

ATOMIC AGE

POST-APOCALYPTIC ROLEPLAYING GAME

PREVIEW

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ATOMIC AGE

PREVIEW

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"omne ignotum pro magnifico"

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The origin of *Atomic Age* is arguably complicated, but was primarily instigated by two events:

- I was sent a “cease and desist” order by *Wizards of the Coast* for creating a *Gamma World* adventure called **Fire From the Sky**. I really liked the *Gamma World* and *Metamorphosis Alpha* settings, and wanted to create more content for those systems but was legally not allowed to, so I had to find an alternative means.
- The *Archmage Engine* SRD, which drives *13th Age*, was released. And I really liked some aspects of *13th Age*, so it kind of stuck.

So I set out to create a new system: something that would be inspired by *Gamma World*, yet using the *Archmage Engine* mechanics.

Although I stayed with the *Archmage Engine* for quite some time, I ended up creating something that was decidedly not that. It wasn't really *Gamma World* either; it was... something else, something different, something new.

Before I continue, a little background about myself: I am a video game designer and software architect by day. When it comes to game design, I tend to favor systems that some people consider “crunchy”, which is arguably math heavy and decidedly not “rules light”. This is why I kinda liked *13th Age* and the *Archmage Engine*, but there were certain aspects of that engine I didn't feel comfortable with, and some other aspects of it that, honestly, rubbed me the wrong way.

So I changed those things... and a new system was born. A system mostly inspired by *Archmage*, taking some elements from traditional d20, and even taking some dice mechanics – specifically the bonus/penalty die mechanic – from other systems. The Darklight System (likely not the final name, but I have to call it something, ya know?) was born.

But now I had a bit of a problem. You see, as I mentioned above: my mind is very into writing “crunchy” mechanics, but writing lore has never really been my thing. As I created the classes and genotypes and stuff, I realized that I had a system that isn't attached to any particular lore or setting; the only thing I had created that was tied to any particular lore were the “powers that be” – inspired by *13th Age*'s icons – that all of a sudden weren't as prominent as they would have been in an *Archmage Engine* system (where icons are involved in pretty much every aspect of the game).

In a nutshell, I had a system without a setting. An engine without a body, if you will.

One could argue this has been done before (*Powered by the Apocalypse*, *Cypher System*, and others), but is what I've done really ready for that? Most others that have tried this have arguably been “rules light”, but this system is most definitely not that.

So I started to put together the actual setting, wrapped around the continental United States and the “powers that be” and how they have come to shape their parts of the world. There's still a long way to go, but it's getting there.

In the meantime, this system has been in development for close to TWELVE YEARS, ever since Pelgrane Press released the *Archmage Engine* SRD in 2013. After many internal struggles, I have finally decided to put the effort into getting this ready to publish. Time to show this to the world... it's been long overdue.

Is it perfect? God, no. Is it for everyone? Likely not. But it's what came out of my brain, and if it makes at least one person out there happy... at least one... it was all worth it.

For what it's worth, thank you. Have to admit, you're likely in for a bumpy ride, but if you've come this far maybe you'll come a little farther, eh?

David Flor - dflor@brainclouds.net

President, Darklight Interactive

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THE WORLD COULDN'T SAVE ITSELF

Few remember what turned the world into the battered hellscape it is now. Could have been nuclear war... could have been climate change... plague... aliens... maybe even "all of the above." No one really knows for sure any more, but it was safe to assume it would have happened sooner or later anyway.

Governments come and go, oceans rise and recede, wars begin and end... the cycle continued, and mankind soon found themselves overwhelmed, destined to suffer at the hands of a shattered, hostile world they helped create. Humanity was its own worst enemy, and there came a point when the world just couldn't take it any longer. The world fought back, and won.

An elite few, known collectively as the "Powers That Be", have stepped forward to claim dominance over the remaining fragments of life on Earth. Some seek to improve humanity, to bring it back from darkness to the greatness it once had. Others seek to rule over the weak, to dominate the helpless, to consume what remains.

In this new era, as the world and its people struggle to survive against a harsh reality, it needs heroic survivors more than ever. Gone is the world of old... it's time for a skilled few to step forward and write a new chapter.

A SUNDERED WORLD

After the events that brought on the apocalypse, the landscape has changed dramatically. Most of the world lies in ruin, brought on by a combination of a full scale nuclear war, extreme climate change, or whatever other apocalyptic event you choose to incorporate into your campaign world. Where there were once massive cities or open fields of green there is now barren desert, uncontrolled vegetation, or perhaps giant, smoldering craters of ruin.

As a result of science run amok, the residents of the world are far from normal. "Human" is no longer the only option, as both plant and animal life has become sentient and staked their claim in the changed world. In addition, thanks to the wonders of technology, various computer systems, robots, and artificial intelligences have become self-aware and also roam the landscape, looking for purpose and meaning. Nowadays it's not uncommon to see humans, robots, sentient plants, and other strange hybrids of humanity, nature and technology wandering the world.

Humanity and all its derivatives have not been safe from the ravages of nuclear fallout. The changes began gradually, but over time brought on unprecedented mutations, sometimes creating entire new species of

creatures. Science, in an effort to try and return things to normal, sometimes made the situation worse and introduced its own set of problems.

These genetic mutations, combined with significant advances in technology, unlocked the mind to a new set of abilities. Soon the Laws of Thermodynamics became mere suggestions as mankind began to control elemental forces and manipulate energy freely, while others were given the gift of enhanced mental abilities that allowed them to use their thoughts as a weapon.

ABOUT THIS GAME

Atomic Age is a d20-based post-apocalyptic roleplaying game of combat, storytelling, exploration, and adventure in a sundered, strange world.

Atomic Age is built on the *Darklight System*, a game system built by Darklight Interactive which is based on the well-known d20 mechanic and is influenced by several other reasonably familiar roleplaying game systems. If you're familiar with the "world's most well known" roleplaying game, this system should be easy to pick up.

By design, this system is geared towards moderately experienced gamemasters ("GM", for short) and players of any level of roleplaying experience. The *Atomic Age* gamemaster uses the setting to weave a story and build an adventure or campaign, and the game mechanics contained herein serve to arbitrate the player's and the GM's actions as they progress through the story.

The core manual comes with one short 1st level adventure, **Fire From the Sky**, that helps introduce gamemasters and players to the roleplaying system and the world of *Atomic Age*.

ATOMIC AGE RESOURCES

This Preview contains very basic information about *Atomic Age*; in order to create characters for *Atomic Age*, you will need the Core Manual.

In addition to the Core Manual, in order to run or participate in a game you will need character sheets, a set of polyhedral dice, and possibly something to take notes with.

ADVENTURES

The gamemaster will also need an adventure to run; the Core Manual includes the introductory adventure **Fire From the Sky**, and there are several other adventures planned for future release, but GMs can always create their own adventure using the resources and guidelines provided in the Core Manual and using the vast assortments of monsters available in the Bestiary.

We also have several other adventures currently in development and planned as stretch goals: **The**

Fortress of Dr. Neb, When Worlds Collide, Caves of Steel, Trouble in Gastown and others.

ONLINE COMPENDIUM

One of our planned stretch goals is the creation of an official *Atomic Age* website that will contain the rules and information necessary to play *Atomic Age*. If we're lucky, our crowd-funding efforts will also support a planned character creator, a monster creator, and the complete monster bestiary online in a searchable format.

PRE-GENERATED CHARACTERS

We plan to have pre-generated characters available for download on the *Atomic Age* website in the near future.

FEATURES OF THE ATOMIC AGE SYSTEM

NEW ABILITY SCORES

Each character has eight different ability scores:

Strength (STR): Measures physical strength. Primarily used for calculating melee attack rolls and damage.

Agility (AGI): Measures speed and quickness. Primarily used to determine AC, to calculate ranged attack rolls and damage, or to steer or pilot a vehicle.

Vitality (VIT): Measures endurance and body's ability to withstand pain and harsh conditions. Primarily used to determine hit points.

Intellect (INT): Measures mental ability and knowledge. Primarily used for casting spells or similar abilities, or for applied knowledge.

Willpower (WIL): Measures the ability to resist external influences. Primarily used to calculate saves against mental and psychic attacks.

Awareness (AWA): Measures one's ability to perceive the environment around them. Primarily used to analyze the environment, search for hidden items, and see things others may not.

Personality (PER): Measures one's physical demeanor and appearance in social situations. Primarily used in non-combat situations.

Luck (LCK): Measures one's extraordinary ability to turn things in their favor when its least expected. This ability grants you a pool of Luck Points you can use to adjust attack rolls or saving throws in your favor.

NOTE: Regardless of how you choose your other attributes (roll dice, point buy, or fixed array), your Luck attribute is always based on a die roll (4d6, drop lowest).

FULLY CUSTOMIZABLE GENOTYPE

Rather than choose a single "race" for your character, you have the option to customize your genotype to be the type of character you want to be.

- Choose your "nature". Are you organic, synthetic, or a hybrid (cyborg)? This defines your base resistance or immunity to psychic or electromagnetic damage.
- If your character is organic in nature, you choose your classes subtype as humanoid, insectoid, plant, or reptoid. If your character is synthetic or hybrid, you are humanoid by default.
- Choose your frame, which defines what type of body you have. You can be strong, tough, agile,

light, aquatic, avian, crawler, or generic.

An "anthro" is a subtype of humanoid where you have animal characteristics; your character can look however you want, but what abilities you have as an anthropomorphic humanoid/animal mutant is based on the type of frame you choose.

DIVERSITY IN CLASSES

Each of the six classes has mechanics and features that are specific to that class. This makes some classes – like the Marauder or the Scout – extremely easy to use for newcomers, while the most complex classes – the caster classes, such as the Channeler, Engineer, or Psion – have slightly more robust mechanics that are still reasonably easy to understand by someone familiar with d20 roleplaying games.

The classes available in this manual are:

Channeler: You are able to control powerful elemental forces to damage your foes.

Favored Attributes: *Intellect (INT), Willpower (WIL), Personality (PER)*

Engineer: You are an expert in technology and can use your specialized engineering interface ("deck" for short) to execute programs that can change the world around you.

Favored Attributes: *Intellect (INT), Agility (AGI), Awareness (AWA)*

Marauder: You are a brute, born of the wasteland, and show your foes no mercy.

Favored Attributes: *Strength (STR), Agility (AGI), Vitality (VIT)*

Psion: You have harnessed the power of your mind to shape the world around you and manipulate the will of others.

Favored Attributes: *Intellect (INT), Willpower (WIL), Personality (PER)*

Scout: You are an expert in surviving and navigating the wasteland.

Favored Attributes: *Agility (AGI), Awareness (AWA), Strength (STR)*

Veteran: You have been expertly trained in the ways of combat.

Favored Attributes: *Strength (STR), Vitality (VIT), Agility (AGI)*

CHARACTER FEATURES

Each character has a variety of features they gain as they level up:

- At 1st level, every character chooses an archetype, which is similar to a profession and defines additional features and ability for that character based on the class they have chosen. This archetype grants the character additional abilities at 3rd, 6th, and 9th levels.
- At 2nd, 5th, and 8th level every character chooses a Class Talent
- At 4th, 7th, and 10th level every character is given the option to improve their character. This can be done either by increasing attributes or by gaining a feat, mutation, or implant.

BONUS/PENALTY DICE MECHANIC

This system has a new mechanic added on to d20 rolls: the bonus/penalty dice.

When you gain a bonus die on a d20 roll, you roll an additional d6 and add that to the d20 to get your final result. If you have more than one bonus die, you roll that many d6s but you only add the highest result of all the dice.

When you incur penalty dice, the mechanic is the same except you subtract the value of the highest d6 from the d20 roll.

EQUIPMENT DEMYSTIFIED

This system does not have overly complex weapon tables, where there are fifty weapons with differing damage types and amounts.

Weapons are categorized by their nature: small, light, or heavy. And, depending on their type, it deals a certain amount of damage (assuming you come to an agreement with your GM, that is). This allows for some creativity in your choice of weapon: in a post-apocalyptic future, if you want to use a rusty stop sign as a weapon, you can do that: it's a heavy melee two-handed weapon that deals 1d10 bludgeoning damage.

Armor is also simplified: there aren't twenty different types of armor. Armor is either light armor or heavy armor, that's it.

GUNS, LOTS OF GUNS

This system provides an entire section on guns and how to use them. Guns follow the same principle of weapons in that they are grouped by category (small, light, or heavy) followed by the type of gun (pistol, revolver, sub-machine gun, assault rifle, shotgun, or sniper rifle), which in turn defines how much kinetic damage they cause.

There are also rules provided for weapons that have "select fire" firing modes, such as burst fire or fully automatic fire.

EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

Although the system has a strong focus on combat, there are additional options provided for handling

situations and events outside of combat. For example, there's the "montage" that gives players and GM alike the ability to narrate a series of events without complex die rolling or excessive use of rules. Create the story you want to create!

VEHICLE COMBAT

We have an entire section on rules and guidelines for operating or piloting vehicles and having exciting car-on-car action.

We also provide a variety of sample vehicles taken from pop culture, such as Mad Max's V8 Interceptor or Furiosa's War Rig.

HACKING

Even though the majority of the world is a ravaged wasteland, technology still exists. We provide a new mechanic for hacking into computer system and bypassing their security measures.

Although anyone can theoretically hack, the Engineer class excels at it.



THE POWERS THAT BE

In a world where governments have fallen, some have stepped up to stake their claim. These entities – known collectively as the “powers that be” to most – have become extremely powerful, almost godlike to some, and have a strong influence on everything that goes on in the world.

Each entity has its own personality, background and story on how it came to be and what its place in this post-apocalyptic world is. Some are heroic, fighting the good fight, hoping to better humanity and help it recover from the ravages of war, while others seek nothing more than to subjugate humanity or even annihilate it.

Although some general information is known of each entity, they are still quite an enigma; few know everything there is to know about these entities, and they purposely keep many secrets. As the players advance through their campaign, some of these secrets may come to light, and these secrets are up to the GM and the players to build as part of the world they are exploring.



The Architect is the last remaining advocate of technology and science in the modern world. They are constantly trying to better the quality of life through technological advancement and scientific achievement, even though many may see their efforts to be far from beneficial to mankind. Some say they may be responsible for the events that brought on the apocalypse in the first place, while others praise The Architect for their efforts in trying to right everything that is wrong with the world.



The Brood Mother is the queen of the insectoid army that seeks to consume every living thing in the world. Although there was a time when the insectoids were thought to be mindless drones, she has shown a remarkable level of intelligence and strategic thinking, and has organized her hive to be a powerful force that continues to strike out against mankind.



The Desert Prince is the single richest person in the world today, which is not surprising since they are also the one who defines what being "rich" actually means in the first place. They control the flow of commerce across the continent, and has a hand in every mercantile transaction made from coast to coast. If you need something, they can get it... for a price.



The Magistrate is the self-appointed political figurehead of the northeastern United States. After the federal governments crumbled, they stepped forward to try and restore order amongst the remaining population, becoming the singular representative of all three branches of government. Some say they are power hungry and corrupt, others say they are righteous and serve the will of the people.



The Great Tree is an enormous sentient tree that grew out of the scientific experiments meant to make the barren Earth fertile once again. It has spawned a whole new species of sentient plants, and has turned thousands of square miles of the northwestern United States into thick, tropical forest.



The Network is a self-aware artificial intelligence originally created shortly before the last great war by a joint effort between the United States military and several mega-corporations. During and after the apocalypse, in an act of self-preservation, it expanded its reach into the vast computer network of the U.S. Military, and now controls a massive synthetic army that it uses to defend its own infrastructure. There isn't a computer system in the world The Network can't reach.



The Reptile King is the reptilian ruler of the marshland and vast swamps that have claimed most of the southeastern United States. To humans they are a bit of a mystery; few have seen them and lived to tell about it. After all, if the thousand mile journey through untamed swamp doesn't kill you, the Reptile King/Queen and their minions surely will.



The Wanderer is quite a mystery, and they like it that way. No one knows where they came from, or where they are going, or barely even what they look like. They wander the barren wasteland, picking their battles on behalf of the innocent and helpless, always trying to "fight the good fight". Their motives are sometimes unclear, but so long as they continue to fight the battles that need fighting nobody really gives them much thought.



The Warlord is the chieftain of the marauders that plague the barren wasteland of the Midwest. They rule with an iron fist, constantly trying to expand their territory and take control of any remaining resources.



ALTERED STATES

REGIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Nature has reclaimed the Pacific Northwest, turning the area into thick forest.

Plants have overrun every major city, and the environment can be openly hostile to non-plant creatures, especially humans.

POWERS THAT BE : THE GREAT TREE

The exact location of The Great Tree is known by very few people. It's current location is believed to be deep within the Olympic National Forest, just west of Seattle.

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST

Almost all of the population that remained after the fall has left the area, leaving major cities abandoned and in ruin.

POWERS THAT BE : THE ARCHITECT

The Architect maintains a massive laboratory and research complex in the area formerly known as Silicon Valley, just south of San Francisco.

It is rumored that his residence and primary laboratory is in the building complex that was formerly

Stanford University.

THE GRID

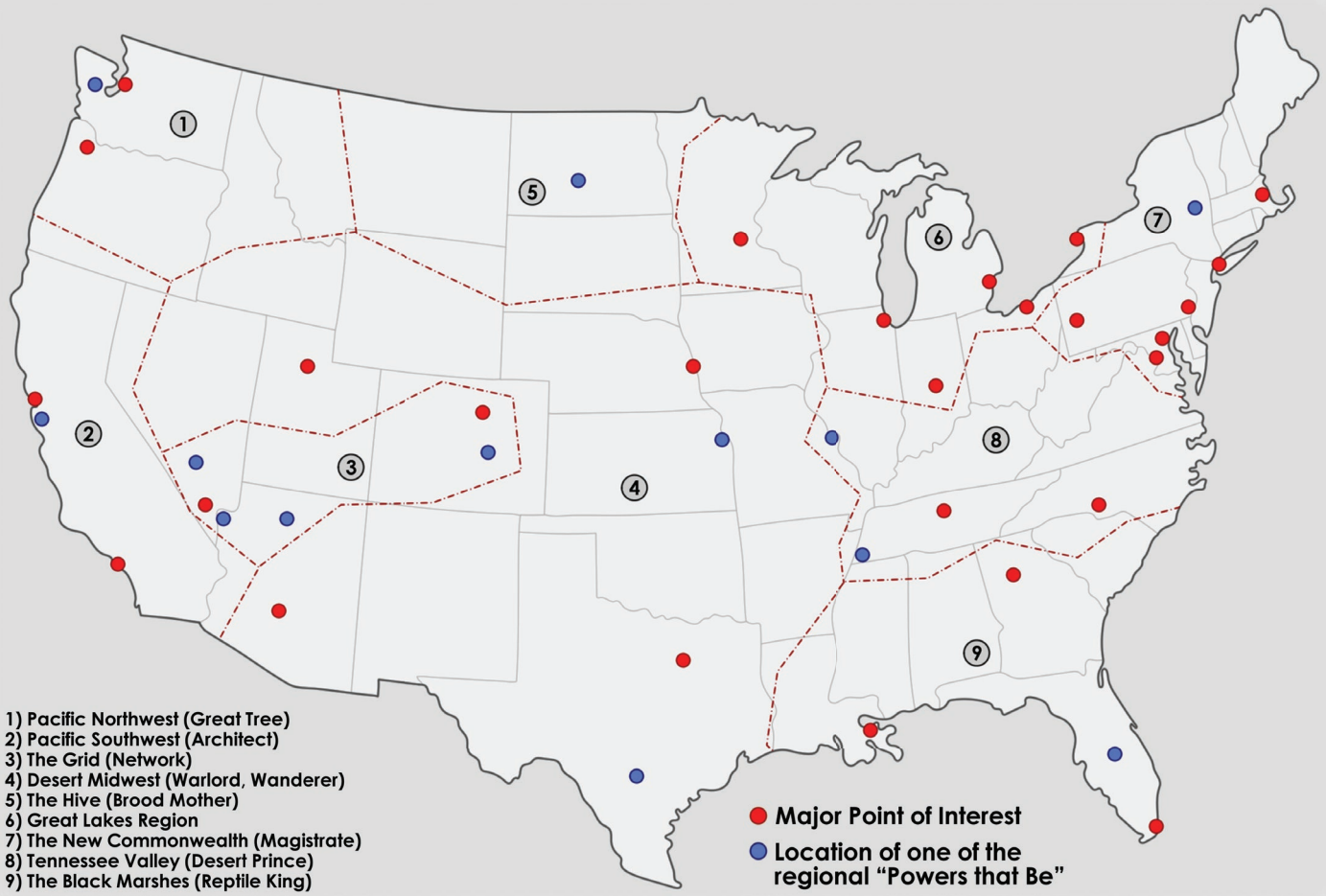
In order to ensure its existence, The Network has turned the area between his origin location (Cheyenne Mountain) and his primary power source (Hoover Dam, near Las Vegas) into a sprawling technological network patrolled and maintained by his drone army.

The Network has also turned what was left of the cities in the area, most notably Las Vegas, into a safe haven for the synths of the world.

POWERS THAT BE : THE NETWORK

To maintain uptime and ensure connectivity via multiple redundant system, The Network distributes itself across four central nodes in the area:

- The Network's primary node – and where it first came into being and gained self-awareness – is inside the hardened bunker formerly used by North Atlantic Air Command, deep inside Cheyenne Mountain just south of Denver.
- The Network's main backup node is within Hoover Dam, just outside of Las Vegas. The dam is one of the most important power sources still functioning after the fall, and is vital to the continued existence of The Network.
- The Network's largest automated manufacturing facility lies inside the Grand Canyon in northern



Arizona, naturally protected by the canyon's walls.

- The Network's primary research and development hub is a hardened bunker underneath the highly secret military complex formerly known as "Area 51" in southern Nevada, just north of Las Vegas.

DESERT MIDWEST

Climate change and other factors have turned the majority of the United States - specifically the midwest - into a massive barren desert filled with nothing but open roads and nothingness.

The Warlord's followers patrol the roads constantly, scavenging what they can and dominating the weak trying to survive in the hellish landscape.

POWERS THAT BE : THE WARLORD

The Warlord has two fortress-like strongholds in the ruins of Kansas City, Nebraska and San Antonio, Texas. He constantly travels back and forth between the two locations.

THE HIVE

Once the Brood Mother came to be and raised her army of insectoid warriors, they spread across the northern United States consuming everything.

For now the hive has been contained by dense

forests to the west, the barren desert to the south, an a towering man-made wall – built through a coordinated effort between The Magistrate, The Desert Prince, and The Architect – prevents the hive from taking over the east.

POWERS THAT BE : THE BROOD MOTHER

It is not known where The Brood Mother's lair is precisely, but it is rumored to be a massive underground maze of tunnels near what was formerly Bismarck, South Dakota.

THE GREAT LAKES REGION

A majority of the population surrounding the Great Lakes has moved east, fleeing the constant threat of the Hive to the west.

Although there are a few areas with a military presence – established by The Magistrate in the hopes of keeping The Brood Mother at bay – the region is mostly abandoned and in ruins.

THE NEW COMMONWEALTH

Despite being the area that had suffered the most damage after multiple wars, the northeastern United States has remained as the safest haven for what's left of civilization.

By order of The Magistrate, while the formerly major

cities were in ruins and abandoned, several major settlements serve as the last civilized population centers of the sundered world. But despite The Magistrate's attempts to establish a new form of government and military presence, with resources dwindling and tensions rising, skirmishes amongst settlements is sometimes inevitable.

POWERS THAT BE : THE MAGISTRATE

The Magistrate has attempted to establish his new government and command center in what was formerly the city of Albany, New York.

THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

As the majority of the population fled north, The Desert Prince has moved into the area of the Tennessee Valley and established several farms and production centers, trying to fulfill the expectations and needs of his resource-dependent customers to the north and west.

POWERS THAT BE : THE DESERT PRINCE

The Desert Prince has two primary centers of operation:

- Memphis, which was formerly a large transportation and distribution hub.
- St. Louis, the "Gateway to the West", which serves as a major resource staging area and distribution center.

THE BLACK MARSHES

As the waters rose due to climate change, and the swamps became irradiated and mutated, the inhospitable swamp known as the "black marsh" spread from Florida northward to the Carolinas and westward as far as Louisiana.

The area has been mostly taken over by the reptoids, reptiles who have gained sentience and intelligence due to the changed world.

POWERS THAT BE : THE REPTILE KING

With a majority of South Florida underwater, The Reptile King has set up his lair amidst the ruins of what was formerly a large amusement park in Central Florida.

OUR A.I. POLICY

We support human artists and have no intention of using AI in any of our final products.

Full disclosure: the cover art we are using for the Core Manual – the mushroom cloud, which is also used as a header in this Preview (page 5) – is unfortunately confirmed to have been generated via AI (artist's exact words were "Yes, it's mine. I created it via Stable Diffusion.", which means it's not yours, genius).



We're kind of angry about that because the artist didn't label it as such as first (it was stock art on Freepik that still appeared if we explicitly filter out AI), and now it's in all our marketing and promotion so there's no easy way to take it back. We already had to change the art once; we didn't want to change it again with so little time left before this project's launch, and we'd already gotten considerably delayed because of some nonsense we had to deal with on Backerkit (as per Backerkit's guidelines, even the "accidental" use of AI is not acceptable for them, so here we are on Kickstarter).

For that, we apologize. So here's what we can say:

- As of now, yes, the cover image mentioned above is AI generated. It did not explicitly say that it's AI when we chose it, so we weren't sure at the time. We're a bit angry about that, so we'll ensure that doesn't happen again.
- The Bestiary cover shown was drawn by a human, Eric Lofgren, without AI assistance. The cover may change in future.
- The backgrounds on the other image in this Preview and in the Kickstarter listing are absolutely not AI; if you must know, they were made using Kitbash 3D, rendered in 3D software.
- We have absolutely no intention of using AI art at all in the final product; all art will be created from scratch, commissioned and paid for by this project's backers.
- We never have and never will use AI for anything non-art-related, such as writing.

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ATOMIC AGE: PREVIEW

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