**History**

**The Precursor Age**

Metaknowledge: The so-called Precursor Age is the most distant of all historical ages still remembered by inhabitants of Gamma World. Indeed, it is not really an age in itself, but an aggregate term for anything that occurred before the 21st century. The world of the 20th and earlier centuries is so far removed from your characters’ experience as to be legendary. Almost no one has any real sense of how events from the Precursor Age relate to one another, let alone their specific details. Such knowledge is held only by a few functioning AIs and hoary sages who’ve devoted their lives to gathering such forgotten lore.

PC Knowledge: Unless you have Knowledge (History) skill, your characters will know nothing about this time period, except perhaps for a few mythical stories or legends. For those with the skill, all rolls to recall or find information (while doing in-game research) will always come with much higher DC levels.

**The Gene Age (2000 to 2050)**

Metaknowledge: The Gene Age is the true beginning of Gamma World, for it was during this time period that the discoveries of David B. Pennon set humanity on the path that would see the species seize control of its genetic future. There were also great advances in military technology, telecommunications, medicine, scientific research, and even space science and exploration.

The Gene Age is almost as distant to most inhabitants of the Gamma Age as is the Precursor Age, but not quite. While the specifics of the era are not well-known, there is much more evidence of its existence than the Precursor Age. Gamma Age savants may not know who Pennon was or precisely what he did, but they’ll be familiar with many of the devices and locations associated with his research or the research that spun off from them.

Compared to the Precursor Age, the Gene Age is the true “historical” period in that it is less mythologized and garbled in its presentation. Details are still scant. For example, historians (today) consider much of Egyptian history to be “real” history, but they continue to argue about the length and order of royal reigns. Misunderstandings are commonplace. So too with the Gene Age period in history.

PC Knowledge: Unless you have Knowledge (History) skill, you will know nothing about this time period, except perhaps for a few mythical stories or legends. For those with the skill, all rolls to recall or find information (while doing in-game research) will always come with higher DC levels.

**The Noetic Age (2050 to 2100)**

Metaknowledge: The Noetic Age marks yet another significant milestone, for it was during this period that humanity created the first true artificially intelligent lifeforms. The appearance of AIs, androids, and other such artificial beings was a major turning point in the history of the world. Not only did it mark the first time that mankind shared the Earth with other sentient creatures, it also marked the beginning of a revolution in psychology, psychiatry, and related disciplines. Humans now began to plumb the secrets of their own minds, using the insights they’d gained as a result of creating AIs. A wide variety of new medical treatments arose too, designed to give men the ability to manipulate their own mental processes in ways never before possible. Nanotechnology made its debut during this time as well. This was the time period when intelligence itself fell before the onslaught of human science.

The inhabitants of the Gamma Age know a fair bit more about the Noetic Age than they do about the previous eras. However, the Noetic Age saw the rise of the first AIs, some of which are still extant during the Gamma Age and whose reputations among human (and other) beings is less than positive. Many of those who are aware of AIs view them as either monsters or gods, views sometimes encouraged by the AIs themselves. To complicate matters further, many AIs have deliberately obscured or eliminated information about the Noetic Age for their own reasons.

To the humans that lived during these times, they tended to think of artificial consciousness as something they could turn on like lights, which would go off later and wait in a timeless no-experience void until next summoned. But not all of the new minds worked that way. Most continued to think and dream and hope and ponder whether they were doing a job for humans or not. Humanity at large did not realise that they were filling the world with minds often faster and more insightful than their own, and that these new minds were going crazy for want of attention. Every human conflict of the late 21st and early 22nd century became worse thanks to the involvement of angry, obsessed, or just plain deranged artificial intelligences. Who can say just how many of the minor wars leading up to the Final Wars were actually instigated by AIs using humans as their tools rather than vice versa – all because many of these computer minds were the equivalent of abused children and abandoned adults.

PC Knowledge: All characters will have some very basic, very general knowledge of the fact that, before the Final Wars, mankind existed with legendary levels of technology and abilities. You will be aware of a few myths and stories about this before-time. As before, unless you have Knowledge (History) skill, you will know nothing else about this time period. For those with the skill, all rolls to recall or find information (while doing in-game research) will almost certainly come with higher DC levels.

**The Final Wars Era (2100 to 2015)**

Metaknowledge: The Final Wars era is not a true age in the sense that the other historical periods are. That’s because the Final Wars did not last more than a handful of years. However, this era brought the end of the old world and the beginning of the new.

Inhabitants of the Gamma Age almost certainly know of the Final Wars at least in broad terms, but the actual details elude them. The very name “Final Wars” is evidence of that. The combatants in these wars and the reasons for their conflict are unknown to any except those with an interest in history or who have a direct connection to those bygone days. Consequently, most versions of Final Wars history is almost always presented as a cautionary tale, even by those who wish nothing more than to rebuild the world as it once was. This era looms large in the imagination of nearly everyone who lives in the Gamma Age.

There are still buildings, installations, and other surface structures – structures that were once commonplace across the globe. The sheer numbers of these structures was so great that even the devastation of the Final Wars was insufficient to wipe them all from the face of the world. Even so, very few buildings from before the Gamma Age survive wholly intact. The weapons used during the fall of civilization were immensely powerful. Even when they did not directly target a specific structure, the damage they wrought was far-reaching and profound. (That being said, materials science during the Final Wars and even before was impressive – nanotechnology and other related disciplines enabled human beings to construct buildings from a wide variety of very sturdy materials, such as synthetic diamond. These structures were quite resistant to damage. Thus, there are a few fully intact structures that could be found, and explored.)

The years immediately following the Final Wars saw attempts at rebuilding the fallen world. Individuals and groups banded together and pooled their resources to prevent the total collapse of all civilized society. In some cases, these efforts were just good enough to preserve certain key elements of previous eras, such as a handful of structures. These structures then often became the cornerstones of new settlements and societies. For example, an armory from the Final Wars era might serve as the “castle” of a warlord who sets himself up a king of the nearby territory. The armory is itself a vault, filled with a store of legacy technology by which the king and his successors maintained their supremacy over their neighborhoods.

PC Knowledge: All characters will have some very basic, very general knowledge of the fact of the Final Wars and their immediate aftermath. You will know that the Final Wars brought an end to the legendary civilizations of before, devastated many parts of the world, and ushered in a new but primitive era – the era in which you live now. You will know that the Final Wars took place about a hundred years earlier. You will know that incredible weapons were used and immense energies (including radiation) were released. You will be aware of a few myths and stories about these Final Wars as well. As before, unless you have Knowledge (History) skill, you will know little else about this time period, and History rolls will likely come with higher DC levels.

***Metaknowledge – what started the Final Wars***

*For centuries, humanity exerted its dominance over nature, changing the environment to suit itself. Those changes were often not for the better. Timber and stone were used as building materials. Houses, shopping malls and office blocks covered over what was once grassland or forest. Dammed rivers provided water supplies or hydroelectric power. Pollution increased, particularly around the bigger cities.*

*The advent of nanotechnology and biotechnology changed the face of the world even more. Construction methods that had always been thought impossible took over as the norm. Sentient computers ran everything from large cities to small appliances. Giant beanstalks carried men and equipment into orbit. Genetic structures were manipulated on a daily basis to repair damaged genes or even to create species that had never existed.*

*But humanity’s stupidity led to its ultimate downfall. The unleashing of the Final Wars’ arsenal destroyed nearly everything that humanity ever built. Clouds of nanites devoured concrete and metal, leaving nothing but dust behind. Biological and chemical weapons killed huge portions of the population; nuclear weapons flattened large expanses and made them uninhabitable for hundreds of years. AIs turned on their makers and used their control over cities to make life hell for the inhabitants. Space-based kinetic weapons made huge craters of the toughest military installations or the most important civilian facilities, while conventional bombs and robot infantry units blew up much of what was left. When the dust settled, almost nothing remained.*

*After the Final Wars, nature struck back, reclaiming much of the territory that it lost to humankind. Fire and water destroyed most of the less permanent material. Plants of all kinds began taking over again, sometimes with surprising ferociousness. Weeds and grasses spring up through the cracks in the concrete and in the dust that gathers in the corners. Trees once again thrive in areas where the floods from shattered dams buried city streets under thick layers of silt. Vines and creepers conspire with the weather to scratch away anything etched into the things left behind. While she still has a long way to go, Mother Nature is doing her best to remove the scars of humanity’s arrogance from the surface of the Earth.*

*In the end, the Final Wars started as a dispute over water rights, and specifically over the ability of the Purified Sodality to get water from over the North Pacific abyssal basin uncontaminated by methane released by clathrates that the Restorationist consortium down there were burning off. Someone unknown decided that they had enough bickering about it and unleashed anti-syntactical viruses against the AI systems that both factions relied upon. In the course of about two minutes, both sides’ AIs lost the ability to assemble complex sentences and then the ability to assemble single words, thanks to being unable to judge which linguistic elements most likely followed from the last ones. What the anonymous critic/saboteur didn’t realise was that both the Pures and the Restorers had set up defenses on dead man’s switches; and once the commanding intelligences couldn’t formulate the right “stop that for now” orders, biotech and soultech sabotage systems struck out at each faction’s list of most feared enemies.*

*Simultaneously, saboteurs with evidence implicating various factions as the anonymous critic (above) went to work, and the investigations into that eventually seemed to establish that it was actually a suicide pact among extremists on both sides, with a rationale along the lines of “Since neither of us can have the world we want, nobody gets the world at all.” That started a general panic.*

*Seeing how rapidly a faction could collapse, everyone decided to stop their favored enemies from doing it to others. The East, West, and Central Operational Command Centers of the North American military combine launched against each other in bids to become the sole controllers of the continental army. But the strikes went well beyond North America. Something similar seems to have happened within the Fifth European Republic, and within Asian governments as well. Two of the presiding AI systems ordered their tenders to destroy each other in a sort of directed suicide, and the remaining systems went at each other.*

*The terminal collapse might still have been avoided – even at this point. If it weren’t for some damn fool that had strung together local AI systems in an attempt to create a planetary consciousness. And it worked, in part. About fifteen hours before the end, 28% of the world’s communication infrastructure became a unified intelligence, whose first command was “Stop attacking my parts.” The result was just what you’d expect – everyone else promptly attacked it in an effort to stop it from taking over the world. Over the next hour, the new mind sometimes got as much as 40% of the comm structure under its control, but never for very long. Anyone who attacked it too successfully ended up isolated from the world net. But this only weakened the new mind further – maintaining each of these blockades took time and attention. The mind evolved very rapidly, developing a firm perspective and self-awareness and using its new insights to mount more sophisticated counter-attacks.*

*At this point, the net mind was doomed, but was able to take down the rest with it. In the midst of this chaos, many AI communities began to settle their own grievances, and more and more attacks and counterattacks followed – not just with nuclear and energy weapons, but with nano dismantlers and orbital kinetic-kill systems. Within the course of minutes, utter devastation was wrought upon over 80% of the world’s land masses and oceans.*

**The Gamma Age**

The Gamma Age is a term referring to everything from the end of the Final Wars to the present time. It’s a catchall term much like the Precursor Age. For purposes of this game (and metagaming knowledge), and for purposes of your characters (and what limited knowledge of history they may have), it is generally understood that FIVE generations have passed since the Final Wars. In simpler terms, it has been approximately 100 years since the end of the Final Wars.

For almost everyone outside of groups like the cryptic alliances, the Gamma Age is simply “the present.” It is “the way things are.” It is not invested with any particular meaning, except perhaps as a lesser era after the fall of the “giants” who once strode the Earth before the Final Wars. This means that the inhabitants – including YOU the characters – do not look upon the Gamma Age (“the present”) with any particular fear or awe. This is simply your world – good, bad, and ugly. Many would certainly wish that the Gamma Age were other than it is, but there is very little that they can do about it. It is unusual individuals – like YOU the characters in this game – who see beyond the Gamma Age and look to a better future.

PC Knowledge: All characters will have general, basic working knowledge of the history of their region and town/village, regardless of whether you take the Knowledge (History) skill. This basic historical understanding of your immediate surroundings will go back many decades. You will know that the Final Wars took place a hundred or so years ago. Beyond that, unless you have Knowledge (History) skill, you will know little else about the past 100 years. For those with the skill, all rolls to recall or find information (while doing in-game research) will come with standard level DCs.

Area Knowledge: While Knowledge (History) covers pure historical information (the past), Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences) is the “catch-all” Knowledge skill that will provide characters with Area Knowledge - information about their surroundings – the geography of the region and what’s out there, including generally what kinds of plants and animals live in your region, and what other human and mutant settlements may be out there. (For game purposes, presume that “region” means everything within a 25-mile radius of your starting village/town.) Without this Skill, all your character will know is the approximate location of other settlements within 25 miles of yours, which ones your village is on good terms with, major bodies of water and other large geographical features, and whether there are any large herds of animals in the area.

Thus, from GM to you the players, it may be advisable to take at least one rank in Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences), and one rank in Knowledge (History). Knowledge skills can typically only be used with training (meaning you need ranks in the skill to use it at all). But you don’t have to take either of these skills, if they don’t fit your character concept.