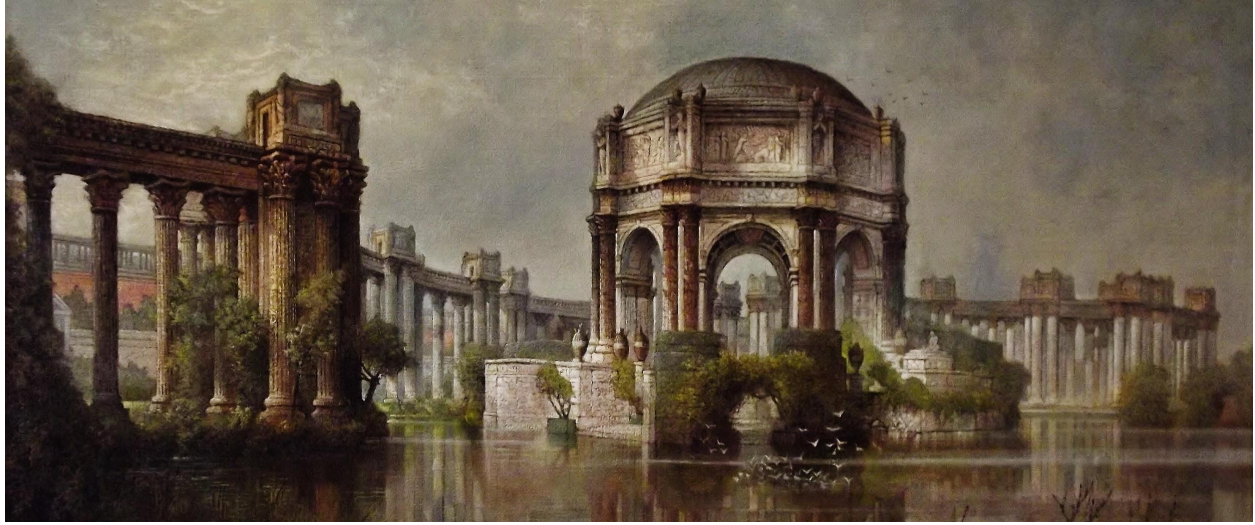


The Academy



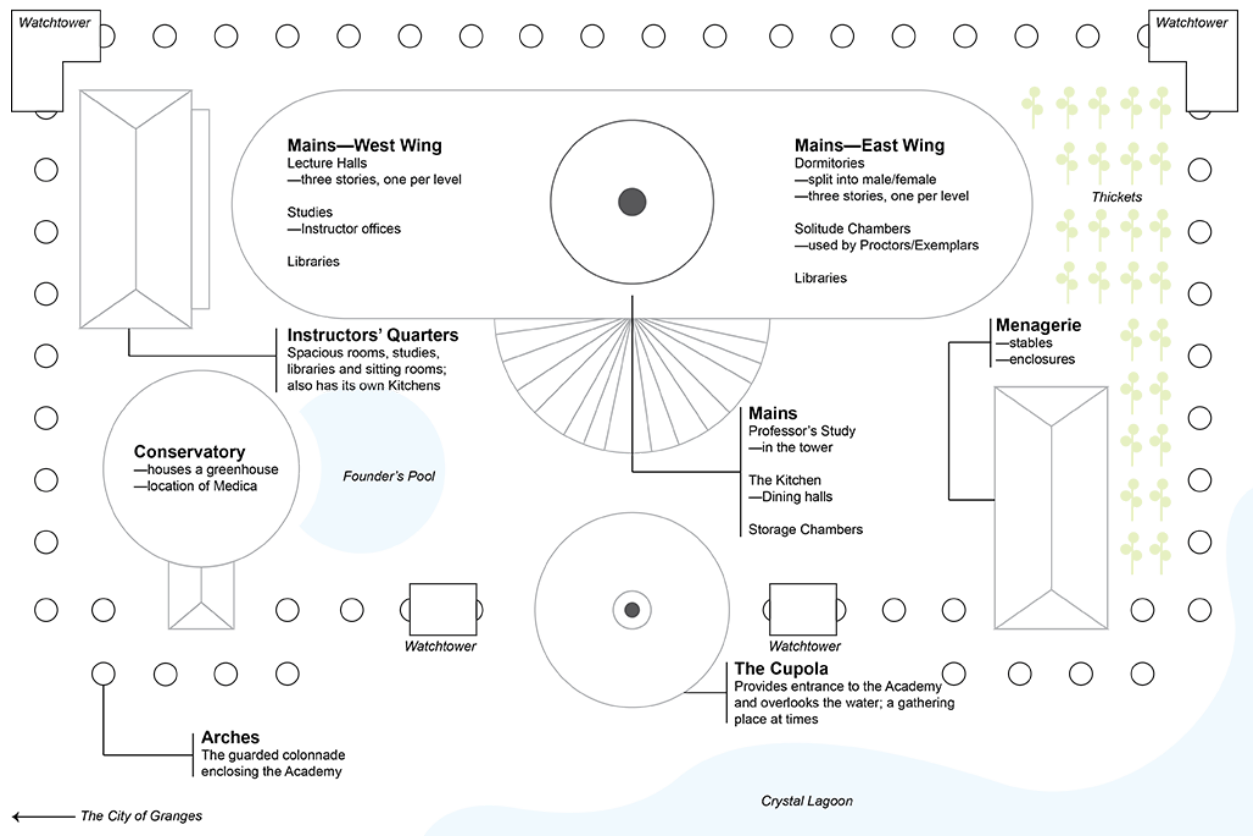
For centuries, the Academy has existed, its Instructors educating select students in Knowledge. Knowledge is the greatest of powers, more deadly than blade or beast. There are four pillars (or Books) of Knowledge: Arcane, Occult, Lore, and Spectral. The four Founders each mastered one of the Books and founded the Academy to spread their Knowledge throughout the world.

History states that upon establishing the Academy, the Founders became the Professor, a powerful, omniscient wielder of all four pillars. Able to break apart into a variety of people, the Professor teaches all levels of students at the Academy from Scholars to Exemplars at the same time. Sometimes male and other times female, the Professor is an ever-changing master of Knowledge.

The Academy is located in the City of Granges. It takes up the majority of the land, its grounds pristine and filled with priceless artifacts of centuries past. Those who live outside of the Academy view it fearfully, but they acknowledge the purpose it serves.

Map of the Academy

The Academy



The Academy is a five-story building. It also has a grand entryway with lots of plush, comfortable seats for students to relax in as they study. Mains, as it is called, houses dormitories, lecture halls, studies, libraries, Kitchens and the Professor's office.

Additionally, there is a large home for Instructors on the grounds. Students often find their way to the Conservatory and Menagerie as they expand their understanding of Knowledge. The Cupola serves as an entry to the Academy, but students gather there for the view of the Crystal Lagoon—particularly on nice days.

Thickets is a dense forest. Plenty of natural ingredients can be found here.

The Arches is a colonnade enforced by Knowledge to keep unpermitted Ethereals from entering the grounds. To be safe, guards patrol the Arches and inhabit Watchtowers.

Levels of Education

Students in the Academy range in age from eight to twenty-four, each level generally divided by age:

Scholars: Beginners in the Academy are known as Scholars. They are usually between ages eight and twelve. As newbies, they spend a lot more time studying under the Instructors. The Professor occasionally interacts with the Scholars in groups. Since they are new to Knowledge, they are very excitable and enthusiastic, but their skills are raw and untrained.

Proctors: Between ages 13–20, students study exclusively beneath the Professor in small groups. They are more comfortable in the Academy and must assist Instructors with Scholars. Proctors also oversee various chores around the Academy including: food preparation, cleaning, dormitory duties, and groundskeeping. Because they are more polished in their understanding of Knowledge, they can be trusted to practice on their own or in groups.

Exemplars: From ages 21–24, students prepare what is known as their Thesis. Upon exhibiting expert Knowledge of their Book, they are considered Fellows. If desired, Fellows can become Instructors at the Academy. After the more strenuous work of their Proctor years, Exemplars are allowed lots of time to study Knowledge on their own. They usually interact with the Professor privately.

Exceptions do apply:

Hopefuls: Some prodigies are adept at Knowledge. They easily outpace Students of their level and study with the Professor just like Exemplars. Hopefuls are still responsible for fulfilling duties of their age range, but they are generally more advanced than other students.

Mishaps: Every year, students must pass an Examination to continue in Knowledge. Some students do not pass their tests and are held back another year. Generally, this occurs during the Scholar years. Despite being behind, this usually evens out in later years when they breeze through other aspects of Knowledge. Until they return to their intended year, they are known as Mishaps.

Staff of the Academy

The Academy is able to function because of its staff.

The Professor: The master of all four pillars of Knowledge; the Professor teaches Knowledge at and oversees the Academy. He (and often she) has many faces and none are certain if any of them are the real Professor

The Instructors: They train Scholars in the use of Knowledge; most Instructors were students at the Academy. It is a very handsomely paid position that allows them room and board on the Academy grounds.

The Fellows: Upon completing their Thesis, Exemplars become Fellows. They may opt to live in apartments on the Academy grounds and train to become Instructors, or they can leave and become advocates for their Knowledge.

The Kitchen: Known collectively as the Kitchen, the chefs, cooks, janitors and servers see to it that all students are fed. Proctors often assist with cleaning and serving.

The Physicians: Knowledge can be quite dangerous. Physicians are trained in setting bones, administering elixirs, performing surgeries, regenerating limbs, and much more. They are all Magi for the most part, but some are Apparitioners.

The Guards: The Academy must be protected and the Guards do just that. In addition to able-bodied swordsmen, there are Magi and Diviners in their midst.

The Groundskeepers: The landscapers, architects, engineers, carpenters, and custodians of the Academy. Proctors often assist them in their work to gain Knowledge.

Basics: Anyone who is unversed in Knowledge but serves a role at the Academy (generally cleaning staff).

Knowledge

In Etherea, Knowledge is the greatest power in existence. To become practiced in its use, one must study. There are four recognized pillars of Knowledge:

Arcane Knowledge: Philosophers use it to read minds, move objects mentally, recall the memories of others, create illusions, and control elements.

Occult Knowledge: Magus are able to use magic once they master the occult. In Etherea, magic is mostly defined by the ability to alter one's form or the form of another, teleportation, disappearing, moving objects with the movement of one's hands (palm must face away), and the creation of temporary spells. Some Magus use staves to control the movement of things or to aid in their magic.

Old Lore: Diviners are capable of summoning what Ethereals refer to as forgotten beasts: dragons, unicorns, centaurs, minotaurs, pegasus, daemons and more to serve them however they see fit. They can also control the elements (earth, fire, wind and water)

Spectral Knowledge: Master Apparitioners are able to enter the spiritual world where they are able to study the aura of others. In this state, they are able to heal most diseases and have been rumored to control specters.

Dark Knowledge: This unrecognized branch of Knowledge is supported by the Order. Sages, those who have mastery of Dark Knowledge, are able to control others, imprison souls, bring forth destruction, and otherwise create chaos. The Academy guards against such Knowledge.

The Origin of Knowledge

The origin of Knowledge is often debated and some prefer that it be kept secret. Most are taught that Knowledge was the result of dedication and peace. The truth is much different. In Nørd, there was a Tree. It was formed of precious gems and metals. Tended by a small group known as Devouts, the Tree flourished and bore fruit in the form of shards. Each shard was beautiful and never fell from the branches. Four different people were drawn to the Tree at different times, each to take a shard.

The Arcanist took the first shard, her mind opened to possibility. The second was claimed by the Occultist, his strength and cleverness expanded beyond their regular limits. The third shard went to the Scribe, a woman who was given the power to control the essence of life. The fourth shard was presented to the Spectralist, a man allowed to see the souls of things. The four realized that these abilities, that Knowledge, was a great responsibility. They swore to never take another shard from the Tree for it was mutually understood that it would be too much responsibility for any Ethereal to hold.

Fate was cruel and the first Sage's forceful removal of a shard killed the Tree. He became versed in Dark Knowledge and his teachings would bring suffering to Etherea. Dark Knowledge craved evil deeds and those who followed it were consumed by its power.

The four recipients of Knowledge defeated this dark Order and established a great Academy to train Ethereals who were granted Knowledge by forces of fate and destiny. Eventually, the Academy could not teach so many students, so the four became the Professor and trained others to take on a similar role in regional schools.

Schools of Knowledge

The Academy is the most comprehensive of all institutions versed in Knowledge. It is located centrally in Etherea in the City of Granges.

The Gymnasium in the North practices Occult Knowledge exclusively, their Magus often known as Sorcerers (or Sorceresses).

The Basilica to the south focuses on both Old and New Lore despite the fact that New Lore is much weaker.

In the east, one can learn Spectral Knowledge at **the Cathedral** or Arcane Knowledge at **the College**.

In the west, the Order teaches Dark Knowledge in the **Catacombs**.

How Knowledge Works

Knowledge can be manifest in multiple ways:

Written—If Knowledge is written, it is generally Occult or Lore. In Occult writings, spells or charms are crafted to serve specific purposes. They are composed on special papers using brushes. In Lore, writing is used to make crests for summoning. Most are drawn using staves.

Spoken—Incantations, chants, magic words, and in Occult, Lore, Spectral and Dark Knowledge. They can be used to invoke, alter or banish.

Internal—Arcane Knowledge is the most heavily internal of all and very difficult to teach if a student is not inclined to it. Mental strength enables the wielder of Arcane abilities to do amazing things like listen to another's thoughts. They are able to create entire worlds in the eyes of others allowing them to construct elaborate illusions. Some Dark Knowledge is internal, but not to the level of Arcane Knowledge.

Consumed—One can ingest elixirs crafted by Magus. These can give temporary abilities (flying, for example), or cause temporary suffering (blindness). Any potion created using Dark Knowledge is potentially fatal.

External—Both Occult and Dark Knowledge use external Knowledge in the same way. By focusing on an object with one's palm facing it, it is possible to move it (like making a book fly into their hand or throwing a rock at someone else). In this same manner, blowing very hard can create a strong gust of wind, and stomping on the ground can cause an earthquake.

Natural—Arcane, Occult and Dark Knowledge can control the elements. In the Arcane, this happens mentally (it is considered natural as it is not created by the Philosopher and must exist somewhere, like a bucket of water). The Occult combines external cues to move existing water, earth, or fire. The only element they can control at all times is air. In Dark Knowledge, Sages capture the essence of an element (example, fire) and refine it for their own purpose (the bottled essence can be imbued to explode if the bottle is broken).

About Knowledge Use

Using Knowledge is a lot like using a muscle of the body. Training and practice refine the efficiency of Knowledge and make it easier to use for extended amounts of time. It requires bodily energy to use and can sometimes drain users of nutrients and cause strain on the heart, lungs and mind when used in excess. Historically, those who practiced from the recognized Books of Knowledge—Arcane, Occult, Old Lore and Spectral—could only use it for harmless and good purposes. Those who attempted to use Knowledge for evil found that the impact of their Knowledge was weaker than intended and drained much more energy than it did otherwise. Depending upon the purpose of the Knowledge, the wielder could potentially die of overexertion. There is no true understanding of why this happens, and most explain it as some invisible force of power judging each use of Knowledge.

For a time in the early decades of Knowledge education, hundreds died of improper Knowledge use. To stop these unnecessary losses, the Professor issued an oath that new students were required to accept, which formed a binding contract making it literally impossible for them to use Knowledge offensively. Such destruction would only be possible with sword and other physical weapons.

There are some moments when Knowledge can be used in a seemingly offensive way. If someone or something is attacking a Knowledge wielder, they can often defend themselves from attack. This does not drain nearly as much power as truly combative Knowledge, but it does allow the infliction of some pain upon the attacker.

Dark Knowledge overcomes this due to a ceremony involving what most describe to be a violet shard. Those who devote themselves to the Order must have their blood placed onto the shard and they gain the ability to use Knowledge for any evil they desire. This eventually becomes an all-consuming need until they expire from energy loss. Those who practice Dark Knowledge have pale, violet eyes that serve as a warning to others.

Etherea



Etherea is divided into five distinct regions: Cree, Granges, Nørd, Vandors and Szoír. The Queendom is ruled from Nørd by Queen Aureline, First of her Name. The remaining four regions have elected officials that rule from small palaces. These Archdukes and Archduchesses must send tribute to the Crown annually. In return, Ethera Røq provides assistance to small towns and alleviates strains that would lead to wars. Originally, the regions were separately ruled and war was commonplace.

Western Szoír is currently estranged from the rest of Etherea. The Impostor rules from Arnyax, the Order supporting him devotedly. Little can be gleaned from the nation and the Queen is keeping an eye on the situation there as it evolves.

Regions of Etherea

Cree—Major Areas in the East

Avalon—An eastern city that houses the massive institute known as the College. The town is along a coast, waterways serving as streets and boats as horses. Most Basics work as fisherman or traders, their vessels the best on the seas. They make bitter ale here and have few fruits or vegetables.

Paralon—A town outside of Avalon that is built partially over the water and partially over land. They have talented cobblers and haberdashers.

Elon—A village built within a fertile valley in Cree. They have a bustling agriculture industry and are known for their beef, leather, wool, mutton, knitwear, quilting, eggs, spicy nog, and cotton. Houses here have gardens and are enclosed in wooden or metal fences. The Bansca River flows through Elon.

Merlon—The largest city in Cree. The Cathedral is located centrally here. The Acolyte instructs students much like the Professor at the Academy. This region is filled with herbs, fruit, vegetables, and horses.

Granges—Major Areas in Central Etherea

The City of Granges (also known as The City by locals)—where the Academy is located. It has very favorable weather and a lot of successful wineries. Additionally, they produce the most paper, ink, dyes, linens, rugs, and cheese.

Groveton—This village outside of The City is notable for its fruit trees. Orchards span the majority of the land here along with flowers and hot springs. They find and bottle honey in addition to fruit wines and ales.

Henter—North of The City is Henter, a hunting town. Their massive forests provide a bounty of creatures including boars, deer, rabbits, foxes, wolves, bears, and pheasants. As such, they have many furs and leathers here as well as lumber.

Hollow—South of The City, Hollow is a town revolving around mining. They have a treasure trove of minerals, gems and metals available in the Schwarzbergen or Black Mountains. They produce armor and weapons at their forges.

Vandors—Major Areas in the South

Mardors—This Vandorian city is where the Basilica is located. Aspiring Diviners learn of Old and New Lore here. The streets are brick and the city is split into agricultural areas and political areas, the Basilica nestled nicely with the more industrial areas. They are known for their presses, wines, beers, olives, breads, pastas, and vegetables. As it is located along the water, they have a lot of merchants and fishermen.

Havadors—North of Mardors is Havadors. They are known for their ceramics, glass and pottery. Additionally, stringed instruments are constructed here.

Landors—East of Mardors is Landors. This town is built in and near Machburg. The mountains are filled with precious gemstones and waters that can be used in elixirs. They have lots of silks and they dye them using overly saturated colors.

Nørd—Major Areas in the North

Nørd—The Ethereal monarchy is located in Nord. The Queendom is ruled by Queen Aureline, first of her Name. She is preceded by her father, the late King Aurel and her mother Queen Regent Linia. The Queen Regent is aged, but serves as an advisor along with the Queen's Table. The monarchy regulates the teaching of Knowledge and requires that each institution's leader join her annually to audit their work. She is described as having golden hair with skin like cherry wood. She is fearless, intelligent and trained as a Philosopher and Diviner. The Nørdic castle is known as Ethera Røq.

Sud—Just south of Nord lies the town of Sud. It is where the Gymnasium is located, seekers of Occult Knowledge often studying in its old, wooden walls. This area is known for its diverse hunting areas, steeds, forges, nuts and mushrooms. They also produce coffee, cream, cheese, and chocolate.

Ost—East of Nord is the town of Ost. They are similar to Sud, but they tend to excel more at crafting furniture, utensils, flatware, linens, and pottery. In the spring, they have beautiful flowers which they use to dye their yarns and fabrics. Most colors here are pastel.

Szoír—Major Areas to the West

Egyax—A jungle city filled with exotic animals like the elephant and the peacock. The land here is riddled with gold and other treasures. Women from this region are considered the most beautiful in all the land. Queen Regent Linia hails from Egyax.

Arnyax—This mysterious city is home to the Order and their Catacombs. They practice Dark Knowledge and create deadly poisons. The city has a large, busy port and marketplace.

Cynax—This town is filled with talented craftspeople. They make all manner of goods, often being commissioned as far as Cree for their wares.

Islands of Creecia—Archipelago East of Cree

Originally known as Réheva, the Islands of Creecia were not always recognized by those on the “mainland,” similar to the Szoírín island which houses Arnyax. Most are taught very little of the island and those who come from it appear Szoírín at first glance. For this reason, many immigrants from the Islands moved to Szoír and established their herolds there. In addition to the common tongue of Etherea, they speak Réhevik. The designation of Creecia comes from its proximity to Cree. The islanders are usually considered Szoírín instead of Creecian, but older generations refer to them as Réhevens.

About Ethereals

Etherea is split into five regions, the crown kingdom being Nørd. Each region has its stereotypes and norms. All people in Etherea are referred to as Ethereals collectively. Each region has another name as well.

Cree—Creecians

People in Cree are olive-skinned and generally have wavy, darker colored hair. It is fairly common to see green or brown-eyed people here. They tend to be slim in this area, their pescatarian diet attributing to the glossy nature of their hair. Due to rowing, most have toned bodies.

Granges—Grangese

Those in Grange tend to be almond eyed with honey-brown skin. They mostly have very curly black or brown hair. Grangese are fairly average height, some ending up being tall further east. There are noticeably more overweight Grangese in southern towns, but they still make up a smaller percentage of the region. Eye color tends to skew grey, brown and green.

Vandors—Vandorian

In Vandors, people have lighter complexions that tan in the sunlight. Hair color here comes in more ranges—auburns, golds, brunettes, and sometimes mixtures of those. Eyes here are bursts of green, blue, gold, brown and grey. There are lots of overweight and obese Vandorians, the abundance of food the culprit.

Nørd—Nørdic

The Nørdic people are darker skinned with black hair in a range of textures (short with tight curls to smooth and straight). Eye color here is generally brown or hazel. People tend to be taller here and muscular.

Szoír—Szoírin

Szoírins have paler, milky complexions. They tend to have either black hair or very light blonde/platinum colored hair. Most are very slim of frame and tall. Eye color is usually blue, but those who practice Dark Knowledge end up having violet eyes.

About Ethereal Women

Women and girls in Etherea are generally tasked with organizational/mental labor. They oversee and direct others. Lots of girls learn handicrafts, ceramics, basket-weaving, hunting, horseback riding, cheesemaking, cooking, baking, wine pressing, musical instruments, singing, dancing, and painting.

Generally, what they wear varies by region. There are baggier pants and form-fitting shirts in the east; robes and dresses in the south; leather, cotton and denim in central Etherea; skirts, blouses and shawls to the west; and fur and denim to the north.

About Ethereal Men

Men and boys in Etherea are generally tasked with physical labor. They produce and manufacture items as well as buildings. Lots of boys learn carpentry, engineering, hunting, horseback riding, cooking, sewing, ceramics, fighting, painting, and sailing.

What they wear depends on the region. In the east, they wear loose fitting pants and form-fitting shirts; robes in the south; leather, cotton and denim in central Etherea, wide pants and long shirts in the west; and furs and denim in the north.

About Family Structure

Ethereals get their family names from their household. If a man marries into a woman's household, their children will receive the name of the wife's family. Therefore, women who marry into a man's household will have children that receive his family's name. Husbands and wives always retain their original family name. Most marry around twenty-five or twenty-six. Average Ethereal homes have three children.

If children do not study at an Institution, they apprentice themselves to learn a trade. This can take ten to twenty years to complete. Usually, they bring their skills back to their hometown.

About Marriage Heralds

When a marriage occurs, the two family heralds (usually a distinct logo featuring the main profession or location of a family; for example a fish for fishermen) are usually joined in unity objects. These include and are not limited to: stoles with the husband's logo on the dexter side and wife's logo on the sinister; embroidered patterns with alternating logos and filigree; metal bangles with the husband's logo worn on the right hand and the wife's on the left; metal bands with the husband's logo etched onto the surface and worn on the right hand ring finger while the wife's band is worn on the left hand ring finger. Different regions prefer different objects.

Common Heralds By Region

Cree

In Avalon, most heralds are related to the fishing profession. There are a variety of different fish, boats, ships, anchors or nets to represent families. In Paralon, most families use hats or shoes for their heralds.

Granges

The City has a lot of pens, scrolls, inks and grapevines as heralds. Groveton tends to use trees, fruit or birds as heralds. Henter has axes, bows and arrows, spears, swords, and wild animals (like bears, wolves, horses, stags, foxes and hounds). Hollows heralds include fire, pickaxes, and weapons.

Vandors

Mardors is known for having heralds of wheat, gourds, or architectural features (arches, pyramids, etc). Havadors usually has heralds of ceramics or stringed instruments. Landors uses mountains, drops of water, and bolts of fabric as heralds.

Nørd

In Sud, they have cocoa or coffee beans, horses, swords or axes for heralds. Ost uses flowers, pottery or silverware for heralds. In Nørd, most heralds have wheels, crowns, mountain peaks or weapons.

Szoír

In Egyax, heralds usually feature exotic animals like zebras, elephants, giraffes, lions, peacocks and tigers. Some heralds also depict chains or links. Arnyax heralds mostly show cobras or spiders. Cynax heralds are mostly of patterns or tools.

Ethereal Queendom

Ethera Røq has been the seat of power in Etherea for many centuries. There are smaller, regional palaces in addition to the Nørdic castle where descendants of the line of Regulus reign. The current monarch, Queen Aureline, succeeded King Aurel following his death. The Queen Regent, Linia serves aboard the Queen's Table.

In Etherea, succession is based upon order of birth, not gender. There have been more queens than kings in Etherea's history, and many of the monarchs were corrupt and overthrown. Under Aureline, Etherea is enjoying a period of peace.

Queen Aureline, first of her Name

The eldest of King Aurel's four children, Aureline has mastered both Arcane Knowledge and Old Lore. She is married to Thrane, a Creecian prince. Together, they have one son, Thraniel, who is four years old. Aureline is well-liked and ever-mindful of the advice her Queen's Table gives her. She studied Knowledge and Lore away from Ethera Røq and keeps the Ethereals at the foremost of her mind. She is the first of her line to study Knowledge since the formation of the monarchy. Rumor suggests that her mother, Queen Regent Linia encouraged the lessons adamantly.

Late King Aurel, third of his Name

King Aurel was not well-liked during his reign of Etherea. He taxed the regions heavily and without mercy. Additionally, he rarely entertained the requested needs of representatives from the other palaces. Most considered his death a blessing, and many Ethereals believe that King Aurel sold his soul to a Sage of the Order.

Ethereal Lexicon (in progress)

Ahdra: There is no direct translation for this Szoírin word, but it can be described as one who is close enough to be family. Generally used between men, the word is often defined as brother. Commonly, it is paired with the family name of the addressed.

Eves: Dinner (*a/so*, evens)

Fisherman's Banter: A card game played by bluffing and calling the bluffs of others until a player exhausts their hand of cards. It was popularized by fishermen and often includes wagers and bets. The game is exciting when played with close friends or strangers as it prompts conversation.

Gegen: A card game similar similar to the idea of Mahjongg. Depending on the books each player earns, the game can really go any which way. It is a Szoírin game and most decks are expertly painted with gold and fine paints. It is a game commonly wagered upon, both by those playing and those observing.

Jahrva: A Szoírin word for a leader. Translates best to commander, but could also be used as a title similar to mister or lord.

Nyx: Little can be done to hinder or halt these deadly water spirits. No one knows how they first came to be, but legends paint them as vengeful and angry. The most agreed upon origin tale is of a fair maiden who was murdered by being drowned in a river or lake. Her hatred grew so strong she became the first of the Nyx. She would lure some to the river using beautiful songs or pull unsuspecting passersby into it by their ankles. Those who died at her hands became Nyx themselves. Little can be done to combat Nyx with Knowledge. Most try to outrun them, but they are fairly invincible when near water. There are summons that are known to feast upon spirits like Nyx, but only Master Diviners know them. Nyx can join into one form or split apart into multiples at a whim.

Soul Eater: Ancient books describe certain instances where the soul of a particularly powerful Apparationer, Diviner, Philospher, Magus, or Sage remains after death. They haunt areas they used to visit when living and eat the souls of passersby. This sustains their soul and few know that the specter exists. Master Apparationers often cleanse areas when rumors of mysterious deaths spread, and they banish the specter to their rest. Most say that soul eaters are accompanied by thick fog and ice.

Wisp: A troublesome spirit visible to those who study Spectral Knowledge. Occasionally, Wisps can be seen on very dark nights with the untrained eye, though anyone who follows their light often ends up in danger. Several essences and oils attract them as they enjoy their fragrances. Most Wisps are blue in color, but there are occasional green ones in certain regions. Sages sometimes use Wisps in their spells and potions.

Tales from Etherea

Etherea is riddled with legends, rumors and stories passed along from neighbor to neighbor, friend to friend and generation to generation.

The Amethyst Watchers

Several tales of the Amethyst Watchers exist throughout Etherea. Most have been severely altered through retelling, and the following are the most popular.

The Shadow Dancer (usually told as a bedtime story)

Once, there was a naughty child. This child was not just bad sometimes, if so, he would only get a pop on the bottom. He wasn't lazy, ignoring his mother's orders. He wasn't a thief, stealing a sweet from the peddler's cart. No! This child was naughty, his mind filled with mischief, mayhem and how he might cause trouble.

One day, his grandma gave him a warning, 'If you don't stop being naughty, the Shadow Dancer will come. The Amethyst Watchers are ever vigilant from their Nightmare Palace, and the Shadow Dancer keeps an eye on the naughty children. If you catch her attention three times, she comes for you through the shadows. She will take your breath away with a kiss soft as feathers. Then she will take your soul with a touch from her gnarled, wrinkled fingers. You will spend eternity on her shelf of naughty children like a wooden puppet unable to move or speak, only watch the other naughty children from the Shadow Dancer's mirror.'

The boy did not heed her warning and he kept being naughty. He frightened horses, broke the toys of the other children, spat in food and kicked hounds. Again, his grandma warned him. 'If you don't stop being naughty, the Shadow Dancer will come for you. She will dance from shadow to shadow until she reaches yours. Then, she will embrace you and take you to the Nightmare Palace.'

Again, the boy ignored his grandma's advice and continued to revel in his naughty ways. He even laughed at her final warning. 'The Shadow Dancer moves closer, her breath is on your back, and she will take you soon. Amend your ways or pay the price.'

Sneering, the naughty boy yelled in her face that she was a foolish old woman. His grandma contorted her shape, her limbs twisting and turning unnaturally. Then, her skin fell to the ground in a heap as a black shadow leapt into the boy's own. Terrified, he ran, but the violet eyes of the Shadow Dancer were always behind him. Gently, she took him in her arms and kissed his forehead. His heart stopped beating, but he did not die. Numbed, he lie limp in her arms, like a stuffed doll. The Shadow Dancer took him back to the Nightmare Palace and placed him on a shelf amongst thousands of other children. His soul remained in her hand when she let him go, and before his eyes, she devoured it hungrily. Then, she turned her eyes to a large, round mirror and scoured Etherea for the next naughty child to become her dinner—you!

Tales from Etherea (continued)

Piebald the Seamster

Down a rarely traveled street and at the end of a narrow, crooked alley lie a seamster's shop. It was small and tight, the clothes nearly hiding the tall, crooked Piebald. He was pale with long, hooked fingers and spindly limbs weighed down by black robes and a hooded cloak. He would sew clothes from sunset to sunrise every night. They were beautiful clothes that some said granted wishes or caused others to fall in love with you. There was no finer material in all of Etherea and word of Piebald's skill spread far and wide. People would come from far and wide to wait in line at midnight when he opened his doors to one customer who could purchase one item. He had only one rule—never touch anything other than what you wanted to purchase. Most were confused by the rule, but were still obedient and heeded his warning.

One day, a girl entered his shop at midnight. She was a fair maiden, but she never listened to anyone choosing instead to do whatever she wished. When Piebald opened the door, he said his usual rules, in a deliberate, rehearsed tone. "Please enter, customer. You may look at my wares at your leisure. Each article costs one penny, but you may only touch what you intend to buy. If not, I will be forced to punish you for breaking my rules."

The girl slid inside and glanced at the clothes. While Piebald's back was to her, she touched several items. They felt soft as feathers and flower petals, so fine was the material Piebald used. Satisfied, the girl directed Piebald's attention to a golden dress she wished to purchase with her penny. The shop grew dark and the hood on Piebald's cloak flew back revealing a set of violet eyes. Before the girl could scream, the golden dress wrapped her up and suspended her from the ground.

'I warned you to touch only that which you intended to purchase!' He shouted, his shape like a haggard gargoyle. 'Since you refused to listen to my warning, you shall spend eternity in service to others.'

Piebald took the girl's soul and wound it around his needle. Then, he put it into a loom and began to make fabric. Her soul was the color of sunsets and flowers and the fabric followed this appearance when he finished his work at the loom. Then, he measured, cut and sewed a robe from the fabric of the girl's soul. A few nights later, another customer rang the bell of the shop and purchased the dress for a penny.

Tales from Etherea (continued)

The Beggar

In a busy square, merchants sold their wares to passersby. A bard sang songs and recited poetry atop the rim of a stone fountain, his tune attracting more families to the center of the town. Every day, near the western entrance to the square, a beggar would sit. He had long, thick, black hair that shone in the light like oil. His clothes were mere tattered rags and his eyes were hidden behind a white, linen bandage. Every day, the people would come and wander past his woven basket ignoring his plea for a coin.

One fateful day, a young girl noticed the beggar. Asking her mother and aunts about him, they told her not to look at him. He was just a poor man who was too lazy to provide for himself, they told her. Feeling pity for the man, she saved a coin her father gave her when she asked to buy a chocolate. Keeping the coin in a pouch, she looked forward to dropping it in the man's bag. When they went to the square again, she tossed it inside the basket when her family was not watching and skipped away merrily.

While she slept, she heard her name called. The sound woke her and she looked around the bedroom she shared with her family. Her siblings were asleep, but again she heard her name. Following the sound, she wandered to the gates of her family home and saw a man. He stood tall and straight, his black hair long and lustrous. He wore fine robes and his eyes were the color of lavender.

"Because you have given me a gift, I will grant you three wishes," the man said.

Confused, the girl asked for more clarification. The man repeated himself. "Whatever you wish, I will grant it. Whisper it into the wind and I will hear it. Sob it into your pillow and I will make it so. Think it in your heart and I will make it come to pass."

The girl blinked and the man was gone. The next morning, she and her family traveled to the square to sell their goods. The beggar was not at the western entrance and no one else noticed but the girl. She asked others if they had seen him, but they told her that it was good the old man was no longer there. With a sigh, she wished that she could see him again. A sudden wind blew through the square and standing in the center near the fountain was the beggar, but he looked like the man from outside the gates.

"You have your first wish," he said solemnly before turning to leave.

The townspeople thought the girl a Diviner of some sort and sent her away. Alone, she endured pain and hunger, her situation reminding her of what the beggar faced on his own. For over ten years, she survived alone, those around her treating her like dirt on the bottom of their sandals. Now a woman grown, she knew what her second wish would be.

Tales from Etherea (continued)

The Beggar (continued)

“If you were being honest about me having three wishes, then please, hear my second,” she said to the night sky. “Grant me land and wealth that I may take in children that are sent wrongfully from their homes and care for them.”

The next day, men on horseback came searching for the girl. She heard that her entire town had fallen victim to a plague and her family had perished. Since she was the only one who lived, their land would now be hers and their money also. Both grieved and happy, the girl returned home, her memories broken in her mind as she set about rebuilding the villa. It was tiring work, but she was successful and children came from all over to live with her.

While looking at herself in the mirror one day, she realized that she favored her mother. She wondered what her other siblings would look like had they lived. Depressed, she lie in bed, the children she had rescued worried that she was dying. As she cried uselessly into her pillow, she grew angry with herself. She wished that instead of being so pathetic and insignificant, she could be powerful and helpful.

All at once, the girl became aware of a deep Knowledge that burned itself into her mind like a red hot brand. She felt her body changing and she hobbled over to the mirror. Her brown hair had turned pale and white, like snow. Her eyes were violet and she blinked at them in awe. Knowing he would be there, she turned and faced the beggar from her youth.

“You also had three wishes before?” She confirmed.

He nodded. “This has happened for centuries, one Djinni searching for the next knowing that the three wishes the future Djinni makes will affect the lives of the world. I pass my Knowledge to you,” he let his forehead rest on hers and hundreds of lifetimes flowed into her, the man vanishing in a cloud of smoke.

Understanding her purpose, she left to find the next Djinni who would wish for three fantastic things.

OOC Comments

So, I thought it would be nice to include a few bits of info about my style of narration and myself. If you cannot tell, I really enjoy fantasy/fiction and world-building. Though I have never published anything before, I hope to one day. The worlds I've created on Storium—Etheria included—are meant to take advantage of this platform. As such, they are really new and I am constantly expanding upon them.

I have a few games going on Storium (they are fairly new and only a few scenes old). I like to give plenty of opportunity for you to build your characters and relationships with others. I might occasionally narrate a challenge without actual cards. I've discovered that Storium currently limits players to three cards per scene. To give everyone the most opportunities to play, I think it is best to do this.

Basically, I just want everyone to have a lot of fun and enjoy a bit of an escape from everyday life. What makes this most exciting for me is finding out how you use the world to your advantage and reading all of your moves.

About Moves

I've noticed that people sometimes have typos and small discrepancies in their moves. I won't ask you to submit revisions for those (especially if everyone is making moves as well). However, if you ever decide that you want to update something, I can "request revisions" on a past move to give you that opportunity.

Since Storium currently has no indication that players are writing or addressing challenges, I would suggest that you all let everyone know in the comments.

About Assets

Since there is currently no way to drop an asset card without addressing a challenge, I might narrate instances where you can sort of "discard" cards that no longer serve a purpose. Whenever that is happening, I will let you know in the comments (and the challenge will have the number of requirements necessary for everyone to get rid of useless cards).

About Goals

I cannot know exactly how goals will be used, but I will try to keep them in line with your own subplots and the story.

About Revisions

I don't really like how public the revisions box is. They are also annoying because once you request a change, it cannot be undone. If I do request a revision, please never feel bad about it. More than likely, it will be for the sake of the world's structure, and not what you have written.

About Shards of Etherea

This fantasy game is meant to allow players to imagine a sort of medieval superhero—though instead of a power, you will practice Knowledge. It is of utmost importance that you use the provided Nature and Subplot cards, otherwise the point of the world will not make sense. If you do not like the Strengths and Weaknesses, feel free to create your own (within reason).

Please use past tense when writing. I've realized that consistency makes it easier to read the game back smoothly. Ideally, I will begin with a chance for players to get to speak with one another and get comfortable with writing styles and such. I am extremely attentive on Storium (I'm East Coast time, btw), so if you have any questions, let me know in the commentary. It might be easy up front to let players know if you are working on a move so we don't have anyone writing over anyone else.

Challenges are going to be handled a bit differently for this game. Instead of everyone working towards one challenge all the time, I will have certain obstacles for each player to face. This could be in addition to a group goal. Be mindful of this during gameplay.

I will update this Google Doc occasionally as the game progresses (mostly adding in information that I deem necessary). Feel free to refer to this guide as often as you'd like.

About Submitting

Knowing a bit of what you're in for, I'd ask that you give your character a thorough background. The Academy selects every Scholar, so imagine what motivates them to choose you. In the pages that follow, I have added a lot of information to inspire you. It is important that you choose the correct Nature card when submitting. Also, do give your character an exact age. I have listed a few locations I will probably bring up throughout the game that can give you an idea of where your character can originate (feel free to make up a place if you'd like). Everyone speaks the same language in Etherea, so there are no language barriers. I do have a bit of info about Ethereals and Etherea at the end of this doc. If you cannot type the ø, it's okay to use the letter "o" instead (same thing with the í)—you'll know what I mean when you get there.

As for technology, it's medieval. Etherea is a monarchy (a queendom) and Ethereals pay tributes (taxes) to the crown.

This story will take place at the Academy, so regardless of where your character is from, keep that in mind. Also, note the usage of proper nouns for consistency.