AETHERIA

STORYTELLER GUIDE

Craft compelling adventures in a world where magic powers cities and impossibility is just another Tuesday

AETHERIA

Storyteller Guide

Running adventures in the modern-magical world

Contents

Your Role as Storyteller

You're not running a medieval fantasy quest. You're running a modern world with ancient magic woven into every level of society. Corporate espionage happens with scrying spells. Traffic jams involve dirigibles. The local pub might have a retired planar traveler serving drinks.

Your job is to make this world feel real, functional, and consequential—while keeping it exciting enough that your players want to be adventurers instead of comfortable middle management.

Running Aetheria

The Core Challenge

Aetheria presents a unique storytelling challenge: how do you make adventure necessary in a world with functional infrastructure, professional services, and established authority?

    The answer: the same way the real world does.

Systems fail. People are corrupt. Technology has limits. Someone always wants more power. And some problems require people willing to work outside the system.

What Makes Aetheria Different

Magic is Infrastructure

It's not mystical. It's utility. Streetlights run on minor enchantments. Transit systems use teleportation circles. This has consequences:

- Disrupting magical infrastructure is like cutting power—immediate, visible, and criminal
- Magical pollution exists. Industrial spellcasting has environmental impact
- Arcane technology can be hacked, sabotaged, or repurposed
- Not everyone can afford premium magical services. Inequality exists

Authority Exists

Unlike traditional fantasy, Aetheria has:

- Professional law enforcement with magical capabilities
- Corporate security forces
- Government intelligence agencies
- Licensed bounty hunters and investigators

    Your players aren't the only competent people in the world. But authority has limitations: jurisdiction disputes, bureaucratic obstacles, corruption, and situations where official involvement makes things worse.

Death Has Consequences

Resurrection magic exists but:

- It's expensive, regulated, and not always successful
- Some methods are illegal or ethically questionable
- Organizations that lose people face real consequences
- Murder investigations use divination magic

    Violence should have weight. Make your players consider consequences.

Core Responsibilities

Create a Living World

Aetheria continues whether players are watching or not. Show this:

Corporate deals happen. Political tensions simmer. Criminal organizations make moves. Research projects progress. People go about their lives.

Your NPCs have goals independent of the players. Let the world feel active and responsive, not frozen until the players arrive.

Maintain the Tone

Aetheria is sophisticated modern fantasy. That means:

Professional Competence

Characters should feel like professionals, not amateurs. They have skills, resources, and knowledge. Challenges should test their capabilities, not make them look incompetent.

Practical Magic

Avoid "why doesn't magic solve this" problems. Consider:

- Magical solutions have costs, limits, or consequences
- Problems often involve people, not just obstacles
- Solutions may be illegal, unethical, or politically complicated
- The best tool isn't always magical

Contemporary Concerns

Include modern problems:

- Data privacy and surveillance
- Corporate malfeasance
- Environmental damage
- Wealth inequality
- Technological ethics
- Information warfare

Adjudicate Fairly

You're running two potentially different systems. Be consistent:

Know how challenges work in your chosen system. Apply the same standards to NPCs and players. Let dice tell the story but don't let bad luck kill a campaign.

When in doubt, favor drama over realism, player success over punishment, and interesting complications over frustrating obstacles.

Balance Player Agency

When to Say Yes

Players propose creative solutions using their skills and the world's capabilities. If it makes sense and they've invested resources, let it work.

When to Complicate

Success doesn't mean easy. A brilliant hacking attempt might work but trigger alarms. Negotiating with a corporate executive might succeed but create a new obligation. Victory can have costs.

When to Say No

Some things don't work because they break the world:

- Solutions that trivialize future challenges
- Actions that ignore established consequences
- Magic that operates outside defined limits
- Technology that doesn't exist in Aetheria

The Modern-Magical Balance

Technology Level

Aetheria is contemporary, not futuristic:

What Exists

Scrying-screens (magical smartphones), enchanted vehicles, arcane transit systems, modern medicine enhanced by healing magic, industrial manufacturing with magical automation, mass communication networks, contemporary architecture with magical reinforcement

What Doesn't Exist

Advanced AI or sentient constructs, space travel or orbital stations, genetic engineering or cloning, nanotechnology, quantum computing, most forms of cybernetic augmentation

The Rule

If it exists in the real modern world, Aetheria probably has a magical equivalent. If it's science fiction, Aetheria probably doesn't have it.

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Adjudicating Skills

Both RPG Anywhere and Infinite Horizons use skill-based resolution with dice pools, but the specifics differ. As Storyteller, your job is to determine when rolls happen and how difficult they should be—regardless of system.

Setting Difficulties

The Core Question

What's at stake, and what makes this hard?

Difficulty Guidelines

Routine Tasks

Don't roll. Professionals can handle routine work in their specialty. Let skilled characters succeed automatically at basic tasks.

Standard Challenges

Most rolls should be here. It's possible to fail, but success is achievable with competence. This is picking a quality lock, negotiating a fair deal, or identifying a magical signature.

Difficult Challenges

These require expertise or luck. Hacking corporate security, persuading a hostile executive, or tracking someone through a crowded city. Failure is likely without the right skills.

Extreme Challenges

Nearly impossible. Cracking military-grade encryption, convincing someone to betray their organization, or finding one person in a metropolis with no leads. Even experts struggle.

Modifiers Matter

Consider what helps or hinders:

Favorable Conditions

Right tools, good information, ample time, assistance from experts, favorable circumstances

Unfavorable Conditions

Missing equipment, working blind, time pressure, active opposition, hostile environment

For Both Systems

The Storyteller determines the base difficulty. The system handles the rest:

In RPG Anywhere, you're setting the number of successes needed. In Infinite Horizons, you're setting the difficulty number. Know your system's math.

When to Roll

Roll When

Failure is interesting, success is uncertain, the outcome matters to the story, time or resources are limited

Don't Roll When

Outcome is predetermined, failure stops the game, success is routine for this character, the roll doesn't matter to anyone

The Alternative to Failure

Sometimes the question isn't "do you succeed" but "what does success cost?"

They break into the facility. The question is whether they trigger alarms. They get the information. The question is what they owe in return. They survive. The question is what they lose in the process.

Success with complications is often more interesting than simple failure.

Scene Pacing

Not every action needs a roll. Handle routine actions in description. Roll for moments that matter. Keep momentum moving.

Equipment in Aetheria

Equipment in Aetheria falls into two categories: things that define your character's capabilities, and things that enable specific solutions. As Storyteller, your job is knowing the difference.

Equipment Philosophy

Background Equipment

Characters have access to tools of their trade. Don't make them track every mundane item. If they're a technician, assume they have basic tools. If they're an investigator, assume they have standard surveillance gear.

Signature Equipment

Some items matter to character identity. A weapon they've trained with. A modified scrying-screen with custom programs. A vehicle they maintain personally. These are part of who they are.

Specialized Equipment

Some problems need specific tools. Breaking into a vault needs proper equipment. Long-range communication needs appropriate devices. These require planning, resources, or connections.

Restricted Equipment

Military-grade weapons, experimental technology, illegal devices, classified information. These are story hooks, not shopping lists. Acquisition should be an adventure.

Equipment Examples

Personal Technology

Scrying-Screen

The magical smartphone equivalent. Standard models provide communication, information access, basic applications. Modified versions might include enhanced security, specialized programs, or illegal capabilities.

Cost: Standard issue for most professionals. Custom modifications vary.

Transit Pass

Access to public teleportation circles and transportation networks. Level of access depends on registration status and payment tier.

Cost: Basic passes are affordable. Premium unlimited access is expensive.

Arcane Focus

Required for most spellcasting. Quality affects reliability and precision. Personal focuses are often custom-made or inherited.

Cost: Basic focuses are common. Masterwork focuses are significant investments.

Credentials and Licenses

Official documentation for various restricted activities. Legal authority, professional accreditation, security clearances.

Cost: Earned through qualification or organization membership.

Professional Tools

Lockpicking Tools

Mechanical and magical. Basic sets handle standard locks. Professional sets include tools for high-security systems.

Cost: Basic sets are cheap. Professional kits are investments.

Medical Kit

First aid supplies, diagnostic tools, healing reagents. Quality determines what conditions can be treated.

Cost: Basic kits are accessible. Comprehensive kits are expensive.

Investigation Kit

Evidence collection, analysis tools, documentation equipment. May include magical detection devices.

Cost: Varies by sophistication.

Hacking Tools

Hardware interfaces, software exploits, security bypass programs. Legality questionable. Effectiveness varies.

Cost: Variable. Black market prices for advanced tools.

Enchanter's Workshop

Portable tools for analyzing, modifying, or creating minor enchantments. Professional setups can handle complex work.

Cost: Basic portable kit is moderate. Full workshop is major investment.

Protective Gear

Light Armor

Reinforced clothing, protective vests, warded garments. Provides protection without restricting movement. Common among security professionals.

Cost: Standard equipment for security work.

Medium Armor

Tactical gear, reinforced plating, layered wards. Obvious when worn. Used by military and high-risk operatives.

Cost: Restricted purchase. Expensive when available.

Wards and Charms

Personal magical protections. Can defend against specific threats, detection, or tracking. Duration varies.

Cost: Single-use charms are affordable. Permanent wards are expensive.

Weapons

Concealed Weapons

Designed to avoid detection. May be illegal depending on jurisdiction. Examples: holdout guns, spring-loaded blades, disguised wands.

Cost: Variable. Often illegal.

Personal Defense

Compact weapons legal for self-defense. Might be conventional, enchanted, or hybrid. Examples: tactical knives, compact firearms, wands, swords, bows, clubs, etc

Cost: Moderate. Licensing may be required.

Professional Weapons

Full-size weapons for security or military use. Higher power, restricted ownership. Examples: arcane rifles, combat-grade wands, enchanted blades, enchanted bows

Cost: Expensive. Strict licensing. Often organization-issued.

Vehicles

Commercial Transport

Access to dirigibles, trains, scheduled teleportation. Reliable but tracked and scheduled.

Cost: Per-trip fees or subscription service.

Enchanted Motorcycle

Personal transportation. Fast, maneuverable, vulnerable. Popular with couriers and independents.

Cost: Significant investment. Maintenance required.

Enclosed Vehicle

Car equivalent. More protection, less maneuverability. Common for professionals.

Cost: Major purchase. Varies by model.

Specialized Equipment

Surveillance Gear

Cameras, listening devices, tracking charms, scrying sensors. Legality varies by application.

Cost: Moderate to expensive. Some types regulated.

Climbing Gear

Ropes, harnesses, adhesive charms, levitation devices. Essential for urban exploration.

Cost: Moderate for mundane gear. Expensive for magical enhancement.

Creating Threats

Threats in Aetheria aren't just monsters. They're corrupt executives, rogue AI constructs, criminal syndicates, environmental disasters, political crises, and yes, occasionally, something with claws and teeth. Your job is making them feel real and dangerous.

Threat Types in Aetheria

Corporate Threats

The Executive

High-level corporate operator pursuing profit, power, or personal agenda. Dangerous because of resources, connections, and legal protection.

Tactics: Lawyers, private security, political leverage, economic pressure, plausible deniability

Weakness: Public scandal, evidence of crimes, shareholder pressure, internal rivals

The Security Team

Professional corporate enforcers. Well-equipped, well-trained, and well-paid to handle problems.

Tactics: Surveillance, overwhelming force, legal justification, coordination

Weakness: Jurisdictional limits, rules of engagement, can be bribed or reasoned with

The Researcher

Brilliant, obsessed, and willing to cross ethical lines. Probably has experimental magic or technology.

Tactics: Unleashing unstable creations, unpredictable effects, intellectual superiority

Weakness: Arrogance, unstable creations turn on them, ethical blindness

Criminal Threats

The Syndicate

Organized crime with magical capabilities. Controls territory, runs profitable illegal operations, maintains loyalty through money and fear.

Tactics: Information networks, street-level enforcers, bribery, violence when necessary

Weakness: Internal politics, territorial disputes, law enforcement pressure, rival organizations

The Street Operator

Independent criminal or small crew. Flexible, opportunistic, desperate enough to be dangerous.

Tactics: Ambush, hit-and-run, desperation moves, leveraging local knowledge

Weakness: Limited resources, poor planning, can be bought or intimidated

The Fixer

Connected criminal facilitator. Doesn't get their hands dirty but makes things happen. Information, equipment, introductions.

Tactics: Never directly involved, extensive network, mutual benefits

Weakness: Reputation matters, can't afford exposure, loyalty is transactional

Magical Threats

Rogue Construct

Animated magical creation operating without control. May be damaged, corrupted, or fulfilling outdated instructions.

Tactics: Tireless, literal thinking, follows programming regardless of consequences

Weakness: Predictable behavior patterns, vulnerable to specific countermeasures

Wild Magic

Areas or phenomena where the Aether flows unpredictably. Reality becomes unstable. Anything can happen.

Tactics: Random effects, escalating instability, infects magical items and spells

Weakness: Can be contained, eventually stabilizes, affects everyone equally

Planar Intrusion

Something from another dimension crossing into Aetheria. Usually doesn't understand local rules, physics, or society.

Tactics: Alien capabilities, doesn't follow expected patterns, disruptive presence

Weakness: Vulnerable to specific wards, eventually forced back, may be negotiable

Corrupted Mage

Spellcaster who's gone too far—addiction to power, forbidden magic, planar influence, or simple madness.

Tactics: Powerful magic, few ethical constraints, unpredictable actions

Weakness: Physical vulnerability, magical instability, hubris, leaves traces

Environmental Threats

Infrastructure Failure

Magical systems breaking down. Could be accident, sabotage, or overload. Effects cascade through connected systems.

Tactics: Spreading disruption, secondary effects, panic, resource shortage

Weakness: Can be repaired, limited scope, predictable progression

Containment Breach

Something dangerous escaping from storage, research facility, or prison. May be creature, weapon, or hazardous material.

Tactics: Immediate danger, spreading contamination, overwhelming responders

Weakness: Can be tracked, has known weaknesses, authorities mobilize resources

Social Threats

The Investigation

Law enforcement or corporate investigation closing in. Your players may be suspects, witnesses, or obstacles.

Tactics: Legal authority, information gathering, pressure tactics, inevitable

Weakness: Must follow procedures, can be misled, jurisdictional limits

The Scandal

Public exposure threatens someone powerful. They'll do anything to bury it, including eliminating everyone who knows.

Tactics: Character assassination, legal harassment, economic pressure, eventual violence

Weakness: Public attention makes violence risky, evidence can force settlement

The Debt

Someone powerful is owed money, favors, or loyalty. They're calling it in, and refusal has consequences.

Tactics: Escalating pressure, leverage, making examples, eventual collection

Weakness: Can be paid, negotiated, or transferred

Monster Mechanics

Both RPG Anywhere and Infinite Horizons handle threats similarly: as dice pools or guaranteed successes. The Storyteller determines the threat's capabilities and translates them into mechanical terms.

The Two Approaches

Dice Pool Method

Roll dice for the threat's actions. Higher capabilities mean more dice. This creates uncertainty and drama.

Use when: You want unpredictability, the threat should feel inconsistent, or when building tension

Guaranteed Success Method

The threat achieves a set number of successes automatically. No rolling, but predictable.

Use when: You want reliability, represent overwhelming competence, or when speed matters

Building a Threat

Determine Threat Level

Minor Threat

Single trained professional or equivalent danger. Examples: beat cop, corporate security guard, street thug, minor construct

Capabilities: 2-3 dice or 1 guaranteed success

Moderate Threat

Experienced professional or significant danger. Examples: detective, tactical security, experienced criminal, dangerous creature

Capabilities: 4-5 dice or 2 guaranteed successes

Major Threat

Expert-level opposition or serious danger. Examples: specialist agent, elite security, syndicate enforcer, powerful creature

Capabilities: 6-7 dice or 3 guaranteed successes

Extreme Threat

World-class capability or existential danger. Examples: legendary operative, military special forces, archmage, catastrophic hazard

Capabilities: 8+ dice or 4+ guaranteed successes

Define Capabilities

What can this threat do? Assign dice or successes to different areas:

Physical

Combat capability, physical prowess, endurance

Mental

Intelligence, magical ability, technical skill

Social

Influence, intimidation, manipulation

Special

Unique abilities, powers, or advantages

Special Abilities

Some threats need capabilities beyond dice pools:

Armor or Resistance

Reduces incoming damage. Assign 1-3 points of damage reduction.

Vulnerabilities

Specific weaknesses. Take extra damage or penalties from certain sources.

Regeneration

Heals damage over time. Specify rate and limits.

Special Actions

Unique capabilities. Define when they can be used and what they cost.

Threat Duration

How long does this threat persist?

Encounter

Single scene. Defeated, escaped, or resolved quickly.

Session

Recurring threat throughout one session. May appear multiple times.

Arc

Multi-session antagonist. Evolves and adapts.

Campaign

Long-term threat. Major storyline focus.

Example Threats

Corporate Security Team

Four-person tactical security unit protecting corporate facility or executive.

Capabilities

4 dice or 2 guaranteed successes in Physical (trained combat)

3 dice or 1 guaranteed success in Awareness (coordinated tactics)

Equipment: Medium armor (1 point damage reduction), professional weapons, surveillance gear, communication systems

Tactics

Coordinate attacks, use cover, call for backup, prefer containment over killing, follow rules of engagement

Weakness

Must follow protocols, can be negotiated with, backup takes time, legal consequences for excessive force

Street Mage

Independent spellcaster working for criminal organization or personal profit.

Capabilities

5 dice or 2 guaranteed successes in Arcana (skilled magic user)

3 dice or 1 guaranteed success in Physical (self-defense capable)

2 dice or 1 guaranteed success in Social (streetwise)

Special Abilities

Can cast spells from two schools of magic, has 3 prepared spell effects per encounter, can enhance one roll per scene with magic

Tactics

Open with best offensive spell, create distance, use environment, escape if overwhelmed

Weakness

Physically vulnerable, limited spell capacity, relies on arcane focus, often overconfident

Rogue Construct

Military security construct operating without proper control.

Capabilities

6 dice or 3 guaranteed successes in Physical (combat model)

3 dice or 1 guaranteed success in Awareness (sensor suite)

0 dice in Social (non-communicative)

Special Abilities

Armor: 2 points damage reduction

Tireless: no fatigue, doesn't need rest

Targeting system: add 1 die or success to ranged attacks

Vulnerability: specific shutdown codes, electrical overload

Tactics

Prioritize threat assessment, systematic elimination, no mercy, follows combat protocols

Weakness

Predictable patterns, vulnerable to hacking, shutdown commands, electrical attacks

Corporate Executive

High-level executive with extensive resources and few ethical constraints.

Capabilities

- 2 dice or 1 guaranteed success in Physical (minimal personal threat)
- 5 dice or 2 guaranteed successes in Social (master manipulator)
- 4 dice or 2 guaranteed successes in Mental (brilliant strategist)

Resources

- Legal team (delays legal consequences)
- Private security (4-person team, see above)
- Information network (knows what's happening)
- Political connections (can pressure authorities)
- Financial power (can buy or ruin people)

Tactics

Never personally involved in violence, uses proxies, legal harassment, economic pressure, maintains plausible deniability, ruins reputations

Weakness

Public scandal, evidence of crimes, shareholder pressure, regulatory oversight, relies on reputation

Planar Entity

Something from another dimension, confused and dangerous.

Capabilities

7 dice or 3 guaranteed successes in Physical (alien power)

4 dice or 2 guaranteed successes in Arcana (innate magic)

Variable Social (may not understand communication)

Special Abilities

Reality distortion: environment behaves strangely nearby

Alien physiology: resistant to normal damage (2 points reduction), vulnerable to specific wards

Unstable: behavior unpredictable, may help or harm randomly

Tactics

Doesn't understand local rules, follows alien logic, may be curious or hostile, difficult to predict

Weakness

Specific wards force it back, planar instability limits time here, may be communicated with

Criminal Syndicate Cell

Local operation of larger criminal organization. 8-12 members led by experienced operator.

Capabilities

- **Leader:** 5 dice or 2 guaranteed successes across areas
- **Lieutenants (2):** 4 dice or 2 guaranteed successes each
- **Enforcers (6-10):** 3 dice or 1 guaranteed success each

Tactics

Avoid attention, use numbers advantage, leverage local knowledge, can escalate to larger organization, prefers intimidation to violence

Resources

- Safe houses and territory
- Information network in local area
- Connections to larger organization
- Access to illegal equipment and services
- Street-level support and informants

Weakness

Internal politics, larger organization may cut them loose, law enforcement pressure, territorial limitations, loyalty is bought

Environmental Hazard: Arcane Reactor Overload

Industrial magical reactor approaching critical failure. No hostile intent, but extremely dangerous.

Threat Progression

Turn 1-2: Warning signs, minor magical fluctuations

Turn 3-4: Dangerous emissions, equipment failure

Turn 5-6: Cascading failure, spreading contamination

Turn 7+: Catastrophic release, area effect

Challenges and Conflicts

Combat in Aetheria should be dangerous, costly, and avoidable when possible. Your players are professionals, not invincible heroes. Violence has consequences—legal, physical, and social.

Physical Wounds

Both systems track physical damage, but handle it differently. As Storyteller, you need to know when damage matters and when it becomes critical.

Damage in Combat

RPG Anywhere

Characters can take four points of physical damage before receiving a condition. Each condition reduces effectiveness. Three conditions typically means unconscious or dying.

Infinite Horizons

Characters have wound tracks based on Body trait. Damage fills these tracks, imposing penalties as it accumulates. Full track means incapacitation.

Wound Severity

Minor Wounds

Bruises, cuts, exhaustion. Hurts but doesn't stop function. May need medical attention eventually.

Mechanical effect: Small penalties or none

Serious Wounds

Broken bones, deep wounds, severe exhaustion. Requires treatment. Significantly limits capability.

Mechanical effect: Major penalties to relevant actions

Critical Wounds

Life-threatening injuries. Requires immediate medical intervention or magical healing. May have permanent consequences.

Mechanical effect: Character incapacitated or dying

Treatment and Recovery

First Aid

Stops bleeding, stabilizes injuries, treats immediate shock. Doesn't heal significant damage but prevents worsening.

Requirements: Medical skill, appropriate supplies, time to work

Professional Medical Care

Hospital treatment or dedicated healer. Can handle serious injuries. Takes hours to days.

Requirements: Access to facility, payment, time for recovery

Magical Healing

Can accelerate recovery significantly. Limited by healer's capability and available magic. Not instant miracle.

Requirements: Skilled healer, may need expensive components, possibly regulated or restricted

Natural Recovery

Time and rest. Minor wounds heal in days. Serious wounds take weeks. Critical wounds take months and may leave scars.

Combat Consequences

Legal Consequences

Violence attracts attention. Authorities investigate. Witnesses talk. Security footage exists. Self-defense has limits.

Social Consequences

Reputation matters. Known for violence? People avoid you. Organizations become cautious. Enemies multiply.

Economic Consequences

Treatment costs money. Damaged equipment needs replacement. Legal defense is expensive. Missing work has consequences.

Physical Consequences

Injuries linger. Even healed wounds ache. Scars exist. Some damage is permanent. Bodies remember violence.

Stability Checks (Infinite Horizons)

Infinite Horizons includes stability—mental and emotional resilience. Horrifying experiences, moral compromise, and extreme stress test stability.

When to Call for Stability Checks

Extreme Violence

Witnessing or committing acts of shocking brutality. Death, torture, massacres.

Supernatural Horror

Encounters with truly alien or incomprehensible entities. Things that shouldn't exist.

Moral Transgression

Actions that violate the character's core values. Betrayals, innocent casualties, necessary evils.

Overwhelming Stress

Sustained pressure without relief. Everything falling apart. No good options remaining.

Stability Failure

Minor Failure

Temporary distraction, momentary panic, need to step back and breathe.

Mechanical effect: Small penalty on next action or two

Major Failure

Longer-lasting impact. Nightmares, jumpiness, avoidance behaviors. Needs time to process.

Mechanical effect: Sustained penalties, may need specific actions to recover

Critical Failure

Serious psychological impact. May need professional help. Potentially long-term consequences.

Mechanical effect: Significant ongoing penalties, requires treatment or time

Recovery

Short-Term

Taking a break, talking it through with allies, compartmentalizing. Gets you through the immediate situation.

Long-Term

Actual processing, professional therapy, addressing root causes. Takes real time and effort.

Storyteller Guidance

Don't Overuse

Stability checks should feel significant. Not every fight needs one. Save them for genuinely traumatic moments.

Respect Player Boundaries

Some players don't enjoy psychological horror or moral dilemma exploration. Know your table.

Allow Agency

Characters can choose to avoid situations that test stability. That's valid play.

Make Recovery Possible

Don't trap characters in permanent psychological damage without player buy-in.

Combat Pacing

When Combat Happens

Players Choose Violence

They initiate. Let them. Then show consequences.

Violence is Thrust Upon Them

Ambush, unavoidable confrontation, situation escalates. Make it scary.

Violence is the Solution

Sometimes the only way through is fighting. Make it costly but achievable.

Running Combat

Establish Stakes

What happens if they lose? What does winning cost? Make both clear.

Track Initiative and Actions

Use your system's method. Keep it moving. Don't let combat drag.

Describe Impact

Don't just narrate mechanics. Show what damage means. Make violence visceral.

Allow Retreat

Combat should be escapable. Smart players recognize no-win scenarios. Let them run.

End Decisively

When the outcome is clear, wrap it up. Don't drag out inevitable conclusions.

Combat Alternatives

Negotiation

Even in hostile situations, talking might work. Not everyone wants to fight.

Escape

Sometimes victory is getting out alive. Create paths for retreat. ;

Surrender

Losing a fight doesn't mean ending a campaign. Capture creates new problems and opportunities. ;

Environmental Solutions

Clever use of environment can avoid direct confrontation. Reward creative thinking.

Making Combat Matter

Limited Resources

Ammunition, spell capacity, medical supplies. Things run out. Plan accordingly.

Attracting Attention

Loud violence brings response. Authorities, bystanders, backup. Time limits emerge.

Property Damage

Breaking things has owners. Owners have lawyers. Consequences follow.

Witnesses

People remember. They talk. Reputation spreads. Actions follow characters.

Building Adventures

Adventures in Aetheria can start small—a simple job, a local problem, an interesting opportunity—and grow into something significant. Your job is creating that first hook and seeing where players take it.

Starting Small

The Initial Hook

Give players a clear, manageable objective with obvious benefit:

Job Offers

Someone needs their specific skills. Clear scope, defined payment, limited commitment. Examples: corporate security hire, private investigation, courier work, technical consultation

Personal Investment

Something threatens something they care about. Examples: friend in trouble, home neighborhood at risk, reputation on the line, debt coming due

Opportunity Knocks

Valuable information, profitable venture, interesting discovery. Examples: inside tip, discovered secret, abandoned facility, mysterious artifact

Accident

Wrong place, wrong time, now involved. Examples: witnessed crime, mistaken identity, collateral damage, caught in crossfire

The First Session

Establish Baseline

Show players how Aetheria works. Use of magic, role of technology, social structure, authority. Make the normal clear before introducing abnormal.

Provide Direction

Don't make them guess. Give clear objective, obvious starting point, accessible information.

Allow Success

First session should feel achievable. Build confidence in capabilities. Establish competence.

Plant Seeds

Drop hints of larger issues. Mention important NPCs. Reference bigger organizations. Don't explain everything.

End with Choice

Session ends with players deciding next step. Not cliffhanger without agency, but consequence requiring decision.

Complications and Development

The First Twist

Hidden Employer

Client is proxy for more powerful party

Larger Stakes

Problem connects to bigger issue

Moral Complication

Success requires questionable choice

New Opposition

Success attracts dangerous attention

Building Connections

Each session adds to growing web:

Recurring NPCs

People remember players. Build relationships. Create allies and enemies.

Organizational Notice

Groups track player actions. Reputation spreads. Offers and threats emerge.

Developing Mysteries

Each answer raises new questions. Clues accumulate. Patterns emerge.

Resource Development

Players establish contacts, safe houses, income sources. Investment in world.

Scaling Up

From Job to Investigation

Simple task reveals bigger problem. Investigation uncovers conspiracy, corruption, or threat.

From Local to Regional

Problem isn't isolated. It affects multiple cities, threatens trade routes, involves national interests.

From Reactive to Proactive

Players stop responding to events and start driving them. They have plans, resources, and enemies.

From Personal to Political

Their actions matter to powerful people. They're players in larger games. Factions want them.

Campaign Seeds

Corporate Conspiracy

Major corporation engaging in illegal research, environmental damage, or political manipulation. Players discover evidence. Going public is complicated.

Scale: Starts as employment dispute or industrial accident. Grows to corporate war.

Infrastructure Crisis

Magical systems failing across city or region. Might be sabotage, natural failure, or something worse. Players have expertise to investigate.

Scale: Starts as local blackout. Grows to existential threat.

Criminal Expansion

Syndicate moving into new territory or operations. Players caught in middle—targeted, recruited, or hired to stop them.

Scale: Starts as street-level violence. Grows to organized crime war.

Planar Instability

Boundaries weakening. Things crossing over. Players have encounter. Authorities don't believe them or can't help.

Scale: Starts as weird incident. Grows to reality breakdown.

Political Tension

Conflict between nations, factions, or organizations heating up. Players have connections to multiple sides. Neutrality becomes impossible.

Scale: Starts as local dispute. Grows to regional conflict.

Personal Vendetta

Someone powerful wants player dead, ruined, or controlled. Players must discover why while surviving.

Scale: Starts as suspicious accidents. Grows to full persecution.

Ancient Legacy

Discovery of pre-modern artifact, site, or knowledge. Multiple parties want it. Players have access or knowledge.

Scale: Starts as archaeological curiosity. Grows to power struggle.

Environmental Disaster

Magical pollution, escaped experiment, or containment failure. Players in affected area. Authorities overwhelmed.

Scale: Starts as localized hazard. Grows to regional catastrophe.

Running Long-Term

Maintain Momentum

Each session should advance something. Plot, character development, world building. Never purely filler.

Track Consequences

Actions have results. Remember what players did. Show how world responds.

Allow Downtime

Between major events, let characters rest, develop relationships, pursue personal goals. Not every session is crisis.

Evolve Opposition

Enemies learn and adapt. Success makes future challenges harder. Failure makes enemies bolder.

Develop NPCs

Important characters grow and change. They have lives independent of players. Their goals shift.

Build Toward Climax

Long-term campaigns need payoff. Build toward resolution of major storylines. Allow victory.

Leave Threads

Some questions remain unanswered. Some NPCs survive. Some problems persist. World continues after campaign.

Using Third-Party Content

Adventure Modules

Most fantasy adventures can adapt to Aetheria

Update Technology

Medieval village becomes urban neighborhood. Dungeon becomes abandoned facility. Castle becomes corporate headquarters.

Modernize Communication

Messages travel instantly. Information is accessible. Adjust timing accordingly.

Add Infrastructure

Roads exist. Transit works. Services are available. Plan around modern convenience.

Update Authority

Guards are professional. Investigation uses magic. Crimes have forensics.

Keep Core Structure

The actual adventure—investigation, conflict, challenge—remains. Just change presentation.

Your Story Begins

You have everything you need. A world where magic powers cities and arcane reactors hum in every district. Where corporate espionage involves divination spells and traffic jams include dirigibles. Where professional adventurers exist because systems fail, people are corrupt, and some problems require working outside established authority.

Your players have characters with skills, resources, and expertise. They're not farmhands destined for greatness —they're professionals entering a complex, dangerous situation because someone needs their specific capabilities.

Start small. A job, a problem, an opportunity. Something manageable with clear objectives and obvious benefit. Let them succeed. Let them feel competent. Then show them the complication underneath.

The person who hired them lied. The problem connects to something bigger. Success attracted dangerous attention. Their actions had unexpected consequences.

Build from there. Each session adds connections. NPCs remember them. Organizations notice them. Mysteries develop. The world responds to their choices.

Scale up gradually. Local problems become regional. Personal threats become political. They stop reacting and start driving events. They become players in larger games.

Aetheria is yours to shape. The threats you create, the NPCs you voice, the complications you introduce— these make the world real. Your players bring the characters. You bring everything else.

Check your notes. Review your threats. Know what happens if players do nothing.

Then let them surprise you.