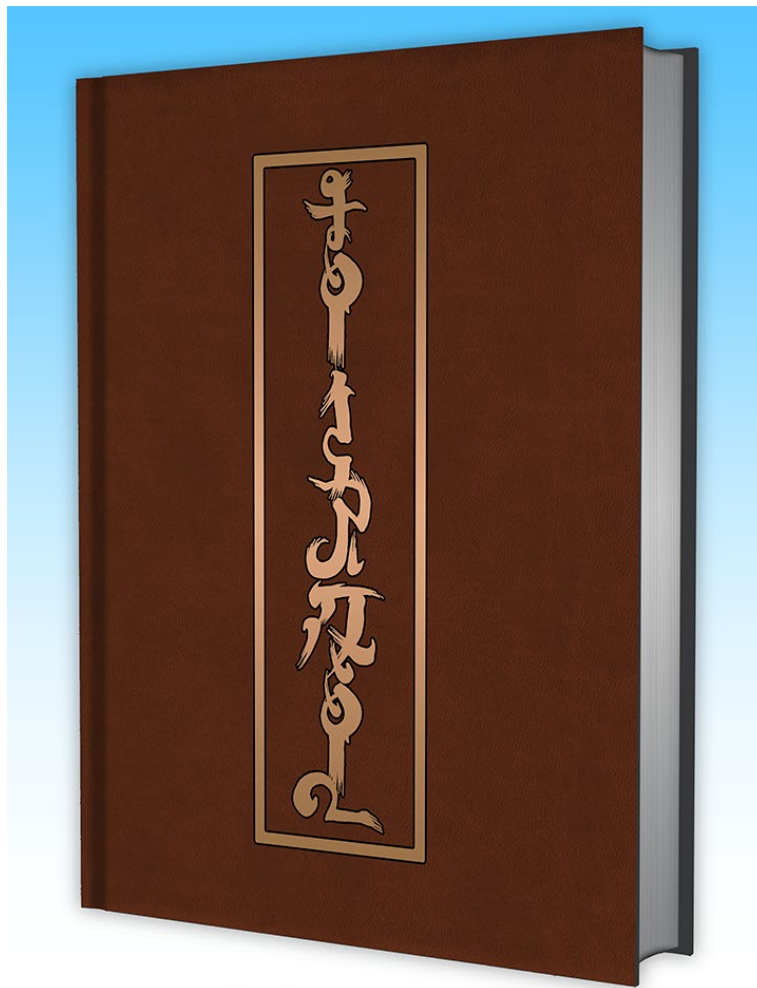


# ALCHEMICALS

## FORGED BY THE MACHINE GOD

Backer Draft Manuscript

– Introduction + Chapter 1 –



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# Introduction

*"You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it."*

— *Pirkei Avot*

There is a world beyond Creation, a world alive with the endless motion of titanic machinery. This is Autochthonia, the Realm of Brass and Shadows, the world that is the living body of the Machine God. No green thing has ever grown here; no sun's light has ever touched its vast metal expanse. It is haunted by alien machine gods and stalked by monstrous nightmares of flesh and steel. Survival here is all but impossible — and yet, the Eight Nations still stand.

The people of Autochthonia live within the body of their god, toiling to maintain the Great Maker's industrial organs and world-machinery. It is a harsh existence, ever on the precipice of disaster. It is only by the incalculable effort of millions and the divine power of the Alchemical Exalted that the people of Autochthonia thrive.

The Alchemical Exalted are the Chosen of the Machine God, biomechanical demigods forged from divine metal and heroic souls. They do not rule the Eight Nations, but serve as Champions of the people, a sacred duty greater than any ambition. The eldest of Alchemicals transcend their human forms to become metropoli, living cities that offer the Eight Nations a stronghold against Autochthonia's perils.

The Realm of Brass and Shadows is unforgiving, and the Eight Nations find themselves faced with many challenges: cataclysmic upheavals of Autochthon's world-machinery, incursions of gruesome techno-organic gremlins, and the ever-present threat to their livelihoods. All the while, the slumbering Autochthon grows ever sicker, his corrupting Blight metastasizing throughout his world-body. Despair not. There is work to be done.

## This Book at a Glance

**Chapter One: The Alchemical Exalted** introduces the Chosen of the Great Maker, the machine-heroes forged to stand against the enemies of the gods and the divine Champions of Autochthonia's Eight Nations.

**Chapter Two: Autochthonia** explores the Realm of Brass and Shadows, the vast realm of world-machinery within the Great Maker's body that the Eight Nations call home.

**Chapter Three: Character Creation** provides rules for creating Alchemical player characters.

**Chapter Four: Traits** details the unique traits used by Alchemicals, including their Castes and the cold, inhuman Clarity of their Great Curse.

**Chapter Five: Charms** provides an extensive panoply of Alchemical Charms, along with rules for the Rite of Reconfiguration that lets Champions install and remove new Charms.

**Chapter Six: Martial Arts and Sorcery** contains new martial arts styles that are prominently practiced in Autochthonia, like Thousand Wounds Gear style and Crystal Chameleon style, along with sorcerous spells and initiations from the Realm of Brass and Shadows.

**Chapter Seven: Artifacts** provides a variety of Autochthonian technology and artifacts, including signature Alchemical weapons like beamklaves.

**Chapter Eight: Quick Characters** provides traits for Alchemicals, machine spirits, and gremlins,

including information and templates that Storytellers can use to create their own machine spirits.

## Lexicon

**Alchemical Exalted:** The Chosen of *Autochthon*, artificial humans wrought from clay and metal and catalyzed by a heroic soul.

**Autochthon:** The Great Maker, The Machine God, the King of All Craftsmen, the ancient Autochthon turned on his kin in the Divine Revolution, lending aid to the traitorous gods and creating the *Alchemical Exalted*. In time, Autochthon departed Creation, taking his faithful with him. The Machine God slumbers now, but the *Eight Nations* descended from his faithful still dwell within his vast world-body, *Autochthonia*.

**Autochthonia:** An entire world of industrial machinery and impossible technology that exists within *Autochthon*'s body. It is the home to the *Eight Nations*, a world set apart from Creation and the rest of the cosmos. Also known as the Realm of Brass and Shadows.

**The Blight:** A corrupting, techno-organic sickness that festers within the Great Maker, spreading through *Autochthonia* with disastrous consequences.

**blight zone:** Regions of *Autochthonia* afflicted by *the Blight*.

**Clarity:** The Great Curse of the *Alchemical Exalted*, a state of increasingly inhuman rationality and utilitarian efficiency. The Alchemicals are aware of Clarity as a phenomenon, though not of its cursed nature.

**colossus:** An *Alchemical* of great experience and power who has undergone a full-body reconstruction to become a vast, mechanical titan through the *Rite of Reconfiguration*.

**The Eight Divine Ministers:** These powerful *machine spirits* are the foremost of *Autochthon*'s souls, akin to the Third Circle demons of the Great Maker's Yozi kin.

**The Eight Nations:** The foremost states of *Autochthonia*, with the resources and expertise needed to create new *Alchemical Exalted*. The Eight Nations are also known collectively as the Octet.

**The Far Reaches:** The strangest and most distant corners of *Autochthonia*, far from the *Eight Nations*.

**The Five Sodalities:** Within the *Eight Nations*, the sodalities are elite trade guilds of artisans, savants, and engineers, entrusted with the secret of creating new *Alchemical Exalted*. The sodalities are one of the three governing institutions that make up the *Tripartite* of the *Eight Nations*.

**gremlin:** A being corrupted by the *Blight*. Many of them are warped *machine spirits*, but the most dangerous are the corrupted Alchemicals known as **Apostates**.

**industrial organ:** A great mechanism of *Autochthon*'s world-body, each unique both in its divine power and critical function.

**machine saint:** An *Alchemical* who serves one of the *Eight Divine Ministers*, rather than acting as a Champion for the *Eight Nations*.

**machine spirit:** One of *Autochthon*'s souls. The greatest of these are the *Eight Divine Ministers*, while the least of them are minor custodians that tend to the myriad mechanisms of *Autochthonia*.

**metropolis:** An elder Alchemical that has become a living city, one of the greatest sanctums and strongholds of the *Eight Nations*.

**Municipal Charm:** An infrastructural-scale Charm installed in a *metropolis*.

**The Olgotary:** The *Eight Nations*' political class, made up of administrators and bureaucrats who form one of the three governing institutions that make up the *Tripartite*. The Olgotary consists of **plutarchs**, who form its bureaucratic, deliberative, and diplomatic branches, the **regulators** who carry out law enforcement, and the **adjudicators** who pass judgments on crimes. Each metropolis' Olgotary is headed by an **autocrat**, while a **grand autocrat** oversees them at the national level.

**Populat:** The working class of the *Eight Nations*.

**The Rite of Reconfiguration:** The sacred technological ritual by which the *Alchemical Exalted* can install new Charms and customize their panoply of transhuman power.

**The Seal of Eight Divinities:** A mystical barrier between *Autochthonia* and the rest of the cosmos, forged by *Autochthon* himself.

**soulgem:** A vital component in the creation of the *Alchemical Exalted*. Citizens of the *Eight Nations* have one of these jewels implanted in their foreheads shortly after birth. Upon death, members of the *Five Sodalities* can assess a soul's potential for catalyzing Exaltation before releasing it from its soulgem to be reborn.

**subminister:** A *machine spirit* that emanates from one of the *Eight Divine Ministers*, comparable to a Second Circle demon.

**The Theomachracy:** The priesthood of *Autochthon* and the clerical administrative class of the *Eight Nations*, making up one of the three governing institutions that make up the *Tripartite*. Within the Theomachracy's ranks, **lectors** preach the Maker's doctrine and offer spiritual guidance, **preceptors** enforce orthodoxy and root out heresy, while **clerics** see to matters of administration, bureaucracy, and doctrine. Each metropolis' Theomachracy is headed by a **celebrant**, while a **grand celebrant** oversees them at the national level.

**The Tripartite:** The governing body within each of the Eight Nations, drawing from the political leadership of the *Olgotary*, the clerical authority of the *Theomachracy*, and the expertise of the *Five Sodalities*. The *Alchemical Exalted* support the Tripartite, but they don't belong to it — they are Champions, not leaders.

**Tunnel Folk:** A term used by the *Eight Nations* to label other human societies that exist in *Autochthonia*'s reaches, lacking the protection of *Alchemical* Champions and *metropoli*.

## Suggested Resources

The following media may offer inspiration for players and Storyteller interested in stories centered around Autochthonia and the Great Maker's Chosen.

### Fiction

***I, Robot*, by Isaac Asimov:** Asimov's famous Three Laws of Robotics don't apply to the free-willed Alchemicals, but these classic short stories offer plenty of inspiration, particularly for Alchemicals engaging with transhuman perspective of Clarity.

### Movies

***Ghost in the Shell*, directed by Mamoru Oshii:** Cybernetically-enhanced agents of a morally questionable state, political intrigue, and cyberpunk philosophy make this a keystone for Alchemicals and Autochthonia. The same is true for its 2002 incarnation as an anime series, ***Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex***.

***Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang:** One of the original inspirations for Autochthonia, Lang's expressionist masterpiece presents a dystopian vision of futuristic technology and class conflict that laid the foundation for the Eight Nations.

## Television

***Star Trek: The Next Generation*, by Gene Roddenberry:** Lieutenant Data's struggle to understand humanity and discover his own isn't a typical story arc for the Alchemical Exalted, but he's still the most influential android in fiction, and among the original inspirations for them.

## Manga

***BLAME!*, by Tsutomu Nihei:** This classic cyberpunk manga's Megastructure is one of the greatest visual inspirations to be found for the world of Autochthonia, while the robotic Safeguard and the cybernetic Silicon Life offer inspiration for machine spirits and gremlins.

## Video Games

***Final Fantasy VII*, by Square Enix:** A game that needs no introduction, Final Fantasy VII's combination of magic with technology in a industrialized society makes it a great inspiration for the aesthetics of Autochthonian technology.

The shape of rubble rose above the ground, beckoning and inviting, like an obstacle course demanding to be conquered. *Foremost Fist of Righteousness* never backed away from a challenge, but especially not one written so plainly in the scenery. Sure, there were probably more important things to focus on at the moment. She could hear the voice of her Circlemates in her mind, chiding her for making everything and anything into a competition. Such was the talk of unambitious people.

*Stern Whip of Industry* was, similarly, not motivated by a desire to chase the taste of victory. The massive, staid man directed the workers with an irritating calm. Where was his sense of joy? His verve? His taste for life? *Fist* had met propaganda posters with more energy.

“I bet I can clear more rubble than you can, and I bet I can open the way through faster than you.” She spoke aloud, her low voice echoing off the maintenance tunnel’s walls.

“It is not a competition,” he replied in his pleasantly deep voice. “We are here to make sure this area is safe and accessible again.”

Predictable. *Foremost Fist* stifled a groan. “C’mon, Big Red, don’t you want to have fun with it?”

“My designation is *Stern Whip of Industry*,” he said humorlessly, “and we are here to save lives. It isn’t for fun.”

At this, *Foremost Fist* placed the bulky width of herself between him and the collapsed tunnel. She squared her shoulders and pumped Essence through her reinforced heart to give her an air of leadership. His attention fell upon her, even though annoyed.

“Listen here, Big Red,” she said and made a gesture to silence the protest he started voicing. “It is equally important to enjoy oneself as it is to do the work. There’s no point in being heroes if we aren’t having a good time about it. So bearing that in mind, **I bet I can clear more rubble than you.**”

The raw charisma of her words moved the big red lunk to heave a gusty, defeated sigh. She’d take it.

“Very well,” he said with what she decided was a hint of a smile. “I shall soundly defeat you in this endeavor if this means you will take the task seriously.”

“I am always taking things seriously,” *Fist* retorted but *Stern Whip of Industry* had already launched into motion.

He moved like an unchained machine as he turned aside hefty chunks of reinforced plastic and steel and pushed away debris with wide sweeps of his massive arms. *Stern Whip of Industry* pressed the heels of his thick palms together and shoveled away dirt and detritus like a shovel in the form of a man. Furious at possibly being outdone, *Foremost Fist of Righteousness* fired a tether beam from the hidden compartments of her wrist, hooked into a spar of concrete, and sailed past his head. He looked up placidly as she soared by. *Fist* winked and made a saucy gesture with her free hand. If the other Alchemical reacted, she didn’t see, as she landed several yards away and launched into her own fervent work.

She lifted and threw; she dug and delved; she carried rebar and rubble until a pristine path was clear. Sweat gathered around her collar and itched in the joints of her mechanical physique. It glistened on the studs of orichalcum and jade that stuck from her chest, biceps, and thighs. When she glanced back, *Stern Whip of Industry* leaned on a shovel, having done twice the work she’d managed in the same amount of time.

A small, self-satisfied smile played across his otherwise stern and unremarkable face.

“I think I win,” he said.

# Chapter One: The Alchemical Exalted

The Alchemical Exalted are the Chosen of Autochthon, the Great Maker. They are human, but they are also machine, wrought from sacred clay and divine metal and animated with the souls of heroes. In Autochthonia, they are Champions of the Eight Nations who dwell within the Machine God. A scarce few remain hidden in Creation, heroes forged to fight the enemies of the gods, but never deployed.

## History

Before the first moment of time, they arose. They created themselves from chaos and nothingness, and ushered in the dawn of reality. Primordial, they named themselves in the crude language of the gods they created, older than the oldest things. At their command, the seas of chaos froze into law. Among their number was Autochthon, the Great Maker, a tinker and a trickster among the titans.

In the time before, the Great Maker and his kin roamed the endless possibilities of the Wyld. They fashioned splendors unimaginable and horrors fearsome even to themselves, scattering ephemeral worldlets like stepping stones before them. They warred against the devouring legions of the ancient Fair Folk; consorted with the poisoned flame that was not yet the Scorpion Empire; laid siege to a castle that doesn't exist, and found themselves defeated. There was the grand folly that was Zen-Mu, and the bitter war that came after.

Soon, the Primordials would undertake their greatest work, the making of Creation. Autochthon delighted in it. He hammered out mountains and welkin-glass on his forge, brought life to the Jadeborn and the gigantes, and invented several very useful prime numbers. He worked from beyond the world as the Primordials raised Heaven over Creation, the architect of their impossible spatial geometries. He raised factory-cathedrals and starspires like sandcastles, shaping and reshaping the world.

But Autochthon was scorned by his kin, who had long mocked him as a sickly, ugly runt. The cruelest of them delighted in tearing down his greatest creations, leaving him to grieve over the ruins. Loathe as he was to endure this, the Great Maker could not stand alone against the other Primordials. He could not make them love him or fear him, but he could make himself useful to them. He offered them wonders from his forge, played on their vanity, and learned to make their hatred for him into a tool. Even then, this reprieve was a paltry thing, lasting only as long as he could keep his hateful siblings so distracted.

Estranged from his Primordial kin, Autochthon sympathized with those gods who plotted to overthrow their makers, offering them what succor and counsel he could. When the Celestial Incarnae discovered the secret of Exaltation, it was Autochthon who showed them how such power might be fashioned into a weapon. He crafted his own Exalted alongside them, the first Alchemicals, demonstrating both the power of the Exalted and his dedication to the cause. He forged weapons and armor for the gods and their Chosen and revealed to them great mysteries of artifice, the many secret methods of refining the magical materials to build weapons of war. But Autochthon still feared his Primordial kin, and struggled to keep his labors hidden from them. He created only a scarce few Alchemicals compared to the other gods' Chosen, and awoke only a few of their number to fight.

The gods waged their terrible war against the Primordials and won, though not before staining Creation with the blood of slain titans. The gods claimed Heaven for themselves, and the Exalted host reigned ascendant over Creation, but Autochthon knew there would be no place for him. He knew that he would forever be a reminder of the Primordials' cruelty, and that the Exalted would never forget his own treachery. For a while, he thought he could bear to linger, but in time, this hope gave way to his fears. Thus he took himself beyond Creation, accompanied by his faithful and followers, and sealed the path to

those who might attempt to follow.

Now the Machine God slumbers, still sickly as he once was. The mortals he brought within him dwell within a world that is his flesh, the ever-shifting engine-realm of Autochthonia. There, they founded the Octet, eight great nations that labor in worship to the Great Maker. Taught by the Great Maker himself, the Eight Nations hold the secret of creating new Alchemical Exalted. These Alchemicals do not rule, but serve. They are exemplars of national service, inspiring people and aiding the governance of nations. They are conduits between mortals and the divine, interceding with the machine spirits that inhabit Autochthonia's reaches. As their power grows, they become the very cities that house their people. Their strength and innovation of the Eight Nations and their Champions hold back the creeping Blight, the sickness of their Maker, that threatens all who dwell within him.

## The Creation of an Alchemical

The Alchemicals are a gift from the Great Maker to his people. They are born of matter, motion, and miracle: the precious reagents needed to shape their body and Charms, the exacting skill and sublime artistry required to create them, and the spark of the Great Maker comingling with mortal souls. After months of work, ritual, and sacrifice, Autochthon's Essence courses through the flesh of his newest Chosen, and the people rejoice in welcome of their fledgling Champion.

When a nation commissions the creation of a new Alchemical, the work falls to the five Sodalities, technologist-guilds who preserve the secrets of Exaltation handed down by the Great Maker, each safeguarding one part of the process. Work begins with the Surgeons, who shape the Champion's body from sacred clay and wax. The Harvesters concoct the catalytic vat-broth in which a nascent Alchemical gestates, but it must be heated and tended in precise rites known only to the Luminors. The Scholars craft the Alchemical's Essence reservoir and the Charms that will imbue the Champion with its divine might. Finally, the Conductors attach the soulgem to the nascent Alchemical, quickening the connection between body and soul. The Great Maker's will works through the artisans in that final moment, and the Alchemical awakens...if the soul is worthy.

*Kanesh puts his palm to the clay to warm it. His hands are anointed with the sacred unguents, and he is a Surgeon of meticulous skill, but still — the clay must be warm. Today, he shapes the Champion's face, and gives it his mother's high cheekbones. Much of his work may be undone when the Alchemical wakes from the broth and the holy clay of their form is Essence-fired into their self-image, but sometimes they keep what they are given. They are children with many parents — the Sodalities, the souls of heroes, the nation, the Maker — and he plays his part in that tender work.*

Mortal souls are the key to Autochthon's miracle of Exaltation, requiring a heroic legacy forged over past lifetimes to catalyze a Champion's Exaltation. Each of the six Alchemical Castes has its own criteria, and the Autochthonians' understanding of them is imperfect, though guided by millennia of trial and error. The souls they choose must be exceptional to have any hope of attracting the unconscious attention of the Great Maker, and so they keep meticulous records of each soul's deeds and distinctions. While those souls marked as candidates for Exaltation have usually distinguished themselves over multiple incarnations, some are selected after a single lifetime of truly exceptional heroism.

*"Have I lived well?" Dargen asks, but no one can hear. The skirmish continues, even as his blood pools from the wound. He will die in these tunnels with gremlin bile on his pike, die for his city and the other warriors of his battalion. The fatal blow hadn't been meant for him, but he made his flesh a bulwark for...who was it? Jadia? Lyzed? It doesn't matter. It bites at him that his last thoughts are selfish. Was his sacrifice real, or vainglorious? Who was he to think his*



*death had to mean something? As the light goes out of his eyes, he dreams that when his soul next stirs, it will be in the body of a Champion.*

If all is successful, the newly Exalted Alchemical emerges from the vats. They are not a resurrection of any past self, but a wholly new entity, greater than the sum of their mortal parts. The Champion understands who and what they are, and has skills and knowledge drawn from memories of their previous incarnations. Many new Alchemicals dream with curiosity about previous lives or feel phantom affections for lost loves; some make lifelong studies of their prior lives.

*None see her as she darts through alleys, despite the flashing moonsilver that adorns her flesh. She has to see. She has to know. She can't remember her previous life — so recent that her children still live as honored elders! — but she can make new memories. She watches them for days in the moments she steals away from duties, spying on their private moments and happy gatherings. She is invisible to them, and they are invaluable to her.*

Nations waste no time in putting their newly made Alchemicals to work. They are equipped with all haste and expected to step seamlessly into whatever role their nation created them for. Most are eager to act straight from the vat, fired with a patriotic fervor of Essence. But Alchemicals are not built for compliance. If a new Champion questions her mission or her cause, it's a problem that her nation has a vested interest in fixing. Too much is invested in an Alchemical's creation to risk losing her to disloyalty or disaffection.

*Principle of Harmony opens his eyes as the broth drains from his vat. When it's all sluiced away, a door cracks open with a pneumatic hiss and he emerges, his broad-muscled body agleam with adamant. He knows much, but remembers little. Fragments of a dozen lives buzz in his head like static, but purpose? Purpose sings like a clarion call. The attendants explain quickly, but Harmony already understands. When they have dressed him, he hurries to calm the riots that have nearly reached even these holy vats, and hopes that his first words will be a persuasive hymn for peace.*

Most nations seek to offset the fabulous expense of creating an Alchemical by producing them in small batches, traditionally known as Circles, that benefit from economies of scale. The availability of suitable souls and magical materials doesn't always allow for this, and choosing the right moment to create a new Alchemical is often especially contentious for a nation's governing Tripartite Assembly. The must weigh the need for a single Champion today against the benefits of a Circle tomorrow — a decision made all the more difficult by the fact that the cost of an Alchemical hero is sometimes better spent on municipal infrastructure and defenses.

#### Exaltation Beyond Autochthonia

Creating a new Alchemical in Creation would be an unprecedented feat, unless the recorded histories are mistaken, but not impossible. The knowledge needed to create one is Autochthon's alone, but it may be that the ancient schematics of the first Alchemicals can still be found.

Then there is the question of the soul. Soulgems are rare in Creation, and not used as they are in Autochthonia: the gigantes of Dis use them to bind mortal wills, while sorcerers may use them in bizarre metaphysical experiments. Finding a way to seal a suitable soul within a gem, or to find an alternative to the soulgem, is an adventure unto itself.

The ancient Alchemicals created by Autochthon before his departure bear

souls of their own. Some of these Champions have stirred from their stasis in the centuries since. Should they fall, their soulgem might be the key to creating a replacement.

Once all is in place, all that remains is the Great Maker's will. If all is right, the sleeping Primordials' power suffuses the souls and labors of the new Champion's creators, catalyzing the Exaltation.

## Clarity

Although the Alchemical Exalted never saw battle in the Divine Revolution, the death-curse of the fallen Primordials fell upon all the Chosen. The Alchemical's Great Curse, also known as Clarity, is rooted in the tension between the Alchemicals' humanity and the cold logic of the machine. Empathy, emotional needs, and irrationality wane until they fade away entirely, replaced by a cold logic that prizes a utilitarian efficiency in accomplishing one's goals above all else.

Clarity doesn't override an Alchemical's goals and agendas, but refines her ability to accomplish them. It is cold, but it is not cruel or sociopathic. A commander may spend the lives of her soldiers without hesitation, but only after carefully calculating cost against benefit. A physician allocates limited supplies so as to save the greatest number of lives, and euthanizes those deemed beyond aid. An advocate of the Populists still advances their cause, but increasingly views them as a bundle of statistics to be improved than as individuals. Where rewarding mortals improves their productivity, the Alchemical does so; where punishment is necessary, she dispenses it without passion or hesitation. Irrational emotions and unnecessary distractions such as love, anger, hedonism, and pity are abandoned as unproductive.

Autochthonia's Champions are aware of this phenomenon, but understand little of it, believing it to be an intrinsic aspect of Alchemical Exaltation. Some deliberately cultivate it, seeking to attain an inhuman perfection at the cost of their emotional bonds to humanity. Others avoid it, unwilling to sacrifice that which makes them human, or avoid maintaining high levels of Clarity for extended periods.

## Essence Fever

An Alchemical's Essence pushes her to action as a Champion of her community. Filled with the Great Maker's purpose, her Essence fever imparts a sense of duty upon the Alchemical, urging her to become the hero that her people need. Outside of Autochthonia, Alchemicals are still Champions, attaching themselves to their adopted community with fierce dedication.

When an Alchemical sees a need in her community, she feels moved to meet it, driven to bold and heroic action. They struggle to accept "good enough" when improvements can be made, satisfied with nothing less than the perfection their Essence inspires them to strive toward. In the Octet, Alchemicals have a clear path to fulfilling this duty by acting at the Tripartite Assembly's direction in service of national interests. But their Essence fever urges them to action, not mere obedience: the same patriotism that drives an Alchemical to follow orders one day might urge him to take a stand against a corrupt regulator's overreach the next.

Newly built Alchemicals must work to master their Essence fever's impulses, asserting control over them and channeling them into longer-term strategies. Inexperienced Champions sometimes act without thought for consequence or practicality, while those who embrace Clarity may be driven to brush aside mortal morals in acting on their Essence fever's impulses.

## Alchemical Life Cycle

Alchemicals are human, but they are not flesh and blood. Their bodies are fashioned from sacred clay and magical materials, catalyzed by the soulgems in their brows, and transformed by the god-machinery of the Charms installed within their flesh.

A newly Exalted Alchemical awakes as a physical and mental adult, taking their first steps on steady legs and opening eyes that already see more than any mortal could. Unless something has gone wrong, she is born understanding who and what she is, with a keen insight to their power and purpose. Her personality and is a composite of traits from her past lives, particularly those that strongly resonate with her Caste, as are the skills and expertise she possesses. She has a patchwork of memories from her past lives, though few Champions can recall their past lives in clear detail.

For some, this composite identity is a struggle. A new Champion might find herself serving a nation that she remembers fighting against, or caught between two conflicting ideologies held with equal passion in different past lives. Some Alchemicals can take years to sort out their identity and truly feel like a full person, not just a jumble of long-dead heroes' opinions.

## Colossi

As a Champion's Essence grows increasingly powerful, she becomes capable of transforming into a colossus, a vast, mechanical titan, standing dozens of feet tall. The Colossus-Class Upgrade Installation is an Alchemical Charm on an industrial scale, requiring a full-body reconstruction. Colossi make for some of the most dramatic demonstrations of Alchemical power and the Octet's might: battling massive gremlins, leading the nations' war efforts, supporting mass construction projects, laying siege to enemy metropoli, and even grappling with the world-engines of Autochthonia itself if need be. Powerful as they are, they're rare compared to most Champions. Most Alchemicals don't reach the height of power needed to become a colossus until they're centuries old, and the amount of magical materials needed to construct their expanded frames is immense.

For many elder Alchemicals, their place among the colossi is a core part of their identity. The transformation can be reverted, but the role of the colossus holds a great cultural significance in Autochthonian society. Younger Alchemicals and mortals alike view colossi with awe, and the Eight Nations laud their deeds with triumphant propaganda.

Such a change in scale radically changes a colossus' personal existence. They find themselves assigned missions of great scope that are often lonely, and almost always perilous. They can't grab a quick meal at their favorite cafeteria or lie with their lover without first undergoing extensive bodily reconfigurations. Even the most personable of colossi often struggle with maintaining their mortal relationships, and it's common for colossi to tilt toward higher Clarity.

## The Metropolitan Ascension

The Great Maker's Chosen are not only his people's Champions, but their very homes. The eldest and most powerful Alchemicals can embark on the final stage of their life cycle, taking root in the machine world and transforming from self to city. The would-be metropolis abandons human form entirely, unfolding her mechanical form into the foundation of a living metropolis. Her transhuman power takes the form of infrastructure-scale Municipal Charms integrated into her superstructure. Avatar-Launching Silos deploy colossi-scale drone bodies. A Thousand Elixirs Crucible's processing facilities synthesize innumerable alchemical and organic reagents from the contents of nearby conduits. The Perpetual Singularity Collapse Engine exerts titanic gravitational force with precision sufficient to drive city-wide industry.

This metropolitan ascension is extraordinarily rare and extraordinarily demanding, taking months or even

years of preparation and logistical planning. An Alchemical must live for time beyond mortal imagining before they can cultivate sufficient Essence and spiritual preparation for this change, in addition to undergoing the colossus upgrade. Plans must be made for the relocation of the new metropolis' populace and their safe transport through Autochthonia, a challenge often entrusted to Circles of younger Alchemicals or guardian colossi. Construction materials and other supplies must also be transported, and transported in great numbers. Much of a metropolis' structure emerges directly from the Alchemical's body, the construction of additional buildings and core Municipal Charms begins almost as soon as the ascension is complete.

Within Autochthonia, the metropolitan ascension also connects the Alchemical to the greater mechanisms of the machine-world. Some Alchemicals undertake their ascension at damaged industrial organs or other disruptions in the Great Maker's systems, upholding his inner structures with their own. In the absence of a pressing crisis, most Alchemicals receive guidance from the Eight Divine Ministers, seeking a place where they might best serve Autochthon. Some receive their answer in vivid dreams or visions of the city they'll become, waking with geographic coordinates imprinted in their memory. Others hallucinate streams of complex geometrical diagrams and mathematical equations that might take them years to decipher. Most receive this call near the time they attain their Essence's apex, though some receive it long before — some Champions have stepped out of the vats already knowing where they must take root. Other Alchemicals petition the Divine Ministers to approve a location that will serve only a nation's own interests. Though their approval is not necessary for the metropolitan ascension, acting in defiance of them would be a politically disastrous blasphemy.

These great labors are but one part of the process. For the Alchemical, the metropolitan ascension may be the most important decision of her life. Almost all of them experience eager anticipation to become something new: a part of Autochthon and haven to their citizens. Many rejoice in their ascension as an expression of their individuality, especially those seeking to distinguish themselves from the metropoli they've grown accustomed to living in. An aspiring metropolis' days become a feverish whirlwind of planning: meeting with urban planners to discuss the layout of her superstructure, consulting demographics analysts and social engineers to identify her new populace, and designing novel Municipal Charms in whatever free time she can find. Most nations encourage them to embark on a final pilgrimage across their nation, accompanied by the Sodalt technicians assigned to her ascension and the first of her citizens to be chosen. This entourage travels to each of the nation's other metropoli, where the Champion seeks council from her city-siblings and is celebrated in grand national festivals to celebrate her.

The metropolitan ascension proper begins once the Alchemical reaches the ordained site of her new urban core and begins her final Rite of Reconfiguration before ascending to cityhood. Her colossus frame reconfigures itself into a chrysalis-like core of clay and metal, helped along by teams of Sodalt technicians. Within it, the Alchemical's form and Essence are melted down and reconstructed into the heart of a metropolis, and the city's foundational structures extrude outward from it over a period of days. Populat construction crews beginning building the vast superstructure of the city's first Municipal Charms, with Sodalt technicians directing their labor and seeing to the most complex, meticulous tasks needed to bring the metropoli online. The ascension's completion is marked by a dramatic burst of Essence as the awakened metropolis' iconic anima banner flares visible for miles in every direction.

During this transformation, the new metropolis is helpless in the Great Maker's embrace, depending entirely on her community to defend her, whether from gremlins, natural perils, or foreign enemies. It's all but unheard of for a metropolis to ascend without at least a Circle of Alchemicals to stand guard, and nations that can afford to deploy colossi do so. And not just Alchemicals — every citizen of the nascent

metropolis stands on the frontline of her defense. Autochthonian history celebrates episodes in which Alchemicals of foreign nations have worked together to see a metropolis through a difficult ascension, putting aside national differences in service to the Great Maker.

Not every elder Alchemical chooses the metropolitan ascension; many find themselves happiest or most effective as Champions or colossi. Some face a subtle pressure toward cityhood, though this rarely rises above the level of gentle suggestion — it's hard to browbeat an Alchemical who's already powerful enough to become a metropoli.

Metropoli in Creation.

Achieving the metropolitan ascension in Creation is challenging, but not impossible. Instead of integrating into the Machine God's world-body, a nascent metropolis must lay her own foundation. Manses could be reconfigured to enable a metropolitan ascension, linking the Alchemical into Creation's geomancy, and some First Age ruins may hold wonders that could be repurposed for such use.

## The Mind of a City

New Alchemicals may see the metropolitan ascension as an ending, but elder cities see it as the moment their lives began. Metropoli act on a scale their citizens have trouble imagining. Individuals are simplified into numbers; time is measured in years and centuries rather than minutes and days; and the complex balancing of city infrastructure becomes as natural as drawing breath. Focused in on the big picture, most metropoli are deeply immersed in Clarity, a mindset that may be better suited to existence as a city than a human one. Not all cities are cold or unfeeling, though. A particularly personable metropoli can interact with her populace through hologlyphic projections or drone bodies, all the while overseeing the entirety of her city-self.

Much of a metropolis' time is spent in labor, overseeing the myriad processes unfolding throughout herself. "Leisure time" becomes occupied by personal projects on a grand scale, including the city's own growth and evolution through the installation of new Municipal Charms. Some metropoli explore and express their transhuman identity through innovative Municipal Charm designs: gilded entertainment domes, libraries filled with adamant record-crystals, mass surveillance grids of unblinking soulsteel sensors, vast metal-smelting furnaces, or other industrial wonders that give the city its character.

Some metropoli involve themselves in civic life even beyond their duties, particularly cities that are still young or that pointedly resist Clarity. Like all other Alchemicals, Metropoli are still excluded from governance and leadership, but they can exert significant influence without crossing that line. Particularly lucky citizens often speak of being in the city's favor, attributing any fortunate happenstances to metropolitan intervention. Woe betide a citizen who angers their metropolis — while rare, many who even suspect they have angered their city request reassignment elsewhere in the nation. Few wish to keep their lives in even the autonomic functions of city they rely on, as any resident of Lux would attest to before stepping to the gravitational beams their city uses to allow transport between the floating obelisk districts.

Elder metropoli tend toward a higher-level perspective, having seen firsthand that not every single detail *has* to be micromanaged. They might still play favorites with some citizens or take an active role in advising the Tripartite, but such things often lose the novelty that made them so appealing to a young city. Some elder metropoli go dormant for centuries, maintaining their Municipal Charms and programmed routines autonomously while their consciousness communes with Autochthon in abstract and esoteric dreams incomprehensible to all but other metropoli. Rousing an elder to action in times of crisis can be a

challenge in and of itself. As their Essence grid expands, they increasingly install Municipal Charms designed to sustain Autochthonia's machine-ecology alongside Charms that provide for the citizens' needs. The oldest cities are not unlike industrial organs, sustaining the Great Maker when his own mechanisms falter and fail.

Most of a metropolis' lasting relationships are with their fellow Alchemicals. A metropolis can be a powerful mentor to a young Champion, and cities of every age seek out Alchemical proteges from among the Alchemicals built within them. Young Alchemicals benefit not only from the city's advice and expertise, but from the insight it offers into their future as potential metropoli. The city, in turn, gains not just new allies, but a chance to remember what life was like before the ascension.

Close relationships between metropoli and mortals are rare, but most cities maintain cordial working relationships with at least the city's officials. Some may take an interest in any citizen who happens to catch their attention, taking them on as a student, friend, lover, or more. Such citizens may occasionally find themselves in the delicate position of being responsible for a measure of the whole city's emotional wellbeing.

A metropolis' oldest and most stable relationships are often those with other cities. Friendships, rivalries, and romances play out over the course of decades, their correspondence transmitted through long-range broadcasting Charms, diplomatic assemblies, and the occasional drone-body visit.

## Champions of the Eight Nations

The Alchemical Exalted are the Champions of the Eight Nations, born from the effort, sacrifice, and dreams of their nations. Their loyal service to the people honors that unpayable debt. In the most archaic dialects of Autochthonic, the word for "Champion" does not mean warrior or hero — it means a holy servant of the people.

Within the Octet, Alchemicals occupy a social status equal to members of the Tripartite. The scope of their service affords them a level of autonomy, privilege, and sometimes even luxury that is available to few other Autochthonians. Senior Alchemicals enjoy tremendous latitude in their duties to the nation; their requisitions are given special priority and generous leeway. Champions who've served long enough to build century-spanning epics may rival city autocrats for influence and privilege.

Despite these advantages, the Alchemicals are also a half-step removed from the people they serve. Their lives and decisions are the subject of propaganda, mythmaking, and scandal; their successes and failures live on in the songs of their people. Such intense celebrity is isolating, often flattening the Champion in the eyes of her nation — she is not a peer, not a countryman. She is an icon.

New Champions may struggle with these expectations, seeking support and guidance from older Alchemicals, who may become lifelong mentors. Some mentors take their pupils on national tours that border on pilgrimage; others arrange for exhaustive meetings, orientations, and internships to immerse the new Champion in public affairs.

Most Alchemicals have a portfolio of routine duties that they attend to between assigned missions, gathering additional responsibilities as they rise in seniority. Unless they have proven unreliable, they are trusted to prioritize these standing obligations at their discretion and may request passion projects as part of their official docket. Champions generally treasure the normalcy of their peacetime duties, whether contributing to underperforming shifts at a local factory, collaborating with Theomachracy exorcists, conducting fungal harvesting experiments, or serving as advisors to high-ranking Tripartite officials.

Throughout these duties, the Alchemicals do not rule over others: governance is the duty of the Tripartite

alone. Instead, Champions are servant-leaders, setting an example for others to emulate and offering wise counsel. They are attached to missions more than offices. The Soulsteel Caste tactician *Eupraxic Advocate* has served alongside Nuradi regulators for decades as part of a standing directive to investigate voidbringer heresies, but she isn't a regulator, nor can she exercise a regulator's authority without a superior officer's approval.

Routine duties are quickly set aside when a nation calls its Champions to action. Missions are handed down from the local or National Tripartite Assemblies, or authorized by high-ranking Tripartite members in urgent circumstances, such as invasion or natural disaster. Alchemicals may be assigned to bolster an expedition into the Reaches, lead sorties against foreign armies, oversee complex civil construction projects, or conduct high-stakes investigations. Diplomatic missions are common, both in earnest and as pretenses for espionage. Whatever the nation requires, the Champions achieve.

While Alchemicals take their highest missions from the National Tripartite Assembly, most retain strong ties to the metropolis they call their birthplace. Its people are their family, and some Alchemicals bend the rules with small acts of favoritism or press their privilege to secure long-standing duties there. Hometown Champions are synonymous with their metropolis, the subjects of murals, plays, and songs. The Tripartite welcomes the positive impact this has on morale, but Champions are expected to curtail this favoritism if it creates a real or perceived conflict of interests between their city and nation.

Though their responsibilities are many, Champions are afforded opportunities for leisure and personal pursuits. They may set aside their standing duties for brief periods as needed without too much scrutiny, and requests for more extensive are rarely refused except as punishment for past infractions. Negligence still comes at a high price, however. Champions who fail at their duties, injure morale, or misappropriate resources find themselves under immense social pressure from the Tripartite and their fellow Alchemicals to mend their behavior. Senior Alchemicals offer stern coaching or correction to wayward Champions; those who still fall short find themselves shut out from opportunities. Official censure burdens the offender with unwanted and onerous duties, alongside the forfeiture of privileges. In extremis, exile is an option, usually in the form of onerous missions — the Moonsilver Caste *Congruence of Intent* cannot return to Estasia until he has slain a hundred Apostates, and perhaps one day he may succeed. The Starmetal Caste *Deliberate Provocation* has been banished from Jarish until she maps every conduit in the shifting labyrinth of the Fold Space, a provably impossible task.

An Alchemical's duty of service is not an unthinking one, however. A Champion's conscience may sometimes bring her into conflict with her nation's interests, and there may not always be a right choice. Criticizing political policy, opposing corrupt leadership, or pointing out her nation's hypocrisies and failings can all be censured as disloyalty unless the Alchemical navigates it deftly. She must be certain that she can persuade instead of alienate, that her words will be seen as voice of the nation's conscience speaking through her. Even success brings consequences. The testimony of *Chatoyant Corollary* set off a firestorm of investigations that ousted hundreds of corrupt Kamaki officials. His reward has been years of burdensome duties, ensuring that the public knows that the face of righteousness is also the face of service.

In addition to their national service, the Alchemical Exalted bear a second mandate as the Chosen of the Great Maker. The Eight Divine Ministers, supreme emanations of the Machine God's soul, must at times call upon Champions for their aid. Most National Tripartite Assemblies dutifully clear the Champion's docket to make way for these divine imperatives, but these objectives can't always be reconciled with other national interests. Alchemicals caught between their patriotic and divine duties must make impossible choices, triumphs or failures that will echo forever in their legends.

# Machine Saints: Operatives of the Divine Ministers

While the majority of Alchemicals are dedicated to the safety and defense of the Octet, a handful serve different masters: the Eight Divine Ministers themselves. While they have no official designation, these Chosen operatives are called Machine Saints in the legends that follow them. They take their assignments directly from the Divine Ministers, performing sacred duties in service to the Maker's will and the Ministers' complex agendas.

The Machine Saints operate outside the view of the public. The Populat knows of them only through rumors, apocryphal angels of the Reaches and mysterious Champions who serve no nation. Across the Eight Nations, the Tripartite treats their existence as a state secret, in accordance with longstanding agreements with the Divine Ministers. The Eight Nations' Alchemical secret police strike terror into the hearts of saboteurs, voidbringers, and gremlins, but the Machine Saints are a threat above even them, a holy order that knows no distraction. They move easily in secret through the Eight Nations, seeming no different than any other Alchemical — at least, until they reveal the Eightfold Emblem that proclaims them an agent of the Divine Ministers.

Machine Saints answer to all Eight Divine Ministers equally, though most tend to work more closely with one or two Ministers whose agendas or ideologies they favor. Each Minister has their own agenda, a facet of Autochthon's eight-part will, and each has their own uses for the Machine Saints. Runel often dispatches Machine Saints to defend the downtrodden, tend to the sick, and raise up those in need, assigning compassionate missions that are rarely glamorous. Debok Moom calls his Saints to violence, testing the Great Maker's greatest weapons in battle. Ku, most secretive of the Divine Ministers, wields Machine Saints as tools of fear against voidbringer cults, tyrants, and heretics, particularly those that the Eight Nations are unwilling to deal with.

Some Machine Saints are created to fill that role, built in one of the hidden theopoli that cluster like temples around Autochthon's Core. Ancient orders of priest-engineers and machine spirits take the place of the Octet's Sodalities in this process. For others, the Divine Ministers sometimes contact the Eight Nations to request a Champion's services as a Machine Saint in perpetuity, sending an orichalcum-inked missive or omens of steam and steel. Not all Champions accept such a request — to be called upon by the Divine Ministers is an honor beyond measure, but it means abandoning the nation they call home and everyone they know there. Finally, some Machine Saints volunteer for the role, petitioning the Divine Ministers and undergoing a series of increasingly esoteric quests to verify the extent of her commitment. Challenging or refusing the Minister is expected as part of these tests — the Divine Ministers want loyalty, but not unthinking obedience. National Tripartite Assemblies feel the loss of a Champion to the Ministers' service keenly, but only the utmost desperation could drive them to interfere in this sacred matter

## Champions in Creation

During Nexus' Time of Red Markets, a strange man of powerful stature took to the streets, striking down criminals and petty tyrants with enormous white jade fists. In the waning years of the Shogunate, a stranger arrived in a small farming village and warned them of oncoming danger, her skin traced with wires that glittered like the night sky. Across the Dreaming Sea, folklore speaks of a woman of living quicksilver who once loved an ancient sun-king. When he perished, she threw herself into the sea, where she grew and unfolded into a great city in silver, a city no explorer has ever found.

When Autochthon created the first Alchemical Exalted, he awakened only a few among them, leaving the rest sealed in stasis within his hidden forges and laboratories across Creation. The Great Maker has left,



but his Chosen still remain, and not all have remained in stasis in the millennia since his departure. How and why they have awakened remains unknown, whether by Autochthon's design or unintended malfunction. Such Alchemicals have never experienced life before, remembering only the faintest traces of her soul's past lives. They know little of the world around him, but they know what it is to be a Champion.

Emerging from long-sealed ruins or hidden laboratories, Creation's Alchemicals find themselves utterly alone at first. Few remain so for long, driven both by human need and Alchemical Essence fever. With no nation to serve, these Champions forge their own communities, and their own place within them. Some might seek to rule, unfettered by Autochthonian taboo, while others might be content as nothing more than a strange guardian to a fishing community. Some find their place within an organization, whether as a merchant prince of the Guild or as an ascetic monk of the Immaculate Order.

Alchemicals are human, but no one in Creation would take a Champion for one. She might be taken for an automaton, a God-Blood wielding strange artifacts, a strange Exigent, or an unknown god, unless she conceals her Exalted nature. Such an Alchemical might struggle to see her own humanity, coming to terms with it in a strange journey of self-discovery. They might find a natural rapport with others who stand apart from most of humanity, joining forces with young Solars, Silver Pact Lunars, outcaste Kinships, wandering Exigents, or even stranger company.