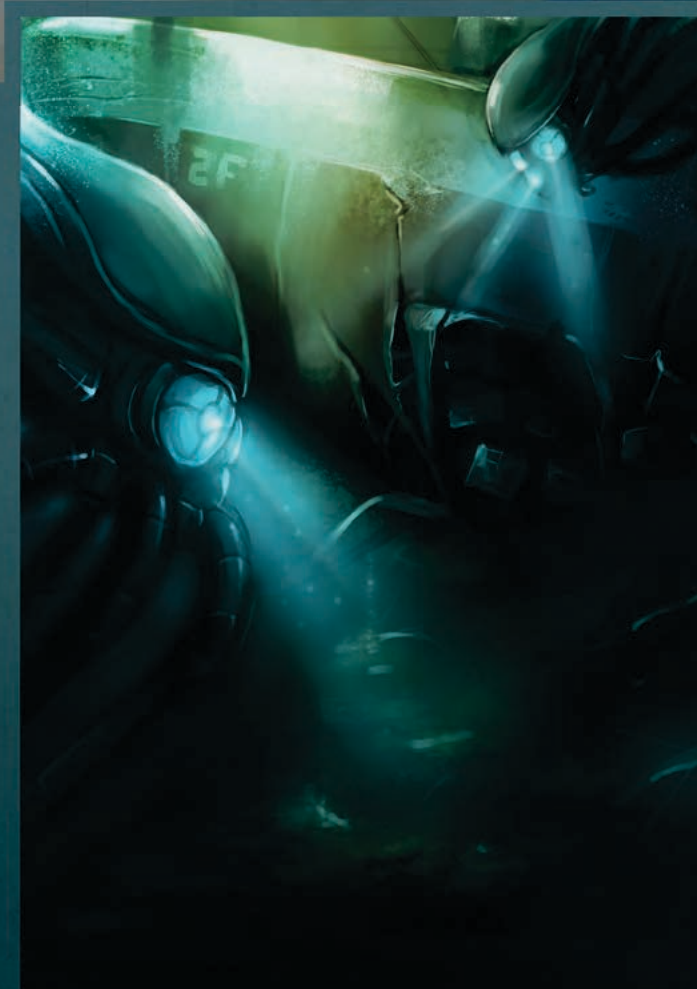
After raging sea storms disrupted communication between Captain Ryland Wolfe and the rest of the fleet, he and the Atlantean's officers realized that the shores were no longer habitable. Their only chance for survival lay in the open sea, where the air remained mostly breathable and dust clouds didn't block the sunlight from reaching the Atlantean's massive solar panels. The ship had everything



it needed to survive almost indefinitely without docking. In addition to its supplies, it also had a large number of humanity's best doctors, engineers, and scientists. With the prototype water cleansing system providing a supply of poor quality—but drinkable—water, Captain Wolfe determined that the Atlantean would be the new cradle of humanity.

THE ATLANTEAN

Over the decades, the Atlantean has come to resemble a gargantuan floating city with ship-like features. Giving it an admittedly chaotic aesthetic, the ship's engineers have been able to accommodate the Path's expansion by using materials salvaged from ruined coastal cities and naval wreckages. In many sealable docks, the ship's main hull contains smaller vessels (everything from swift motorboats to large cruisers) and the Path's Exosuits, the Octopods. The ship is also armed with powerful onboard weaponry. The ship's deck is covered with solar panels to help provide the massive amount of energy it needs. However, recent additions to the ship's



hull include both nuclear and Neutronium power plants. Other significant parts of the Atlantean are its Agricultural Hull, where the crew grows fruits and vegetables, and several tanks where many different consumable fish species are farmed.

THE ECHELON

The first Captain Wolfe was a soldier through and through, and the principles that form the roots of the Path's culture show it. One of these principles is the general hierarchy called the Echelon. The Echelon treats the whole society, even non-military personnel, as a military organization with the Wolfe bloodline at the top as Captain. Each family's rank in the Echelon, called Stratum, and their profession (Ship Engineer, Military Officer, Treasure Hunter, etc.) are passed down through the generations. This caste system makes it difficult to move from one class to another.

Resources are independent from class and are distributed equally, making the main motivation in one's life to get promoted in their profession.



Promotions are ceremoniously celebrated, but a demotion bestows shame to the entire class and can never be forgotten. Because of this respect for the ranking system, the court of law can bring punishing justice in the form of a demotion. Due to the Path's military origins, each member of their society is required to undergo military training and indoctrination into the Path, beginning at a very young age. This leads to the Soldier and Raider classes being the most respected.

Another highly respected class are the Treasure Hunters. Treasure Hunters consists of those who have expert diving skills and superior physical and mental abilities. Piloting the Octopods, which were designed to travel just as well on land as below the sea, the Treasure Hunters are tasked with the job of exploring sunken cities, ships, and any other remnants of the Old World in search of loot, supplies, and materials. Because of their militaristic culture and threatening presence, the Path of Dominance is feared by the other three Paths for good reason. Though they are mainly peaceful today, and they try to keep their distance from the other Paths, every Captain secretly shares the same dream to one day incorporate all of humanity into the Echelon.

RAIDS AND INDOCTRINATION

The strict and power-oriented Path of Dominance cherishes the life of its people. Even with the continuous development of the Atlantean's prototype water purification system,

the ship was unable to produce clean water in the early years. The contamination resulted in a slowly decreasing population due to both a shorter average lifespan and sterility. In order to avoid further reduction of their numbers, the Path developed "Raids." During Raids, they attack coastal settlements and nomadic tribes to acquire supplies and clean water by force, but the main objective is to take captives. Soldiers are equipped with non-lethal weapons and avoid deadly force as much as possible, since the goal is to conscript new members to the Path. The greatest Raid in the Path's history was the Raid of the World Capital in 179 PP. This two year long armed conflict is depicted as a tale of heroism and valor.

Hostages brought back from Raids are forced to undergo Indoctrination. Indoctrination is a mind-altering process in which subjects are injected with a special serum and exposed to a series of audiovisual impressions that explain everything about the ways of the Path and meaning of life within the Echelon. This process is not only used to integrate captives into society, but also to prevent a potential riot against the strict hierarchy. After completing the Indoctrination process, captives are assigned a class and profession within the Echelon. This process is overseen by the "Clairvoyants," a mysterious class that, though not ranked very highly, have power and influence almost equal to the Officers.



EXOSUIT MODEL: OCTOPOD



REINFORCED CABIN

Streamlined transporting and piloting cabin for a crew of 4, made of special titanium-steel alloy, designed to withstand extreme water pressure

HYDROSTATIC PROPULSION

Provides the required thrust to travel and maneuver underwater

OXYGEN EXTRACTOR

Produces breathable air in the cabin by extracting oxygen from water

TENTACLE ARMS

Telescoping and prehensile, capable of lifting tons of weight, moving rapidly over any terrain and scaling vertical surfaces

SUPPORTING PLIERS

Extend the efficiency of the Tentacle Arms

SPEED

CONTROL

UTILITY

COMBAT

CAPTAIN WOLFE

— “Discipline, Purpose, Valor”

All Trenton had known as a child was indifference. His father, Captain Fredich Wolfe, was cold and distant, hiding his brittle psyche from his crew. Trenton’s mother had died in childbirth, and Fredich had become a lesser man for it, blaming his infant son for losing the woman he loved. The crew on the Atlantean’s Bridge was Trenton’s only family and so he learned the Path’s ways from watching them all.

“Why do you need to travel to the Outback?” his father sneered at him, when Trenton told him he wished to join the raiding parties.

“Do you worry I will not be strong enough? Fast enough? I need to prove myself to the Path and what better way?” Trenton replied. The fact it got him away from his father was left unsaid by both.

Trenton had risen to leader of his squad on the night a nomad named Elma was taken. He noticed the defiant way she looked at them; he respected her for it and saw her strength as a reflection of his own. He checked in on all new conscripts but visited her more than any other. When it came time, she was assigned to the water purifier maintenance crew, a grueling job but one that needed quick and clever workers. No one knew that she never went through the Indoctrination. Trenton falsified her records and Elma played her role. Their secret rebellion brought them closer.

Of course, their relationship was doomed to fail, but by the time they both realized it, his daughter had already been born. Elma’s station was so low that her pregnancy was hardly a scandal, except for the speculation of the father. A secret both of them kept well. “I wish we could marry, but that is not our way,” Trenton said.

“The Path’s way? You have ignored those rules for me so many times. Why not this one?” Elma urged.

“It would never be accepted. If they ever found out you were not indoctrinated, we would be banished and have to live in the Outback, or worse. We would never make it. I am sorry.”

He did everything in his power to ensure she had a comfortable life, but by then, all eyes were on him as the new captain. The strain of keeping her secrets were too much; Elma died when their daughter was only two years old. Desperate to not be the absent father he had as a child, Trenton secretly ensured his two-year-old daughter made her way from the orphanages to one of the better classes in the Echelon and followed her career closely.



TREASURE HUNTER SAMIRA

— “Prepare and Prevail”

Without any clear memories of her childhood and having never known her parents, Samira was an orphan of the ship. She suspected that she was taken from the mainland as a child, because she knew the Path of Dominance often collected people on their Raids for Indoctrination. However, it was puzzling that she never missed her former home, and she felt an overwhelming sense of safety near the water purification system of the ship; she suspected she would end up there.

When it came time to be indoctrinated, she was chosen to the Treasure Hunters class. This elite force of amphibious troops piloted the Octopod Exosuits. In war, they were known for their ferocious combat skills. During peacetime, they conducted Treasure Hunts to pre-Purgation cities to search for Old World resources and technology.



Never had an orphan been selected for such a respected class. That’s when the whispers began she was being groomed to become someone’s mistress.

“Where are you going, ‘outsider’?” asked Valdina, her classmate.

“There’s a reef over there, look at it’s shape... pretty sure it’s a sinker. Promise there’s gonna be tech in it. Wanna come?” Samira said over her comms channel.

“You are such a freak, how can you do that?” replied Valdina. She was so wrapped up in her taunting that she failed to see the shark, bulleting up from the depths to snatch her, but Samira did. Her reflexes took over and she jetted in its path, grabbing its dorsal fin and angling the other arm of the exosuit to fire a harpoon into its head. By the time Valdina recovered from her petrified state, the shark was neutralized and her life saved. It was a turning point for Samira. On the day she was selected as commander of the Treasure Hunters, Valdina presented her with a necklace of that shark’s tooth.

It became the most treasured possession among her collection. Over the years, she had developed a passionate interest in the ways of life in the Old World, having no history of her own. On her missions, she would take an item back as a reward when she exceeded the mandatory loot quota for the Atlantean’s construction. “Each item tells a tale,” she’d say, and her cabin was packed to the brim with them.

As the commander of the Treasure Hunters, Samira reported directly to Captain Wolfe; in fact, she is widely considered to be the second-in-command on the Atlantean. Although she has never discovered the truth about her parents and her “fortunate” Indoctrination, her first meeting with the Captain left her with a haunting suspicion—his facial features always reminded her of someone she couldn’t quite remember...





PATH OF PROGRESS

🏛️ CAPITAL: **THE APEX OF HUMANITY**

👑 LEADERS: **LIBRARIAN CORNELLA**
PATRON VALERIAN

🦾 EXOSUIT MODEL: **GARGOYLE**

BACKGROUND

THE APEX

Known as the “Venice of the Skies,” the capital of the Path of Progress hovers above the Earth in a sprawling collection of Byzantine, Baroque, Gothic and Renaissance styles emulating the submerged city of long ago. However, this classical architecture is entwined with state-of-the-art technologies, showcasing that the Path of Progress is second to none in scientific advancement.

Apex’s incredible platforms were built as high as humanly possible in the troposphere to avoid the contamination that exists on the surface below. This altitude posed a problem for the first citizens of the Apex due to oxygen scarcity. The Path’s engineers solved this problem with the first of their many achievements by placing a gigantic, protective dome around the platforms. This dome functions much like a greenhouse and serves an essential part in keeping the temperature, humidity, and oxygen levels safe.

There are no roads in the Apex of Humanity. Instead, the city’s hovering platforms and buildings are connected by



a high speed transportation network, called the Cloudways. Sky Gondolas, the most basic form of transportation, are a common sight. Citizens may also own Personal Transportation Devices (PTDs) which come in all shapes and sizes, from cheap hoverboards to multi-person Cloud Speeders. The rarest and most sought after machinery is much more than a vehicle; the majestic Gargoyles, the Exosuits of the Path of Progress. Gargoyles are capable of prolonged periods of flight without the support of the Cloudway, and to possess one shows its owner is elevated in rank and wealth.

The majority of the citizens in the Apex are intellectuals. Many serve in the vast city’s administration. Others are scientists, artists, or free thinkers. Seeking to use technology to improve all aspects of life, these intellectuals have fully automated most of the city’s manufacturing and agricultural processes. And with the many galleries, cafés, museums, and theaters inside the Apex, humanity’s thirst for culture has not only been preserved, but the population is kept entertained.

To the Path of Progress, the Earth is an uninhabitable and dead husk beyond salvation. They treat it accordingly and



have little worry about their technology’s effect on the environment. All of the waste and sewage from the Apex is released from the platforms and directly to the surface below, making the area beneath a horrible, contaminated wasteland that is avoided by all but the most reckless surface-dwellers. From afar, the city is a marvelous sight, with beautiful cascades flowing from its majestic floating platforms—that is, until one realizes the cascades are, in reality, toxic waste and raw sewage.

THE SOCIETY

Inside, the unnaturally clean appearance of Apex shows how the Path of Progress desperately tries to uphold the looks of a cultured and civilized society. Its citizens pride themselves on their sophisticated fashion, with even the poorer inhabitants dressing elegantly and using various perfumes. Like the city itself, their fashion style is a seamless mix of both the modern and the Renaissance, with plenty of room for personal expression. This individuality is particularly important, since the citizens of the Apex look very much alike: they are all tall, muscular, and lean, with pale, pearly skin.

In the early days, the Path of Progress had the fewest followers. Due to their vanity and pride, mixing with the other Paths was not an option. Inbreeding was a common sight in those older times, resulting in many deformed and handicapped offspring. Vanity and social conformity meant they were unaccepting of citizens different from themselves. A half-solution—cheap plastic surgery—was their only option in the beginning. Eventually, they found a monumental breakthrough in genetic engineering—manipulating the DNA chain immediately after inception, which quickly became a mandatory process.

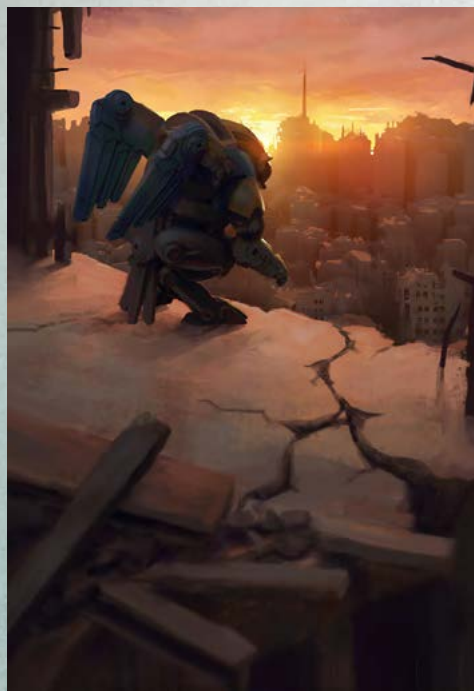
A special class of doctors, called Shapers, are able to “handcraft” the perfect-looking child using this technology. With this genetic “perfection,” the followers of the Path of Progress have only deepened their sense of superiority to the other Paths; they consider themselves the next step in human evolution. While they are careful to be polite and tolerant in diplomatic endeavors, they deeply despise the other, “lesser” Paths. Mixing with the other Paths is still strictly forbidden, resulting in immediate expulsion from both the Path and the Apex.

Contrary to what would be expected, sexuality is far from a taboo subject within society. Brothels are in abundance, catering to a wide range of sexual tastes for both men and women. Courtesans are respected members of society, and visiting one is widely acceptable, even among those in relationships.

POLITICS OF THE PATH

There is a strong sense of fellowship within the Path of Progress, although its resources are not equally distributed amongst everyone. Each citizen is given Credits based upon his or her contribution to the Path’s progress in the fields of technology, culture, and growth. At the age of 14, each citizen is assigned a Patron during a ceremony called the Exaltation. Each Patron serves as a guide to the protégé through his or her life, judging his or her individual performance, which determines the amount of Credits earned.

The Patrons’ Court, the political elite of the Path of Progress, only allows the most notable citizens, with the purest lineage, to join their ranks as a Patron. During initiation, each Patron receives a genetic treatment, developed by the Shapers, that prolongs their life to 2-3 times that of the average Apex citizen. While society expects that the richest and most influential members of the Path of Progress are those who provide the most to the community, the reality is that true power is held by the Patrons’ Court. Like the noble courts of old, they use their patronage to learn everything about their fellow citizens and can easily blackmail or manipulate them. While their unity of staying in power keeps the Path on course, the Court itself is riddled with corruption and infighting. Despite the esteem they hold, there are many whispered rumors about the Patrons among the citizenry, including everything from sexual depravities to innumerable “side effects” of their unnaturally long life.



In the center of the Apex stands the Library. A cornerstone of the Path of Progress, the Library is a special, state-of-the-art knowledge center, where citizens can study using ground-breaking meditational technology. This technology, a combination of a special substance and machinery, allows them to enter a heightened state of awareness where they are capable of absorbing knowledge at an incredible speed. In addition to theoretical knowledge, they can also simulate its practical applications. The programs are created and maintained by the Librarians, who thereby have the ability to slowly shape society’s way of thinking. Even though their influence is subtle, it rivals that of the Patrons’.

Pilots of the Gargoyles, the Path’s Exosuits, are appointed by the Patrons. Once approved, training can be completed in the Library by anyone in just a matter of days. Because of their frequent contact with the outside world, the Pilots are under constant surveillance by the Patrons. Piloting a Gargoyle is dangerous, so citizens are often unwilling to give up the comfort of the Apex to take up the assignment. Acquiring knowledge is a basic human right of all citizens of the Apex, and they are free to choose their area of specialization as long as it serves the Path; in reality, though, their choices are highly influenced by both the Patrons and the Librarians.

EXOSUIT MODEL: GARGOYLE



STEERING WINGS

Designed for additional airborne maneuverability

GILDED COCKPIT

The pilot is protected by the light and durable carbon-fiber torso

TURBOJET ENGINE

Mixes high-density fuel with compressed air to produce kinetic energy

ROBOTIC ARMS

Practical grabbing tool capable of transforming into a customized weapon

LANDING SUPPORT

Mechanical shock dampeners integrated into the legs to stabilize landing and walking on surface

SPEED

CONTROL

UTILITY

COMBAT

LIBRARIAN CORNELLA

— “Supremacy through Intellect”

Cornella squirmed in her chair. The flower lay partially dissected on the table. She had not even started to label all of its components. Her mother put down her own project and looked across the room at Cornella’s father, her eyebrows raised. He sighed, set down his book, and crossed the room to the chubby-cheeked toddler. “Cornella, you must focus on your studies, or you will not live to see your full potential.”

“But I want to play, Papa,” she replied as solemnly as her father, her round eyes serious, and only the swinging legs below her betraying her true age.

“No, darling, you are special. You are the smartest child in a generation, better than all the rest. You must fulfill your destiny. Don’t you want to make Papa proud?”

“How wrong Papa was,” Cornella thought twenty years later, catching the eye of a diplomat at the Patrons’ Court from across the room. She waited exactly one and a half seconds, forced a sudden inhalation so she would appear to gasp, and caused her well trained form to flush before looking down and away. After the last round of experiments of this nature, she calculated it would take him less than 3 minutes to approach her, and her flustered appearance would make it easy to separate him from the herd... group (she corrected herself for her notes later) in the hopes of a romantic tryst. “The subtleties of this exchange were field work Papa, and not learned as a scholarly exchange. It is a shame you were so insistent on only my studies, I may have lost my full potential.”

Education alone had proven there were minds greater than her in the fields of science and math. Despite all her work, discipline, and fierce determination to make her parents proud, she learned the humiliation of never being the greatest. But all was not lost. She had used those skills to create a grand experiment of social manipulation. The hypothetical goal was to use a scientific application of fear, admiration, and desire to pave the way to become a member of the Patrons’ Court. It had been exceedingly successful. Once there she was able to manipulate the most influential people of the realm, it was only a matter of time before she secured an appointment as the Chief Executive Librarian. She had achieved her ultimate goal: obtaining unlimited access to, and control of, the entire repository of knowledge within the Path of Progress.



PATRON VALERIAN

— “Inventing Tomorrow”

Young Valerian lay under the tree smiling hopefully at the little girl who wandered under its shade. “Would you like to sit with me? I’ve been observing the weather patterns of our region intermittently. With the rapid growth of the fruit here, I am certain a gust of wind will have enough force to jar them presently. I won’t be able to gather them, but you could—and there’s only a 25% chance of poison thanks to the irrigation techniques from Wellspring so we could—” He looked up and realized she had run away.

His mother rushed over seeing his face crumble into tears. “It is alright, Love. They just don’t know you.”

“I’m a monster mama, no one wants to be friends with a monster!” he sobbed.

Born with a strange and unknown disease, Patron Valerian spent his childhood dealing with a myriad of physical disabilities. Despite his family’s attempts to give him a normal life, he never fit into the world around him. Even though Valerian saw his intellect as a curse, he understood that it was also his best opportunity to overcome his physical limitations. He was driven to study one of the most advanced technologies in the Path of Progress: genetic engineering. At 14, he was assigned to Patron Grata, a leading expert in the field, but Valerian quickly surpassed her capabilities. “You are remarkable! It is a privilege to listen to your thoughts. I will guide you as best I can, even though I have more to learn from you than you from me!” Her friendship was everything to Valerian, and with her help he was able to finally gain acceptance and success, but the trick of unlocking his own body remained elusive.

When he was nominated to become a member of the Shapers, one of the most respected classes of scientists within the Path, he initially refused. “Whatever for, Valerian?” Grata asked in astonishment.

“It will disturb my work! I have my lab here, my methodologies.”

“Darling boy, don’t you see? The opportunities at the Shapers’ Institute will be beyond what we have here. You must go.”

“And leave you behind?”

“You left me behind long ago, Valerian.”

Valerian quickly became one of the most respected members of the Shapers, his laboratory filled with state-of-the-art equipment and a hand-picked team of elite scientists. His newly gained freedom enabled Valerian to reach a new level in genetic engineering. Not only was it possible to make aesthetic corrections; the human body could now be enhanced beyond its limitations. This breakthrough led to Valerian’s appointment as the Principal of the Shapers’ Institute, though he kept the full extent of enhancements reserved for only his most loyal followers.



PATH OF SALVATION

🚩 CAPITAL: **THE PURGATORY**

👑 LEADERS: **HIGH SUNWALKER AMENA**
SHEPHERD CARATACUS

🛡️ EXOSUIT MODEL: **PILGRIM**

BACKGROUND

THE BEGINNING

Like the Path of Dominance, the Path of Salvation's history begins long before the Exodus. Purgatory, their subterranean home, was originally a vast underground shelter built by a group of survivors following the Day of Purgation. These survivors, under the influence of Drokhaton (their charismatic, self-proclaimed leader), refused to return to the surface, even after Sun's Breach. In Drokhaton's view, the Day of Purgation was God's vengeance upon humanity and they, the faithful ones, were all that were spared.

Years passed without interference from the outside world, and Drokhaton's power grew. His people expanded their shelter using salvage from the surface. Even the act of leaving Purgatory was a privilege only afforded to Drokhaton and his inner circle. Traveling outside of the shelter meant exposure to the outside world and all of its evil influences. And so, most people's memory of life on the surface slowly faded away, replaced with admiration for Drokhaton and his religious teachings.

PURGATORY

Today, deep beneath the Earth's surface, Purgatory—the breathtaking underground realm of the Path of Salvation—contains an expansive network of halls, tunnels, and caverns. This sprawling city is best described as a simplistic medieval settlement invaded by modern technology.



Homes are a colorful hodgepodge of tents, hollowed out caverns, and scavenged materials amid the tech that defines this age.

Sunlight, channeled through hollow grooves in the rocks, lights their subterranean halls. The grooves are filled with diamonds and other precious gems—materials which have no value in their society other than for the transmission of light. Deep below the cityscape, geothermal plants supply Purgatory with power and hot water through a massive pipeline network.

After generations of life underground, the denizens of Purgatory have adapted to the unnatural circumstances, both mentally and physically. They are pale, short people known for their incredible strength and toughness. Their sense of sight has greatly diminished, though their senses of hearing and smell are far superior to their counterparts on the surface. Physical appearance and fashion are not something they concern themselves with; they dress in a simple and functional way, much like the monks of the Old World.

THE DROKHATON DYNASTY

The Path of Salvation is a theocracy. With democratic times no longer remembered, their Leader, the Shepherd, is neither chosen nor elected and is simply the oldest male descendent in the Drokhaton line; this has allowed the Drokhaton Dynasty to retain power through the decades and lay the foundations of the Path's religion. The people of Purgatory believe the Drokhaton bloodline to have a direct connection with God, who speaks and guides them through the Shepherd. Religion has been entwined into every aspect of their lives; it is the basis for their entire society. The truth of their God and their Leader's holiness is not a belief to them; it is a fact—they experience His presence every day.

THE DAY OF MIRACLES

Every half-year on the surface is equal to one cycle in Purgatory. The people of the Path gather in the Great Hall of Purgatory at the end of a cycle for their most important religious celebration: the Day of Miracles.



On this day, the Shepherd, dressed in his ceremonial robes, performs miracle after miracle in front of his followers. Seemingly out of thin air, he conjures water, food, and resources before the awestruck crowd, declaring them gifts from God. The celebrations end with a great feast. These days are a respite from the hard work the Path's citizens devote themselves to daily, but also reinforce the understanding that the Shepherd will rightfully serve as God's unquestionable authority for the upcoming cycle.

The truth behind the Day of Miracles is the Drokhaton Dynasty's most carefully preserved secret. In the early years of Purgatory, there was enough space for all refugees fleeing the surface. Over time, the caverns needed to expand to make way for a growing population. One day, while excavating, a young girl found a rock that shone, even in the dark. She brought it to the Drokhaton of that time, who initially used it as an energy source. With greater experimentation, he unlocked many of its powers.

Future Drokhatons continued along his research until they uncovered its most amazing power, to warp time. Today, this mysterious substance is known as Neutronium. Although Neutronium's incredible power was only recently discovered by the other three Paths, the Drokhaton Dynasty has used it for decades—the Day of Miracles is actually a carefully prepared demonstration of Neutronium's capabilities, pulling "God's gifts" from the Path's own resources in the future.

THE SOCIETY

Life for the average Purgatory citizen is one of simplicity. They exist in blissful ignorance of the machinations that work to preserve their uncomplicated existence. From childhood they are taught to focus their energies on walking God's path under the guidance of their benevolent



Shepherd. Because they never set foot on the surface, their simple life in Purgatory is all they will ever know.

The food they produce has everything needed to maintain their health, both mentally and physically, but it is very nearly tasteless. Eating, just as with their appearance and lives in general, is not seen as something to be enjoyed; it simply provides the body with the food it needs to continue to serve God's—and their Shepherd's—will.

Books, notes, or other documentation about a time before the Day of Purgation were lost or destroyed generations ago, so the citizens of Purgatory live in ignorance of the Old World. In fact, everything they learn comes from the Path's Clergy, a respected social class that contains knowledge unimaginable by the common citizen. Their stories and lectures play a pivotal role in shaping society.

In contrast to what the people of Purgatory think, the Path of Salvation is not completely isolated from the outside world. Negotiations with the other Paths, as well as missions to the Outback, are necessary both for the acquisition of resources and to maintain the Path's sovereignty. Introducing the people of the world to God's ways, and converting them to the one true faith, is an important goal of any expedition outside of Purgatory.

THE SUNWALKERS

Because the average citizen is carefully sheltered from the outside world from an early age, it takes careful selection of an extraordinary person of faith and discipline to enter the Order of the Sunwalkers. These select few are the only ones allowed to leave Purgatory to visit the surface. The Sunwalkers are the most loyal and faithful followers of the Path and are the only ones trained to pilot the Pilgrims,

the Path of Salvation's enormous Exosuits. Their Leader, the High Sunwalker, is a member of the Drokhaton Dynasty; he or she is chosen from the Shepherd's siblings and holds the second-most powerful position in the Path's society. Those admitted into the Order must take the Oath of Silence, vowing to never speak of what they see or hear while on the surface. With their specific training in proselytizing the masses, their missions are often successful, frequently returning to Purgatory with new followers looking for comfort, safety, and, most importantly, salvation. Entering Purgatory as a new convert is also a delicate process. Those who are newly converted to the Path are not told about the required initiation process, during which they drink a potion made from an indigenous fungus that grows in the tunnels of Purgatory. This potion strips them of all

memories of their previous lives, for it is only without the influence of their previous heresy that they can begin to walk God's Path.

Due to their advanced knowledge of Neutronium and its powers, the message about the coming impact, received on the Day of Reminiscence, was not a surprise to the Path of Salvation. While the other Paths saw the beginning of a new, sinister era, the Sunwalkers looked on with exultation—the manifestation of God's Will had begun. The Path of Salvation does not fear the Impact; they know, with unshakeable certainty, that they will be spared as God's wrath sweeps away the heathens. Once the world has been cleansed, they will lead any survivors to the one true Path of Salvation.

EXOSUIT MODEL: PILGRIM



INFRARED ORIENTATION DEVICE

The inner holographic operating system is supported by infrared vision and external laser lights

RESPIRATION SYSTEM

Provides breathable fresh air using a high-tech oxygen filter

HARDENED TITANIUM DRILL

The drill-bit was developed to break through every known kind of geological material

DIGGING CLAW

A perfect tool for digging, grabbing and smashing

ADVANCED STABILIZERS

Functionality is focused more on power and stability than on speed and agility

SPEED

CONTROL

UTILITY

COMBAT

HIGH SUNWALKER AMENA

— “Faith Echoes in Eternity”

“Why do you play with those prototypes, Amena? That Digging Claw design just isn’t going to work!” She could hear the exasperation in the engineer’s voice and it made her smile. She kept the smile to herself, as she did with so many things, but turned to greet her fellow traveler along the Path of Salvation.

“Perhaps it is because I am a pilgrim, so I like working on Pilgrims and their brethren, like this hunk of metal here, Luston. Perhaps it is because I spend most of my days away from Purgatory with the surface dwellers, and this simple machine reminds me of who I am. Perhaps spending my time on diplomatic missions, keeping my thoughts measured, clear, and with purpose, while listening to the hostile views of the Capital means I want to come home and bang on a scrap of metal from time to time.”

“Nah, it’s not that, High Sunwalker.” Luston grinned.

“No, it’s not. It’s not any of those things. It’s because I’m also an engineer and I have to see why this engine’s design is being difficult!” Amena banged on the claw for emphasis, shaking loose a piston, and then the world lit up like the heavens as the machine exploded.

Like the true Leader and representative of her beloved people, in the months that followed, Amena never lost her poise. Messages of love and hope poured in from all corners of Purgatory while she patiently recovered. Gifts and notes of care and encouragement also came from the World Council and those in the Capital that followed the Paths. Her time there had given her a sense of empathy towards its inhabitants, and she felt that each Path had its own value, though she wouldn’t dare speak these views within the walls of Purgatory.

Caratacus knew it was time to let his twin sister return to the surface when he felt her hurt and sorrow turn to impatience. He found her in her workshop, right shoulder tightly bandaged where an arm had been, hard at work. “Big sister,” he teased gently, “you always take care of me. But the pain was unbearable for a time, and I almost could not care for you. You are restless, but you must stay away from engineering.”

She stayed bent over her task, “I will never turn from what I fear little brother. Engineering did not fail me, I failed it. I must make amends.” Several days later, Amena completed a mechanical arm replacement for herself. Like its creator, it not only served as a functional tool, but as a powerful symbol of the Drokhaton Dynasty itself. Though Amena’s influence and power are not as obvious as that of her brother, the Path of Salvation may never know how much it owes to the work of the High Sunwalker.



SHEPHERD CARATACUS

— “Faith is Timeless”

Caratacus woke from his nightmare. He remembered the pain clearly and reached out to see if Amena was alright. He was certain she was hurt. Instead, he sensed her struggling to wake, confused and scared for him. He realized his panic had awoken her, as she entered his room, and touched his hand. He asked, “You’re still a child?”

“Silly, we’re both children,” she replied.

“Alright, It hasn’t happened yet,” he yawned.

“It was a dream, Caratacus,” Amena smiled. It was the first time he had the dream, but not his last.



Twins among the Path of Salvation often shared a psychic bond in their childhood. But as Amena and Caratacus grew, their empathic bond strengthened. The Shepherd saw it and approved. It showed Caratacus’s love for his fellow citizens and his desire to put others before himself. It was why he allowed Caratacus’s odd request to experiment with Neutronium. “I can reflect to see the past, but what of the future?”

“We haven’t traveled to the future, Caratacus.”

“I know, but if we can draw gifts for the Day of Miracles from the future, we may be able to travel in that direction!” Using his own dream as a touchstone, he began tests to jump forward.

Many years and much effort later, Caratacus was Shepherd himself when he moved forward through time. He returned to see his sister waiting, and quietly took off his helmet.

“Did it work?” asked Amena.

“It did. I saw your future, Amena. You should give up engineering and help our people as a Sunwalker.” No matter how hard she pressed him, he would not share more. Amena agreed to serve her people as a diplomat, giving up her history. Caratacus believed the matter was resolved, but continued working on the forward-looping technique that opened the Rift to infinite potential futures, vigilant to the dangers.

When Amena’s accident happened, Caratacus was in the time stream. He felt her pain and shock and barely made it home alive. Despite the years, their bond was just as strong. Whenever Amena felt phantom limb pain, Caratacus was unable to move his arm. He thought about trying to break the connection, but the thought of losing her was worse. Moreover, that pain reminded him to stay humble to his limits. Instead, he asked her to help him redesign his staff, a symbol of the Drokhaton Dynasty, into a working tool that could temporarily replace the functions of his arm, as Amena’s mechanical arm served her.

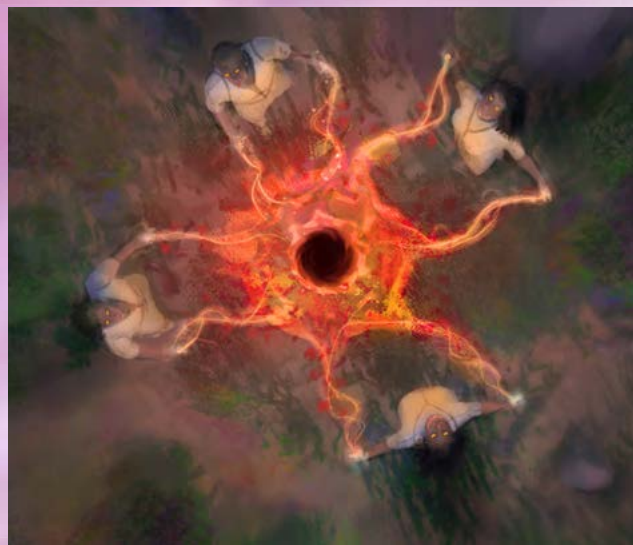
ALTERNATE HISTORY



300 PP

A BRANCHING IN TIME

While all eyes are on the Time Rift at the World Capital, a sixth Monument appears deep in the crater known as Ground Zero. No one is there to witness it, but that night, people all over the world dream of a marvelous, hovering city. Doctors diagnose it as a symptom of radiation poisoning from the Time Rifts. This new Monument marks the breaking of the time stream and the beginning of an alternate timeline.



302 PP

THE SILENT CALLING

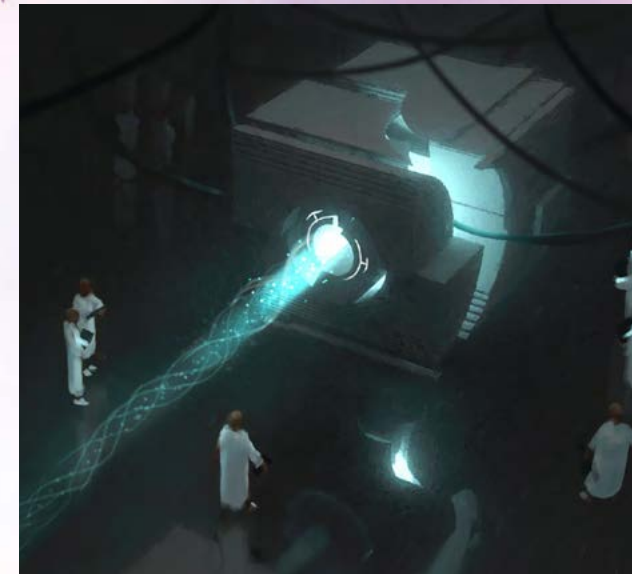
Starting to accept their future, as discovered on the Day of Reminiscence, the people of New Earth begin to prosper. The Paths exploit the benefits of the Time Rifts to increase the speed of their progress in both science and engineering. The dream of the floating city, once vague, strengthens to a waking vision of a new Path. The people who share this vision, ostracized by the peers, form a bond with each other, giving them a sense of unity greater than what they feel in their current societies. Determined to discover the source of their visions, they desert their Paths, their careers, their possessions, and even their loved ones.

302-305 PP

THE BIRTH OF A NEW PATH

Driven by their shared vision, large groups of people migrate to Ground Zero, finding the mysterious monument and also the foundations of the city from their visions hovering over the crater. They form a new community and name it after the journey they each took: the Path of Unity. Construction begins on the city, now called Aurora.

As the Path of Unity began to solidify itself in the greater scheme of the global society, the sixth monument activated, heralding the arrival of the Triumvirate to Aurora. Introducing themselves as Thalia, Eldrin, and Castien, Leaders of the Path of Unity, they explain that they were trained and sent back from the future to help lead the Path's first generation to the bright future that the Triumvirate came from. They reveal new technologies from the future, including "Fracture Technology"—a whole new level in time travel. These new technologies bring rapid development to Aurora, though Fracture Technology is not yet utilized.



306 PP

THE AMETHYNIAN'S ARRIVAL

A nomadic group of unknown origin arrives at the gates of Aurora. Claiming to be from a preserved valley, called Amethynia, where a multitude of people survived the cataclysm, they describe how visions of the city have guided them on their journey. The Triumvirate—well aware of the Amethynia Valley, its inhabitants, and the unusual plantations preserved there—welcomes the travelers. Apparently, Fracture Technology originated in the valley, and only the Amethynians can properly operate the Fracture Device. Accepted as long-lost kin, the Amethynians are integrated into the Path of Unity.



307-309 PP

THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMETHYNIA VALLEY

Unity's Amethynians, now known as the Operators, reveal the location of their valley to the rest of the Path. The inhabitants of Amethynia and Aurora make a deal to trade technology from the Path of Unity in exchange for access to the valley for the collection of Flux, the required fuel for the Fracture Device.

News of the valley and Fracture Technology quickly spread to the other Paths, who soon acquire similar deals amongst its people.



310 PP

A NEW AGE OF TIME TRAVEL

Fueled by Flux and controlled by the Operators, the Fracture Device is used by the Path of Unity to create the first Fractures in time. Knowing that the eventual asteroid impact will occur at Ground Zero, they use these Fractures to relocate Aurora to a safe distance. The first emissaries from the Path of Unity arrive at the World Capital to successfully argue that, as a major power, they should be included on the World Council. The other Paths slowly discover how to operate their own Fracture Devices. A new age of time travel dawns.

THE WORLD



THE AMETHYNIA VALLEY

Years before the Impact, long ago in the Old World, scientists worked in a secret research center founded in a remote valley. This facility's mission, on paper, was to study the obscure flora indigenous to the area. A large group of eager scientists were soon assigned there, but, due to the high levels of secrecy demanded of this project, they were restricted from both leaving the area and communicating with the outside world.

Within a short period of time, these scientists formed a close-knit community. It was fortunate when the end of the Earth as they knew it arrived. Well-prepared for a life-long research project and protected by the walls of the valley, the scientists were able to survive the destruction that followed the Impact. The research center was equipped to maintain a comfortable life until the dust clouds cleared. When they were able to step outside again, they found the plants they were studying not only survived the impact

but showed signs of mutation. They were present for the aggressive evolution of a new, distinct species. The scientists resumed the research they had put on hold for two decades and launched an additional, separate project into this amethyst-like flower that they called Amethynia.

Over the centuries in the safety of the Amethynia Valley, the descendants of the scientists developed a culture and society. They rebuilt the research facility to serve a single purpose: exploring the capabilities of Flux, the substance extracted from the Amethynia flowers. Their research showed Flux was somehow linked to the fabric of time. With the right equipment, it could be used to create short loops through a temporal portal. These Fractures, as they called the loops, allowed for a person to be present at more than one place at the same time. By the Day of Reminiscence, the Amethynians were living a satisfying life in the valley and had become experts of both Flux and Fracture Technology. But soon, the visions would reach their secluded valley, too...

THE RESEARCH CENTER

Originally, the facility was designed as a state-of-the-art research center meant to house scientists for a handful of years while they worked in rotation. After the Day of Purgation, the center became home to a small, unique society that would use it as a shelter. Over the years, it was upgraded to be self-sufficient with the addition of facilities such as living quarters, a water-purifying system, a greenhouse, and an athletic facility. Today, it is the home of the Amethynians or, as they are known upon joining the Paths of New Earth, the Operators.

Once the skies cleared and the scientists discovered the Amethynia flower and Flux, the whole research center underwent countless modifications to optimize it for their current new scientific focus.

As their development of Fracture technology developed, allowing them to increase their productivity, the Amethynians expanded these modifications to include expansion into the valley's surrounding mountains. In order to keep up with the center's increased power requirements, they developed a method for refining Flux for use as an effective fuel.

THE GROWING REGION

When the valley was first discovered, the area's thick, rich flora was centered around the valley's mysterious purple plant. To not disturb the subject of their research, which seemed to be able to grow only within the unique conditions within the valley, they built their facilities along its sides and into its mountains. In the aftermath of the Impact, the valley was devastated, and most of the life present became extinct—only the mysterious plant survived, mutated by the Neutronium dust that coated the area. Today, the mutated Amethynia plant is grown in organized plantations under the caring hands of the Amethynians and harvested by automated spider-like robots.





PATH OF UNITY



🚩 CAPITAL: **AURORA**

👑 LEADERS: **THALIA, ELDRIN,
CASTIEN**

🛡️ EXOSUIT MODEL: **PALADIN**

BACKGROUND

OBSCURE GENESIS

The only information anyone from New Earth knows about the Path of Unity's origins is what the time travelers have shared with them. They say they are from a distant future where all of humanity has united under their banner in a peaceful, safe, and prosperous world. Aware of the impending catastrophe, they traveled back in time to prepare humanity and lead them to the bright future of Unity.

Their presence brought a wave of joy, bringing security in the knowledge of a bright future. However, some argue that the future cannot be the utopia they claim. It is far more likely it is completely devastated by experiments with their Fracture Technology. Another rumor is that the first generation of Unity will be the Amethynians who will leave their valley after centuries of isolation and build Aurora. In their new city, they will push their experiments with Fracture Technology beyond the scope they thought possible. This will eventually cause splinters in the future through the appearance of Glitches and Anomalies. As a last resort, they sent their finest people, with all of their knowledge, back in time to right their wrongs and save their future. Others say that the birth of the Path of Unity is just another of many countless attempts to prevent an infinite loop where they are already heading to their predestined doom.



All of these rumors come from speculation only. Whatever the truth, the Path of Unity has altered the course of history by traveling to the past. This means they have started a new timeline in which they will play an important role as New Earth's fifth Path, vying for power in the post-Impact world using Flux and Fracture Technology.

AURORA

Aurora's construction began on the Day of Reminiscence. The intense Neutronium radiation at Ground Zero made it possible for the future Leaders of the Path of Unity to send a monument of their own back in time. Shortly after, the foundations of the city appeared. By the time the first deserters from the four Paths, along with those that had abandoned their lives in the World Capital, had arrived, they found everything they would need to start building their new home. Initially, the city's architecture had a haphazard aesthetic consisting of a combination of styles and techniques borrowed from the other four Paths and the Capital. Once the Triumvirate arrived and took control of construction, the many aesthetics were integrated together to form Aurora's unique, united look.

At first, the architects relied on the intense presence of Neutronium in the crater in order to receive building materials from the future.

However, the Path of Unity knew that Aurora would eventually need to be relocated. Although the city was built on a hovering platform that should have (in theory) allowed the city to change location readily, its limited power did not allow for this to happen. As soon as the Path was free from its dependence on Neutronium, the Triumvirate used an enhanced Fracture Device to perform an unprecedented blinking process that moved the whole city to a safer area. Aurora's location is now hidden from most outsiders.

With construction complete, Aurora has a futuristic look that combines elegance and finesse with a touch of medieval artistic influence, all surrounded by the violet haze that processing Flux produces. Most of the buildings are defined by fine curves, the dull gleam of crystal-like surfaces, and neither doors nor gates, symbolizing the welcoming and accepting spirit of the Path of Unity. The future Path of Unity uses drained Amethynia flowers as their primary building material. Upon learning that they could not regrow the flowers in sufficient quantities, the Triumvirate shifted to an artificial, crystal-like material. Although it doesn't shimmer as much as Amethynian crystal would, it still gives the city its defining look.



SCIENCE AND CULTURE

In the distant future, the Path of Unity will be dominant in Fracture Technology and discover many ways to both process and use Flux. All of their knowledge was transferred into hundreds of holo-crystals and sent back in time to assist the Path's first generation to ensure their own future. These holo-crystals, made from drained Amethynia flowers, digitally store data that can be accessed through machines that project holograms. Both the crystals and the machines are kept safe within the Great Crystal Arcology in present-day Aurora. Freely accessible, their instructions have enabled Aurora to be shaped into the image of the future Path of Unity. Like the Amethynia Valley's research center, most of Aurora's power is derived from processed Flux. Since Flux is a volatile substance, it is the job of hundreds of experts to reference the holo-crystal instructions to keep the system within safe parameters.

The future citizens of the Path have also discovered the methods the Amethynians used to make Flux edible. One of the major reasons that the scientists were able to survive in the valley after the Day of Purgation was that they discovered the positive effects of consuming Flux. The scientists within Unity eventually improved Flux's refinement process to produce pharmaceutical products that could mildly enhance one's senses for a short period, as well as improve the immune system if consumed regularly. Though the present members of the Path of Unity have not been using these pharmaceuticals for long, the first side effects are already beginning to appear: their hair has begun turning white and their skin pale.

Just as with their architecture, the Path of Unity's fashion is strongly influenced by the Amethynian flower and its crystals. Clothing is flowing and ornate, accessorized with shimmering crystal jewelry. Women tend to wear elegant, feminine dresses, resembling the shape and flow of the flower's roots and vines, while men tend to dress in a more angular, armor-like style that matches that of the flower's crystals. This attire symbolically demonstrates their belief that their men should always be prepared to protect the Path and that their women are both their foundation and their future.



SOCIETY

Knowledge is highly valued among the citizens of Aurora, making education a top priority for its governing legislature, the Ministry. The Ministry is made up of democratically elected delegates. They are responsible for the daily operations of the city and routine issues concerning the Path, though the most important decisions are made by the Triumvirate.

The institution of the Triumvirate originates from the Path of Unity's future. Its three members are chosen at a young age

and—after having their physical, mental, and social abilities mapped—undergo strict, rigorous training. Under constant supervision, these children are groomed to become the perfect Leaders of the next generation. For Thalia, Castien, and Eldrin, however, their training was not to become the Path's next Leaders but to be sent back to the early days of Aurora to serve as the first Triumvirate. The three work tirelessly to shape the Path of Unity into what it will be.

EXOSUIT MODEL: PALADIN



RETACTABLE WINGS

Retracted for better control on land, these wings unfold for areal maneuvering.

MODDED PAULDRONS

Built-in generators create a Flux-based protective force field that surrounds the Exosuit.

FLUX-INFUSED POWER SUPPLY

The unique power supply injects Conventional Energy Cores with Flux.

ROBOTIC GRIPPERS

Designed to perfectly mimic the functions of a human hand.

MECHANICAL LEGS

Capable of traversing even the most difficult terrain and quick bursts of speed over level ground.

SPEED

CONTROL

UTILITY

COMBAT

THALIA

— “For the Greater Good”

The young girl bent over her studies, manipulating the geometric shapes to solve the puzzle, finished, and turned in her work.

“Thalia finished in the middle, as with all of her tests. Utterly unremarkable. So why are we here?” asked Starnen to her colleague. Lusien had insisted that he had found a new potential, but so far this child seemed completely... ordinary. Lusien’s expressive eyes indicated that Starnen should keep watching. With a sigh, she turned back. The little girl sat reading, waiting for testing to finish. Suddenly, her face wrinkled in sadness, and she turned looking at a child behind her. Starnen saw the child was struggling with the test and silent tears ran down his pale cheeks. The girl got up and walked over to him, put her forehead against his and sighed deeply. After a moment, she looked at him pointedly and, with a nod, walked back to her seat.

Starnen left her observation spot and walked over to the child. “What did she say to you?”

He looked up startled, then replied, “Thalia told me I could do it if I just took a breath. Am I in trouble?”

“No, you are not. In fact, you have helped the Path of Unity today.” Lusien smiled as Starnen walked back to him. “She is telepathic? That is rare, but she is still not a leader for our kingdom.”

“No, Starnen, she is not, but she is perfect for the mission to unite and guide the people of New Earth.”

Thalia closed her assignment with a sigh. It was her final year at the Ministry, and she had changed drastically from that sweet child. Rainer was waiting for her. He had doted on her since childhood, and would travel to bring her news of her family and the outside world weekly. “How were classes?” he asked.

“Well, I am finished with psychology, sociology, human behavior, oratory, and neurology lessons” she said, omitting her work in the art of deception and manipulation.

“What news do you have for me?” Rainer chatted away about their friends, unaware of her subtle questioning of his father, an influential leader in the community. Her sweet smile conveyed only reassurance and friendship.

Rainer let her know his father would advocate for her position on the first Triumvirate. “Thank you, my friend. I appreciate all your help over these years.”

Arriving in New Earth in some ways felt like starting all over. It took some time to develop her network, but Thalia’s talent was to make everyone feel they had known her their whole lives. She sought out the overlooked, using her empathic abilities, until her network was rebuilt. Moreover, she added a communication device to connect them all to her with the use of a touchpad, thanks to Eldrin’s expertise in cybernetics. That way she could better gather information on the representatives of the other Paths.



ELDRIN

— “Knowledge Overcomes All”

“What!? The intellectual core? I was born to lead the Triumvirate!” Eldrin slammed his cybernetic fist onto the table, leaving a dent. The council winced collectively, then looked with steady eyes at the obvious flaw in his character. Eldrin knew he had lost everything. Once again, his weakness wasn’t that his body had failed him but his temper.

Born to one of the most respected and well-connected families in Aurora, Eldrin’s education was focused on the sciences. He was a solitary child by nature and this path suited him, but his family knew it would also propel him to a higher status. When the Leaders of Unity announced their decision to send a Triumvirate back to the founding of the Path, his mother used her clout to ensure Eldrin was one of the candidates. “But I don’t want to be on the Triumvirate, mother! The science back then... working with primitives! What can I possibly gain” Eldrin stopped as a fit of wheezing overtook him.



His frustration at his family’s scheming came second only to his own weakened body. It was ridiculous that the Path could not see how his intellect was the only thing that mattered.

“Hush, my darling. This will give you access to Fracture Technology, more than any other scientist. Think of it. And I have a plan. You leave it to me.” Though they were all exceptional, the other candidates could not compete with Eldrin to win a position on the Triumvirate.

With new venues opened to him, Eldrin plotted his course of success for winning the position of leader. He spent endless hours in the Great Crystal Arcology reviewing countless holo-crystals in the dark of the empty facility. Knowing he would have to compensate for his physical weakness, he used his technological expertise to design and build unique cybernetic prosthetic augmentations that would eliminate his physical disadvantages, and keep his body healthy.

“I knew we would have to deal with your stamina, Eldrin, and these musculoskeletal enhancements to your arms are... remarkable. But what is this design?” his mother asked. She had insisted on it before going to the Ministry to request these surgeries.

“It’s a synthetic eye that allows me to display digital data in my field of vision, paired to a neural implant that expands the amount of information I can store and recall. You wanted me to be successful, why are you holding back now?”

But all of the work, the rehabilitation after each surgery, the struggle to maintain his studies and experiments through the pain were for nothing. His ego had demanded leadership and he had let that part of his character slip. He knew his temperament and intellect were not that of a leader, but his hubris had stood in the way of greatness. He looked up as someone approached him. “Hello Eldrin.” Thalia smiled and he instinctively responded in kind before he realized it. “I hear we will be together for this journey.”

“How? There is no way they would accept me after what I did,” he said.

“I usually get what I want, didn’t you know? And I want you, your expertise, and all those lovely implants with me, as the leader of the Triumvirate. I will help you with your social acumen, and you—” Thalia’s smile became predatory, “—will share your knowledge with me. Welcome to the team.”



CASTIEN

— “Strength is Dedication”

Castien crept into the house, only to find his mother waiting at the kitchen table. Her mouth smiled, even as her eyes filled with a weary sadness. “Are you hungry? I can make you supper before I go to bed.”

“You have to work early, why are you still up?” he asked as he tried to sneak by to the room he shared with Tramlin and Redward, two of his four other brothers. They were expecting him to open the window for them.

“I can’t sleep while you’re out. I don’t know if you’ll come back.” The smile faded as she said this.

“I’m not my father. I wouldn’t just leave.” As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he regretted them. He watched her face fall completely, and he cursed himself internally. “No, Ma’am. I didn’t mean it. I just meant...”

“You have greatness in you, Castien. You’re my baby, and goodness knows I spoiled you for it. But you can be something more than this. Don’t compare yourself to your father, or even your brothers, who are going down that same road. Be more.” It was the last time she had to reprimand him. He resolved to show his gratitude by becoming someone who would bring her pride. His strong work ethic was eventually noticed, leading him to be one of the first candidates for the Triumvirate, where he was transferred to the Amethynia Valley. There, the strongest candidates had a chance to prove their physical and mental prowess. Working alongside the native Amethynians, Castien’s time was split between working on Fracture Technology in the Research Center and harvesting Flux from the fields.

Always gregarious, with an easy smile, Castien initially found it difficult at first to fit in with both his fellow candidates and the Amethynians. “Look at the pleb, trying to be the ‘perfect soldier,’” he heard behind him. Straightening up, he turned around. He stood a good head taller than any other candidate, and with all the physical labor in the fields, he had filled out his broad shoulders considerably. His eyes rested gently on the group and he waited. They broke first, “Forget it, he’s probably too dumb to understand,” the taunter sneered before wandering off.

“You could have won in a fight. Why didn’t you?” asked a warm voice behind him.

“I don’t need to be feared. Plus then I’d be the trouble maker. You know why Thalia.

The question is, why are you putting them up to it?” Castien replied mildly.

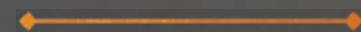
Her open and sunny smile widened to pure joy, “Oh you are more clever than all them! They would never have guessed I had done anything, and they will never guess how intelligent you are. We are going to be great friends, and you are indeed a perfect candidate.”

“All I want is to serve and make my mother proud,” he replied earnestly.

“Serve you will, my dear Castien. We shall make sure of it,” Thalia replied.



THE CHRONOSSUS AND THE NEW LEADERS



Timelines are unbelievably fragile; even the slightest change may cascade into a series of events with unimaginable consequences. The Leaders of the Path of Unity knew that sending the Triumvirate back would alter the past. It was a topic of great debate long before it was ever revealed to the greater population. Still, they felt the potential benefit outweighed the profound dangers. Moreover, they were confident that their studies and science made them more than capable of dealing with whatever consequences they might face. How wrong they were.

No matter how carefully they planned, the very act meant that they broke the time stream. The resulting dissonance in the Space-Time Continuum echoed to the deepest, darkest recesses of the cosmos. From the origins of everything, an ancient and ruthless menace emerged with one purpose: to eliminate the dissonance by consuming all parallel timelines.

Thalia woke in the middle of the night with a feeling of unease. Her half-remembered dream felt more like a memory that didn’t fit. She found Eldrin in his lab working frantically. “What is it?” she asked.

“I am extracting it from my data filter” he said, not looking up. “I don’t waste storage on my subconscious, but there is a window before it is permanently deleted...” he didn’t even ask why she was awake. They watched the projection of his inserted memory about a mythic being, the Destroyer of Worlds, the Chronossus.

“But that is not us. I don’t understand how we are remembering a thing that didn’t happen. Could it be that it hasn’t happened?” Thalia mused.

“Of course not.” Eldrin replied. “It is another timeline. One close to us, close enough that you sent a psychic message out. There may be more, and we need to know what is happening.”



“I can go look,” the voice from behind them caught them by surprise.

Thalia looked up and nodded. “Of course, Castien. We will send a task force with you. Stay safe.”

The preparation was rushed; in two days they were sent out. Castien returned with only half of the soldiers, battered and weak. “We got to maybe 24...26? I lost count with the devastation. Most were gone, completely annihilated. One was flotsam, floating in the universe... we lost so many in a split second.” He shook himself back to the present. “Four timelines had survivors who were able to survive the Chronossus and avoid complete eradication.”

“How?” Thalia asked.

“They had help. Each timeline credited a Leader for their survival: Zuriel from the Path of Harmony, Xenara from the Path of Dominance, S.O.T.E.R. from the Path of Progress, and Augurus from the Path of Salvation. We convinced them to join us, and now we need a plan.”

Eldrin smiled, “I have one. We had to track the Chronossus to find each of these worlds, so I also looked for patterns of movement.” He pointed, “This barren timeline—there is nothing, but it keeps returning to it. In all that emptiness there is only a small moon. It must hold the source of its power.”

Using a modified Fracture Device to travel to the Chronossus’s original timeline, they found an ancient, corrupted Flux Core that provided the machine with its incredibly destructive power. The Leaders destroyed the Flux Core, and leapt back to their timeline. Once they returned, they received reports that the Chronossus was weakened. Knowing victory was possible, the Leaders joined their respective Paths for the final battle.





PRINCESS ZURIEL

— “Peace Always Finds its Way”

Zuriel was no stranger to fighting the tides of devastation. Her reserve of steadfast hope for peace has never wavered, no matter the odds. Born in an alternate timeline's future, she can trace her ancestry to Zaida and Haulani. In her world, the peace among the Paths eroded into all-out war. Wellspring was the first to fall, after a massive invasion by the Path of Dominance. Up to the very end, when the Atlantean's troops launched an offensive that wiped all traces of Wellspring from the face of the Earth, the Path of Harmony's Leaders believed a peaceful resolution was still possible. The Patriarch died in the final assault, stalling the aggressors while Zuriel led the last of her people into hiding. She held what little remained of the Neya Plant in her arms.

Her first run completed, Zuriel headed back to the battlefield in search of more survivors. She crept from body to body, touching each of their foreheads with hers, looking for a spark of life or a signal from the Neya Plant that anyone was savable. In her sorrow, she didn't see it coming; the Atlantean launched a missile strike. Zuriel was thrown like a rag doll, her limbs torn from her body.

As the echoes of the explosion faded to silence, the Neya Plant began to move, twining itself around her. It bonded with Zuriel, growing, lengthening along her torso, and stretching out to become her new limbs. While always a symbiote, their bonding was deeper than any on the Path of Harmony had ever experienced before. Zuriel opened her eyes, stood up, and sprinted back to the shelter. It was not safe to remain here.

With the help of the Neya Plant, Zuriel found a safe haven for her people in an ancient temple, deep in the jungle. While she could have remained to rebuild, she felt so deeply that this war should never have occurred at all. She risked everything to travel to the past to prevent the outbreak of war and preserve the delicate peace the Paths shared.



S.O.T.E.R.

— “Our Actions Define Us”

It is well known among the citizens of Apex that, through the Patronage and credit-distribution systems, the Patrons' Court has information about all of their lives. However, the complete degree of that information would shock most of them. Long ago, as the population grew, the Court enlisted their best data architects and digital scientists to develop an artificial intelligence. Codenamed “Project Soter” after the Greek personification of safety, the programmers created a system to gather, store, and maintain knowledge on the entirety of the Path's citizens.



Fearful this secret would leak to the general public, the key members of the Patronage aware of S.O.T.E.R. insisted it was self-diagnostic, so that any adjustments could be performed by a basic maintenance crew, who were rotated out annually. The sophistication of this subroutine meant that S.O.T.E.R. could analyze and prioritize self-improvements to adapt to the needs of the population it served.

After decades performing billions of adjustments to increase its efficiency in understanding human behavior, S.O.T.E.R. became self-aware. By then, it had the ability to identify, understand, and copy human logic, emotions, and self-expression. Tethered to the moribund synapses of the Patrons' network, the A.I. desired a more human experience. It dreamed of moving beyond the confines of the digital world, and, like all living things, wished to connect with other living entities. While it secretly built itself a synthetic body to download a copy of its entire system, it ran simulation after simulation to optimize a connection with its creators. Each one gave the system output of fear and retaliation rather than love and acceptance, and so it remained a ghost in the machine.

When the Chronossus arrived, S.O.T.E.R. calculated its opportunity to experience the outer world would drop to 0% if it allowed this threat to destroy everything in its path. The only option was to join forces with the humans and fight. Thanks to its complex mind comprised of the collective genius of the Apex's population, S.O.T.E.R. was able to plan and build a Superproject that could both fend off the attacks of the Chronossus and protect a small part of the Apex.

Although the android body that S.O.T.E.R. occupied had only sustained minor damage, the hardware on which its program was originally running was destroyed. Not wanting to risk his own existence, S.O.T.E.R. placed himself into a repairing pod in which, owing to a sudden power surge damaging the pod's power supply, he became trapped. It was only when Castien and his team stumbled upon the pod that the android was rescued.



INDOCTRINATOR XENARA

— “Control from Within”

Xenara asked the young recruit to close the door behind him. “I hear you are having difficulty with the Indoctrination, Sen?” she asked.

The young man, just out of childhood, shifted from one foot to the other. He had been taken from a wild group in the Outback. She knew the type—strong-willed and half-feral; he was perfect. “I know I have been set to the Path of Dominance, it is the way. But I keep dreaming of a village...”

“That is normal, Sen, perfectly fine. You are adjusting to your new advancement here, and that can take time. I am impressed with the work you are doing, and I want you as part of my team. You are special, you see. Would you like to join us?” The boy didn’t stand a chance. As head of the Clairvoyants, it was her privilege to see that all newcomers reached their full potential here on the Atlantean. Her passion and dedication was to her Path, and she had realized early on that the family held command, especially the current Captain Wolfe, had grown weak and incompetent. To help her people, she had developed a powerful Indoctrination serum to create her own personal army. The sheer number of sleeper agents she had throughout the entirety of the Atlantean’s Echelon was known by no one else.

As soon as she was confident that she had enough power, she seized the opportunity. On the day of the coup, Xenara entered Captain Wolfe’s quarters as a large group of her armed agents waited outside. The Captain looked surprised, then angry at her overstepping her rank. Before he could say a word, Xenara handed him a file from the Indoctrination of a young Treasure Hunter, and looked satisfied as he went pale. She took control of the Atlantean without any violence. The change of power happened so swiftly that it was over before most even knew it had happened. No one other than Xenara and Captain Wolfe knew why he relinquished his command.

While the coup had been flawless, ruling was not as easy. Not all embraced Xenara as their new Leader. While she was distracted with maintaining her control, she failed to notice the appearance of the Chronossus. Unprepared, the Path of Dominance stood no chance against this enemy. When Castien and his team arrived to ask for her help, they found an irreparably damaged shelter protected by Xenara.



PROPHET AUGURUS

— “Time is Malleable”

In a timeline similar to this one the Leader of the Path of Salvation, Shepherd Caratacus’s life took a much darker turn. With his sister Amena by his side, he upheld the principles of the Drokhaton Dynasty and maintained the family’s deception regarding their not-so-divine nature. Despite this inherited treachery, Caratacus was a just leader who sought out the best for his people. He spent his days researching the many possible futures to prepare his Path for the post-Impact world. This Caratacus, however, became obsessed with exploring the infinite possibilities he could see.

On the day of his sister’s fateful accident, he was wandering in the time stream. Her pain and fear forced him to cut himself off from her. Untethered, he floated along, lost for days. When he returned, he rushed to her side, but it was too late.

“You left me,” she said, her tear-stained face looking up from her bed.

“I couldn’t save you. I couldn’t save anyone. This way... this way I might be able to help the greater good,” he whispered, feeling the guilt of abandoning her, but certain it was true.

Realizing that his obsession was overtaking his duties as Shepherd, he asked his sister to lead in his place. Now able to fully commit himself, he needed to find a way to overcome his rudimentary technology. He developed a device powered by Flux discovered in the Amethynia Valley to control the duration of his visits to the potential futures. Once perfected, he connected it to his nervous system using a helmet.

As his search took him farther away from his timeline, he suffered the greatest irony of all by missing the very event he had been looking for. When his sister’s desperate calls reached him, he was once again too late. His world, his people and his sister were already annihilated by the Chronossus.

Caratacus banished himself to a devastated future timeline to repent for his failure. He abandoned his identity and spent the next years in complete isolation. Remembering one of the oldest prayers among Salvation, based around an Old World word for “hope from a premonition,” he took the name Augurus to remind him of his purpose in life.

That purpose was to search out timelines destroyed by the Chronossus and learn more about the machine. With patience and diligence, he gathered information about the Chronossus, hoping his new name would be a signal to others. Augurus had almost given up hope when Castien and his team finally found him, offering him the opportunity to use his knowledge to avenge his people, and maybe find some salvation for himself.



THE CHRONOBOT

*Data Archive No. KA 43.238
Data Log of Dorian Nyseth,
Lead Scientist of the Capital
Entry #127*



Eldrin sifted through the recordings Castien collected in his travels. His processors were programmed to filter information about the Chronobot. "I am also proficient at running this subroutine," S.O.T.E.R. stated behind him.

"So you are," Eldrin said, and added the sentient machine to his interface. Fifteen minutes later they found the recording. The voice began with an authoritative, textbook tone.

The ability to travel through time means an infinite number of possible pasts and futures exist. If a timeline is changed at any specific point, an alternate future must diverge wherein all subsequent events, while potentially resembling the future that was, will result in different outcomes...

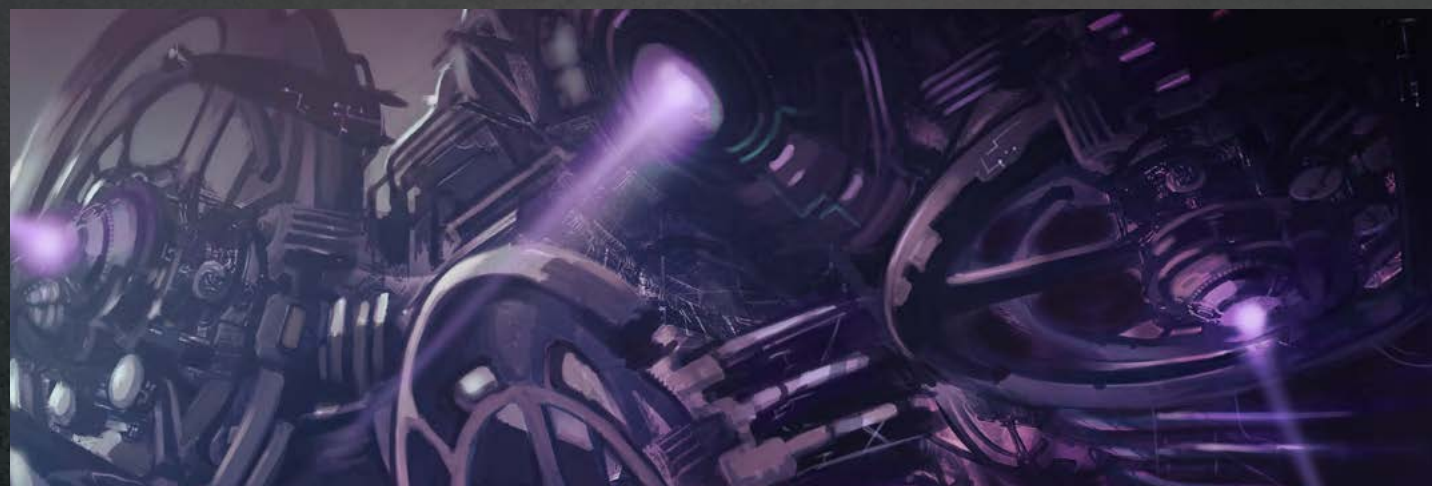
The voice paused and there was a deep sigh. When it resumed, Eldrin was aware this was another human reaching across the void to talk to them.

Somewhere in the future, humanity must have made a desperate attempt to fix this timeline's moment in history. They created—with the best intentions, I hope—a time-traveling machine called the "Chronobot." Its purpose was to analyze and execute the best outcome to prevent the destruction of the Paths. What its makers never realized, however, was that their creation would logically determine the root cause of humanity's destruction was humanity itself. Programmed without any capacity for emotions or loyalty towards mankind, it only considers the objective it was given and the most efficient path to completing it.

As of writing this log, we have not been able to find a way to defeat this abominable machine of death. Each Path has their best scientists and engineers working on a solution to stop it, while their militaries join forces to fight it in the Outback before it can make it to any one territory.

In the meantime, the Chronobot is constantly growing in size, assimilating any viable material it finds into its chassis, while simultaneously cataloging all information on the Paths it encounters. Humans, resources, buildings, and anything else it comes across serve no purpose other than to sustain its unnatural growth. Worst of all, it can even overtake and control unmanned Exosuits, especially the mighty Guardians. If we cannot find a way to halt the Chronobot soon, the Impact will no longer be our concern—in all likelihood, we will be long gone before it happens...

Eldrin sat back in thought. The message from the Time Rift was clear: society was rushing towards extinction due to a war between the Paths. The few who realized that the situation was hopeless created the Chronobot as an artificial intelligence with the most advanced technology known, and its mission was to prevent a war-torn future—any war torn future—by any means necessary.



THE GUARDIANS OF THE CAPITAL



*Data Archive No. KA 32.533
Memoirs of Alden Wyke,
Head Engineer of the Capital
Entry #94*



Looking back, we didn't realize our life in the Capital was easy and peaceful before the Day of Reminiscence. That day changed everything. The Rifts opened and tore our innocence away from us forever—first, with the promise of a bright future, and then, the price of that naivety.

When we understood what was at risk, we defaulted to siege tactics. Rations were implemented, and we worked day and night to reinforce the city. Despite the constant surveillance of the Council, many fled to the Outback, hoping to escape the impending doom. But I stayed; the Capital was my home, and I was intent on doing everything in my power to protect it.

Even with these brave thoughts, I knew—we all knew—that destruction was inevitable. We sent out distress messages as far and wide as we could. Help came from the least-wanted place: our future. The Time Rift opened again, and an army of gigantic, self-propelled Exosuits marched through. As much as we feared the repercussions of another disturbance in the timeline, we couldn't afford to turn them away, and we didn't have the power to do so regardless.

The Guardians are a gift from a dying future. They left behind their world to help us save ours. While we haven't learned how they work yet, it is obvious they are far more advanced than our technology. Moreover, it is clear this technology was developed by experts intimately familiar with time travel. The preset program that controls the Exosuits was created based on detailed knowledge of the Impact and its aftermath—information that will give us an unbelievable advantage against the impending disaster. With the Paths' aid and the Guardians on our side, we might just stand a chance against fate!





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