



HEART OF STEAM

THREE CITIES, ONE HEART

An Illustrated Guide to Aetherholm, Velmira, and Lunaris

*Three cities learned to listen.
None of them heard the same answer.*

WONDERS WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

THREE WAYS OF FACING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Across the world of Heart of Steam, Aetherium is more than a source of power. It reacts to rhythm, memory, error, and shared presence. It can pass through machines, archives, rituals, water, and living minds - but it never becomes entirely obedient to any of them.

Three cities stand at the heart of that discovery.

Aetherholm studies the impossible through instruments, pressure, and mechanical design.

Velmira surrounds it with ceremony, masks, and carefully guarded versions of memory.

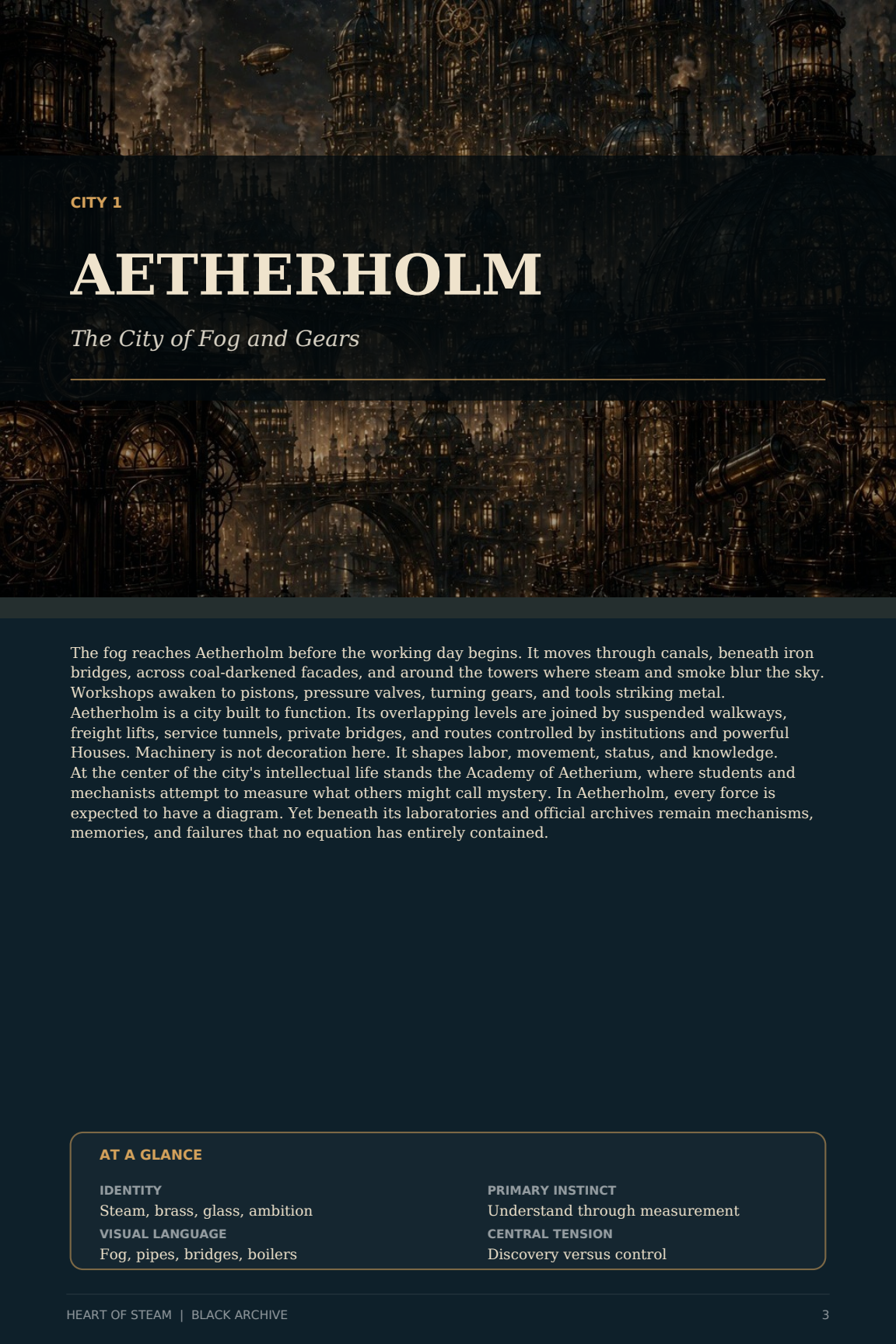
Lunaris listens through water, tides, and the living matter beneath its domes.

Each city believes it has found a responsible way to protect what it does not fully understand. Each city also reveals the danger hidden inside that belief.

How can something living be guarded without becoming a possession?

A NOTE TO THE READER

This illustrated guide contains light setting spoilers from all three books of the Heart of Steam trilogy. It introduces important locations and concepts but does not reveal the resolution of the final story.



CITY 1

AETHERHOLM

The City of Fog and Gears

The fog reaches Aetherholm before the working day begins. It moves through canals, beneath iron bridges, across coal-darkened facades, and around the towers where steam and smoke blur the sky. Workshops awaken to pistons, pressure valves, turning gears, and tools striking metal. Aetherholm is a city built to function. Its overlapping levels are joined by suspended walkways, freight lifts, service tunnels, private bridges, and routes controlled by institutions and powerful Houses. Machinery is not decoration here. It shapes labor, movement, status, and knowledge. At the center of the city's intellectual life stands the Academy of Aetherium, where students and mechanists attempt to measure what others might call mystery. In Aetherholm, every force is expected to have a diagram. Yet beneath its laboratories and official archives remain mechanisms, memories, and failures that no equation has entirely contained.

AT A GLANCE

IDENTITY

Steam, brass, glass, ambition

VISUAL LANGUAGE

Fog, pipes, bridges, boilers

PRIMARY INSTINCT

Understand through measurement

CENTRAL TENSION

Discovery versus control

WHAT THE CITY KEEPS BELOW

● THE ACADEMY OF AETHERIUM

An institution dedicated to studying Aetherium and developing its technical applications. Its laboratories contain experimental devices, mechanical prosthetics, harmonic systems, shielded crystals, and projects that challenge the accepted limits of machinery.

● THE FORBIDDEN LIBRARY

A sealed chamber inside the Academy containing protected records and a map connected to the city's hidden structures. It marks the beginning of Lyra Ashcroft's search - and the possibility that a closed door may also be waiting.

● THE FORGE OF MEMORIES

A deep structure beneath the Academy, linked to early experiments involving Aetherium, memory, the Heart of Steam, and the work of Kael Ashcroft. It is evidence that progress was separated from responsibility.

AETHERIUM AND CULTURE

PRESSURE · FREQUENCY · RESONANCE · ENGINEERING

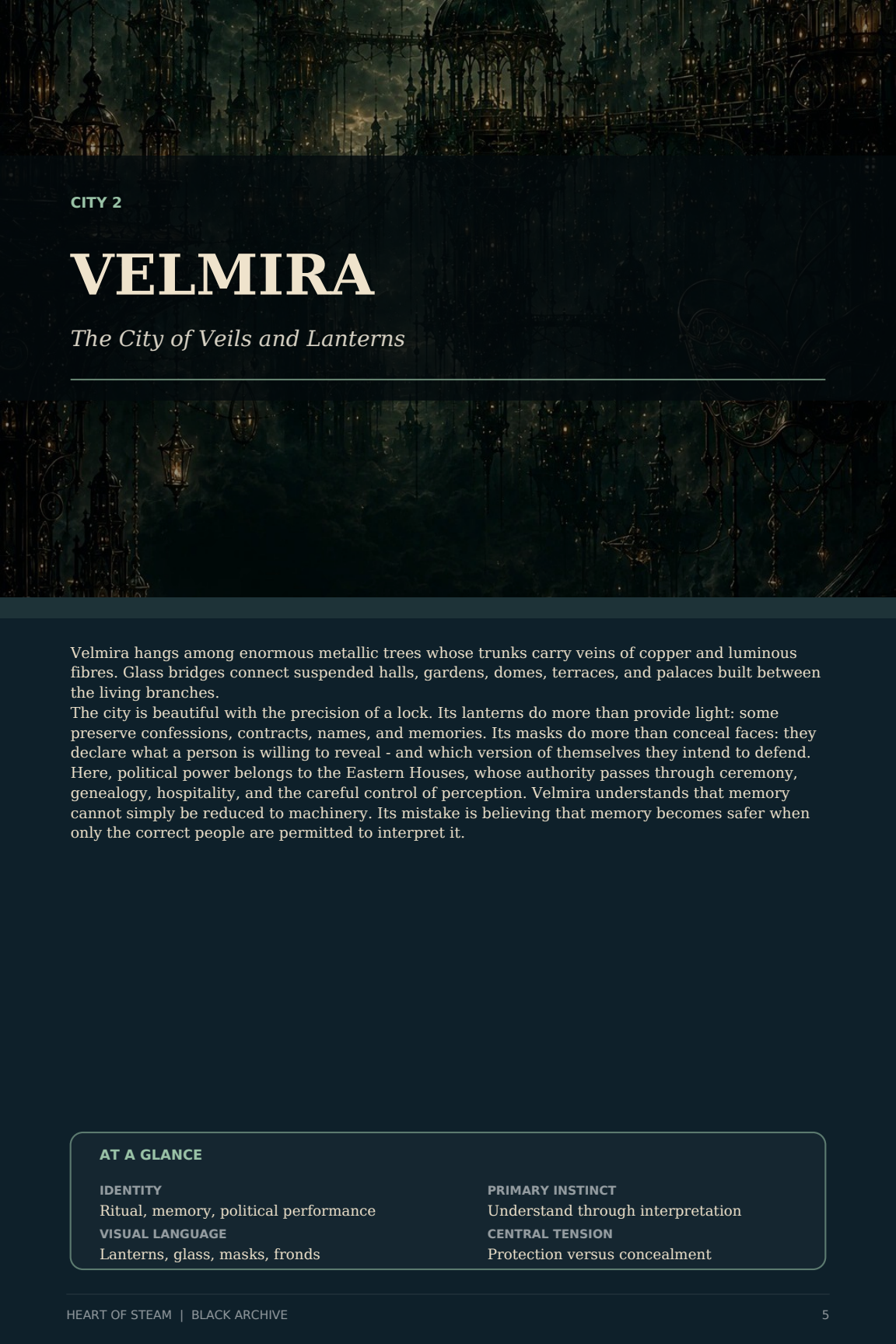
GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Learning that a machine may listen.

GREATEST ERROR

Believing that anything measurable must therefore be governable.





CITY 2

VELMIRA

The City of Veils and Lanterns

Velmira hangs among enormous metallic trees whose trunks carry veins of copper and luminous fibres. Glass bridges connect suspended halls, gardens, domes, terraces, and palaces built between the living branches.

The city is beautiful with the precision of a lock. Its lanterns do more than provide light: some preserve confessions, contracts, names, and memories. Its masks do more than conceal faces: they declare what a person is willing to reveal - and which version of themselves they intend to defend. Here, political power belongs to the Eastern Houses, whose authority passes through ceremony, genealogy, hospitality, and the careful control of perception. Velmira understands that memory cannot simply be reduced to machinery. Its mistake is believing that memory becomes safer when only the correct people are permitted to interpret it.

AT A GLANCE

IDENTITY

Ritual, memory, political performance

VISUAL LANGUAGE

Lanterns, glass, masks, fronds

PRIMARY INSTINCT

Understand through interpretation

CENTRAL TENSION

Protection versus concealment

WHAT THE CITY KEEPS BELOW

● THE PALACE OF VEILS

The ceremonial heart of Velmira, where politics and hospitality share the same corridors. Its masks, changing passages, and layered ceremonies reveal a culture in which access is never merely physical.

● THE HALL OF A THOUSAND LANTERNS

A vast archive in which individual flames preserve memories entrusted to the Eastern Houses. The lanterns embody Velmira's central contradiction: memory can be protected from destruction, yet protection can quietly become ownership.

● THE COURT OF FRONDS

A political and ceremonial institution through which the Eastern Houses receive visitors, negotiate authority, and determine which voices may enter public memory. Here, silence can possess as much meaning as speech.

AETHERIUM AND CULTURE

MEMORY • RITUAL • SYMBOL • WITNESS

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Understanding that truth requires interpretation.

GREATEST ERROR

Allowing interpretation to become permission.



CITY 3

LUNARIS

The City of Tides and Broken Moons

Lunaris rises from the sea through moving piers, curved bridges, submerged chambers, and glass domes reinforced with brass. Every surface carries a reflection, and every reflection seems capable of preserving a different version of the moon.

The city does not possess firm borders in the way Aetherholm does. Water passes beneath its streets, beside its houses, through transparent channels, and into the rituals of everyday life. Objects emerge with the tide. Names appear in water. Bells sound from below rather than above. Beneath Lunaris lies a living formation of Aetherium, more like a growing coral network than a mineral resource. It responds not only to energy but to memory, connection, and the boundaries between one person and another. Lunaris believes that pain should never remain alone. Its danger begins when sharing pain becomes permission to dissolve the person carrying it.

AT A GLANCE

IDENTITY

Water, memory, shared loss

VISUAL LANGUAGE

Domes, tides, shells, broken moons

PRIMARY INSTINCT

Understand through reception

CENTRAL TENSION

Belonging versus erasure

WHAT THE CITY KEEPS BELOW

● THE HARBOR OF DOMES

A district of moving platforms, curved bridges, and glass structures that continue beneath the waterline. Its shifting piers and reflected moons make arrival feel less like crossing a border than entering a tide.

● THE GUILD OF CUSTODIANS

The institution responsible for Lunar's records, rites, submerged thresholds, and disputed memories. Its work reveals the city's central question: who decides when receiving a memory becomes possessing it?

● THE AETHERIUM BED

A living, coral-like formation growing beneath the city. It responds to memory, relationship, and the boundaries between people rather than to pressure alone, binding Lunar to the Breath of the Sea.

AETHERIUM AND CULTURE

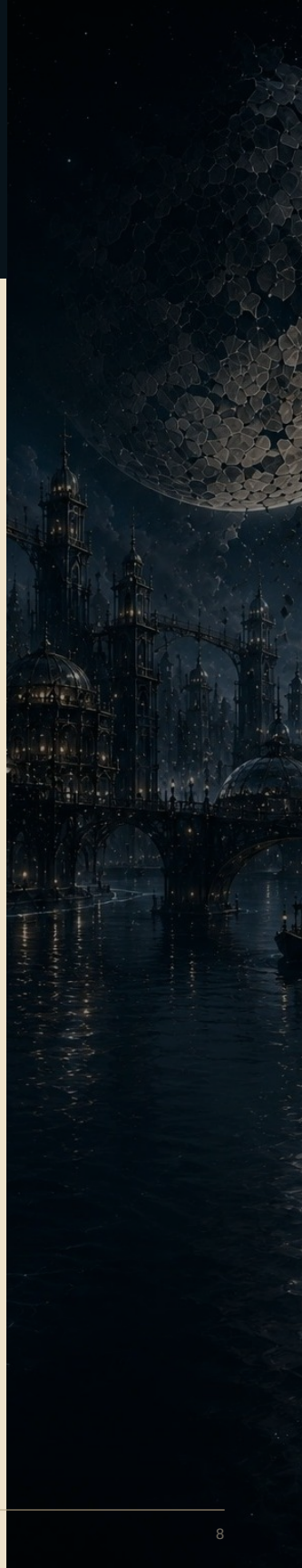
TIDE • MEMORY • RELATIONSHIP • RECEPTION

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Learning that no memory should be left entirely alone.

GREATEST ERROR

Allowing shared memory to dissolve the person who carries it.



CONCLUSION

THREE WAYS OF LISTENING

Three attempts. Three warnings. One shared responsibility.

AETHERHOLM

TO MEASURE

How does it work?

Its machinery gives form to the unseen, but form can become command.

VELMIRA

TO VEIL

Which truth can be safely revealed?

Its veils prevent careless exposure, but protection can become control.

LUNARIS

TO RECEIVE

How can no memory remain alone?

Its waters offer belonging, but belonging can become erasure.

ONE HEART

THREE CITIES. THREE ATTEMPTS.

Aetherholm, Velmira, and Lunaris are not three stages of a perfect answer. They are three attempts to guard what none of them can fully possess.

The machine must learn that understanding does not grant ownership. The veil must learn that protection does not grant authority over truth. The tide must learn that connection does not require the loss of every boundary.

The Heart of Steam does not ask the cities to become one. It asks them to remain distinct - and still answer one another.

*A living heart is protected by the hands
that remain open around it.*

WONDERS WORKSHOP