



A ROLEPLAYING FABLE OF LOST SCIENCE,
ELEMENTAL MAGIC AND
UNCHARTED SKIES





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UNCHARTED SKIES.

“NO MATTER HOW MANY WEAPONS YOU HAVE,
NO MATTER HOW GREAT YOUR TECHNOLOGY MIGHT BE,
THE WORLD CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT LOVE.”

– HAYAO MIYAZAKI’S *LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY*

*This book is dedicated to the memory of Stewart Wieck,
without whose enthusiasm and support Upwind would
have remained only a little draft...*

Created and written by:

Jeff Barber

Illustrated by:

James Stowe

Additional writing by:

John Hay

Michael Knowles

Jason Werner

Edited by:

Roderick Robertson

Proofread by:

Amy Lynn

Rachel Lapidow

Graphic Design by:

Aileen E. Miles

Canon contributions from:

Ezra Davis

Andy Hirth

Jay Moore

Anthony Sigrist

Jason Werner

Garrett White

Published by:

Biohazard Games

Nocturnal Media

Deep gratitude to:

Joel Arakaki

Alan Bahr

Laura Barber

Allan Grohe

John Hay

Andy Hirth

Jack Holcomb

Rich Howard

Faust Kells

Robb Minneman

Ross Payton

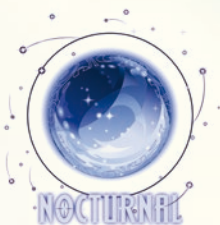
Caleb Stokes

Eric Shandrow

Ben Stone

Steve Wieck

Stewart Wieck



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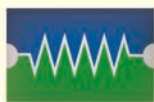
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INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this book, you probably already know about pen and paper roleplaying games. If that's the case, skip ahead to the next section to see what makes *UPWIND* different from most other RPGs. If you are new to playing RPGs, continue reading for a primer on how they work.

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Roleplaying games allow a group of players to cooperatively create and participate in adventure stories in any genre or setting. Roleplaying adventures are like improvised plays in which everyone has a role, but the thread of the narrative is created by the impromptu interactions of the participants and the course of the story is unknown until the participants tell it. Roleplaying games are cooperative, so there is no winning or losing. They are played solely for the enjoyment of experiencing exciting events in fantastical locales and creating unique tales with friends.

One participant, called the game moderator, is responsible for knowing the rules and the setting, and for creating the basic elements of plot for the story he wishes to share. The other players use the game rules to create characters, usually with some guidance from the moderator about what sort of characters would best fit into the story. During play, the moderator describes events that take place in the world around the characters and the actions of its inhabitants. The players guide their characters through the events by making

decisions for them, describing their actions and interacting with the moderator's non-player characters. The rules provide a framework to support character actions and interactions and to determine the game-world consequences of the choices the players make.

The moderator describes what is happening in the setting, providing whatever details he imagines and what information he thinks is relevant to the story. The players explain what actions their characters take in response, and this exchange of description and response forms the narrative. Players can also be proactive, telling the moderator what their characters choose to do on their own initiative — either adding their own parts to the story or acting in anticipation of the moderator's potential events.

A story may be played through in a single session of a few hours, or it might be made up of multiple sessions. The story may have a specific arc with a single plot, or it might be a series or mixture of smaller plots interlinked by the characters and their shared adventures.

It is common for participants to speak to each other “in-character,” in the active, first person voices of their characters. Such interactions are one of the most engaging aspects of roleplaying games and participants are encouraged to have fun with them. The more enthusiastic and evocative the moderator and players make their interactions, the more engaged the participants will be and the more fun the whole group will have.



WHAT A GROUP NEEDS TO PLAY

- Two or more enthusiastic participants. Four to five is optimal, but more can be fun too.
- A copy of this book.
- Photocopies or printouts of the character sheet (one for each player) and some pencils.
- One deck of basic playing cards for each participant, including the moderator.

UPWIND — A ROLEPLAYING FABLE OF LOST SCIENCE, ELEMENTAL MAGIC AND UNCHARTED SKIES.

THE SETTING

UPWIND presents a fantastical setting where the remains of a broken world drift through a sky divided into the Dark and the Light. The Kin, the people of the Kingdoms in the Light, inhabit these floating islands, while the Children of the Dark dwell far below where the Light does not reach. The Wind is a powerful, supernatural force energizing the machines of the Kin and charging the elemental Potential they all wield. Lost technology is the currency of the kingdoms, scavenged from the remnants of the Masters of the Wind — a culture destroyed long ago in the great cataclysm known as the DownFall. The young civilization of the Kin has been reborn and struggles both with itself and the Children of the Dark as it strives to recover.

Ruins lie everywhere, and what seem like ancient cities and old villages crouch among the remnants of settlements more ancient still. The broken metal and stone of these fallen places are monuments to a mysterious past and serve as the cannibalized foundations of a new civilization.

The general infrastructure of the Kingdoms in the Light is a random patchwork of the simple and the salvaged, often held together with elemental magic. Built on the bones of the Masters' lost civilization and cobbled together from recovered technology, the traditional and reclaimed worlds intertwine and overlap. Stitching this piecemeal enterprise together is an interweaving of Kin reverse engineering, innovation and Potential that has brought civilization to the brink of a new age of industry.

UPWIND is specifically inspired by these fantastical animated films and series:

- Studio Ghibli's *LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY* and *NAUSICAA: VALLEY OF THE WIND*
- Disney Studio's *TREASURE PLANET*
- Ralph Bakshi's *WIZARDS*
- Gonzo K.K.'s *LAST EXILE*
- Bones Studio's *FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST*
- Nickelodeon's *AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER*

THE CHARACTERS

UPWIND campaigns feature the Knights of the Explorers' Guild — storied, skyfaring explorers, scholars, engineers, elementalists and soldiers who search the Twilight Frontier for lost Masters' caches. The player characters are Explorer Knights, individuals with exceptional skills and elemental powers. Duty-bound to the Guild, they lead missions across dangerous skies and expeditions into the uncharted Dark. UPWIND has a strong maritime theme, with Wind-powered skyships serving as the backbones of trade and defense, while exploration, mystery, intrigue and war form the backdrop of the narrative. The Age of the Grand Amplifier is said to be drawing to a close, the Children of the Dark threaten from below, and the Kin misunderstand the truth about both.

THE MECHANICS

UPWIND uses an original game system called Q. Unlike most systems, Q does not shape the narrative by resolving character actions one at a time. Instead, Q works through a sort of quantum mechanic, determining detailed outcomes that resolve entire encounters. Potential outcomes are negotiated cooperatively and proposed as stakes for which the participants bid using hands of playing cards. The narrative is then tailored to the winning outcome, and the story progresses in a quantum, rather than incremental, way. As a result, UPWIND plays as fast as you can tell your story.

THE UNCHARTED SKIES

Many Explorers' Guild scholars believe the islands of stone that drift through the sky were once parts of a greater world — a single, immense mass of rock, covered in soil, with mountains, forests, seas, deserts and rivers of its own. They believe that it was on this vast world that the Masters of the Wind built their great cities and perfected their fantastic science. They also believe it was here that the Masters pushed that science too far and in doing so unleashed the Wind — the ultimate elemental power. Most scholars believe that the Masters lost control of this power, releasing a force so great it shattered their world and scattered the fragments across the sky.

THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

The Light and the Dark are the borders of existence. The Light shines from above: a bright, sourceless glow that never fades. The Light fills the sky and is the destination toward which the Wind always flows. The Dark is the void below, a shadowed and dim realm from which the Wind forever blows. The space between, the skies of *UPWIND*, hold the skylands, the drifting debris of an ancient, broken world. These stony islands drift slowly across the sky, buoyed on the elemental power of the Wind, casting their vast shadows over the darkened realms below.

THE WIND

The Wind fills the skies between the Light and the Dark. It is a

primal force and the source of all elemental power. The Wind is a constant in the universe, blowing continually from the Dark toward the Light. Most Guild scholars believe it was first unleashed by the Masters of the Wind, an ancient civilization possessed of limitless knowledge and fantastical science. Others believe that the Wind has always been and that the Masters, in toying with something they did not understand, caused it to destroy their world.

The Wind is a physical as well as magical force. As a physical power, it turns the countless windmills that fringe the windward edges of most inhabited skylands. The mills turn the wheels and belts of industry, spin the generators that feed arc (see the *Arc* box on page 87) to the cities' power grids and charge the precious spark bottles. As an arcane power, it buoys the highlands in the air and blows them around the sky. It also charges the induction hulls of the great skyships, allowing traders to make passages between the kingdoms and the Guild to make its dangerous explorations.

THE SKYLANDS

Skylands are huge shards of rock and soil that drift through the air. Their upper surfaces are green with vegetation and dotted with mountains and waterways. Their undersides are broken and jagged, with naked stone eroding into the sky beneath. A few are truly vast, spanning more than two hundred leagues from edge to edge. They support rich ecosystems with high mountains, dense forests, seas, rivers and wild plains. They are home to the greatest Kin nations



FOGS AND SHADES

Independent of any predictable schedule and useless for telling time, there are periods when the brightness of the local illumination varies dramatically, albeit randomly. Referred to by their namesakes, *shades* and *fogs* can bring dimness and even deep shadows to typically well-illuminated regions.

Shades occur when one skyland passes over another, casting its shadow on the lands below. The larger the shading highland and the closer it passes, the darker the shade it creates. Shades can last for bells or even clocks, depending upon the relative speeds of the two skylands. Fogs occur whenever a highland enters heavy clouds, mists or squalls and vary widely in density and opaqueness, and therefore in the gloom they create. Often damp or even full of rain, fogs also have a notable effect on sound — both amplifying it and making it seem directionless.

Everyone, from liegeman constables and city guardsmen to the average pirate and cut-purse, knows that shades and fogs bring with them increased criminal activity, as it's easier to sneak about, break in and carry out other nefarious deeds when it's easier to hide. It's common knowledge that these occasional events bring with them increased crime rates — so much so that in some regions of the realms shades are known as “crooks,” and there are nursery rhymes warning children about what happens when the fog rolls in.

(polities such as Leeward, Bright, Dominion and Verdant) as well as the largest Kin settlements (cities such as Kingsport, Safe Harbor and the fabled Highstone).

Many skylands are no more than a dozen leagues across, supporting only scrubby woods, dry plains, small port towns and tiny villages. Most are only islets, floating aimlessly between the greater masses. These are untamed places, unpredictable in nature and location, and home to bandit tribes and barbarous, feral Kin.

The larger skylands drift slowly in enigmatic patterns, following some arcane migration. The smaller islands move faster and more unpredictably, while the tiniest follow almost random trajectories, creating dangerous collision and navigation hazards.

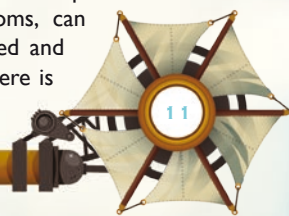
The highlands are scattered throughout the sky between the Light and the Dark. Some are higher, closer to the Light, and some are lower, nearer the Dark. On the higher islands, the bright glow of the Light is constant, but their great bulks cast shadows on any lands over which they pass, creating long, unpredictable periods of twilight in the middle levels. In the deeper reaches, the cumulative shadows of the countless skylands drifting above, as well as the

clouds, fogs and squalls that fill the skies, create a constant and total darkness.

As slowly as they drift across the sky, most islands are even slower to move from one elevation to another. The level at which they float seems to depend on an inherent, elemental buoyancy unique to each individual skyland. The largest lands are the most stable, rarely rising, falling, or even yawing in any measurable way. The smallest islets are the most unstable and can radically change in elevation, sometimes tumbling up and down the sky on unpredictable and dangerous trajectories. There seems to be some minimum size, some mass threshold, below which the Wind can no longer hold a skyland aloft, and any stony islet smaller than this becomes just another falling boulder.

THE ARIDS

The Light may nourish the farmer's crops, it may be worshipped by some as divine, it may keep the Dark at bay; but if a ship sails too high, it will burn to a cinder just the same. Any sailor who has visited the Arids, the most upwind skylands in the kingdoms, can attest to their desiccated and scorched landscapes. There is





no water, fog or clouds. What shade exists is found only under the islands and the air is hard to breathe for the heat. Life is rare here and tends toward small plants and desperate animals that cling to the undersides of the region's skylands in vain attempts to escape the heat.

The only thing the Arids have in plenty is mineral wealth, primarily iron and copper. These valuable metals are the lifeblood of the Sovereign Domain of Bright, and its people guard their mines and territory with the same fervor with which they worship the Light.

The Arids mark the upper limit of the Kingdoms in the Light, if only because no one dares explore any higher. Even the most obsessed Guild chart makers do not venture beyond these dry rocks, despite widespread tales of great Masters' caches that lie waiting within the blinding light. The Domain of Bright claims whatever islands may lie beyond, and as no other government sees the economic or strategic value in this inaccessible desert, they are happy to leave them to it.

THE UPLANDS

The uplands, known by navigators as the *High Realms* or the *Upwinds*, make up a warm, bright region known for its rich farmlands and productive ranch country. The skylands that drift here are the most populous and prosperous in the kingdoms. The greatest among the many nations in this region are the kingdoms of Verdant, Loft, Horizon and Skyreach.

The uplands are green and pleasant lands with gentle Wind and gentler rains. The density of skylands is greater here than anywhere else in the kingdoms; arable land is abundant and water is plentiful. Masters' ruins are also unusually common in the region and almost every town is built near, or even among, old remnants. Unfortunately, everything, save perhaps a few lichen-covered girders or shards of elemental glass, has long since been scavenged and put to new use.

THE DUST

Scattered across a broad swath of sky along the traditional border between the upper and lower realms is a chain of small skylands called *the Dust*. These islets, most barely large enough to remain aloft, are notoriously difficult to navigate due to their uncommon density and unpredictable paths. Only the most capable or most desperate dare sail the region, so it is perhaps no surprise then

ORIENTATION

Navigation in the world of *UPWIND* is a challenging task that requires expertise and experience, and the Guild's navigators are some of the most valued members of the cadre.

There are two primary directions on the surface of a highland: leeward and windward, sometimes called upcountry and downcountry. Leeward means toward the center of the island, away from the edge and the Wind. Windward is the opposite, toward the edge and the ever-blowing Wind. For precise locations, all local Guild outposts maintain what are called *Grand Lines*, an arbitrary benchmark from which an angle and distance can be measured to determine any location on the surface of an occupied skyland. The undersides of the highlands are distinguished from the surfaces using the terms “upside” and “downside,” and use the same grand line mechanic to identify specific locations.

In the air, aboard a skyship, there are also two primary directions: upwind and downwind. Upwind is with the direction of the Wind, toward the Light, against the pull of gravity. Downwind is against the Wind, toward the Dark, with the pull of gravity. The word “downwind” long ago also came to mean “lesser” or “bad,” and in some places is considered a strong insult when used to describe a person or his actions.

that the Dust is also known to be a favorite haven for some of the most infamous pirate bands in the realms.

So infamous in fact, that the Guild has established a small but well-defended outpost on the edge of the Dust, from which it patrols the region. Known as Red Rock, the fortification is manned by a garrison of 100 soldiers led by a handful of seasoned Knights. Impregnable to anything but a fleet, the commander is confident that the pirates' affinity for fighting among themselves makes the risk of the bandits forming such a combined fleet extremely unlikely.

THE LOWLANDS

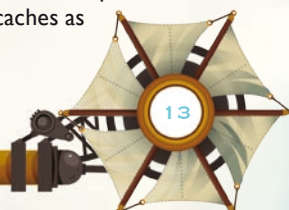
Traditionally called the *Low Realms*, this reach of the kingdoms is cooler and wetter, with a muted Light that lends the perpetually cloudy skies a leaden cast. The lowlands are cool, with dense forests, numerous lakes and countless rivers that cascade downwind, forming the largest edgefalls in the realms.

The Kin of this region are rugged and independent, and their proximity to the Twilight Frontier and exposure to raids by the Children has made them some of the most stalwart warriors in the kingdoms. Foremost among the nations here is the Fortress Dominion, a large realm protected from incursions by dozens of fortified skylands and long governed by a military aristocracy.

With vast forests covering most of the region's islands, the lowlands are known for their raw timber and wood products — most significantly quality skyship hulls and spars. Shipyards such as *Fitzen Hulls*, *Honorson's Woodworks* and *Stout Keel* are respected by sailors across the realms. In fact, most of the Explorers' Guild's own ships come from Stout Keel, which has a history of working closely with the Order to meet its demanding standards and unique design requests.

THE OUTLANDS

The Outlands is what Guild navigators call the isolated skylands that have drifted well away from the most traveled trade routes of the Kingdoms in the Light. Just as these islands vary wildly in size and elevation, so they also vary ecologically, serving as habitat for strange creatures uncommon in the realms. The few Kin that inhabit these distant shores are stranger still, rarely finding their way into the kingdoms, speaking strange dialects and bearing odd customs when they do. There is a small Guild squadron dedicated to seeking out and surveying these lost skylands and the people who inhabit them, as much in hopes of finding lost Masters' caches as in finding lost tribes.



THE SKY BEYOND

The Sky Beyond is just that. In every direction, beyond the Outlands, the open sky goes on forever. Skylands become increasingly rare, and the Wind more turbulent and unpredictable.

Navigation becomes impossible as all sphereometers eventually exceed their ranges, and leaving waypoints behind ultimately becomes impractical. As a result, no one knows what lies beyond that open sky — what vast treasures or lethal dangers.

COURSE-MADE-GOOD

Given the nature of the Skylands — their relative positions, altitudes and motion — distances in the realms are less important than flight times and so they are measured more often in clocks than in actual leagues. Thus the old sailor's adage, "The faster the ship, the smaller the kingdoms."

The speed of horizontal travel is determined by ship design and the vagaries of the Wind. And while maximum vertical speed is determined by hull design, the bravery — or recklessness — of the crew is the ultimate limiting factor. Most induction hulls are capable of putting out more lift than the average crew is willing to utilize, and of course every hull is able to fall as fast as cutting power — and the force of gravity — allows. In general, a ship on the rise is about half as fast as the same vessel in a controlled descent.

The following are common courses and their average transit times in clocks:

The Arids to the Twilight Frontier — 9 clocks downwind / 18 clocks upwind

The Uplands to The Lowlands — 5 clocks downwind / 10 clocks upwind

Verdant to Upper Loft — 10 clocks

Verdant to Lower Loft — 8 clocks

Verdant to Grim — 16 clocks

Loft to Grim — 24 clocks

Sovereign Domain to The Fortress Dominion — 5 clocks downwind / 10 clocks upwind

Horizon to Upper Loft — 16 clocks

Horizon to Lower Loft — 8 clocks

Verdant to The Fortress Dominion — 4 clocks downwind / 8 clocks upwind

The Twilight Frontier to the Dark — 16 clocks up or down, due more to low visibility than distance

Variables like crew quality, vessel design, weather and the level of risk a ship's master is willing to accept can increase or decrease travel times by as much as 25%.

Hawking (see [Maneuvers](#), page 107) can reduce average fall times up to 75% depending upon the level of risk the skipper is willing to accept. This risk is represented by the challenge level the moderator assigns any play associated with a hawking maneuver. Level 1 represents a 25% reduction, level 2 a 50% reduction and level 3 a 75% reduction (see [Challenge Levels](#), page 180). Collision with a downwind object — such as a skyland — and the consequences thereof, must be part of the stakes for any play involving hawking.



TELLING TIME

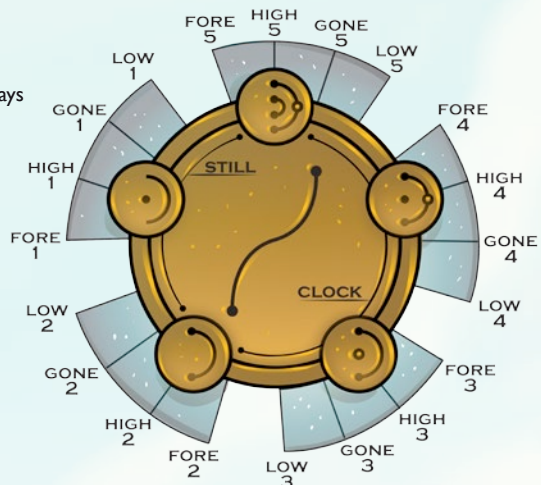
In a world without day or night, where shadows pass randomly and there are no seasons, sun, moon, or even stars, there is no natural way to mark the passage of time. This conundrum is a constant challenge for governments and industry throughout the Kingdoms in the Light. There have long been clockwork- and arc-powered chronometers, but no practical way to synchronize them between distant cities, much less within a fleet or across a kingdom. As a consequence, time differences between nations, or even towns within a single realm, are wild and arbitrary.

In the lands of Verdant, individual settlements typically use bell towers or Wind-powered horns to mark the passage of time, sounding at points spaced evenly throughout a repeating schedule. They sound five times to signify the end of sleep, four times for the mid-work break, three times for dinner, two times near bedtime and once well after most decent folk have long since gone to bed.

These divisions are known accordingly by the number of bells — five, four, three, two and one bell respectively. Each passage of five bells is called a Clock, and every ten clocks is called a Turn. Ten turns is known as a Round, and a period of ten rounds is called a Cycle.

UPWIND UNIT Real World Reference

Bell	5 hours
Clock	25 hours/~1 day
Turn	250 hours/~10 days
Round	~104 days
Cycle	~2.9 years



Different cultures have different ways of coordinating the time of clock or marking specific times between bells. Most use some version similar to the above Verdani example.

High four — means right at four bells

Gone four — means that one quarter of the time has passed between four bells and three bells

Low four — means the time is halfway between four and three bells

Fore three — means that three quarters of the time has passed between four and three bells

The time between five bells and two bells is referred to generally as Clock, and the time between two bells and five is called Still or Rest. Fore-clock is often used to denote the clock prior to, and Aft-clock is used to denote the clock immediately following the current one. High clock is used to indicate the earlier bells of a given clock and low clock is used to indicate the later ones.

Lunch is usually eaten around low four and dinner at low three. Many Kin are in bed by two bells, but given the continuous illumination, there is a large counter-shift in most occupations. Factories and large farms, as well as repair shops, taverns and other small businesses are often around-the-clock concerns, as there is always work to be done and money to be made.

When more precise timing is called for, such as in scientific research, military operations, or aboard ship, those involved rely on absolute local time kept by individual master clocks. Hardly foolproof, this practice often leads to frustrating confusion between groups, with annoying, inconvenient, sometimes even tragic, consequences.

THE LIGHTLESS REALMS

The Knights of the Explorers' Guild serve the Kingdoms in the Light in a variety of ways, working as scientists, historians, technicians and protectors, but it is as expeditioners that they are most renowned. The primary duty of the Explorer Knights is to search out and recover artifacts of the Masters of the Wind — technology and knowledge hidden in the scattered ruins of ancient Masters' caches.

Long ago, when the Kin made their first tentative flights between the skylands, they found many great treasures among the shards and splinters of the Masters' shattered, upwind cities. As explorers ranged farther and wider, such easily exploited ruins became increasingly rare. Over the past 200 cycles, the Explorer Knights have been forced to delve ever deeper in search of new sources of Masters' technology. In consequence, each mission is now a dangerous expedition into the Twilight Frontier, where encounters with the Children of the Dark have become dangerously common.

TWILIGHT FRONTIER

The Twilight Frontier is a dark and shadowed realm of mystery and danger — the chill no-man's-land between the lowest realms of the Kin and the deep territory of the Children of the Dark. It is here that the Knights search for the last remaining caches of Masters' technology. It is in these unexplored ruins that the Guild battles the Children over these precious spoils. More Knights have died charting its depths than in any other service, and yet the expeditions must continue if the Kin are to survive.

Here, the shadows of the countless skylands drifting overhead coalesce into a constant, shifting gloom that veils the cold landscape. Figures in the bow of a frigate are only silhouettes when seen from the stern, lookouts strain to spy other vessels, and skylands are often only darker patches against a dark sky. Lanterns and arc light help and so are sometimes strung about deck or camp. Though they allow a sailor to see what his hands are about, they attract predators and darken the world beyond the circle of light to



inky blackness. As a result, many crews prefer to simply struggle with the dimness rather than allow threats to sneak up on them.

The dark, cloudy air is always cold and damp, and rain is frequent. Dense fog banks, with all the navigational hazards they represent, are common and the dimness only increases the danger. The Wind has a biting chill and drives the rain into every face, collar and cuff. The wet gets into everything, and after only a couple of clocks, the sails are heavy with moisture, the planks are slick, and even belowdecks the chill and dank works its way into everything, including sailors' bones.

Crews rig electric heaters, but their warmth is little comfort in the pervasive chill. Wet clothes, boots and blankets are uncomfortable and can lead to raw rashes or strange fungal infections. Fresh food stores spoil quickly and the lack of light makes liegemen and Knights alike moody and quarrelsome — problematic in the close quarters aboard ship.

There is a constant need for vigilance in excess of normal shipboard life. The shadowy world is full of predators that can silently strip a crewmember from the deck and skylands that can loom without warning out of the dark or endless fog banks. Crews are therefore always on alert and the constant wariness leaves everyone on edge.

The dangers are even greater when shore parties leave the protection of their ships. At least there they have stout hulls, cannons and fellow crew to protect them. Ashore, there are fewer hands with weapons and not only the predators of the Dark skies with which to contend, but those of the shadowy skylands themselves. As a result, shore parties typically travel heavily armed and, whenever possible, their ships follow as closely as Wind shadows allow, ready to provide air support and cannon fire if needed. Knights, with their powerful Potential, are particularly valuable protection when ashore. If a mission requires establishing a shore camp — at an archeological dig or on a zoological survey — crews are careful to pick defensible positions and post pickets, sometimes even offloading cannon and digging defense works if they plan to stay for more than a few clocks.

Light and noise are known to attract both the attention of predators and patrols of the

TWILIGHT RULES

The Frontier can be such a challenging environment that if characters are untrained, unprepared or lose their equipment — lacking light, food, warm clothing, heat sources and the like — players generally take 1-card penalties to their Play hands (see *Hand Size Penalties*, page 191 for guidelines).

All Kin know that the Wind rises from the Dark, and since the Wind is the source of all Potential, it follows that the closer one sails to the source of the Wind, the closer one gets to that power. To model this elemental fact, when their characters sail into the Twilight Frontier, players gain one additional card for their Potential hands — to a maximum of 5 cards. When they leave the Frontier, they must discard a random card from their Potential hands. These cards enter or leave player hands whenever narratively appropriate.

Children of the Dark. There is therefore an oppressive, fatiguing need to work in the dark and remain quiet — so oppressive, in fact, that many feel compelled to whisper and anyone dropping a tool or otherwise making sudden noise is the target of angry reprimands. When lights are needed for the task at hand, they are hooded and guards are set well outside the glow to watch for dangers that might be attracted by the lamps.

The vegetation of the region is pale, dense and succulent, but slow-growing in the dim light. The plants generally have oversized leaves to catch what light they can, and extensive roots to pull nutrients from the rich, dead rain that drifts from above and forms thick, decaying loam. There is a surprising number and diversity of animals that dwell here. Many are small and furtive, spending most of their time hiding from the many hungry predators that stalk the region.

As one descends, the darker and colder it becomes; and the familiar flora and fauna of the upper realms gives way to the strange Potential plants, blind prey and glowing predators of the Coldway. The Frontier is a no-man's-land between the ecologies of the Light and the Dark, and the creatures of the Light rarely stand a chance when they meet.

The Frontier has an exceptional density of skylands, though most are smaller than average. Because they are smaller and faster moving, they add even greater hazard to sailing in the dim light. The underlying rock is jagged and would be treacherous but for the constant weathering and the softening due to the collection of dead rain. Collisions are more common, and groundswell appears to be a more frequent — and therefore more dangerous — phenomenon.

THE DARK

The *Down Below*, the *Fell Lands*, the *Coldway*, or just simply the *Dark* — no matter what it is called, the chill and lightless depths of this black world are beyond the knowledge of the Kin. The Dark defies the imagination and challenges the hearts of even the bravest Knights. It is a land of eternal darkness where the shadows cast by the world above blot out the Light and create an endless black murk that hides ships, landscapes and hunting monsters alike. Here one can barely see his own hands, and a crewmate at arm's length is only a smudge against the greater blackness. Despite the threat of attracting predators, arc lanterns and spotlights are required for any complex tasks or to sight looming land masses. Without them, ships must only creep along for fear of wrecking against unseen skylands.

The Dark is cold and often frozen, and sleet and snow are common. Blizzards are frequent and bring with them additional hazards as decks and rigging ice up, and falling snow hides oncoming skylands. The Wind is frigid and cuts to a sailor's bones more surely than any blade. Electric heaters keep the lower decks from freezing, but only just, offering cold comfort to shivering crews.

DARK RULES

The conditions for crews exploring the Dark are so harsh that if characters are untrained, unprepared or lose their equipment — lacking light, food, warm clothing, heat sources and the like — players generally take a 2-card penalty to their Play hands. See *Hand Size Penalties*, page 191, for guidelines.

Just as entering the Twilight Frontier increases a character's access to Potential, traveling into the Dark amplifies it even more. When characters sail from the Frontier into the Dark they add another additional card to their current Potential hand — to a maximum of 6 cards. When they leave the Dark, they must discard a random card from their Potential hand. These cards enter or leave player hands whenever narratively appropriate.

What equipment that isn't wet is usually frozen, and bloody rashes and frostbite are not uncommon. The chill air does confer the advantage of preserving food, but freezing water butts frequently rupture and the resulting ice must be thawed before it can be drunk or used in cooking. Discomfort is extreme, and when combined with the need for constant, straining vigilance against the threats of collision, predators and Child patrols, even the most stalwart crew quickly becomes exhausted and short-tempered.

As on the Frontier, going ashore in the Dark is particularly dangerous and shore parties are covered by following ships with wary gun crews whenever possible. Those who must travel up-country go in force and heavily armed, choosing defensible positions for their dark, wet, cold little camps. In such situations, powerful

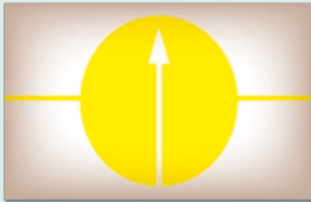


Potentialists are essential as both defenders and as sources of elemental heat and light.

If light attracts curious animals on the Frontier, it is utterly irresistible to the predators who stalk the Dark. Whether they fly, float, slither, crawl, run, or move in some combination of these, these hunters are unable to resist the lure of unshielded lights, so extreme caution must be taken by both ship crews and shore parties to avoid drawing deadly attention to themselves.

The skies of the Dark are characterized by small, rare, widely scattered skylands — as if they were truly the last remnants of a shattered

land. Snow and ice hide their jagged, barren surfaces and the Potential plants that grow here are particularly small, sparse and hardy. The skylands' drift rates are high, with almost as much vertical as horizontal movement, as groundswell seems an almost constant phenomenon. Their chaotic, treacherous motion makes these islands so difficult to locate on return voyages that expeditions into the Dark are often made by pairs of frigate-class ships that combine survey and recovery into single missions. The additional cannon and crew also make the inevitable encounters with the Children more survivable.



ASCENT
ARCHIPELAGO



CASCADE
PROTECTORATE



CLOUD
PRINCIPALITY



THE KIN

The Kin are the inhabitants of the Kingdoms in the Light. Though the isolating geography of their strange world has led to the development of many races and unique cultures, all Kin carry clear heritage from their original ancestral lineages. They are generally lean creatures, though those with Stone ancestry can be truly massive. Their faces are open and protracted, with bright, narrow eyes, high cheeks, small noses and narrow jaws. Their ears are wide, pointed and alert and their hair is thick and heavy. Their arms and legs are long, with strong, four-fingered hands and narrow feet bearing four almost prehensile toes. Skin, hair and eye color vary widely, with the differences marking an individual's ancestry.

There is still much scholarly debate among archaeologists and historians regarding the origin of the Kin. Though much of this debate focuses on the mysteries of their ultimate genesis, there is general agreement that modern Kin arose from four original rootstocks that survived the DownFall. Scholars call these stocks the Ancestral Lineages and give them various names that archaeological evidence, perhaps inevitably, links to the four elements — the Spark, the Torrent, the Stone and the Gale.

The Spark were lithe and energetic Arc users. They were quick thinkers, with fiery personalities and boundless energy. Their complexions were light and rosy, their hair straw colored and their eyes a bright, electric blue.

The Torrent were small and thoughtful Rain users. They

were calm planners with deep emotions and strong social bonds. Their complexions were so pale as to be almost luminescent, their hair was almost pure white and their eyes a shiny, cloud-colored gray.

The Stone were massive, brawny Ore users. They were strong, stubborn and resolutely steadfast. Their flesh was the variable tones of dark rock and their hair was lustrous and the color of rich soil. Their eyes were large, emotional and a copper-colored brown.

The Gale were tall and clever Wind users. They were smart, incessant and adaptable. Their complexions were warm and dark, their hair was black as coal and their eyes were a pale sky blue and mischievous.

Archeological evidence implies that each of the original Kin lineages was naturally imbued with their elemental affinities, such that it somehow formed the essence of their physical makeups, personalities, attributes and Potential powers. Each ancestral line had a predisposition to manifest Potential powers congruent with the element with which it was aligned. This phenomenon bears out in modern times; more often than not, the purer the heritage, the more potent the elementalism. Inexplicably, however, there seem to be frequent cases when hybridization also results in surprisingly potent powers within specific individuals.

It is generally believed that when the DownFall struck, these ancestral lineages were scattered among the remnants of the world, surviving only in isolated refuges by scavenging the



CHANTY

*Don't want to marry a lad from the Spark
Lad from the Spark
Lad from the Spark
Don't want to marry a lad from the Spark
He will leave me down in the dark
That lad from the Spark*

Chorus:

*Hey ya, hey ya,
Round we go
Hey ya, hey ya
Round we go*

*Do not give me a lass from the Stone
Lass from the Stone
Lass from the Stone
Do not give me a lass from the Stone
She would smash my old man's bones
That lass from the Stone*

-Chorus-

*Don't want to marry a man from Gale
Man from Gale
Man from Gale
Don't want to marry a man from Gale
Sure one day away he'd sail
That man from Gale*

-Chorus-

*Do not give me a Torrent wife
A Torrent wife
A Torrent wife
Do not give me a Torrent wife
That would be a soggy life
That Torrent wife*

—Opening stanzas from a popular
Horozian sailors' chanty

ruins that remained. Some of these enclaves were of single lineages, that led to persons of rather pure heredity dominating given regions of the sky. Other refuges must have sheltered several lineages, where the inevitable and

random intermingling over the intervening 400 cycles served to create great variety among the modern inhabitants.

These isolated lineages, combined by the random flow of history, served to create dozens of unique cultures across the skies, setting the foundations for what would eventually become the Kingdoms in the Light.

POTENTIAL

The skies of the realms seethe with raw elemental power, infused into all things by the enigmatic force of the Wind. This arcane Potential manifests in the cardinal elements, each in opposition, each holding dominion in its quarter.

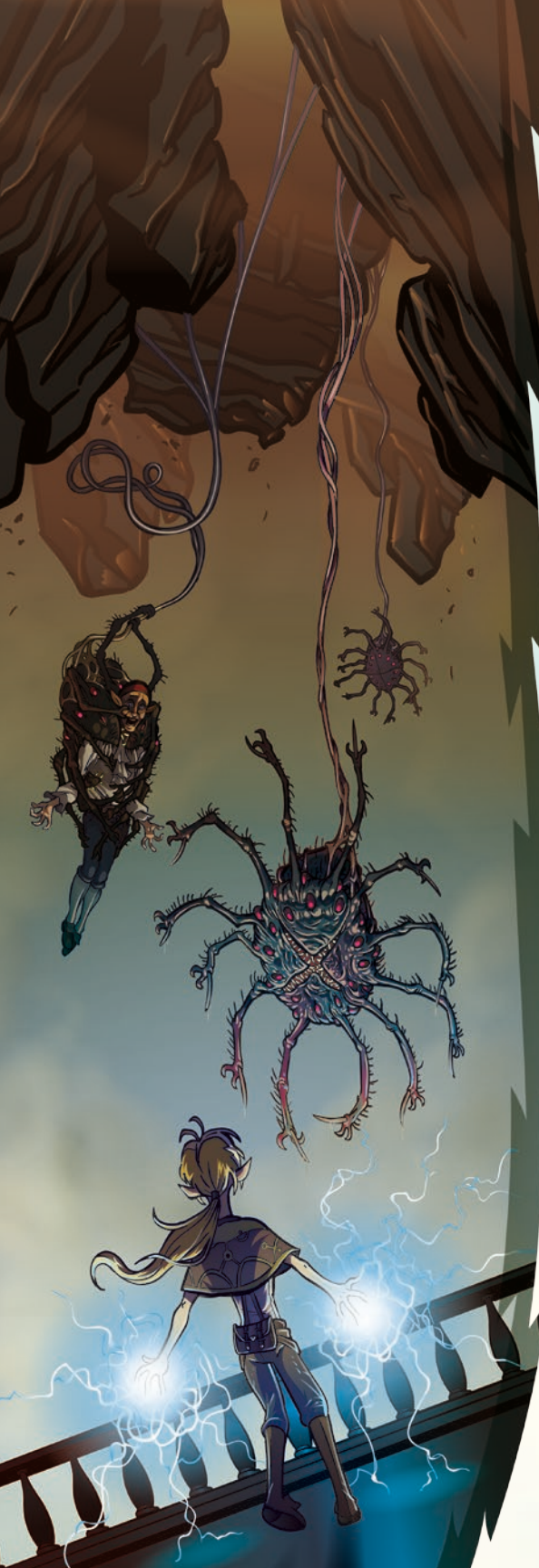
Every Kin is empowered with Potential and the ability to bend it to her will. The least child can direct dust motes, raindrops or embers to his whim. The average adult can ignite tinder, snuff a candle or fill a glass with a simple impulse. Those with deep enough Potential can burn sails, mold boulders or knit flesh; trained elementalists can tame storms, flood rivers, blast down buildings or command stone constructs through will alone.

Pragmatists say the ability to effectively tap Potential is nothing more than the result of intense, specialized training. Mystics believe it is simply an extension of the spirit inherent in all Kin. Elementalists claim Potential is the conscious manipulation of the magical power of the Wind itself, a primal form of elementalism that only a special few can exploit properly.

Whatever its true nature, Potential is a real and formidable force that provides unique abilities to those who can tap it. The vast majority of Kin have only trivial or minor access to, and control over, Potential. Individuals with enough potency to become great elementalists or Explorer Knights are exceedingly rare and are commonly referred to as Potential adepts.

Though it manifests differently in every adept, there are commonalities in the forms it takes. Potential often exaggerates certain physical abilities, such as speed, strength, or coordination. Physical adepts can move with uncanny swiftness, lift thousands of pounds, outmaneuver even the most agile wild animals, or even fly. Sometimes Potential takes the form of extreme mental powers, giving adepts





exceptional senses, arcane healing abilities, supernatural invisibility, or insight so revealing as to be prescient. Potential can also manifest as raw elementalism — the ability to draw a deluge from thin air, cast lightning from an empty palm, blast enemies with an irresistible gale, or crack open the very ground with a touch.

All Kin, whether average users or Knight-level adepts, have an affinity for one of the four cardinal elements based on their ancestral connections to the original Kin lineages. Those descended most directly from the Stone are Ore users; those with Spark ancestry are Arc users; those descended from the Torrent are Rain adepts and those from the Gale have Wind Potential. Each element has essential abilities with which it can imbue Kin.

Ore — Adepts with this affinity typically have supernatural strength, fortitude, vigor, or health. They can manipulate metal, stone and dirt with acts of will, reshaping it, moving it, tossing it as projectiles, creating structures, traps and fortifications; even commanding it to form body armor or animate rock golems.

Arc — Those with this affinity often manifest uncanny speed, coordination, dexterity, or agility. They can summon electricity and use it to illuminate the dark, power devices, burn through obstacles, short out equipment, stun enemies, or blast them with electrical fire.

Rain — This affinity provides adepts with supernatural insight, wisdom and emotional control. Users can heal the sick and injured, calm the panicked, read and manipulate thoughts, or even make themselves vanish from conscious sight. They can control water, pulling it from the environment, dousing fires, replenishing stores and, when there is a large enough source, forming offensive waves or ice walls and lethal, liquid projectiles.

Wind — Potential users with this affinity may be supernaturally clever, with uncanny memories and magical logic. They might have supernatural senses and be able to see in the dark or hear whispers a league away. They can call up fair winds

to fill their sails or punishing gales to blast their enemies. Some can even fly.

As with mundane activities, a Kin is responsible for the consequences of his supernatural actions. Children are taught from a very young age to control their use of Potential; tradition, and even some laws, guide when, how much, and what kind of Potential can be used in given circumstances. Nonetheless, accidents do occur, emotions get the better of people and criminals commit crimes and hurt others with Potential. Such events are part of life in the realms and are dealt with as part of the same customs and laws that govern the rest of Kin life.

There are good — or even exceptional — elementalists who, for various reasons, were either not recruited into the Guild or who failed to qualify. Most often such individuals have previous obligations or are drafted into government ministries or rival organizations. Sometimes they are simply not interested in service with the Guild and have other ambitions. These powerful individuals can rival Knights in their control over Potential and can be important NPCs.

UPWIND magic is purposefully unstructured and spontaneous to model the dynamic intention of the setting and give players complete, improvisational control over the arcane effects their characters can create.

ROUTINE POTENTIAL USE

All Kin have some level of Potential, even if it's only enough to light or blow out a candle. Routine Potential use is therefore a common feature of clock-to-clock life among the Kin. Most Kin have so little access or control over Potential that if they were player characters, they would have Potential hands of only a single card.

The following are examples of the purposes and tasks to which average Kin commonly put their limited Potential:

- Find or purify water.
- Light a candle or stove.
- Enhance one's strength to move a heavy object.
- Heal an injury.
- Enhance abilities used in hunting.
- Shape metal or stone.
- Light a dark space.

- Charm or control animals.
- Signal others over distances.
- Simplify housework.
- Dig or build earthworks.
- Self-defense.
- Breaking and entering.
- Pick a pocket.
- Assault a guard or other target.
- Facilitate deception.

KINGDOMS AND CULTURES

The Kingdoms in the Light, known more colloquially as the *realms*, is a loose alliance of monarchies, theocracies, principalities, republics and other sovereign Kin nations that have historically banded together for purposes of trade and mutual protection. Though the politics of the kingdoms is characterized by power struggles and subterfuge, and the frequent infighting often leads to sanctions, embargos, feuds and even war, the kingdoms remain united against their common enemy and single greatest threat: the Children of the Dark.

The kingdoms are scattered among the highest of the skylands, where the Light shines the brightest and the taint of the Dark is weakest. Here crops grow well, and the raids of the Children and incursions by beasts of the lower shadows are rare. Though some nations border the Twilight Frontier, and others have established outposts there, it is a dangerous region where life is bleak and the Dark a constant threat.

The largest, most populous and most influential of the kingdoms include Bright, Horizon, Fortress, Loft, Skyreach and Verdant. These nations, along with their closest allies, form the central power blocs within the Kingdoms in the Light and have historically held the greatest sway in the lives of the Kin.

KINGDOM OF VERDANT

Verdant is one of the largest of the Kingdoms in the Light and is governed by the constitutional monarchy of Her Righteous Majesty Elsa Elena Worthies and her Parliament of Lords. Other realms may lay claim to greater natural

resources — metal ores, timber, major Masters' caches — but Verdant unequivocally holds title to superior scholars and grander industry. The scholars, scientists and engineers of Verdant are the most skilled in the realms, its numerous universities and innovative guilds attract the brightest minds. The result has been an inevitable migration of intellectuals from other nations to the institutions and factories of cities like Cleft, Rim and Highstone. This boon of intellectual and technical expertise allows Verdant to compete with rival traders, offering commodities every bit as valuable as copper ore, seasoned lumber, spices and textiles.

The Verdani's long history of cultural malleability and far-ranging exploration and trade has resulted in a diverse and tolerant people, who are all the better for the combination of their differences. Like Masters' alloy, the Verdani are stronger for the alchemical mixture of blood, knowledge and traditions they have become.

The Verdani are perhaps most accurately described as accepting and practical, adapting to cultural changes with ease. They are quick to take advantage of new circumstances, techniques and technologies and have turned this flexibility into a potent cultural asset. Verdani are also known for their informality, independence and deep sense of loyalty to family, friends and crew — perhaps as a source of stability in an otherwise pliable social landscape. Though usually an advantage, their informality can be seen as disrespect for the traditions of others and can, therefore, sometimes be a source of conflict.

The Verdani are known to provide some of the best mechanics and arcanotechnicians in the realms, and they are particularly famous for their exceptionally skilled navigators and helmsmen. Many assume this is because Verdant is home to the Explorer Knights' Academy and that the knowledge somehow leaks into the surrounding countryside.

Due to their mixed heritage, the Verdani show the broadest diversity of physical characteristics of all Kin and as a result, individuals are often confused for members of other lineages. If

there is such a thing as a typical Verdani he would be described as tall, dusky and bright-eyed. Sandy hair is common, though dark

and light are not rare. There is a wide variety of clothing and personal grooming styles that clearly have many cultural influences, and tradition is apparent only in its absence.

The Vale

Verdant's largest skyland, the Vale is temperate and lush. To leeward, low clouds cover lower mountains, which in turn are covered by dense forest and crisscrossed by fast moving rivers. To windward, fertile plains span the margins of the island, supporting countless tiny farming villages and scattered ranch towns.

Highstone

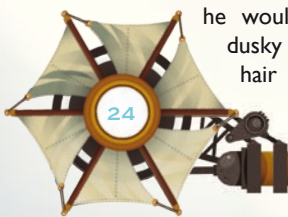
Vale is home to one of the greatest of all Kin cities, the metropolis of Highstone. Over 100,000 people live in the capital and its environs. Kin from all over the kingdoms know of the city and every sailor, trader, politician and scholar has visited there at one time or another. The city is a sprawling port of stone and elemental glass clinging to the very windward edge of the skyland. Shipyards, docks and warehouses clog the shore, and what space is left is packed with the forest of windmills that feed the city's insatiable hunger for arc.

Highstone was built inextricably among the bones of the largest Masters' ruin in the known realms. Though any items of intrinsic value were scavenged in bygone clocks, the city itself is constructed primarily of the ancient stone, metal and elemental glass that remained. Everywhere one looks, there are reminders of the power, skill and ultimate folly of the Masters — crumbling foundation blocks, cracked aqueducts and broken plinths. Toppled columns form abstract sculptures where they sprout from the ground and old basements serve as ad hoc cisterns in many neighborhoods. Ancient foundations have been incorporated into newer structures and Masters' avenues still determine the layout of city streets.

Landmarks

Though much of what was once a city of fantastic architecture now lies in ruins, there are several ancient landmarks that stand intact, or mostly so, within the city giving it an air of antiquity and mystery.

The Warren is a trackless series of geometrically perfect tunnels beneath the city that clearly





served some greater purpose than that of basements or sewers. Once lined with Masters' alloy rails and other inexplicable machinery, the vast majority of these resources were scavenged long ago. Now the tunnels serve an endless variety of uses for Highstone's residents — warehouses, breweries, cisterns, granaries and even a training ground for Explorer Knights. Many of the deeper tunnels have been broken open and exposed to the sky by erosion of the underside of Vale and have been turned into ersatz defense works, docks, warehouses, chandleries and even taverns. The Warrens are dangerous for the unwary, and mostly impossible-to-enforce ordinances against entering the tunnels are meant to keep the curious from various forms of harm.

The Arch is so big it is the first landmark one can see when approaching Highstone by ship and is therefore a traditional point of reference for navigators. Apparently a massive ring two-thirds buried in the ground, the Arch rises up in a smooth, canted curve that reaches 300 feet at its zenith, casting a fixed, crescent shadow across the center of Highstone.

The Arch is made of some inert material that even Guild scholars have been unable to identify — not quite metal, not quite stone and all but impervious to damage. It is a massive relic of the old world and a constant reminder of the height of the Masters' culture and just how much was lost when it was destroyed.

Though elementalists and mundane scientists are at a loss to explain why, any Kin within the circumference of the Arch has access to greater Potential than when outside it — they actually grow more powerful in their manipulation of the Wind. As a result, the Explorer Knights' Academy's school of elementalism maintains research and training compounds in this part of the city, as do several other organizations who have vested interests in studying Potential.

Now part of a beautifully manicured park open to the public, the *Glass Lake* is an odd, inexplicable pool of elemental glass roughly the size of six city blocks. The material is uncommonly clear and possesses a unique greenish tint. The lake is deep, extending through to the open sky below in some places, and contains countless arcanelectric inclusions — wires, cables and various device-like nodes can

ARCH RULES

When a character enters the immediate environs of the Arch, her Potential hand increases by one randomly drawn card. When she leaves the area, she immediately loses a card from her Potential hand. Additionally, while within the Arch's circumference, she recovers Potential at twice the normal rate. See *Decks and Hands*, page 172 and *Potential Plays*, page 187.

The districts under the Arch have a reputation for uncommonly frequent Potential accidents, as visitors are sometimes caught off guard by their increased power.

be seen trapped in the material. Though many have advocated excavating around the lake or even tunneling directly into it, concerns over the damage this might cause, and the difficulty in cutting elemental glass, have so far prevented any such operation. Currently, scholars continue to study the lake with noninvasive techniques and speculate. Though the passage of time has left the surface somewhat pitted, one can see hundreds of feet into the blue-green depths, especially above the so-called "Great Windows" where the glass lake is exposed on the downside of the island.

Industry

The skylands of Vale support some of the most productive and sophisticated industries in the realms, manufacturing the widest variety of technological parts and devices in the kingdoms. Fully half the skyships, cogs, mills, trams and other heavy equipment built in the realms uses some essential parts imported from Verdant.

Guild Headquarters

The Guild Headquarters is perhaps Highstone's greatest institution, and it is certainly its most famous. Though the Explorer Knights' Guild has bases, houses and outposts throughout the kingdoms, the headquarters in Highstone is its primary facility. It is home to the command cadre of the Guild captains, the revered Guild scholars and, perhaps most importantly, the Explorers'



Academy. The headquarters is a sprawling complex of imposing stone and iron buildings as old as any in the city. The compound has its own docks and shipyard and, like all Guild facilities, it is a sovereign territory, politically independent from Verdant and its queen.

Fields of Green

Verdant's temperate climate, consistent rainfall and vast, arable skylands have made it the major agricultural exporter in the realms. Fully half of the island cluster is under cultivation, with rolling green hills and pastoral villages dominating the downcountry regions and coastal provinces. Trade in staple crops, livestock and luxury foodstuffs makes up a third of the country's export revenue, and its central location within the realms makes the transport of perishable goods commercially viable.

THE FORTRESS DOMINION

The Fortress Dominion is a lowlands kingdom bordering the Twilight Frontier. It is home to the stalwart Raid tribe of the Kin and is famous for the fierce warriors the culture produces. Its location along the border has made Fortress the first bastion of defense against the encroaching Children and forced a tradition of martial prowess and stoic vigilance upon the region's people.

Fortress is a green, dim, foggy realm, but is not without its own stark beauty. The great forests are the nation's primary source of wealth and industry and are critical to its well-known shipyards, the foremost of which is the famous *Stout Keel*. Lumber camps dot the Dominion skylands and protecting them, and the convoys that transport their products, is a strategic priority of the Fortress navy.

Fortress is governed by a military aristocracy known as the Cadre, which has ruled the region for generations. Though not technically hereditary, the essential government posts have been held within the same extended families for the past 40 cycles and the position of grand marshal has been passed among the same five families for 60. The current grand marshal is Lord Colin Hale, a skilled military commander and strategist who has greatly improved the viability of the Bastion through improvements in patrol schedules and supply routes. Hale has also proven an uncommonly cagey politician, turning the petty intrigues of other nobles against each other, and

as a result managing to stay clear of many of the pitfalls of aristocratic politics.

The location and history of the nation has made it a realm of warriors known for its infantry and artillery, and foremost among these are the *Fortress Musketeers*. As famous for their bravery as for their skills with powder rifle and sword, these highly trained soldiers are the backbone of Dominion forces, and the Guild itself frequently sends its Knights to learn from them.

Dominian culture is deeply interwoven with their kingdom's geographical location on the border of the Twilight Frontier. As the first defense against the Dark and the threats it hides, it was perhaps inevitable that the survival of its people would lead to the evolution of a warrior culture, where one's contribution to the defense of the realm is the ultimate measure of value. Accordingly, authority and social standing in the Dominion result from a family line's ability to contribute great warriors, military leaders, weapon makers and shipbuilders to the cause of defending the nation.

Dominians are strictly hierarchical in their interactions, and their familial and social relationships are complex, nested within the greater military rank structure of their society. Essentially a military oligarchy, members of the Dominion rise and fall within society with their martial successes and failures. Brave warriors who fight decisive battles with the Children and win rise quickly; but those who lose, should they survive, fall even faster. Military architects and logisticians, master weaponsmiths and shipwrights are also honored, gaining status more slowly but more surely.

Strangely, those Dominians who are selected to serve in the Guild of Explorer Knights are simultaneously admired and held in disdain. They are admired for the skills that qualified them for membership in the Guild, but at the same time they are seen as abandoning the people of Fortress when they could otherwise use their abilities to defend the realm. Accordingly, Dominians are relatively rare in the Guild, and those who do join often bring with them a hindering cultural guilt. Due to this tension, the ruling Cadre of Fortress and the sky captains of the Guild have an uneasy political relationship.

Dominians are known for stubborn arrogance and aggressiveness, but it is perhaps fairer to describe them as culturally confident people of action. They are equally well known for their keen sense of honor and concern for their personal and familial reputations. To those they respect, they are stalwart companions and brave men at arms who are as valuable in a fight as they are on the deck of a storm-tossed skyship.

Though not as common as tales would have one believe, the warriors of the Dominion are duelists of great prowess with a long tradition of calling each other out over matters of honor, leadership and love. Every member of the Cadre has likely been called out at least a dozen times during his life and bears the scars to prove it. Though duels for all but the most outrageous insults are fought only to first blood, they do occasionally end in death. Though the practice is prohibited by the sky captains, dueling still sometimes occurs within the Guild when a Dominion member feels he has suffered an egregious blow to his honor.

The Dominians appear to be a hardy hybrid of Stone and Spark ancestry — thick-bodied, strong-limbed and tall. They are pale-skinned and hairy, with eyes the color of steel and hair the color of polished copper. Beards are common for men and long hair for women, and both are strung with a complex heraldry of beads, pendants and charms denoting familial lines, social rank and military achievements.

The Bastion

The Bastion, as it is generally called, is the coronation of heavy fortifications that form the first line of defense between the Twilight Frontier and the Kingdoms in the Light. Dotted along the Dominion's border with the Frontier and varying in age and construction, the individual forts together form a bulwark against invasion by the Children of the Dark. Each fortress is garrisoned by a variable number of infantry and musketeer companies and its own small fleet of skyships, well crewed with sailors and cannoners. Each fort is commanded by a ranking Cadre officer known as a *fleet marshal*, but unfortunately, the de facto hereditary nature of the post means that some fortresses are notably deficient in the quality of their leadership.

Most Bastion citadels also support small civilian settlements that have grown up around them, clinging to the safety of the forts while providing various services to the soldiers stationed there, as well as the coastal traders who are an essential part of the Bastion supply lines.

The Aerie

The Aerie is the largest fortification along the Bastion and serves as the primary port for the Dominion naval fleet. The Aerie has grown so much since its original foundations were laid that the skyland on which it is built has since been entirely subsumed, essentially becoming a vast, impregnable, floating fortress. Even the inevitable military town that surrounds most forts has perforce been incorporated within the ramparts.

TREASURE HUNTERS

Masters' salvage is the lifeblood of the Kingdoms in the Light and reclamation, scrounging and scavenging are not only lucrative pursuits, they are considered prestigious, romantic professions. The skills required to find, excavate, repair and broker Masters' technology demand exceptional knowledge and experience. The fortitude required to sail into uncharted regions, overcome the dangers encountered there, and return alive require courage of the highest order. That, or desperation in equal measure.

The role of scavenger has been so elevated as to have acquired levels of rank within the Guild as well as the status of honorific outside the order.

- Seeker
- Rover
- Scrounger
- Scavenger
- Salvager
- Salvager Captain
- Master Salvenger



There are docks and quays scattered about the Aerie, but the primary moorage is protected within the thick walls of the structure, like the yolk in an armored egg. Access to the port is through a massive gate in the bottom of the skyland, protected by ranks of long-range cannon batteries. Many rightly believe that if the drift of the Aerie could somehow be intentionally controlled — if it could be sailed about the skies like a ship — there is no military power in the realms that could stand against the Dominion.

The Wild

The Wild is a vast archipelago of large skylands that makes up much of the Dominion's core territories. Sparsely inhabited by hunters, loggers and bandits, these islands are covered in dense forests and low mountains, which in turn are crisscrossed by tumbling streams and dotted with deep, cold lakes. The Wild is the source of the superior timber used by the shipwrights of Fortress and an essential part of the nation's simple economy.

For being part of the Kingdoms in the Light, the Wild has been poorly explored and only cursorily mapped, due in part to the historical tension between the Cadre and the Guild. Many, therefore, believe the thick forests and deep valleys still hide significant Masters' caches. As a result, there are a surprising number of prospectors and obsessed treasure hunters who scour the Wild looking for salvage — with frequent enough success to keep them all searching.

THE KINGDOM OF LOFT

The Kingdom of Loft is a collection of principalities, baronies and duchies — known as the Estates — whose internal politics are so complex and touchy that no outsider could hope to understand the intricacies. The large nation is one of the richest and most populous in the realms, and if not for the constant political infighting, Loft could be the dominant power among the Kingdoms in the Light.

The country has what navigators call a *high loft* — meaning it includes islands from a wide



range of altitudes. This large territory means Loft has an abundance of varied resources for which it does not need to trade. As a result of its massive trade fleet — the largest in the kingdoms — the nation can sell what it produces without having to buy in return, its ships sailing home packed mostly with profit.

Loft is ruled by the Sky King, a hereditary post whose power has ebbed and flowed with the fortunes of the realm and the individual savvy, charisma, or ruthlessness of the sitting king. In theory, the king — or the rare queen — of Loft is related to every prince, duke, baron and lord across the nation. Each noble is the Crown's sworn liegeman, paying taxes, maintaining law and infrastructure and providing military support in times of war. In practice, the system is only as viable as the authority the reigning sky king can bring to bear.

His Royal Grace Anders Evansk ver Lode is the recently crowned sky king, having inherited the throne on the demise of his sickly and uniquely ineffectual uncle. As the result of eight cycles of poor and indecisive leadership, King Anders has inherited a weak crown plagued by contentious vassals and self-serving civil bureaucrats. In fact, it seems likely that, if he is unable to rein in his liegemen and put his house in order, Loft may soon suffer a second Succession Rebellion.

The Loftians are a clever and energetic culture of merchants who always have a deal in the works and a dozen others under contract. They are prone to cutthroat negotiations and ceaseless plotting; all of which they seal in thick contracts backed by an impenetrable labyrinth of mercantile law and a seemingly endless horde of crafty lawyers.

It is impossible to know if the discordant and quarrelsome nature of Loftian trade practices mirrors the country's fragmented political structure, or if the truculent nature of the Estates that form the kingdom birthed the commercial traditions. Whatever the case, the incessant plotting and constant infighting has served to keep the nation divided and to thereby limit its influence and power within the Convocation of Kingdoms.

The people of Loft are unmistakably the descendants of Spark stock — both

physically and culturally. Small, light-skinned and almost universally blue-eyed, they are clever but quick-tempered and argumentative, and these characteristics seem to define the culture and the history of the nation. Loftians are well-known for their style and preoccupation with the sartorial arts. Their clothiers chase ever-changing fashion trends as their wealthy clients wage a constant war of prestige using gowns, vests and shoes as weapons.

The Royal Trading Company

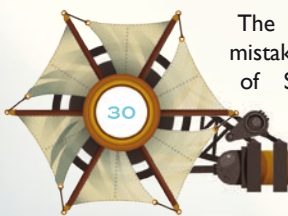
The Royal Trading Company is, in origin at least, a chartered ministry established by the Crown to facilitate trade with foreign nations. Over the cycles, however, the Trading Company has become a potent and effectively independent entity that is now wealthier, and in many ways more powerful, than the Crown itself.

The Council of Traders manages the Company, drawing its membership from the Estates, whose votes are based on shares each controls in the Company. Because the formula used to determine shares is arcane and leads to frequent changes in control, and because it is in the nature of Loftians to bicker and plot against each other, relations within the Council are no more harmonious than within the kingdom at large. The members do, however, manage to keep this infighting mostly behind closed doors, presenting a more or less unified front to the rest of the realms.

The Royal Trading Company controls the single largest fleet of Skyships in all the Kingdoms in the Light. Since the majority are armed against piracy and other dangers, the Company by default also controls the largest navy in the realms. The distribution of shares and the cronyism of their feudal government means control of this vast navy is fragmented into dozens of smaller fleets, which are just as likely to compete with, and even fire on, other Loftian vessels as they are to fight those of other nations.

Merchant

Merchant is one of the largest cities in the realms and likely the richest. Founded as a trade port over 320 cycles ago, the city has become famous for its great wealth and sophisticated, almost decadent, culture. Merchant is home to the offices of the Royal Trading Company, an ancient sprawl of buildings that rivals the headquarters of the Guild. Merchant has two vast





commercial shipping ports, both of which are larger than any other in the realms. The trade houses that own Loft Harbor and Merchant Bay are bitter rivals and there is a constant and not-so-subtle economic war being waged as they vie for patronage and contracts.

The Estates

Loft was a collection of independent settlements, city states and fiefdoms that came together for mutual protection and aid long before the Convocation of Kingdoms did the same thing for the Kingdoms in the Light at large. Their origins as individual polities, as well as a series of bloody rebellions, continue to define the country's internal relationships in modern times, making the nation a political and cultural patchwork.

The Estates, as they are generally called, are historical remnants of these original polities and remain staunchly independent, with unique ethnicities, cultures and family allegiances, and their relationships are as contentious as those within the Council of Traders. Most of the great commercial houses that make up the Royal Trading Company are owned by the families who control the Estates, and thereby control the country.

The Estates are as diverse as the skylands of Loft and vary widely in size, resources and influence. The largest are Pale, Gust and Highhome, while the most profitable — and therefore most influential — are Vast, Gray Rock and Kingsland.

THE SOVEREIGN DOMAIN OF BRIGHT

The Sovereign Domain, known informally as Bright, is the most upwind of the kingdoms, the last settled region beyond which the extreme heat and aridity makes permanent Kin habitation impossible. It is perhaps understandable, then, that the people of Bright would come to give the Light religious significance, deifying it, interweaving its importance with the legacy of the Masters.

The Domain is a realm of fervent religious belief, home to the Church of the Lucent Masters. Church scripture says the Masters retreated from the world long ago, withdrawing into the Light. Doctrine claims they reside there still, observing the Kin and gauging their worth. The faithful believe that when all

Kin finally prove themselves, the Masters will return and share their knowledge with the realms.

The Domain is governed by a conservative, matriarchal theocracy guided by strict canon law, led by a hierarchy of church mothers called the *Supreme Sisterhood*. This body is in turn presided over with final authority by the holy *evant*: the Exalted Daughter of the Light, the Chosen of the Masters, the All-Mother of the Sovereign Domain of Bright. The Holy Elevant is chosen by the Sisterhood on the death of the previous *evant*, and serves for the remainder of her life. The current *evant*, Mother Ewa Way, was a compromise selection made by a divided Sisterhood that could not agree on other candidates. Though Way holds limited sway within the Sisterhood, she is a dedicated advocate for the people and so is well-loved by the masses — political leverage she uses wisely.

Often called Brightlanders by foreigners, the people of the Domain are a devout and insular culture known for generous hospitality, dedication to family, and a religious animosity for all things of the Dark. Traditionally Brightlanders are skilled miners, masons and engineers, and many of the Guild's best water elementalists are recruited from this arid region.

While religion may be exported — and there are many Brightlander missionaries drifting about the realms — it is difficult to fill the treasury of a nation by trading holy doctrine. Selling iron and copper ore however, is an excellent way to collect for the church. Bright is known for its abundant mineral wealth and it is estimated that more than half of the virgin iron and three quarters of the copper used across the kingdoms — ore not salvaged from Masters' ruins — comes from Domain mines.

The Bright culture has developed hand in hand with its fervent religious beliefs, so that almost every aspect of life in Bright has religious significance and overtones. The patterns of clock-to-clock existence are shaped by ritual, as are the general outlook and behaviors of the people. Formal community prayers are scheduled fixtures, and blessings, hand gestures and formalized physical contact are essential elements of interpersonal interaction. They have invocations and devotions addressing every aspect of life and it is common to overhear the



devout singing short prayers over even the most mundane tasks.

Brightlanders have a reputation for serenity and calm that is not only well-deserved, but so profound that many outsiders find it unnatural — even off-putting. Born of their beliefs and strong sense of community, Brightlanders' serenity often makes them the peacemakers among foreign crews and capable leaders during shipboard emergencies and the crises of battle.

Brightlanders also have superior reputations as craftsmen, architects and artists. Though much of what they create has religious significance or purpose, their buildings, monuments and works of art are unmatched in function and beauty. The Guild intentionally recruits Brightlander architects into its engineering corps and taps their unique skills in constructing their compounds, ports and fortresses.

The inhabitants of the Sovereign Domain of Bright appear to be a well-mixed cross of the Torrent and Stone ancestral stocks. They are generally of medium build with Light-darkened skin and copper- or tin-colored eyes. Their hair is the lustrous black of the obsidian common in their sculpture and they tend to wear it in long, elaborate styles. They have open, generally serene faces that are considered by many to be the most beautiful in the kingdoms.

Sacred

Sacred clings to the underside of the vast, flat, and extremely arid eponymous skyland of Bright — the most upwind capital of all the Kingdoms in the Light. Carved from the living rock, the city is a wonder of clever engineering and graceful architecture where buildings, streets, plazas, esplanades and other urban infrastructure jut, cling, tunnel, hang and dangle from the bottom of the skyland — hidden from the blazing, deadly heat that bakes the island's upper surface.

Jokingly called “Upside-Town” by foreign trader crews, the inverted city is the seat of Bright's conservative theocracy. Ironically, in this realm where light is believed to give life, water is the most limiting resource. Accordingly, powerful water elementalists are highly valued citizens and responsible for keeping the city's warren of cisterns and aqueducts full. The Sisterhood is well-aware that Sacred's lack of water is a strategic weakness and keeps the reservoirs well-guarded.

The Lucent Temple

In a city known for its architectural wonders, the Lucent Temple stands as Sacred's greatest feat of engineering. The temple is a massive, inverted, cylindrical ziggurat that clings to the bottom rim of a deep well bored from the upper surface of the skyland through the island's bedrock, into the Temple's roof and out through its floor. In the Temple, the intense and constant light pouring through the wide well from above is gathered by an ancient elemental glass lens and focused into a blinding beam that arrows downwind in constant and powerfully symbolic defiance of the Dark far below. The light is so intense that it can guide sailors to the city from twenty leagues away, and so hot that the sails of any ship that passes through the beam within a quarter mile of the Temple itself burst into flames.

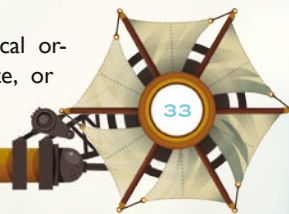
The Temple is the seat of the Sovereign Domain's religious and governmental power and hosts a constant stream of the faithful making pilgrimages from across the realms.

THE SOAR REPUBLIC

The Duchy of Soar, as it was originally known, was once part of the Kingdom of Loft, but the Succession Rebellion split the kingdom into fragments almost 100 cycles ago. Since that time, most of the errant territories and fiefdoms have either been reconquered or reluctantly ceded back to Loft — all but the steadfastly independent Duchy.

Soar is a realm of contrasts. Proud of its many ancient traditions, it is also known for progressive social customs that have allowed it to become the first true republic in the kingdoms. The small nation is governed by the Senate of Peers, a representative caucus elected by direct vote every two cycles. Citizens pay taxes according to their means, and social responsibility is a way of life. All citizens serve a minimum of one cycle in the Soar navy — likely the reason it has so far resisted attempts by Loft to recover its lost skylands. Perhaps because of the fact that every citizen is a trained sailor, Soarians have a well-earned reputation for able skyman-ship and are heavily recruited by the Guild for their liegemen crews.

Despite their historical origin as a Loftian Estate, or



perhaps because of it, Soarians seem to have advanced their heritage of belligerent individualism into a form of true egalitarianism. This culture of equality does come with obligations, such as the significant taxes and compulsory military service. Soarians know they remain the only post-Rebellion Estate not to have been reconquered or otherwise resorbed into Loft, so usually bear such duties proudly.

Soarians as a culture are as dichotomous as the Republic's past and present. As individuals, they are steadfastly independent, yet they are also fiercely loyal to their countrymen. They are simultaneously insular and traditional, fearing the corrupting influence of Loftian politics, yet open and progressive about new ideas they believe could strengthen their nation. Ultimately, many outsiders are also divided — some believing the nation will last, while others believe it is only a matter of time before it is pulled back into the Loftian fold.

Soarians are clearly of Loftian ancestry, coming from the same Spark forebears. Some random permutation or errant lineage, however, has given them a tendency to somewhat darker complexions and stockier forms. Soarians wear a variety of fabrics in bright colors and seem to have an endless array of hats, capes and cloaks for every occasion.

City of Soar

The City of Soar is small but densely inhabited. It is unique in that a majority of its infrastructure and living spaces are underground, burrowed into the bedrock of the skyland itself. The city is built around a series of large, well-like shafts that pass through the entire island, providing access, ventilation and light to the underground parts of the settlement. The excavated architecture is airy and artistic, with a minimalist aesthetic, open public spaces, and elaborate lens and mirror portlights that cleverly channel light into even the darkest areas.

The Senate's *Republican Chamber* dominates the city's few above-ground structures. The Chamber is a huge, covered amphitheater which, by law, is always open to Soar citizens. A constant series of Senate meetings, debates and votes, as well as public forums and announcements, make the Chamber a busy place.

University of Soar

Soar is a nation of intellectuals with a strong tradition of education and civic participation. In fact, the country is the only one with compulsory schooling for youngsters, focused primarily on literacy, history and civics.

The University of Soar is one of the finest colleges in the realms and its gifted faculty make it second only to the Explorer Knights' Academy in Verdant. The University supports exceptional curricula in philosophy, archaeology and medicine. The school also hosts a growing arcanosciences division and a premiere music department.

Soarian Gliders

Kite gliders are found throughout the kingdoms and some navies even use them for scouting or stealth assaults. Though many joke it was inevitable given the name of their country, Soar does, in fact, produce the best kites and the most skilled glider pilots in the kingdoms. Unmatched in speed and acrobatic prowess, the gliders of Soar are in high demand around the realms as engineers and instructors, and the liegemen are known to recruit Soarian gliders as scouts.

VAULT

Vault is a small nation wedged between the Fortress Dominion and the downwind reaches of Loft. Vault has few natural resources and no industries or even expertise of note. Its trade fleet is small, its rulers are weak and ineffective and the populace is desperate. The country's economy has all but collapsed, crime and corruption are rampant, and bandit gangs and local crime bosses have more influence over the people than the failing parliament.

At best the government is ineffectual, at worst it is complicit. Corruption is entrenched and envoys and ambassadors bearing economic incentives from around the realms have failed to spur reform. Vault has no true navy and is instead patrolled by mercenaries, who are little more than pirates in shabby uniforms who bought their authority from corrupt government officials. As a result, Vault has become a semilegal haven for bandits and criminals of all kinds, and some of the most notorious pirates in the realms take refuge here when they need to go to ground.

Bound by the treaties of the Convocation, the Guild is obliged to provide support, expertise



and law enforcement at the request of the Vaultish government. Despite their good faith efforts and major expenditures of resources, the Guild has been mostly ineffectual, as corruption and collusion undermine any progress it makes. Things have become so desperate that two squadrons from the Guild's 5th Fleet have been permanently assigned to patrolling Vault.

Stereotyped as swindlers and thieves, life is hard for those Vaultish lucky enough to escape their homeland. Those few who find their way into the Guild — as liegemen or even Knights — typically suffer undue prejudice and must constantly prove themselves to their peers.

The Vaultish people are almost as much of a random combination of lineages as the Verdani and as a result they have no common physical type, running the gamut of size and coloration. They tend to have long hair — both males and females — and to wear colorful, often gaudy, layered clothing.

Haven

Perhaps the irony was inevitable, but the capital city of Vault is more a haven for smugglers and black marketeers than for decent folk. The government is so profoundly corrupt that criminals who can pay sufficient bribes are allowed to act with impunity. Haven has gained a well-earned reputation for illegal goods and contraband cargoes, and its underworld operates with more organization and efficiency than most legitimate governments. The Guild has been trying for cycles to root out the corruption, but since it pervades every level of the society, each time it pulls a weed, three more grow in its place.

Iron Prison

Perhaps it is also inevitably ironic that the Guild's only prison is located within Vault territory. Though the Iron Prison was originally built on a small and isolated island high in the Arids, that same skyland suffered a notable groundswell over 20 cycles ago and now drifts along among the islands of Vault.

The Iron Prison, as it was uncreatively named, is a large, iron-walled compound that clings to the underside of a small skyland that was once a productive iron mine that was played out in the construction of the facility. The prison has room for 500 inmates, though it currently houses just over 300. A small village has been

established on the surface during the last 12 cycles, providing a waypoint port and housing for the families of the Knights and liegemen assigned to the jail. Known unofficially as *Lock-down*, the town now supports a larger population than the prison itself.

In the course of its law enforcement duties, the Guild usually remands any prisoners to the governments whose laws they have broken. In the rare cases where criminals have violated elements of the Convocation treaties or proven uniquely dangerous, they are sent to the Iron Prison. In particular, criminals with substantive command over Potential are incarcerated here, where they can be kept under control by Knights with even greater powers.

The Iron Prison is also where the Guild keeps its own criminals — the few tragic liegemen and the handful of Knights who have failed to uphold their vows or otherwise proven criminal.

THE KINGDOM OF SKYREACH

Skyreach is a wealthy, culturally aloof nation of scholars, technicians and savvy traders, ruled by an oligarchy of clever, nationalistic Kin. They are technologically advanced and often utilize Masters' equipment, devices and engineering that they did not acquire from the Guild, but was instead salvaged by their own corps of explorers, the *Delvers*.

Skyreach is not a large nation, but its location in the upwind Midlands means it has a fair climate and is well-positioned on the major trade routes. The capital city of Sky has a technological infrastructure and cosmopolitan sophistication that rival those of Highstone.

Skyreach citizens trace their heredity back to the Gale, with just enough Torrent interbreeding to give them a slightly shorter stature and lighter skin than their ancestors.

Masters' Highland

The city of Sky is built on a small highland that is covered in the largest, most intact Masters' artifact in the realms: a vast collection of structures called *The Reach*. The layout is multi-layered and sometimes confusing, but the majority of buildings that make up the city are original Masters' constructs, built of an artificial, stone-like material that appears to have somehow been extruded rather than



cut. Ancient and sometimes awkwardly shaped for their current uses, the streets, walls, plazas and buildings of Sky are the very same structures once occupied by the long-lost Masters.

As much rumor as confirmed fact, there is evidence that the skyland on which Sky is built is itself entirely artificial — a construct of the Masters. Though the Skyreach government is careful to keep curious outsiders from learning too much, the agents of other polities have confirmed there are secrets being kept about the true nature of the Reach. Many speculate that this vast Masters' cache is where their Delvers have found most of their salvage, and many governments, as well as the Guild, worry about the possibility that Skyreach is more than just a skyland. As unlikely as it seems, they worry that Skyreach technicians might eventually discover that the island's motion can be controlled — that it can be sailed like a skyship. The strategic advantage of being able to fly an entire skyland wherever its navy commanded would shatter the delicate military detente established by the Convocation.

Delvers' Society

The Delvers' Society is an elite group of scavengers that are second only to the Explorer Knights themselves in their achievements exploring the Twilight Frontier. They are expert sailors and navigators, and though their scientific surveys are focused solely on the acquisition of Masters' technology, they are smart, resourceful and uniquely productive. Known for discovering the *Glass Falls Complex* and the enigmatic machine now known as the *Engineering Chamber*, the Delvers are an experienced cadre who have the grudging respect of the Explorer Knights.

HORIZON

Horizon consists of a long, shallow archipelago, located between Verdant and the Dominion, known for its mineral resources and its brazen, daring cultural ethos. Horizon has only a fraction of the mineral wealth of Bright, but it is sufficient to serve as the basis of the nation's economy. Fully one third of the workforce has something to do with the ore trade — extraction, processing, or shipping.

The people of Horizon have the reputation for being audacious, enthusiastic and generally fearless. Alternatively, some would

describe them as rude, pushy and more than a little crazy. Horizians who have joined the Guild have borne out all these stereotypes. Some blame this impulsive, active nature on their Spark ancestry. Others blame it on the de facto national drink known as *jot* — a native brew containing a rather potent stimulant those not used to the beverage are advised to avoid.

Clearly descended from two ancestral lines, Horizians have all the brashness of their Spark ancestors and the Potential of their Gale forebears. Horizians are known for tawny hair, dark complexions and sky-colored eyes that make them an exceptionally striking and handsome people.

Cliffside

Though not the capital, Cliffside is the largest settlement in Horizon. Cliffside clings to the tall, rocky faces of a thick, mineral-rich skyland known as *The Bluff*. The city is carved from the exposed cliffs and is a warren of docks, balconies, gantries, ledges, chambers and tunnels, giving the city more of a vertical topography than a horizontal one. Skyships nestle in cell-like cradles dug from the cliff face, and loading ore from the mines or cargo to warehouses is as simple as parking the ships wherever they are needed.

Superior Smiths

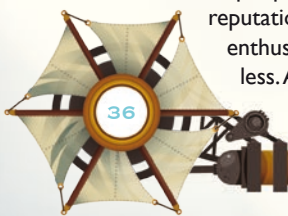
Horizon is also known for an auxiliary metalworking industry that claims some of the realms finest foundries and blacksmiths. These workshops in turn produce some of the finest swords, cannon and gun barrels in the kingdoms. The Guild in particular favors Horizon-made cannons, and every liegeman carries a sword forged under long-standing contract with *Hardsmith and Sons Fine Blades*.

Descriptive Names

The Horizon dialect is a descriptive tongue with a vast array of adjectives and qualifiers for just about every part of speech. Most notably, at least to foreigners, is the practice of adding such descriptors to almost every Horizon name. Arman, Navid, Payam and Nima are not just Arman, Navid and so on. More commonly, they are Fat Arman, Silly Navid, Crook-Tooth Payam and Very Pretty Nima.

THE REGENCY OF DIMM

Dimm is a broken nation with a tragic past. Until recently known as the Kingdom of Dimm, the



Regency is a small collection of skylands drifting near the Twilight Frontier between the Fortress Dominion and the lower reaches of Horizon. Never wealthy or dominant in any trade, but with a long-standing monarchy and a hardworking people, Dimm made do. It was a proud nation and a stalwart member of the Convocation.

Tragically, just over 15 cycles ago, a major groundswell event dropped the nation's capital skyland into the Dark; despite a massive search effort by the Guild, it was never found. Though most surviving Dimmish refuse to give up hope, most other Kin know the city — with its entire citizenry and its king — is lost forever.

As a result of this disaster and the mortal blow to its government and economy, Dimm is a dying nation in the midst of a diaspora as its people spread across the realms in search of better lives. Those who can take their families with them do so, and those who can't send what little money they can home to loved ones.

Dimmish clans often travel together in ramshackle skyships seeking work, trading skills and crafts wherever they can. Sadly, with limited resources these vagabonds live a marginal existence, in some cases resorting to petty theft and smuggling to get by. As a result, the Dimmish have begun to earn a reputation that makes their ragtag flotillas unwelcome almost everywhere they go.

The Dimmish were almost pure descendants of the Torrent with the small stature, translucent complexion and milk-white hair of their ancestors. This ethnic distinction identifies the Dimmish people as such wherever they go, and if their ghostly appearance is not enough, their patterned woollens and engraved leathers mark them as well. Though once an insular lineage, with so little choice, the Dimmish have begun taking wives and husbands where they can find them. Accordingly, Gale and even a little Stone ancestry have become part of the younger generations.

The Calms

The middle reaches of Dimm — known as the Calms — are damp and still, with wet mists and pervasive fogs. Accordingly, the region is particularly favorable to the growth of large cloud gardens, which gather in these calm eddies forming sprawling, floating forests. These cloud forests can grow so large that Kin frequently use them

as base camps for the risky trade of hemoth hunting. The massive animals migrate to the forests to calve and breed, and their concentrated numbers makes hunting them possible. A hard and dangerous trade under the best of circumstances, hemoth hunting is only for the very brave — or very desperate.

THE SPIRE

The Guild has been aware of the Spire since its earliest explorations. Currently located downwind of the Calms on the border between Dimm and the Twilight Frontier, this free-floating stone and alloy structure shaped like a sailmaker's needle is over 100 yards long and hangs in the air with its tapered point aiming straight down toward the Dark.

Riddled with empty chambers and quiet, enigmatic machines, the strangest mystery about the Spire is that it does not move. It does not drift like a skyland, it does not move with the Wind like a ship, and it does not respond, or even budge, when exposed to Potential forces. As well as the Guild's best navigators have been able to determine, the Spire has not moved from its current location in the Sky since its discovery over 80 cycles ago. How this is so, what purpose the structure served, and if it is still active, are all equally mysterious and unanswered questions.

Bleak, wet and dark as it is, the Spire now supports a permanent Guild outpost that serves as a unique, fixed navigational waypoint. It hosts a huge and particularly powerful lodestone unimaginatively called *Waypoint 01*, needles from which the Guild has been distributing throughout the kingdoms. (See the box on *Practical Navigation* on page 94 for more information on lodestones and needles.)

Cartographers and mathematicians stationed at the Spire outpost and using Waypoint 01 as their baseline reference have been able to more accurately triangulate the locations of the major skylands and so better track their eternal movements. The improvements to current charts and course estimation rubrics have not only increased the efficiency and accuracy of navigation, but have also saved lives by reducing drift error; thereby assuring more ships make it safely to port.



OTHER NATIONS

The alliance of the Kingdoms in the Light includes many other polities: some large, some small, some influential in politics and trade, others marginalized by location or paucity of resources within their borders. There are still others that, like the Cloud Principality, either never signed the original treaties of the Convocation or have since withdrawn from the accords in the intervening cycles.

THE CLOUD PRINCIPALITY

The Cloud Principality is a fair-sized collection of resource-rich skylands on the Midlands border of the Sky Beyond. Historically, the ruling family of Cloud opted not to sign the Convocation treaties and, in the many cycles since, Cloud has become a uniquely insular and enigmatic nation. They maintain no embassies in the realms and allow almost no foreigners within their borders. Even the Explorer Knights are limited to a single small Guild house in the main port and restricted to specific flight paths in and out of the sovereign territory.

The current government is secretive and isolationist and consistently refuses to broaden diplomatic relations or trade with the outside world. The country's borders are patrolled by a small but formidable navy, and its crews are competent and vigilant.

Strangely, during each of the historical IncurSIONs, Cloud unexpectedly contributed a sizable fleet to the defense effort, putting their ships under the command of the Guild but demanding a strict operational segregation in return. The Guild obliged and the Cloud forces proved both able and valuable. It was as if the rulers wanted the realms to know they did not expect others to defend them.

The lack of trade and cultural isolation have only added to the general mystique of the secretive nation, and there are many conflicting and unlikely rumors about the true nature of the Principality. If any of the other kingdoms or the Guild have agents within its borders, no one is sharing what they have learned.

The citizens of Cloud are insular and conditioned by their history to mistrust and avoid the outside world. Unsurprisingly, they

are not well educated about the realms beyond their country and know little about other cultures. Surprisingly, however, they are not as backward as might be expected, and they have a high rate of literacy among the common people and a good understanding of their own country's history and political relationship with the rest of the Kingdoms in the Light.

The people of Cloud have retained one of the purest lineages in the realms and are clearly descended from the Stone. They are uniformly large, enigmatic and stoic people with dark complexions, brown hair and metal-colored eyes. They are physically strong, mentally methodical and uniquely reserved. Standard dress is simple, well-made and practical, consisting of dull, undyed fabrics and sturdy leathers.

Cirrus City

Cirrus is a small, antiquated settlement constructed primarily of stone and built on a series of wide terraces overlooking its well-defended harbor. The people are reserved and seem to shun contact with the few foreigners allowed into the city.

Alloy Trade

The one commodity in which the Cloud government is willing to trade is the rare metal known as Masters' alloy. The Principality appears to have significant caches of the valuable resource hidden within its borders and actively trades it for other strategic goods, but only with the Guild — hence the Guild's limited access to Cirrus. The Guild keeps what it needs and trades the surplus to other nations.

There are stories of raiders and privateers who thought to sneak into the Principality and take their share of this Masters' treasure. The stories all end the same way — with the bandit crews never being seen again.

Secrets

Many believe that the diplomatic isolation, vigilant navy and considerable exports of Masters' alloy imply that the Principality is hiding secrets it wishes to keep to itself. As a result, there are many governments, trade companies and guilds that would like to know just what is hidden beyond the mysterious country's borders. Accordingly, there is a small industry of agents and spies constantly assailing the Principality, but so



far those who have survived doing so have had little to report.

Errant Knights

It is against strictly enforced national laws for citizens of Cloud to travel outside of the country without customs papers authorizing such trips, and such papers are seldom issued. The government also does not allow the Guild to host Novice Festivals inside the country, so Cloud Knights are exceedingly rare in the Guild. Rare, but not unknown.

Even within the insular lands of the Principality, the reputation of the Explorers' Guild is such that there are youngsters who are willing to leave everything they know behind forever, just for a chance at becoming a Knight. There have been at least three cases in the past two cycles of hopeful aspirants who managed to smuggle themselves out of the country and compete in a festival — one making it all the way to the Academy Fair in Highstone. She was ultimately accepted into the Academy and the other two now serve with the liegemen.

CASCADE PROTECTORATE

Once a colony of Loft, Cascade is now an independent nation on the edge of the Periphery, separated from its ancestral rulers by the hazardous skies of the Dust. A nation of proud, independent Kin, the Protectorate is known for its cultural openness, spicy food and unorthodox skyship designs. Frequently deluged by the Torrent, and therefore a damp nation of rainforest jungle, the geography of the Cascade islands is characterized by many large rivers and resulting edgefalls.

LEEWARD

Leeward is a collection of temperate islands on an outward course from Horizon. The pastoral lands are second only to those of Verdant in agricultural exports, but first in the production of spices, tobacco and plant-based textiles. The climate is mild and conducive to farming and the people are generally hardworking and devout. Most Leewardians are followers of the Lady of the Wind, believing that all elemental forces are only aspects of the Goddess, and therefore



her purview alone. Accordingly, they eschew all use of personal Potential, considering it a form of impiety. As a result, the only Leewardians to ever become Knights are those willing to abandon their faith.

THE OUT-COLONY OF RIM

Rim Colony, or just the Colony as many sailors call it, is a uniquely aggressive nation that has been staunchly opposed to the Convocation and the Guild since the founding of the alliance. This opposition is surprising, in that the bloody revolt in which Rim was engaged at the time against the Fortress Confederacy was one of the reasons the summit was originally convened. Though having benefited from the resulting peace, Rim has refused to join the Convocation for 200 cycles. In that time, the country has actually declared war — however short-lived — against almost half of the other nations across the sky, as if every political disagreement was the most grievous threat to its sovereignty.

ASCENT ARCHIPELAGO

The isles of Ascent are a sparsely inhabited archipelago of small islands upwind of Horizon, on the very edge of the Sky Beyond. Geologically unique, these beautiful skylands are governed by a collection of independent but allied, long-ruling matriarchal families called *Kinships*. Though not opposed to the use of technology, there is a cultural reticence about being too reliant on machines and arc, so little of the archipelago has been industrialized. Though widely considered technologically backward as a result, Ascentians are anything but unsophisticated. The people of the Isles are known for their progressive social philosophies, cultural musicality and exceptional skymanship. They have also famously never had any of their King's Quota appointees fail to graduate from the Academy.

TEMPEST

Tempest is a wild place, meteorologically, geographically and culturally. Consisting mostly of a pair of larger, treacherously rugged skylands that orbit each other like sparring fighters, Tempest seems the perfect name for this strange land, as it often drags huge Potential storms along in its wake. It is also perhaps more than coincidental that the

region is home to a uniquely combative people. Tempest is not a unified nation, let alone a member of the Convocation, and consists of countless warlord-ruled clans that seem engaged in an everlasting conflict — but a war conducted periodically, almost ritualistically, rather than with the intent of actually conquering others. They are considered barbarians by most of the rest of the realms, and those nations that historically attempted to conquer the region were quickly repelled by staunch alliances among the otherwise embattled clans. As a result of its warlike culture, Tempest produces some of the best fighters and tacticians and they are actively recruited by the Guild, despite the region having no formal relationship with the Convocation.

THE PERIPHERY

There are many Kin settlements, villages, camps and outposts that, because of the scattered and ever-changing geography of the realms, are not part of — or even claimed by — any of the kingdoms. Though often isolated or temporary, some of these places have managed to survive on the periphery, eking out existences in an often harsh and dangerous solitude.

NOMAD

Nomad is a unique town, and not just because it is one of the few truly independent settlements within the kingdoms. It is distinctive because it is composed, not of buildings on an island, but of a collection of ship hulls, rafts, barges, quays, docks and improvised platforms all fitted with induction systems and chained, roped, pinned, nailed and even welded together into an entirely Kin-made, floating city. The resulting metropolis is constantly changing as ships, or even entire neighborhoods, come and go, joining and leaving the whole. Finding one's way about the town, therefore, is a particular challenge for any newcomer — or anyone who has been away more than a handful of turns.

Nomad is ruled by the *Wandering Captain*, the eldest living member of the settlement's apocryphal founding family. This hereditary post is currently held by Anlee Dunny, a young, seemingly clever woman who has a subtle but effective hand when managing her city and her subjects.

Unlike a single skyship, sails and induction hull tuning alone are incapable of moving the vast



SPOKEN DIALECTS

The dialects of the Kin are an interesting study of the effects of isolation and the passage of time on linguistic evolution and cultural meaning. Scholars have convincing evidence that before the DownFall the Kin spoke a shared language, but that language was verbal only, with no written form. Surprisingly, in the countless cycles since, though there has been considerable fragmentation into regional dialects, skyland-specific accents, and changes of meaning for some vocabulary, most Kin are able to understand most other Kin, even if accents and colloquialisms mean they can't catch every word or nuance.

An additional curiosity is that the written scripts, clearly invented after the diaspora of the DownFall, are as disparate as the cultures that created them, so that even though most Kin can, more or less, understand each other when then they speak, they are unable to read any written text unless they have actually learned that specific form.

and cumbersome bulk of the raft-town with any speed or on any fixed course. Accordingly, moving to more desirable skies or away from hazards such as oncoming skylands and thermal drafts is a challenging endeavor requiring a uniquely experienced navigator and a large fleet of well-crewed tugs. Much like steering one of the fragile, lumbering dirigibles flown as upcountry freighters, Nomad's navigation crew depends heavily on local variations in the strength of the Wind, large deflection eddies and coordinated tuning of its countless induction hulls to catch and ride natural air currents to desired destinations. A slow, difficult and imperfect process under the best conditions, it's a good thing that the denizens of Nomad don't seem to care about getting anywhere quickly.

Nomad is well-known across the kingdoms as a trader's crossroads where cargoes of all types can be sold or traded with low tariffs and eager buyers. The various Exchanges that drive the economy of this strange market town are known to be both lucrative and liberal places to do business. Nomad is also known, particularly among the trader ships' crews, for its open, accepting and permissive social mores. Accordingly, sailors always look forward to putting into its port. Nomad gives free compass needles to any ship's navigator who asks for one, knowing that since the city's economy depends on flowing trade, they need to make it as easy as possible to be found.

In recent cycles, Nomad has mostly wandered the skies on the borders of Soar — the nation

with perhaps the highest tolerance for the cultural freedoms that define Nomad society.

GRIM

Grim is a remote and lonely settlement far off in the Outlands. Its distant location and erratic drift make it difficult to find, which suits many of Grim's inhabitants just fine, as most don't want to be found. Loners, hermits, fugitives and some just plain crazies make up the small population of this isolated town. Grim's only feature of note is that it sits on the edge of a vast Masters' ruin, having originally been founded as a prospector's camp. It grew into an unintended boomtown to support the independents who came to pick over the bones after the Guild — who first discovered the place — had cleaned out what it wanted. There are still enough scraps of Masters' alloy and elemental glass for some of the locals to scrape livings from the ruins, but everything of value was scavenged long ago. Or so the Explorer Knights believe.

There is a persistent rumor that the Knights missed something, that they did not delve deep enough into the site to discover all its secrets. Accordingly, there is an equally persistent economy of prospectors and treasure hunters who continue to scour and search the site. They are rumored to meet with enough success that those same rumors convince others to take up the hunt as their predecessors abandon the life or fail to return from the ancient warren of tunnels and debris.

HOLE

Hole is a unique settlement on the edges of both the Periphery and the Twilight Frontier. Originally a remote mining camp, the settlement gets its name from the fact that the skyland's dominant feature is a vast, conical, mined-out hole that plunges entirely through the heart of the island. The shanty town itself now clings to the inner surface of this cavity like a fungus, cascading down the terraced walls from the less dangerous neighborhoods of the *Rim* to the viler environs of the *Pit*.

Hole has grown into a dubious port town; an independent, pirate fiefdom, the rulers of which change with the Wind as various local gangs gain and lose power, territory and influence. The current leader of Hole has ruled for almost a cycle now and appears stronger than ever. Known only as The Metal Man, this enigmatic figure is rumored to be an ex-raider who ran afoul of a dangerous Masters' cache on his last run.

The leaders of Hole have always had a tacit sort of understanding with neighboring polities and the Guild itself, as the place serves as a sometimes-useful neutral meeting ground and emergency repair and provisioning port. As long as the ambitions of the local thugs and raiders do not bleed too far into the surrounding skies, the Guild is willing to leave the denizens of the place to their dubious selves.

SHADOW

Shadow is the unofficial name for the unofficial settlement that has grown up around the Guild

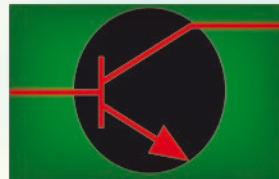
Frontier outpost of *Fort Alabaster*. The presence of the fortress provides a degree of safety in an otherwise dangerous region, so, perhaps inevitably, a transient community of explorers, privateers, hangers-on and other opportunists has colonized the rest of the dim, wet skyland. The fort has a history as the final staging point for expeditions headed into the Twilight Frontier, so it is also inevitable that privateers, raiders and other Frontier scavengers use Shadow as a de facto home port. As a result, the rough and tumble lawlessness and haphazard sprawl of the surrounding town is in sharp contrast to the organized Guild standards of the fort.

Despite its dubious reputation, Shadow has also drawn a significant population of civilian scholars, researchers, merchants and craftsmen all looking to gain from proximity to the Frontier. A growing community of Explorer Knight families has also established itself in Shadow, complicating the fort's mission, its relationship with the town and, ultimately, its defense.

The fort, as well as the island, is named for the soft, white stone that makes up the majority of its mass, and from which the Guild and the local denizens have built their infrastructure. Lacking a ready source of harder rock, masons are constantly having to make minor repairs as the damp and foggy environment erodes their pale, moss-covered stonework. As a result, the large, upcountry quarry is vital and always busy.



COLONY



DIMM



A HISTORY OF THE KIN

“The Masters of the Wind” is the traditional name given to the lost culture from whose remains Kin civilization and technology are derived. The Masters were great scientists and ingenious engineers. Myths claim that they held dominion over all nature and that nothing was beyond their power. There are as many tales about the Masters as there are mysteries, but there is no doubt that they had fantastical science and wondrous technology.

THE DOWNFALL

No one knows how the world of the Masters came to an end. Historians have little to go on and Guild archeologists argue over contradictory evidence. What is widely believed is that unknown cycles ago a great catastrophe befell the Masters — that despite their potent science, their world ended in apocalyptic disaster.

Some fear the destruction was a natural cataclysm and that what happened to the old world may happen again to the new. Others believe the threat was external—that the Masters had a great enemy from across The Sky Beyond and that it was war with this adversary that destroyed them. One legend says they traveled to other worlds and another claims the Masters lie sleeping in the Light, waiting for the Kin to wake them. Some argue there was no catastrophe — that the world was always as it is and that the Masters’ civilization was ended by some as yet unknown cause. Many believe the Masters brought the cataclysm on themselves — that with vast hubris they reached too far, overstepping some natural law and in doing so released

ZEALOTS

Most scholars — and many religions — claim that the Masters were somehow responsible for the creation of the Wind and consequently the destruction of their world. Accordingly, there are many teachers and evangelists who eschew technology and its trappings, believing it inherently evil. This view is not without influential supporters and many religious, political and social movements have been founded on this conviction.

the Wind, cracking the world apart and scattering its remains across the skies.

Where the legends and evidence do agree is that whatever their fate, however the reign of the Masters ended, it was apocalyptic. This event is called the *Great Catastrophe* by some; the *Cataclysm* or the *Wrath of the Wind* by others; while some cultures refuse to name it at all out of old superstition. The Guild histories simply refer to it as the DownFall.

Far more remains unknown about the Down-Fall than will ever be learned, but certain facts must be true. It is clear the Masters’ civilization was utterly destroyed. It is also clear that some small number survived the initial



THE LEGEND OF THE FIFTH REFUGE

The four lineages — the Gale, Torrent, Stone and Spark — are known lines of Kin ancestry. A common legend, however — one scholars research and children sing about in nursery rhymes — tells of a lost line: the survivors of the Fifth Refuge. Though there are tantalizing hints in rare oral histories and ancient documents, there is little physical evidence supporting these tales. A fire pit and broken pot on a distant skyland, or rusted tools at a post-DownFall camp on the edge of the Frontier, are not enough to convince even the most open-minded. Those deluded few who profess that this fifth lineage may in fact be the Children of the Dark are considered crazy at best, and traitorous at worst.

destruction in isolated, scattered refuges. These groups must have found ways to eke life from what remained, founding the tribes that would eventually become the races of the Kin. It is believed that during these lost cycles the Kin learned to tap the Potential that flowed through the new world, first using it simply to survive, but ultimately to found new civilizations.

There are few ancient sites from the age of the Masters that did not suffer at least some damage during the DownFall. The plentiful ruins, tumbled structures and overgrown rubble are testament to this. As every Kin knows, the salvage from these places is vital to the technology and economy of the modern kingdoms. Strangely, despite the shiploads of Masters' technology that have been recovered from hundreds of sites across the skies, remains of the Masters themselves — bones, preserved or interred bodies — have never been discovered; remains of Kin and even Children of the Dark, but no third race that might represent the Masters of the Wind.

Though artifacts hint at their forms, this lack has led

to wide speculation. Most assume the Masters are the direct ancestors of the Kin, while others believe this impossible or even blasphemous. The more fanciful suggest that the Masters gave up their biological forms and became immortal machines, or forewent physical forms altogether and ascended to a higher, incorporeal existence.

All this archaeological speculation has, however, revealed another, perhaps more troubling, discovery: the archeological record — the evidence of buried bones and cultural artifacts — detailing the ancient history of the Kin is essentially missing. There is evidence of their existence in the time of the Masters, and there are abundant archaeological traces of their diaspora after the DownFall, but at a certain point this history, the thread of their existence, abruptly ends. It's as if they didn't exist one clock, and were created newly formed in the next. Most archaeologists believe that the record was simply lost in the destruction of the DownFall, but others remain troubled by the implications.

THE AGE OF ISOLATION

The survivors of the DownFall endured countless cycles lost and scattered across the skies — a period scholars now call the Age of Isolation. During this time, the survivors cobbled together an existence from the ruined world around them. Each clan exploited its unique refuge as it could, slowly rebuilding civilization as their environments allowed. It is an accepted truth that the use of Potential made the difference between life and death in the refuges. Fighting thirst and hunger, the elements, wild beasts and likely each other, their survival would have been impossible without the ability to tap the arcane power of the Wind.

Isolation was certainly the underlying cause of the changes that led to the diversity among modern Kin: the hybridization of pure strains, the inevitable breeding in or out of traits, the survival advantage of some characteristics and the fatal disadvantage of others. They struggled and labored and adapted, and isolated on their skyland refuges, they founded diverse tribes and evolved unique cultures.

In exploring the remnants of the shattered world, they found the lost technologies of the Masters and salvaged what they could. They



rediscovered the power of machines, and, with a growing understanding of Potential, they were able to cobble together a new discipline, establishing the science of arcanotechnology. When the magic of induction was ultimately engineered, the first skyships were quick to follow. Haltingly, one tentative, experimental flight at a time, the Age of Isolation came to an end.

Patchy records suggest that the Gale tribes of Verdant were the first to rediscover the science of induction and apply it to the construction of flying vessels, freeing them from the confines of their isolated refuges. The *BOOK OF CHARTS* — the oldest known sky map folio — is annotated in archaic Verd, implying the Gale were among the first ancient navigators. Many believe this is why the people of Verdant are superior sailors and why they are the most racially intermixed of the Kin.

Tentative at first, these early explorations were short-range, limited by the crude craft these intrepid sailors were able to assemble. As their confidence and vessels improved, these sorties became true journeys, and exploration became colonization. With the vast increase in resources new skylands provided, populations grew quickly, spurring still more colonization efforts, and the Kin began to spread across the uncharted skies.

THE FIRST AGE OF EXPLORATION

The First Age of Exploration was a heady time of brave adventure, new discovery and a rapid expansion of what was known about the skies. For the first time, tribes were able to colonize other skylands and search widely for new caches of Masters' technology. Cultures spread and populations grew. New resources were exploited and previously undiscovered ruins picked clean of their treasures and their secrets. As the races of the Kin set out to rediscover their broken world they did so with the near-sighted belief that they were the only ones—the only ones to have survived the DownFall, the only ones to control Potential, the only ones to have built skyships, and the only ones destined to inherit the Masters' salvaged technology.

It was perhaps unavoidable then — something in their natures, the threat to survival, or perhaps a remnant arrogance inherited from the

THE BALLAD OF OLD FICK

A favorite among sailors, this living chanty tells of an unlikely explorer who travelled the skies in the first skyship, charming women and fathering children across the realms. In doing so, the story goes, he single-handedly brought about the end of the Age of Isolation. The song consists of countless verses with favorites unique to every nation and more forever being added by bored or drunken sailors across the kingdoms:

Old Fick liked his lovers pretty... yes he did, yes he did.

Old Fick liked his lovers witty... oh yes he did, oh yes he did.

Old Fick liked to drink his wine... yes he did, yes he did.

Old Fick liked to take his time... oh yes he did, oh yes he did.

Masters — that this time of exploration would drive the tribes of the Kin into conflict, that this age would end in widespread war, destruction and conquest.

THE COLONIZATION WARS

Most historians agree that the time of the Colonization Wars was the defining era in Kin history, establishing the major cultures and nations that would eventually ally as the Kingdoms in the Light and laying the essential foundations for what came after. Defining or not, the Age of Colonization was certainly the darkest in Kin history. The death and destruction that raged across the old realms was, in its own mundane, bloody way, just as cataclysmic as the DownFall, with whole tribes and cultures lost to the violence.

Some historians claim that as destructive as the Age of Colonization was, it was also inevitable. They argue that since the skylands — and more specifically, the salvageable

THE CONSUL ASSEMBLY

The Consul Assembly was intended as a diplomatic alternative to the Alliance Knights and was created by the same binding Convocation treaties that established that order. Unlike the independent status conferred on the Knights, the Consul Assembly was intended to engage the rulers and governments of the realms directly, so that diplomacy and national cooperation would have alternative recourse as a balance against the military authority of the Knights.

Accordingly, each signatory country is allowed a staff of three ambassadors to represent their interests in the Assembly. Who these representatives are, how they are selected, and how long they serve is left to their respective governments to decide. The selected envoys are installed at the *Consul Hall* in the city of *Weatherly*, in Verdant. Here they meet on a cyclical schedule of standing business, and during frequent emergency sessions that are convened to address what seems a never-ending stream of crises.

Perhaps in the early clocks of the Assembly the body was more effective and served a grander purpose. In the modern era however, it has become a bloated, quarrelsome, and frequently deadlocked congress. Those ambassadors who mean well and work to support the Convocation are outnumbered by career politicians who are either petty and short-sighted in their own rights, or whose effectiveness is limited by the restrictions placed on them by their own governments. Either way, good faith discourse and true diplomatic advancement are rare in the Assembly.

The archaic voting structure lends additional politicking to the messy power blocs and backroom deals that characterize Consul diplomacy. With each signatory nation having one vote, smaller or poorer countries become less allies to win with logic and conviction than votes to be purchased with favorable trade deals, outright bribes, or even threats.

This means that the Consul Assembly has become little more than distracting political theater that contributes little to supporting the tenets of the Convocation, and leaves all the real labor, diplomatic or otherwise, to the Explorer Knights' Guild.

legacy of the Masters — are finite, limited resources, war was an inescapable consequence of competition between the rapidly expanding tribes of Kin. They also warn that since land and salvage will always be limiting resources, until Kin are able to sustain themselves — through technological advances of their own making or new uses of Potential — conflict will always threaten the future.

THE CONVOCATION OF KINGDOMS

Violence is the recourse of fear, and fear is the result of ignorance, and in those ancient cycles, the Kin were nothing if not ignorant. But, as such things prove to be, the conflicts became too costly in both resources

and spirit. Enmity became truce, truce became treaty, treaty became alliance, and alliance led to the Convocation of Kingdoms.

A call for parley by one of the more powerful confederations of nations eventually led to a grand summit — an unprecedented meeting of representatives from each kingdom, principality, republic, city state, clan and tribe. Though it would eventually become known as the Convocation of Kingdoms, the summit was originally meant only to provide diplomatic communication between the most aggressive nations. It was never intended to initiate the broad alliance of countries that ultimately resulted. But, after debating for most of a cycle, the diplomats were successful in curtailing the worst aggression, as well as formulating basic treaties for trade and mutual aid. The loose and



quarrelsome alliance known as the Kingdoms in the Light was born.

As the histories describe it, the Convocation of Kingdoms concluded with the inception of a neutral corps of diplomat warriors known as the Alliance Knights. Realizing that their fragile new confederation would only survive if there was a trusted authority — a recourse for grievance, guidance and defense — the delegates wisely established what was, at first, only meant to be an independent peacekeeping navy. A fleet given charter to patrol the realms, arbitrate differences where they could, and enforce the Treaty where they could not.

Though argumentative and flawed, the Convocation proved a timely boon, as it allowed the nascent alliance to stand united against the First Incursion. If it had not been for the new treaty, many historians believe the Children of the Dark might have conquered their way upwind all but unopposed.

Challenged frequently, with national conflicts common and wars sometimes inevitable, the Convocation has held fast for more than 200 cycles, remaining perhaps the most significant defense between the threat of the Dark and the Kingdoms in the Light.

THE FIRST INCURSION

Some might call it luck and others fate, but within a cycle of the ratification of the Convocation, the Children of the Dark made their first forays into the skies of the Kin. Had it been otherwise, the realms might have fallen, but the new treaties, and particularly the Alliance Knights, proved essential in staving off the threat. In a direct way, it may have been the Incursion itself that cemented the young alliance of the Kingdoms in the Light, fortifying the bonds that still hold the realms together.

It was certainly naive of the kingdoms to assume they were the only survivors of the DownFall, but then, who would have believed that the unexplored realm of the Dark could actually hide anything other than wild monsters? Who would have guessed an unknown horde of



savages would also be driven to explore and to wage war against those they encountered?

The First Incursion started when a small trade fleet plying settlements along the expanding, downwind frontier was set upon by a squadron of metal-hulled ships that vanished as quickly as they had appeared. Increasingly frequent air battles and surprise raids over the next half cycle had the Alliance Knights believing that one of the still-belligerent nations was secretly breaking the treaties of the Convocation or that a large band of pirates had grown unusually bold. It was not until a patrolling Knights' squadron encountered one of the mysterious fleets that the reality became clear. These raiders came from the Down Below, mounting their assaults from the cover of darkness and then disappearing back across the Twilight Frontier.

While nations and their rulers reacted with disbelief, denial and even panic, the Alliance Knights responded with decisive action. Gathering their dispersed forces and committing everything to the hunt, the consolidated fleet plunged into the Twilight Frontier, taking the fight to their new and enigmatic enemy. In a definitive strike, the Alliance Knights broke the mysterious fleet, burned their outposts and drove the shattered remnants back into the Dark.

Even now, most strategists claim that this was the wisest course of action — the only way to assure this new enemy would be properly wary of the kingdoms. Diplomats have always argued that this aggressive naval response is why the Children hate the Kin and why every attempt at parley has resulted in lost envoys and silence. The more thoughtful in both camps quietly speculate that the violence of the Alliance's response was why the Second Incursion was so much more coordinated, savage and destructive.

THE SECOND AGE OF EXPLORATION

In the political aftermath of the First Incursion, the Alliance Knights were heroes and increased funding and recruitment led not only to an expansion of their fleet, but to a broadening of their authority, responsibilities and mission. With the Knights' decisive actions during the Incursion and the discovery of the previously unknown technological

caches of the Twilight Frontier, it was inevitable that their charter was expanded. The Alliance tithes were increased, recruiting fairs traveled from skyland to skyland, and the shipyards of Fortress and Verdant quickly added vessels to their growing navy.

The revelation of the Children's existence shifted focus to the Twilight Frontier and the secrets hidden there. A new arm of the Alliance Knights — The Explorers' Guild — was established with the charge of charting the Twilight Frontier. The Guild set about its duties deliberately, and from the start its forays into the Twilight Frontier were wildly successful. They mapped new skies and discovered and plundered new Masters' ruins, salvaging more technology in the first cycle than had been discovered elsewhere in the previous ten. They established outposts not only on the border but within the Frontier, and in the realms their reputations grew as they drove technological advancement, expanded scientific knowledge and provided a much-needed sense of security.

There were infrequent encounters with the Children across the Frontier — distant sightings, brief skirmishes and occasional, tentative raids. Enough contact to keep the Alliance Knights well-trained and focused, but not so many that the Consul Assembly considered them a threat. There were always a few among the Knights, however, who felt that there was something ominous in these encounters, something telling — as if the Children always held back, feigning weakness. Their suspicions proved well-founded when the Second Incursion came and the reason for the duplicity became clear.

THE SECOND INCURSION

Even the most optimistic Kin knew the Children would return, so the Kingdoms in the Light were not entirely unprepared when they did. What even the most pessimistic did not anticipate, however, was the size and savagery of the massed fleets that finally surged across the Frontier. It was as if the Children had exaggerated the strategic lesson of their initial defeat and committed every resource they had to the fight.

Most military historians now believe that the infrequent, cautious encounters with the Children during the Age of Exploration were feints in service of two aims: the first was to learn all



they could about their upwind enemy, and the second was to lull that enemy into complacency. Both goals succeeded. When the Children finally attacked, their false timidity had been replaced with a vicious savagery that was terrifying to see, as if the cycles of holding back had driven them into a frenzy that could finally be unleashed. It was obvious the Children had used the time to expand their fleets, train sailors and soldiers and build a vast armory of weapons and machines of war. In addition, though their use of Potential had always been reckless and unstudied, their elementalists brought new abilities into battle, showing the Kin how devastating war magic could be.

The first clocks of the war were chaotic and brutal. The Children not only destroyed every strategic Kin outpost across the Frontier, but also made devastating sorties into the kingdoms, battering, burning and killing as far upwind as the middle realms and the lowest skylands of Vale. The joint fleets of the Knights and the national navies were not only unable to stem the invasion, they could barely retreat upwind faster than they were burned or blown from the sky. Those bloody, smoke-filled rounds left a broken defense fleet and the kingdoms exposed to whatever attack might follow.

Then, without warning, the assault ended. As suddenly and unexpectedly as it had begun, the Second Incursion was over; the Children inexplicably retreated into the Dark. And to this very clock, no one knows why.

The Second Incursion left much of the Kingdoms in the Light in ruins and left the Kin marked and fearful. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it also tempered the bonds holding the nations of the Convocation together, convincing most that a strong defense was tantamount. During the rebuilding and reorganization that characterized the aftermath of the Second Incursion, the Alliance Knights and Explorers' Guild coalesced into a single restructured entity known as the Explorer Knights' Guild. Forged in the war and credited with the only major victories of the Incursion, the Guild has since only grown in size and authority as both its ranks and its coffers have filled — the ranks with earnest and skilled recruits from across the realms, and the coffers with the tithes they collect from, and the salvage they recover and sell to, the rest of the kingdoms.

Reconstruction took many cycles, and it was many more before the realms' defenses were fully restored. Frontier fortifications were built and manned and naval fleets were expanded and crewed as generations of Kin looked downwind in fear, bracing for the next attack. Nations participated in nonstop joint military exercises based on hard-won knowledge of Child tactics. Treaties of strategic cooperation and materiel support were negotiated or renewed. Everywhere along the border of the Twilight Frontier patrol ships and outpost garrisons searched the dim skies for sign of a third incursion, but it never came.

THE AGE OF THE PROPHECY

More than 80 cycles have passed since the Second Incursion, and though most still fear the Dark, that dread has taken on the form of tradition more than historical threat. Unfortunately, as is true of traditions, they fade and can be set aside in the face of clock-to-clock affairs. Even those whose duty it is to remain vigilant — the commanders and captains among the navies of the realms — have begun to resent their onerous defense duties and the vast resources they must invest in them cycle after cycle.

Concurrently, many Convocation member nations have begun questioning their contributions to the Explorer Knights' Guild and debate ever more heatedly if the expenditure of resources is worthwhile, or even necessary. This fading support has left Guild leadership frustrated and increasingly concerned about its ability to execute its sworn duties. The Captain's Council has not forgotten the threat posed by the Children of the Dark, and every time a battle-damaged vessel limps into the harbor or an overdue ship is declared lost, they worry that the Third Incursion may have already begun.

THE GRAND AMPLIFIER

Perhaps the best-known legend across the Kingdoms in the Light is the Prophecy of the Grand Amplifier. The Amplifier is thought to be the most powerful device ever created by the Masters of the Wind. The tales claim that it eliminates the natural boundaries

of elementalism, allowing the user to manifest anything her mind can conceive.

The prophecy is older than the kingdoms and carries a weight of truth uncommon in such omens. The prophecy claims that in the Cycle of Change — the 202nd cycle by the Unified Calendar — the Amplifier will be found and a great battle will ensue between the Kin and the Children. The victors will win the device and use its power to achieve their greatest ambition. If the

Kin prevail, they will restore the ancient world of the Masters, regaining all their lost knowledge. If the Children win, the Kin will be burned from the sky and cast as ash upon the Wind.

As the kingdoms drift inexorably through the 201st cycle, some among the Guild seek the Amplifier with increasing fervor and prepare for what they are sure will be the Third Incursion and the ultimate war for survival.

EXCERPTS FROM “THE GUILD — A HISTORICAL PRIMER”

Cycle 1.0 UC — The Convocation of Kingdoms concludes. A subchapter of the treaty mandates the initiation of the Unified Calendar but, despite the new standard, many Kin cultures continue to use their traditional dating systems. Cross-referencing dates therefore remains a confusing and inaccurate task.

Cycle 2.22 UC — The newly christened Alliance Knight flagship *DOMINION* encounters a Child vessel off the downwind arm of Darkover Reach. Assuming it a vessel from the realms, they attempt to hail her. The calls are answered with cannon fire and the ship slips away into the Dark. This event forever stands as the “first shot” of the First Incursion.

Cycle 17.5 UC — Though apocryphal histories claim the Sovereign Sword was presented to Captain Egan with his appointment at the Convocation, the truth is the gift is not made until he is an old man on his deathbed. It is his last command that the sword be forever carried by his successors as a symbol of Knightly honor and steadfastness.

Cycle 54.8 UC — The flagship *DOMINION* — the fifth command vessel to bear that name — and her three frigate escorts are lost with all hands while on a mission into the lightless realms to make diplomatic contact with the Children of the Dark. The loss convinces even the most hopeful elements among the nations of the Convocation that diplomacy with this enigmatic foe is not a viable option.

Cycle 104.0 UC — Princess Alcee de Confortola becomes the first Loftian seneschal of the Alliance Knights. Her command lasts less than a single turn, however; she is killed leading her squadron into battle during Loft’s Succession Rebellion. Her death at the cannons of her mother nation while upholding the Convocation Treaty galvanize the country and help bring an end to the hostilities. Princess Alcee remains a singular example to all Knights of loyalty in service to the Guild.

Cycle 119.4 UC — The Second Incursion burns its way upwind, crushing an ill-prepared defense, killing thousands and destroying most everything in its path. Then, less than a quarter cycle after it started, the Incursion ends and the invading fleet vanishes back into the Dark.

Cycle 120.1 UC — In a largely unacknowledged transition, the Alliance Knights and the Explorers’ Guild formally become a single entity under the Convocation of Kingdoms. Now known as the Explorer Knights’ Guild, the Order experiences unprecedented recruitment and support in the aftermath of the Second Incursion.



Cycle 126.2 UC — The Explorers' Academy is founded in Highstone with the construction of the Great Hall. Though not the first training facility for the newly formed Guild, The Academy eventually becomes the greatest seat of learning and the most comprehensive archive of knowledge in the kingdoms.

Cycle 131.1 UC — The inscription commonly known as *THE PROPHECY OF THE GRAND AMPLIFIER* is discovered in an otherwise unremarkable Masters' ruin on the upwind border of the Dark. Its translation proves problematic and remains an active and contentious topic of Guild research to the current clock.

Cycle 184.9 UC — Gray, the capital skyland of Dimm, a small but proud downwind nation, experiences a catastrophic groundswell and vanishes into the Twilight Frontier below. After many turns of frantic search and rescue missions, the Guild is forced to concede the loss of the island with 80% of the nation's population. It is the greatest natural disaster since the DownFall and the greatest loss of Kin lives since the Second Incursion.

Cycle 196.11 UC — Brother Eldan Fey is promoted to high captain during the somber ceremony aboard the Guild flagship — as tradition dictates. The ceremony is attended by the Captain's Council and representatives from across the realms. Fey shocks many of those in attendance by foregoing the customary receiving line, instead immediately retreating below decks with the Council for a closed meeting.

Cycle 200.3 UC — At the death of his ineffectual uncle, His Royal Grace Anders ver Lode ascends to the throne of The Sky King of Loft. Widely believed to be a rakish ne'er-do-well, Anders is determined to prove his detractors wrong.

Cycle 201.1 UC — The Holy Elevant, Ewa Way, is raised to her post by a divided Sisterhood, placing her — however ill-suited and unprepared — at the center of a politically charged theocracy. Desperate for political allies, she relies on the genuine love and good will of the Brightlander people and an improved relationship with the Guild.

Cycle 201.3 UC — The present clock. A time of prosperity and rapid scientific and technological advancement for the Kingdoms in the Light. It is also a time of growing concern as the frequency of encounters with Children of the Dark is again on the rise. The Guild grows concerned and the superstitious across the realms retell old tales of the Grand Amplifier and its promise of salvation.



**THE FORTRESS
DOMINION**



HORIZON



LEEWARD



THE GUILD

AS THE EMISSARIES OF THE GREAT KINGDOMS
GATHERED TOGETHER IN CONVOCATION
WE FIND THAT THE GIFTS OF THE MASTERS OF THE
WIND ARE MOST POTENT WHEN SHARED BY ALL, AND
WE FIND THAT AS ENEMIES OF EACH OTHER, WE ARE MORE
DANGEROUS THAN THE CREATURES OF THE DARK, AND
WE FIND THAT THE OPEN SKY PROVIDES FOR US, AS IT ALSO
SEPARATES AND DIVIDES US, AND
WE FIND THAT THE CONTINUED SURVIVAL OF THE
KINSHIP IS IN DOUBT
THEREFORE LET IT BE KNOWN THAT WE DECLARE
AN ALLIANCE AMONGST OURSELVES; THAT WE SHALL INCEPT
A LEARNED CORPS TO MEDIATE DIFFERENCES WITH UNERR-
ING WISDOM, TO DISCOVER LOST KNOWLEDGE WITH UNTIRING
DILIGENCE, AND TO DEFEND THE ALLIANCE WITH UNCEASING
VIGILANCE AND UNWAVERING HONOR.

— INTRODUCTORY TEXT OF THE FOUNDING CHARTER
OF THE ALLIANCE KNIGHTS

The Explorer Knights' Guild, the order to which all Knights belong, is an old, secretive, wealthy and singularly powerful organization. The circumstances of its inception are legend, as its original charter was drafted at the Convocation of Kingdoms, the great conclave at which the foundations for the alliance of the Kingdoms in the Light were laid.

For over 200 cycles, the Guild has counted among its ranks the most able explorers, technicians, military commanders and elementalists from across the kingdoms. The organization's elite governors, known as

the *Sky Captains*, answer to no single nation, yet they are sworn servants and protectors of all the Kingdoms in the Light; bound by pact, long tradition, and ironbound honor, they serve the greater good in their quest for knowledge and in defense against the Children of the Dark. In all other matters — political, social and military — the Guild is sworn to neutrality and may act only to uphold the Convocation Treaty and its own sovereign rights and territories.

The precepts of the Explorers' Guild's original charter are exemplified by the Explorer Knights' Vow. The Guild is a deeply honorable order that maintains a strict objectivity, intervening



BLAZES OF RANK

Despite its naval rank structure: sky captains, first mates, able-bodied skymen, etc., the Guild itself is a meritocracy, where one's authority is only ever earned by exceptional ability, character and service. The Guild was founded on the precepts of merit, where each contributed to his fullest capacity and authority lay with the one most qualified to take charge in a given circumstance. There are times however — delegation, emergencies and battle to mark a few — when there is value in a clear chain of command.

Position in the Explorer Knights' Guild is denoted with Blazes of Rank, and each Blaze is earned by meeting specific goals, completing demanding missions, fighting successful actions, and other conduct that upholds the Knights' Pledge. Blazes can only be bestowed by sky captains and, on rare occasions, the high captain himself.

An actual Blaze of Rank is a small, stylized version of the Guild's traditional coat of arms and is emblazoned — tattooed — on the honoree's body using Potential-imbued ink that glows dully with arc-colored light. The process is a well-guarded secret and only certain healers stationed at the larger Guild bases know how it's done.

Every new Knight, after completing his graduation cruise, receives his first Blaze in a much anticipated ceremony. Traditionally, Blazes are applied in a line along a Knight's inner forearm, starting at the wrist, though there have always been exceptions. Some Knights have them placed on their biceps, chests, necks or even faces; and a well-known little poem about Andrew Enis, the eccentric 13th high captain, suggests that some Knights choose even more... personal locations.

The tradition is simple but clear: If a Knight has fewer Blazes than those around him, he follows orders. If he has the same number, deference is made to expertise and experience; and if he has more, he is in command. In practice, the number of Knights on a particular crew or mission is usually small enough that everyone knows their relative ranks without actually counting. This simple structure and the Order's rigorous training result in a cooperative form of leadership that helps make the Explorers' Guild the tight-knit and uniquely effective organization it is.

The newest Knights have a single Blaze and, though there is no fixed limit, most Knights end their careers — one way or another — with fewer than ten. The current high captain, Eldon Fey, has 14 Blazes, and Orin Beck, the most decorated Knight in Guild history, officially had 21, though the final three were earned during the Second Incursion on a deep mission from which he did not return, so the Blazes were never officially applied.

Though awarding new Blazes is ultimately left up to moderators, they should consider granting characters new marks when they accomplish particularly notable missions or provide exceptional service in the name of the Guild. Otherwise, barring exceptional achievement, a reasonable rate is to award a new Blaze for every 3 attribute increases a character earns.

Whenever a character earns a Blaze of Rank the player should mark it on his character sheet and record the reason the Blaze was awarded with an evocative title that describes the event. The first of these is always for graduation from the Academy, but those that follow should evoke the challenges and glory of a Knight's career. The resulting record will ultimately stand as a log of the character's achievements as an Explorer Knight.

Example:

Wreck of the Heartbreaker

The Great Ale Conspiracy

Battle of the Narrows

The Dross Disaster

The Queen's Log Book

The Amber Tower Affair

The Defense of Rubble Field #88

The Hull Incident



An Explorer Knight, a dark-skinned elf with yellow eyes, is shown in a dynamic pose, leaping forward. He wears an orange trench coat over a white shirt, red pants, and brown boots. He holds a large sword aloft in his right hand and a mechanical gauntlet in his left. A red cape flows behind him. Below him, a Novice, a light-skinned elf with blonde hair, is shown in a crouching, ready stance. He wears a blue tunic, brown pants, and blue armor on his forearms. He has a sword at his waist and is surrounded by blue energy. The background is a light blue gradient with stylized white clouds.

only when the tenets of the Convocation are violated. It is dedicated to the acquisition of knowledge and the expansion of science, both by exploring Masters' ruins and through fundamental research. The Knights' fleet is the primary military arbiter against aggressive kingdoms, and they are the ultimate defense against the Children of the Dark.

Failure to serve the Guild's charge, or violation of its neutrality, not only means disgrace to the Order, but dishonor and execution for the errant Knight. In the Guild's long history of service, only 17 Knights have ever earned punishment for such crimes, and novices learn every story as an object lesson against similar fates.

It is rare for an Explorer Knight to retire and leave the Guild. Many die in service to the Order while away on expeditions. Those who do not — those who age out, become infirm or disabled — normally serve as recruiters, base commanders, or instructors and scholars at the Academy.

EXPLORERS' GUILD RANKS

Though the Guild eschews the structure of a strict military hierarchy, there are levels of traditional standing and authority within the Guild, and a simple chain of command based on these relationships.

NOVICE

Novice is the traditional title for those selected to begin training to become a Knight. It is not an official rank and novices have no standing in the Guild beyond their roles as students. They are subject to the orders of journeymen and Knights, and most liegemen as well.

APPRENTICE

Apprentice is the name given to students who have passed their Trials. Apprentices are not part of the chain of command, despite how some of them may act regarding novices. In truth, all they receive for their new title are more difficult classes and a redoubling of their physical training.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

In general speech, and regardless of rank, Knights refer to each other as “Brother” or “Sister,” and liegemen and civilians refer to them as “Brother John” or “Sister Jane.” The deference with which the terms are generally used have turned them into *de facto* titles of respect.

Many novices — especially the young women — rightly wonder why the Guild is often called the Brotherhood of Explorer Knights. They ask: why not Sisterhood, or some other more gender-neutral name? Female Knights have been vital in the Guild since its inception, when High Captain Egan’s own daughter, the famous Sister Gena, took her vows. The truth is, there is no good reason; the traditional name is mostly an artifact of history and chauvinism. There is a growing movement among female Knights and liegemen to refer to the Guild as the Sisterhood and the habit has become surprisingly widespread.

Approximately a third of all Knights are female and a quarter of liegemen are actually liegewomen. Their presence within the Guild has always been honored, and women used to struggling in patriarchal cultures are profoundly surprised when they experience the equality that characterizes the relationships between male and female Guild members — Knights and liegemen alike.

JOURNEYMAN

This rank is the first Guild position in which students hold official authority. Journeymen are put in charge of the novices, providing much of their physical and leadership training. They have rank over Apprentices and even liegemen — though it is a wise journeyman who does not

take advantage of that latter authority. They are subject to the same orders, obligations and discipline as Knights, and can be called into active duty in times of crisis.

RANKING JOURNEYMAN

Ranking journeymen are highly trained cadets in their last cycle at the Academy. They spend much of their time on active shipboard assignments and conducting individual projects, research and specialized training in their growing areas of expertise. They have active rank over liegemen and conduct themselves accordingly within the Guild’s chain of command.

EXPLORER KNIGHT

Though the title is used colloquially to include all Knights, it traditionally refers to those who have up to four Blazes of Rank. The majority of active Knights serve at this rank.

RANKING KNIGHT

These Knights have between five and eight Blazes. If the Guild followed military practice instead of its own traditional ways, these would be the senior officers within the Guild. Many end their service with the Guild without having risen higher, and many vessels, forts and outposts are commanded by Knights of this rank.

SKY CAPTAIN

Sky Captains, called more commonly just *Captains*, are those Knights who have earned more than eight Blazes of Rank. They are the high command of the Explorers’ Guild and the decentralized, peer leadership that determines the Order’s goals and guides its actions. They command the storied warships, the primary bases and the major fortifications that make up the core of the Guild’s naval resources. They serve as the chief administrators, diplomats and master scientists who are the backbone of the Guild.

The *Captain’s Council* is a circle of 10 to 12 peers who advise the high captain. They are selected by the sky captains from among their own number once every cycle. Campaigning for the position is not only discouraged, it is considered dishonorable, and most captains dread being selected anyway, as service on the Council takes them away from their beloved ships.

HIGH CAPTAIN

The high captain is the ranking member of the Guild and the ultimate voice of command. Selected from among all the sky captains at the death or retirement of the previous high captain, it is a position of great power, authority and honor. High captains can literally change the world with their actions, so it is a boon to the realms that this power resides solely in the hands of the best of the Explorer Knights.

GUILD LIEGEMEN

If the Knights are the bones of the Guild, the liegemen are its flesh. The official muster records state that there are currently 946 Explorer Knights actively serving in the Explorers' Guild. Those same records state there are over 100,000 liegemen in Guild service. As legendary as the prowess of the Knights may be, it would be impossible for the Guild to carry out its charter if not for the loyal service of the liegemen.

The liegemen are the sailors, soldiers, specialists and support staff who comprise the Guild's ship crews and base personnel. They also include the technicians, clerks, agents, craftsmen and laborers who keep the Guild functioning from clock to clock. They crew the ships, build the weapons, organize the supply lines, cook the food and manage the countless logistical details that allow the Knights to focus on their essential tasks.

Liegemen are recruited as volunteers from every polity — soldiers from the Dominion, engineers from Bright, sailors from Verdant — and trained at a number of bases around the realms. Many who fail to qualify at Novice Festivals, and even some who are otherwise drummed out of the Academy, choose to serve the Guild as liegemen. Though not the exacting qualifications required of novices, recruitment standards are high and training is long and challenging. Every liegeman recruit learns their letters, basic Guild history and Order protocol. They are trained to crew ships and how to fight with fist, sword and powder gun. Each liegeman then takes advanced training, specializing in a role suited to his demonstrated talents — ship's crew, soldier, technician, or support staff. Depending upon the nature of their advanced instruction, recruits can spend as much as a cycle in their initial training.

Liegemen are vital to the successes of the Explorers' Guild, and it is a foolish Knight who does not treat them with the respect and loyalty their contributions merit.

Service as a liegeman is a coveted and well-respected occupation. They are educated and well-trained, equipped, housed, fed and paid. Being a liegeman comes with such benefits that most — those who survive, anyway — serve their “full mark” or seven cycles, retiring with honor and a small pension. Though many liegemen choose to sail the realms and serve in a number of widespread posts, many end up taking assignments in their home countries or settling down and raising families while still in the service.

LIEGEMAN RANKS

Rank among liegemen is more of an organizational necessity than it is among the peer leadership of the Knights.

Recruit

From the time they first enlist until they complete their training, liegemen are called recruits. They are subject to the strict regulations and discipline of the Guild and are at the very bottom of the chain of command.

Page

Pages are liegemen in the middle of their first or second assignments and although they have completed their training, most are still improving their skills and refining their specialties.

Yeoman

Yeoman are skilled liegemen who are at least two cycles into their service; they have refined their skills and proven their competence. Most liegemen hold this rank throughout their careers.

Sergeant

Sergeants are the sturdy foundation of the liegemen. They have the experience and leadership to keep the massive machine that is the Guild functioning from clock to clock, and they do it with practiced organization and uncanny resourcefulness. Most sergeants have specific supervisory responsibilities over 50 to 100 lower-ranking personnel and report directly to a steward.



Steward

Stewards serve as mates aboard ship and as staff officers under base commanders, so they speak with particular authority. They know all their subordinates well and are always aware of the unique needs of their specific area of responsibility. It is an uncommon but vital rank that is typically filled by uniquely competent liegemen in the last cycles of their careers.

Master and Seneschal

There are many smaller vessels and holdings that are commanded by exceptionally experienced liegemen who have proven themselves able leaders. Aboard ship these officers are called *Masters*, while in forts or other Guild houses they are titled *Seneschals*. Usually in their fifth or sixth cycle of service, masters and seneschals are highly respected by those who serve under them and well-trusted by the Knights who command them.

Liege Commander

Explorer Knights have fluid roles within the Guild, and, given their relatively small numbers, they are frequently called away from standing duties to serve some greater need. When a Knight is forced to leave her post as a base commander or ship's captain and is unable to pass command to another Knight, she appoints a commander from among her subordinate stewards, masters, or seneschals. A commander holds the same effective rank, authority and responsibility as the Knight who appointed her, until that Knight returns or another relieves her of the charge.

GUILD HOLDINGS

The Guild of Explorer Knights is a sovereign order, chartered by the treaties of the Convocation of Kingdoms to serve the Kin of all the realms, and is therefore subordinate to none. Accordingly, the Guild has widespread holdings across the realms that are independent and traditionally immune from the laws of the polities in which they are located. Collectively called *Guild Houses*, these holdings include missions, forts, port houses and outposts. Though varying in purpose, size and layout, all Guild holdings have their own docks or port facilities, or are associated with large municipal harbors.

MISSION HOUSES

Missions are established in the largest settlements and are typically the hubs for administrative, diplomatic, trade and training activity. Missions are staffed by politically experienced Knights and armies of liegeman clerks, support staff and guards. They are the most physically diverse compounds, campuses and structures, including everything from fortifications to farmland.

Red House

Located in the Loftian estate-city of Kingsland, Red House is a regional hub for Guild logistics and communication. Occupying a once-stately but overly baroque mansion and grounds, the facility stands in sharp contrast to more typical Knights' holdings. Two Knights, a half-dozen liegeman officers, 100 clerks and technicians and a small garrison of 20 soldiers live and work on the grounds. Red House also serves as an office for a variable number of Patrol Service constables.

PORT HOUSES

Port houses are small Guild holdings usually located in minor settlements or other out-of-the-way locations, where the threat of attack is low but Guild ships and crews frequently require resources and support. Usually just small dockside offices and storage depots, most port houses are staffed by a liegeman steward, a few clerks and a squad of soldiers.

Bright-Ore House

This small outpost is really just a transfer and resupply station for Guild freighters loading at the mine and smelting facilities of *Brightlander Arm* in the Sovereign Domain. Staffed by only a dozen liegemen, the house is a hot one given its location in the Arids, but is otherwise considered an easy posting.

FORTS

Guild forts include a wide variety of fortified locations garrisoned by Knights and liegemen. Large and small, sprawling complexes to single watchtowers, new bastions to ancient underground bunkers, these sites all have one thing in common: they are engaged in war.

Whether they stand against the

Dark or stand between rival polities, fortress garrisons are well-manned and well-armed and focused on their missions. Most are found along the border of the Twilight Frontier, serving as bulwarks against invasion from the Down Below. Some are training grounds and others support scouts, long-distance patrols and expeditionary forces. Some larger forts among the kingdoms include mission houses as a practical use of resources, and as a not so subtle reminder of the naval might that stands behind the Guild politicians and ambassadors.

There are two dozen major fortifications — garrisoned with over 1,000 liegemen each — and over 50 smaller forts, blockhouses and strongholds scattered across the realms and the Frontier. Most Guild forts are commanded by a cadre of Knights, but some smaller blockhouses are commanded by ranking seneschals. Both are supported by variable numbers of staff and soldiers, and most have skyships permanently assigned to post squadrons — small fleets for the larger strongholds, and a single cutter or pair of gunboats for the smallest. The presence of fortifications — even those on the Frontier — often encourages the growth of small, symbiotic communities in the shadows of their walls.

Fort Alabaster

Fort Alabaster is famous for being the downwind-most point of Kin civilization. A small but well-garrisoned stronghold, the namesake stone of the blocky white structure seems to glow in the remnant Light of the Frontier. Constructed of the locally abundant limestone despite the soft rock's unsuitability for architecture, Ore adepts must frequently attend to the weathering bulwarks.

The shanty village of *Shadow* surrounds the fort, living like a parasite off the blood and protection of the hosting garrison. The small but experienced fleet stationed at Fort Alabaster has two primary missions: the first is to patrol the Frontier, gathering intelligence on the Children of the Dark. The second is as an early warning system should a third Incursion manifest. The fort's trio of fast couriers is manned around the clock and ready to race off to defensive positions in the realms carrying advance warnings.

OUTPOSTS

Outposts are small holdings in the remoter parts of the realms or the Frontier that serve multiple purposes. Part fort, part mission, part port house, these tiny stations are lonely and boring, but sometimes very dangerous — places that often feel forgotten on the dim edge of the Dark or the empty Sky Beyond.

Black Reach

This remote outpost is a tiny fortification closer to the Sky Beyond than civilization. Though it might appear otherwise, assignment here is not a backhanded punishment. The outpost serves as an essential resupply depot for deep salvage missions and an early warning station at the far end of the Bastion. Life here is one of tension-filled tedium, but the garrison consists of experienced and dutiful liegemen willing to stand on the edge.

EXPLORER KNIGHTS' HEADQUARTERS

The Explorers' Guild Headquarters is perhaps Highstone's greatest institution, and it is certainly its most famous. Though the Explorer Knights' Guild has bases, offices and outposts throughout the kingdoms, the headquarters in Highstone is its primary holding. Home to the command council, the headquarters is a sprawling complex of imposing stone and iron buildings as old as any in the city. The compound has its own docks and shipyard, and, like all Guild facilities, it is a sovereign territory politically independent from Verdant and its queen.

The Redoubt

The Redoubt is the oldest building on the Headquarters' grounds, and Guild legend claims it was the first building to fall under the auspices of the Alliance Knights with their original charter. In truth, but for the banners, flags and immaculate landscaping, the old fort would be just an ugly pile of gray stone blocks squatting on a shoreline bluff.

The Redoubt is no longer a viable fortress considering modern weapons and tactics, and the six shiny brass cannon on its parapets are more symbolic than defensive. Instead, the Redoubt now houses the offices of Fleet Command, Guild Intelligence and the high captain and his staff.



The Explorers' Guild Naval Yard

The Cave, as most Guild members call it, is one of the busiest naval ports in the realms, and it was the first built entirely underground. The Cave is an extraordinarily wide cylindrical shaft excavated from the underside of the skyland to within a few hundred feet of the upper surface. Docks line the interior walls, arranged like the spokes of stacked wheels, and gantries, warehouses and workshops fill spaces carved into the stone like the cells of a beehive. Cut from the living rock beneath Guild Headquarters, the Cave provides formidable defenses while allowing crews ready access to the network of passages and chambers that surround the shaft.

Given its form, the Cave is exceptionally easy to defend. Any attackers must expose themselves to the tactical disadvantage of fire from above while sacrificing their own maneuverability and firing options, since they can only attack from below. Large, gleaming cannon batteries cover all approaches to the naval yard and believable rumors claim there are hidden Masters' weapons that can incinerate anything that gets past the main guns.

Conclave Hall

Purportedly built over the original foundations of the building where the Conclave of Kingdoms was ratified, Conclave Hall is a vast structure that serves as the formal administrative offices and chief embassy for the Guild. Over a thousand people work within the sprawling edifice, and there are viable claims that it is the largest single building in the kingdoms.

THE EXPLORER FLEET

More important than its land-based holdings is the Guild's vast navy. There is an old saying, "one Knight in the air is worth a hundred on the ground," and it is as true now as it has ever been. Both the symbolic and actual manifestation of the Order's authority, the Guild fleet is the dominant naval power in the realms.

The Guild navy is divided into six separate fleets, each tasked with particular responsibilities and each assigned its vessels, crews and resources accordingly.

The *1st Fleet* is traditionally assigned to Guild Headquarters and is ostensibly under the direct command of the high captain himself, though in practice this is seldom the case. The smallest in

size, it is used primarily to carry the political authority of the Guild wherever it must be present across the realms. It is also used to carry Captains' Council members and their administrative machine to the battlefield in times of war.

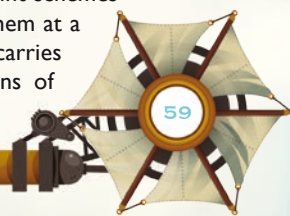
The *2nd and 4th Fleets* share joint responsibility for patrolling the borders of the Twilight Frontier and standing as the first line of defense against invaders from the Dark. Spiritual heirs of the *3rd Fleet*, which carried the victory at the Battle Upon the Deep but was lost almost to a Kin, the 2nd and 4th are each three times the size of any of the other Guild fleets. These combined fleets include the most powerful ships, the majority of the fighting liegemen, and the core of the Guild Intelligence services. The *3rd Fleet* designation remains "officially unassigned" in respect to the fallen.

The *5th Fleet* is tasked with patrolling the skies of the realms both as a policing body — hunting down pirates and smugglers, apprehending fugitives, search and rescue — and as a peacekeeping force serving the Guild's diplomatic charge. Many of the Knights who prove able negotiators and statesmen are assigned to the *5th Fleet*, which works in tandem with the various major Guild missions across the realms.

The *6th Fleet* — the storied "Seekers" — make up the heart of the Guild's exploration and scientific corps. These expeditioners include the most able navigators, historians, archaeologists and arcanotechnicians, and are charged with exploring the Twilight Frontier, learning the secrets of the Masters of the Wind and bringing them back to the realms.

The *7th Fleet* is the second smallest and is tasked as a reserve and training fleet; it is made up in part of the famous "blue ships" of the Academy.

Each fleet has its own cadre of Knights, liegeman officers, soldiers and sailors, as well as hordes of support staff. Each has unique organizational structures born of the differing demands of their missions, but there are shared traditions of service, history and pride. Each fleet's ships fly ensigns and pennants identifying themselves and their current roles, and share distinctive hull paint schemes and colors that mark them at a glance. Each proudly carries on the unique traditions of



their individual fleet and passes on the lauded histories of their accomplishments, distinctions and heroes.

GUILD RESOURCES

Beyond the Knights, liegemen, fortresses and fleets, the Explorers' Guild has deep and unique resources.

MONEY

Most Kin do not realize that in many ways the Guild operates like the biggest trading companies, and that most of its wealth comes from the thoughtful management of the technological salvage it recovers from lost Masters' sites. The Guild sells much of what its crews find and uses the rest to either stock its own needs or to generate new, and often lucrative, technologies. The Guild also benefits from the tithes each nation grudgingly contributes to its coffers, per the requirements of the Convocation charter. Most of the Guild's wealth is measured in ships and land, as the majority of liquid resources are used to pay operational expenses such as wages, equipment, maintenance, training and research.

EXPERTISE

The smartest and best-trained scholars, engineers, scientists, navigators and technicians in the realms are members of the Guild. Their individual and combined expertise is a priceless and well-utilized resource. The information, data, maps and schematics they have found, compiled and created represent the single greatest body of knowledge in the realms.

TREATIES AND ALLIANCES

The original Guild charter details the charge of the Order and provides for its authority, organization and fiscal support. In addition to this charter, the Explorers' Guild leadership has negotiated a wide variety of additional treaties, covenants and contracts with various nations, private institutions and even individuals over the cycles. These accords represent extremely valuable assets, leverage and resources.

EQUIPMENT

The Explorer Knights and their liegemen are generally well-armed and provided with the equipment

and stores they need to complete their missions. Their equipment is serviceable and well-maintained by diligent armorers and technicians.

MASTERS' SECRETS

The Guild has an additional resource that is all but unavailable to other polities and organizations: the Guild has first choice from all the salvage they collect on their delving missions. These unique Masters' devices and powerful weapons often give the Knights secret advantages and uncanny abilities.

THE EXPLORERS' GUILD AMONG THE KINGDOMS

The Guild of Explorer Knights may be wealthy, highly trained and politically powerful, but it sails alone in a dangerous sky full of national conflict, greed, piracy and war. Its long history means it has had time to make many enemies, and for every steadfast ally, there is opposition bristling at the financial burden and political authority of the Guild. Though the average citizen of the realms generally respects the Order, the average citizen rarely sets the policies or makes the diplomatic decisions that determine his nation's relationship with the Guild. Such is the purview of parliaments and kings, and they are forever vulnerable to the influences of self-interest, ambition and power.

BRIGHT

The Supreme Sisterhood of Bright pays their Guild tithes but is otherwise content to remain apart from the political travails of the rest of the realms. Their mineral resources mean that Bright's advantage in trade is assured, and given their distance from the Frontier, there is a general sense of natural security. Therefore the Sisterhood, at least publicly, eschews political rivalries.

VERDANT

The Kingdom of Verdant has had a long and mutually beneficial relationship with the Explorer Knights' Guild. The presence of both the Guild Headquarters and the Academy in its capital city of Highstone have given the nation a sort of influence-by-proximity that has served its interests well. Though the kings of Verdant have not always seen eye to eye with



ECONOMIES AND CURRENCIES

The economies of the Kingdoms in the Light are based on the elaborate, volatile and complicated production and flow of goods and Masters' technology between governments, large trade houses and the warehouseers of the Explorer Knights' Guild. This trade establishes the value of commodities and backs the value of the currencies issued by the various governments, trade alliances and guilds. Such currencies consist primarily of bonds, checks and other documents with no more inherent value than the word of their backers. These monies are spent, traded, banked and hoarded with various levels of value across the kingdoms, and the value of any one currency is rarely consistent from realm to realm or even clock to clock.

Parallel to, and often intertwined with, the ebb and flow of these economies, is the considerably more stable, convenient and coveted currency known as ingots. Ingots are made of Masters' alloy, the rare, versatile and useful metal scavenged from Masters' ruins throughout the highlands. Ingots are cut, cast, pounded, smelted, ground, or otherwise forged from the salvaged metal into various forms depending on the agency minting them: coins, bars, tubes, rounds, blocks, rings — just about any convenient shape, size and design.

Most ingot currencies come in several basic values, differentiated by weight. Verdant, and many of the realms with which it trades, use three sizes of variously shaped ingots known as falcons, hawks and eagles. *Falcons* are short, thin cylinders, five of which are worth a single hawk. *Hawks* are thick rings, ten of which are worth one bar-shaped *eagle*.

Most vendors and traders will accept any form of Masters' alloy as payment, with only a slight discount in per ounce value if it is in some unwieldy form. Smaller quantities — pieces of ingots, screws, nuts, wire bits and even shavings — are commonly exchanged in quantities roughly equivalent to falcons, often referred to in the local Verdant slang as *doves* or *chicks*.

A chick can buy a weak beer, and three will coax information from a hungry urchin. A full falcon can buy a modest meal, post a letter or buy a ticket on the upcountry tram. A single hawk can purchase a new shirt, a night at a shabby inn or a pair of used mechanic's pliers. Three of them can buy some fair quality boots, and five can purchase an old, but serviceable sword. A full eagle can buy a good sword, and a trio will pay for a worn, but sound, firearm.

Masters' alloy is inherently valuable for its qualities as a raw material for metal work. Simple tools and weapons made of Masters' alloy typically cost about three times the value of the alloy's weight. The value of more complex or intricate devices is not as predictable but is always much higher than for those made of iron or steel.

the Guild's high captains, they have always remained staunch allies.

FORTRESS DOMINION

The Dominion, especially under the guidance of the current grand marshal, is as vocally opposed to the authority and taxes granted the Guild as any nation of the Convocation. Their calls to limit the size and power of the Guild are loud and frequent but have so far garnered only moderate support from other polities.

THE KINGDOM OF LOFT

The factionalized Trade Houses of Loft are so focused on their own internal rivalries that its Council of Traders has rarely challenged the authority of the Guild in recent history. As the troublesome new King Anders continues to solidify his relationship with the Guild, however, the Council may feel compelled to reassess their alliances as well.



GUILD FACTIONS

Despite its fabled tradition as a devoted order, as in any large organization, there are factions within the Guild that do not always agree. These different groups form along ideological and political lines, and, though not always divisive, they do create internal conflicts that influence command decisions and impact overall effectiveness.

Some factions are as divided and touchy as the realms themselves, but these tend to be short-lived. There are, however, a few enduring camps, and though not always formally named or even organized, they nonetheless have identifiable ideologies.

The Old Guard — The old guard claims to be the Guild's champion of tradition, values and security, but as much as it tries to keep the Guild strong, it often limits its adaptability and therefore its effectiveness. It is also one of the most aggressive factions, advocating for a more offensive response to the incursions of the Children of the Dark.

The Centrists — The centrists are conservative in honoring the Guild's original charter but are willing to adopt new practices and missions when they prove viable. This is both the largest and the most subdivided of the factions but collectively holds the most influence.

The New Guard — The new guard believes it honors the past while promoting new structures, procedures and political positions designed around flexibility and adaptiveness. Many of the younger Knights and liegemen are members of this camp.

The Radicals — The radicals advocate for rebuilding a leaner, less hidebound Guild with an even flatter hierarchy than it already has. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this group of freethinkers is almost as subdivided as the centrists, but its internal factions are even more divergent. One branch presses hard for decisive military action against the Children, while another calls loudly for diplomatic parley with the enemy.

THE REPUBLIC OF SOAR

Both its people and its governing senate are staunch supporters of the Guild. They are only too aware that without the tacit might of the Guild navy standing behind the Convocation of Kingdoms, Soar would quickly be swallowed back into the Kingdom of Loft.

THE CLOUD PRINCIPALITY

As a non-signatory of the Convocation Treaty, Cloud continues to maintain its distant and enigmatic relationship with the Guild. Allowing a single small Guild house within its borders and officially prohibiting its sons and daughters from becoming Knights, the Principality has been more successful than any other nation in keeping the Guild out of its business and borders.

HORIZON

If Verdant has the strongest political relationship with the Guild, then the people of Horizon certainly have the most enthusiastic. Horizians love the Explorer Knights with the same reckless vigor with which they live their lives. It is a rare citizen who did not compete in a Novice Festival as a child and has the scars to prove it. There is not a port in the country that does not welcome Guild vessels with a celebration, and not a tavern in those ports that doesn't give Knights all the free jot they care to drink.

SKYREACH

The oligarchy of Skyreach has a tempered relationship with the Guild—in part because of their long-standing national rivalry with the nation of



Verdant, and in part because the Guild is the only organization with greater technological know-how and resources. The wealth, sophistication and arrogance of the people of Skyreach, however, have left it few genuine friends among the Kingdoms in the Light, and the leadership reluctantly realizes the Guild is its best protection against the machinations of other nations.

THE KINGDOM OF VAULT

Vault is a weeping sore in the body politic of the Kingdoms in the Light and a painful drain on the resources of the Guild, which is bound by the Convocation to provide naval and law enforcement to any nation assailed by pirates. The parliament of Vault seems to have permanently invoked their right to that support. There is little to distinguish the rampant criminal gangs from the bloated government

bureaucracy, and the few honest citizens are desperate. The Guild has recently assigned two squadrons from the 5th Fleet to assist the ineffectual parliament in bringing the numerous pirate bands to ground but is finding government corruption a deadlier weapon than ship cannons.

REGENCY OF DIMM

Traditionally staunch supporters of the Convocation, it may be that the Guild is the only true ally the people of Dimm still possess. The tragedy of losing their capital and the diaspora that loss forced on the population has cost the Dimmish the goodwill of almost every other nation. As a respectable means of earning a living for their families, more Dimmish citizens join the liegemen per capita than those of any other nation.



LOFT



THE ROYAL TRADING
COMPANY



THE EXPLORER KNIGHTS

The Explorer Knights' Guild is an ancient and storied order of innately talented and highly trained expeditioners — sailors, scholars, arcanotechnicians, archaeologists, soldiers and elementalists. They are carefully selected as children and train for many cycles before joining Guild crews and journeying deep into the Twilight Frontier in search of lost Masters' artifacts.

The Knights have a grand reputation. Every child wants to be one, every story of derring-do features them, and hardly a monarch, senate or parliament in the kingdoms does not consult them in its councils. Wherever they travel, the people of the realms respect them, honor them and, sometimes rightly, fear them.

BECOMING A NOVICE

Every child dreams of being an Explorer Knight. Captivated by the tales of adventure and glory that pervade every culture, the allure is irresistible. In the innocence of childhood, most earnestly believe they want to be heroes of the Kin just like in the stories, fighting to protect the realms. Others seek glory, authority or power. Some seek treasure, and some even seek knowledge and the exceptional education that is part of Knight training. Regardless of their reasons, those who prove worthy eventually learn that service in the Explorers' Guild is nothing like they dreamed. It proves equal parts challenging and rewarding, wondrous and terrifying, painful and noble. It is both

the highest service and the greatest sacrifice they will ever make.

A small army of recruiters, mostly elderly or disabled Knights, continually scour the Kingdoms in the Light, searching for children with the unique, arcane promise to become Explorer Knights. Most youngsters cannot wait until they are old enough to compete in a Novice Festival, where they are given the chance to win an appointment to the Academy. Less than one in a thousand earns a berth at the school, and even many of these will not meet the exacting standards of the Guild.

To become novices, hopefuls must demonstrate unique levels of physical prowess and mental fortitude. More importantly, they must demonstrate an exceptional ability to use Potential. Preternatural abilities reside in all Kin, but the magnitude and mastery separates Explorer Knights from common folk; they must show the telltale signs that Guild training will unleash this Potential.

At the Academy, novices learn much more than command of their Potential. They learn skymanship, tactics, martial and survival skills; they also learn science, medicine, history and engineering, becoming warrior scholars. Novice training is rigorous, demanding, harsh and unrelenting. Many wash out; some are physically disabled or mentally broken, and some are even killed. Those who survive the ordeal, however, become something more than Kin, something almost supernatural — they become Explorer Knights.



QUALIFICATIONS AND RECRUITMENT

There are four primary attributes that qualify Guild recruits. First, they must be physically fit, with athletic coordination and deep reserves of stamina. Second, they must be clever, with an exceptional combination of careful logic and decisive wits. Third, they must be able to pass muster as honorable Kin — their personal conduct must speak to their suitability to serve as Knights. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they must possess uniquely powerful natural Potential — uncommon command over one of the primary elements. Demonstrating such power, even in a raw or uncontrolled form, is the primary consideration in becoming a novice.

The most common way Knights are recruited is by qualifying at Novice Festivals, which are best described as elaborate traveling carnivals. Most move from skyland to skyland following long circuits that bring them around about once every half cycle or so. Cadres of envoys,

recruiters, healers, technicians, teachers, performers and support staff land their small flotillas and establish a colorful fairground made up of a tantalizing array of tents, stages, arenas, challenge courses and testing equipment. Envoys meet with the local authorities to discuss the festival and other Guild business, and performers disperse into the cities and across the countryside to draw in the crowds.

A recruit may be Vouchsafed — vouched for by a serving Knight who chooses to sponsor the youngster. This form of enlistment is rare, but when it happens, the graduation rate is higher than for other sources due to the strong mentoring bond that usually forms between the sponsoring Knights and their protégés.

A recruit may be offered as part of the King's Quota allotted to each member nation of the Convocation of Kingdoms. This dispensation is part of the original Guild charter, but is now more a symbolic way of making sure that every member nation is represented in the Guild. Each nation is allowed a traditional number of





recruits in each cohort and, out of earnest national interests, the novices offered through King's Quotas are usually exceptional.

The least common means of recruitment is by Special Selection — a vague designation that covers odd backgrounds, strange exceptions, unorthodox qualifications and other unlikely candidates. Currently, there is a trio of journeymen training under this designation. One is a feral Kin with such exceptional Wind Potential that he was found flying out of sight of any skylands, and two are a pair of emotionally troubled twins who can speak in each other's minds over any distance.

NOVICE FESTIVALS

Novice Festivals have a twofold aim. First, they are a vital and very effective means for the Explorer Knights' Guild to seed goodwill among the people of the realms. The arrival of a Festival is always a highly anticipated event in the lives of the Kin and provides the Guild with its only chance to directly promote its tenets and agenda — especially within nations with which it otherwise has touchy relationships.

This positive propaganda is not subtle and takes the form of a turn-long celebration—a frenetic combination of party, circus and sporting events. There are plays and musical performances, and demonstrations of athletic and martial prowess and Potential. There are feasts and free beer, and dances and parties for the young and old alike. The Festivals also bring staffs of specialists who provide much needed community service in parallel with the entertainment. Potential healers attend the sick and wounded, Ore users replace and repair structures, Rain-bringers fill cisterns and irrigate crops, and teachers offer lectures on history, science and the Guild. In combination, these diverse entertainments and services leave each skyland excited, rejuvenated and grateful to the Guild in a way no other political actions could.

The second, and most vital, purpose of Novice Festivals is to recruit new students into the Explorers' Guild, and is in truth why most youngsters are so excited when a Festival comes to town. Most Festival

VOUCHSAFED

Master Imran would never let her go to the fair, though she wanted it more than anything. It could just as easily have been that wizened stranger staring at the ironmonger's stall that nicked the teapot, or any of the crowd going to and from the fair, but Master Imran blamed her. People that looked so strange and spoke words she'd never heard! What fun! Three-Husbands Nura said some were even Explorer Knights! But Imran blamed her. If she could find it, maybe Master Imran would let her go to the fair. But not now. Never was there an ungrateful taskmaster like Imran, and he was yelling again.

Maybe, though...eyes closed, she could see the pot in her mind, its handle and the gooseneck spout reaching out. She could almost feel her hands running along its metal surface, touching it, shaping it. Her breath came short, her jaw clenched, and she stood frozen — oblivious to the jangling, clanging cacophony that suddenly erupted around her.

Hinges, nails, platters, bars, bolts, pans, forks, hooks and kettles — all the tinker's wares — were suddenly gone. In their places were clicking-hot piles of teapots, some minuscule and some enormous but all exactly, precisely the same.

The old stranger guffawed with an uncouth hoot. "She put the wind up your arse, squire! Haw, haw... one like that don't belong with you." Beckoning the girl to his side, he reached into his purse, and as he did so his cloak swung back revealing the worn hilt of a Knights' blade. As he pulled out a handful of coins he asked wryly, "How much for a teapot?"

staff includes one or two older Knights, traditionally referred to as Guides, who may have been invalided out of shipboard duty or who have a particular talent for picking strong recruits. They are in charge of administering the tests and running the challenge courses that are used to weed out prospects, and they are ultimately responsible for choosing new novices. The recruitment portion of a typical Festival lasts six clocks and closes the fair. It is open to all comers over the age of three cycles and consists of a series of mental and physical tests as well as individual and teamwork challenges.

It is a rare Kin who did not compete in at least one Novice Festival when he was younger, and many have competed multiple times. There is no limit on attempts, and since Potential develops at different rates in different people, trying more than once is even encouraged.

Since the defining qualification of a novice is his mastery over Potential, and since basic ability is so easily demonstrated, assessing Potential is always the focus of the first clock of the trials. This series of simple challenges is called "the Wind" and winnows the prospective field so aggressively that, by the end of the clock, there may be only a handful of candidates remaining.

The Potential tests assess the type and magnitude of the power a candidate possesses, as well as his ability to control, modulate and focus its use. There are also challenges that gauge the range of effects a prospect can manifest, as well as the facility with which he can apply those effects. There is no single set of criteria a candidate must meet to pass the Potential phase of the trials, as there are always specific strengths, desirable abilities and unique effects that can signal promise in a given prospect and catch the interest of the Guides.

The second clock is referred to as "the Rain" and consists of a battery of cognitive tests, puzzles, mechanical challenges and interviews that allow the Guides to assess the capacity for learning and training of individual prospects. Academic knowledge or even literacy are not mandatory for recruitment — the Academy more than fills in those gaps — but there must be raw talent for comprehension, analysis and logic. It is surprising how many hopefuls are turned away for neglecting their preparation in these areas.

The third clock does not actually involve the prospects themselves but focuses instead on assessing their characters during a

series of interviews called “the Ore.” While the candidates prepare for the final round of the trials, the Festival staff invites any members of the local community with vested interests — families and friends, as well as rivals and enemies — to speak in an open forum, sharing whatever good things — or bad — they think the Guild should know about any aspirant. Usually, at least half of the remaining prospects are eliminated during the Ore.

Over the last three clocks of the Festival, the candidates face their most demanding physical tests, a culminating challenge called “the Arc.” The Arc consists of a grueling series of rapid-fire trials that include dangerous speed and coordination evaluations, brutal endurance assessments, obstacle courses that can only be negotiated with Potential and teamwork, marksmanship, swordsmanship and even hand-to-hand fighting. More than ability in individual skills, the Arc is intended to test fortitude, decisiveness, leadership and spirit. Less than one in ten who make it to the Arc pass, and a handful are always eliminated by injury — and occasionally even death — during the event.

Fewer than one in a thousand prospects are accepted as novices by the Guild, and it is not uncommon for a given Festival to reveal no suitable candidates. If a novice is selected, he is given a small Masters’ alloy medallion during a simple ceremony closing the Festival and instructed to report to the Explorer Knights’ Academy to join the next cohort. By long tradition, the medallion grants both his passage on any kingdom ship headed to Highstone and his admittance through the Academy gates.

The largest and best attended Novice Festival in the realms is the Academy Fair. A more elaborate production than any regional Festivals, the Fair is held once per cycle at the Explorers’ Academy’s Potential Grounds and lasts for three turns. It has become much more than just a recruiting Festival, and it draws participants, performers, musicians and vendors from across Verdant and beyond. Thousands of prospects travel to Vale to compete at the Fair, and though the percentage accepted is actually lower than at the regional events, there is the perception that one’s chances are better if one competes at the Academy Fair.

As much as the essential intentions of the Novice Festivals can accommodate, the Explorers’ Guild attempts to respect local customs as they move from one nation to another. In places with strongly held traditions, the Guides won’t let prospects of one gender or the other compete, or allow candidates to participate until they reach a certain age or have fulfilled cultural obligations. They will not host Festivals during holy celebrations, and in most countries, they will not take recruits who do not have the blessing of their parents.

The Guild believes the sooner they can begin training new recruits, the more potent and skilled Knights they will become. Accordingly, most prospects are young — between three and four cycles — when they participate in their first Festival. Sometimes older candidates compete. Maybe it is their second or third attempt. Maybe some injury, family obligation, or other circumstance precluded them from competing when they were younger, or perhaps they have only recently begun to manifest stronger Potential. Whatever the reason, there are occasionally older, more mature candidates who are chosen at Novice Festivals.

THE EXPLORERS’ ACADEMY

The Explorers’ Academy is a legendary place, with a mythology all its own. The school once occupied a lonely shoreline cliff well outside of Highstone, but in the cycles since the Academy was founded, the city has expanded so that it now surrounds the walled compound with a busy port sprawl. There is a high wall surrounding the campus—not so much to keep the unauthorized out, as to keep spirited youngsters in.

The Academy campus is a complex warren of old stone and dark wood, with lecture halls, dormitories, training grounds and laboratories forming a labyrinth in which the greatest minds of the kingdoms study and teach. Each building has its own rich history and many are associated with long-held traditions.

THE GREAT HALL

The Great Hall is reputed to be the oldest building at the Academy, and supposedly housed the entirety of the school when it was first founded — classrooms, labs, dining hall, barracks



— everything. It now houses the administrative offices and the headmaster's quarters, and contains the *Guild Chamber* — the large lecture hall where school-wide presentations, assemblies and ceremonies are held.

SCHOLARS' LIBRARY

The Scholars' Library is a sprawling building at the heart of the campus and the single greatest repository of books, documents and sphere records in the kingdoms. It is the primary archive for everything the Kin know about the Masters of the Wind and the primary focus of the greatest minds in the realms. Each floor and wing is dedicated to a specific area of knowledge, and the hall housing the collection on the Children of the Dark, small as it is, is always locked and diligently guarded.

BARRACKS

There are several different barracks named after famous Knights, and cohorts are typically assigned all to the same one for the duration of their training. Each has a different layout and

character, but they all feature bays of bunks for each boat crew, privies and washrooms, and small auxiliary library study spaces. The individual barracks are the centers of student life, and between studying and sleeping, they spend much of their time in them. Social gatherings, competitions, pranks and rivalries are common within and between the different barracks.

THE YARDS

Collectively called *the Yards* and specifically identified by their particular purposes, there are more than a dozen training and practice fields scattered around the campus. *Sword Yard* is where blade training takes place, *the Pit* is where hand-to-hand combat is practiced, and the walled *Powder Yard* is where students practice their marksmanship. One of the largest, known as *the Green*, is where wargames, parades and other major outdoor events are held. The Green is also where the semiofficial Keg league, to which the students are devoted, plays most of its matches.



KEG

Keg is a rough-and-tumble game unique to the Academy, and though technically against school regulations, it nonetheless remains very popular with the students — and most of the faculty. The game has few rules, and even these are flexible and must be sorted out by the participants prior to a given match. Keg is played by two or more teams with variable, but equal, numbers of players. It is played within a agreed-upon space called the *Barrel*. The Barrel may be an empty field or it may include natural terrain or Kin-made structures like walls and even buildings. Each team places prizes — usually special treats, vouchers for chores, bottles of beer, or sometimes even money — inside a small wooden keg, which it then places or hides — depending upon the rules — somewhere in the Barrel. The object of the game is to capture as many of the other team's kegs as possible while simultaneously defending your own. The match ends when one team gains control of a majority of the kegs, and the booty contained within each keg goes to the team that controls it when the game is called.

Keg is always a rough game and injuries are common. Anything goes — including all-out use of Potential — as long as the players stop short of permanent incapacitation or irreparable damage to Academy facilities. Though technically against school regulations, the Academy cadre looks the other way as Keg has always been very effective in exercising teamwork and the control of Potential.

THE BLUE DOCKS

The Academy has its own fleet of skyships for training purposes — launches, cutters, frigates and its massive flagship, *EGS FORTITUDE*. Accordingly, it has its own bustling skyfront with docks, a chandlery, a sail loft, a large workshop and a full staff of liegeman sailors, shipwrights and sail makers. Given the tradition of painting training ship hulls sky blue, the name of the docks was probably inevitable.

THE TUNNELS

The Tunnels that crisscross under the Academy are part of the same ancient underground network that residents of Highstone know as the *Warrens*. This region of the Warrens has been well explored and, in as much as is possible, sealed off from the rest of the passages. What remains is a self-contained maze of chambers, corridors and halls that the Academy puts to all kinds of uses: storage, classrooms, laboratories—even training grounds and living quarters.

It is inevitable, almost a tradition, that the Tunnels spark the curiosity of the novices, and it is a rare student who does not break curfew to go exploring with his boat crew.

Though mostly safe, it is not unheard of for students to stumble upon some secret passage and what is hidden beyond it. There are many stories — a few are even true — about students being lost or killed exploring these unknown places.

THE KNIGHTS' BLADE TAVERN

The Knights' Blade is the name of the large inn that sits just outside the Academy's upcountry gate. Though not officially part of the school, most Knights would argue that tradition says otherwise. The Blade is a welcoming watering hole popular with both students and staff who want something to drink, a meal that was not cooked in the dining hall or simply need to get off campus for a change of scenery and perspective. Owned and operated by a long series of retired liegemen, the Blade is an innocuous place for trainees to get away and blow off some steam.

THE POTENTIAL GROUNDS

Technically another training yard, the Potential Grounds are where Academy personnel and students experiment with and perfect their elemental powers. Located several miles from the Academy and well outside the limits of the



city in an old stone quarry, the grounds are surrounded by thick berms and dotted with reinforced blast walls intended to isolate accidents from other trainees and the surrounding landscape. Though separate from the campus, the grounds are an iconic feature of the Academy and every Knight remembers when he first stepped foot into the quarry. The Grounds also host the famous Academy Fair every cycle, the largest Novice Festival in the kingdoms.

THE UPCOUNTRY COMPOUND

Known simply as the Upcountry Compound, this isolated facility is one of the newest additions to the Academy and was built deep within the Wind shadow of Vale's uplands. As vital as Potential is to the Guild, there are circumstances when researchers, scientists and sometimes even arcanotechnicians occasionally need to isolate experiments and delicate equipment from the effects of Potential. The Compound is where school staff and students conduct work that, for a wide variety of reasons, must be absolutely mundane.

The Compound is also where the Guild stores strange Masters' artifacts and Potential-powered devices that are deemed too dangerous to use but too valuable to destroy. This unique stockpile is kept in a reinforced vault under the main building and is guarded around the clock by a unit of proven liegemen.

THE WELL OF HEROES

The Well of Heroes is a sacred place, deep under the Great Hall. The Well is a tall, cylindrical, dome-ceilinged chamber carved from the underside of the skyland itself and exposed to the infinite depths of the sky below. It is descended by a wide, rail-less ramp cut into the wall that spirals from the Great Hall above to the Well's floor below. The floor is a baroque, open lattice of ancient Masters' alloy that allows the Wind to fill the chamber with both fresh air and Potential, and many suffer from marked vertigo when they first walk across it.



There are tiers cut into the base of the wall making the floor of the Well a circular amphitheater. Above the top tiers, carved into the bedrock walls by Ore users, are the names of every Knight who has died in service to the Explorers' Guild. As part of this record, there are dates and simple epitaphs that laud the service or characters of the honored dead. Some are easy to understand and some are famously enigmatic. The well-known heroes are obvious, as their names are darkened by the touch of generations of students who have come since and paid their respects. It is a rare Knight who did not sneak down to the Well during his Academy clocks to read the names, wonder at the circumstances of each death and contemplate the meanings of the epitaphs.

EXPLORER KNIGHT TRAINING

However a student is recruited into the Academy — festival, sponsorship, quota or Special Selection — he is assigned to a cohort and given a reporting date. There are stories told about novices who were late and thereby failed out even before they had begun their training.

Life at the Explorer Knights' Academy is challenging, difficult and often very dangerous. The coursework is intense, the training grueling and the expectations of conduct and performance of the highest order. Life in the Academy is formative, as the greatest minds and talents in the realms share their knowledge and skills with the next generation of Knights. Many of the instructors are Knights themselves, while others are unrivaled experts in their particular fields — history, science, technology, the martial arts, even philosophy.

From the moment a student first steps on campus, the Academy fosters a culture that instills independence, self-reliance and personal responsibility. This ethos permeates the youngsters' entire experience as they are given knowledge, skills and expectations most would consider too much for the most capable adults. Supervision is intentionally minimal to encourage students to be responsible for themselves and each other. Those who cannot meet expectations are quickly revealed and ultimately drummed out of the school.

HONORABLE EPITAPHS

Erdmus Gale — "He gave his life so that others might keep theirs."

Tollier Tayl — "Swordsman, scholar, soothsayer."

Nina Summs — "She went to the edge."

Hideo Hill — "He illuminated the Dark."

Saya Prinn — "Call me Brother one more time — I dare you."

Holand Rays — "Don't worry — she'll hold."

COHORTS AND CREWS

Cohorts serve as formal organizational structures, academic classes and military units. There are usually two cohorts initiated per cycle, depending on the productivity of the Novice Festivals. Between 80 and 100 students typically enter the Academy with a single cohort, though less than half of those will ultimately graduate.

Cohorts are further divided into smaller groups of 10 to 12 novices called *Boat Crews*, or simply *Crews*. Crews are carefully assembled by Academy instructors based on various metrics of compatibility and effectiveness, as well as careful observation of teamwork. Attention is also paid to inherent bonds of friendship, nationality and shared experience. For their first half cycle, it is not uncommon for novices to be shifted many times from one crew to another attempting to create the most effective and compatible teams.

Crews serve as essential study and training groups, as well as teams for Academy challenges and games. As the members of a given crew inevitably grow closer than siblings, they become devoted to each other. By the time a crew makes it to graduation, it will typically have only four to eight remaining members, and these individuals are as dedicated and loyal a band as it is possible for Kin to form. As a result, the members of given crews are usually assigned together to the same ships or other post-graduation duties so the Guild may take advantage of their exceptional teamwork and loyalty.



BOAT CREWS

Though not a hard rule, the default suggestion is that a given group of player characters consist of the members of an Academy boat crew. This gives the players a ready background to explain why they are together, why their teamwork is so good and why they start the campaign as loyal and abiding comrades.

Each boat crew is given a numerical designation, such as BC 318, that is used administratively, in orders, dispatches and other official communications. These numbers are sequential and denote the historical order and potential legacy of every boat crew. The sequence is currently in the first half of the 300s.

Most boat crews eventually earn names for themselves as well, usually based on singular events — famous or infamous — from their time at the Academy. These nicknames are commonly used by the other members of their cohorts and, depending upon their reputations and achievements, sometimes throughout the Explorers' Guild at large. Better-known examples include Rowlands Raiders, The Cricket Killers, Egan's Blades, The Nevers, Hull Girls, and The Remorseless.

Each boat crew is also expected to design its own pennant around the base ensign of its cohort. These flags evolve as boat crews earn honors, achievements and Blazes of Rank. They hold places of honor within the Guild, and in addition to being flown over the station or on the ship to which a crew has been assigned, they are featured in ceremonies, celebrations, funerals and memorials.

In the first session or two of a campaign, players should come up with their own boat crew nickname — ideally in association with an Academy Flashback — and design their crew's pennant. Players can use the online template from the Upwind website (www.biohazardgames.us) to draw representations of their crew's ensigns.

Most who fail — those drummed out of the Academy — do so for some unredeemable deficiency. It is rare that the inadequacy is academic, or even a matter of physical performance, as remedial training and diligent focus can usually fill such gaps. Most commonly, students wash out of the Academy for deficits of character or failure to master Potential. Those unable to live honorably — cheats, liars, bullies, the lazy and the selfish — have no place in the Guild, and if they cannot quickly mend their ways they are expelled. Those who do not live up to their original promise in controlling Potential are also drummed out. Those with issues of character are sent away. Those with unrealized Potential are often recruited into the ranks of the liegemen.

A significant number are mustered out due to injuries incurred in Potential training, combat exercises, or other misadventure. Though most can be healed by the skilled Rain users among the Academy staff, those who are too grievously hurt are pensioned out. There are a few

in each cohort who are actually killed outright during training and are lost. These young men and women are posthumously awarded rank as Knights and returned to their homelands and families by an honor guard of journeymen.

Academy training is divided into four sequential tiers — novice, apprentice, journeyman and ranking journeyman.

NOVICES

Novices are the raw recruits, fresh from the cities and hinterlands of the realms; full of equal parts pride, uncertainty, apprehension and excitement; and each convinced that his future holds nothing but glory and adventure. It is a goal of the novice tier to teach the recruits the reality of service in the Guild and reframe their expectations.

The first cycle of a novice's training focuses on the basic expectations of conduct and

SYLLABUS OF COURSES — NOVICE CYCLE

- Guild History
- Philosophy of Service
- Skymanship — Theory and Advanced Practicum
- Compulsory and Advanced Navigation
- Compulsory and Advanced Mechanics
- Ancient and Modern Arcanoelectrical Arts
- Introduction to Zoology of the Dark
- Advanced Coldway Survival
- Potential Practicums — First, Second, Third and Trials
- Sword Arts — Compulsory, Advanced and Elite Option
- Marksmanship — Compulsory, Advanced and Elite Option
- Gunnery — Compulsory and Gun Captaincy

essential elements of Guild culture and procedures. Academic classes address foundational knowledge with remedial work in reading and arithmetic if required. Physical training emphasizes conditioning and coordination, and the new recruits drill on the essentials of close combat.

Novice training also focuses intensely on Potential control, expanding awareness and conductivity as well as raw power and modulation. Exercises that open the mind, establish subtle control and reinforce willpower dominate the training regimen. Potential training is where most of the novices who wash out ultimately fail, as the manifestation and control of elemental forces is as much a matter of diligent effort as natural ability. Potential training is also how the majority of novices who are hurt or killed receive their injuries.

When his teachers believe a novice is ready, he is pulled from his routine training without warning and given a three-clock battery of academic and physical tests, called the *Trial*. Typically 5 to 10 novices participate in a given Trial, and the test culminates in a dangerous challenge that requires potent and effective application of the novices' Potential abilities. Since each recruit's powers are different, the Potential phase of the Trial is always specific to the individuals involved.

Though the exact timing of one's Trial is a surprise, novices know that when they have been training for most of a cycle, it will likely come soon. In anticipation, as this time approaches most members of the cohort begin studying and training ever more aggressively. This frenzied time of nonstop preparation is unofficially called the *Hone* — as in sharpening a blade. Novices who fail are drummed out, and every cohort loses a significant number to the Trial.

APPRENTICES

After passing their Trials, recruits are promoted to the status of apprentice and spend another cycle in a grueling series of advanced academic courses including navigational theory, arcanocircuitry, geopolitics, tactics and leadership. Apprentices also begin specializing in areas for which they show particular promise such as technology, medicine, logistics, academic research or diplomacy. This is also a time of

DRUM BEATS

Students may be drummed out of the Academy for a number of reasons — inability to meet the exceptional standards, failing the Trial, dishonorable conduct or severe injury. When the decision to expel a student is made, ranking journeymen quietly rouse him while the rest of his cohort sleeps. They gather his things, escort him off campus and put him on a ship bound for his home skies. As the cohort musters for class, a ranking journeyman plays a drum in the central training yard to signal the loss of the student.





RANKING REGATTA

As a much-anticipated part of the Ranking, apprentices compete in a five-clock-long series of games and competitions, less as a means of testing them and more as a celebration of their achievements and a chance to show off their growing skills. The culminating event of these games is a long-standing tradition known as the *Ranking Regatta*. The Regatta is a launch race between boat crews around a complicated, turbulent course known for its unpredictable conditions and several low-Potential, overland legs.

Six clocks before the starting gun, crews are given decrepit boat hulls and broken, damaged or semifunctional components with which to build functional, race-ready sky vessels. What makes the race a uniquely fun challenge is that there is the expectation of no-holds-barred trickery, duplicity and underhandedness from the moment the parts are distributed until the last boat crosses the finish line. Theft, espionage, sabotage, misdirection and outright racecourse assault are not only allowed, but encouraged.

There are only three rules: no bystanders may be injured, no apprentices may be killed, and no circuit boxes may be damaged. As a result, the clocks leading up to the Regatta are a nonstop free-for-all of creative problem solving, clever deception and dirty trickery. The apprentices get no sleep as they simultaneously guard their boats and work feverishly to make them skyworthy.

The clock of the Regatta is always highly anticipated, with most of Highstone turning out to watch the antics. It is not uncommon for one or two boats to not make the starting line, and for another couple to fail before the race even starts. Then, once underway, it is almost a tradition for sabotage, overt attacks and blatant uses of Potential to take out at least half of the field before the race is over. Stories are still told of the Regatta of Cycle 154 UC, when not a single boat crossed the finish line.

The winners earn nothing but lifetime bragging rights and the grudging respect of the rest of the Academy. Though Explorer Knight training is usually a deadly serious pursuit, this silly race is one of the most anticipated and memorable events at the school.

intense physical effort, focusing on combat and weapons training as well as advanced skyman-ship. Much of this training consists of workshops and practicums where they must apply what they have been taught in real-world drills and exercises. Mastery of Potential remains a central focus during the apprentice tier, and recruits are drilled continually and expected to make significant increases in power and control. Random explosions, sudden floods, destructive quakes and errant cyclones are frequent occurrences on the Potential training yards.

It is during this tier of training that the majority of those who are ultimately drummed out of the Guild fail. This is when the unforgiving pace and high expectations take their toll, and those unable to sustain the focus or who lack the necessary depth of character begin to crack.

Fundamental flaws are exposed and tested, and those unable to tap hidden reserves ultimately wash out.

When the cycle is up and the cohort has completed its requisite studies, those who pass are finally initiated into the Guild. In a simple but solemn ceremony called the *Ranking*, apprentices are given their first official position, that of journeyman. To mark the significance of the transition, the new journeymen are scribed with the outline for their first Blaze of Rank, both as an official symbol of induction as well as a sign of the faith, trust and honor being offered to them as new members of the Explorers' Guild.

JOURNEYMEN

At the Ranking ceremony, apprentices are given the position of journeyman, traditionally becoming members of the Explorers' Guild.



Though not Knights, journeymen are officially in the chain of command and part of the Guild cadre. They are subject to the same regulations and discipline, they can be called to active duty in times of crisis, and they hold rank over liegemen. They are also given responsibility for the clock-to-clock wellbeing, tutelage and mentoring of the novices. This serious duty is the first independent leadership role for most journeymen and they learn as much about command caring for the novices as they do in all their endless classes on theory.

The journeyman tier lasts the third cycle and focuses on specialist studies in areas such as navigational engineering, advanced skymanship, fleet tactics, arcanoengineering and command leadership. These studies consist of projects, workshops and shipboard assignments where journeymen work alongside active Knights and experienced liegemen. Such projects and fieldwork are not only the best form of training, but the contributions made by working journeymen are essential to the effectiveness of the Guild.

During the second half of this final cycle in the Academy, students are known as *Ranking journeymen*. By this time, they have effectively transitioned into active service and are only awaiting formal graduation. They are crewing ships, conducting research, training younger students and even manning Guild bases across the realms. Their Potential training focuses on individual suites of essential abilities — specific powers, effects and manifestations — over which they will eventually become masters. They train almost exclusively in this range of powers and drive themselves to maximize their potency and perfect their control.

GRADUATION

At the end of their training, the members of each cohort are recalled to Highstone to take their formal vows. The Knights' graduation ceremony is the most solemn of Academy traditions and holds a unique place in the memory of every Knight. The graduation ceremony takes place in the Well of Heroes, deep under the Academy, where school staff and apprentices gather to bear witness. The ranking journeymen form a large circle facing an inner ring of older Knights. These individuals were asked, each by a specific journeyman, to present her with her new Knight's blade. The ring of Knights recites

DISCIPLINE

"In summary, the three of you stand accused of stealing a longboat and barge, 'misappropriating' several tons of provisions, assaulting a very senior liegeman by the expedient of getting him drunk while on duty, bringing unauthorized civilians — 'Bert Bandle and the Bandaloons,' was it? — aboard a Guild vessel, inducing several dozen of your fellow journeymen to violate a similarly long list of regulations, all in order to throw a graduation party?

"Well...despite Sky Captain Telly's recommendation that you be 'hung by your thumbs until your arms pull off,' this court finds you guilty, publicly reprimands you, and confines you to quarters until further notice.

"For discovering — in the process of committing said infractions — an active espionage ring and preventing what likely would have been a profoundly catastrophic act of sabotage, you are each given the gratitude of the Guild and instructed to carry out your punishment in your new command quarters aboard the *EGS VALIANT*.

"Dismissed."

the first line of the Explorer Knights' Pledge and the journeymen offer the response "I so vow," as they take a step forward, repeating the exchange for each line of the oath. At the end of the vow, each journeyman is standing before the Knight holding his new blade and as the echo of the last response fades, the students kneel and are handed their swords. The high captain then commands them to: "Rise as Knights of the Guild and stand against the Dark." Most Knights, even in old age, claim this phrase marked the proudest moment of their lives.

Following graduation — and the inevitable celebrations — each boat crew is assigned what is traditionally called its graduation cruise. These missions are almost

THE EXPLORER KNIGHTS' PLEDGE

To honor the Guild

I so vow

To seek the Knowledge

I so vow

To defend the Kingdoms

I so vow

To defy the Dark

I so vow

Regardless of their native dialect, every subject of the realms knows the words to the Knights' Pledge by heart. They are as familiar and deeply rooted as the oldest nursery rhymes and children's songs. Novices, apprentices and journeymen recite them countless times, and there are bronze plaques featuring the words in every classroom and barracks at the Academy and in every hall in every Guild port, fort and outpost. The Pledge is easily the most well-known verse in the realms.

It is not until their graduation, however, that the weight of history and obligation borne in these lines truly settles on the shoulders of the journeymen. It is not until they recite them in that sacred moment that these words finally come to life and every Knight swears that it is only in the solemnity of that ceremony that they finally understood the meaning of the Pledge.

always shipboard assignments that take the crews deep into the Twilight Frontier. For many young Knights, this is one of the first times they have ever travelled into the region, so the trip is equal parts excitement and apprehension.

Upon returning from their cruise, the new Knight's first Blaze of Rank, with the outline they received during their Ranking ceremony a cycle before, is completed. Some older and wiser Knights point to this moment — the unceremonious completion of their first Blaze — as the moment they realized they were truly part of the Guild.

Long before a cohort is Knighted, the Academy cadre has usually made a decision about a Knight's first posting. No one has a better idea of his strengths, talents and interests than his recent teachers, so this important task usually falls to them. Though journeymen can submit formal requests for particular postings prior to

graduation, the Knight's preferences are just one of many things the Guild must consider as it makes the best use of its personnel.

Though it is impractical for the members of a boat crew to always be posted to the same assignment, the Guild recognizes the benefits of keeping such a tight knit-group working as a team. Accordingly, though their specialties and assignments may occasionally force them apart, every effort is made to post crews to the same ship or base whenever possible.

The postings within the Guild are as varied as the responsibilities of the Guild itself. Knights are most commonly assigned to shipboard duty, serving as command crew for every kind of naval mission. Guild vessels sail the realms, supporting trade and diplomacy, keeping the political peace and patrolling the skies for bandits and pirates. They guard the realms against invasion from the Dark and battle the Children when it happens. They explore the Twilight



THE KNIGHTS' BLADE

Guild historians say the tradition of the Explorer Knights' blade (or, more commonly, simply "Knights' blade") can be traced back to the very founding of the Alliance Knights. During the Convocation of Kingdoms, at the signing of the original charter establishing the Order, Captain Egan was gifted with a sword of Masters' alloy from the personal armory of Sovereign Warrior Cale IV, of the Fortress Confederacy. This weapon is the pinnacle of the swordmaker's art, and is still carried, almost 200 cycles later, by the ranking high captain of the Guild.

Guild smiths began copying its characteristic style and formidable functionality, and soon most Knights were carrying blades inspired by that original weapon. It eventually became tradition to bestow such blades on Knights upon their graduation from the Academy. Now the tradition of the Knights' blade is long-standing, and the weapons are typically the only identifying badges of authority carried by members of the Guild. In fact, showing such a blade is all a Knight needs to do to convince most people of the veracity of his rank. Accordingly, the Guild has authority to imprison any who counterfeit Knights' blades or obtain them through nefarious means.

Traditionally, the Knights' blade is a wide, tapered broadsword with a deep fuller. The blade is etched with a circuit-like tracery, reminiscent of the Explorer Knights' heraldry, overlaying the burnished, flowing, iridescent hues of the Masters' alloy underneath. The hilt, grip and pommel are seamless with the blade, forged of the same piece of alloy, with the Guild's crest engraved one side of the hilt and Knight's name on the other.

Though of similar design, each blade is custom forged to the measurements, idiosyncrasies and fighting style of each Knight, so that every weapon is as unique as the Knight who wields it. These swords are made in a single foundry at Guild headquarters, by only a handful of master smiths, and they all share the unmistakable style, design features and lethality of the original weapon. Knights' blades are well-known and easily recognized as such across the Kingdoms in the Light.



Frontier, delving into Masters' ruins and hunting the dangerous denizens that live there. Knights are assigned to Guild bases, forts and outposts across the realms and the Frontier. They serve as military commanders, base cadre, engineers, doctors and, in certain polities, even as diplomats and political advisors.

After a cycle or two of postings elsewhere, those Knights with particular expertise may be

reassigned to the Academy to serve as teachers, training staff, scientists, engineers or archivists. Knights can expect to serve in a variety of posts throughout their careers and often request specific assignments as their skills, experience and interests grow. Regardless of where they are assigned, Knights can expect their unique talents to be put to good use and their best to be tested.



KNIGHTS' TALES

Stories and legends about individual Knights are legion. The actual truth of such tales, however, is not always the point.

Tonio the Loftian — One of the best swordsmen ever to train at the Academy, Tonio was also a potent Arc user with the ability to vanish into thin air and appear again instantly somewhere else entirely. It is said that by relying on these skills, he could simultaneously fight — and beat — a dozen swordsmen.

Madrix the Mad — Madrix was not really mad. She was just a powerful Arc adept obsessed with — and perhaps overly imaginative about — arcanoelectrical devices and their practical application to routine tasks. Her dynamo-driven hull-scrubber and autonomous helmsman's assistant are still used across the fleet to this clock. Her self-actuating head plunger and dentist-free tooth extractor are — luckily — safely locked in display cases at the Academy Museum of Arcanoelectrical Arts.

Lilo the Duelist — There are only 17 historical cases of Explorer Knights receiving capital punishment for “criminal violation of the Knights' Pledge.” Lilo the Duelist became the 15th when, while serving on a diplomatic mission to the Fortress Dominion, he killed a ranking member of the Cadre. Some witnesses claimed it was a formal duel and therefore legal. Others claimed it was a crime of passion and therefore murder. Lilo refused to ever say anything at all, even when standing on the gallows.

Captain Sligh — One of the greatest naval tacticians the Guild has ever known, Sligh's methods were so unorthodox that Academy instructors are proscribed from teaching them out of concern that impressionable novices may take inspiration from them. Nevertheless, stories get out — like the one about the battle of Middle Horn Skyland, when the captain's flagship passed unseen through the enemy line, hidden among a large herd of migrating hemoths.

Bella the Unbeautiful — It is uncertain how Bella got her inaccurate honorific, as she was quite a handsome woman. Regardless, she is considered the most successful political negotiator in Guild history, brokering the *Treaty of Upchance Estate*, the *Sealed Accords*, and the *Annexation of White Cloud Skyland*. Her memoir, *ALWAYS LOOK THEM IN THE EYE*, is still required reading as part of the Academy's political science curriculum.

Gilbert Gauge the Unfortunate Explorer — Gauge was a historian and navigator with a combination of skill and Potential powers that made him an unparalleled expert at finding Masters' caches. Personally responsible for locating three Prime class, six Archive class and over a dozen Standard class caches, his work led to more actual salvage-tons than any explorer before or since. Unfortunately, he would have been even more successful — made many more expeditions — had he not been desperately skysick from the moment he stepped aboard ship to the moment he stepped off.



THE EXPLORER
KNIGHTS' GUILD



MASTERS' CACHES

Most of what is known about the Masters and their pre-DownFall culture, and all of what is known of their technology, comes from studying what has been salvaged from the various repositories, stashes, ruins and caches that escaped destruction. The enigmatic architecture, the unique materials, the strange arcanelectrical devices and the maddeningly scarce records have provided what little the Kin have learned about their past and the lost Masters. The great majority of these archeological and technological finds have been made in the Twilight Frontier, so it is here that the Guild now focuses most of its exploration, salvage and research.

Survey missions, consisting of fast ships with small crews of navigators and cartographers, hunt for new sites, charting skylands and plotting the locations of new finds. If a find has particularly valuable salvage, is difficult to chart or uniquely vulnerable because of its drift or location, survey crews will recover what they have manpower, time and cargo capacity to take. If the site is large, complex, or particularly productive, the Guild will send in one or more recovery missions.

Recovery missions, consisting of heavy freighters crewed with archeologists, technicians and liegemen work teams, follow the survey mission charts and return to prospected sites to scour them clean of whatever salvage they contain. These missions are usually long and arduous, and are escorted by one or more frigates to provide protection against marauding Children.

POWER

The rain had stopped while they were sleeping, the mist twining with campfire smoke to lie heavily in the little dell and drip steadily from the rock face, sucking the heat from her mug of tea. The liegemen tending the campfire were enveloped in haze as they watched her standing still, immobile except for the occasional sip. Vikka could feel their eyes on her as she pondered the ancient alloy doorway. In the still air, their nervous systems crackled and sparked through her mind. There was so much Potential pouring out from within the mountain that with the least effort she could have spoken their every thought. *"Today,"* she wondered. *"Today we turn on the machine..."*

Explorer Knights have an evolving classification system for the types of the Masters' caches — called reserves by the Guild — they have discovered to date, with each category sharing general characteristics and types of salvage.

City — Though scholars agree that the Masters' population must have been small and dispersed, there are some sites that





appear to have been significant population centers. With enigmatic architecture and infrastructure that may have supported several thousand individuals, cities are rare and highly valued for the insights they provide about the Masters.

Compound — Compounds are collections of structures that are too small to qualify as cities, and appear to have been built to serve specific functions. They frequently provide some of the strangest and most valuable salvage, and are as uncommon as they are mysterious.

Monument — Monuments are single, isolated, enigmatic structures that are relatively intact. Many provide valuable salvage, but many are also strangely devoid of any technology whatsoever. The Spire is perhaps the most well-known example of a monument.

Outpost — Outposts are essentially hybrids of small compounds and monuments. A single unique structure in proximity to a number of smaller support and possibly residential buildings. Outposts are a relatively common form of Masters' site.

Ruin — Ruins are the most abundant form of Masters' reserve and may have been any kind of site before being destroyed in the DownFall. They generally provide little in the way of functional technology, though sometimes they yield valuable treasures. Ruins are frequently sources of valuable raw materials like Masters' alloy and elemental glass.

Warren — Warrens are the uncommon underground complexes built by the Masters. They are often full of valuable machines and unique materials, but most of them collapsed and were destroyed in the DownFall.

Vacant — Vacants are any form of Masters' cache that has clearly been scoured of salvage before the Guild discovered it. Some of these have been exploited by rival organizations such as the Delvers' Society, but more often, there is a clear sign that the Children of the Dark were there first and made off with the bounty. Vacants are becoming increasingly common and are a growing concern for the Guild.

FAMOUS SITES

There are hundreds of notable Masters' reserves that have been discovered and dozens

of these are famous enough, even outside the Guild, to have their own growing legends.

Apex Outpost — This unique outpost is in the heart of the Twilight Frontier and is built on the very top of the single mountain that makes up the improbably tall and narrow skyland on which it perches. Though it was vacant when first encountered by the Guild, it remains a valuable site for staging other missions. The structure is particularly defensible and has been fortified with a battery of cannons and stockpiled with supplies. A lodestone was installed at the site cycles ago to serve as an exploration waypoint, and though not a permanent Guild outpost, it is frequently occupied by small crews of surveyors and scientists on various missions.

Black Reserve Ruins — The Black Reserve is a small compound downwind of Loft on the very edge of the Dark, constructed entirely of a unique, durable black substance the Guild has yet to find anywhere else. Impervious to all attempts to cut, melt, crack, smash or even scratch the material from which it is built, the reserve keeps a whole division of Guild researchers occupied.

The Engineering Chamber — The Chamber remains one of the most enigmatic Masters' devices yet found. It was famously not actually discovered by the Explorer Knights, but found instead by the Delvers' Society of Skyreach. The Chamber is a small monument of sorts and it floats in the air of its own accord, unsupported by a skyland, like the Spire.

The Chamber looks superficially like the armored enclosures that surround most skyship circuit boxes, but is much larger and houses a much more complicated — albeit seemingly inert — collection of machinery and control devices. The Delvers' Society claims it originally found only limited and common salvage but the Guild is unconvinced. Given the Chamber's autonomous buoyancy and concerns about the city of Sky's own legacy as a floating artifact, there are those who are convinced the Chamber provided secrets that may prove dangerous to the political stability of the realms.

First Treasury — This small city was the first major Masters' cache the Guild discovered when they began exploring the Twilight Frontier. It proved a trove of both information and technology and took two full cycles to completely exploit. Though it is now buried

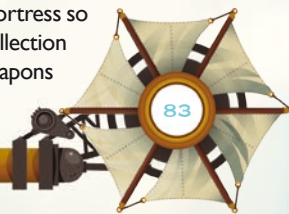
under dead rain and overgrown with Potential plants, a recent breakthrough in the study of Masters' iconography has renewed interest in the site because of the heretofore-indecipherable inscriptions on many of its structures.

Glass Falls Complex — Also discovered by the Delvers' Society, the Glass Falls Complex is a particularly enigmatic site on the border of the Sky Beyond and the Dark. At first thought to be a geological phenomenon, it took some exploration and excavation to realize that the formations that hang over the sides of this oddly uniform skyland were actually made of elemental glass rather than volcanic or mineral flows. It looks as if some large glass structure once occupied this location and was somehow superheated or otherwise melted, and it cooled and solidified as it flowed over the sides of the skyland — like a frozen edgefall. Though the finer fingers, spines and edges have long since broken or eroded away, the main structures still hang in the sky, beautiful crystal curtains that refract a ship's arc lamps in a million radiant colors.

The Falls Complex would be little more than a curiosity if not for the discovery of a series of circuit-laden pylons arranged around what was likely the original glass structure. Many scientists believe that these devices were responsible for the destruction of whatever once stood there, and Guild leadership was extremely interested — and concerned — when it was proven that these pylons were sensitive to Potential energy. The pylons are now being studied at one of the Guild's Potential shadow research facilities on an undisclosed skyland in the lowlands.

The Lost Fortress — The Lost Fortress is one of the most famous Masters' reserves yet discovered. Found by the well-known navigator Captain Truk, the fortress is a massive structure built into the bedrock of a large skyland on the downwind border of the Twilight Frontier. The structure is a warren of heavily fortified defense works, bunkers, underground chambers and interconnecting tunnels. It appears to have once been part of a larger complex, as there are passages and rooms that end in open sky, as if part of the skyland through which they led was sheared away in the DownFall.

What made the Lost Fortress so significant was the vast collection of exotic Masters' weapons





that were found stockpiled there — lightning cannons, buzz lances, arc swords and a diverse collection of stranger, Potential-powered devices. This one discovery revolutionized the Guild's armory and gave engineers countless new lines of technological development to pursue.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

A number of new discoveries have been charted by recent survey missions but have not yet been thoroughly explored by recovery crews. These remain high priority salvage targets and the Guild is hurrying to ready a series of expeditions to exploit them in hopes of beating the Children to any hidden treasures.

The Great Spiral — The Spiral is a monument located just upwind from the border of the Dark and directly below, though over a hundred leagues away from, the Spire. Like the Spire, the Great Spiral appears not to drift like the skylands around it. The structure is a huge flat disk floating perpendicular to the Wind. There appear to be several sealed entrances, but no Kin have yet explored the interior.

The Compound of Echoes — The Compound is a symmetrical array of structures that occupies an otherwise barren skyland just downwind of the Fortress Dominion. Reportedly, any noise made at the center of the array of structures echoes hundreds of times before fading away. No entrances to any of the supposed buildings have yet been found.

Rubble Field #88 — When first discovered, Field #88 appeared to be just another of the dozens of relatively low-value ruins common on the Frontier, so it was simply given a standard numerical designation on the navigational charts. A shore party quickly discovered, however, that the rubble field in fact appears to be a technological midden of sorts — a junkyard — for devices, equipment and machines cast off by the Masters. Though the survey is only preliminary, Guild technologists are already touting Field #88 as the greatest technological find since the induction hull, and the Guild has made exploiting it the focus of the 6th Fleet.

The Tunnels — The Tunnels appears to be the largest underground Masters' complex yet discovered. It is an interconnecting warren of horizontal passages and vertical shafts that appear more burrowed than excavated. Their past purpose is unknown and only the very outermost passages have been accessed.

RUMORED LOCATIONS

There are also many sites that are known only through rumor and legends — references on old charts, unverified tales from once-lost sailors and archeological evidence from rare Masters' texts. These references are often fragmentary and even contradictory, but they have led to new discoveries in the past.

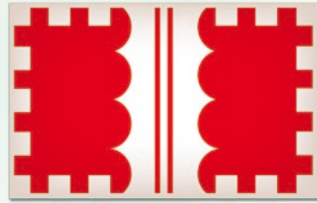
The Glass City is a common legend with many versions, and there are even several children's nursery rhymes that feature this site. They claim it is a wonderland made entirely of elemental glass inhabited by clockwork people and ruled over by a Child sorcerer. *The Lightning Cave* is another well-known story, describing a vast underground city where the Masters are believed to be sleeping, awaiting some lost signal

to restore the world. The *Black Castle* is probably the most commonly embellished tale and one most often used to frighten Kin children; versions of the story tell of a flying Children of the Dark fortress that rises out of the Frontier to capture unwary sailors and misbehaving youngsters alike. The *City of Gray* is real, but its legend is quickly growing. Gray was the Dimmish capital, lost over 15 cycles ago to a tragic groundswell that dropped it into the Dark. Despite the failure of every search, stories of what has become of it are common sailors' fare.

The story of the *Grand Amplifier* is likely the best-known legend in the realms, yet despite the many archeological references and sailors' tales, it remains undiscovered. The most common legends claim the Amplifier was the ultimate Masters' device — a tool that allowed them to not only control the four elements, but also intensify their effects. The stories say that the Amplifier offered the Masters complete command of elemental forces, and allowed them to leave their bodies and even travel to other worlds. Other, darker myths claim that the Amplifier was the Masters' greatest failure, and activating the machine shattered the world.



SKY REACH



THE SOAR
REPUBLIC



ARCANOTECHNOLOGY

Technology is ubiquitous in the world of *UPWIND*; it is a strange synthesis of lost science, baroque invention and raw elementalism. Engineers and technicians across the kingdoms are creative designers and skillful builders, but despite their abilities, there are finite limits to what they can construct with mundane materials. To go beyond these limits, to build the devices and machines most critical to the lives of the Kin, they must incorporate arcanotechnology in their constructions — components salvaged from the ruins left behind by the Masters of the Wind. The inherent rarity and value of these items, such as circuit boxes and spark bottles, makes the Guild's expeditions into the Dark vital to the technological foundations of the Kingdoms in the Light. These dangerous salvage missions have become essential to the economy and infrastructure of Kin society.

The technology of *UPWIND* has a genre-specific design, nature and appearance. It is intricate, baroque, seemingly fragile and strangely complex. It is, nonetheless, surprisingly durable and only as complex as is needed for its purpose and the enigmatic designs of its arcane components.

Most devices are oversized and bulky, with lots of levers, knobs, pulls and switches. Larger machines are constructed on intricate Masters' alloy frames. The cabinets enclosing many devices are made of dark, heavily polished wood or brass and decorated with rich filigree. Alloy fittings are engraved with ancient runes and intricate maker's marks. Liquids and gases are piped around in

ARTIFACT

"Decide what makes it go yet?"

"It's clockwork, I think. With some kind of arc motivator, instead of a winder."

"Where does the spark bottle go? I don't see a port."

"There isn't one."

"Where does the arc come from?"

"Nowhere, as far as I can tell."

"So you did fix it."

"Nope. I didn't."

"But...it's moving."

"Yep."

"So you fixed it."

"Nope. Didn't. The evidence would indicate that it fixed itself."

"It's bigger than it was. And it has more...things hanging off."

"Yes it does."

"How could that be?"

"I've no idea."

burnished tubing and stored in hammered alloy reservoirs. Countless, heavy, cloth-insulated wires carry arc into dense banks of capacitors,



ELECTRICAL ARC

Electrical arc is a form of Potential, but it is also the electrical energy by which arcanotechnology is powered. Arc is the lifeblood of the kingdoms and is most commonly generated by large windmills built out over the edges of the highlands, where the mundane updrafts of the Wind continually turn their vanes. The mills generate power that is fed directly to the grids of local settlements, where it is used to light and heat buildings, drive trolleys, run factories, charge spark bottles and power all manner of other smaller machines, devices and appliances.

Arc is also generated by the interaction between certain kinds of arcane devices and the elemental force of the Wind. Perhaps the most important of these devices are the induction hulls that buoy skyships in the air. Induction hulls hold the ships aloft as well as generating the arc needed to power the ships' circuit boxes and charge any arcanoelectrical fixtures and armaments.

In the larger cities, arc powers urbanization and industrialization at an ever-increasing pace. There are buildings with girders of Masters' alloy that stand as high as 20 stories, with running water, auto-lifts and walls of elemental glass. Standpipes deliver pressurized water, and improving sanitation systems with indoor plumbing keeping the cobbled streets cleaner and limiting urban disease. Factories run clock and still—machines driving the economy of the realms, helping to build a new world with the salvaged remnants of the old.

While abundant and cheap in large settlements, arc's wondrous benefits are still uncommon in rural regions. Here traditional infrastructure still dominates: dirt roads, draft animals, coal heat, cisterns, outdoor plumbing and stone or wood architecture. Inevitably, this has begun to change as well. Oxen draw a plow in one field while a cantankerous electrical combine breaks down in another. Horses pull a cart into the village as a spark train startles them with a shower of arc as it stops at the new station. The neighbors install indoor plumbing, the quarry purchases a used dynamo-rig, and the general store now has a brand new audiograph. And on the shore, a child flying a homemade kite watches in wonder as a skyship sails into the distant sky.

relays and solenoids, while glass dials, ports, condensers and tubes protrude everywhere from complicated frames and numerous sockets.

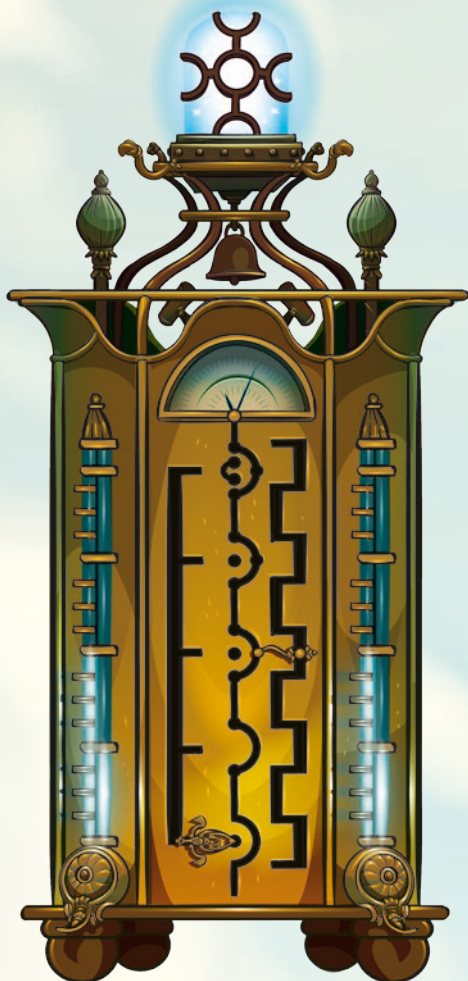
Large machines are complex, almost living things, whose intricate structures and hidden functions are known only to the technicians charged with keeping them working. Despite being commonplace, even the smallest devices are hopelessly complicated to the untrained, sometimes running as much on Potential as they do on electricity.

The technology of *UPWIND* manages to accomplish most of the same things that the engineering of a more technologically advanced setting would allow, though often at far greater cost — not only financial cost, but greater expense in terms of space, speed, rarity and general efficiency.

There are common, mundane technologies—devices and machines that are part of every-clock life. There are arc lamps, though they

are fickle and give off a harsh, bluish light; there are electric heaters for buildings and water, but they are buzzing, cumbersome fire hazards; there are arc-powered trams and lorries, but they are large, expensive and slow; there are audiographs for speaking over distance, but they require connecting wires and hiss with static. There are house-sized ice making machines, bulky printing presses, spark-throwing passenger trains, ubiquitous windmills, handheld electric torches and auto-flushing toilets.

There is pure arcanotechnology as well — sky ships, arc cannons, autonomous war cogs and navigational sphereometers — but these things are rare and exceptionally valuable. Powered as much by elemental magic as electrical current, such machines are typically found only in the possession of governments,



royals, or the Guild and are built almost exclusively of Masters' components.

There are other things, either for lack of engineering or Masters' technology, or for the vagaries of the elemental influence of the Wind, that are notably absent from the *UPWIND* setting: wireless communications, synthetic materials, compact explosives and internal combustion engines are all good examples of nonexistent technologies.

ARC POWDER

Common and Expensive

Arc Powder is a valuable alchemical substance used in a variety of applications.

Primarily used as an explosive propellant for cannons and firearms, it is used in both

GEARING UP

Access to equipment in *UPWIND* is treated much like the meta access to financial resources (see *Personal Resources*, page 213). If an item of gear or a device is relatively easy to come by, players can assume their characters have it or can get it. If an item is too rare, costly, or otherwise unavailable for reasons of plot, then players should assume they can only have access to it when they have fulfilled the in-game conditions to acquire it. Accordingly, there are no specific prices given for the different materials, equipment and arcanotechnologies described below. Only relative values (cheap, affordable, or expensive) and abundance (common, scarce, or rare) are listed to help moderators determine in-game values and access.

Similarly, equipment stats such as weight, weapon range, or arc consumption are unspecified as well, as such capabilities vary wildly and are otherwise accounted for by the stakes mechanic of the game.

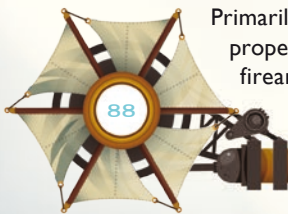
military and industrial explosives. Various grades of arc powder are incorporated as fuel in some arcanelectrical devices, as well as experimental engines and generators.

Arc powder is manufactured using a combination of alchemical and magical processes overseen by capable Arc users. There are several forms of mundane explosives, but these do not have the reliability or power of the elemental compound.

CIRCUIT BOXES

Scarce and Expensive

Circuit boxes are relatively rare, but are one of the most useful Masters' components in the realms. Accordingly, they are also one of the most valuable. Circuit boxes are small cubical devices that vary in size but are seldom larger than a footlocker. They are made of a rare grade Masters' alloy, with a dark-blue color and dull shine. They are featureless except for a variable



number of small sockets on one face into which power and control leads can be fitted, and an intricate array of brass calibrating keys on the opposite face.

Circuit Boxes are enigmatic yet vital components. They allow for the fine control of signals and the delicate balance of power levels that make such machines as induction hulls and autonomous cogs possible. Control systems, relay keys, throttles, register knobs and helm inputs are typically routed through circuit boxes, without which the fine control of most sophisticated devices would be impossible.

COGS

Common and Expensive

Meshed-cog, dynamo-driven motivators, usually just called *Motivators* or *Cogs*, are versatile automatons ranging in structure and function from the simple to the complex. There are as many different sizes and designs as there are tasks they perform. Cogs are built as tools,

servants and laborers and, in some cases, as integral parts of larger machines, factories, vehicles, or ships. They are driven by complex gear assemblies, cams and transmissions integrated with flywheels, belts, pulleys, levers and various Masters' components, all run by powerful electrical dynamos.

Motivators have no true intelligence and can only act within the limits of their physical



WAR MACHINES

War cogs are rare but potent engines used primarily in land-based battles. Based on labor cog designs, war cogs are built using similar principles but with heavier frames, more powerful dynamos, armored plating, redundant systems and integrated weapons. Used primarily to carry cannons, munitions and other supplies to the battlefield, some war cogs are actually designed to participate in the fighting. These lumbering weapon platforms are controlled by skilled pilots, mount cannon-sized powder guns and wield lethal melee weapons.

War cogs are heavy and slow and depend on large spark bottle banks or long and unwieldy power umbilicals. Their utility is limited to fighting on land and, with the superiority of sky ship bombardment, they are useful only when enemy air support is not possible.

design and arcane instructions. Sophisticated cogs, which can do more than single tasks, require circuit box controls and significant arc. Sedentary cogs may draw power from the local grid, but mobile cogs must be tethered to heavy arc cables or run on large spark bottles to meet their considerable power needs.

Cogs are durable, tireless and methodical. Most are controlled with simple banks of levers, switches, dials and keys and are oblivious to their surroundings. The more sophisticated cogs — those with greater integration of Masters' technology — can be controlled through wired connections or even by limited spoken commands. They are variously responsive to their environment, so the uneducated often believe they are alive and aware.

Motivators require expert engineering and valuable Masters' components, so they are expensive. There is also a growing and vocal movement across the kingdoms to ban the construction and use of cogs. The movement's proponents are made up of an alliance of laborers' guild members and religious conservatives.



CONTROL COILS

Rare and Expensive

Coils are an exceedingly rare Masters' technology, the original purpose of which was lost in the DownFall. They are likely remnant medical equipment that allowed ancient technicians to intentionally add mechanical functionality to living organisms. Now, however, they are primarily used to repair particularly valuable Knights when they would otherwise die or be invalidated out of the service.

Control coils are small rings of intricately worked metal that contain densely packed components similar to the internal workings of a circuit box but on a much finer scale. When pressed against living flesh and connected to a power source, a ring quickly fuses to the organism's nervous system, providing an arcanoelectrical interface. Any device that would otherwise require a circuit box can then be attached to this interface, connecting the wearer

with the equipment as if it were an extension of his own body. Used mostly to replace lost limbs, eyes, or other organs with arcanomechanical equivalents, rings can also be used to integrate particularly able helmsmen to their ship's induction hulls or pilots to specially equipped war cogs.

Coils are very rare, extremely delicate and impossible to replicate. They are therefore one of the most valuable kinds of Masters' plunder. They vary in size and applicability, but finding a ring is a sure step toward one's next Blaze of Rank. In fact, functional rings are so rare that the Guild's quartermaster records indicate there are currently only 47 in use within the Guild, and only a dozen known outside the Order.

Once attached to a user, a control coil cannot be removed without killing him. If forcibly removed, the ring ceases to function despite all efforts at repair. The only way rings can be recovered is when the user dies. Shortly after



the host's death, the interface connections withdraw and the coil becomes inert. Only then can it be attached to another user.

As unlikely as it should be, if a player character is fitted with a coil, it should provide significant advantage. If the ring is installed to replace a lost limb or organ, then the replacement, though delicate and in need of constant maintenance or repair, can provide functionality the previous appendage did not — great strength, unique or integrated weaponry, or special tools. If the ring is installed to provide a control interface for a specialized task such as piloting a sky ship, then the ring provides a I-card innate cache (see *Caches*, page 183) for plays in which having refined control of that system is valuable. The cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

DIRIGIBLES

Rare and Expensive

Dirigibles are one solution to the issue of up-country mass transport and cargo hauling. Though not as reliable or efficient as spark trains, dirigibles can carry up to 100 passengers and five tons of cargo over trackless or inaccessible terrain to Potential-free locations deep within the Windless interiors of large highlands.

Though there are some brave souls who use dirigibles for inter-skyland transports, their fragility, low speed and finicky engineering make them impractical long-range flyers at best, and unreliably dangerous at worst.

DYNAMOS

Common and Affordable

Dynamos are pervasive, relatively simple devices that are used both to generate arc from mechanical energy, and for turning arc into mechanical power. Accordingly, they are found in countless applications throughout Kin technology. As generators, they are found in the ubiquitous windmills that crowd skyland coastlines and convert wind into arc. As motors, they are used to drive factory machines, cranes, winches, street cars, labor cogs and all manner of shipboard equipment. Dynamos come in all sizes and levels of power output and can provide incredible levels of torque. Constructed of heavy steel armatures, copper coils, lodestones, drive shafts and output flywheels, with regular maintenance these devices are both durable and reliable. Dynamos were one

of the first significant pieces of Masters' technology the Kin were able to understand and replicate, and as a result they are relatively inexpensive and readily available across the realms.

ELEMENTAL GLASS

Scarce and Affordable

Elemental Glass is not actually glass at all, nor is it metal. It defies the analysis of Guild chemists and even the best engineers have been unable to recreate the substance. This Masters' material comes in an array of colors and opacities and is currently harvested from where it typically lies shattered among ancient ruins. With the right tools and techniques — usually involving forge-level temperatures and massive cutting dies, elemental glass can be cut or formed to specific purposes. Given violent enough impact, it can shatter.

Elemental glass is commonly used when fortifications or ship armor require transparent view ports. Slabs of various sizes are used in architecture as load bearing windows, translucent walls, or in aesthetic features. It can also be molded into fine tools, filaments and insulators for use in arcanelectrical devices, chemical manufacture and even surgery.

GLIDERS

Rare and Affordable

Glider kites supposedly have their origins in pre-induction hull times when daring, half-mad adventurers used them to sail the gaps between highlands as they passed within range of each other. Kite gliders are now used in a variety of applications. The navies of the realms use them for scouting or other stealth missions. They are used by scientists and scholars studying animals and weather patterns, and by recreationalists with more time and money than instinct for self-preservation. Many of the very best gliders are potent Wind users who are able to control the power and behavior of the local air currents.

Modern glider kites take advantage of Kin ingenuity — and sometimes Masters' materials — and are lighter, more maneuverable and more durable than their notoriously unreliable predecessors. Nonetheless, they remain extremely dangerous vehicles, vulnerable to structural failure, high winds, lightning strikes and the inevitable consequences of gravity.



Kites are only viable flying machines when there is abundant and consistent wind. Using them effectively takes practice and a sound working knowledge of air currents and thermals. They have limited range and can carry no more cargo than what the glider can put in its pockets or a small pack. Launching a kite is as simple as strapping it on and jumping into the sky. Regaining the resulting loss in altitude — and landing safely — is what requires skill.

MASTERS' ALLOY

Scarce and Expensive

Masters' alloy is an extremely valuable metal that has become essential to the industries and economies of the Kingdoms in the Light. Often referred to simply as "alloy," the substance has unique properties that make it particularly useful in most metallurgical applications. It is strong and lightweight, and, save for a minor patina, it doesn't corrode. It is extremely hard to bend or dent, has a high melting point and holds a keen edge despite hard use. Though it is exceptionally tough and almost heatproof, artificers can readily cut, shape, cast and forge it using arc torches, heavy lathes, presses and anvils.

Alloy comes in various grades, which vary based on the precise proportions of its constituents. Each grade has uses for which it is particularly applicable, and the rarer the grade, the more expensive the raw stock and the items made from it.

Slag, or *scab*, is the lowest grade. It is the lightest form and has the lowest melting point and the lowest tensile strength. *Ingot*, or *coin*, is a mid-grade alloy and is the standard stock with which most mechanics and technicians like to work, and the grade from which most currency is minted. *Blade* is another mid-grade but a rarer one. It has the best strength to weight ratio and is the stock preferred by weaponsmiths. *Cast*, also called *plate*, is a denser, higher-grade form commonly used in the construction of gun and cannon barrels and shipboard circuit box armor. *Pure* is the finest grade yet discovered and is extremely rare. It has properties that make it coveted by those who work with circuit boxes, or cross arcanoelectrical engineering and elementalism, and prospectors dream of discovering lost caches of pure.

Unfortunately, alloy does not occur naturally, and even the best Kin metallurgists and elementalists have been unable to replicate its production. Accordingly, what alloy the Kin possess has to be scavenged, or mined, from ruins of the Masters. An entire industry dedicated to recovering and recycling alloy is a major part of the economy of the kingdoms, and a goodly portion of the Guild's income comes from directing the great mining houses to the new alloy finds its expeditions discover.

Masters' alloy appearance varies by grade, but it is always some version of a burnished, coppery color, with vague, hard to see patterns, swirls and whorls. In shadow it can appear almost black, but in bright light it often shimmers like oil on water — a colorful iridescence that seems more than just reflected light. If left exposed to the elements, alloy will develop a thin, spotty, green patina that is easily removed with a good buffing.

REEL KITES

Common and Cheap

Reel kites are used in many applications and take advantage of the constant, ubiquitous presence of the wind. Kites vary in construction and size by function and payload, but they all share general characteristics: kites are fabric wings with wood or alloy airframes that are carried aloft by the Wind. A kite can be launched from any shore or ship and is usually tethered to a hand or dynamo-cranked reel spiked to the ground or mounted to the deck.

Smaller kites are used to measure wind speed and direction, carry small scientific instruments aloft, lure flying animals, or serve as coded signals. Larger kites are used to carry lookouts aloft, launch bombs, or mine the airspace over strategic targets to discourage aerial attack. Larger ships often fly kites during battle maneuvers to provide observation platforms, sniper perches and anti-aircraft obstructions.

SPARK BOTTLES

Common and Expensive

Spark bottles are essential components in all portable or mobile arc-powered devices. They are Masters' technology and, though relatively common, they remain valuable because they are in such high demand. Spark bottles store arc, serving as power reservoirs. They charge slowly



and hold amounts of energy proportional to their sizes. Bottles consist of delicate interior structures encased in elemental glass, bell jar-shaped housings and are relatively fragile items. They are usually protected by stout metal cages and give off a bright, actinic blue glow when charged. The smallest are the size of a child's fist and the very largest are as big as footlockers. Most devices can utilize bottles of only a single size, and though the finite amount of power a spark bottle can provide is relative to its size, it is the energy demands of the specific device that determine a given bottle's longevity.

SPARK TRAINS

Scarce and Expensive

The limitations imposed by Wind shadows on upcountry transportation over larger highlands have made the development of overland transport and shipping an economically essential element of many kingdoms' infrastructures. Spark trains are a common solution.

Spark trains are large, noisy machines that have their own sort of romantic appeal, not unlike that of skyships. Trains have massive locomotives driven along steel rails by sets of huge arc-powered dynamos. The average train is 10-15 cars long and can carry hundreds of passengers and tons of cargo. Spark trains receive arc directly from overhead rails, making tracks dangerous to anyone foolish enough to climb on or tamper with them. The power rails themselves are energized by dedicated induction mills that feed arc directly to the spark train track system.

SPHEREOMETERS

Scarce and Affordable

Sphereometers have been essential devices since the first skyship ventured beyond sight of land. Though their design has improved over the hundreds of cycles since they were first invented, the basic function remains the same.

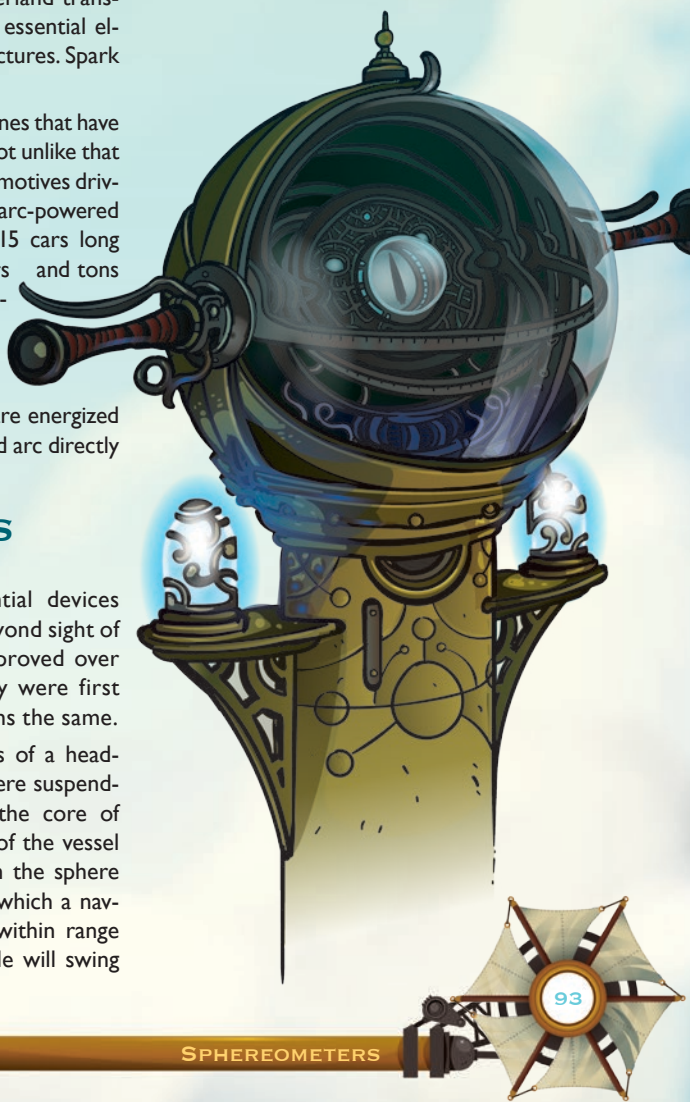
A typical sphereometer consists of a head-sized, armature-mounted, glass sphere suspended within gimbals that separate the core of the mechanism from the motions of the vessel aboard which it is installed. Within the sphere is a tiny clockwork instrument to which a navigation needle is attached. When within range of the parent lodestone, the needle will swing

on the delicate apparatus, orienting toward the lodestone and the associated destination.

Though sphereometers share general form and functionality, construction quality and features such as arc-lit globes, range gauges and repeater relays dramatically affect function and price.

Though sphereometers themselves are expensive, the lodestone needles critical to their function are not. This is partly because the needles are small and abundant, but mostly because the Guild — and other national navies — would rather not waste resources searching for ships unable to find their way back to port for want of a small sliver of magnetized stone.

The most expensive or hard to find needles are those linked to strategic, secret or hidden locations such as military bases, Guild camps, newly discovered Masters' caches, or pirate



PRACTICAL NAVIGATION

Most short-range navigation is managed by sight, using lookouts, spyglasses and pilot kites. Long-range navigation, especially passage through the trackless ether between skylands, requires the use of lodestones and powerful elementalism.

Each new Guild outpost is issued a block of lodestone that has been enchanted with a unique elemental attraction. Shards from this same block are worked into hundreds of fine compass needles that are distributed among the Guild fleet. Each ship's navigator places the new sliver of lodestone in the ship's needle safe, along with needles linked to every other Guild house's lodestone.

When installed in a sphereometer, the new needle points unerringly toward its parent lodestone, and can therefore be used to guide a ship to it. Unfortunately, the range of even the best lodestones is only a hundred leagues or so, and navigators often have to lead their ships on roundabout courses, sailing from one trackable location to the next. Therefore, the larger the selection of needles, the greater the range and course options for a ship and crew.

An experienced navigator can use the function and behavior of his sphereometer to determine a surprising amount of information about a target lodestone and the destination it marks. When a needle is out of range, it “wanders,” pointing in no consistent or reliable direction. As it enters the margins of its range, it “pecks” and begins pointing more or less along a stable course, indicating that the destination is within 300 miles. As the range closes below 100 miles, the needle begins to “bear,” holding a fixed heading. When the range is less than 10 leagues, the needle “hums” or vibrates with such tension, old skyman claim they can tell by the sound it makes exactly how many miles they have left to sail.

Other variations in a needle's behavior — “interruptions,” “twitches,” “skips,” “spins” or “bobbles”—tell navigators that the target is moving relative to their ship, that a skyland has occluded the destination or that someone has altered or otherwise interfered with the attracting lodestone. As a sphereometer moves away from the lodestone, it starts to “fade,” “wane” and ultimately wander again as it moves beyond the limits of its attraction to its target. For obvious reasons, safeguarding a ship's needle collection is the primary charge of all navigators. Should even a few needles be damaged or lost, a ship may be severed from the network of lodestones and left to sail aimlessly around the skies until its crew dies of thirst.

Journeys deep into uncharted sky, especially forays into the Dark, perforce delve far beyond the range of established lodestones. Such expeditions therefore carry a supply of way-point lodestones that they can leave behind as navigational beacons for their return journeys. The stones are typically left on uncharted highlands, or aboard launches or sister ships left behind to maintain the waypoints. Such temporary outposts are essential to the safe return of deep expeditions, and the crews assigned to remain behind and protect waypoints are charged with a critical but terribly dangerous duty. Even then, if an expedition is out too long, ill-chance or natural drift can sever a return course, stranding the crew in unknown skies.

hideouts. Such navigation aids — if you can acquire them at all — are expensive, costing what the black market will bear.

maker's skill and the haphazard application of Masters' technology to destructive ends.

WEAPONS

The weapons of the Kin are a strange amalgamation of the blacksmith's art, the gun

HEAVY WEAPONS

Arc Cannons

Rare and Expensive

Some ship weapons take advantage of Masters' components and are typically rare and intended



for specific uses. One such gun is the arc cannon. This destructive device uses a huge capacitor to store arc drawn through the ship's induction hull. When fired, the cannon releases a lightning-like discharge that stuns or even electrocutes crew, ignites flammables and burns out electrical systems aboard the target vessel.

Unfortunately, arc cannons have some inherent limitations: they have extremely short ranges and are slow to recharge. Fifty yards is their practical limit, and they can take half a battle to accumulate sufficient power for a second shot. The trajectory of their discharge is also frequently unpredictable and can sometimes be as dangerous to the user's own ship and crew as it is to the actual target.

Kite Mines

Scarce and Affordable

Kite mines are surprisingly simple weapons and a perfect example of Kin ingenuity. Kite mines are explosive devices — incendiary, fragmentary or armor penetrating — that are detonated either by contact fuses, clockwork timers, arc wires, simple pull cords, or even remote Potential triggers. These devices are mounted as the payload on large, hovering kites, which are then deployed on the pervasive wind. Skilled kite handlers can set the kites to block approaches to ground targets or as outriding defenses aboard ships to deter boarders or attacks from above and below.

Muzzle Rockets

Common and Affordable

Muzzle rockets are small explosive armaments commonly used as ship-to-ship and ground-to-ship defenses. Rockets are propelled by a slow-burning formulation of arc powder packed delicately into a funnel-like ignition chamber. The rockets are loaded into keel-mounted launching tubes that are aimed by the simple expedient of adjusting the ship's helm. Once rockets are fired, their sometimes-erratic trajectories depend entirely on their inherent design and the current environmental conditions.

Powder Cannons

Common and Affordable

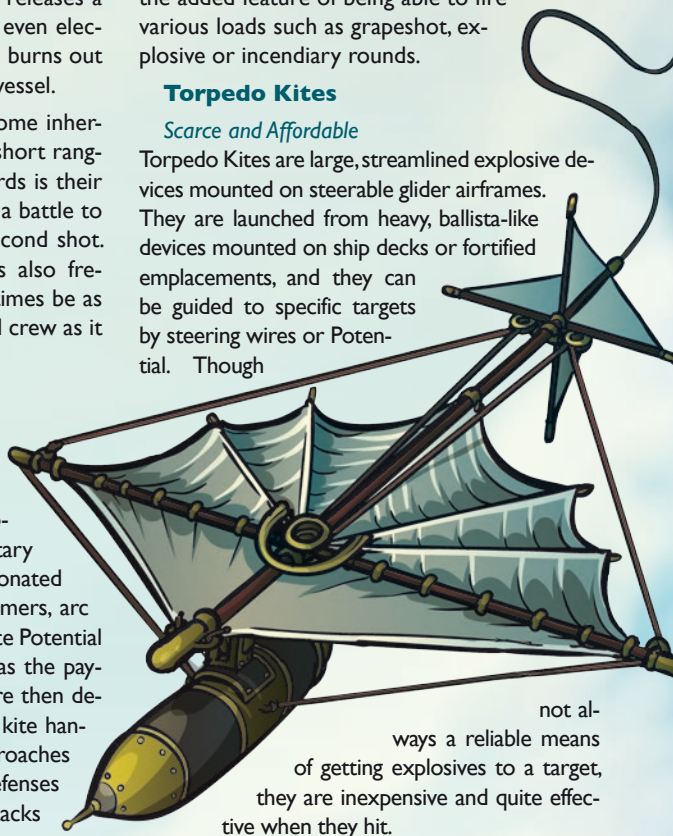
Naval, Guild and even most civilian skyships are equipped with cannons. Some are antipersonnel weapons, some are for attacking ground targets,

but most are intended for ship-to-ship combat. Commonly, these are just larger, heavier, much more destructive versions of static guns, with the added feature of being able to fire various loads such as grapeshot, explosive or incendiary rounds.

Torpedo Kites

Scarce and Affordable

Torpedo Kites are large, streamlined explosive devices mounted on steerable glider airframes. They are launched from heavy, ballista-like devices mounted on ship decks or fortified emplacements, and they can be guided to specific targets by steering wires or Potential. Though



not always a reliable means of getting explosives to a target, they are inexpensive and quite effective when they hit.

PERSONAL WEAPONS

Swords

Common and Cheap

Every guard, soldier, mercenary, adventurer and Knight carries a sword, and there are as many types of blades and schools of combat as there are Kingdoms in the Light. The Explorer Knights specifically carry stout, double-edged Masters' alloy blades fit for shipboard fighting, which are bestowed on them upon graduation from the Academy. Liegemen are issued well-made steel blades of similar design. Every naval officer, soldier, privateer, pirate, bandit and brigand across the realms carries some kind of edged weapon, as they are inexpensive, easy to maintain and uniformly deadly.



Firearms

Common and Affordable

Firearms are rarer than blades but most professional soldiers — and all Knights — carry at least a powder pistol. The simplest are heavy, breech-loading weapons called static guns that use small electrical sparks to ignite their charges and fire lead projectiles.



The sparks are created by the release of static charge generated by geared cocking levers or cumbersome hand cranks. The spark is released into the arc powder by pulling the trigger, but charges dissipate from the trigger capacitors after

a breath or two, so static guns must be cranked just before firing. There are more sophisticated designs that utilize cylinders or magazines to increase shot capacity. Others incorporate small spark bottles to supply direct power, greatly increasing the rate of fire. Such guns are accordingly rare and expensive. Regardless of their design, static guns frequently malfunction in humid or wet conditions, as their firing mechanisms are unable to maintain viable charges.

Static guns can be one-handed pistols or two-handed blunderbusses, muskets, or long rifles. Most officers carry pistols and most ship crews have access to gun lockers during battle. The Fortress Musketeers of the Dominion are famed across the kingdoms for their prowess with their lethal long guns and are unrivaled marksmen.

Arc Throwers

Scarce and Affordable

Arc throwers are Kin-portable, gun-like weapons that discharge arc in discrete electrical bolts. There are various designs, but they all have similar functionality. Arc throwers discharge the power from a spark bottle in darts of electrical fire that burn or even explode on impact. The destructive force of each shot is mostly determined by limiters built into the weapon, but ultimately restricted by the size of the spark bottle to which it is attached; some models allow for the discharge of the entire reservoir with a single blast.

Arc throwers are notoriously inaccurate, with only about a quarter the range of powder guns, but they make up for the deficiency by being able to take down multiple targets with a single shot. On higher settings, they can short out electrical equipment, melt some materials and start fires. Accordingly, arc throwers are illegal in some jurisdictions and deployed by the Guild only under specific circumstances.

Though relatively unsophisticated devices and inexpensive to make, their high energy demands make arc throwers inefficient and expensive to fuel.

Bottle Wands

Rare and Expensive

Cycles ago, some clever — or sadistic — Guild engineer devised a usually nonlethal hand weapon called the Arc-Induced Muscular Contraction Cudgel. More commonly called a bottle wand, these light, arm-length truncheons are rigged with small spark bottles and conductive contacts. When touched against a living target and triggered, the device delivers a measured jolt of arc that temporarily incapacitates all but the stoutest Kin. Powerful enough to be lethal if employed incorrectly, users have learned bottle wands can also be used to disable uninsulated arcanelectrical devices.

WINDMILLS

Common and Affordable

One of the mundane yet central technologies of the Kin is the ubiquitous windmill. Mills crowd every populated shoreline, jutting out over the edges of every highland — horizontal towers tapping into the physical updrafts of the Wind. Windmills are as varied in design as they are



in application; they can be made of wood or metal scaffolding with canvas, leather, wood or even metallic vanes. Mills are used for everything from grinding grain and pumping water to feeding municipal electrical grids, powering factories and charging spark bottles.

One common mill design uses induction hull technology rather than spinning vanes to collect arc from the Wind. Rather than moving parts, these structures simply hold splayed trusses laced with induction coils out in the flow of the Wind. The coils feed arc to power grids, spark bottles or directly to dynamos or other machinery, providing immediate electrical power.

RELICS

Explorer Knight characters typically start play with all the basic equipment they need, including their Knights' blades. Every Knight character also begins play with one unique item of equipment called a *Relic*, intended to enhance his character concept,

role and effectiveness within the party. Typically this device, tool, weapon, talisman, artifact or other piece of gear is an iconic object that provides a character with unique capabilities, and further defines his personality, history or style.

Relics are usually Masters' artifacts, or at least composed in part of arcanotechnology, and though they can be mundane, many are imbued with elemental magic. Relics are often family heirlooms or items passed from master to apprentice or mentor to student. Sometimes Guild captains decide to entrust such objects to the use of a particular Knight who has demonstrated unique ability exploiting the specific item.

All Relics are considered exceptionally rare and prohibitively expensive. See the Character Creation section for guidelines on creating custom Relics (see page 203). The following are descriptively and mechanically appropriate examples and may be used as written or for inspiration.



1 EA. PIRATE'S ELECTRICAL ROPE

This wondrous device is a unique Masters' artifact of unknown origin. The Guild quartermaster's records note only "1 ea. electric rope — recovered during raid on Vaultish pirate lair, Cycle 179 UC," but provides no further information.

In its inactive state, the arcanelectrical rope is about one foot long and the thickness of a thumb. Though it is braided like traditional cordage, the fibers that comprise it are composed of an unknown, virtually indestructible, gray material. When activated by a jolt from an Arc user, the rope extends up to 100 feet. It can slither about, tie itself in knots or around other objects and it can stiffen into a virtually unbendable pole, ring, square, or any other simple shape. To control the rope, one need only touch it and nudge with the same act of will used to control Potential. The duration and speed of the rope's functionality is in proportion to the amount of arc it receives and is therefore most useful in the hands of a potent elemental.

Narratively, the rope is a valuable magical tool that can be used in dozens of clever ways. Mechanically, the rope turns any face card into a Jack to crown any tricky play in which the character uses the device (see *Crowning Plays*, page 182).

2ND GAUGE UNIVERSAL WORK CHEST

The Second Gauge Engineers of High were once a proud cadre of Knights renowned for their prowess as technicians and were coveted crew aboard every Guild ship. Unfortunately, almost 10 cycles ago, an accident of an unknown nature burned High and the Second Gauge training facility to the ground, killing most of their greatest teachers. One of the only remaining legacies of the Second Gauge Engineers is the handful of work chests that were deployed across the fleet.

These chests are large toolboxes the size of short wardrobes. They have uncanny numbers of drawers, trays and compartments that cleverly pull, fold and open out to reveal a myriad of tools and spare parts. The chests weigh almost 500 pounds apiece, but because there are induction hull elements built into their frames, their apparent weight is only about 30

pounds. This allows such a chest to be wheeled around or carried like a backpack with relative ease on its integral harness wherever there is a trace of Wind. Users must be wary, however. Though it is easy to lift a work chest, they retain the inertia of a 500-pound object and take considerable force to move, but, more importantly, considerable force to stop.

Narratively, the chest provides the tools and materials to make most repairs. Mechanically, if a player is willing to discard a face card from his current Play hand, his character has whatever he needs to repair any mundane or Kin-made arcanelectrical device. If willing to discard a Joker, his character may repair a Masters' artifact. How long any such repairs take is left to the discretion of the moderator.

AZOMOND'S PROTOTYPE OMNI-COMPASS

Professor Azomond — an engineer at the College of Applied Arcanotechnology at Cliffside — spent the latter half of his life obsessively working to improve the fundamental technology of navigation: the sphereometer. He wanted to be able to voyage the skies at will without having to depend on needle libraries. His goal was to develop compasses that could be tuned to known lodestones as needed based on their unique Potential signatures rather than specific needles.

There were persistent rumors that Azomond accomplished his goal, but unfortunately he was never able to confirm his success as he disappeared one clock, along with his latest prototype, while on a testing cruise. Eventually, after he and his apprentice were declared dead, college personnel came across what appeared to be an early version of the device while clearing out his workshop.

The Omni-Compass is an unwieldy machine that bears only a vague resemblance to an actual sphereometer. It is a cobbled together mass of cannibalized components that appears only half-finished and lacks any kind of housing. Nonetheless, when wired up to a high-voltage conduit, the machine unerringly points to the closest lodestone, regardless of distance. Though clearly not a generally useful navigational tool, since it switches from one target to another when their relative distances change, there are specific applications in which the Omni-Compass is uniquely valuable—even a life saver.



Narratively, Azomond's tool tracks the closest lodestone, regardless of distance. Mechanically, the compass crowns any play involving navigation relying on lodestones.

DARKUNDER'S CLOCKWORK SWORD

Darkunder was a famous pirate, more or less tolerated by the Guild because he mostly attacked ships and outposts of the Children of the Dark. The tales say he stole the sword from a Child prince and then killed a hundred warriors with it as he made good his escape. The sword itself is as unlikely as it is ugly. The weapon is about two feet long and looks more like a rusty metal broomstick than a blade. Chipped and cracked in places, to say it is dull would be to imply that it even has an edge. A thick, flexible metal conduit leads incongruously from the sword's pommel to a small box on a leather harness. The box has a pump-like handle that powers a complex arcano-electrical mechanism, which in turn powers the sword. Uncharged, the sword is less effective than said broomstick. When pumped up, however, the blade vibrates so fiercely it literally screams and becomes a heinously dangerous weapon.

Narratively, when activated, Darkunder's Sword can cut through just about any material short of Masters' alloy — wood, stone, iron and even armored steel. Resistance varies, but the user can, with relative ease, hack through just about anything. Mechanically, the blade allows the user to crown any face card as if it were an Ace when the character is using the sword as part of the encounter in question.

THE DOWNGATE SALVAGE POTENTIOMETER

The Downgate Salvage was one of the most productive Masters' caches ever discovered, producing a remarkable number of one-of-a-kind artifacts and devices. So many, in fact, that most archaeologists are convinced that the original Downgate facility must have been some kind of Masters' prototyping workshop.

At first consideration, the Downgate Potentiometer appears to be a minor Relic, but in truth it has proven exceptionally versatile and valuable. It looks vaguely like a tiny sphereometer, but closer inspection reveals that the glass housing encloses an intricate, multiaxis gauge

rather than a navigation needle. When attached to a power source, the gauge system registers ambient Potential, identifying both type — Ore, Arc, Rain, or Wind — and relative power level.

Narratively, the Potentiometer allows users to note changes in ambient Potential, granting the ability to track the lingering auras of Potential using animals — including Kin and Children — and Potential-powered devices. It can also indicate the boundaries for such phenomena as Potential shadows and murks, as well as the onset of Potential storms or the manifestation of elementals, effectively providing advance warning against any kind of change in local Potential levels. Mechanically, the Potentiometer grants a 1-card innate cache that can be used when Potential is part of a play. The cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

GEEGAN THE INDECISIVE'S SECOND THOUGHT GOGGLES

As the stories go — and there are lots of them about Geegan the Indecisive — he was a powerful Horizian elementalist who always had trouble making even the simplest decisions. In a very uncharacteristically decisive act, he put his considerable abilities to use and turned a pair of old helmsman's goggles into a device he swore turned hindsight into foresight. He claimed they let him make decisions with confidence by allowing him to see how all his choices would turn out in advance.

It is not clear exactly what went wrong — whether it was a flaw in the device or in Geegan's mind — but after wearing the device for exactly one uniquely decisive cycle without ever taking them off, Geegan removed the goggles, put them in a box and posted it to the Explorer Knights' Academy. He then walked away from his workshop and was never heard from again.

Narratively, the Second Thought Goggles allow the character to obtain insight regarding any singular course of action. After the player describes his plan to the game moderator, the moderator must then offer a single, relevant word that provides useful information about that proposed course of action. In the right circumstances this Relic is uniquely powerful, so to activate this narrative power, the player must discard the highest card from





his Potential hand. Mechanically, the Goggles allow the player to look at the top card of his Play deck any time he wishes. Once per game session, he may then exchange the current top card in his Play deck for any card in his Play hand.

THE GLASS WHISTLE OF INDETERMINATE RANGE

The Glass Whistle appears to be made of elemental glass that is the deep, verdant shade of emeralds. The object is a short, thin tube with a single indecipherable sigil engraved at one end. The surface is worn and pitted so the Relic is thought to be quite old. Though clearly not an original feature, a braided leather cord has been fixed around one end providing a convenient way to hang the whistle around the user's neck.

The whistle has no apparent moving parts and seems somehow incomplete, like it is part of some larger device or tool. Despite its name, the whistle does not make any noise when sounded. However, when blown, the last person to have touched the whistle prior to the user hears a clear, shrill note. The remarkable aspect is that not only does no one else hear the sound, but it has been tested over hundreds of leagues and is apparently audible at any range.

The note can be modulated for length — long and short — though not for frequency. Rudimentary codes can therefore be established to send information over great distances, and even untrained individuals can use simple patterns representing “yes” or “no,” “go” or “stop.”

Accordingly, in an era when technologists desperately pursue ever-elusive, wireless communications, the whistle is a priceless artifact.

Narratively, the whistle can be used for one-way communication over any distance, as long as the target was the last person to have touched the whistle prior to the user and is aware of the meaning of any code. Mechanically, the whistle provides a 2-card, innate cache for plays in which communication or coordination over distance is central to the action. This cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

GRANDMOTHER AGNES'S PORTABLE LOOKING GLASS

This small, seemingly unremarkable hand mirror is actually an inexplicably powerful artifact. There are no moving parts — no buttons, knobs or sliders of any kind — but when held by a potent Rain user with a strong will, the mirror shows glimpses of whatever he wishes to know, find or figure out. Though only the user can see the images in the glass, and the images are often vague and hard to interpret, with practice the device can be invaluable in the pursuit of one's goals.

Though no one knows where the mirror originated, it is obvious to any arcanotechnician that it is a powerful piece of unidentified Masters' technology that has been clumsily housed in a pretty silver case engraved with a Loftian script monogram. The Knight known by the nom de guerre "the Iron Witch" claimed to have actually inherited it from her grandmother.

Narratively, the Glass can offer insights about player questions — locations, identities, plans or similar at the discretion of the moderator. Mechanically, the vanity provides the user with the Potential attribute *Clairvoyant Insight* at level 2.

HALE'S LEFT-HANDED GAUNTLET OF AEGIS

This heavy, baroque alloy gauntlet is a singularly valuable piece of defensive equipment and was made famous by the renowned Theodoric Hale of the Fortress Dominion. Powered by an integrated spark bottle, the gauntlet generates a large, wall-like, translucent shield of Potential energy that is impenetrable to any attacks short of ship-mounted cannons. Unfortunately, the wall manifests two feet to the user's left and when he moves, so does the wall — so he can only use it to protect others.

Features of the Gauntlet's design indicate that it is likely part of a matched set and there is much speculation about what the combined pair could do. Accordingly, the right-handed version is on the Guild's "Priority Salvage List" and every recovery crew is motivated by the promised bounty to find the device.

Narratively, the Gauntlet creates a virtually impenetrable mobile barrier but one the character cannot really use himself. Mechanically, it provides a 1-card cache for any play where protecting others from physical harm is part of the stakes.

HONORABLE ELAM'S AMBIENT POTENTIAL CAPACITOR

Of unknown origin, bequeathed to the Guild by Elam Strange of the Soar Republic, this cumbersome metal and leather harness is weighed down with a latticework of unidentifiable arcanoelectrical devices, attached to the apparatus seemingly at random. When worn and connected to a major power source — like a skyship induction hull or an industrial windmill — the device allows the user to recover her Potential in a quarter of the standard time. Using the device is a rather painful experience, however — like a constant, low level electrical shock — and leaves the user smelling of burnt hair and ozone.

Narratively and mechanically, the Capacitor allows the wearer to gain a single Potential card immediately and to refill her Potential hand in a single bell of in-game time.

INSTANTLY DEPLOYABLE ARCANOELECTRICAL AIRFOILS

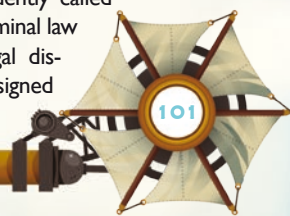
One of the many Relics that were recovered from the Masters' cache at the Downgate Salvage, the Airfoils are valuable only to a select few Potential users: those with the power of flight.

These artificial wings are made of an extremely durable, foil-like fabric of unknown composition mounted on a tight-fitting harness. When in the retracted position, the wings form a lumpy sort of vest that — while stiff and uncomfortable — can be worn over most clothing. When activated, the wings spring out to a span of almost 15 feet and shine brightly with silvery, reflected light.

Narratively, the wings are simply a technological affectation that gives any character with the power of Potential flight a dramatic gimmick. Mechanically, the Deployable Airfoils provide such a character with two additional Potential hand cards per game session, but these cards may only be used for flight — either narratively or in a play.

JUSTICAR'S SASH OF RANK AND OFFICE

In the early clocks of the Convocation, before the advent of the Constable Patrol Service, the Alliance Knights were frequently called upon to enforce local criminal law and adjudicate petty legal disputes. Those Knights assigned



the role of justicar wore baroque uniform sashes with an unfortunate level of embroidered details and colorful frilly bits.

Only two of these Justicar sashes survive in the present clock, however. One ragged and threadbare example is a prized artifact in the Museum of Guild History in Highstone. The second — remarkably well-preserved and still very gaudy — remains in active use, usually by a Knight serving as a commander in the Patrol Service. Though expert technicians have verified there are no arcaneoelectrical components and only remnant Potential auras, the sash still grants the wearer an interesting and significant ability.

Narratively, when a Knight wears the Sash of Office, anyone with whom he makes eye contact is compelled to recognize the force of justice he represents and becomes intimidated and deferential. Mechanically, the Sash prevents Jacks from being crowned by the wearer's opposition.

LEOBRANTO'S SKELETON KEY

Leobranto, ninth Duke of Towersall Estate in the Kingdom of Loft, had an obsession for discovering secrets. Sometimes it meant bribing, trading, extorting — or worse — for information. Often, it meant opening locks. His Skeleton Key is the manifestation of a lifetime's work at prying into dark and hidden things.

The Key is a brass rod, as long as a man's forearm, covered in various protrusions, vanes, dials, wheels, hooks, and extensions, and marked with the disturbing symbol of a face with open mouth and empty eye sockets. Some of the protrusions are smaller than can be seen with the naked eye and correspondingly delicate. The device runs on arc, but rather than being powered by a spark bottle, a small crank handle at one end generates the electricity required to operate it with only a few quick turns.

When powered up and pressed into any lock, a forest of manipulator arms extends from the rod and into the tumblers. With enough patience and cranks of the handle, the Skeleton Key will open any lock. The Key's manipulators are long and jointed enough that, with some practice, even locked windows, sliding doors and hidden catches can be opened.

Leobranto had a reputation for stopping at nothing to collect the secrets he desired,

and there are some disturbing rumors about the Skeleton Key. Some believe that the Relic's finer manipulators are small enough to actually reach inside a person's head and unlock the secrets he keeps only there. Accordingly, some say that the most secure lock Duke Leobranto ever opened was the one on a man's thoughts.

Narratively, Leobranto's Key can open any locked or sealed door, panel or hatch almost as quickly as a proper key. As long as it can be touched to the target's skull, the key can also be used by a Rain adept to enhance any powers she might have to read or manipulate the thoughts of others. Mechanically, it provides a 1-card cache for any play involving physical intrusion or Potential mind reading and mental control. The cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

THE MASTERS' CRANK-POWERED SCHEMATIC GENERATOR

This strange device is one of the most sophisticated arcaneoelectrical artifacts ever recovered from a Masters' cache. An alloy plate the size and thickness of a large book, the object is featureless but for a central socket and a mounting bracket for a simple hand crank. When the crank is inserted into the socket and turned by a Potential adept, the Schematic unfolds like a right-angled metal flower into a large, flat, thin sheet of metal and displays an archaic-looking but accurate design schematic for the closest arcaneoelectrical device. When the user stops turning the crank, the object quickly folds back up into its inert, block-like form.

Narratively, the Schematic Generator can be used to help understand the purpose and function of even the strangest arcaneoelectrical device or Masters' artifact. The object is power hungry, however, and keeping it open long enough to grasp essential function drains the user of their entire Potential hand. Mechanically, the Generator allows the player to crown any face card bid in a play involving use of the scanned device.

PYM'S LAST INDUCTION BOARD

There was once a sizable squadron of induction gliders operating in the fleet, which were used for scouting missions, stealth insertions, fast courier runs and other hazardous duties. One by one, however, the dangerous missions on which they





were sent ended with the destruction or loss of all but one of these fantastic machines. Now, only a single flyer remains — the Last Induction Board.

A narrow, streamlined oval with various hand and foot holds and a pair of small, collapsible airfoils, the board is a highly maneuverable, high speed, one-Kin flying sled that can outperform and outpace any other aircraft in the skies. Frighteningly fast and agile as a mumble bird, the board is powered by its own induction filaments and integrated circuit box. A complex array of levers and pedals give the pilot fine power modulation and nimble flight control.

The induction boards were originally discovered together in a Masters' cache deep in the Frontier, but since that discovery all efforts to salvage or replicate additional machines have failed. Pym, a Wind-powered Knight and current custodian of the Last Board, is considered one of the best, and definitely craziest, pilots in the Guild.

Narratively, this Relic gives the user assisted flight. Mechanically, the board grants a 2-card innate cache that can be used anytime agile or fast flight is applicable to the play. The cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

RF#88 MALLEABLE SHIMMER CIRCUIT

Discovered in the exceptionally productive salvage operations at Rubble Field #88, the Malleable Shimmer Circuit is a remarkable artifact with a variety of useful properties, especially applicable to survival and espionage situations. Apparently made of the same material as the I ea. Electric Rope, the Circuit consists of lightweight webbing or netting that can expand from a handkerchief-sized object into a square, circle, ball, cube, or other simple geometric shape 10 feet across, and rigidly hold that form. It can be as pliable as a blanket or as rigid as



a metal box, with open mesh or solid, waterproof walls. It can generate heat, serving as a welcome shelter in the Coldway, and even fade or “shimmer” into a kind vagueness approximating invisibility. The Circuit can provide safe cover from small arms fire and some users have even worn it as effective armor.

The circuit must be powered by a spark bottle, with operation times dependent on the functions being used and the capacity of the bottle. Narratively, the Circuit is a versatile tool that can be used in a wide variety of essential applications. Mechanically, it provides a 2-card innate cache that can be used whenever a property of the device can be applied in the encounter. The cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

RIGHTLY'S FACT-FILLED SCHOLAR'S TOME

This ancient, dog-eared book is a remarkable artifact. Printed in some kind of arcanoelectrical ink, the book responds to a powerful Rain Potential user by rewording its contents to match the text of any of a vast library of fact-filled volumes — the actual current location of which is unknown. The book somehow senses the current academic need of the user and unerringly provides access to a book containing relevant information on the subject in question. The complexity, usefulness or comprehensibility of this book is left to the determination of the moderator.

Narratively, the Tome provides specific facts about obscure topics as long as said facts might reasonably be found in a book. To use the book, the player must discard a face card from his Potential hand. Mechanically, the Tome provides a 2-card innate cache when obscure facts are relevant to a play. This cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

UNCLE FENIGG'S FARLOOK LONG GUN

Uncle Fenigg's Farlook is said to have once belonged to Captain Enos Fenigg of Sand Isle. Records show Fenigg established the Knights' first sniper cadre and his *MANUAL OF LONG GUNS* is still required reading for novices. The weapon looks like an antique and is gaudy with gold filigree, intricate carvings and polished metal. It is almost eight feet

long and weighs close to thirty pounds. A large lumpy tube runs the length of the barrel, with adjusting knobs, movable lenses of various sizes and colors, a number of static charging cranks protruding from its curved surface and a large, silk-padded eyepiece at the stock end.

Narratively, the various lenses, levers and charging cranks allow the eyeglass' user to see through cloud, smoke and even absolute darkness. Mechanically, the weapon provides a player a 1-card innate cache he can use when long range or extreme accuracy are the primary circumstances. This cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

VENABLE JAMES'S TRICK SHOT SHORT GUN

Venable James was a student at the Explorer Knights' Academy and was drummed out of the Guild in the middle of his apprentice cycle. These two facts are true. How he became the mythical perpetrator of every student's mischievous desires is less certain. However it came to pass, Venable is blamed for a long list of apocryphal Academy shenanigans.

One of the most well-known involves marksmanship training, a nest full of bird eggs, a chamber pot, the high captain's personal secretary and the shouted phrase, “Look out below!” However the details of the event are portrayed — and there are many versions, including a 100-verse slant rhyme poem — there are two things that are constants in all the stories. The first is that this was the event that finally got Venable drummed out of the Academy, and second, the pistol he used was a powerful Relic.

Whether the pistol was a part of the Academy armory inventory or Venable brought it with him when he enrolled is lost to history. The gun itself is not. An antique weapon, the Short Gun is a cumbersome revolver with a long barrel and a series of “aim calibrators,” “trim adjusters” and “target acquisition screws” on the frame, barrel and grips.

Narratively, the Venable Short Gun allows the user to literally shoot around corners. Mechanically, the pistol provides a 1-card innate cache that can be used whenever particularly difficult shots are part of the play. This cache replenishes at the start of every game session.



SKYSHIPS

Skyships are the airborne sailing vessels that allow the Kin to travel between skylands and to delve into the Dark in search of arcanelectrical treasure. There are countless designs, from skiffs, cutters and barges, to galleys, frigates and great men of war, but they all share a common element in their construction: the induction hull.

INDUCTION HULLS

Shipwrights integrate networks of filament arrays, arcanelectrical capacitors and discharge collectors within the structure of skyship hulls. When interfaced with a circuit box, the network allows the hull to catch the arcane updrafts of the Wind, generating both elemental buoyancy and electrical arc. The buoyancy is manipulated to float, raise and lower the hull, and excess arc is siphoned off to power ship systems and charge spark bottles wired into the onboard grid.

Most skyship hulls are wood to reduce weight — though some feature metal frames, or even ironclad hulls — and are aerodynamic to increase speed. Most also have paired, skid-like keels that allow them to set down on open ground when proper docking facilities are unavailable.

In battle, the greatest threat to any skyship is the destruction or incapacitation of its circuit box. A dismasted ship may not be able to make headway or maneuver, but as long as its induction hull remains active it will remain aloft. If for any reason the induction hull fails, the ship becomes just another falling object. If the hull cannot be reactivated or begins to tumble, it is only a matter of time before it crashes spectacularly onto a downwind skyland or is lost forever in the deepest Dark.

FIXTURES AND SYSTEMS

The hulls of skyships, though typically sleek designs to reduce air resistance, are not limited by the engineering demands required of waterborne ships. Accordingly, they feature many elements that would be impossible to integrate into a watertight vessel.

Instead of a single keel, most boats have large, reinforced paired keels that not only serve as the vessel's spine, but as robust skids on which the boat can land and which provide a sturdy base when on level ground. Most hulls are raised between the keels so that sailors can access the bottom of the ship for repairs, weapons maintenance and loading and offloading cargo and crew through keel gates and hull ports.

Most vessels of any size have at least one keel gate — a large port in the underside of the hull through which cargo can be loaded, ships' boats can be launched and recovered, soldiers can sortie and weapons (usually downward-pointing cannon and various classes of bombs) can be deployed. Most keel gates have safety rails along their perimeters and hatches to keep out the weather, birds, boarders and other uninvited guests. Most also have at least one overhead gantry supporting a manual block and tackle, or even dynamo-driven cranes. Larger ships — especially big freighters and men of war — can have up to four keel gates.

Most ships also have a number of hull ports — small hatches that can be used for a variety of purposes. They provide access to external parts of the ship and useful look-out posts while in flight, and they allow convenient — or

even clandestine — entrance and egress when on the ground. They are tactical sniper and grenadier perches during battle, and larger ports can provide access for “under-guns” or other downward-aiming heavy weapons.

Observation cupolas are bulbous, dome-like observatories usually found on either side of the bows, between the keels and along the freeboards of larger vessels, and they are usually large enough to accommodate a number of occupants. They are typically made of elemental glass panels mounted in baroque metal frames, and provide excellent vantage for passengers, scientists and battle officers.

Most skyships of any size — especially fighting ships — have some form of engineering or circuit chamber: a heavily-armored enclosure that protects the ship’s circuit box and other critical components from all but the worst battle damage. After all, even a ravaged induction hull can keep a ship in the air if its circuit box is still functioning. Engineering chambers are usually cramped, spherical bunkers constructed of metal bulkheads, reinforced doors and Masters’

alloy stanchions. They are uniformly hot and stuffy, choked with delicate equipment and snaking conduits. They are variably lit by actinic lamps and showers of sparks, and they inevitably stink of sweat, ozone and hot insulation.

Induction hulls typically generate more arc than a ship requires, and this excess is usually siphoned off into a bottle bank — a reservoir of large spark bottles integrated into the vessel’s infrastructure. Heavy cables lead around the ship to sockets and couplings, delivering power where needed. Accordingly, arc is abundant and readily available aboard most skyships. Electric lamps, winches, capstans, cranes, heaters, stoves and other useful devices are therefore relatively common features of shipboard life.

Ships with closed or multiple decks are usually equipped with networks of speaking tubes or arc-powered audiographs that allow crew to communicate from deck to deck and around the ship. This system is essential for passing orders between the helm and the engineering chamber, and for coordinating ship maneuvers during battle.



BROADSIDES

THREE SISTERS was in trouble. Holed in half a dozen places, her induction hull sparked and popped with free arc. Smoke boiled from every opening, including the jammed keel gate as the surviving, panicking crew struggled to get their lone boat over the side. The skyship was already falling out of formation with the other merchantmen when another pirate torpedo burst from the mist and exploded in her rigging.

Aboard the *EGS STALWART* the ranking Knight bawled her orders: "Haul in the mains, full down on forward pitch! Boats away! Engineer, stand by to cut power, we're going down but quick! Sergeant Merio, take your crew and the other boats to pick up survivors from the *SISTERS*. Watch yourself — she'll be on fire soon enough.

"Now, let's drop that bastard in the fog bank..."

Skyships also have relatively sophisticated cistern and plumbing systems, at least relative to typical Kin buildings. Most sailors are therefore an uncommonly clean and sanitary bunch. After all, everyone is downwind of somebody, and no one wants a sudden rain of sewage to ruin his clock.

SAIL PLANS

Large canvas sails rigged on laterally mounted masts and angled spars catch the mundane drafts of the Wind, much like the wings of a soaring bird. Crews skillfully manipulate these sails and use the resulting forces to drive and maneuver their ships across the rising air. Most of a skyship's canvas — the main wings — provide forward motion, but there are also piloting sails that allow a good crew to maneuver their vessel with acrobatic grace. Though design, number and specific rigging plans vary widely, most Kin skyships use versions of the following sails:

Mainsails — Also called wing sails or just wings, these are a ship's largest and most essential sails. They provide most of the motive force and

help crews control the pitch, yaw and roll of their vessels. These sails are generally long and triangular, with wide bases and pointed tips. They are bent on spars mounted laterally at dihedral angles, like the wings of a hawk. They are set, furled and trimmed by complicated systems of lines and blocks that lead inboard. Small vessels have only a single pair of mains: port and starboard, but larger vessels can have as many as eight — four per side. Though it is a rough and graceless ride, a skyship can be sailed with only wings if need be.

Yaw Jibs and Mizzens — Set vertically along the mid decks or keels of most ships, these blade-like sails are essential to quick and accurate maneuvering, and therefore critical to bringing weapons to bear in battle. "Underhull" yaw sail spars can be unshipped or withdrawn into the hull when the vessel is required to land on the ground. Their spars are essential supports for mainmast stays.

Roll Vanes — Roll sails look like smaller versions of main sails but have subtler controls and can be rigged in various sizes and locations along the length of a ship to better balance and maneuver it. They are essential controls for the angle of hull roll, and so are critical during actions and for aiming the guns.

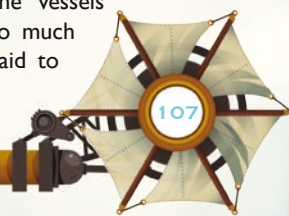
Pitch Vanes — Also known as pitch sails, vanes can be set horizontally at the bow or stern or both depending upon the wind and whether the ship is rising, descending or "sailing even." These smaller sails allow the crew to control the fore and aft angle at which a ship rides. Of all sails types, these are least essential to the control of a vessel.

Some vessels are propelled by large, dynamo powered air screws. Such designs are expensive, slow and useless in strong winds, but valuable in applications where maneuverability is the primary consideration. Most dirigibles depend on air screws — another reason the gas-buoyed vessels are slow and unreliable.

MANEUVERS

There are a number of standard orders and associated maneuvers that describe skyship flight and are essential to vessel operations.

Drop — Waterborne vessels sink when damaged too much to float. Skyships are said to



drop when their induction hulls fail due to malfunction or damage.

Fall — Fall is the controlled decrease in output from an induction hull to reduce its altitude. When this is done slowly, most often in a slow spiral, it is called shedding or sinking.

Hawking — If falling is done precipitously, either as a combat or evasive maneuver, or to reach a downwind destination as fast as gravity allows, it is called hawking or stooping. This barely-controlled descent is always dangerous, as it strains the vessel and crew alike and downwind obstacles are difficult to avoid while stooping.

Rise — Rise is the increase in output from a ship's induction hull to increase its altitude and can be done slowly or aggressively. When this is done slowly, usually with a gentle spiral it is called climbing. When it is done precipitously — usually in battle maneuvers or emergency situations — it is called jumping.

Slip — Slipping is a technique that can be used to move an induction hull through the air without the use of sails. Accordingly, it can be valuable in situations when a ship is caught in unexpected calms, has to make a sudden maneuver, or has lost its spars and sails. Slipping is essentially allowing one part of a ship to drop faster than another part, which drives the ship in the direction of the drop, but at the cost of altitude. The maneuver requires the careful coordination of the helmsman and circuit box engineer and, if sustained, puts considerable strain on the induction system and risks burning it out.

Slipping is slow, requires regaining lost altitude and is usually done only in vital maneuvers or as a last recourse.

Tack — Tacking is any change in the horizontal course of a ship and is accomplished by a combination of steering and yaw sail trim. It is essential to maintaining courses, navigating crowded skies and fighting ship battles.

Veer — Veering is any maneuver that takes the ship's keels out of line with the hull's horizontal motion. Veering is used in battle to strafe targets while continuing to move. It can also be used to maintain speed in acrobatic flight, navigate in crowded airspace and to take strain off damaged or weak rigging. The use of slip is required in veering actions.

WIND SHADOWS

Skyships are beautiful, romantic, powerful symbols of Kin culture, exemplifying the sophistication of their own engineering as well as its synergy with the science of the Masters. However, they are not omnipotent machines as they are unable to reach all locations, even within the Kingdoms in the Light. Skyships depend on the free flow of Wind beneath their hulls not only for their arcane lift, but for their motive and maneuvering power. As a result, skyship crews must take care to avoid the Wind shadows that exist above all but the smallest skylands.

Skylands block the flow of Wind, making it impossible for skyships to fly near an island's up-country surface. The larger the island, the larger and emptier the Wind shadow and the higher it extends. Consequently, skyships must fly leagues above the largest islands to safely navigate over them. Accordingly, travel, trade and exploration of all but the smallest island interiors must take place on the surface — by spark train, lorry, wagon, horse or foot.

AIRPOWER

Despite their limitations over larger islands, skyships remain the dominant force in warfare throughout the realms. Most are armed with powder or arc cannons, and even unarmed ships can drop munitions or simple stones from high above, making them effective weapons platforms. Most Kin live along the windward edges of their skylands, well within attack range, and warships are the most formidable tools of war in the open sky.

RUNNING DARK

In the darkness of the Twilight Frontier, ship-to-ship combat depends on sighting the enemy and tracking its position well enough to target weapons — even at short ranges. Sighting depends on well-drilled lookouts using spotting devices, listening apparatus and even various Potential abilities to acquire and stalk enemy ships. Slow speeds, quiet seamanship, and limited visibility turn such battles into blind games of hull-lizard-and-arc-rat, punctuated by the sudden explosions of broadsides and muzzle rockets.

Sighting — This is the art and science of acquiring viable target trajectories for a ship's heavy weapons crews. It demands sharp



lookouts, arcanoelectrical gadgetry, continuous trigonometric calculations, quiet communications and well-trained gun crews.

Running Dark — This activity is the difficult, tension-filled practice of rigging and sailing a battle-ready ship with no lights, minimal sound and a silent crew, in hopes of avoiding detection by enemy lookouts.

Eluding — This is the challenging tactic of evading sighting contact with an enemy vessel to prevent the crew from making effective use of their weapons. Eluding requires well-trained crews working in silent harmony to shed contact and slip away into the surrounding shadows.

SHIP CLASSES

There are as many kinds of ships in the skies of the realms as there are sailors to sail them. Tiny skiffs, luxurious pleasure yachts, fat coastal traders, tugs, tramps, massive barges, clipper ships and warships of every class; given enough induction, anything can be made to fly. The commercial fleets of the kingdoms are as diverse as their needs and the only thing they have in common is their lack of uniformity.

PRIVATE VESSELS

Skiffs — Skiffs are the smallest sky boats that can support a working induction hull and include anything less than 30 feet in length. Because their size so limits crew and cargo capacity, and because the circuit boxes needed to keep them in the air are so expensive, skiffs are relatively rare. Fast and maneuverable, skiffs are fun to fly and can usually travel farther upcountry before losing lift than any other skyships. Skiffs can hold up to 10 passengers or carry half a ton of gear and cargo.

Barges — Barges are large, ponderous platforms typically used for carrying heavy, bulky cargoes over relatively short distances. They can be of just about any size a shipyard is able to produce and can hold hundreds of passengers and tons of cargo. Barges are also used as temporary — or in the case of the flying city of Nomad, permanent — housing, staging platforms, or bases of operation for a variety of purposes. Barges are very slow and are usually towed by tugs driven by large air screws.

Freighters — Freighters vary more widely in size and design than any other class of ship in the skies. Small, sleek and fast, or large, heavy

EGS SHIP NAMES

The Explorers' Guild has a longstanding tradition of naming its ships after the admirable virtues to which tradition holds its Knights. With the prefix EGS — for Explorer Guild Ship — the names are intended to stir their crews to noble aspirations.

DOMINANT

ENDURANCE

GALLANT

INDOMITABLE

INQUISITIVE

READY

RELIABLE

SACRED

SPIRITED

UNSTOPPABLE

VALIANT

and loaded with tons of cargo, as merchant vessels, they always represent compromises between speed, cargo capacity, crew size and operational costs. Coastal and near-island freighters are usually no more than 80 feet long with cargo capacity of 20 tons and 15 crew members. Freighters that range across the realms can be over 180 feet long with 60 crew and capacity for 100 tons of cargo.

Though most private and commercial ships have some complement of small arms and cannon to deter pirates, compared to true navy vessels these weapons are usually too few and too poorly crewed to be substantial threats.

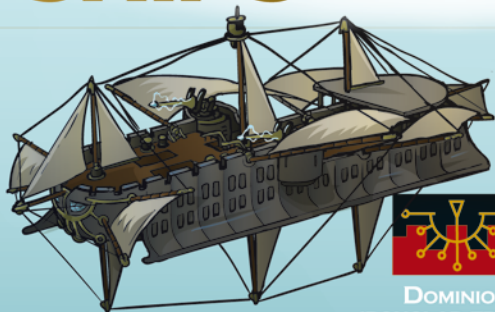
NAVAL VESSELS

The kingdoms' navies, and the Explorers' Guild specifically, are more deliberate in the design and intent of the ships they commission and most belong to one of a number of specific classes.

Launches — Also called a pinnace, a launch is a general-use open boat between 30 and 40 feet in length and can hold a maximum of 20 tightly packed crew and passengers. Launches are the



SHIPS OF THE REALMS



DOMINION
IRONCLAD FRIGATE
DEFIANCE



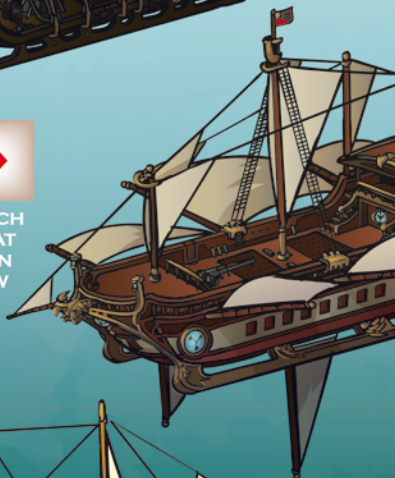
CLOUD
DIRIGIBLE
BARGE
UPCOUNTRY
LADY



PROTECTORATE CUTTER
WIND EAGLE



SKYREACH
GUNBOAT
SUDDEN
ARROW



EXPLORERS' GUILD



WARSHIP
EGS DOMINION



PATROLCRAFT
EARNEST PREDATOR



FREIGHTER
NEEDS BEARER



PIRATE CORVETTE
HARSH MISTRESS



BRIGHT FLAGSHIP
LIGHT OF THE FAITHFUL



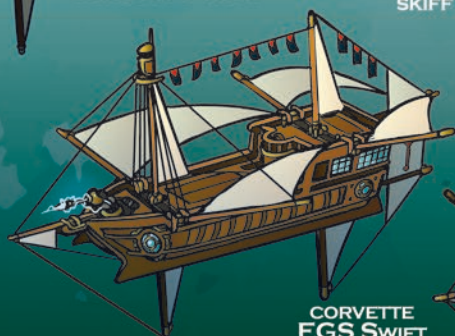
ROYAL TRADING
COMPANY FREIGHTER
WINGS OF PROFIT



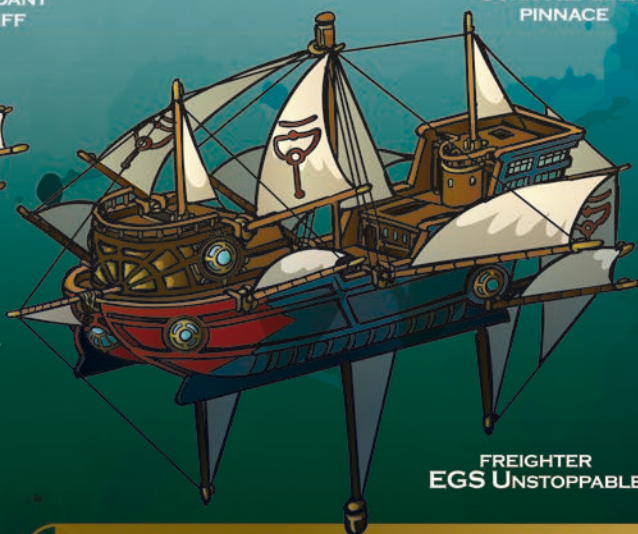
VERDANT
SKIFF



SOAR REPUBLIC
PINNACLE



CORVETTE
EGS SWIFT



FREIGHTER
EGS UNSTOPPABLE



CAPTAIN'S
LAUNCH



CHILDREN OF THE DARK



DREADNOUGHT
DEAD MAKER

workhorses of any fleet and the smallest boats a navy typically puts in the air. Most ships above corvette class carry at least one as a tender, and they are typically used to ferry personnel, carry scouting or boarding parties, or as lifeboats. Launches are often integrated into the keels of larger ships where they can be readily boarded from within the bigger vessel and rapidly deployed as lifeboats or for combat sorties. Waypoint crews can live aboard them for turns at a time when maintaining return courses for exploratory vessels. Launches are commonplace in both national and Guild fleets.

Gunboats — Gunboats are undecked vessels that range from 40 to 50 feet, with heavily reinforced hulls and extra induction filaments to help support the weight and recoil of their heavy weapons. They are manned by a crew of up to 20 sailors and gunners and are typically armed with one or two large powder or arc cannon, or half a dozen smaller cannon, carronades and swivel guns. They can also be fitted with artillery and mortars, or stocked with simple bombs and grenades that can be dropped on targets from above. Gunboats are maneuverable and quick but have only limited sailing range due to their lack of stores, facilities and sophisticated navigational equipment.

Cutters — Cutters are the smallest of the proper naval ships. They range between 70 and 90 feet long and have two decks. They are typically built for speed but their aerodynamic designs mean they have limited cargo capacity. Naval cutters are armed, but seldom heavily, and then only for defense. Cutters are the fastest ships in any fleet and used as couriers, critical personnel transports, heavy scouts and long-range exploration vessels. As such, their crews are usually small, ranging between 15 and 25 liegemen.

Corvettes — Corvettes are small, fast, heavily armed fighting ships that range between 80 and 120 feet in length. They typically have large crews of up to 150 sailors and soldiers and a battery of 20 to 30 well-served cannons. Because of their small size and large crews, they are short-range vessels that cannot be away from port for more than a turn without the support of supply ships.

Frigates — Frigates are the deadliest compromise between speed and armament, and the backbone of every navy in the realms. Though they vary in

FLYING COLORS

Lacking any reliable form of long distance communication, the skyships of the kingdoms fly flags, pennants, ensigns and banners that communicate all manner of information to each other — nationality, status, condition, intention, navigational restrictions and various other signal essentials. Since vessels can be seen and approached from any angle, it is vital that such flags be visible from any approach — fore, aft, port and starboard, above the deck and below the hull. Accordingly, most vessels have upwind and downwind yards on which they fly their various flags, allowing them to be read from all possible angles.

When targeting a specific vessel, or in dimmer conditions, signal officers use bright arc lamps to communicate, using one of several standard flashing codes or one of the many secret — and frequently changed — codes of the trade houses, national navies, or the Guild fleet.

size and crew compliment, they are typically 100 to 150 feet long, manned by up to 220 liegemen and armed with a devastating array of ship's guns, mortars, bomb-throwers and heavier, rarer weapons such as arc cannons and torpedo kites.

Warships — Warships are massive vessels of at least 200 feet, with multiple gun decks mounting as many as 100 cannon or other heavy weapons. With crews in excess of 400 Kin, these vessels are slow but exceedingly powerful machines of war that serve as the flagships of their respective navies.

Ironclads — Ironclads are increasingly common frigate-class warships with hulls built from metal rather than wood. Very heavy, and therefore requiring excessive induction capacity and circuit box integration, ironclads are expensive but formidable weapons. They are heavily armored, extremely durable and typically armed with exotic Masters' weaponry.





NPCs, GROUPS AND FACTIONS

SIGNIFICANT PERSONALITIES

CAPTAIN “GRIMSTONE” DOE

As commander of the Explorer Knights' 4th Fleet, Captain Abram Doe is one of the most well-known members of the Guild. With critical and never-ending responsibilities, he is also one of the hardest working. Doe is an exceptionally serious man and, despite his heritage, a potent Ore user — the combination of which earned him his longstanding moniker early in his time at the Academy.

Doe is a grim giant, massive for a Kin — especially one of Dimmish ancestry. Doe was a very young child when the capital skyland of Gray sank into the Frontier, and it is clear the event affected his personality and motivations deeply. His hard-nosed, stern demeanor is as constant as the Wind and his no-nonsense approach to his duties only adds to his intimidating reputation. He demands competence in others and brings out the best in his men, who admire him as a uniquely able commander.

Doe's renown began at the Academy, where his size and ancestry made him an early target for other novices looking to prove themselves. After one particularly decisive confrontation, however, no one challenged him again. His fame grew during his graduation cruise when, in a daring tactic, he dropped his own skyship onto a Child man-of-war, saving his crew and taking the enemy vessel. Doe's

exemplary service continued with more unorthodox tactics in the *Battle of the Narrows* and *The Downstone Incident* and by enduring *The Hunt* — in which he survived, stranded alone and stalked for a full turn by a Child patrol.

If there is one thing about Doe's service that causes concern among the Council of Captains, it is his vocal insistence that the Third Incursion is already underway and that the kingdoms must mobilize for war. He is fanatically certain of it, and at every opportunity presses passionately for marshalling the navies of the realms. More than tactical instinct, Doe has a secret reason for believing the Incursion is imminent.

During the famous Hunt episode, he encountered a Child warrior who called herself Leader of Killers. Forced to fight together against wild beasts and a massive Masters' automaton, they established a grudging mutual respect, stopped trying to kill each other, and afterwards went their separate, wary ways. During their time together he gained insight into the Children and clarity about their intentions. The experience convinced Doe that a strong defense and earnest diplomacy are the best hope for peace with the Children of the Dark. The encounter also left him with frequent and uncharacteristic clockdreams about the formidable Child woman.

Doe has the pale, white-haired features of the Torrent, but his size and Ore abilities indicate there is strong Stone heritage in his family line. Though not as young as he once was, Doe remains physically fit and intimidating. He proudly wears the traditional embossed leathers of his



people and, in addition to his Knights' blade, wears an ornate Masters' alloy gauntlet known as *Fist of the Father* — a very old Relic that dramatically enhances his already potent Ore Potential.

Characteristics — Doe is stern and quiet and can be exceptionally intimidating. He socializes only as much as his rank and status demands. He is a skilled but unorthodox tactician, and a well-respected commander who has earned the loyalty of his men.

Potential — Doe is a powerful Ore user and the *Fist* allows him to always crown whenever he uses Potential.

Caches — When playing Captain Doe, the moderator can use caches in tactical situations or when his intimidating demeanor is relevant to the circumstances.

CAPTAIN TRUK

Captain Phineas Able Truk was once a successful and well-respected sky captain and navigator. Not only did he discover the vast Masters' repository that would eventually become known as the *Lost Fortress*, but in his time at High with the Second Gauge Engineers he perfected the first angular calibration spool, doubling the accuracy of all modern sphereometers. Truk survived the mysterious destruction of the High compound, but not without suffering severe injuries and losing his right leg.

No longer fit for shipboard service, Truk took a post at the Explorer Knights' Academy as a navigational theory and engineering instructor. As it turned out, the former sky captain had a natural talent for the classroom that quickly earned him the respect of his fellow professors and the devotion of his students. For eight cycles now, Truk has trained some of the finest navigators in the Guild fleet and continued to refine various methods and tools.

Truk is intelligent and quick-witted, though he has begun to ramble some in his conversations and lectures. He has an endless supply of stories about past adventures with which he entralls the younger students. He is generous with his knowledge, his workshop and, perhaps most notably, his time. The captain lost his young wife and daughter in childbirth long ago and seems to have made his students his replacement family.

Over the past two cycles, Truk has become increasingly obsessed with an obscure interpretation

of the *Prophecy of the Grand Amplifier* and a lost Relic called the *Eye of the Navigator*. He believes the Eye can be used to find places that are unmarked by navigational lodestones and has become convinced — obsessed, really — that if the Eye could be found, so could the Amplifier. Despite the deference in which he is held by his colleagues, this obsession is beginning to cost Truk his credibility and alienate him from his peers.

Regardless of his wrinkled face, gray hair and failing hearing, Truk remains bright-eyed and intense. Though his once-athletic form has grown gaunt, Truk remains unbowed and his ready smile is as engaging as ever. His dress is old-fashioned and he frequently wears a boat cloak, even in fair weather. Truk's artificial leg is a custom design operated through a control ring, but it has never really worked right, and he is constantly tinkering with, and simultaneously complaining about, the metal limb.

Characteristics — Truk is likely the best navigator in the Guild and has an encyclopedic knowledge of the drifting geography of the realms. He is a practical, more than imaginative, engineer, and a capable, though out of practice, sailor. He is a gifted teacher and mentor.

Potential — The captain is an Ore adept of only moderate skill.

Caches — When playing Captain Truk, the moderator may use caches when the circumstances deal with navigation, geography or research into Relics such as the *Eye of the Navigator* or the *Grand Amplifier*.

THE DREAD PIRATE MARGIT

The Dread Pirate Margit is a legend — literally — and the legend claims she is a vicious, cutthroat sky bandit who burned down her own village as a youngster and fled with all its valuables. The stories tell of a ruthless woman raiding and pillaging up and down the Vaultish frontier, stealing, burning and killing her way from skyland to skyland. The Parliament's mercenaries have been unable to stop her and the recently arrived 5th Fleet has yet to chase her to ground. All the while she reaps more destruction across the country and her dread reputation grows.

The truth is a lot less fanciful and much more desperate. Margit was once a simple bookkeeper with a clever mind and a good heart.

When her settlement was raided by the very mercenaries the Vaultish parliament pay to serve as the country's navy, she gathered the survivors together and took to the sky in an old freighter. Following her heart and her head for logistics, she recruited other refugees of similar attacks for purposes of mutual protection — adding numbers, expertise and ships to her growing fleet.

Within half a cycle, Margit was carrying the fight to the mercenaries, taking ships, raiding depots and ransoming prisoners for money and supplies. Camouflaged behind her first mate — a humongous woman both in personality and bulk — she runs the operation with the same precision and attention to detail with which she once kept her books. Her people are devoted and loyally keep her secret while propagating the myth that surrounds her — effective armor against her many foes.

Margit's band operates out of a remote sky-land on the shoulder of the Twilight Frontier. Her secret harbor is a hidden, natural cavern that serves both as shelter in the cold realm and protection from those who hunt her.

Margit is a slim, mousey woman who is unassuming until one meets her gaze and sees the intensity in her eyes. She is of indeterminate, mixed heritage and would easily blend into any crowd. Though soft spoken, her word carries absolute authority among her crew of refugees.

Characteristics — Margit is a skilled logician and an increasingly skilled naval tactician. She is a natural leader who is very good at listening to sound advice from her advisors and who cares deeply about her charges.

Potential — Margit has above average Rain Potential that seems to manifest most in putting those around her at ease.

Caches — When playing Margit, the moderator may use caches whenever a play involves leadership, protecting her people or desperate naval tactics.

GRAND MARSHAL HALE

Lord Colin Hale is the grand marshal of the Fortress Dominion, which implies all that needs to be known about the man. As he holds the highest rank in a military oligarchy, it is not surprising that he is always more the warrior than his peers. He is committed

and decisive, and both savvy and brave enough to rise to the top in a culture that prizes martial prowess and still recognizes dueling as a legitimate way to settle personal differences.

Lord Hale was born to privilege, but like all Raid aristocrats he had to prove his military mettle. Attending the prestigious Dominion Institute of War and graduating at the top of his class set Hale on just that course. Serving with distinction as a gunnery officer, not only did he win commendations at the battles of *Downwind Crossing* and *Fort Alabaster*, but his cannons held the line at the *Black Reach Invasion* despite horrendous losses, likely saving a thousand civilian lives and preventing the Children from taking the outpost.

Once assigned to the Aerie, his breeding, record and natural political savvy propelled him quickly up the ranks to base commander. From there he was soon promoted to the Grand Marshal's personal staff, and when the old man died three cycles ago during the *Frontier Campaign*, it was perhaps inevitable that Hale was chosen by the ranking Cadre officers to serve as the new leader of the Dominion.

Grand Marshal Hale is the sort of military leader who believes that the best defense is to make sure that the enemy is unable to wage war, so his strategies have put the Dominion in a state of aggressive offense that contrasts sharply with the policies of most of the other Kingdoms in the Light. Hale also believes that the Guild is an outdated entity and that the kingdoms would be better off dedicating the resources with which they support it to a unified assault on the Dark, aimed at eliminating the threat it represents once and for all.

Grand Marshal Hale's only son was killed in the very same action that took the life of the previous marshal, and his death has only served to harden Hale's hatred for the Children and his resolve to destroy them. His wife, whom he dearly loves in his own stern way, was so stricken by the loss of their only child that she has become despondent and reclusive.

Hale is a thick-bodied man with close-cropped red hair and a traditional beard. He is formal and curt in most interactions, and he seldom smiles since the death of his son. He spends all his waking hours attending to matters of state or military duties and is doing all he can to bring his wrath to bear on the Children of the Dark.



Characteristics — Hale is a battle-hardened officer who has become a capable and uniquely practical politician. He is exceptionally knowledgeable about military strategy, tactics and history, and he is an exemplary leader under fire. He is quiet and impatient in social situations, preferring instead to be attending to his duties.

Potential — Hale has no notable Potential and secretly harbors jealousy for those who do. Some suspect it is one of the reasons he so dislikes the Guild.

Caches — When playing Marshal Hale, the moderator may use caches when the circumstances involve authority, leadership or military strategy and action.

HIGH CAPTAIN ELDAN FEY

High Captain Fey is arguably the most powerful man in the kingdoms, since the entire cadre of Explorer Knights and the largest navy in the realms follow his orders. He is a hero of great renown, having fought at both the *Siege of Highland Gate* and the *Battle of Fort Alabaster* — where he lost his left arm. Tales are told across the realms of his military genius and the prowess with which he wields Arc. He is more respected by the sky captains of the Guild than any commander in recent memory, and even most reigning kings, princes, senators and lord governors of the realms grudgingly defer to him.

It is all the more surprising, therefore, that in person he is not only unassuming, but could easily be mistaken for an Academy librarian. Short and balding with heavy jowls, Fey is far from the imposing image of the blood-soaked, Arc-wielding warrior conjured by his reputation. His steely blue eyes tell another story, however, and he has been known to leave novices shaking in their boots after simply meeting their eyes.

Fey is calm and soft-spoken, and is known for deliberate consideration but decisive action. The high captain is fatherly and patient in most of his interactions and has not raised his voice since leaving the deck of his skyship to take over his current post. He always seems to know what is going on around him — in battle or in debate — and can be single-minded when circumstances merit. He is a superior tactician by virtue of long study rather than natural ability, and his battle plan for the *Assault of Red Banner Wells* led to

victory, even though he was over a hundred leagues away when it was fought.

Fey is of mixed descent — his father was Verdani but his mother was Loftian. What's left of his once-black hair turned gray long ago and his face is a busy map of both worry and laugh lines. Fey is well on his way from stout to portly and dresses in simple sailor's clothing, preferring officers' jackets and tall boots. The captain carries the Sovereign Sword, the original Knights' blade, everywhere he goes and wears his 14 badges of rank in the traditional forearm stripe.

Characteristics — Fey is exceptionally well-read, well-trained and broadly experienced. He is an expert in a wide range of skills with particular knowledge of tactics, leadership, geography, politics and history. He can carry on thoughtful discussions in most academic fields and, though quiet by nature, he holds his own in even the most complex social situations.

Potential — Fey is a naturally potent Arc user and has exceptionally nuanced control of his powers.

Caches — When playing Captain Fey, the moderator may use caches in almost any circumstances. He is, after all, the high captain of the Explorer Knights' Guild.

THE HOLY ELEVANT

Formally known as The Holy Elevant, the Exalted Daughter of the Light, and All-Mother of the Sovereign Domain of Bright, Mother Ewa Way is a young, kind and guileless woman thrust into a position of authority that, instead, demands a full measure of political cunning. She was chosen to serve as the Holy Elevant by a divided Sisterhood and was not the candidate any of the factions really wanted. She is therefore without political allies of any real value and has had to learn quickly to survive the cutthroat, backstabbing world of church politics. Mother Way's one meager source of leverage is that she served for three cycles as the chief healer at Sacred's overtaxed pauper's hospital. Her formidable command of healing Potential made her much beloved among the city's poor, and she has so far put this advantage to effective use. She knows, however, that there is only so much water in that well and is actively seeking other support — particularly from the Guild.



Ewa Way is a fervent devotee of the Light and truly dedicated to the teachings of the Church. She is well-educated but naive, though that naiveté is quickly being stripped away by her new position — one she, in truth, did not want. Despite the considerable pressures of her new role she manages to maintain the serene demeanor of the truly faithful.

Ewa is tall for a woman of Torrent ancestry and ethereally beautiful. Her floor-length black hair is kept in intricate braids and her gentle eyes can soften the hearts of even the most cantankerous members of the Supreme Sisterhood. She always wears the sky-blue robes of her order and the ever-glowing, lens-like medallion of her office, a Relic known as the *Elevant's Light*.

Characteristics — The Elevant is naive but is learning quickly. She is extremely well-versed in all aspects of Church doctrine and practice, and her inherently good heart comes through even in her current circumstances. Way is a skilled healer and administrator, and when others act in good faith she is a strong leader.

Potential — Mother Way is one of the most powerful Rain Potential users in the realms, actually turning down the Guild when they tried to recruit her as a child so that she might instead serve the Light.

Caches — When playing Mother Way, the moderator may use caches when the circumstances involve healing, nurturing or caring for others.

THE METAL MAN

No one knows where he came from, or even his actual name, but The Metal Man is the current, de facto governor of Hole, and it appears he is there to stay. The history of this pirate's refuge has been characterized by frequent and bloody changes in leadership, but The Metal Man's rapid and exceedingly violent rise to power seems to have changed that, and he has now been in control twice as long as any previous gang leader. His enemies would fear him, but they are all dead; and if one lives in Hole and does not work directly for him, then one works for someone who does. Not a ship, cargo or coin moves in Hole without The Metal Man knowing about it, and despite the physical threat his organization represents, it seems that knowledge is his primary leverage.

The Metal Man resides in a fortified, castle-like warehouse at the very mouth of the Pit, and he rarely leaves the compound. Those who have been called to meet with him claim the metal-encased body of the previous occupant — and one time leader — still hangs on the wall of the audience chamber where he does business. The Metal Man has a daughter named Ilea who is making her own name as a smuggler captain and may someday exceed her father in both cunning and ruthlessness. She is his one vulnerability and despite her considerable abilities and ambitions, the Metal Man is known to be aggressively overprotective.

The descriptions of The Metal Man himself often fall short of the reality, and in truth there is actually more metal than man left to his body. The most accurate speculation claims he ran afoul of some kind of autonomous cog deep in a Masters' ruin in the darkest part of the Frontier. The most popular tale claims that the fight lasted more than a clock and when it was over each had beaten the other so badly they had to join forces just to survive. As unlikely as that may be, The Metal Man is nonetheless a cobbled together horror of kin flesh, metal skeleton, cog-like actuators, cables and spark bottles. Both legs are meshed-gear pistons, and one of his arms is a massive, crushing pincher. Most of his skull is steel plated and one of his eyes is a large, glowing lens that his men are convinced can see their thoughts.

Characteristics — The Metal Man is an enigmatic and cunning criminal with a skillset and knowledge base to match. He can come off ingratiating and compliant when it serves his purposes, but rages wildly when frustrated or angry. Leverage through knowledge is his preferred tool, but he quickly resorts to extreme violence when knowledge fails to get him what he wants.

Potential — The Metal Man is a capable user of Ore Potential, which is the only reason he is able to survive in his unique condition. He has been known to enforce his interests and defend his fortress-like home with formidable metal golems.

Caches — When playing The Metal Man, the moderator may use caches in circumstances where violence, intimidation or criminal enterprise can be brought to bear.

QUIET KNIFE

The *Red Circle* is a secret order of female agents sworn to the service of the Trader's Council



of Loft. This highly trained band of spies, saboteurs, infiltrators and assassins has exceptional tradecraft and plies that trade across the realms gathering secrets, manipulating alliances and eliminating threats to the Royal Trading Company. The Circle members are raised and trained from early childhood to be resourceful, clever, lethal, but above all, loyal. They do not hesitate to obey any order they are given by their leader, whom they love as a mother and fear more than death.

Members of the Circle are stripped of their given names and reborn as part of their training, during which they receive names more descriptive of their virtues. The current Red Mother is known as Quiet Knife and she has been head of the order for almost two cycles. Her control over her agents is absolute and when they fail, are injured, grow too feeble or are otherwise compromised, it is one of her responsibilities to cull them from the Circle.

No one, even the Trader's Council, knows who Quiet Knife is or even what she looks like, as each successive Red Mother is chosen by the previous from among the ranks of the Circle — the Council plays no role. Quiet Knife is intense and focused, even when compared to her predecessors, and Circle effectiveness has never been higher. Quiet Knife has an uncanny capacity to know just how to train, motivate, reward and punish individual agents. She does all these things without emotion and with abject ruthlessness.

When not on a mission herself, Quiet Knife wears the red veil and robes of the order and, like all members, wears her dyed-red hair very short. She moves with a characteristically smooth grace and has an economy of words in keeping with her name, preferring to show rather than say. She is infinitely patient and restrained but acts quickly and decisively when circumstance requires.

Characteristics — Quiet Knife is a consummate agent: intelligent, educated, exceptionally fit and wholly devoted to the Circle. She is a lethal fighter with most weapons and is almost as deadly with her bare hands. She is practiced in survival, social manipulation and espionage. She is a master of disguise, and she can pass unseen when it suits her need.

Potential — Quiet Knife is a powerful Rain user specializing in infiltrating the impenetrable, hiding in plain sight and silently eliminating opponents.

Caches — When playing Quiet Knife, the moderator may use caches in situations where sneaking, close quarters combat or assassination are relevant to the play.

SENATOR GABALI

Senator Lieke Gabali of the Soar Republic is one of the most capable — and formidable — politicians in the Kingdoms in the Light. A proud and staunch supporter of the Republic, she has led the *Independence Coalition* for more than four cycles and held the position of *Voice of the Majority* for almost three.

Gabali is a ruthless negotiator and does not hesitate to leverage any situation to her coalition's advantage. Her dealings are as secretive and pointed as they are effective and she has a reputation for never forgetting a slight. She is suspicious of all things Loftian and is convinced their ancestral nation is always conspiring to draw Soar back into the fold.

Gabali is young for her station and clearly exhibits the fiery Sparkish characteristics of her Loftian heritage. Handsome in a cold and pale way, Gabali can be as ingratiating or as cutting as the moment demands. In a culture where politics are a way of life, Gabali is a consummate practitioner and always working an angle.

Characteristics — Senator Gabali is a superlative negotiator, formidable politician and an exceptional historian. She is also a ruthless and cunning backroom dealmaker.

Potential — Gabali can barely light a candle with her below-average Potential abilities.

Caches — When playing the Senator, the moderator may use caches whenever politics, negotiation, or ruthlessness are involved in the play.

THE SKY KING OF LOFT

There is an old saying among the Trading Houses of Loft: "Beware what you trade for, as you may get exactly what you trade for," and over the last cycle His Royal Grace Anders ver Lode has learned just what is meant by that insightful proverb.

From childhood, Anders has been educated and trained to be king, as it was assumed his sickly uncle would pass on sooner rather than later. His family, tutors and advisors did their best to prepare him, but Anders only halfheartedly did



his part. Unfortunately, the boy was convinced that being king was his right and, as such, once he was crowned all those boring lessons and protocols wouldn't matter. Now that he finally wears the crown, Anders has begun to realize just how wrong he was.

Though Anders is naturally clever, he has always been a bit of a rake — at least until recently. Consequently, most members of the Council of Traders assume he will be a weak king and many have already made subtle moves to further minimize the influence of the Crown's Company shares his uncle was already mismanaging. As a result, Anders currently struggles to effect his decrees and seeks wider Council support.

Anders may not have taken his studies seriously as a youngster, but his natural love of history and geography is now proving one of his only assets. His knowledge of the intricate relationships — past and present — between the various principalities that comprise his kingdom is exceptional. This knowledge has allowed him the few successes he has been able to achieve by letting him play one Council faction against another.

Like most children, Anders desperately wanted to be an Explorer Knight as a boy, and he had enough Wind Potential that he very well might have been recruited. As heir to the throne of Loft, however, he was never allowed to compete; but he never lost his obsession with the Guild or his desire to serve. As a result, Anders has always been an outspoken supporter of Guild interests, and since his coronation, he has re-ratified and strengthened several royal treaties — one of his only direct authorities — between Loft and the Guild. The clever among the Traders' Council recognize that a king looking for allies can't do much better than the Explorer Knights, and these renewed treaties have become an open point of contention between the Crown and the Council.

The king is tall and handsome with shining blue eyes and black hair. He recently shed his rakish fashions for more conservative, kingly attire, though he is still particular about the quality and fit of his clothes. Anders has a disarming smile and a charming way of always making the target of his attention feel flattered and beautiful. Unfortunately, this skill is wasted on the Council, as it consists mostly of suspicious,

greedy, withered old men and women who long ago learned flattery endangered profits.

As tradition demands, Anders wears the thin elemental glass crown of his office everywhere he goes, even though it's rather too large on him and is forever slipping to one side or the other. His one concession to personal style is the expensive Masters' alloy sword he also wears everywhere. Though certainly not a Knights' blade, he is unapologetic about this wistful affectation and refuses to replace it with anything more mundane.

Characteristics — Anders is a skilled amateur historian specializing in the political history of Loft, and it's one of the few academic topics about which he can hold discourse at length. He is an inexperienced businessman lost among a swarm of crafty old ship traders and at best has a spotty understanding of figures and contracts. He does, however, have a natural understanding of people and what motivates them, and this savvy is the only thing currently keeping his young head above the political waters.

Potential — Anders is actually a potent, natural Wind user and had he not been actively discouraged in his training he might have been great.

Caches — When playing Sky King Anders, the moderator may use caches when the circumstances involve his innate charm and charisma.

STEWARD DANFORTH

Steward Danforth is the highest ranking liegeman at the Explorers' Academy and has been there so long that no one remembers a time before "The Steward." His responsibilities appear to be so broad and varied that it is unclear exactly what his job entails. He oversees the journeymen in charge of the students. He quietly orchestrates every major event from the arrival of new novices to graduation itself. He is the default institutional memory for the school and as much a part of the campus as the buildings. Though every student learns to fear his preternatural appearance whenever they are up to mischief, by the time they leave the Academy they have come to trust, respect and even love the dutiful old man.

There are as many rumors and myths about The Steward as there are students who have passed through the Academy, and everyone has their favorite. One of the most popular is that Danforth does not have the slightest hint



of Potential, and another is that he personally walks every drummed out student to the docks with gentle kindness and unique wisdom that eases their departures. Both happen to be true.

Steward Danforth is a severe-looking, austere dressed man whom no one can recall ever raising his voice. He has an uncanny ability to be everywhere at once when needed — or when there is mischief afoot — and the rumors are he has a Relic that obviates his need for sleep.

Characteristics — Danforth has a vast and detailed knowledge of Academy history, policy, proceedings and ceremony. He also has encyclopedic knowledge of the campus, the faculty, the staff and the students.

Potential — The Steward is a rare anomaly — a Kin with absolutely no Potential.

Caches — When playing Danforth, the moderator can use cache cards whenever the vital needs of a student, the reputation of the Academy, or the prevention of mischief are part of the play.

THE WANDERING CAPTAIN

Anlee is a leader of uncanny political subtlety and finesse. She has to be to keep her strange little kingdom — the floating city of Nomad — in the air and flush with trade. Most thought that, when her father died three cycles ago, the mousey little girl who had always stood quietly behind his chair through meeting after meeting would have to take a husband from among the Congress of Merchants if she had any hope of maintaining the political ties that held the city together and kept the markets viable. How wrong they were.

What they did not realize was that during all those cycles behind that chair, her clever little mind was observing and learning. What they did not know was that as her father's health deteriorated, she began advising him, and in the end, she had actually been making all the command decisions for her father behind the scenes.

After his death, the Congress was uniformly shocked when her first orders immediately resulted in economic benefits, and she has been surprising them ever since with her astute analyses, keen decisions and undeniable successes. Fearing financial loss if they did otherwise, the Congress quickly got behind Captain Anlee and

have been profitably carrying out her wishes ever since.

Anlee is a uniquely clever leader and trader, even for a Wandering Captain, but her success has been due as much to her insightful political savvy as her financial acumen. She has the uncanny ability to always find the leverage in any situation and apply it with such subtlety that the target seldom even knows he's been moved. She knows just how to pit her opponents against each other and use her allies' strengths to bolster her own — all while making it look like someone else's idea.

If Anlee could be said to have a weakness it would be in her political relationships beyond Nomad. Not because of any particular failing of hers, but because Nomad's reputation in the realms — as a trader's free-for-all and sailors' den of iniquity — leave her with little clout.

Anlee is a tiny woman with short brown hair and unremarkable features. She typically dresses in men's clothing, but always wears the captain's rank tabs and wide hat of her office. She is attended by a pair of large, intimidating bodyguards named Rorry and Fen — cousins, actually — who are always close at hand and exceptionally vigilant.

Characteristics — Captain Anlee is a savvy administrator with a great understanding of her business. She is good with numbers and expert at reading and manipulating other people. She is not much good in a fight, however, but she is an expert Get player. She is generally kindhearted and sympathetic — two traits that she is often forced to hide in her clock-to-clock business dealings.

Potential — Anlee is useless when it comes to using Potential. It is all she can do to blow out a candle with her minimal control of Wind.

Caches — When playing Anlee, the moderator may use caches when the circumstances involve business or the subtle manipulation of others.

SOCIETIES, FACTIONS AND GANGS

There are countless allied and independent organizations, groups and leagues across the Kingdoms in the Light. The following are a few of the better known examples.



RIVAL EXPEDITIONEERS

Many of the Kingdoms in the Light have established their own alternatives to the Explorer Knights — organizations, agencies or branches charged with mapping the Frontier and discovering the secrets hidden there. Small and often poorly trained and unprepared, these groups are rarely effective, and the Guild has been known to occasionally rescue errant salvage crews, much to the chagrin of their charter nations. Such incidents only serve to fuel the resentment and jealousy many of these groups have for the Guild.

Some of these agencies are better prepared and more successful than others. The Delvers' Society of Skyreach and the Fortress Dominion Scouts are the most capable alternatives to the Guild, and the Delvers have been so effective they are sometimes contracted by other polities or private trade companies.

BLACK JAX'S BOATMEN

Black Jax is a notorious bandit who is reputed to have operated across the Kingdoms in the Light — always staying one flight ahead of the local authorities. Though no longer an active raider himself, he appears to have effectively franchised his operation to form an interdependent network of gangs from many nations, making the Boatmen one of the largest criminal organizations in realms.

Though each band operates independently — with more or less success — they pay tribute to Jax, knowing that if they need assistance for a given job, or run afoul of other gangs or the authorities, the organization will provide muscle, bribes, lawyers, or a little payback as required. Though not always a smooth operation or a contention-free organization, the Boatmen is still a remarkably effective enterprise.

THE COALITION OF INDEPENDENT STATES

Not every nation in the realms is a member of the Convocation of Kingdoms. When the treaty was signed more than 200 cycles ago, a few countries — like the Cloud Principality and Rim — did not join, and several — like Far Sky and Apex — have since withdrawn. Ten cycles ago, several of these nations formed the Coalition of Independent States.

PERSONA

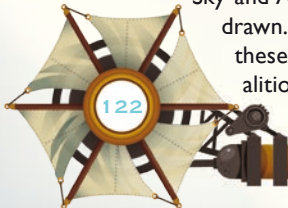
"Wot? Ain't you never 'eard of the Lightless Captain? Oi, Bilal! 'E says e's never 'eard of the Lightless Captain! Tip 'im the... Whoops. Bilal's drunk.

"Right. So there's this blighter, tall as tall... like you, say, and dark and grim too. Beggin' yer pardon — no personal reflection. And 'e's a sky captain wiv the Knights' Guild. On'y they threw 'im out on 'is arse, like, fer bein' a right nutter about the Childer o' the Dark and fer losin' 'is 'ole ship and crew in some 'orrible set-to in the Downbelow. Lost 'is eye, so 'e did. 'Cept I'm near sure it was t'othern as you seem to've done. So 'e says, 'Right, mates. Never will I rest 'till I've scabbled me a ship 'n crew and go back for the ones as wot I left behind.' And they say 'e's wanderin' still, nobblin' poor souls t' fill 'im a crew as to go back to the Dark an... an... oh."

This loose federation was intended as a boon to trade but has since become a political standard to which agitators discontented with the Convocation have begun to rally.

Hampered by the contention and self-interests of its membership, the Coalition was not always a viable organization. Then, two cycles ago, their leadership allowed Convocation nations to join and undertook an aggressive anti-Guild campaign. The Coalition began blaming the Explorers' Guild for all the economic ills, technological restrictions, excessive tariffs and "unchecked" raids of the Children — unconcerned with the validity of their claims. They openly advocated non-compliance with Convocation tenets related to the Guild, and discouraged trade with non-Coalition countries. In an era of relative peace, this shrewd political maneuvering gained surprising support as many nations began to question the value of the Guild.

The Coalition went so far as to establish the Expeditioneers — a commissioned cooperative of allied salvagers — with the intention of



DIPLOMACY, SUBTERFUGE, FORCE

Though the Guild's primary mission is exploration and discovery, it also serves as the diplomatic and peacekeeping core of the Convocation of Kingdoms. As such, it is often called upon to resolve disagreements, conflicts and confrontations between polities that make up the realms, both as an ambassadorial and a military power. Given its flat hierarchy and the tremendous individual authority of the Knights, it is essential, therefore, that they be guided not only by the tenets of their vows but by clear and readily applicable rules of engagement. These rules are documented in the *Precepts of Obligation* in the subsection of the Convocation Treaty that specifies the Order's responsibilities:

"Representatives of the Explorers' Guild will execute their duties exhausting first all the resources of diplomacy. Should these prove inadequate to achieve essential objectives, recourse to appropriate subterfuge is authorized. Should all resources of espionage abjectly fail, then and only then, representatives of the Guild may reluctantly, and with all due restraint, resort to the application of coercive force."

Most Knights choose to remember these essential tenets as "Talk, Trick, Fight" and often choose to interpret "first exhausting all resources" just as loosely.

supplying an alternative salvage economy. To date, they have successfully exploited several new Masters' caches, but at a loss of life and material well in excess of the value of their productivity — a fact the Coalition has been careful to downplay.

THE CABAL

Guild intelligence suspects the existence of a secret affiliation of agents, fixers and handlers with an unknown agenda. Investigators call it the Cabal, and though no one from CPS or the Guild's intelligence service has been able to compromise the group, there is enough circumstantial evidence to convince them the organization exists.

The Guild's concerns are growing, as they fear the Cabal is a conspiracy intent on undermining the Convocation. The Knights urgently want to know several things: who is behind the organization, what is their ultimate goal and have their operatives infiltrated the Guild? Lack of hard evidence aside, there are many who have come to believe the Coalition of Independent States is behind the Cabal's activities.

CONSTABLE PATROL SERVICE

Much of the Alliance Knights' resources — and subsequently those of the Guild — used to be spent assisting local law enforcement. As

the mission of the Guild grew and focused on the Frontier and the Children of the Dark, the Knights could no longer serve as the arbiters of local law. Accordingly, the Guild established the Constable Patrol Service, a kind of cross-border policing corps that can be called in by local governments unable to manage on their own or when crimes are international. Though there is a leadership cadre of Knights that manages the CPS that can be called in when cases require their expertise, the Service is made up primarily of uniformed liegemen and constables specially trained in law, investigation, forensics and fugitive apprehension.

The CPS operates under the same Convocation mandates as the Guild proper and has branches in most major cities in all member nations. They must be called in by the local government to work sovereign cases, but they may act independently when investigating international crimes. As one might expect, the restrictions and jurisdiction of their office makes for often problematic working relationships with local authorities.

FERAL KIN

Though increasingly uncommon in an era of wide ranging exploration and settlement,



nevertheless, there remain isolated tribes of Kin who have never recovered from the DownFall. They live as primitives, hunting and gathering what they can in upcountry mountains of remote skylands. Isolated by distance and open skies, these wild men never rediscovered the technology of the Masters or the power of flight that reunited the disparate Kingdoms in the Light.

Living as their forbears, these people rely on ancient survival skills and tribal social structures. They avoid contact with outsiders when first discovered and frequently attack or flee out of fear of the unknown. Some have even been known to kill or enslave shipwrecked sailors, and tales are told of fates even worse than these.

Though a few tribes have successfully made the transition to civilization post-contact, most encounters have ultimately resulted in the elimination of discovered groups — either through violent conflict or cultural dissolution.

THE LIGHT'S CHAMPIONS

If his biographer is to be believed, Admiral Valamir Revis may be the greatest swordsman, tactician, leader and lover in the realms. In truth, his celebrity and reputation are more likely based on his biographer's extravagant exaggeration than on the privateer commander's innate merit. Due to the widespread sale of countless chapbooks recounting the adventures of the Champions, this band of rather hapless mercenaries and their smooth-talking leader has a reputation that earns them better contracts than a true appraisal of their abilities might otherwise warrant.

Revis was not always a besotted has-been, and there was a time when he was a rather daring captain in the Marquis' Marauders and a duelist of dangerous reputation. As his hair grayed and his soul grew heavier, the bottle began to offer more solace than his honor, and Revis decided it was easier to maintain a facade than his self-respect. Dead comrades, lost love and mounting debts pushed him out of the Marauders, forcing him to start his own company. His innate charm and dumb luck in encountering Dunkle Brinks — his hyperbolic biographer — served to build his undue reputation despite his undeserving conduct.

Though not entirely incompetent, the Champions' exaggerated reputation allows them

to negotiate fees in excess of the risks they actually undertake. In truth they are opportunists who are not above criminal behavior when they can get away with it. Revis is also adept at contractual trickery that often conveniently voids their agreements before the Champions actually encounter real risk, but well after non-refundable advances have been paid. Fortunately for the company, and unfortunately for their clients, this part of their story is not nearly as well-lauded in their chapbook adventures, so to date, the Champions have mostly stayed ahead of the rumors of their duplicity, betrayal and outright failures.

PRIVATEERS AND SKY PIRATES

The Explorer Knights are not the only Kin willing to brave the Dark in search of treasure. Throughout the kingdoms there are crews and small bands of privateers with their own ships. These sometimes daring, often desperate, Kin journey into the Dark seeking riches and adventure but do so without the training, resources, or support of the Guild. Some sail in service to specific governments, some for private organizations and some completely on their own.

Such privateers often sail with limited resources, substandard equipment and aging ships. Their rates of survival are only marginally higher than their rates of success, but for many the risks are worth the fabulous wealth promised by a successful mission.

An even riskier occupation, with an even lower survival rate, is that of the true pirate. These nefarious villains plague the kingdoms, living as parasites, hijacking trading vessels and raiding outlying settlements. They sail in captured ships, survive on stolen goods and hide among remote clusters of uninhabited skylands. The pirates are careful to avoid the Guild, whose duties typically preclude them from hunting these bandits, but they are constantly stalked by naval forces across the kingdoms. It is, however, not uncommon for some governments to secretly pay pirate bands to raid their political and economic rivals.

THE RETRIEVERS

Known variously as the Savior, the Mongrel and the Retriever, Sanzen Withers is a renowned Explorer Knight with a notorious reputation across the Kingdoms in the Light. The leader of



a wild crew of ex-liegemen, privateers and mercenaries, Sanzen has become known for his uncanny ability to locate and rescue the lost, missing and abandoned.

A Rain user of exceptional power, one still Sanzen had a compelling, vision-like dream about a Loftian nobleman who had been marooned by his rivals in the Twilight Frontier, and when he woke he was unable to shake the feeling that the event was real. Following his instincts, the Knight ignored orders and took his ship and crew downwind, actually finding and rescuing the half-starved and mostly frozen man. Since then his reputation as the “Finder of Lost Kin” has spread within the Guild and across the realms.

His ship, the *EGS FOUNDLING*, is crewed in large part by those he has rescued — liegemen and privateers he pulled from the depths of the Frontier and who in turn have devoted themselves to his cause. Bera the bosun never speaks of anything but her ship, but she is one of the best sailors in the realms. Igor the Older and Igor the Younger are Vaultish cousins and an exceptional helm team, but they refuse to answer questions about their past and never come above decks in certain ports. One-time Wanda is the sneakiest member of a sneaky crew and the Retrievers’ lead scout. She is also Sanzen’s on-again, off-again lover and believed to carry a dozen knives on her person at any time.

Always a reckless hothead and rule-breaker, Sanzen’s irreverent leadership, unorthodox methods and dubious



choices in crew are reluctantly condoned by the Guild—both because he is uniquely effective and because, more often than not, it's Guild personnel that he and his Retrievers end up rescuing.

THE SIBLINGS

Known in ports across the realms simply as the Siblings, Symon and Sady are brother and sister and the leaders of a misfit crew of other orphans and oddballs they've picked up in their endless travels. Along the way they have somehow melded the strange band into what often seems more family than crew, and into what has become a surprisingly successful privateer salvage operation.

An exceptional arcanotechnologist, Symon has an uncanny ability to rebuild Master's devices that others claim are unsalvageable. His expertise is such that he is widely sought after for technical advice and so is always elbow deep in one strange old machine or another. Sady has her own reputation as a Potential adept of rare insight, who is apparently able to use her Rain affinity to divine the locations of small, heretofore overlooked Masters' caches — or at least that's what the rumors claim. Together, they are able to salvage and sell more than enough to keep their odd family fed, equipped and in the air.

This odd family consists of a strange assortment of misfits, and despite their various eccentricities they are an effective crew. Lady Sera is the no-nonsense first mate and a shrewd negotiator when the Siblings take their salvage to market. Strange J, the ship's medic, is a Vaultish native and one of the best Get players in the realms. Uncle Gee, the quartermaster, is a jocular but cryptic fellow who speaks only in rhymes, and Stef Stef the Knife, the chief of security, is a fierce warrior who rumors say keeps a jar full of the hearts of those who have crossed the Siblings.

Perhaps most surprisingly, the Siblings are still only children, in their 6th and 4th cycles respectively. Their parents were lost over a cycle ago while exploring a remote region of the Frontier, and ever since Symon and Sady have captained their parents' small ship, the *SNICKER*, on one dangerous but successful salvage mission after another. The Explorers' Guild has twice attempted to recruit them into the Academy, and both times they've been turned down. Those who have

met the Siblings know they simply believe they are better off counting on each other and their little family than on even the vast resources and Knights of the Guild.

THE VAGABOND FLEET

Founded by a core of Dimmish clans after the loss of their capital city, the Vagabond fleet was originally simply a means of optimizing resources, consolidating expertise and benefiting from mutual protection. Never more than a dozen small vessels, the fleet moved from port to port, nation to nation, carrying tramp cargos, plying useful crafts, trading rare items and offering entertainment. In the cycles since, the Vagabond Fleet has become a massive flotilla that at times exceeds 50 vessels, and now the few Dimmish who remain are outnumbered by the ne'er-dowells, scavengers and criminals who make up the majority of the population.

Unlike the largely honorable but much-maligned Dimmish sailing clans, the Vagabond Fleet deserves every bit of its bad reputation and therefore takes pains to hide its nature. In the open sky, the ships sail together, but among the skylands they disperse, only to rendezvous again after visiting local settlements. They rarely make harbor together, as 50 ships would overwhelm the small ports they favor and draw the attention of the local authorities. Instead, they hide their numbers and disguise their reputation by appearing as independent ships. The unfortunate result of the ruse is that locals everywhere just assume that any Dimmish vessel is part of the fleet, so they treat even honest Dimm as miscreants.

The Vagabond Fleet is rivaled only by Hole for the claim of most lawless place in the realms. As long as it does not endanger the ships or violate the orders of the current *Vagabond Skipper* — the fleet's admiral — anything goes: smuggling, piracy, extortion, ransom, sabotage—even assassination and murder. If there is money to be made by any illegal means, there are crews aboard the fleet pursuing that particular vocation.

The Patrol Service has tried many times to arrest the Vagabond Skipper and his henchmen, but their agents are quickly found out and the fleet scatters like minnows before a pike when attacked. It then quickly reforms when the attention of the authorities is drawn elsewhere, and its voyage of vice resumes.



INTO THE SKY

There is more to the Kingdoms in the Light than the hard ground of the Skylands. The skies themselves are boundless, waiting to be charted and explored. Full of wonders, mystery and constant danger, they call to the soul of every Explorer Knight. The following are just a few examples of the strange and fantastical found in the skies of the realms.

CLOUD GARDENS

Cloud gardens are unique ecologies based on airborne plants — the array of species that are buoyed by wild Potential. These plants form drifting, copse-like thickets of bulbous trunks and stems with splayed branches and spherical arrays of pulpy leaves, all held together with grasping vines and interlocking root-like structures.

Most gardens are small, bushy spheres of leafy green drifting alone on the wind — seldom larger than a skyship. Others, made of clusters of smaller gardens that collected in natural eddies and grew together, can be quite large and ecologically complex as a result — almost skylands in their own rights.

Most gardens are too small to buoy the weight of much more than a single landing party, but they can serve as transient hunting grounds or refuges for shipwrecked sailors. It is not unknown for some feral Kin, or even bandits and deserters, to use the larger ones as permanent homes or temporary hideouts.

The upper layers are bright and green with branching stalks and dense foliage that vies for

access to Light. The deeper layers are darker, verdant, shadowed warrens of trunks, vines and roots where the foliage has died away leaving maze-like dens. The undersides are shaded and viney, with patchy clusters of leaves and succulent epiphytes growing in the reflected Light of the surrounding clouds.

Cloud gardens in turn provide habitats for epiphytic plants and even animals — attracting birds and other flyers as well as small, climbing colonizers that make their way aboard these floating forests by a variety of intentional and accidental means. Cloud gardens are essential food sources and hunting grounds for many airborne animals, and hemoths in particular are known to consume whole clusters as they forage through the skies.

CYCLONES

There are many kinds and degrees of foul weather in the open skies: squalls, fogs, drenching rains and gales; one of the most intense and dangerous to sailors is the cyclone. Cyclones are born in the wakes of larger skylands, where the temperature differences above and below can violently circulate denser, colder air up into the warmer as the skyland drifts away from the storm nucleus. The temperature, density and humidity differentials have to be just so to initiate a cyclone, otherwise the nucleus dies in a minor squall. Luckily, the strange and characteristic cloud patterns that form in advance of a cyclone usually forecast such powerful storms.



Cyclones are particularly dangerous to shipping and settlements on the trailing shores of major skylands. The vertical winds can pummel infrastructure, destroy crops and smash unwary vessels into the ground.

DEADFALL

Deadfall is the component of dead rain that consists of the larger, whole bodies of deceased creatures rather than the finer-grained, detrital, organic materials that make up the majority of dead rain mass. Besides being messy and often disgusting, deadfall can be dangerous when particularly large organisms either fall over the edge of a skyland, or die — or are killed — in mid-flight.

As unlikely as a mid-flight death may seem, many creatures remain airborne only by virtue of natural Potential. When they die, that Potential effect rapidly fades and they either fall away into the Dark or hit something downwind. The devastation is instantaneous, massive and messy when a large, dead bull hemoth falling at 50 leagues an hour smashes into a city or swats an unsuspecting vessel from the sky.

DOWNSIDES

The undersides of many skylands are often as busy as the surfaces. Exposed to the sky as it is, the mineral wealth of the kingdoms is easier to exploit using Wind power and gravity than it would be if mines were dug from above. Accordingly, the undersides of many inhabited skylands are covered in suspended mining towns that hug the bare rock. Catwalks, ramps and quays cling to the stone, leading to warrens of deep tunnels and moored barge fleets that await cargoes of ore.

On the downside of some particularly congested skylands are fortresses, harbors, warehouses, homes and even whole villages and towns clinging to the rock. They are excavated from the overhead stone, bolted to the rocky surface, or even hang by networks of heavy chains from their island ceilings. Such locations may be limited and cramped, but they are easier to defend against skyship and infantry assault, and are protected from the unbearably hot light of the Arids and the almost constant rain of the lower realms.



WILD POTENTIAL

The Kin are not the only creatures that manifest Potential, nor is it exclusive to living things. There are many animals, plants and inanimate objects that possess or interact with wild Potential.

Just as Kin can enhance their physical traits, throw electrical fire or manipulate the wind, there are animals across the realms that instinctively use Potential to find food, defend themselves, migrate and secure mates. Abilities vary by species; the most typical manifestations of wild Potential are enhanced senses, speed and strength. Elemental locomotion is also common and often dramatic. Some species can meld with stone to find refuge, some can pass unseen when hunting prey and still others can float or soar on the Wind, living among the clouds or migrating to other highlands.

Some plants use Potential as a natural part of their ecology. Some collect water from dry air or nutrients from bare rock. Others subtly deter grazing, and still others, like the species that constitute cloud gardens, can drift on the Wind, held aloft by the same forces that lift skylands and induction hulls.

Perhaps most significantly, wild Potential manifests in buoying the highlands that make up the realms. Scientists and elementalists disagree about just how this massive, ubiquitous force interacts with the islands of stone — or even why. They have not identified what aspect of the stone is essential, and they wonder at that lack of control systems or arcaelectrical side effects analogous to those in functioning induction hulls.

EDGE FALLS

Most skylands have at least small rivers, while some of the largest support great, slow-moving waterways that meander across their surfaces. Most of these rivers eventually cascade over an edge and into the sky. As it falls, the water quickly turns to spray and then to mist, creating almost constant clouds beneath the larger skylands and recharging the water cycle. In rare instances, rivers fall from higher islands onto lower ones, creating tiered waterfalls as they cascade from one skyland to another.

Edge falls provide convenient means by which skyships can take aboard water stores and are only dangerous when a ship blunders under one — either while watering or when lost in a resulting fog — or when a large fall passes over a downwind settlement. Such torrential destruction is relatively rare, however, and it can usually be foreseen and prepared for as drifting skylands draw near.

GHOST SHIPS

Skyships are durable machines, but disconnect the wrong wire, damage the circuit box, or

degrade the induction hull enough and they will drop from the sky like stones. Left active, however, with hull intact and the circuit box engaged, a skyship might float along for cycles, drifting anywhere with the vagaries of the Wind.

There are events — accidents, sabotage, storms — that result in errant ships coming free of their moorings and drifting off to be lost in the sky. There are other times — more tragic or violent events — when the crew of a ship is lost but the vessel remains airborne: mutiny, poison, plague, battle or worse. When this happens, the result is a masterless vessel adrift on the Wind — what old sailors call a ghost ship.

Sometimes they are a boon; lucky salvage under Convocation law. Other times they are somber reminders of the dangers of plying uncharted skies. They can also be floating coffins — morbid reminders of the danger that always lurks just downwind.

GROUNDSWELL

The creation myths and religious doctrine of the various Kin cultures all describe versions of how the skylands came to be. Most



credit their existence to the science or folly of the Masters, depending upon their perspective. Others assume they were once part of some larger whole — a single continuous landmass that was destroyed in some unimaginable catastrophe. Some even believe they are the corpses of the Masters, dead and doomed to drift forever in an etheric tomb.

Though the origins of the skylands remain unknown, they do move, drifting along enigmatic courses with smaller islands orbiting the larger. Some claim there is a predictability to these patterns, an inscrutable, repeating migration.

More rarely, skylands have been known to rise or fall in significant changes of altitude. Generally restricted to the lesser islands, these changes are seldom more than a few leagues and occur slowly, over turns or even cycles. Sometimes, however, islands can shift altitude dramatically and quite suddenly. Such events are called groundswell, and when they occur in the region of the Twilight Frontier, they can even result in new skylands rising up to become unexpected parts of the Kingdoms in the Light.

Like hemoths breaching from a cloud, these islands rise from the Down Below and bring with them mysteries and secrets — panicked creatures adapted to life in the Dark, lost Masters' ruins, and, in one instance, a hastily abandoned Child outpost. Conversely, there have also been low-hanging skylands lost to the Coldway when unexpected changes in altitude dropped them into the Dark. In one of the most tragic events in Kin history, just such an incident dropped the entire capital of Dimm — the city of Gray — into the Dark. Despite ongoing search missions by the Guild, the skyland — city, citizens, king and all — remains lost.

HAIL STORMS

Given the interactions of meteorological and geographic phenomena in the realms, hailstorms are frequent, and large ones can create massive, hugely damaging hailstones. These plunging showers of fist-sized, falling ice can devastate crops, shatter buildings, kill livestock and exposed Kin, and threaten navigation by shredding sails, breaking masts and even knocking ships from the sky. Captains and navigators value a wary weather eye and are vigilant for any

signs of the updrafts and rotating cloud formations characteristic of oncoming hailstorms.

MURKS

There are records dating back to before the Convocation of Kingdoms that describe encounters with “strange airs,” “transformative glooms,” and “alchemical murks.” Though infrequent, such encounters have been documented in recent cycles as well, particularly along the Outland borders of the Twilight Frontier.

Unsuspecting ships — and, more rarely, drifting skylands — pass through dull, patchy clouds that are considerably more, and more dangerous, than mere water vapor. Elementalists assume they must be some unknown type of Potential phenomena and that the seemingly random transmogrifications they induce are consequences of wild magic.

Murks, as navigators call them, appear as harmless patches of vapor, mostly indistinguishable from any other cloud formation, until a ship unwittingly enters one. Without warning, things start to change. Objects may suddenly alter in shape, texture, or even composition: wood turns to water; metal to glass or ice; stone to gas, metal or sometimes even flesh. These changes often lead to malfunctions and failures. Gaps and holes may suddenly appear in deck planks or bulkheads, masts may simply vaporize and sails can just burst into flame.

Murks are seldom large, and once the ship passes through the cloud the random transformations cease. Sometimes though, the arbitrary changes so compromise the functional integrity of the induction system that the vessel simply plunges from the sky and is lost. There is a long history of inexplicable close calls and mysterious vanishings on the Frontier that the Guild now attributes to alchemical murks.

Of all the dangers they represent, murks are most terrifying when they alter Kin themselves. The lucky come away with burn-like wounds or missing fingers. The less fortunate lose limbs or must have them subsequently amputated. Some die, but they are not the most forlorn; those are the few who have been changed partly or completely into other things but did not die. These wretched few have been transferred to the Explorers' Sanatorium in Highstone in hopes that some clock they may be cured.



NATURAL ARC

Natural arc is a constant threat to sailors and skyships, and even the greenest crew has had to deal with the hazards it presents. Arc strikes and discharges are a common occurrence around skylands, particularly when cold storm clouds mix with warm layers of air, or when the Wind lifts excessive dust into the nearby sky. The resulting thunderstorms can wreath an island in lethal webs that stretch from cloud to cloud, or to the ground. In the open sky, roiling clouds can generate their own natural arc and volleys of highly dangerous bolts threaten ship and crew.

When natural arc strikes a sky ship it can melt, burn, explode or even magnetize objects. It can burst wood, start fires and kill crew, but most dangerously, it can short out induction systems. When this happens, the unlucky ship plummets from the sky, tumbling like a dead bird to the Dark below. Even the rare vessel with a backup circuit box is uncommonly lucky if its crew is able to activate it in time to stop the downward plunge.

It is standard practice, therefore, for sky ships to remain grounded when near-shore lightning storms arise, or stand off and wait to land until they subside. When they encounter natural arc in the open sky, navigators plot wide, evasive courses to avoid it whenever possible and pray to whatever powers they believe in when they cannot.

Arc Ghosts — Arc ghosts are a common shipboard phenomenon, particularly when the conditions that foretell arc storms are present. Ghosts are minor discharges of static arc that form at the tips of masts, spars and booms, forming faintly glowing, actinic apparitions. They are considered good omens, as their presence warn attentive helmsmen to adjust course, thereby avoiding rising storms.

When in proximity — as determined by the moderator — to natural arc, Arc users may increase their Potential hand by one card.

POTENTIAL SHADOWS

Everyone knows that skylands block — or, according to some, actually leech — the Potential

POTENTIAL SHADOW RULES

As a character with Potential travels upcountry — away from the shores of a given skyland — his access to Potential decreases with distance as the Wind is blocked. For each bell a character spends in a Potential shadow, the player's Potential hand is reduced by one card (see page 187). Once the character regains access to the Wind, the player recovers Potential cards at the normal rate of one per bell. The effective boundaries of this effect are determined by the moderator.

borne upward by the Wind. They also know that the interior regions of small islands have areas of reduced Potential, and that the central areas of large skylands lack Potential entirely. These shadows make it impossible to fly induction-hulled skyships in these areas. They also reduce the efficacy and power of anyone trying to use their Potential abilities. The average person loses their meager powers, and otherwise potent elementalists are rapidly weakened.

Accordingly, Potential shadows are frequently used by those interested in stable, low-magic environments — whether conducting experiments that are sensitive to the presence of, or fluctuation in, ambient Potential; storing or warehousing magically sensitive materials; or looking for extra security against magical intrusion. They are also used by mundane criminals looking to even the odds against the Guild.

Potential shadows are also one of the only reliable defenses against the ubiquitous threat of aerial bombardment from skyships, as they prevent the close approach of enemy vessels. At the point a ship is high enough above a given skyland for the Wind to provide sufficient lift, it is usually too far away for its guns and bombs to be accurate threats.



WIND WELLS

Wind wells are an increasingly common defensive feature for fortresses and other strategic locations. These vertical tunnels are massive excavations that are dug upward from the underside of given skylands by powerful elementalists, and penetrate to the Potential shadows in the islands' leeward regions. The resulting shafts channel Potential up to localized points within the shadowed region above, supplying the garrison at the site with elemental power. Perhaps more importantly, the massive wells allow friendly skyships to access upcountry sites from below that are otherwise inaccessible from the air.

Though it is theoretically possible for a skyship to catch the resulting upward stream of Potential where it passes through the island and ride it down to land at, or threaten, a leeward fortress, the motion of the skylands and the vagaries of the Wind make doing so prohibitively risky for even the most skilled crew.



POTENTIAL SQUALL

Legends claim that Potential storms are the echoes of the cataclysm that destroyed the world of the Masters. Scientists claim they are simply eddies in the natural flow of the Wind, where Potential piles up like drift on a riverbank — albeit in uncontrolled tempests rather than harmless lines of flotsam. Scholars and scientists debate, but the fact they are dangerous manifestations of wild Potential is not in question.

Potential squalls look like any other blow or thunderstorm — at least from a distance. Closer to hand, however, they are anything but mundane. As a ship approaches such a squall, or should one wash over a skyland, all manner of Potential manifestations occur. Great volumes of water spontaneously appear or vanish; objects spontaneously burst into flames; arc leaps about, making hair stand on end, burning or rupturing objects, even electrocuting the unlucky. Metal deforms or animates and the very landscape alters as bedrock itself becomes malleable and changes form. Wind — physical as well as magical — howls in every direction, ripping sails from masts, crew from decks and dashing unlucky ships from the sky.

Within such a storm's nebulous boundaries the ebb and flow of Potential is much more unpredictable than in any other environment. Sudden fluxes in the elemental load of the Wind causes dramatic variability in the energies upon which elementalists call. Their powers become erratically unpredictable — sometimes dangerously exceeding their normal abilities and other times weakening them to ineffectiveness.

SKYLAND EDDIES

Everyone knows that skylands create Potential shadows above them, blocking enough of the elemental potency of the Wind that induction hulls are unable to support their own weight, so skyships are unable to fly near the leeward regions of larger skylands. Similarly, skylands block the physical wind as well, creating turbulent, sometimes dangerous, eddies along their shores — whirlwinds and ragged updrafts that can toss about, damage and sometimes even capsize an unlucky ship.

POTENTIAL SQUALL RULES

If a play using Potential is made while the characters are within a Potential storm, they make the play as usual. Then, after the cards are revealed, the moderator draws a card at random from his Play deck. If the card is of the same suit as any of the hands played, it is added to any matching bids' scores. If it is from an opposing suit, it is subtracted from the opposed bids' scores. If it is of either of the other two suits, there is no effect. Note that the rules for Potential plays made with opposing suits still apply (see page 187).

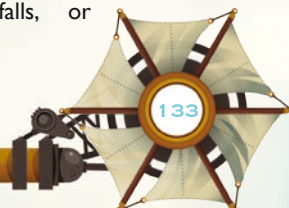
STONE RAIN

The exposed rock of the undersides of the skylands is constantly eroding. As a result, tons of dust, pebbles, gravel and larger rock masses continually fall into the sky and tumble toward the Dark. Usually, this debris falls harmlessly into oblivion, but occasionally it hits lower skylands, becoming dangerous and devastating showers known as stone rain. Such rains destroy not only crops and buildings and kill livestock and Kin, but they have also been known to punch right through skyships or even knock them out of the sky.

THERMAL FALLS

Though landlubbers may believe that the Wind forever blows upward, even the most inexperienced ship's hand quickly learns there are times when air currents move downward, sinking toward the Dark. Most commonly, these downfalls are caused by relative differences in air temperature — usually particularly warm air moving rapidly upward, displacing cooler, heavier air that falls downward in turn.

Most often, these thermal differences are slight, forming in proximity to arid skylands, around large waterfalls, or





persistent cloudbanks. Most create only minor navigational issues and are easy to avoid. Others, if encountered without warning or if particularly strong, have been known to capsize skyships.

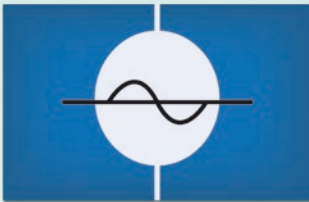
THE TORRENT

The Torrent is a single massive, ever-shifting, ever-twisting, flowing cloud formation a dozen leagues across that stretches vertically from the Dark into the higher uplands. This undulating cumulus spout writhes continually upward, racing the Wind itself. A Potential-driven violation of the known laws of nature, the cloud mass is an upward flow of cold, dense, wet air. Generating a constant barrier of drifting fog and rain, the Torrent is wreathed in an impenetrable haze

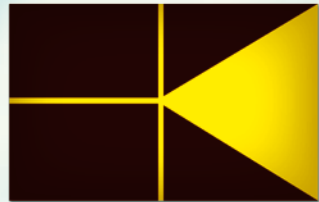
of discharging arc, unpredictable thermals and howling crosswinds.

The Torrent wanders widely and unpredictably across the skies, twisting and bending — an eel-like monster veiled in eternal squalls. When it inevitably crashes into random skylands, the buffeting winds, freezing rains and flash flooding blast away whole ecosystems and wreak havoc in settled areas — often destroying entire settlements unlucky enough to be in its path.

Scholars debate the nature of the Torrent with many believing it is supernatural in origin — either a side-effect of the Wind itself or some magical grounding phenomenon maintaining equilibrium among the elements.



THE SOVEREIGN
DOMAIN OF
BRIGHT



VAULT



THE TORRENT



CREATURES OF THE REALMS

The living things that inhabit the skies of *UPWIND* are as fantastical, varied and dangerous as the realms themselves. Some are mundane plants and animals, some have various levels of inherent natural Potential, and others are born entirely of the elements.

Each of the creature descriptions below are paired with a series of example encounters intended to demonstrate how moderators can use the animals in their stories and what difficulty levels to assign any associated plays. Note that the encounter options do not present actual stakes, as these are always specific to the participants and the situation. Once stakes have been negotiated, the suggested challenge levels of these encounters should be adjusted accordingly.

AIR-BORN

The air-born were once thought an old sailor's tale invented to encourage an extra drink or two from gullible landlubbers at the local tavern. Busted masts, rent sails, sailors mysteriously knocked overboard, sourceless attacks on lone ships, even wrecks and lost vessels have been attributed to this strange and supposedly invisible threat. Therefore, Guild scholars started tracing the tales as potential navigation hazards, and even sponsored several expeditions intended to either prove or disprove their existence once and for all.

In the end, and in a decidedly tragic way, the Guild research ship *EGS MINDFUL* and most of her crew were lost proving these creatures are in fact

very real. Sailing in skies known for the phenomena, the ship blundered into the unusually severe shear forces created by the presence of air-born and was broken up and lost. Only a handful of crew escaped by lifeboat to report the discovery.

Air-born do not seem to be alive or even aware, in any sense of the words. They exist and appear to react to stimuli, but only in ways more in tune with the laws of aerodynamics than conscious thought. Many believe the air-born are not entities at all, but rather manifestations of Potential created within particularly strong elemental updrafts of Wind. These entities may therefore be literally born out of the ether, spending their energy, or fury, in random vortices of elemental force then fading from existence. Ships captured by air-born can experience a range of turbulence, from gentle gusts to destructive blasts that can capsize them or even wrench them apart.

Easy — A single air-born manifests in otherwise calm skies and keeps nudging the ship off course.

Medium — A forceful air-born rips loose a mainsail and, while the crew attempts repairs, knocks one of the sailors overboard.

Hard — A massive air-born smashes into a village as it washes over a skyland shore, destroying buildings and endangering the inhabitants.

AIR FISH

There has long been debate about whether air fish are birds who have adapted to the semiaquatic life of edge falls and dense clouds, or fish who have adapted to a damp, airborne



existence. Air fish vary greatly in size, shape and ecology, but they are all found exclusively in and around the cascading waters of edge falls or the dense, wet clouds that trail along behind them. Held aloft by fin-like wings and low levels of natural Potential, these creatures are fast and agile, and usually form small schools.

Most air fish eat the plants and small animals that wash over the edge falls or are otherwise attracted to the regions of dense mist around them. Some are large and effective predators that eat bigger prey. Darters, rip-jaws and arrowheads are common examples that can be dangerous even to Kin.

Air fish are a popular and tasty source of meat, and where abundant they can support specialized fisheries. Air fisherman use fine, ballista-launched nets to ensnare schools of smaller species and harpoons to spear the bigger air fish. Using crossbows firing tethered bolts to harpoon single air fish is a diverting means of acquiring fresh meat for bored skyship crews on long journeys.

Easy — Crewmembers try to shoot air fish for their dinner, with money riding on the size of the catch.

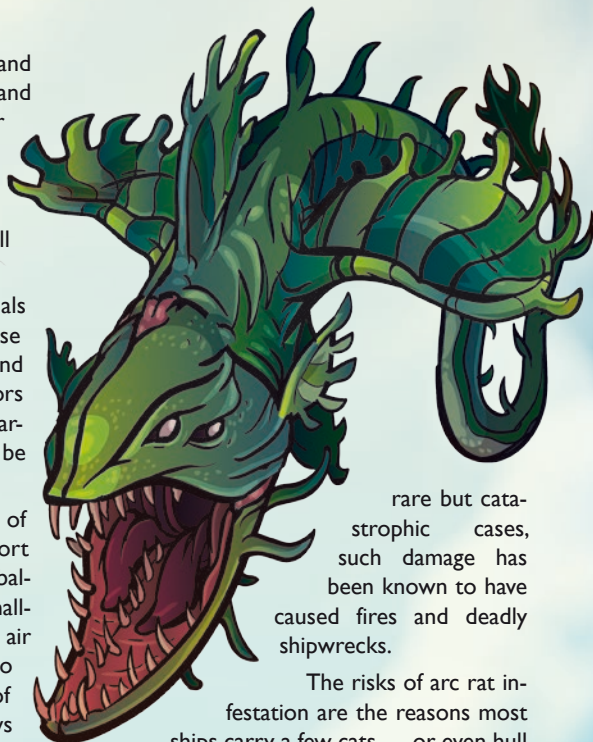
Medium — A school of predatory air fish catches the scent of blood and swarms the wounded occupants of a stranded skiff.

Hard — A fleeing shoal of air fish uses the ship as cover, luring in the large, hungry sky dragon that is chasing them.

ARC RATS

Arc rats are scaly, resilient vermin with sharp gnawing teeth, digging claws and prehensile tails. Each is about the size of a boot, and where there's one, there's usually a dozen. These animals are found across the realms, and they range from annoying pests to lethal dangers.

Arc rats are drawn to electricity and commonly chew on power cables, wiring and other sources of arc, apparently drawing sustenance from the raw energy. When well fed they are fast and aggressive, and have been known to swarm over and attack hapless victims that surprise or corner them. They are most dangerous, however, when they inadvertently chew through critical systems — such as the cabling between circuit boxes and induction hulls. In



rare but catastrophic cases, such damage has been known to have caused fires and deadly shipwrecks.

The risks of arc rat infestation are the reasons most ships carry a few cats — or even hull lizards — aboard as working pets. These predators are good rat hunters and do a reasonable job of keeping boats free of the vermin — at least most of the time.

Easy — Arc rats draining power from a leaking conduit in the spark bottle storage locker leave the bottles discharged and the crew without portable power.

Medium — Mapping arc rat spoor across a Masters' rubble field leads archeologists to a remarkable cache containing a strange and still-functioning power source.

Hard — Arc rats have chewed through a primary power coupling, and the arc cannon fails during a Children of the Dark assault on a remote Guild outpost.

ARC WEEVILS

Arc weevils are a ubiquitous problem wherever there are arcanelectrical devices. Weevils are artifacts of wild Potential that manifest within the workings of arc-powered devices and cause a range of problems from minor malfunctions to catastrophic failures.

Arc weevils are rarely seen as they only occur within wires and circuits, but they can



often be heard, felt or even smelled as they interfere with the nominal functioning of a device. Electrical popping and pitched keening, increased vibration and overheating, as well as the persistent smell of ozone, can all hint at the presence of weevils.

No one knows what Arc weevils gain from infesting electrical devices, so no one knows why they do it. Weevil infestations are easy to clear, as decoupling a device from all power sources — including capacitors — kills or otherwise drives them out. Care must be taken to clear a weevil infestation in isolation, however, as forcing them out of one system often just drives them into other, uninfected devices nearby.

If left unchecked, Arc weevils will ultimately damage or destroy the electrical devices they infest, and in some cases that destruction can be dangerous. Induction hull systems are uniquely susceptible to both infestation and disastrous consequences if they fail. It is therefore essential that hulls be systematically purged every turn or so by careening and completely powering down — particularly when on long, unsupported journeys.

Infested spark bottles will eventually explode like grenades, casting lethal, glassy shrapnel in all directions and starting fires. Arc weevils are the reason charged spark bottles are carefully rotated through inventories and spent bottles are fully discharged before they are put back into service.

Arc users who train specifically as weevil exterminators are particularly valuable, especially as long haul ship crews loathe to waste time on preventative cleansing. Arc users who narratively spend a face card from their Potential decks can clear a given device of weevil infestation. Two face cards can cleanse a frigate-sized ship and three can purge larger vessels or machines — like freight trains, factories or arcanelectrical laboratories.

Easy — An arcanotechnology professor at the Academy gives a final exam, and one of the tasks is to rid a spark bottle of its arc weevil infestation.

Medium — Arc weevils infest a rack of shipboard spark bottles and the overload threatens to rupture the bottles and blow a hole in the hull.

Hard — A ship's systems are behaving erratically and power is failing due to an undiagnosed Arc weevil infestation running rampant through the entire vessel.

ELEMENTALS

Elementals are forms of natural Potential that are found throughout both the Light and the Dark. Elementals are essentially wild, uncontrolled golems that behave with something akin to mischievous or even devious intelligence. Known variously across the realms as sprites, pixies and ghosts, they are as rare as they are unpredictable.

Unlike air-born, which are seemingly random forces, or groundlings, which are generally benign, elementals seem to behave with intention and often appear malicious. Elementals manifest out of the specific element to which they are attuned and can be anything from a hot spark or a tremble in the ground to a torrential downpour or a thrashing whirlwind. This energy — great or small — is typically spent in a deliberately damaging way that ranges from blowing out lamps or breaking delicate instruments to starting shipboard fires or making lethal attacks against crewmembers.

Elementals seem regionally more or less abundant, and their presence seems to correlate with the density of wild Potential. Knights are generally sensitive to the ebb and flow of this energy and are sometimes able to provide hasty warning when the ambient magical forces reach levels that risk the appearance of elementals. Unfortunately, average liegemen have little recourse when attacked by elementals and must depend on Potential-wielding Knights to protect them.

If a character uses Potential in a play against elementals, the opposed suit rule applies if the Potential is opposed to the form of elemental encountered.

Easy — A Rain elemental douses the camp's fire every time it is lit.

Medium — A Wind elemental blasts an unwary liegeman over a skyland edge and into the sky.

Hard — An agitated Arc elemental shorts half the induction hull of a skyship, causing it to plunge downward, dangerously out of control.



GOLEMS

Golems are controlled elementals: Potential manifestations that adepts frequently create to carry out various dangerous, laborious, boring or otherwise physically challenging tasks. Though the most practical and commonly encountered golems are made with Ore Potential, Rain, Arc and even Wind golems can be uniquely useful in the right circumstances.

Traditionally, or perhaps simply due to the natural inclinations of most elementalists, golems tend to be given vaguely Kin-shaped forms regardless of their size. They are by no means limited to that shape, however; and can be manifested in any form their function requires.

Golems can follow complex instructions and carry out detailed orders, but these commands must be specific and complete because golems are invariably and horrifically destructive if left uncontrolled.

There are stories of powerful elementalists and half-insane arcanotechnicians who combined their disciplines to create clockwork motivators with elemental cores. The end results are said to be powerful, virtually indestructible entities with self-motivation and the ability to carry out complex tasks. Some rumors even claim there is a Guild ship with a crew made up entirely of such golems, captained by a hopelessly mad Explorer Knight; it's said the golems have become self-aware and forever patrol the Twilight Frontier in savage, single-minded pursuit of minions of the Dark.

GROUNDLINGS

No one is quite certain what groundlings really are, and even the Guild's arcane zoologists debate among themselves. Some believe they were once true animals that were somehow imbued with a natural form of Ore Potential. Others claim they are not animals at all, but rather elementals that have taken permanent forms as feral golems.

Whatever their true origin, groundlings seem to be intelligent and have formed a rudimentary culture. Common in the lower realms, colonies have been discovered in recent cycles on the rockier islands of the uplands. They are known for facility with Ore Potential and seem to draw whatever sustenance they need from living stone itself. Though it is clear they communicate among themselves, it is unknown how or with what sophistication. It is also unknown how, or even if, they reproduce, where they might have originated, or how they colonize from one skyland to another.

Groundlings look like crude stone golems of wildly varying shapes, sizes and anatomies; their individual forms appear to be mutable. Those who have encountered them claim they frequently demonstrate intentional behavior. These entities are found in only remote and

rocky regions. Preferring to dwell within exposed bedrock, they fuse into the living rock of valleys, mountains and the undersurfaces of some highlands. Individually, groundlings are rarely dangerous, but where there is one there are usually many, and they can be deadly in packs. Territorial by nature, they will defend their rocks, and their considerable Ore Potential abilities make them challenging adversaries.

Groundlings can translocate through solid stone apparently at will, though it is slower than normal movement and does seem to drain their energy. They attack with powerful blows from their own rocky limbs or with ranged blasts of rocky shrapnel. A common pack tactic is to encircle foes from below and ambush them from out of the ground. When overwhelmed or trying to escape, they simply plunge into any nearby exposed rock and vanish. If killed — perhaps dispelled is more accurate — they simply revert to what appears to be natural stone with only a vague resemblance to their previous forms. It is not known if this reversion is permanent or if the same wild Potential that forms them can revive them with time. Groundlings separated from the proximity of natural stone slowly



Hemoth are truly gentle giants. They are clever, for animals, and apparently communicate using low frequency airborne vibrations that are felt as much as heard.

Though hunted for meat by some Kin cultures, hemoths are only aggressive in defense of their herds, otherwise drifting peacefully through the sky. Stories are told of feral Kin who have somehow domesticated hemoth herds, not only riding upon them like ship's crew, but of whole tribes living nomadic lives upon their backs. Such tales always seem to accompany strong drink and should be taken accordingly.

Hemoths graze on cloud gardens, diving through the dense vegetation that grows in these drifting groves, consuming great swaths of the plants — and often the animals — that live within. A sizable herd can devastate even a large garden, eating all but a few remnant tatters in short order. These shreds are quick to seed new gardens, however, and some plant species depend on being consumed by feeding hemoths for dispersion.

weaken, eventually reverting to inert rock.

Easy — A single curious groundling steals things from the Knights' campsite and the items are found randomly embedded in the ground nearby.

Medium — A group of groundlings are harrying a small village because the inhabitants are quarrying stone from a local bluff with a particularly high concentration of wild Ore Potential.

Hard — After a series of major Potential experiments conducted on a supposedly uninhabited highland, groundlings attack the scientists working there in wave after wave of quake-like assaults.

HEMOTH

The hemoth are massive creatures that drift through the skies of the realms in large familial herds. They are shaped like ship-sized teardrops with rows of stubby, seemingly ineffectual wings along their flanks. Their gigantic, ponderous forms are held aloft by the elemental power of the Wind — like the hulls of skyships— though arcane zoologists disagree about just how these massive creatures control this Potential.

Easy — Hemoth dung falling from the sky — known as “foul rain” — splatters across the ground nearby, dousing bystanders in rank-smelling feces.

Medium — A curious hemoth calf takes an interest in the ship and its playful antics snap off several spars. Its mother emerges from the clouds and closes rapidly with the vessel.

Hard — Hemoth hunters trigger defensive behavior in a large herd and the creatures attack the hunters' home port.

HOOK KITES

Kites are common animals in the skies of the realms. Hand-sized, membranous and angular, these sticky animals drift through the air in dense, compact flocks, held aloft by natural Potential. Most are harmless, and their iridescent colors make them quite beautiful when a whole flock catches the Light at just the right angle. They are slow-moving drifters, with rudimentary eyes, no limbs and no significant intelligence. Most species are harmless, gaining what sustenance they need from collecting the organic detritus blown from the highlands and carried on the wind.



Hook or gallows kites, however, are an entirely different matter. Relatively uncommon, these larger, Kin-sized creatures drift in small packs, and where their smaller cousins are harmless, hook kits can be deadly. Hooks, as helmsmen call them, dangle long, thin, tough, leathery tails in the air, trolling them like fishermen's lines. The tails are covered in sharp, curved spurs that readily snag any prey unwary enough to be in their paths. The hooks secrete paralyzing toxins and digestive chemicals that kill, then liquefy, their prey, allowing the kites to absorb the resulting nutrients through their tails. As a result, a flock of hooks can be a macabre sight, with the shriveled corpses of various animals dangling below the pack like condemned hanging from gallows.

Under most circumstances the slow-moving animals are easy enough for a helmsman to avoid, but there are stories of crew being snagged and dragged overboard on foggy passages or in the dimness of the Frontier. Though not very maneuverable, hook kites are aware and mobile enough to avoid collisions with highlands — usually. If they fail to respond quickly enough or if a storm blows them ashore they can be a nuisance, or even dangerous, to the local inhabitants — getting

hung up on trees, buildings and powerlines, snagging livestock and even oblivious Kin.

Easy — A hook kite blunders into a building snagging its tail in the eaves. Its thrashing becomes dangerous to the local children when they gather in curiosity.

Medium — A band of smugglers tethers a swarm of hooks to stakes surrounding their hideout — flying them like their namesakes — complicating any approach from the air.

Hard — A large hemoth collides with a flock of hooks and trails a dozen of the creatures in its wake. The pain from the kite toxin infuriates the massive beast and it rampages blindly toward an unwary shipping fleet.

HULL LICE

Hull lice are arthropods that inhabit dim, dank environments such as the perpetually damp undersides of Lowland and Frontier highlands. The young hatch from thumb-sized eggs and quickly



scatter, voraciously eating anything they can tear apart with their tiny mandibles, including each other. The adults, especially the females, can be large — the biggest growing to the size of a cat.

Hull lice are extremely territorial and wage constant ecological war among themselves as they vie for unclaimed habitat. As a result, they are prone to cling to any transient objects — including the shadowed undersides of boat hulls — as means to colonize new territories. Consequently, ships that spend much time in wetter, darker regions are prone to hull lice infestations. At best annoying omnivores that can decimate stores, larger lice have been known to attack and gravely wound Kin, snipping chunks — and even appendages — from unwary, injured or sleeping Kin.

Easy — As a prank, a reckless apprentice takes a big louse from the Academy menagerie and tucks it into a novice's bunk right before bed time.

Medium — Upon returning to the ship after several clocks exploring a newly discovered Masters' cache, the crew discover only crumbs remain of the vessel's stores.

Hard — Pirates leave their prisoners securely bound and locked below deck. In the dank darkness, hungry lice crawl toward the helpless prey.

POWDER WORMS

These worms apparently begin life as tiny larva adrift on the Wind. When they encounter the ground of a skyland, they dig into the soil and live off the organic material found there — decaying plants and animals.

Aboard drifting skyships, however, powder worms can get into everything, and seem perfectly content to eat untreated wood, exposed food and even arc powder. As they feed, they grow rapidly and can quickly consume stores and damage wooden structures. Powder worms are particularly dangerous as they somehow incorporate the Arc Potential inherent in the explosive powder they eat into their own gelatinous tissues. As a result, powder worms can become small, unintentional, organic grenades, the most serious risk of which is the detonation of the ship's magazine or an arc powder storage depot.

Easy — During the celebration an agent disperses a vial of worm larva into the enemy's unguarded powder cache.

Medium — The pirates grin as they throw a volley of explosive worms at the defenders prior to boarding the frigate.

Hard — A bad infestation of powder worms turns the ship's magazine into a dangerous bomb — one that any sudden jar or impact could detonate.

RAINBIRDS

Rainbirds are believed to be manifestations of wild Potential, and legend says they were given form ages ago by the Masters of the Wind. The stories say they are healing magic created to help the Masters care for sick and injured Kin.

These natural golems look only vaguely like birds, and if not for the fact that they are animate and appear to fly, rainbirds would look mostly like water tossed from a pail — a “head” and “wings” of roiling liquid followed by a long “tail” of spray and foam. Rainbirds are rare and usually only found in proximity to edge falls, rain clouds, dense fogs and — most commonly — the Torrent. They seem to come and go — manifest and fade — as if magically unstable or as if they are only visible when conditions are exactly right.

There have been many confirmed reports of rainbirds appearing when sailors or air fisherman suffered injuries in proximity to falls or dense clouds. The reports claim that when this happens, if the victims hold very still, the rainbirds slowly approach and douse the injury in Potential-rich water, staunching bleeding and knitting bones.

More dubious stories claim that rainbirds also heal the sick, and there are a number of edge falls around the realms to which ailing believers make pilgrimages in hopes of receiving the Masters' healing magic. There are even a few such places where the locals make a little coin carrying pilgrims out into the mists in their fishing boats. Though such reports remain unconfirmed, there is something to be said for the fact that air fisherman are hale and hearty to uncannily old ages.

Given the aridity of the region, rainbirds are extremely rare in the Domain of Bright, but they are revered by the devout of the Lucent Church as avatars of the Masters.

Easy — An earnest novice seeks information on rainbirds in the Academy library.



Medium — The crew of a Guild science vessel attempts to capture a rainbird.

Hard — A dying grandmother begs to be taken out into the sky so she might be healed by “the blessing of the Masters.”

ROCK CREEPERS

Rock creepers haunt the nightmares of every Kin child, as they are the bringers of moral justice in the most popular — and terrifying — Kin fairy tales. Though not nearly as intelligent, patient, or voracious as they are portrayed in nursery rhymes, they are every bit as formidable and frightening.

Though not related to spiders, rock creepers have many long, multijointed and hairy legs — 12, in fact — and compact, ovoid bodies covered in bristles. Also unlike spiders, they are huge — ranging from two to as many as eight feet across. They have powerful gripping claws on the end of each limb and spear-like palps they use to pith whatever animals they are able to ambush.

These monsters favor the shadowed, underside crevices of highlands, where they cling to the rock and drop stealthily onto unsuspecting prey. Tethered to the stone overhead by long, elastic ropes of tacky mucous, the creatures dangle like gruesome marionettes as they feed. Once sated, they drop whatever remains of their prey and make their slow, bloated climbs back to their killing perches.

These creatures are so loathsome and so dangerous to regional skyship crews that many nations still offer sizable bounties for rock creeper palps.

Easy — A fresh, half-consumed corpse drops from the sky and lands with a sickening splat in the town square.

Medium — A single rock creeper drops onto the deck of the ship and scuttles toward the nearest crewman.

Hard — A ship runs afoul of a colony of feeding creepers and their gooey tethers hopelessly entangle the rigging, capturing the vessel like a proverbial fly.

SKINNERS

Skinnners are innocuous animals that look like large, swift butterflies from a distance. Up close, however, they are reminiscent more of leeches with large, membranous wings. In ones and twos skinnners are harmless, and even in small flocks they can be shooed away with the wave of a hand or other sudden movement. In small numbers they are only annoying to sedentary or sleeping individuals on whom they gently land and extract small nips of flesh.

In large numbers, however, the story is frighteningly different. In flocks of over 100 animals, skinnners become fearless, lethal pack hunters that can swarm over the deck of a ship, flense the flesh from a surprised sailor and be gone in three heartbeats. Skinnners are common around cloud gardens and live in colonies on the undersides of some larger downwind islands. Flocking in dangerous numbers is relatively rare, and Guild zoologists have yet to determine what triggers the lethal behavior.



Easy — A young Knight on his first voyage into the Frontier is harassed and bit by half a dozen skimmers.

Medium — Brigands threaten to leave a captured liegeman alone in a small cabin and toss in an open sack containing several dozen skimmers.

Hard — Workers at an archeological dig disturb a skimmer hive just as the ripened eggs begin to hatch.

SKY DRAGONS

Sky Dragons are exceedingly rare, and even though the skeleton of a large female hangs in the zoology department's main hall at the Explorer Knights' Academy, few people have ever seen one — alive or otherwise.

These large, winged creatures range throughout the realms, riding air currents and thermals for clocks on end without ever settling on land. They seem to prefer secluded, unsettled regions of the sky and where they do exist, they stalk cloud gardens, ambushing prey from above or from within a passing bank of mist.

Sky dragons are lean, almost snake-like, with long, narrow, pointed wings evolved for gliding and a pair of strong, sharp-taloned feet. Dragon hide is unique among animals as it is able to subtly change hues to blend in with the colors around it: in a bright sky, the hide slowly fades to blue, and with oncoming squalls, the hide turns dark gray — perfect camouflage for an ambush predator.

But for the rush of their wings, sky dragons are eerily quiet — at least to the Kin ear. In reality, they have a range of supersonic screams that are so powerful they can be used to stun even the largest prey. Sailors talk of crewmen blasted into unconsciousness or even blown overboard by the intensity of a sky dragon's inaudible cry. True or false, such tales, coupled with the suddenness and utter silence of their attacks, have given dragons a reputation as the most frightening monsters in the skies.

Sky dragons appear to be able to use their ultrasonic calls as a form of echolocation, allowing them to navigate within clouds or, as a number of species do, within the dim reaches of the Twilight Frontier and the Dark below.

Easy — The crew of the tramp freighter is frightened

by reports of a local sky dragon sighting and requires convincing before they will leave port.

Medium — A juvenile dragon lands on the railing of the ship, and begins calling out with eerily silent, ultrasonic screams. Moments later, the ship pitches violently as the protective mother lands on and crushes the opposite rail.

Hard — A family of sky dragons has claimed an old ruin containing a valuable Masters' cache as their permanent roost, and the mission is to clear out the residents so salvage operations can begin.

WIND EAGLES

Wind eagles are a common sight in the skies of the kingdoms—consummate flyers that can soar almost indefinitely, rarely setting foot on land. As ungainly on the ground as they are elegant in the air, eagles tend to nest on cliff edges and bluff faces where they can launch and land with the help of gravity and the Wind.

Eagles are large birds, as even the smallest have wingspans comparable to the width of a man's outstretched arms, and the largest can exceed the sail-span of a Guild corvette. Such birds are not as uncommon as farmers would like, and they are responsible for considerable livestock losses when they nest nearby. Eagle species include herbivores, scavengers and predators, and the larger the species the more likely they are to be meat-eaters. The smaller species include windriders, gales and swiftpets, and the largest are known regionally as arks, ship hawks and sky kings.

Eagles seem to know they are the masters of the air and are generally unafraid of Kin. Though not usually a direct threat, hungry eagles have been known to pluck unwary crew from the decks of unlucky vessels. There have also been confirmed reports of territorial birds all but destroying vessels that blundered into their nesting areas — their sharp beaks and strong talons making short work of the doomed boats.

There are regions where eagle hunters eke out a living harvesting and selling eagle meat and earning bounties on particularly troublesome individual birds. There are also occasional reports of feral Kin riding on the backs of eagles, as if they have trained them as mounts. Such stories have yet to be confirmed.



Easy — Despite the ban on the capture of eagles within Verdant, poachers are caught with half a dozen live eggs.

Medium — A massive wind eagle bursts from the clouds, crashes into the ship, doing significant damage and becomes badly tangled in the rigging.

Hard — The large eagle flies away clutching a screaming crewmember in his talons.

DENIZENS OF THE DARK

The frightening legends about a place are often far more terrifying than the truth, but when it comes to the stories about the Twilight Frontier and the Dark beyond, the terror of reality far exceeds the myths. The Frontier is a dim netherworld of cold, dank shadows inhabited by furtive, hungry beasts. The Dark is worse — a black, lightless nightmare of freezing air and

icy snow haunted by lethal, voracious monsters about which little is known and their victims never see coming.

The unique environment of the Down Below has given the creatures who dwell there dangerous adaptations that have turned them into consummate survivors and lethal hunters.

Natural Lights — Many animals of the region — and even some of the strange plants — produce natural light which they use to attract mates, lure prey, mislead predators, provide countershading and signal pack members while on the hunt. These lights can be dim or bright, and most species can turn them on and off — or at least shield them — at will. Pale blues, acid greens and eerie yellows are the most common colors.

The fact that light readily attracts predators and other curious inhabitants of the Fell Lands makes it a challenge for ship crews as they navigate in the Dark. Unable to see even their own hands without



ANATOMY

Soar University Library — Audiograph recording — Catalog #78409-b-2f

Notes: Daamarak, B. Prof. —
Unidentified species — Field Notes
— Anatomy — Unexplained Deaths

Provenance: Pantir's "Lost"
Expedition

VOICE 1:

"Look at this! How tightly the humerus articulates with the glenoid. And the greater tuberosity! Feel how prominent it is! What prodigious force the creature must generate! And the pectoralis inserts on this... keel, or ridge. What an enormous moment arm! You see, Mr. Harloc? Here is the source of the creature's considerable strength, not your superstitious 'pan-elemental Potential.'"

VOICE 2:

"I see your point, sir. But are you sure this is the right time to be making such a... a close examination? Are you sure it's dead?"

VOICE 1:

"Nonsense! Look at this tissue damage. If it is not dead, it soon will buh... oof... GET IT OFF, GET IT OFF, GET IT—" [screaming, crashing sounds]

Recording ends.

some light, Guild sailors rely on hooded lanterns, shaded arc candles and dim alchemical lights. Even these faint glows appear as bright beacons to the local fauna, endangering crews and vessels. Technologies that allow Kin to see in the dark without lights have long been a goal of Guild engineers, but the prototypes are bulky and unreliable. Potential adepts who can use their talents to see in the dark without a light source, therefore, have a valuable advantage.

Sensitive Sight — The eyes of most denizens of the

Coldway are large with huge pupils, extremely sensitive to even the slightest glow. Many creatures' eyes are so oversized as to make their faces seem comical or benign, but that appearance is a dangerous fancy.

Echolocation — Like bats and sky dragons, many of the creatures of this realm are able to perceive their environments with high-pitched sounds, homing in on the subtle echoes. Better than sight in almost every way, this ability makes already-dangerous predators even more lethal.

Heat Sense — Many creatures of the Dark are able to sense minor differences in temperature; in the constant cold of the Deeps this can be a valuable way to locate warm-bodied prey.

Acute Smell — The Wind carries scents and odors from prey to predator, and there are some hunters that are so well-adapted to sensing these airborne trails that they can unerringly follow them back to their unsuspecting sources.

BLINKERS

No one knows what blinkers actually are. From an indeterminate distance through the Dark, they look like moving strings or chains of sequentially blinking lights, but when approached or pursued they invariably cease winking and disappear. No explorers have ever encountered them up close, or even found anything dead on shore that might anatomically match a blinker.

There have never been reports of a blinker attacking anyone — or no one has survived to publish one — and Guild crews report no sounds or other indicators associated with their appearances. Several cycles ago a small zoological mission was dispatched to solve the mystery of the blinkers. The vessel was armed with several harpoon cannon and an experimental net-casting gun that used arc to stun whatever it caught. The expedition departed Fort Alabaster and has not been heard from since.

Easy — A sharp-eyed crewman believes he sees an actual blinker and tries to convince his crewmates.

Medium — An unseen creature of great mass crashes into the ship and badly damages the induction hull.

Hard — An avaricious crew of liegemen, sighting what it believes must be a blinker, plans to capture it and claim the bounty.



BLOOD FROGS

Blood frogs are disgusting creatures that have killed more explorers than dark dragons. The size of cannonballs, blood frogs are corpulent, slimy masses of almost amorphous flesh. They have huge mouths with small, serrated teeth and wet, bulbous lips.

Blood frogs have only rudimentary eyes, but appear to be particularly sensitive to body heat, using it to stalk their hosts. These animals are well-adapted as parasites, feeding on larger creatures like hemoths or the various species of Dark-adapted wind eagles. A feeding frog unhinges its jaws, forming a sucking seal on its target's skin, and imbeds its grooved teeth into the host's flesh. Venom in the frog's saliva serves as a soporific, anesthetic and blood thinner, numbing the area around the bite and preventing the blood from clotting. As the frog's bladder-like stomach fills, its body swells and becomes bloated. At this point the frog releases its grip and drags its grossly distended body away to digest its meal.

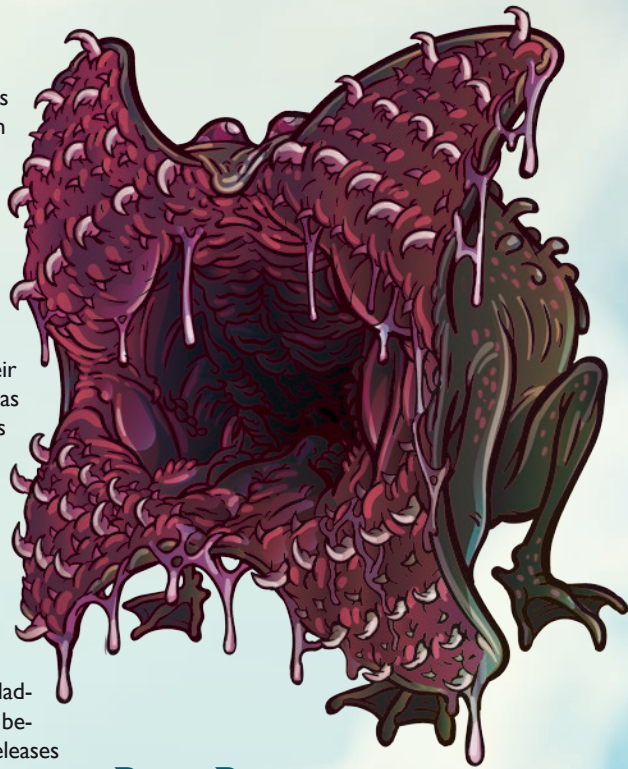
Blood frogs sometimes find their way into Explorer camps or onto parked ships where they can attack sleeping Kin. Unfortunately for Kin, frog saliva is such a strong sedative that it usually drugs the host into unconsciousness. What is more unfortunate is that the average swollen stomach volume of a blood frog is sufficient to half-drain, and thereby kill, the average Kin through exsanguination.

Blood frog venom has proven so valuable to apothecaries that many liegemen run a lucrative sideline collecting frog venom sacs whenever their deep delves take them into regions where they are found. The newest crew members, due to lack of seniority, usually serve as bait.

Easy — A zoologist tries to safely harvest the venom sac from a dead blood frog without running afoul of the poison.

Medium — A Knight tries to remove a feeding frog from the body of an unconscious comrade without killing the victim.

Hard — A diplomat is attacked by an assassin using a dart coated with concentrated blood frog venom.



DARK DRAGONS

Scientists assert that dark dragons evolved from the same lineage that spawned their sky dragon cousins in the realms above. They are large, pale animals with huge, soaring wings and clawed feet. Though they have lost the ability to shift their skin color — useless in the Deeps — their echolocation has become acutely sensitive.

Though exceedingly rare, dark dragons are individually the most dangerous predators known to Guild zoologists. Like their upwind Kin, they are silent ambushers whose attacks are sudden and blindingly swift. They are so strong they can tear smaller ships to flinders, and with the advantage of echolocation they would be virtually unstoppable if not for the discovery of candle slugs.

Candle slugs are sausage-sized mollusks that crawl about eating dead rain, the flotsam of organic material that collects on the downwind islands of the Frontier and the Coldway. Candle slugs glow with a dim yellow light that gets brighter as they find abundant food — apparently as a signal to brood mates to come and eat before faster scavengers steal the bounty.



As might be guessed, candle slugs are easy prey and are a particular favorite of dark dragon hatchlings. Accordingly candle slugs have evolved an exceptional sensitivity to the high frequency sound used in dragon echolocation and when hit by these waves, their glow blinks out instantly.

Cycles ago, a clever liegeman by the name of Hobbs realized this phenomena could be used to warn crews of hunting dragons — and other sources of “unhearable sound” — and Guild vessels started carrying what have become known as Hobbs’s Boxes. These small wire cages contain table scrapes and happily grazing candle slugs. A Hobbs’s Box is mounted on the binnacle and carefully watched by the assistant helmsman. When the slugs suddenly blink out, he sounds an alarm and the crew readies for an attack. Rather than running for weapons, however, the crew rings bells, beats drums, sets off firecrackers and fires several cannon all together, creating a cacophony of bludgeoning sound that is surprisingly

effective at camouflaging individual crew members from, and eventually driving off, all but the most persistent Dark dragon.

Easy — A novice is instructed by his Zoology of the Dark professor to reassemble the skeleton of an unknown juvenile avian and properly identify its species.

Medium — A trio of liegemen fail to return to camp after going candle slug gathering.

Hard — The camp is attacked by a pair of hungry dark dragons forced from their normal hunting grounds by something larger.

DWELLERS

Dwellers are enigmatic creatures. They are gaunt, bipedal beings with long limbs, squat bodies, heavy jaws and bulbous eyes. They are self-aware and social but otherwise appear prelingual. Dwellers are found across the skies, but are most commonly encountered in the Twilight Frontier. Though regional populations are usually small, there have been reports of large concentrations in specific locales.

The creatures are furtive and live in small family bands. Strangely, dwellers are most frequently found denning in Masters’ ruins, living in the deepest chambers and using the tunnels to move about unseen. The more warren-like the cache the more likely dwellers are to be found. Dwellers do not appear to make tools or build structures, but they have been observed using found objects in tool-like ways — including as effective weapons. They appear to be omnivores and opportunistic hunters.

Most Guild zoologists believe dwellers are related to the feral species often encountered in the Dark — another vestigial line of Children. Some fringe thinkers believe they may be degenerate relatives of the Kin or even corrupt descendants of the Masters of the Wind themselves. Necropsies of recovered specimens have provided scant clues to the mystery and scholars continue to debate their origins.

Though the creatures generally avoid contact with Kin, there are cases of violent encounters and savage battles with dweller hordes. Whether larger populations make them more aggressive or drive them into territorial frenzies, these attacks have been unprovoked, vicious and deadly. Accordingly, Guild members



are instructed to treat all contact with dwellers as potentially dangerous.

Easy — An old farmer has long reported seeing dwellers around an overgrown ruin upcountry from his fields, but to date no one has taken the old Kin seriously.

Medium — The staff at a Frontier survey camp has gone missing and the only evidence of what might have happened is the partially dissected body of a dweller in the lab tent.

Hard — An advance mapping party is attacked by a horde of frenzied dwellers when they enter a newly discovered section of a Masters' cache.

FERALS

The Children of the Dark are known to ally with brutish, semi-intelligent creatures that many believe are degenerate lineages of the Child race. Ferals are Child-like in the same way boulders are like pebbles. Massive, heavily muscled, standing nine feet tall even with their stooped backs and short, powerful legs, these brutes make formidable ground assault troops for the Child fleet.

Ferals make up for their lumbering intellect with lightning-fast reflexes and a natural instinct for destruction. Though most wield large, simple hand weapons, some carry small deck guns into battle, making them formidable mobile artillery. Fortunately for the Kin, ferals have no significant control over Potential. Most are also ill-suited to shipboard fighting, as their size and reckless abandon in combat make them dangerous even to their own crews in close quarters. Accordingly, they are rarely used in naval actions or boarding parties. As ground troops, however, they are fast, fearless and brutal and serve both as unstoppable assault troops and immovable defenders.

Easy — Some local children find a dead feral near an outpost village on the border of the Frontier. Word reaches the Guild garrison, raising concerns about what this might signify.

Medium — A pair of Knights corner a raging feral at the edge of a battlefield and vicious fighting ensues.

Hard — Despite the race's distinct lack of skymanship, several ferals leap aboard from the attacking Child frigate and begin wreaking havoc with massive iron clubs.

MEAT CRICKETS

Meat crickets are large, regionally abundant arthropods found throughout the Frontier. They are ugly, pallid, hard-shelled creatures the size of dogs, with dangerous pinching claws and long, multijointed hind legs that allow them to leap 30 feet at a bound. Meat crickets are voracious, carnivorous pack hunters that employ both pursuit and ambush tactics with equal effectiveness.

When chasing prey, crickets cooperate to bring down individual animals much larger than themselves — snapping at their limbs with their formidable claws, leaping ahead to cut them off, and wearing them down by injury, blood-loss and fatigue. The loud, eerie chirping sounds they use to coordinate their pursuit add chilling notes to the kill.

When lying in ambush, meat crickets array themselves around a kill zone, camouflaging themselves in ground litter. The ring of predators will then take it in turns, chirping quietly; their cooing calls serving to attract other predators that are themselves on the hunt. When the unwary target finally enters their ring, the crickets burst from cover, swarming the prey and eating it alive. Meat crickets in a feeding frenzy are frightening and dangerous even to themselves, often taking slices out of each other as they eat.

Meat crickets are actually quite tasty, and if explorer crews are willing to risk being hunted themselves, crickets are a ready source of fresh meat. They are easily roasted, and served in their own shells, have a mild, fish-like taste. It has become a common pastime for the more artistic among Guild crews to scrimshaw images from their explorations on the large pincer claws leftover from a meat cricket feast.

Easy — The missing navigational chart turns out to be carved onto the empty claw of what was once a particularly large meat cricket.

Medium — An eccentric Academy professor surprises his Dark Survival students by releasing half a dozen meat crickets into the classroom — which immediately begin rampaging — and issuing instructions to kill, cook and eat them or fail the final exam.

Hard — A stranded Knight creeping through a murky



Frontier forest suddenly realizes that the quiet chirping she has been hearing is now coming from every direction, and that she is surrounded by hungry predators.

POTENTIAL PLANTS

Potential Plants is the general term for the wide variety of botanical species that have adapted to the dimmest reaches of the Frontier and the lightless depths of the Dark. They serve as the basis of the ecology of what would otherwise be lifeless realms. Though scientists are still trying to understand exactly how they sustain themselves, Potential plants have evolved to gain energy from the higher ambient Potential — specifically that of Rain — found in the deep Frontier and the Coldway beyond.

Potential plants are the basis of the food chain in the regions with too little Light to otherwise sustain normal plant life. They are eaten by grazers, which are eaten in turn by the ever-hungry carnivores that abound in the Dark. Potential plants are difficult to study outside their natural environment, as they require rather uncommon and difficult to maintain growing conditions — low temperatures and high ambient Rain Potential — so Guild botanists must risk the dangers of the Dark to pursue their research. Growing in a wide variety of forms and environments, the diversity of Potential plants is still being cataloged. Many species appear to be related to more mundane plant varieties of the Kingdoms in the Light, but many are unique, strange and even dangerous.

Ghost Trees — The name ghost tree actually includes a number of different species of large, woody plants that form the sparse forests of the Dark. With ghostly white trunks and large, translucent, Potential-absorbing leaves, ghost trees are strikingly eerie, and it is easy to imagine them as spirits in a haunted landscape.

Blade Cactus — There are several species in this dangerous group of Potential plants. The stout, barrel-like growths are reminiscent of various cactus species common in the Arids at the other end of the sky. Instead of the typical spines, however, these plants feature sharp-edged plates similar to small dagger blades.

When disturbed, an unknown mechanism triggers a small explosion of arc energy that

blasts the blades outward like grenade shrapnel into whatever animal presumably tried to eat the plant. In doing so, the plant achieves the dual goals of dispersing its seed pods and providing fertilizer for those seedlings.

Wormroot — On the surface, wormroot is a small, unremarkable growth, but below the ground its large and dangerous root system makes it anything but innocuous. The widespread auxiliary roots of this plant lie just below the surface of the soil, forming a large-diameter net. The roots are actually animate, able to move suddenly and constrict. When an animal walks over the roots, they burst from the soil, engulfing the prey and wrapping it up in ever-tightening coils of constricting, vine-like rootlets. Animals unlucky enough to blunder into a wormroot net are slowly strangled to death, after which their decaying corpses provide nutrients for the plant. Wormroot has been known to trap — and kill — unwary Kin.

Fartberries — Fartberries are one of the most common edible plants in the Twilight Frontier. The small, pale berries grow on short, ground-hugging bushes that favor soil with high amounts of decaying organic content or dead rain. Unfortunately, they smell — and pretty much taste — just like their namesake. But when stranded on the Frontier without food, palatability is less an issue than survival.

Easy — An optimistic — or maybe vindictive — ship's cook makes a fartberry pie and serves it to an unwary crew.

Medium — An enthusiastic Guild botanist has asked for help in digging up and repotting a sample blade cactus without triggering its defensive seed dispersal.

Hard — A group of inexperienced Knights inadvertently lands their skiff in a large wormroot grove.

POTENTIAL PUPPETS

Potential puppets — or grave dolls, as the more superstitious sailors call them — are gruesome monsters that can result when creatures die suddenly in the Potential-rich environs of the Dark.

When an organism — Kin or Child included — dies while using Potential or from a powerful elemental effect, its nervous system may continue to compel it to move — often causing it to act in atavistic, possibly aggressive, ways — despite even horrific wounds. Though its



DEAD RAIN

Dead rain, deadfall, dross, or black snow are names for the constant precipitation of organic flotsam that slowly drifts down from the higher levels to the lower. Dead leaves, broken twigs, scattered seeds, pollen, cloud garden fragments and even dead birds and other deceased flying animals — these things drift on the Wind, falling from above and collecting on skylands below. Dead rain occurs in the Kingdoms in the Light, but does not gather near so thickly as it does in the Frontier and the Dark.

Dead rain accumulates slowly, but it leaves rich, loamy soil in which Potential plants readily grow. Dross is wet and rank, lending a smell of death and decay to the shadowed landscapes.

movements are clumsy and become increasingly so as the residual magic animating them slowly abates, dolls can still be dangerous because they lack fear, feel no pain and are unpredictably violent.

Dolls rarely remain ambulatory for more than a few clocks. and by the end are typically reduced to crawling, twitching, masses of decaying flesh.

Easy — After a pitched battle with a Child patrol, several of the fallen continue to thrash on the ground instilling the survivors with abiding dread.

Medium — After killing a hungry rock creep-er with a bolt of arc fire, a Knight must fight it again as the creature regains its many feet and charges to attack.

Hard — The shambling crew of a drifting ghost ship lurch out of the shadows and attack as the boarding party enters the hold.

SAIL MITES

Sail mites are fuzzy, thumbnail-sized, multi-limbed creatures, and the bane of sailing vessels in the Frontier. Invariably, these ubiquitous little

monsters find their way aboard any ship that spends more than a clock or two in the Deeps, and once aboard the only thing that can eliminate the infestation is returning to the Light of the higher realms.

Sail mites are voracious saprophytes eating just about any nonliving organic material, but seem to have a particular preference for sailcloth. The tiny creatures spit up digestive juices that liquefy the canvas, which they then slurp up, leaving an ever-expanding latticework of irregular holes. A hundred mites can ruin a sail in less than a clock, and it is a constant battle between bug and crew to protect the ship.

Luckily, mites are terrified of light and scatter in its presence, making protecting the sails a matter of periodically flashing them with arc lamps. Unfortunately, not only is this a tedious and time-consuming task for the crew, it also risks attracting the attention of predators hunting the surrounding darkness. Accordingly, the first sail-maker to develop inedible sailcloth will make a fortune through contracts with the Guild.

Easy — As a disciplinary assignment, a recently promoted journeyman is tasked with flash-cleaning the sails on a large man-of-war — a task that will take several clocks of dangling from the rigging.

Medium — The formula for a new pesticide wash effective against sail mites has been stolen from a Guild laboratory by rival agents.

Hard — An aggressive strain of mites has riddled the lines of a ship, but the damage has gone unnoticed. In the midst of combat maneuvers, several lines part and the rigging goes dramatically by the board.

SCREECHERS

No one knows what screechers look like, or even what kind of animal they might be, but screechers have the most ominous reputation of all denizens of the Dark. Known only by the sound they make, the noise is hard to describe: a horrible keening that sounds more like a mournful scream of agony than an animal call. The cries are long and wailing and are only ever heard one at a time, as if the species is a solitary hunter.

Though apparently rare, screechers have been heard in all regions of the Deeps — the

open sky, groundside, in forests and open terrain, even underground in caves or Masters' ruins.

What makes them so terrifying is that in every reported incident of a calling screecher, someone has vanished. No one has ever seen what happened, what attacked, or where the victim went. There has never been any blood or other evidence beyond the fact of the missing

person and occasionally a dropped tool, weapon or such. No one has ever seen or heard anything save that uncanny, mournful cry, yet every time someone dies.

Hard — Any encounters with screechers should be considered very difficult, as to date all have apparently been lethal.



VERDANT



THE CHILDREN OF THE DARK

The Children are the denizens of the Dark and the long-standing enemies of the Kin. There is little evidence of them from the time of the Masters, so most historians believe that, like the Kin, they were born of the same catastrophe that destroyed the old world. Even though encounters with them have been rare since their sudden withdrawal at the end of the Second Incursion, the kingdoms are rife with Child legends, and recent skirmishes have led to concern among some Guild leaders that a Third Incursion may be imminent.

Little is known about the Children. They are Kin-like in form, but only the maddest scholars believe they bear any actual relationship to the Kin. Children are uniformly tall, pale and gaunt, with wide, dark eyes that are extremely sensitive to light. They are fast, agile creatures, with lean frames that belie their considerable strength, and their warriors are ferocious fighters. They typically wear heavy, fur-lined leathers reinforced with intricately worked armor plates and are armed with large swords, lethal powder guns and crude, but effective, arcanoelectrical weapons.

Most encounters with the Children take place in the Twilight Frontier. Here they compete directly with the Kin to recover the same lost treasures, and frequently cross courses — and swords — with Guild Knights as they explore the same dim regions. Increasingly, the Children send raiding parties upwind of the Frontier where they attack Kin outposts and colonies, and bloody skirmishes frequently ensue.

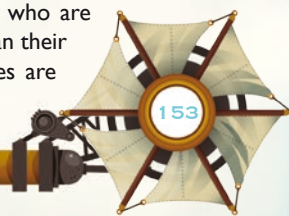
The Children use baser forms of the same technologies as the Kin. Their engineering is less refined and perhaps less reliable, but what they lack in elegance and durability they make up for with raw efficiency and pure destructive power. In truth, their engineers seem to rely more on Potential than design and craft.

The Children are known to be exceptional Potential adepts. Their arcane power is every bit as potent as that of the Kin, and their warriors often rely more on raw Potential than on skill or tactics. In fact, mounting evidence hints at the possibility that unlike the Kin, who are restricted by lineage to control over only one of the four cardinal elements, individual Children may have access to multiple elemental forms. Eyewitness accounts, after action reports and transcripts from prisoner interrogations are both convincing and troubling.

Despite their obvious savagery, the Children are clearly civilized and appear to hold fealty to a more unified rule or social hierarchy than the often contentious and divided Kin. Though little is known about whatever principalities, kings or dark covenants hold sway over the Children, it is certain that it is a vicious and cunning alliance with nothing but conquest intended for the Kingdoms in the Light.

DARK ALLIES

The Children are not alone in their black world. Their raiders are often accompanied by great, winged beasts who are even more ferocious than their masters and whose bites are



savage and prone to fester. Ground troops are frequently supported by hulking, brutish members of some feral offshoot of the Children who are as dim as they are vicious, and who fight with the needful desire to destroy.

There are also reports of Child raiders fighting alongside monstrous constructs — powerful automatons that, despite their limited self-direction, deal lethal destruction on the battlefield. Assuming such tales are true, the Guild fears the Children have stumbled upon a fantastic and terrifying Masters' cache.

SECRETS OF THE CHILDREN — MODERATOR'S EYES ONLY

If you are not a moderator planning to run *UPWIND*, the author recommends skipping to [page 161](#) to avoid spoilers about the nature of the Children of the Dark. Maintaining their mystery will help keep the game setting more interesting, compelling and fun.

The Children are an enigma and only a few among the Guild have begun to suspect their true nature. What most Kin consider common knowledge — the stories, legends and old wives' tales — may seem true from the perspective of the Light, but in reality is a fragmented misinterpretation of a tragic history.

THE ETHOS

Like the Kin, the Children of the Dark were created by the Masters to serve a singular purpose. Where the four original lineages — Spark, Gale, Stone and Torrent — were each constructed to control a singular Potential, the Children, called the Ethos by the Masters, were created as overseers tasked with controlling the Kin. To that end, the Ethos were given Quintessence — the unified control over all four forms of Potential. Though this combination of powers limited their facility with any single element, it allowed the Ethos to counter and suppress the Potential abilities of their charges, thereby assuring their authority over the Masters' Kin servitors. Though Quintessence dilutes the Ethos' singular Potential abilities, the Children have diverse and flexible powers that more than compensate for any lack of raw magnitude.

The purity of the Ethos ancestry means that every Child has Potential power well in excess of the average Kin. This fact, combined with the diversity and flexibility of Quintessence, is likely what allowed the Ethos to survive and adapt to the harsh conditions of the Dark. The constant need for warmth, light, defense and sustenance could only have been met by unified control over all the elements.



CHILD CHARACTERS

It is inevitable that someone will want to run a campaign with Children of the Dark as player characters. Mechanically, they work just like Kin in terms of abilities and skills, but their Potential functions a little differently.

Children of the Dark do not have single-suit Potential hands. Since they remain a pure lineage and Quintessence includes all forms of Potential, Child players draw all their cards for both their Play and Potential hands from complete, four-suit decks. The player then powers his Potential attributes — which could include effects from any of the four elemental types — only from the appropriate suits drawn into his Potential hand. Statistically, this means that the average Child character is more versatile, but less powerful, than the average Knight, as they have more suits to play from, but fewer cards available from any given suit.

Child character Potential replenishes at the same rate as it does for Kin characters — one card per bell. Similarly, their Potential hand size varies with their proximity to the source of the Wind. When in the Dark, the player holds 6 Potential cards. As the character moves upwind into the Twilight Frontier, the player holds 5 cards, and only 4 cards when in the Light. As a result, the Children are keenly aware that as they move away from the Dark toward the Light, their access to, and control over, Potential is significantly reduced.

THE DOWNFALL

It was their hierarchy of slavery that ultimately wrought the destruction of the Masters of the Wind. The Masters created both the Kin and their Ethos overseers as slaves, and they were as unconcerned with the suffering of these living tools as a carpenter to the needs of his hammer. Ingrained with the undeniable urge to serve, the Kin were unable to resist the Masters or the orders of the Ethos.

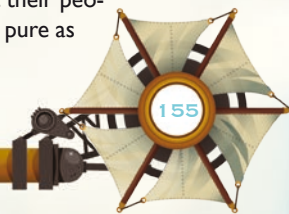
The Ethos, however, were different. In their roles as overseers they were given a measure of free will to facilitate their work, and it was this self-determination that ultimately proved the downfall of the Masters. As the ages passed, this seed of independence outgrew their origins and the Ethos chafed at the yoke of the Masters. The end, perhaps, was inevitable and when the chance came, the bold among them did not hesitate.

The Masters of the Wind had long sought means of directly controlling Potential without the need and imprecision of using the Kin as intermediaries. Great effort was turned to this goal and finally, after generations of Kin and Ethos had been sacrificed as mere tools, the Masters created the *Grand Amplifier*. This ultimate machine obviated the need for the Kin — and by default

the Ethos. The Amplifier allowed the Masters to harness true elemental power themselves.

The Masters could finally rid themselves of the drain of resources represented by their servitors and began a campaign of practical genocide. When the Ethos were given orders to destroy their charges — kill all the Kin — the conspirators among them realized their own time was short and acted. Recognizing their last, best chance, they infiltrated the central capacitor of the Grand Amplifier and sabotaged the machine. As the core shut down, disconnecting from its many satellite nodes, a cascading surge of Potential exploded outward, shattering existence and bringing about the Downfall. In trying to save themselves from certain destruction, the ancestors of the Children of the Dark unintentionally sacrificed their world.

There were always fewer Ethos than members of the other original lineages. This, and their proximity to the Grand Amplifier at the time of its destruction, resulted in the Ethos being all but destroyed in the Downfall. Surviving in only a single refuge, their numbers were small and slow to recover, but their people remained ancestrally pure as a result.



CHILD NAMES

Children of the Dark are given Clade names at birth to which are appended other descriptors as they age and earn personal reputations — good or bad. Clade names are traditional and honored, and describe aspects of the original survivors themselves or their contributions to the surviving Ethos community. The most recognized Clade names include Coursefinder, Lawbringer, Lightbearer, Machinefixer, Monsterhunter, Mythbreaker, Peacemaker and Plantkeeper. Examples of individual names include Speaker to Foes Arranger of Deals, Dependable Ally Sailor of Fortune, Storyteller Liar to Men, Once Soldier Kinkiller and Singer of Songs Maker of Oaths.

Combined in formal attributions these names would be Coursefinder/Speaker to Foes Arranger of Deals, Lawbringer/Dependable Ally Sailor of Fortune, or Lightbearer/Storyteller Liar to Men. In common reference, however, these individuals might be called Speaker, Fortune and Liar.

THE CLADES

The post-DownFall history of the Ethos was not one of uniform peace or purpose, and their recovery has come at a considerable cost in culture, resources and lives. Though conflict and factionalism have been part of their history, their cultural purity and the harsh conditions imposed on them by the Dark mean they have nonetheless remained a more interdependent people than any in the Kingdoms in the Light.

Only a few conspirators survived the sabotage of the Grand Amplifier and the cataclysm that followed. Perhaps to unify the survivors, or perhaps simply to protect themselves from blame, they condemned the hubris of the Masters for the DownFall and kept their own role in the cataclysm a closely guarded secret. As natural leaders among the survivors, the

conspirators positioned themselves to establish authority and organization, becoming the Primaries who founded what would eventually be known as the Clades — instituting a new social order among the Ethos.

Even the current Primaries do not know for certain how the Clades originated. The common belief is that each represented an original tribe or extended family group, but there are oral histories that hint at other beginnings. In truth, the Clades were designations assigned by the Masters of the Wind to groups of Ethos based on their oversight of specific Kin lineages. Familiarity, and the natural tendency to trust what one knows, forged surviving groups into insular bands during the DownFall, giving them ancestral significance in spite of their arbitrary origins.

Over time, the Clades became the dominant force in Ethos culture, and alliances, rivalries, grudges and feuds formed a complex and volatile sociopolitical landscape. Loyalty and service to one's Clade became the central tenet of Ethos life and the Primaries deftly used these loyalties and rivalries to keep their people focused on their enemies — imagined and real — to protect their own interests and power. When, hundreds of cycles later, the Ethos encountered a resurgent Kin, it was therefore inevitable that these dimly remembered minions of the Masters became a new enemy — one the Clade leaders could blame for the destruction of the world and use as a new focus to control their own people.

Unlike the Kin, the Ethos have stories of their slavery and retain some histories of the Masters and what came before. Much of this knowledge is fragmentary and confused, but there are kernels of truth in what survives, and from childhood every Ethos knows the Five Dictums of the First Lawbringer:

- The Masters created, and we formed.
- The Masters enslaved, and we fell.
- The Masters faltered, and we fought.
- The Masters failed, and we are free.
- The Masters dream, and we fear.

The Children remember the Masters' dominance and hate them for it. They hope to keep the dormant overlords sleeping and to destroy any means by which that slumber might be broken. They believe that if the Grand Amplifier



A MATTER OF DIPLOMACY

The gulf of misunderstanding that exists between the Kin and the Children is wider than their shared origins should merit. One might believe that, since the Children are the ultimate liberators of the Kin, there could be a bridge of gratitude and even trust that might span that gap. There are two essential reasons this bridge has yet to be built.

First, the Masters kept the Kin culturally arrested to keep them compliant and from questioning authority. It was not until after the DownFall, when forced to think and survive on their own, that the Kin began to learn, value knowledge and develop real societies. Accordingly, their pre-DownFall history is lost, existing now as only fragmented myths and legends in which the tyranny of the Masters of the Wind has become conflated with the existence of the Children of the Dark, who now bear the misdirected animosity of the Kin. Despite several tentative — and decidedly unsuccessful — missions over the cycles, a diplomatic resolution to the ongoing conflict is widely viewed as impossible by most Kin.

Second, the nature of the power dynamics among the Clades of the Children has led to a suppression of historical knowledge by generations of Primaries who have sought ways to control, manipulate and direct their people. The Kin have simply proven too valuable an enemy — too valuable a lens with which the Primaries are able to focus the woes of their own people. As a result, the very idea of diplomatic relations is considered by the average Child to be preposterous at best, and treasonous at worst.

Despite this seemingly hopeless lack of understanding, there are those on both sides who actively seek to establish diplomatic relations. Though there are some who openly advocate for such missions, there are a quiet few who conspire in secret and strive to make contact with their counterparts among their longtime enemies.

can be located and repaired, it could be used to waken the sleeping tyrants and thereby return both themselves and the Kin to servitude.

Examples of Major Clades

Coursefinder — With large holdings on the Spinward Meridian of Refuge, Coursefinder Clade is known for its master navigators and a tradition of far-ranging explorations. Coursefinder's freighter fleet is essential to the support of the Children's outlying colonies — an economic situation they do not hesitate to exploit.

Lawbringer — This Clade holds key territories within the *Inner Core* of Refuge, including the *Trove* and the *Archive Library*, making it a vital source of information of all types. Lawbringer is respected by most Clades as trustworthy, if not exactly honorable, so it is often called upon as a go-between and arbitrator.

Lightbearer — The technicians of Lightbearer are clever arcanotechnicians, but their skills do not come cheap. They also ruthlessly leverage their occupation of the *Core* and its control

systems to force concessions in its negotiations with the other Clades.

Wartaker — Wartaker Clade has a long tradition of providing sailors and soldiers to any Clade willing to pay their price. They are as neutral as any Clade can be, but quick to respond with force when their own interests are threatened. Wartaker has small holdings and lease agreements scattered throughout Refuge.

Shipbuilder — This Clade is known for its vessel construction and civil engineering expertise and is one of the wealthiest clans. Shipbuilder holds only one small segment of the *Counter Spin Trench* but dominates Clade holdings on *Harbor*.

THE TRAITORS' REBELLION

Though the Kin do not know why the Second Incursion ended so abruptly with the withdrawal of the Child fleet, the truth represents a critical historical schism among the Children

of the Dark that influences their society to the present.

In the cycles leading up to the Second Incur-sion, several antagonistic Clades vied for dom-inance within the *Circle*, the secretive oligarchy that rules over all the Children. In their mach-inations they looked to incite war with their old enemy as a way to focus unrest outward and gain support within. Those Clades who were opposed to war failed to outmaneuver their foes, and the grand plans for what became known simply as the *Fate Offensive* — the Second Incur-sion to the Kin — were executed.

The opposition among the Children did not end, however; it simply became a conspiracy to wrest control from the dominant Clades while their attention was focused upwind on the war effort. As a coup, the takeover was bloody and tactically flawed, but the strategy of striking during the culmination of the *Offensive* was effective. The Traitors took control of essential Clade holdings, key infrastructure, weapons fac-tories and depots. These gave the rebels forti-fied positions and ample resources while deny-ing the depleted and distant fleets those same resources. Perhaps most importantly, they took hostages from among the rival Clades and were ruthless in exploiting this advantage.

Demands that the *Offensive* be abandoned and the fleet returned to the Dark were sent to the front up the now-reduced supply lines. Orders were given, the fleet broke off the fight-ing and dove back down the sky. The civil war to which it returned lasted for most of three cycles, but the sociopolitical chaos it created influences Child culture to the present. The mis-trust, feuds and vendettas between Clades are deeper than ever, while alliances are few, tenta-tive and fluid.

The recent generation of leadership, born into this legacy of civil unrest and conflict, have be-gun to recognize the cost to their people. They are worn by the subterfuge and privation of the constant mistrust and vigilance. They again look upwind toward the renewed resources and the unity of purpose conquest would bring.

CITIES IN THE DARK

The Children are concentrated in three primary population centers — large Masters'

IRONCLAD

"Hands to repel boarders! Liege-men, all you liegemen! Look there, at that metal monster! See? We hit her hard—she's trailing smoke and she's going down, but before she does, that crew wants your ship. Hear me, Guildsmen: they're coming for your boat! Now, you can either stop them here — knock 'em out of the sky — or you can go down with 'em. Make no mistake, that's what they want. They want to take your bonnie ship into the Dark and you right with it. So hold and fight! Fight for your lives, fight for your honor and fight for the Guild!"

"Here they come now lads! Guns ready! Hold. Hold. Fire!"

complexes that they have turned to their own use over countless cycles of occupation. Known as Sanctuary, Refuge and Harbor, these sprawl-ing settlements form the geographic core of Child civilization.

Sanctuary

Sanctuary is the largest of the cities of the Chil-dren of the Dark, though city might not be the most appropriate descriptor. More like a war-ren of interconnected family enclaves, the orig-inal architecture of what was once a Masters' stronghold has greatly influenced the culture of the Children and the occupancy of the city.

The technology that was stockpiled here was vital to the post-DownFall survival of the Ethos, and is perhaps the only reason they made it through the onset of the Dark and the freezing of their world. The ancient machines that keep the city warm, purify water, and produce food are legacies of the Masters and essential, fragile elements in the Children's ongoing survival.

Sanctuary is home to the Clades — the trib-al lineages that form Child society. Each Clade represents a distinct clan line descended from the original survivors, and the web of alliances, rivalries, intrigues and open feuds that exists among the Clades defines Child culture. The members each claim the offices they hold and



the portions of Sanctuary they control determine their influence within the ruling conclave known as the Circle.

Refuge

Refuge is the oldest of the three major Child cities, and though it is the smallest, it remains influential among the more traditional factions. Known to have provided the protection that spared the Ethos during the initial clocks of the DownFall, Refuge is a massive, entirely Master-made construct. A huge sphere covered in countless structures and riddled with long passages, subdivided chambers and huge galleries, Refuge is the largest still active Masters' machine in existence.

Refuge was clearly once a self-motivating base or ship, and Child technicians have spent generations trying to regain control of its secrets and the ultimate power it represents. Many among the Circle are convinced that it would provide the means to fend off the return of the Masters, or even destroy them once and for all, if only they could reactivate its control systems.

Harbor

Harbor is the center of the Children of the Dark's navy and home to most of the Clades' warrior caste members. This uncommonly large skyland supports training grounds, weapon factories, shipwrights and foundries and is the fleet's homeport. Huge docks, large depots, massive defensive works, sprawling shipyards and countless commercial operations ring the island, and a constant swarm of naval and freighter traffic crowd the cold, dark skies.

THE CHILD FLEET

The skyships of the Children of the Dark, though also based on the principles of induction, have radically different designs than those of the Kin. Environmental factors unique to the Dark necessitated different engineering solutions, resulting in a divergent naval architecture with its own unique features, strengths and weaknesses.

Metal Hulls — Wood, or at least wood suitable for building ship hulls, is scarce in the Dark, as most Potential plant fibers, while tough, are porous and spongy. Given the abundance of mineral resources in the



region, however, it is inevitable that the hulls of Child ships are built primarily from steel, and in some cases even Masters' alloy. This makes them heavy, with more inertia and less maneuverability than Kin vessels, but it also makes them considerably more durable. Because of the added mass of the hull materials, designs tend to weight-saving features that sacrifice capacity and comfort for maneuverability and acceleration — sleeker forms, bulkhead cutouts, fewer decks, smaller compartments and cargo spaces.

Slip Propulsion — The higher levels of Potential found in the Dark, closer to the Wind, mean that it is possible for Child shipwrights to forego sails in favor of more reliable and powerful “slip-based” propulsion systems. Instead of large canvas sails catching the mundane force of the Wind, the Children use fin-like, metallic vanes densely laced with induction filaments to both drive and maneuver their vessels.

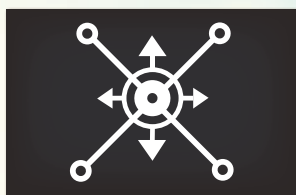
The vanes are arrayed about the freeboards and undersides of the ships like stubby bird wings or the fins on a hemoth, and work like small, individual induction hulls with their own variable power outputs. Also like fins, the pilot can adjust individual vanes to direct their lift at various angles, allowing the ship to “slip” along on its own buoyancy. Though generally not as fast, and technologically more expensive, this type of propulsion provides better acceleration, maneuverability and reliability, while obviating the need for cumbersome rigging and constant sail management. Unfortunately,

the farther upwind — away from the source of the Wind — a Child ship travels, the lower the output of its induction propulsion, and the slower and more ponderous it becomes.

Potential Helmsmen — Child ships do not use circuit boxes to control the flow of Potential in their complex induction hulls. The historical shortage of circuit boxes in the Dark, and the unique Quintessence of the Children, have compelled engineers to integrate live adepts in place of arcanelectrical controls.

Suitable helmsmen are rare and highly trained and therefore greatly valued. They drive their ships from inside cramped, armored cockpits similar to the engineering chambers of Kin vessels. They are connected to their commanders by audiograph and ride strapped in arcanelectrical harnesses. The integrated conduits allow the helmsman to modulate the output of both the induction hulls and the propulsion vanes in the same way they regulate their own Potential. The integration of active intelligence with the ship control systems makes up for the sluggishness of the heavier hulls with faster response and better coordination. A living pilot is also a tactical failsafe in design and explains why so few Child vessels have ever been captured intact. Using Potential in this way, however, is exhausting and requires overlapping shifts of 2–4 adepts at a time depending upon the size of the ship and the nature of its flight.

In a very real sense, Child vessels fly as much by force of will as by force of Wind.



PIRATE SHIP



TONE AND TROPES

UPWIND is set in a strange world of elemental magic, lost science, swashbuckling Knights, wind-powered flying ships, endless skies and ancient mysteries. There are rival kingdoms, exotic geographies, strange beasts, legendary heroes and enigmatic foes. It is a world of high action, supernatural physical prowess, wondrous technology and archetypal characters.

Despite these specific elements, one of the best things about role playing games is that every time they are played, the results are as varied as the players in a given session. No matter what the designers, publishers, or even the game moderator originally intends, the style, tone and content are ultimately determined by the imaginations and interactions of the distinctive combination of players around a given table. Each game is a unique experience and, accordingly, players are encouraged to do whatever they want with the content of this book. Play it light, goofy and for laughs; or gritty, serious and dark. Treat the rules like gospel or ignore the ones you don't like; dump setting elements you don't want and add in your own custom features.

INTENTION

This said, the author did have a particular intention in mind when writing *UPWIND* and so offers the following guidelines for those interested in playing the game accordingly. *UPWIND* draws from the tropes of Studio Ghibli movies and anime-style action stories. These tales usually feature young — often child — heroes with wild powers, serious responsibilities and no adult supervision. The *UPWIND* setting, and the Explorer

Knights specifically, were designed to support these essential tropes.

- Young characters with exceptional power, skills and responsibilities.
- Outrageous, even exaggerated, action.
- Big decisions with big consequences.
- Fantastic environments filled with unlikely places and strange, powerful technology.
- Dangerous creatures and mysterious enemies.
- An enigmatic history that threatens the future.

THE FANTASTICAL

The world of *UPWIND* is the essence of fantastic, and players should be constantly reminded of the strange, alternate realm in which the game takes place. The unlikely geography, the magical Wind, the Potential everyone wields, flying ships, the unique “Tesla-punk” technology and the bizarre creatures that inhabit the skies should be constant touchstones for the wondrous environment and the otherworldly nature of the setting.

HIGH ACTION

UPWIND is intended to tell stories of high action and derring-do. The characters have elite-level athletic, acrobatic and martial training as well as uncanny supernatural abilities powered by elemental magic. To tell the kinds of stories big enough and action-packed enough to contain such characters, the Q mechanics are built to support wild, extreme, outrageous action scenes reminiscent of the



craziest anime films. The game challenges the participants to imagine the most daring, dramatic and flashy ways to resolve their encounters.

HEROIC YOUTH

New Explorer Knights are little more than teenagers with elite levels of training, awesome elemental powers, dangerous magical technology and impossible missions. They have demanding duties and weighty responsibilities with wide discretion in how to meet them. They have essentially been reared to be overconfident, overenthusiastic and even reckless in pursuit of their goals. It is helpful for players and moderators alike to think of the Explorer Knights as young “superheroes” in the classic comic book sense — possessing strange and supernatural powers with which they must defend their world.

DUTY

As members of the Explorers’ Guild, the characters are duty-bound by the tenets of the Knights’ Pledge to *Honor the Guild*, *Seek the Knowledge*, *Defend the Kingdoms*, and *Defy the Dark*. Explorer Knights are traditionally beyond reproach, and despite their youth are profoundly honorable, deeply loyal and steadfastly dedicated to their duties. Though every Knight is unique and taught by the Academy to think for herself, everyone is staunchly devoted to her brothers and sisters and to protecting the Kingdoms in the Light.

EXPLORATION

UPWIND is a world meant to be explored. Intentionally strange and wondrous, the setting begs characters to investigate the environment by playing on the curiosity of players to see what’s beyond the next skyland. The Explorer Knights by intention are charged with charting a limitless sky, and discovering lost technology and ancient secrets is a sworn duty. The environment is steeped in mystery, strangeness and wonder, and entire campaigns can be played around nothing but exploration and discovery.

IMPENDING THREAT

The world of *UPWIND* is one on the brink of war, where an enigmatic prophecy is coming to fruition and an ancient enemy again threatens

from the darkness below. As a result, the setting features adventures for every sort of hero — from spies, lawmen and explorers, to scientists, sky captains and warriors. As the kingdoms prepare for the Third Incursion, the actions of the characters take on greater consequence, and the growing conflicts into which their adventures take them are complex, unstable and dangerous. There are hostile challenges in every mission they undertake and dire repercussions for failure.

UPWIND CAMPAIGNS

The roles and missions of the Explorer Knights are so diverse that game moderators can send their players on any sort of adventure anywhere across the realms. The characters might be the close-knit members of a boat crew, or they may have been selected for a particular assignment based on their individual skill sets. Their adventures may have them sailing deep into the Frontier, or back and forth across the realms, or they may be posted to a single Guild house. The possibilities are limited only by the imaginations of the moderator and his players.

The following suggestions use the variety of Guild obligations and missions to provide moderators with inspiration for the different kinds of campaigns that can be played in *UPWIND*.

SHIPS’ CREW

First and foremost, Explorer Knights are skyfaring sailors who live for shipboard adventure and the wonders that only service in the fleet can show them. Expertly trained, every Knight is a superior sailor — the creak of the masts, the snap of the sails, the power of the Wind is as much in their blood as the vows they swore at graduation. Assigned the finest ships and crews in the realms, the uncharted skies call to the heart of every Knight.

Explorers

Explorer Knights are voyagers of the first order: delving into the Twilight Frontier and questing after Masters’ ruins and the secrets hidden in them. They are master navigators and mapmakers leading the way. They are soldiers and scouts protecting crews while they salvage. They are archanotechnologists and archaeologists studying ancient ruins and recovering lost treasures. Adventures built around exploration



are at the heart of *UPWIND* and a fun and familiar way for groups new to the game to get started. Such adventures include a variety of mysteries, puzzles, surprises, dangerous situations, or creatures and combat. Treasure hunting is a central goal and there are lots of opportunities for scholarly, scientific and technologically-oriented characters to use their expertise.

Hook: Rubble Field #73 is rich in Masters' artifacts, but it has been as deadly as it has been productive. Camp 73 has grown up on the margins of the cache, and the Guild staff working there have been braving the field's tumbles, holes and grottos, wresting secrets and treasures from its depths for over a cycle. Recently, however, an unprecedented number of disappearances and mysterious deaths have prompted the Guild to assign a boat crew of Knights to discover the cause. The party arrives on the Frontier with little to go on, an outpost of desperate salvagers and a lethal threat hidden in the ruins.

Patrols

Brotherhood ships are responsible for patrolling the dangerous borders of the Frontier. They are the primary defense against raids by the Children of the Dark, and in a time that many have begun calling the Third Incursion, encounters with the denizens of the Down Below have become all too frequent. The Knights lead the defense, hold the line and defy the Dark. Patrol adventures involve pitched battles, command decisions, a little exploring, chases, roleplaying and, inevitably, lots of fighting.

Hook: The Captain's Council is growing concerned regarding increasing contact with elements of the Child fleet and is anxious to acquire accurate intelligence regarding its distribution. The members of the boat crew have been given command of the fast corvette *EGS SPIRITED* and ordered to search out the enemy, document its movements and report back to Guild headquarters with an evaluation of their strategic activity. If the opportunity presents itself, they are instructed to shadow a Child vessel to its homeport in hopes of charting the location of a major Children of the Dark base.

Law Bringers

Guild vessels and their crews patrol the skies of the Kingdoms in the Light, ever vigilant for pirates, bandits and smugglers. Despite the

growing threat from below, there are always those with nefarious intent hunting the shipping lanes and preying on outlying settlements, and the Knights are an essential part of policing the skies. Campaigns structured around the ongoing adventures of a patrol crew are perfect for ranging around the realms and staging encounters of all kinds. Adventures include search and rescue, investigation, chases, infiltration, stand-offs and hostage situations. There could be lots of interesting roleplaying as characters go undercover and make shady contacts.

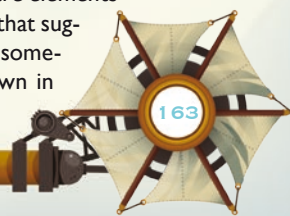
Hook: The rulers of Vault are weak and the populace is desperate. The country's economy has all but collapsed, corruption is rampant, and the nation has become a haven for some of the most notorious pirates in the realms. Obligated by the treaties of the Convocation, the Guild has been mostly ineffectual in its efforts to enforce the rule of law because corruption and collusion undermine any progress it makes.

Things have become so desperate that the 5th Fleet's 4th squadron — known as Roland's Raiders — has been permanently assigned to patrol Vault. The party has been newly ordered to join the crew of the squadron's flagship — the *EGS RIVAL* — and is expected to spearhead the fight against the criminal chaos.

Hunters

Shipboard adventures can center on tracking down people, creatures, or objects — missing ships, fugitives, artifacts and dangerous monsters. Trails of clues create mysteries and allow the moderator to send the characters across the realms to interesting encounters with the strange, wonderful and threatening that inhabit the hinterlands. Hunting adventures are among the easiest to plot, provide built-in motivation and are roleplaying classics. Hunter games focus on investigation, making and meeting contacts, going undercover and running targets to ground. There will likely be suspenseful action scenes, with the prospect of combat when the quarry is finally cornered.

Hook: Reports of a massive creature razing remote villages along the border of The Sky Beyond have reached the Guild. A rogue hemoth is suspected, but there are elements in the witness accounts that suggest something else — something heretofore unknown in



the realms. An aging but well-armed frigate — the *EGS DEFiant* — is tasked with the hunt and crewed with a full complement of experienced liegeman sailors and enthusiastic scientists: the former prepare for a dangerous hunt, while the latter dream of new discoveries.

Escorts

There are countless delivery, courier and escort missions carried out by the Guild fleet every cycle. Most are routine, such as the delivery of dispatches by fast courier from base to base or to the Frontier and back; some are uncommon, such as prisoner transfers and diplomatic escorts; and some are rare, such as infiltrating agents and sneaking envoys from one warring polity to another. They all provide challenging situations for characters to overcome and have their own inherent dangers. Escort adventures involve lots of shipboard action, roleplaying with contacts or interesting passengers, fighting off hijackers and otherwise protecting the cargo, agent, diplomat or escorted ship from ever-present dangers.

Hook: The party has been ordered to take command of and prep a nondescript civilian freighter ironically named *MAJESTIC*. Then, once the “envoy” comes aboard, they are to take her to all destinations she specifies and ensure that nothing untoward happens to her en route or at any of their ports of call. The orders are from the high captain himself and emphasize three things: the envoy’s mission is secret; the envoy’s mission is exceptionally dangerous, and several powerful interests want her to fail; and the envoy’s success is more important than the members of the ship’s crew — even the Knights.

BASE STAFF

Every significant Guild house has at least one Knight in command, and larger posts may require whole boat crews or an entire cadre of Knights to fill its critical positions.

Command

Knights are trained from the start to be leaders. They make the decisions and give the orders that secure their bases and determine the ultimate success or failure of every mission. Campaigns about base commanders involve lots of executive decisions and complex and challenging roleplaying, as everyone on the post looks to the characters for orders. This is a good

setup for intrigue, ongoing challenges and recurring adversaries. If the characters are assigned to a larger base they could serve as unit leaders in charge of subordinate divisions and leading local missions that allow the moderator to run a variety of different adventure types and styles.

Hook: The party is assigned as part of the command staff at *Iron Tower*, the Guild house on the Aerie in the Fortress Dominion. Hosting the military liaison between the Guild and the Dominion, as well as the vessel procurement office working with Dominion shipbuilding concerns, the responsibilities of this house are vital to the security of the realms. Despite the rivalry — and sometimes open animosity — between the Dominion and the Guild, both sides recognize they must somehow maintain their alliance or leave the Kingdoms in the Light all but undefended against a future Incursion.

Intrigue

A favorite for roleplaying games, stories focusing on intrigue and espionage are perfect for characters assigned to a Guild house. Bases large and small attract mysteries, and in the politically charged world of the realms, security and vigilance are essential defenses. The Guild maintains diplomatic missions throughout the kingdoms, and the staff of each mission is supported by at least a pair of Knights, one of whom is usually the ambassador himself. This campaign setup is rife with opportunity for testing the characters’ social, diplomatic and investigatory attributes. They can be called on to defend their own secrets, or execute suspenseful intrusions and daring plans to acquire those of their rivals and adversaries.

Hook: The party has been assigned as security at the Guild’s mission house on *Kingsland*, one of the most influential Estates in the nation of Loft. After the suspicious deaths of the two most recent ambassadors, the Captain’s Council is not taking any chances and wants to make sure their new envoy is well-protected. They believe having a boat crew of Knights as his security staff will give the diplomat a distinct advantage in any investigation or potential confrontation.

Outposts

Games built around garrisoning an outpost have all the possibilities for decision making and intrigue as those set at larger bases but with the added challenge of being isolated on a frontier with limited support and resources. The characters have to



deal with invaders, monsters, betrayal or whatever the story throws at them — without backup. Outpost games could also be constructed around establishing a new base or recapturing one taken by the Children of the Dark. A game like this would present all sorts of fun logistical problems, clever planning and lots of action.

Hook: *Gapstone Bridge* is a remote Guild outpost that was abandoned and subsequently lost during the Second Incursion, over 80 cycles ago. Recently re-charted by a far-ranging survey ship, the fleet has been ordered to retake, rebuild and re-garrison the small fort. Whether because they earned someone's ire or because someone thinks they are uniquely capable, the boat crew has been given command of this dubious mission. With a single heavy frigate, one old freighter, 150 liegemen and a hold full of supplies, the party is given one round to reoccupy and repair the base — whatever creatures or Child forces might already be waiting there notwithstanding.

KNIGHTS ERRANT

Knights can be assigned to any role or task the Guild requires, and the Order always needs agents to carry out a wide variety of missions. Instead of being assigned to a specific ship or house, a group of Knights could work as agents with missions that put them on different ships, take them to various bases and require that they travel across the realms. Such agents could be investigators, spies, couriers, inspectors or fugitive hunters. Such games include lots of interaction with NPCs, social skills, investigation, espionage and much suspenseful action and dangerous fighting.

Hook: Spark Bottle Bo is the popularized nom de guerre of a notorious thief heisting his — or her — way across the Kingdoms in the Light. If even a small fraction of the unlikely folklore surrounding him — or her — can be believed he — or she — is exceptionally skilled, dangerously cunning and remarkably attractive. He — or she — is also responsible for the thefts of a number of priceless Masters' artifacts including the *Lucent Dynamo*, the *Perpetual Gearbox* and the only known *Third-Phase Arc Sword*.

Recently the disappearance of an original Masters' schematic from a Guild vault has convinced the Order that it is time to bring Bo to ground. The party has been assigned this challenging task and is given authorization to

requisition whatever vessel, equipment and personnel they need. It is clear that the blueprints are uniquely valuable — or dangerous — and must be recovered at all costs.

WARRIORS

Many believe the realms stand on the brink of the Third Incursion and that the Kingdoms in the Light are already at war with the Children. If players prefer all-out battle, moderators can set their games on the front line and the characters at the heart of the fighting. Knights could be charged with defending forts or outposts, patrolling borders, planning and conducting assaults, scouting enemy positions or rescuing prisoners of war. Such games would provide lots of opportunity for action and combat, but they could also be full of intrigue, clever planning and roleplaying drama.

Hook: *Point Defiance* is one of the many forts that makes up the Bastion — the bulwark of scattered defensive installations that guards the Frontier border of the Fortress Dominion and serves as the first line of defense for the Kingdoms in the Light. Point Defiance, however, is actually a Guild outpost, garrisoned by the Explorer Knight fleet as one of their obligations to the Convocation Treaty.

The Fort is farther downwind than any other emplacement along the Bastion, hovering on the dim, gray horizon of the Twilight Frontier itself. The fortress is large, well-manned, well-armed and homeport to one of the biggest dedicated fleets in the Guild. Over 2,500 Knights, liegemen and civilian staff occupy the fort and crew the vessels stationed there.

The ships patrolling from Point Defiance have three times the encounters with Child vessels than those of any other navy of the realms, and the fort is always in a tension-filled state of high alert. The frequent skirmishing means that new personnel are constantly transferring in as the dead and wounded travel upwind, so the characters can arrive at their busy new post on the standard resupply transport. They had better like to fight, because it's a way of life here at the sharp end.

THE ACADEMY

The author recommends that moderators include an



Academy Flashback at the start of every session as a way to emphasize the importance of the school in the lives of Knights and to foreshadow or provide clues relevant to the adventure. The Academy is full of brilliant and magically powerful people, strange devices and weapons, lots of secrets and hundreds of intelligent, active, potent and curious children. It is possible to set whole adventures at the Academy with the characters playing teachers, staff or, especially, students. The rules for flashbacks provide guidance on making less experienced characters, and the setting is full of opportunity. Adventures include mystery-solving students or faculty, strange researches, training challenges, or graduation cruises. A whole campaign could follow a boat crew from the characters' individual recruitments all the way through graduation.

Hook: Every Kin child dreams of being an Explorer Knight — of attending the Academy, having great adventures and becoming a famous hero. All that seems rather simplistic now as the characters disembark on the famous Blue Docks and walk up the quay toward the Academy gates. It's their first official clock as novices in the Guild and they have no idea what they have actually gotten themselves into.

ACADEMY FLASHBACKS

The single most formative experience in the lives of Knight characters is their time at the Explorer Knights' Academy. Their broad knowledge, exceptional skills and mastery over Potential all result from the elite training they receive there. Their personal character, philosophy and honor are shaped by this essential education, and everything they do in their future service to the Guild is rooted in these formative Academy lessons.

To emphasize the living role Academy training plays in the lives of Knight characters, the author recommends that game moderators intentionally run a short encounter in the form of an Academy Flashback near the beginning of every game session. These encounters supply both narrative context and foreshadowing for the pending adventure, and they can be used to provide the characters with a flashback cache (see *Caches*, page 183).

Flashbacks are useful ways to provide backstory to a narrative, and they are particularly

fun and effective in roleplaying games. Not only do they allow the game moderator to add detail and context to the story, they also provide the characters — and players — with a sense of their own histories, enhancing engagement and verisimilitude in the adventure.

When a moderator plans a flashback, she should consider what story elements — foreshadowing, context or clues — she wants the characters to get out of the encounter, and therefore when in the characters' pasts she should set the scene. The life of an Explorer Knight can be divided into natural parts: recruitment festivals or special appointments; novice, apprentice, journeyman or ranking journeyman training; and graduation. Setting the flashback during recruitment or novice training is a good time to focus on personality development, friendships and formative childhood experiences like family, loss, mentors and first loves. Setting flashbacks during apprentice or journeyman training is a good time to focus on specific knowledge and skills and to establish relationships between party members and important Guild NPCs. Flashbacks around graduation allow moderators to relate their stories to the plans and ambitions of the characters and to create pivotal events on which their futures — and future adventures — can be based.

Regardless of when the moderator sets a flashback, he should intentionally connect the events, memories, or feelings to the story he is planning to tell so that the scene is a relevant and useful part of the narrative. Doing so also allows him to award specific characters, or the whole party, flashback caches.

Flashbacks work best when they are roleplaying encounters, but they can certainly incorporate stakes and making plays. The only caution is that the stakes should be composed such that they do not break the thread of any previously established narrative — eliminating known NPCs or PCs, changing historical events, or cancelling current character motivations and goals, for example.

Most in-game flashbacks provide some version of foreshadowing — hints at elements that will eventually come up in the story: relationships, clues, object lessons or character insights. Accordingly, flashbacks should be structured around several specific types of encounters.



Lessons — One or more of the characters has been through a previous situation that shares aspects with the current story. These flashbacks can be used to provide the players with knowledge or information about how their characters might deal with the present circumstances. Caches for such flashbacks might be assigned to one or more characters, or the whole party, and trigger when resolving present encounters that share specific elements or potential outcomes with the past lesson.

Relationships — Flashbacks are the perfect way to introduce recurring NPCs or set up existing relationships with friends, contacts, allied or rival groups and, of course, enemies. Ongoing relationships are a great way to generate plot and create a sense of verisimilitude and history within a campaign. Vignettes about how characters met or why their relationships are strong or went bad make excellent content for flashbacks, and caches benefiting or challenging characters based on those relationships are useful and interesting rewards.

Hints — Flashbacks are an excellent way to provide useful insight regarding upcoming obstacles within the adventure. They are particularly useful when that clue is necessary for the progression of the game. It allows the moderator to share the information in a way that avoids the narrative pitfalls of spoon-feeding or railroading. Appropriate caches could be assigned to any investigative efforts or social interactions connected to the events of the flashback.

Conflicts — One or more of the characters find themselves on different sides of an issue that somehow relates to the current circumstances. Arguing through it and finding — or failing to find — a resolution could inform the characters' interactions when a similar situation comes up in the current story. Assigned caches could trigger when the characters find resolution to their old conflict or when they engage in a new argument or debate.

Tactics — The characters find themselves in a skirmish, duel or battle in unusual circumstances, uncommon terrain or against an unfamiliar opponent. This can inform their approach in the current story thread and caches could be triggered when they find themselves fighting on the same terrain or engaged with a similar enemy.

The following guidelines help moderators get the most out of Academy Flashbacks:

- Design each flashback so it relates to one or more elements of the upcoming scenario. Ignore the fact that real flashbacks are never collective experiences and just assume boat crew members are constant elements in each other's memories.
- Pick a moment early in the session's narrative that might trigger the flashback, something that reminds a character of his past: someone asking a question, a compatriot bringing up an old story or an inconsequential scene that jogs a memory. Use it as a descriptive segue to transition the characters from the game present to the game past.
- Based on when in their history the flashback takes place, ask the players to reduce their hands' sizes accordingly (see below).
- Roleplay through a short vignette involving some or all of the characters. Feel free to include NPCs and ask players whose characters are not involved to take on those roles as appropriate. Focus on character interactions and encourage roleplaying around the central event.
- If a playworthy encounter is part of the flashback, guide the story so it leads to a single decisive bid, the outcome of which forms the essential experience or lesson the flashback is intended to present.
- As stakes for the play — or as a simple narrative benefit — offer a 1- to 3-card cache representing the lessons learned from their featured experience. Such awards are almost always story caches, but depending upon the significance of the flashback they may sometimes be innate. They can be bonus or challenge caches depending upon any bids or narrative circumstances.
- After the climactic play of the flashback, provide a narrative, transitional segue back to the present. If necessary offer a hint about the significance of the flashback — especially as it might relate to the upcoming events.

Example:

The moderator will be introducing a new NPC in the upcoming session and wants to create a preexisting relationship with the party



before doing so. He therefore sets up a flashback by describing the arrival of a fancy invitation to a private demonstration at the laboratory of the notorious Dr. Korov. This triggers a memory of when the characters attended an arcanelectrical technology exposition in Highstone when they were just apprentices.

The flashback opens with the party wandering the main floor of the exhibition hall as a younger, and less notorious, Dr. Korov is demonstrating his revolutionary Potential Amplification Apparatus. Without warning, the device overcharges and manifests a volatile Rain elemental in the middle of the exhibition hall. The characters respond with quick thinking; they evacuate visitors and disperse the entity with their own Arc abilities before too many of the exhibits are destroyed. They also disentangle the good doctor from his mangled device and provide him with some much-needed first aid.

For their decisive actions, the moderator awards them a 2-card story cache any time they are dealing with the unexpected effects of experimental devices. He then segues back to the present with a warning that at the very least, a demonstration by the esteemed doctor is likely to be interesting.

FLASHBACK HAND SIZES

Because flashbacks involve earlier versions of the characters — from times when they were less well-trained, practiced and skilled — moderators should assign hand penalties based on how far in the past a given flashback takes place. The world is no less challenging or dangerous when characters are young, so moderators do not reduce their hand sizes during flashbacks. They should, however, be aware of how easy it is to overpower small player hands with 8 cards and therefore scale challenge levels accordingly, rarely setting them over 1 or 2. They should also mostly play lower cards unless character failure makes the lesson inherent in the flashback more dramatic, poignant or narratively appropriate. Use the following guidelines when determining flashback penalties or when playing younger characters in campaigns set during their Academy clocks:

Festival Competitors and Novices —

These characters have only 3 cards in their Play hands and 2 cards in their Potential hands.

Apprentices — Apprentice characters have Play hands of 4 cards and 3 cards in their Potential hands.

Journeyman — Journeyman characters have Play hands of 5 cards and a full 4-card Potential hand.

If a moderator opts to run a flashback set around graduation, hand sizes are not reduced.

When the moderator initiates a flashback, the players should randomly draw their hand down to the specified limits and set the unused cards aside. After the flashback is over, the players can return the extra cards to their hands. Any cards used in plays during flashbacks are replaced normally from their respective Play decks. Any Potential spent in a flashback is recovered immediately when the story returns to the present.

The only caches that may be used during Academy Flashbacks are ancestral, culture and trait caches, as characters do not yet have their Knights' blades, Relics or access to any story caches. New attributes earned during campaign play and character advancement are also inaccessible in flashback scenes, as they have not yet been learned.

NON-KNIGHT PCS

There is no reason a group cannot choose to play non-Knight characters in their *UPWIND* games, as being pirates, spies or assassins is sometimes more fun than playing the good guys. Though their resources will be limited and their use of Potential will not be as refined, such limits make for interesting challenges, and there is certainly a greater variety of characters and adventures to choose from when the players are free of the obligations and vows of Knighthood. There are, of course, always exceptions and exceptional individuals, even outside the Guild. It is therefore left to the discretion of the moderator how strictly to enforce the following guidelines.

Similar to Knights in training, non-Knight characters should be limited by hand size restrictions (see *Decks and Hands* on page 172). It is exceptionally rare that a Kin not trained at the Academy reaches levels of skill or Potential that rival the prowess



of the Knights. Accordingly, moderators should limit the size of all but the most exceptional non-Knight PCs hands:

Average Kin peasant — 2 Play, 1 Potential.

Skilled laborer — 3 Play, 1 Potential.

Educated professional — 4 Play, 1 Potential.

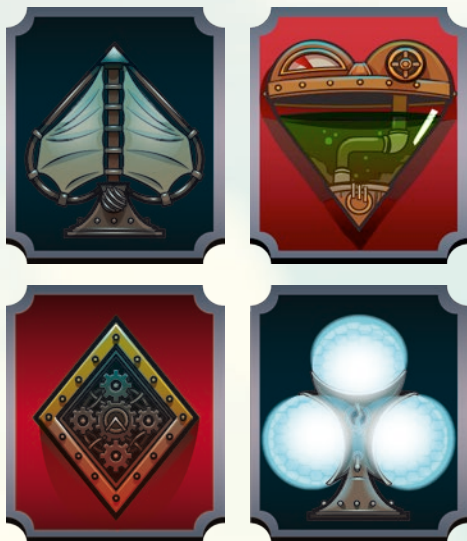
Experienced Liegeman — 4 Play, 2 Potential.

Well-trained agents, officers, elementalists or scientists with organizational support — up to 5 Play and 2 Potential at the moderator's discretion.

Experts, savants, exceptional elementalists, scholars, leaders and other influential or potent individuals — up to 6 Play and/or 4 Potential at the moderator's discretion.

Generally, moderators still have 8-card hands when running non-Knight games. They may reduce their Play hand accordingly if they wish, but note that the world does not become less challenging just because one is not an Explorer Knight.

Non-Knight characters do not receive Relics during character generation, nor do they have the benefit of a Knights' cache and they have no access to requisitions from the Guild quartermasters.



Q IS FOR QUANTUM

UPWIND uses an original game system called Q. Like most game systems, it provides a framework of objectivity and chance that helps guide the game's story. Unlike most systems, Q does not shape that story by resolving incremental character actions one at a time; instead it resolves whole encounters through a sort of quantum mechanic, determining which of a pair of potential outcomes will be used to continue the adventure narrative.

As in most roleplaying games, the participants cooperatively create the story as the moderator presents events in the game setting and the players describe their characters' reactions to those events. When these encounters become particularly interesting or complex, or when failure might have consequences for the characters, game rules are used to determine the outcomes. In Q, these potential outcomes are determined by cooperative negotiation between the game moderator and the players and proposed as stakes for which the participants bid using hands of playing cards. The participants then weave the winning outcome into the ongoing narrative and the story progresses accordingly — in a quantum, rather than incremental, way.

Character attributes are explained later in the rules, but it is relevant to note here for the sake of subsequent examples that they consist of Abilities, Skills and elemental powers called Potential. They are represented by descriptive phrases created by the players and serve the dual purposes of describing their characters and specifying what those characters can do.

Example

The EGS VIGILANT has been hit by cannon fire from a Child frigate and its induction hull has been badly damaged. The ship is losing altitude fast and is about to crash into a downwind skyland. The enemy ship is pacing the VIGILANT and readying another broadside. Knowing they will not survive a second raking and desperate to save his crew, Rowan, a young Explorer Knight, grabs the helm and shouts through the speaking tube for the engineer to give full power to the hull.

The moderator calls for a play and asks the player to suggest the stakes for which he would like to bid. The player says he wants Rowan to save the ship and crew by ramming the enemy vessel and causing it to crash into the floating island instead, allowing the VIGILANT to limp away and escape into the surrounding clouds. In doing so he also wants to win the lasting admiration of his crew and earn a new Blaze of Rank from his superiors.

The moderator proposes that should the player lose, the VIGILANT will crash into the island and half the crewmen will die in the wreck and the subsequent fighting when the enemy vessel lands. He also says that Rowan's superiors will still award him the new Blaze for his heroic actions in saving the remainder of his crew, but that Rowan will be so wracked with guilt about the loss of life that he will incur a I-card challenge cache (See Caches, page 183) for all future encounters in which he puts his crew at risk.

The player and moderator negotiate back and forth about the details and the challenge level



but ultimately agree to these stakes. The player uses Rowan's skill "Fly like the Wind," and when all the bids and bonus cards are played, he luckily wins the stakes.

The moderator describes how the VIGILANT bucks with the power surge, lurching upward, then drops onto the other vessel, driving it downward where it crashes into the island below. He then describes how the badly damaged VIGILANT, trailing blue sparks and black smoke, vanishes into the clouds. He explains that, should the crew survive the rest of the trip home, they will stand as an honor guard when Rowan receives his new Blaze, name at least one firstborn after him, and buy the drinks whenever they meet in port.

DECKS AND HANDS

Unlike most RPGs, which use dice as their randomizers, Q uses playing cards. Hands of cards provide points that the participants spend in secret bids to win their proposed outcomes.

All participants need full decks of standard playing cards, and before the game begins they must prepare these decks for play. Players each remove one Joker and set it aside, as it is not used in the game. They then separate out the suits that represents their characters' elemental Potentials (see *Attribute Suits*, page 209), shuffle those cards, and set them aside as their Potential decks. They shuffle the other three suits and the remaining Joker into stacks called Play decks. They draw six cards from their Play decks to form their Play hands, and four cards from their Potential decks to form their Potential hands.

Players should not share the content of their hands with each other and, to maintain the bluffing potential of the core mechanic, they should also keep their cards secret from the moderator.

The game moderator also preps his deck, but he does not separate the suits. He simply shuffles all his cards together and draws a Play hand of eight cards. Though the moderator has a slightly larger Play hand, note that the odds are ultimately still in the players' favor, as they have ten cards with their Play and Potential hands combined, as well as access to bonus cache cards (see *Caches*, page 183) and teamwork cards (see *Teamwork*, page 184) from other characters. Note that the moderator keeps one Joker in his Play deck if there are three or fewer players

PREPPING DECKS

- Players separate their characters' Potential suits from the rest of their cards and play with two separate decks — their Play decks, containing three suits, and their Potential Decks, containing the one suit assigned to their Potential attributes.
- Players keep one Joker in their Play decks and discard the second Joker from play.
- Moderators use a single deck containing all four suits.
- Moderators place one Joker in their decks if there are three or fewer players, and two Jokers if there are four or more players.

in the game, and two Jokers if there are four or more players.

REPLENISHING CARDS

Cards are spent from the participants' hands into their respective discard piles.

Play hand cards are replenished from the Play deck after every play.

Potential hands replenish from the Potential deck but are limited resources that take game time to recharge once spent. Potential cards replenish at roughly the rate of one card per bell of in-game time, as determined by the moderator.

RESHUFFLING

When a participant reaches the end of her Play or Potential deck, she discards the cards left in that hand, reshuffles the deck and redraws the given hand. The reshuffle occurs as soon as the last card is drawn.

DISCARDING AND REDRAWING

There are times during play when players must discard cards to reduce their hand size — most commonly due to wounds or, when playing in a flashback scene, when their characters were not as well-trained or powerful.



CHALLENGE MODE

It is tacitly understood in most RPGs that the players usually ultimately achieve their primary goals. Every good adventure has setbacks and challenges, but in the end the characters typically succeed. Accordingly, like the mechanics of most games, Q is biased toward player success. Unlike most roleplaying games, however, where failure of a single attack roll or skill check rarely has major consequences, losing a bid can have profound effects on an *UPWIND* adventure. This impact is intentional and part of making stories with meaningful consequence, but it does take a little getting used to.

If a group's style of play favors fewer setbacks or easier challenges, the moderator can opt to reduce the overall difficulty by reducing his own hand size to seven cards, thereby reducing the frequency of high cards in his hand. Conversely, if the group feels play is too easy or wants to face more challenging encounters, the moderator can bump his hand size to nine cards. Larger reductions or increases are not recommended as they leave the moderator problematically underpowered or overpowered.

When players must discard one or more cards for injury, they randomly select the designated number of discards from their hands and place them in their respective discard piles. As characters heal, they draw cards from their respective decks and add them to their hands.

When players enter a flashback, they randomly draw down cards from their hand to the specified limits and set them aside. When play returns to the present the players return their original cards to their hands. Any cards used in plays during flashbacks are replaced normally from their respective decks, and any Potential cards used in the flashback are immediately recovered upon return to the present narrative.

KNIGHTS' SACRIFICE

Sometimes luck is against a player and he just draws a bad hand and ends up feeling underpowered. While there are circumstances that flush player hands (see *Jokers*, page 189), there are times when a player's cards are so bad he just needs a fresh hand — a mulligan. Accordingly, a player may choose to sacrifice his Knights' cache for the session — mark it off without any other benefit — to flush either his entire Play or Potential hand and draw new cards. If he chooses to do this, he must keep the new hand, even if it turns out to be worse than the original.

PLAYS

The core of any roleplaying game mechanic is the resolution of encounters — events, actions,

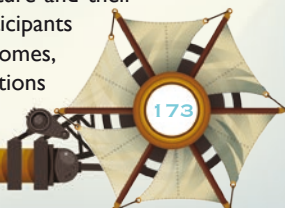
or challenges within the story narrative the group is creating. In Q, this resolution starts with negotiating stakes — the potential outcomes for a given encounter.

NEGOTIATING STAKES

When negotiating stakes, the player usually states his desired outcome first, then the moderator builds off this to offer counter stakes and gauge the challenge level for the play — one, two or three cards. The player and moderator negotiate back and forth, working to create balance, make the stakes more interesting, give the characters lasting consequences or change the challenge level. Once everyone is satisfied with the proposed outcomes, they make their bids.

The participants should remember that roleplaying is not really about winning or losing, and that the ultimate goal is to create a fun and interesting narrative. While stakes may be opposed, and therefore appear competitive, negotiation should always be collaborative and any final stakes should be agreeable to all participants. Once everyone gets used to the mechanic of proposing outcomes, the process becomes an easy, creative, and fun part of the game.

It's easy to propose unfair, ridiculous, or even broken stakes, so participants should cooperate to propose outcomes in keeping with the tone of the given adventure and their group's style of play. Participants should offer initial outcomes, then suggest modifications



and otherwise build consensus to make the final stakes fun and fitting for everyone.

While negotiating stakes, participants should answer some of the following questions to enhance their proposed outcomes.

- What do the characters want or need?
- How can the narrative be complicated in a meaningful way?
- What would be most fun or interesting if it happened at this point in the story?
- What would add emotion or drama to the circumstances?
- How might the circumstances be turned into a moral dilemma for the characters?
- What kind of lasting or permanent consequences could occur?
- How can future plot or story complications be seeded into the narrative?
- What could be added to the outcomes to make the overall story more creative or interesting?

Example

Niko finds himself cornered by a band of pirates in a lonely alley somewhere in the lower warrens of Hole. The pirates are clearly out for blood. Everyone draws weapons and prepares to fight. The moderator calls for a play.

Option #1

Player's Stakes — *Niko uses Unstoppable Force to trounce the pirates with such ease and authority they beg for their lives offering any service in exchange. They become standing underworld contacts on whom the Knight may call in the future.*

Moderator's Stakes — *The pirates beat Niko badly, doing a major wound and stealing his Knights' blade. The Knight is so traumatized by the experience that during his next three encounters with pirates, he will be so intimidated he may not crown any associated plays (see Crowning, page 182).*

Option #2

Player's Stakes — *Niko uses his One of the Boys ability to pass himself off as a member of a bigger gang looking to recruit new members. He convinces the thugs with a compelling story and some equally compelling bribes, and he finds himself the boss of his own small gang.*

Moderator's Stakes — *Niko successfully recruits his own*

gang, but word gets back to his captain before he can explain, and he is accused of malfeasance upon his return to the fleet.

Option #3

Player's Stakes — *Niko kills the leader of the thugs, arrests his compatriots and breaks the back of the local branch of Black Jax's Boatmen.*

Moderator's Stakes — *Niko kills the leader who turns out to be the younger brother of Black Jax himself. Subsequently, Jax vows to kill 100 Guild members in revenge. Black Jax becomes a dangerous but elusive threat, costing the Guild many lives before he is eventually captured.*

Complexity

The variety of possible outcomes is limited only by the creativity of the participants. They can be simple or complex, narrow or broad, literal or meta, immediate or pending, temporary or lasting. They can be anything about which the participants can agree — awarding of caches, future in-game benefits or disadvantages, restrictions on PC or NPC actions, changes in challenge level or even setting-altering events. Characters can best old enemies or gain new ones, earn the favor of a king or incur the wrath of a whole kingdom, make or lose a fortune, become convinced of a truth, or get lost in a web of lies, obtain unique artifacts and resources, have epiphanies and solve mysteries. Characters can lose limbs or gain new phobias, desires, allies, motivations or goals. Outcomes can provide bonus or penalty caches linked to standing actions or to future circumstances, encounters or events. The possibilities are limitless, depending only on the imagination of the participants and the stakes on which they are willing to bid.

Example

Isa is an experienced Knight serving as the Guild's ambassador to the Cloud Principality and has been in ongoing negotiations with the ruling oligarchy to improve diplomatic relations between the mysterious nation and its closest political neighbors. The summit has gone on for several intrigue-ridden clocks and the final ratification of the treaty has come down to a climactic play. The player says Isa will use her Steely Negotiator skill and the participants begin their negotiations.

If the player wins she wants Cloud to accept diplomatic missions from bordering countries and would like the Principality to permit its citizens to



join the Guild, despite the fact that Cloud is not a member of the Convocation. She wants the Cloud diplomat with whom Isa has been working to actually trust her and she wants her fellow Knights to have caught the Red Circle assassin they learned has targeted the diplomat before she has the chance to strike. Finally, Isa would like to have so impressed her superiors that the members of her boat crew get their next Blazes of Rank and she is permanently assigned to the Guild's diplomatic corps.

The moderator likes the stakes but, noting the detailed expectations, proposes equally complex counter stakes. He suggests that if the player loses, the negotiations sour and that the Cloud diplomat expresses concern over the ulterior motives of the Guild to his superiors, claiming he does not trust the Knights. He will also share concerns over his own safety so that when the Red Circle assassin successfully strikes, the Knights will be blamed for his death and be forced to flee Principality authorities. Assuming they escape, the Guild will assign the whole boat crew to an outpost in the Sky Beyond for the next half cycle as consequence for their problematic failure.

Wanting to avoid the outpost assignment at all costs, the player suggests dropping Isa's diplomatic corps assignment if the moderator drops the outpost punishment. He agrees and they make the play.

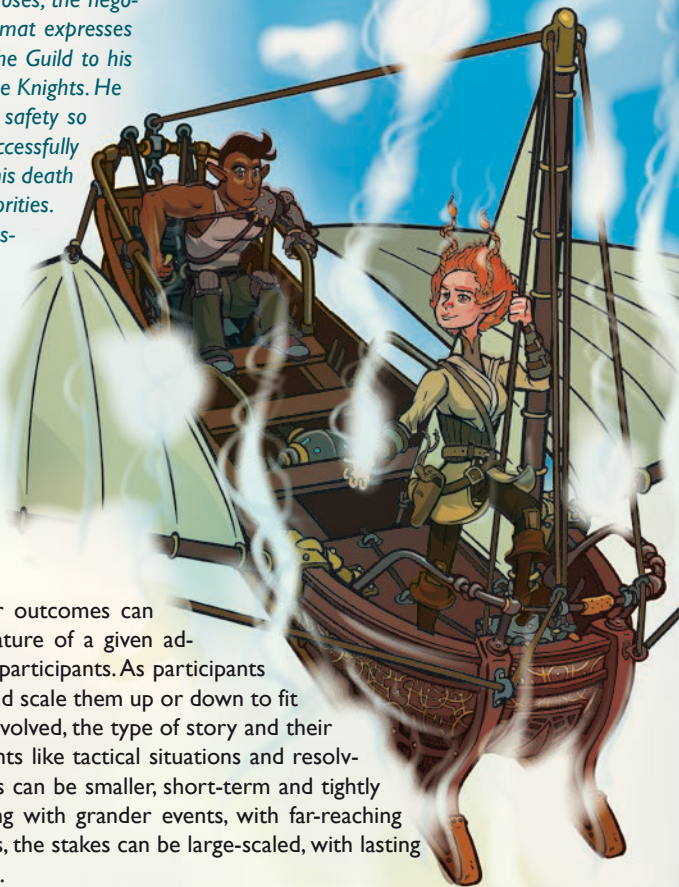
Scope

The scope of encounters and their outcomes can vary widely depending upon the nature of a given adventure and the preferences of the participants. As participants negotiate their outcomes, they should scale them up or down to fit the game situation, the characters involved, the type of story and their group's style of play. If the participants like tactical situations and resolving lots of fine details, the outcomes can be smaller, short-term and tightly scaled. If the participants like playing with grander events, with far-reaching and broadly significant consequences, the stakes can be large-scaled, with lasting character and setting-altering effects.

Example

Narrower Outcomes

- Pick a pocket and make it around the corner without being detected.
- Repair a malfunctioning power conduit before the ship loses more altitude.
- Disarm the attacking Child of the Dark warrior and knock him unconscious.
- Locate the misshelved book in the old library and decipher the code it contains.
- Hide the fact that a character is a Knight so as not to scare off the cute boy.



Broader Outcomes

- *Execute a complex plan that successfully steals the enemy defense schematics, misdirects the guards and gets the operative through the defensive lines and onto the fast courier before the theft is even noticed.*
- *Decipher the old map discovering the lost clue that allows calculation of the navigational corrections for the regional anomaly, leading the expedition to finally discover the legendary Masters' cache.*
- *Run a clever con that leads a nefarious Baron to incriminate himself with his own stolen contraband while manipulating the Baron's cronies into being the actual agents of his downfall.*

OUTCOMES

One of the things that sets *UPWIND* apart from other RPGs is how the stakes mechanic can be used to establish meta outcomes for encounters — outcomes that break the fourth wall of the narrative and reference the adventure, game or characters themselves.

Pending Outcomes

Outcomes can set up eventualities that trigger at some inconvenient — but narratively fun — time in the future. They can provide foreshadowing by offering future complications or challenges beyond the current scene.

Example

The characters have discovered they are being shadowed by a mysterious ship flying no flags. They do not want their destination known and decide to try and lose their pursuers in the oncoming cloudbank. The moderator calls for a play and the participants negotiate stakes.

Option #1

Player's Stakes — *The characters manage to evade the trailing ship and, in the process, get a close enough look to identify its nationality.*

Moderator's Stakes — *The characters manage to evade the ship — but only for the moment. At some dramatically appropriate point later in the narrative, the mystery ship will unerringly intercept the party.*

Option #2

Player's Stakes — *The characters make a strafing pass with their ship's guns to dismast their pursuer's vessel, evading the mystery ship as it is forced to stop and make repairs.*



SCHRODINGER'S STAKES

Like the imaginary cat in the famous thought experiment — which is both alive and dead until an observer opens the box — the actual narrative outcomes in Q only “occur” after the play is won. The outcomes do not exist in the story until the play is made, at which point the options collapse into a singular tale. This critical change of state from proposed stakes to narrative event is what puts the “Q” in quantum.

Moderator's Stakes — *The characters successfully strafe and stop their pursuers but, unbeknownst to the characters, during the fray their ship took damage that is overlooked. At the moderator's discretion a critical malfunction may occur at a dramatically dangerous point in the future.*

Option #3

Player's Stakes — *The characters deliberately allow the pursuing vessel to keep them in sight, accepting whatever risks that might entail. In exchange, the characters receive a 2-card story cache that can be used in any plays made against those same pursuers in subsequent encounters.*

Moderator's Stakes — *The pursuers see through the characters' ruse and remain wary and unpredictable. The pursuers will automatically surprise the PCs should they choose to confront them at any time in the future, and have a 1-card challenge cache to use if they do so.*

Cascading Outcomes

It can make for good story, and involve more characters in a given encounter, to propose nested outcomes that affect the circumstances of future plays — the actions of one character influencing the options, stakes or challenge level of another character's subsequent play.

Example

The incoming shells from the automated artillery are ripping up the battlefield and the liegeman platoon is pinned down. The soldiers will be slaughtered if Geeta and Arin don't do something soon. The moderator judges the circumstances



and says it will likely be a 3-card play to get the platoon to safety.

Option #1

Geeta's player wants her to be a hero and sacrifice herself to save the soldiers. Geeta charges off across the battlefield shooting off Arc Potential in all directions to draw fire. The player asks for a play to reduce the challenge level from a 3 to a 2 for any play Arin's character subsequently makes to lead the shell-shocked troops to safety.

Option #2

Arin jams his hands into the ground, calling on his Ore Potential to form a redoubt of stone to protect the soldiers. His player says he wants to make a play in which, should he win, the moderator must agree not to kill off any of the soldiers when Geeta makes a subsequent play to save them.

Retroactive Outcomes

Outcomes can also be proposed that alter the circumstances or even the setting of a given encounter. They can change elements of the situation, characters and environment or even aspects of the unspecified past.

Example

The bandits have found and stolen Angean and Erol's launch, and are attempting to use it in a ruse to board and attack the unwary Guild ship. The stranded Knights arrive just moments too late and watch as the launch lifts off and disappears into the haze of the cloudbank in which the liegeman crew is hiding their vessel.

Option #1

Angean wants to stop the thieves using her Clever Girl attribute and suggests she secretly put a hidden clockwork switch on the launch's circuit box that, if not reset, times out immediately after activating the hull. She proposes that the launch quickly loses power as a result, forcing the bandits into a crash landing.

Option #2

Erol is a little paranoid and wants to use his Always has an Exit attribute to bid on stakes that include an act of foresight. In preparation for just such an event, Erol previously stationed a squad of liegeman musketeers in the brush around the launch with orders to ambush the bandits he suspected might circle back and try to steal the launch. As a result, he proposes that as part of the outcome the bandits never got off the ground.

Option #3

Angean is a Wind user and wants to have used her Potential to bring the launch so far upcountry that the skyland's Wind shadow prevents the bandits from getting it airborne without their own Wind magic. She proposes an outcome that adds in this previously unspecified detail, making it a preexisting part of the story.

It is important to note that retroactive outcomes should not casually rewrite previously established narrative, but instead fill in only noncontradictory actions and events.

Congruent Outcomes

Congruent outcomes are created when the moderator agrees to most of the stakes proposed by the player, but modifies or tweaks them just a little to provide unexpected, more challenging or edgier counter stakes.

Example

The crew of the EGS LOYALTY has found a damaged Child vessel grounded on a fog-enshrouded island and moves in, guns run out and the crews ready to fire. Jonen gives the order, the cannons roar and the moderator calls for a play.

Option #1

The player wants to kill the Child officers with a well-aimed barrage.

The moderator agrees that the broadside will sweep the command deck clear but offers the counter-stakes that the Child's secret dispatches — the reason the Knights were chasing the ship in the first place — will be destroyed in the resulting fire.

Option #2

The player wants to hit the enemy ship's powder magazine, blowing it to splinters and wiping out the entire crew in the blast.

The moderator agrees to the stakes of destroying the ship but with the caveat that upon inspecting the subsequent wreckage, the Knights discover there were two dozen Kin prisoners aboard — half of them young children.

Personal Outcomes

Some stakes give individual characters profound or far-reaching consequences. More directed at the characters themselves, these outcomes can fundamentally change their status, goals, motivations, personalities, bodies and futures. They can also affect boat crew interactions and dynamics



— changing the relationships between the PCs. Examples of such outcomes could include:

- Falling in love or getting married.
- Gaining a mental illness.
- Retiring a character from the campaign and introducing a new one.
- Establishing a major goal like revenge, fame or an appointment as an Academy instructor.
- Incurring a deep-seated phobia.
- Gaining a strong emotional connection — love or hate — to another player character.
- Losing a limb to injury.
- Being required to roleplay a particular personality trait.
- Characters having to trust an NPC, even though the players know he betrayed them.
- Taking a mortal wound or suffering outright character death.

Example

Two characters, Eza and Penn, are bickering about something one of them did and the moderator, realizing this is a common occurrence, suggests that romantic tension between the characters might be the cause. He decides to call an opposed play to determine the nature of their relationship and asks the players to suggest stakes. Eza chooses to use her ability Good Judge of Character and Penn his skill Lady-Killer.

Option #1

Penn's player decides his character is secretly harboring feelings for Eza and proposes that if he wins the bid, Eza realizes that she is also falling in love with him so her player must roleplay accordingly.

Eza's player decides her character is a bit oblivious to this kind of thing, and if she wins, Penn's feelings will go unrequited. The rejection will make him cool and angry with her, so his player must roleplay accordingly.

Option #2

Penn and Eza's players both decide that they want congruent outcomes and that whoever loses the play must ask the other to marry him or her and that the winner gets to accept or decline as he or she wishes.

Example

Aril learns that his best friend and fellow Knight has been killed in action in an encounter with the Children of the Dark. The moderator wants the news to have lasting impact on the

character and significant consequences in the story, and so calls for a play. The player decides to use Aril's "Cool Under Fire" attribute.

The moderator suggests that if Aril wins, he controls his emotions, grieving quietly and foregoing angry outbursts and vows of vengeance. He does however, gain a 1-card story cache he can use the next time he faces off with a Child opponent. If Aril loses the play, the moderator suggests that he is inconsolable and furious beyond words. He becomes obsessed with vengeance against the Children and must roleplay this out at his first opportunity. The raging fury also grants Aril a 3-card story cache he can use in any subsequent encounter with Children of the Dark.

Outcomes to Avoid

Stakes should not be proposed that simply negate previous outcomes. If previous outcomes have been woven into the narrative, players should not maneuver to simply cancel them by offering stakes that are just thinly veiled mulligans. If outcomes are proposed that eliminate setbacks or lasting consequences the players have already suffered, they should be in keeping with the spirit of the story and not simply be a metagaming tactic to negate a complication. Similarly, outcomes that end the narrative prematurely by cutting all ties to the plot, destroying key clues or MacGuffins, killing off the central adversaries — or even the PCs themselves — are counterproductive and should not be offered as stakes.

Stakes that should typically be avoided include:

- The outright deaths of player characters. Characters may be killed, but only by taking wounds (see [Wound Draws](#), page 192) as part of agreed-upon stakes.
- The PC's ship's induction hull failing instantly without the chance of repair or crash landing. When a hull fails, the ship falls like a stone into the Dark below and the death of its crew is usually inevitable.
- Elimination of past consequences simply to be rid of hindrances, complications or restrictions, rather than resolving such narrative challenges through play.
- Elimination of essential plot elements or story threads, or the introduction of changes, that could break the narrative or otherwise ruin the intent of the game.
- Premature elimination of the goals the PCs are chasing or that are driving the story along.



URNS, PLAYS AND SPOTLIGHT TIME

In traditional resolution systems, players share the spotlight and shape the narrative incrementally as they take their individual turns. This has the effect of parsing out character actions so that each player gets his share of narrative attention by default. In Q, since whole encounters can be resolved with single plays, it is important that moderators make sure that the opportunity to make plays shifts from player to player in a “turn-like,” if not actually sequential, fashion, featuring every character and giving each the chance to shape the narrative. Turns or plays — the end result of collective storytelling is the same if the moderator is intentional about making sure everyone has an equal chance to participate.

CALLING PLAYS

Plays are usually called by the game moderator, but players are encouraged to request them as well. Though moderators may defer, they should go along with it if they feel it’s narratively appropriate and players aren’t just slyly trying to flush low cards from their hands. Since plays are used to resolve whole encounters, it makes sense that they are made less frequently than die rolls in incremental game systems. Though plays can be made anytime, controlling the timing and set-up significantly enhances the drama of the mechanic and the quality of the storytelling.

Plays should usually only be called when the possible outcomes are significant, the results could be dramatic or they would have meaningful impact on the story. Using a play to determine if a character can gain access to some random warehouse is probably not worth interrupting the flow of the narrative. Using a play to determine if a character is able to sneak into a Child of the Dark fortress would definitely be worthwhile. A good rule of thumb is if the characters’ actions might fail in an interesting way, it is worth calling a play.

Setting Up Plays

Plays can be made anytime, but are most dramatic at just the right moments in the narrative. Using the Child fortress example above, the moderator could call for a play as soon as the character first sneaks up to the walls. The end results might ultimately be the same for the plot, but the potential for suspenseful narrative and complicated outcomes would be limited. Alternatively, the moderator could describe the environmental circumstances and let the player describe his character’s actions until the character has scaled the wall, avoided the guards on the ramparts, descended a dark tower stair and come to a heavy door barred by an arcane-electrical lock. If the moderator now calls for the play, the consequences of any potential outcomes will, by necessity, be more dramatic and exciting.

PLAYS AND ATTRIBUTES

Character attributes are descriptive, evocative phrases created by the players and unique to each character. They serve the dual purposes of describing characters and specifying what those characters can do. Whenever a character is faced with an encounter, the player chooses one attribute with which to make the associated play, even if more than one fits the given circumstance. It does not have to apply to all the elements of the situation or the proposed outcomes of the play, but it should fit the encounter in a meaningful way. Players are expected to practice a little gamesmanship in picking which attributes to use. They need good cards, but they also need to be able to sell the moderator on a given attribute’s applicability, as the moderator has final discretion about the suitability of any attribute for a given play.

Moderators should avoid asking players to use a specific attribute in a given encounter. Encounters should be presented in ways that encourage the players to decide how they want to handle them based on the cards in their hands, and how cleverly they can interpret or apply their characters’ attributes.

Default Draws

Even if his character has no readily applicable attribute, a player might still want to — or have to — attempt a play to resolve an encounter. In such circumstances, the player is allowed to pull a single card from the appropriate deck and play it as his bid. The player may crown any appropriate



face card that chance provides in the draw. If he is still holding any, he may add one of his applicable caches to the bid as well. As always, Jokers drawn in a default play beat anything but another Joker, die after being pulled and trigger a reshuffle. Default plays are otherwise resolved normally.

Note that making default plays — successful or otherwise — is how players earn new attributes for their characters (see *Character Advancement*, page 213).

BIDDING

Q's core mechanic is based on the moderator and players using hands of playing cards to make secret bids for proposed outcomes. Whenever a play is called, the participants negotiate stakes and then make bids. The number of cards each of the participants may bid ranges from 1 to 3.

For players, this number is determined by the level (1, 2 or 3) of the attribute the character is using (see *Attribute Ranks*, page 208). Players must base their plays on a single attribute, even if more than one may be applicable to the encounter. The system does not allow for combinations of attributes.

Bid size may be further limited by the number of cards of a given suit in a player's hand. Each character attribute is linked to one of the four card suits (see *Attribute Suits*, page 209), and all the cards in a player's bid must be of the suit linked to the attribute being used. If the player does not have enough cards of that particular suit to meet his attribute level, he must either play short or use a different attribute.

The number of cards the game moderator bids is based on the challenge level he assigns to the encounter — easy (1), medium (2), hard (3) (see *Challenge Levels* below).

Bid Scores

Each numbered card is worth points equal to its value. Face cards and Aces are worth 10 points each, and may trigger crowning (see *Crowning*, page 182), and Jokers have special rules (see *Jokers*, page 189). A participant's score is the sum of all the hand, crowning and cache cards played as part of her bid.

Challenge Levels

The game moderator assigns a challenge level for every play based on the content and context of the stakes and must inform the players of that value prior to bidding. Challenge

levels are 1-card (easy), 2-cards (medium) and 3-cards (hard). They are relative, quantitative limits on the number of cards the moderator may play in a given bid and allow players to assess what their characters are up against. Challenge levels should be assigned as objectively as possible, with the intention of keeping them internally consistent within the storytelling.

Easy, 1-card challenge levels should be assigned to any plays involving routine circumstances where the risk of failure would be low, but where that failure would create interesting complications in the story.

Example

- *Winning a skyship race for bragging rights.*
- *Drinking a local thug under the table.*
- *Ridding a small device of an arc weevil infestation.*
- *Finding a helpful clue in some personal papers.*
- *Convincing a gullible person with a simple lie.*
- *Subduing a target lacking any martial training.*
- *Conducting basic research.*

Medium, 2-card challenge levels should be assigned to any plays where failure is not uncommon and could significantly affect the direction of the narrative.

Example

- *Tracking an enemy vessel to its hidden base.*
- *Repairing an experimental arc cannon.*
- *Subduing a pirate leader without hurting him.*
- *Charming everyone at a state dinner.*
- *Convincing a prince you are the official ambassador.*
- *Diagnosing the problem with a malfunctioning induction hull.*
- *Delivering a compelling briefing to a committee of fleet officers.*
- *Turning someone into a double agent.*

Hard, 3-card challenge levels should only be assigned to plays where failure would prevent characters from achieving significant goals.

Example

- *Bluffing an assaulting force that the undermanned fortress is well-defended.*
- *Flying a burning skyship between rearing cliffs and landing safely before the powder magazine explodes.*
- *Fighting a Child of the Dark commander in single combat.*



- *Convincing the roomful of high captains that their intelligence is wrong and that the invasion fleet has already crossed the Twilight Frontier.*
- *Winning the princess's hand in marriage.*
- *Designing a new arcanoelectrical device.*
- *Winning a fight when outnumbered ten to one.*

Deciding the challenge level should be part of negotiating stakes and participants can advocate for raising and lowering them as they work out their potential outcomes. If a participant feels that the stakes are unbalanced, he can suggest that the challenge level be raised or lowered as a way to compensate.

Circumstances that raise challenge level:

- NPC injury — consequences that injure, incapacitate or kill opposed characters through combat or daring actions.
- Higher stakes — more elaborate, valuable or consequential outcomes for the characters.

- Mutually exclusive stakes — player and moderator outcomes that are mutually exclusive or strongly divergent.
- Specific benefits — outcomes that include significant personal benefits, bonuses or advantages for a player character.
- Lasting consequences — outcomes with longer durations or broader impacts.
- Dubious attributes — using an attribute with indirect or questionable application to the circumstances.

Circumstances that lower challenge level:

- PC injury — consequences that injure, incapacitate or kill player characters or allies through combat or daring actions.
- Lower stakes — outcomes that ultimately have minor impact on the narrative.
- Congruent stakes — player and moderator outcomes that share parallel or overlapping elements with each other.



- Accepting disadvantages — players including outcomes in their own stakes that add character restrictions or complications.
- Perfect attribute — using an attribute that appears to be custom-made for the circumstances.

In addition to challenge level, there is a subtler way moderators can adjust the challenge of individual plays behind the scenes. Like the players, the moderator has control over which cards he chooses to play, but because his hand is larger than either of a player's two hands, he often has more options. If he wants to push the story in the direction of his stakes, he can play high cards. If he likes the player's stakes better or thinks the player could use a success he can "throw" the bid by playing low cards. By playing high cards, the moderator effectively raises the difficulty and by playing low cards he lowers it.

Moderator Suits

As with player bids, all cards bid by the moderator in a given play must be of the same suit. This places an essential balancing restriction on the moderator's plays that is a necessary complement to character attribute suits.

Crowning Plays

Face cards and Aces are each worth 10 points when played in a bid. They are also uniquely powerful cards under the right circumstances and may be used to "crown" plays. When a face card or Ace is played as part of an initial bid, the player may be able to crown that bid by drawing a single, random bonus card from his Play deck and adding its value to his score.

Plays may be crowned only under card specific, narrative circumstances as determined by the actions and intentions of the characters. Jacks may only be used to crown plays involving trickery, deception, subterfuge, thievery or similarly underhanded and disreputable purposes. Queens may only be used to crown plays involving wisdom, healing, defense, charisma, compassion, love or similarly wise or nurturing circumstances. Kings may crown only plays involving combat, strategy, leadership, diplomacy, nobility, negotiation or similar contexts involving forceful authority. Aces may be used to

crown any play at any time for any reason — making them singularly powerful cards.

BIDDING GUIDELINES

- Players choose only one attribute, and may play a number of cards of that attribute's suit up to the attribute's rank. Potential plays are made from the Potential hand; otherwise, cards are made from the Play hand.
- The moderator sets a challenge level of 1, 2 or 3 cards. The moderator must play cards of the same suit.
- Participants may crown one face card under the appropriate circumstances.
- Participants may crown Aces at any time.
- Participants may add one card from one appropriate cache.
- Helpers may play 2s and 3s (only 2s for non-knight characters)
- Jokers automatically win the bid, unless tied with another Joker.

Jacks may be used to crown plays in encounters like the following:

- Sneaking past alert sentries.
- Convincing a pirate crew the Knight is a fellow freebooter.
- Switching the real jewels with the fakes.
- Ditching the dangerous looking thugs following the party.
- Flying a ship so that it appears damaged and vulnerable.
- Predicting the thieves' next target.

Queens may be used to crown in these sorts of encounters:

- Tending to wounded comrades.
- Defending others.
- Reassuring terrified children that everything will be OK.
- Convincing the authorities you are telling the truth when you really are.
- Attempting to seduce a prudish courier.
- Convincing the command staff to take a different course of action.



CROWNING GUIDELINES

- Aces may crown any play involving any circumstances.
- To trigger a bonus card, the crowning face card or Ace must be bid as part of the original play and be of the suit linked to the attribute the character is using.
- The bonus cards triggered by crowning are considered “suitless” and do not need to match the attribute suit of the rest of the cards in the play.
- Cards added to a play from caches may not be crowned.
- Bids may only be crowned once, regardless of how many applicable face cards may be part of the play.
- Players are encouraged to stretch interpretation and applicability in hopes of crowning, but the game moderator has final discretion over whether any potential crowning card applies to a given play.

- Stopping the villagers from lynching a Child of the Dark spy.

Kings may be used to crown these kinds of plays:

- Dueling with the captain of an enemy ship.
- Planning a raid on a pirate hideout.
- Rallying the crew before a big battle.
- Negotiating a new treaty with the Royal Trading Company.
- Demanding a prisoner reveal the details of a secret plan.
- Leading the flagship into battle with a Child man-of-war.

Example:

Domnall is negotiating with a cagey old sailor for information about a local smuggling operation. The sailor does not want to be caught between the Guild and the smugglers, but is also interested in making a little money off the Knight if he can. The moderator calls for a play.

The player's stakes are that he learns the names of the smuggling ring's leaders and the location of their den. The Knight does not have the price the sailor is asking for, so decides to use his skill We Have Ways of Making You Talk.

The moderator's stakes are that the sailor cleans out the Knight's purse and gives Domnall enough misinformation that the Knight has a 2-card challenge cache that can be used against him in any future interactions with the smugglers in question. Since this is important information with serious consequences to the plot, the moderator sets the difficulty at 3 cards.

Domnall has the 4, 8 and King of Spades — the suit linked to the attribute he is using — and justifies crowning the play with the King because he is being forceful and intimidating. The player pulls a 5 as the crowning card for a total of 27.

The moderator plays the 3, 10, and Jack of Clubs. He justifies crowning with the Jack because the sailor is very streetwise and values his own skin. The moderator draws a 7 as the bonus card, for a total of 30.

As a result, Domnall is out of money and is going to have an even harder time dealing with the smugglers — if he can ever track them down.

Caches

Caches — as in a stashed supply — are bonus cards that can be added to bids to increase scores and are mechanically similar to crowning. Caches represent advantage, motivation, inspiration and knowledge provided by character experience, valuable equipment, special training, powerful allies or other unique narrative circumstances (see *Innate and Story Caches*, page 196). Cache cards are always drawn from the Play deck, never from the Potential deck. Like crowning cards, cache cards are considered “suitless” and they can be bid for any type of play: ability, skill or Potential.

Example

Every Explorer Knight has a 1-card Knights' Cache for the achievement, pride and authority of being a Knight, and this cache can be used in any circumstance.

Evengi is at the helm during a Potential storm. He has the skill Born to Fly at 3 and the player has the 5, 9 and 10 of the linked suit in his hand. Desperate to see the ship and crew safely through the raging weather, Evengi puts everything he's got into the effort, and the player puts everything



FUDGING OR NUDGING

Unlike games where dice make success or failure a matter of random chance, Q intentionally provides a degree of control over the odds. By purposefully playing particularly high cards, participants can improve their chances of taking the given stakes. By cleverly negotiating stakes they are willing to lose and then playing particularly low cards, players can shed a bad hand and moderators can give the characters an advantage or shape the direction of the plot.

This ability to nudge the outcomes is a feature of Q and should be exploited. Moderators can help or hinder the players as fits the game, without having to fudge the rules. Every moderator knows that there are times when the story, pacing or table dynamic is such that it would be best if the characters succeeded. Conversely, there are times — usually for reasons of drama or plot — when it would be more fun if the characters failed. Q provides a mechanic to nudge the narrative in such directions without having to use GM fiat. Accordingly, both players and moderators should confidently bid whatever cards they have to win — or intentionally lose — a given play. It's part of the game.

into the play — including his Knights' cache. He draws the cache card from his Play deck and gets a 7, bumping his play score from a 24 to a 31.

Caches are important and valuable aspects of the Q system and the various types and uses are extensive. There are detailed guidelines for creating and managing caches in the *Innate and Story Caches* section on page 196.

Teamwork

If one or more characters can meaningfully combine their attributes in the resolution of an encounter, they can choose to use teamwork, representing the practiced coordination of abilities, skills and Potential. When using teamwork, one character must act as the primary and any helpers as secondaries, and all helpers must justify to the satisfaction of the moderator how their characters' selected attributes are contributing to the collective effort. This kind of cooperation is second nature to Knights — it's how they have lived and trained for most of their lives — and simply requires a little creative description to be successful.

Helper characters may each provide one card for a given play, which must be of the suit assigned to the ability, skill or Potential being used to help. Explorer Knights have superior teamwork skills based on long practice and deep familiarity, so they may play a 2 or a

3 — an issue of game balance — as helping cards. Unless the moderator rules otherwise, non-Knight PCs may use only 2s. The values of any cards played as teamwork are added to the total score for the primary player's bid, just like other bonus cards.

Characters helping other characters by playing teamwork cards may not make their own bids in a collective play. They are too busy providing assistance to also act on their own.

Teamwork plays may be crowned, but only by the primary, and only if he plays a face card appropriate to the circumstances as per the crowning rules. The primary may also contribute a cache to the play, as per the normal cache rules. Helpers may not crown or contribute cache cards to teamwork plays. Primary characters earn marks toward attribute advancement (see *Character Advancement*, page 213); helpers do not.

As with a normal play, all participants reveal their contributions to the bid simultaneously.

Example

Enoch and Edlyn are exploring a Masters' ruin deep in the Twilight Frontier, when they are attacked by some kind of ancient sentry cog made of whirling gears and scissoring blades. Edlyn draws her sword preparing to fight the automaton and the moderator calls for a play. Edlyn attacks with Mama Bear 2 and plays two cards from the assigned suit — the



CACHE GUIDELINES

- Individual caches vary in size but should seldom exceed 3 cards.
- Cache cards must be committed to a given bid before they are revealed.
- Only a single cache card may be added to a given bid, even if the acting player has several caches that apply to the situation.
- Every participant involved in a collective play may use an applicable cache.
- Plays in which cache cards are used may also be crowned as normal, but cache cards themselves are never crowned.

8 and King of Diamonds. Enoch wants to help and decides to use his Machines Just Speak to Me attribute to jam a large wrench into the device's biggest cluster of gears. He plays a 3 of Clubs from his hand, and when the cards are revealed the collective score is 21. Since Edlyn is fighting and played a King, her player draws a crowning card and gets a 6 for a final score of 27.

Maxing Out

Note that, given the standard maximum play of 3 cards, plus the options to play a single crowning card and a single cache card, an individual participant may never play more than 5 cards in a given bid. This means the highest possible score without teamwork is 50 points.

Opposed Plays

Not all plays occur between the moderator and players. Occasionally two or more players have opposed or mutually exclusive goals. Sometimes their characters may even want to fight each other. When this happens, all the standard rules for making plays apply, except that the players propose the opposed stakes to, and make bids against, each other. The moderator's role is to mediate as needed and incorporate the winning outcome into the narrative.

Example

During an Academy Flashback Edlyn, Gizi and Clovis are each team captains in a Keg match being

played during one of the apprentices' rare moments of free time. The players each propose different stakes for themselves — Edlyn wants the others to call her "Your Majesty" for the next 3 game sessions, Gizi wants a 1-card cache to use against the others in a future contest and Clovis wants Edlyn to take his next watch so he can take Gizi on a date. The players pick the attributes they are going to use and select their cards. With bids of 18, 30 and 23 respectively, Gizi wins and the moderator awards her a cache she can use in any subsequent competition between members of the trio.

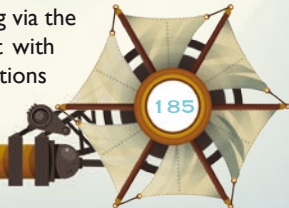
Collective Plays

Most often, plays are made individually, between a single player and the moderator; between two players, or between the moderator and a single player being assisted by others. Sometimes, especially during climactic action sequences, several players may want to make plays at the same time within the narrative. When this happens, the players' goals may align, overlap, be incongruous, or even opposed, and the moderator is tasked with sorting out how to proceed.

If there is a clear, logical order based on the circumstances or the goals of the players, then the order of individual plays can follow that sequence or be determined by playing initiative cards. If there is no logical order, or the moderator prefers to facilitate a more dramatic scene, then he may call for a collective play.

In collective plays, stakes are negotiated as usual but are set with a separate outcome for each player, various outcomes for subgroups of characters or a single collective outcome the whole party is trying to achieve. The participants negotiate a single potential moderator's outcome that stands in opposition to all of the players' individual or collective stakes.

The play is made as usual but with each participant laying down cards, playing caches or providing teamwork cards, all at the same time. The highest score wins the stakes. If the players chose individual stakes, the outcome of the player with the highest score shapes the narrative. If the winning player was bidding for shared stakes or a single collective outcome, these determine the narrative. When multiple characters share single stakes, they share in the success or failure of the effort, contributing via the attributes they used but with the single winner's actions



INITIATIVE CARDS

Sometimes players *really* want to be the first to respond to a given circumstance in the story. When this happens, they can opt to spend initiative cards. Players who want to vie to resolve a play may each pick a single card from the hand they intend to use — Play or Potential — and reveal it simultaneously.

The participants then make any plays in descending order of their cards, understanding that the possible stakes, or need to even make a play, may change with the outcome of any preceding plays. For purposes of determining initiative, face cards have their traditional values, with Aces beaten only by Jokers. Ties are resolved in order of suits — Clubs (Arc) beat Diamonds (Ore), which beat Hearts (Rain), which beat Spades (Wind). If ties involve Jokers they are broken with luck draws (see *Luck Draws*, page 196).

Example

Three of the four players in the session all want to react to the appearance of the Child warship overhead. Each is excited to use his own Potential and not really interested in cooperating. Each selects a card from his Play hand and reveals them at the same time. A Jack and two Queens — one of Hearts and one of Clubs. The player who spent the Queen of Clubs goes first, the player who spent the Queen of Hearts goes second and the Jack goes third, assuming that the Queen of Club's play does not eliminate the need for further actions by resolving the entire encounter.

When initiative cards are used, the participants using them may not replenish their Play hands until after executing the intent for which they just played the card. This means they must make their bids out of a hand that is a card short, and that playing a high card to go first in the current state means sacrificing a card that might have been more useful in the future.

When the contested plays are complete, or were obviated by earlier plays, the players may replenish their respective hands. Note that it is never necessary for the game moderator to play an initiative card as the intent of any NPCs can be expressed in the moderator's stakes.

being the focus of the successful outcome. If the moderator wins, his stakes shape the narrative and all the involved characters suffer the opposed outcome together.

Example

Alessandro, Myron and Katri are ranking Knights fighting to protect a beleaguered outpost from an assault by Children of the Dark. Two Child frigates are attacking — one strafing with its heavy guns while the other lands to disembark troops. In their enthusiasm to prevent the attack, all three players start talking over each other as they share their plans. No one wants to risk spending an initiative card, so the moderator calls for a collective play. In no particular order he negotiates stakes with each character.

Alessandro wants to use his Arc Potential Burn Baby Burn to ignite the powder magazines of both

vessels, destroying them in a massive, combined explosion.

Myron wants to use his ancestral Relic — an ancient rifle with a 2-card innate cache for ranged shots — and his Like a Bullet to the Head skill to snipe the deck officers aboard both ships, forcing the ships to break off the assault in confusion and withdraw.

Katri wants to use her Rain Potential Fog of War and call up a dense mist that causes the enemy vessels to crash into the shore of the skyland right under the well-crewed guns of the outpost.

The moderator decides he wants the attacking ships to be a diversion that draws the Knights out, committing their defenses to what appears to be a frontal assault, allowing the stealthy band of Child warriors that was dropped off on the other side of the island to successfully take the fort from the unprotected rear. The moderator adds that since the



fighting will be so fierce and chaotic, if he wins, each player will also take a minor wound.

The participants all make their opposed bids, with Alessandro scoring 24, Myron 26, Katri 29 and the moderator 25. Katri's player wins the stakes, so Katri forces the ships to crash where they lie at the mercy of the fort's guns.

Potential Plays

The Potential deck represents the source of a character's elemental power and is restricted to the suit linked to the single cardinal element with which the character has an affinity:

- Diamonds represent Ore.
- Clubs represent Arc.
- Hearts represent Rain.
- Spades represent Wind.

At the beginning of each session, each player makes a separate Potential deck with the cards of his elemental suit. Potential hands consist of 4 cards drawn from the Potential deck.

Cards are spent from the Potential hand whenever a character uses magic. Potential plays work the same way as those for abilities and skills. When a player uses a Potential attribute in a play, he must power the play exclusively with cards from his Potential deck. Note that playing a Joker is the only exception to this rule (see *Jokers*, page 189). Bonus cards may be used in Potential plays following the normal rules for crowning and caches.

Example

Emi is aboard the EGS REGAL, and the ship has taken several broadsides from a Child frigate. The lower deck is on fire, and the flames are threatening the circuit box chamber. If the fire is not controlled soon, the induction hull will fail and the ship will fall from the sky. The moderator calls for a play and negotiates stakes. Emi's player decides to use her Hot Stuff Potential and plays a 9 and Queen of Hearts from her Potential hand. Since Emi is trying to save her crew, the moderator allows the player to crown the Queen and she draws a 6, for a total score of 25.

Opposed Suits

In the world of UPWIND, the powers of the elements are fundamentally opposed: Ore counters Wind, Arc counters Rain, and vice versa. Accordingly, each element can potentially cancel the effects of its cardinal opposite. If opposing

COLLECTIVE PLAY GUIDELINES

- Given that the moderator is pitted against multiple players, the moderator will usually lose unless she plays exceptional cards. This makes narrative sense as multiple characters are all striving to overcome a single challenge.
- Because the players are likely to win, and because there is more drama in collective plays, they are a good way to determine the outcomes of climactic scenes — plays that resolve big events, plots or storylines. They are great ways to end sessions, set up cliffhangers and leave players wanting more.
- Characters helping other characters by playing teamwork cards may not make their own bids in a collective play. They are too busy providing assistance to also act on their own.
- It is important to watch for any opposed Potential suits when making collective plays involving Potential, as they are more likely to occur because of the multiple participants. When they do, the opposed suit rules apply to all relevant hands (see *Opposed Suits*, below).
- Though it is possible to negotiate opposed stakes for each individual player, it is not advisable, as doing so quickly becomes cumbersome and difficult to track.

Potential suits are played in a bid, the highest Potential card in each bid is discarded before any crowning occurs, and the remaining cards and totals are then used to resolve the play as usual.

Example

Fayez, an Arc user, is practicing in the Academy Potential Ground for his upcoming Trial. Fayez is being challenged by an instructor





he does not know and decides to use Burning Bright 3, bidding a 4, 6 and 10 of Clubs. The instructor is a Rain user representing a 2-card challenge level and the moderator bids a 7 and Queen of Hearts. When the cards are revealed, the opposed suits mean that the elemental forces partially cancel each other out. The high card in each bid — the 10 and the Queen — is discarded and the new scores are compared. Fayez now has a score of 10 and the instructor a 7, so Fayez wins the stakes.

Note that the canceling effect only occurs if the opposed suits are both being played as Potential cards — as supernatural attribute against supernatural attribute. Opposed suits where only one, or neither, participant is using Potential are resolved normally, without any cards being cancelled.

Replenishing Potential Hands

Potential hands replenish at the rate of one card per bell of in-game time (roughly one card per five hours) as the ambient Wind reinfuses a depleted Potential user with power. Accordingly, if a character spends one Potential card, he would have only 3 cards to draw on until his hand replenishes later in the story.

Ongoing Effects

If a player wishes to maintain a lasting effect — such as an illusion, a golem, a light source or similar — at the moderator's discretion he may do so by making a play or spending the requisite narrative Potential hand card as normal (see *Narrative Use of Potential*, page 195). However, sustaining that effect delays the normal recovery of Potential cards by the duration of the effect. The player may not replenish any Potential cards spent on the specific effect until his character, or other circumstances, cause the effect to end. After that point, the character begins to recover Potential cards normally: one with the passing of each bell.

Example

Gittan has the Ore Potential Feet of Clay and wants to use it narratively to create two stone golems to guard her ship while she and the other Knights search upcountry for sign of a Child patrol. The player randomly selects and discards 2 cards to power the two golems, and Gittan may not replenish those spent cards as long as the golems are active. If she subsequently wishes to make a

play using Potential, she will only have two Potential cards in her hand with which to bid and may recover cards spent on that effect normally. Once she dismisses the golems, she must still wait one bell to recover one card and a second bell to recover her full complement of Potential.

Running Out of Potential

Using supernatural power drains a character's mental, physical and Potential energy. As long as the character has cards in her Potential hand, she is able to cast elemental effects. When she spends the last of her Potential cards, she is magically exhausted and may not readily manifest more Potential until she has recovered at least one card.

A character with zero Potential cards may attempt an act of elemental will to use a Potential attribute. To do so, the player draws a single card from the moderator's Play deck. If the card is of the character's elemental suit, then the card may be used normally — either narratively or as part of a play. If the card is from the character's opposed suit (see *Opposed Suits*, above), the magic fails, and she is rendered unconscious by the supernatural drain. She remains incapacitated for approximately one bell — until she recovers a Potential card. Additionally, the character suffers a 1-card Play hand penalty (See *Hand Size Penalties*, page 191) for one bell after waking, due to general fatigue and disorientation.

If the card is from neither the matching nor the opposed suit, the magic fails, and the character suffers a 1-card Play hand penalty for approximately a quarter bell due to disorientation, but is otherwise unaffected. Players may opt to attempt this act of will multiple times in a row if they are willing to risk the consequences.

If the card is a Joker, the character manages a powerful manifestation of Potential and is spectacularly successful. When drawn to activate Potential, Jokers go into the moderator's discard pile.

Example

Lira has spent the last of her Potential fighting off the Child warriors who have been chasing her across the dark skyland. When she reaches the far shore she wants to signal the launch to pick her up. Because of the distance and the gloom, all she can think to do is to fire lightning into the air as a magical flare. Taking a chance, she draws a card from

the moderator's Play deck and unfortunately pulls a heart — which represents Rain and is opposed to Arc — and the intended flare fizzles. The overexertion knocks her unconscious and she slumps to the ground. Her fate is now a race between her bloodthirsty pursuers and her crew's search party.

Winning the Play

Once the player and the moderator have selected their cards they play them simultaneously, face up. The hand with the highest point total wins, establishing which of the proposed outcomes is incorporated into the narrative. The point value for each card equals the number on that card. Face cards — Jacks, Queens and Kings — and Aces all have values of 10 points. These remain exceptionally powerful cards, however, as face cards and Aces can be used to crown plays (see *Crowning Plays*, page 182). Jokers have no point value but automatically win plays in which they are bid (see *Jokers*, below).

Example

Miram is trying to subdue a guard without alerting the rest of the enemy crew. She has Like a Blade in the Dark at 3 linked to Spades. Unfortunately, her Play hand has only 2 Spades — the 6 and the Queen. Unless she can play a bonus card of some kind (via crowning or cache), her best score will be a 16 if the player sticks with that attribute.

Jokers

Jokers are powerful cards in Q, representing consummate skill and ability or simply uncanny luck. When a Joker is bid, or drawn as a crowning or cache card, whoever played the card automatically wins the play, regardless of any other cards played. Jokers are considered “suitless” and may be played for any attribute, including Potential powers.

Participants should consider filling out bids that include Jokers with enough cards to meet the limit they are allowed to bid for the given attribute. If they are allowed to bid three cards in a play but only pull out the one Joker in anticipation of making the reveal, their opponents may get suspicious. By filling out the bid, the presence of the Joker is kept secret, preventing the possible counter play of another Joker (see *Ties*, page 190) as well as enhancing the drama of the reveal.

Individual Jokers “die” after use — the participant



who played his Joker must remove it from his deck for the remainder of the session. If a Joker is pulled to crown, as a cache card or as a tie-breaker during a play, it has the same effect as if it were played in the original bid — that hand wins automatically and the Joker dies. If a Joker is drawn as a luck card — or for any other reason — it is considered the high card but does not die and is recycled into the Play deck normally when the deck is next shuffled.

After a Joker is played as part of a bid, all participants in the game must immediately discard their current Play hands, shuffle their discards into their Play decks and redraw. The intention of this rule is to provide suspenseful limits on hoarding good cards and allow players the occasional opportunity to flush bad hands.

It is important to remember that moderators keep only one Joker in their decks if there are three or fewer players, but two if there are four or more.

Ties

If a tie occurs during a bid, the participants must escalate the stakes by negotiating additional elements into the potential outcomes. Then, after agreeing to the new stakes, each participant may add one additional card of the appropriate suit from her hand — Play or Potential, depending on the circumstances — to her bid and the new high score wins. Jokers may also be played as tie-breaking cards. If only one of the participants can play the appropriate suit, she automatically wins the stakes. If none of the participants can play a card, they all draw random “suitless” cards from their Play decks as if crowning, add them to their bids, and the highest score wins. If there are subsequent ties, then the process is repeated, with the stakes rising each time and additional tie-breaking cards being drawn until a winner is determined.

Example

The player wants Lajos to successfully impersonate a Loftian noble, and replace the real navigational chart with a counterfeit version without the switch being discovered until the smugglers have delivered their cargo to the waiting ambush. The moderator says if the player loses, the smugglers will see through the subterfuge and disappear with the cargo.

The player and moderator make bids and tie at 22 points apiece. The player adds the capture of the smuggler chieftain to his stakes and the moderator adds that the smugglers will take the Loftian noble's daughter hostage to his.

The player used Spades but has no Spades left in his hand. The moderator played Diamonds and still has a 3 in that suit. He plays it for a new score of 25 and wins the play. Not only do the Knights now have to find the smugglers all over again, they have to rescue the Loftian girl as well.

Tie bids in which two or more Jokers are played are unlikely coincidences, and should therefore represent extraordinary coincidences in the game. When participants bid Jokers against each other, they are obliged to construct the narrative so that both outcomes become valid parts of the story. Inherent contradictions may make this difficult, especially if the stakes are mutually exclusive, but with a little creativity, the participants should be able to maintain the intended spirit, if not the actual letter, of the original stakes.

Example

Merit is engaged in a savage sword battle with a Child of the Dark captain, and it is clear their fight is to the death. The player's stakes call for her Knight to take down the captain in front of his crew, who then return to the Dark and spread the legend of the unbeatable demoness of the Light.

The moderator's stakes say that Merit will take a mortal wound and, since dying is likely, the Child captain will take her head back to the Dark and make a Clade heirloom of her skull.

The participants both bid Jokers and so launch into excited negotiation. It is decided that the fight ends with the Child captain so badly injured that he dies of his wounds only clocks after sailing home, but not before bequeathing his new trophy — Merit's left arm — to his Clade, along with the tale of the unkillable warrior of the Light. After receiving copious healing magic from a fellow Knight, Merit eventually gets back on her feet, but will now have to learn to function with only her right arm.

Anytime a player intends to use a crowning or cache card and her opponent plays a Joker, she should still draw the card(s), as there is a slight chance that she could pull her own Joker and force a tie. As when Jokers are played intentionally, Jokers pulled as tie-breakers die



and all participants discard their remaining Play hands, reshuffle and redraw.

INTEGRATING OUTCOMES

Once the outcome of a play has been determined, the moderator — with the help of the players — must integrate the events of the winning stakes into the ongoing narrative. This is usually as simple as describing how the stakes play out, using as much detail and flair as fits a given gaming group's style of play. The intention is to splice the outcome seamlessly onto the thread of what has happened before, while simultaneously setting up whatever might happen next — the next event, encounter or character interaction. This description-focused resolution allows for fluid pacing and dynamic storytelling that is difficult to achieve with incremental game systems.

Moderators should consider the following guidelines as they thread outcomes into the narrative.

- Use the descriptive tricks of good storytelling to increase player immersion — describe what their characters see, hear, smell and feel, but hint at their possible reactions, thoughts and emotions as well.
- Embellish outcomes with specific details and creative flair to increase drama, tension, excitement, emotion or humor.
- Encourage the players to contribute to the storytelling. Ask them to describe exactly what their characters do, say, think and feel as scenes resolve.
- Encourage the players to experience their characters' emotions — pride, excitement, relief, anger, fear — by including the relevant feelings in the descriptions and their roleplaying.
- Set up the roleplaying segue that connects the current encounter to the next.

Relative Scores

The winning bid is the winning bid regardless of the difference between the scores, and the stakes associated with that bid determine the ongoing narrative. Moderators may use the magnitude of that gap, however, to help define the relative qualities of that success as they integrate those stakes into their narratives. The larger the gap, the more effective, decisive, subtle, lasting, stylish

or flamboyant the outcomes. The smaller the gap, the narrower the margins and the more marginal, risky, close or lucky the results.

Example

Tonio wants to fight the Child of the Dark commander, take him prisoner and escape before enemy reinforcements arrive. The participants make bids and the player wins.

With a score difference of 1–3 points, Tonio could manage this just in time, taking some superficial wounds, exhausting himself and having to carry the now-unconscious Child slung over his shoulder as he staggers away just before the angry warriors arrive and start searching for their missing leader.

With a difference of 4–9 points, perhaps Tonio is able to club the officer into submission, taking only a few scratches and force marching him away at sword point in time to leave the reinforcements confused about where to go next.

With a difference of 10+ points, Tonio might be able to surprise the officer, subduing him with practiced skill, binding and gagging him with enough time to both get away and to create a false trail to mislead any pursuers.

Note that points gaps should not alter the winning stakes but only serve as a guide to coloring the narrative describing those elements.

HAND SIZE PENALTIES

Reductions in hand size are used to model injuries when characters are wounded. They are also used to model other states or effects such as fatigue, hunger or poison and environmental conditions like darkness, extreme heat or cold, noxious fumes or dangerous weather. Moderators should feel free to impose hand size penalties anytime characters are under physical or mental limitations, or are forced to endure challenging environmental conditions.

Moderators should have players randomly discard the appropriate number of cards from their Play hands as circumstances and conditions merit. When such conditions end, it is up to the moderator to determine when and how rapidly the players may refill their hands.

Use the following examples as guidelines for assessing hand penalties.



- –1 card for every five clocks without sufficient food
- –1 card when acting in shadows without a light source
- –1 card for each bell spent in exceptionally hot environments without sufficient water
- –1 card when working in the cold, dim environment of the Twilight Frontier without appropriate gear — lighting and warm clothing — or Potential equivalents
- –2 cards for each clock without sufficient sleep
- –2 cards for every clock without sufficient water
- –3 cards for each bell spent in exceptionally cold environments without proper clothing or a source of heat
- –3 cards when acting in total darkness without a light source
- –3 cards for working in the black and frozen environment of the Dark without appropriate gear or Potential equivalents

If the cumulative effects of such conditions are not immediately lethal — like fatigue, hunger or darkness — when the player's hand reaches 0 cards, his character is rendered unconscious or is otherwise appropriately incapacitated. If the cumulative effects are generally lethal — like extreme cold, dehydration or poison — when the player's hand reaches 0, his character dies. Such determinations are at the discretion of the moderator.

Note that when conditions are lethal — such as freezing cold or starvation — the reduction in hand size simulates physical injury. In such circumstances, Potential hands may not exceed Play hands and are reduced accordingly, and they are only regained as the character recovers (see *Wounds and Potential Hands*, page 194).

INJURY AND WOUND DRAWS

The rules for resolving dangerous encounters in which characters might be hurt — like sword fights, falling off a cliff, animal attacks or poisoned wine — are the same as for resolving any other kind of encounter in Q, with one exception: when participants make plays for which there is a risk of player character injury, part of the moderator's stakes should include a wound draw.

Character injuries are simulated by reducing the size of the injured character's Play hand by a number of cards equal to the number of wounds the character took. Smaller hands reduce character effectiveness, modeling the effects of injury — pain, shock, mental confusion and physical incapacitation. The size of the reduction depends on the severity of the injury.

There are three severities of injury — minor, major and mortal — and the level should be determined as part of negotiating stakes.

Minor Injury — When a minor injury is part of a winning outcome, the player draws one card from his Play deck, divides its numerical value by 3 and his character suffers that number of wounds. Such injuries usually result in scrapes, cuts, bruises and broken noses, fingers or ribs. They are typically the consequences of brawling, clumsy accidents or being thrown around the deck of a storm-tossed ship.

Major Injury — When winning stakes include a major injury, the player draws one card from his Play deck, divides its numerical value by 2 and his character takes that number of wounds. These injuries result in deep cuts, punctures or gouges, concussions, broken limbs or internal bleeding. They are usually the consequence of falls, animal attacks, shipwrecks and combat.

Mortal Injury — These are life-threatening injuries where death is possible and lifelong physical consequences are likely. When a character takes a major wound, the player draws one card from his Play deck, and assigns the character its full numerical value in wounds.

The results of wound draws are suitless and always rounded down so the possible wound penalties range from 0 to 3 for minor injuries, 1 to 5 for major injuries and 2 to 10 for mortal injuries.

When assigned a wound draw, the player taking the injury must randomly discard a number of cards from his Play hand equal to the calculated value of that draw. The player must use the new, smaller hand size for all his plays until his character heals.

Example

Uryx is in a vicious sword fight with a band of Children of the Dark boarders who are assaulting his ship, and the player knows it could go badly when the moderator includes a major wound as part of the counter stakes. Uryx's player loses the bid so in





addition to the other stakes, his character is wounded. The player draws a card — a 9. Major wound card values are divided by 2 and rounded down, meaning that Uryx is badly hurt and the player must discard 4 cards from his Play hand. Until Uryx heals, his player is restricted to a 2-card Play hand.

Face Cards and Wounds

If a face card is pulled in any level of wound draw, rather than count it as 10, the character suffers the card-specific effect and number of wounds as listed below. If the result is inappropriate to the cause of the damage, moderators should assign a more fitting incapacitation:

- Jacks indicate a broken or otherwise incapacitated arm and a 1-card penalty.
- Queens indicate a broken or otherwise incapacitated leg and a 2-card penalty.
- Kings indicate injuries to the torso, including broken ribs and internal damage, and a 3-card penalty.
- Aces indicate a head injury and unconsciousness and a 4-card penalty.
- Jokers indicate that the character somehow miraculously avoided being wounded in any way, making it through the encounter without a scratch. Jokers pulled as wound draws do not die and are recycled into a player's discard pile.

Characters are expected to roleplay any wound effects as part of the integration of injury stakes into the narrative, screaming, groaning in pain, limiting their actions and seeking appropriate medical care. Lasting consequences of character injury — a gruesome scar, pronounced limp, severed limb, blinded eye, recurring nightmares — should be negotiated as part of the original stakes that include the injury.

Example

The stakes for a play already call for a major wound, but the player really wants a lot of other benefits out of the encounter. The moderator agrees, but with the addition to the stakes that if the character takes the wound and draws a Jack or a Queen, he permanently loses that limb.

If a player ever loses enough cards that his Play hand effectively drops to zero, his character is rendered unconscious by his injuries. If his Play hand drops below

zero, his character is killed. The effects of wound draws are cumulative, so characters still suffering from previous injuries may die from even minor wounds. If other potentially lethal game or narrative effects cause a player to lose additional cards from his hand, the effects are the same as for injury and could be fatal.

Example

Bree is mortally wounded, with only a single card left in the player's hand. She is stranded in the unforgiving, dank chill of the Twilight Frontier without access to shelter, cold weather gear or even a campfire. The moderator assesses a 1-card penalty for the harsh conditions, and as the player gives up his last card, Bree collapses, unconscious.

Wounds and Potential Hands

A player may never have more cards in his Potential hand than he has in his Play hand, as physical wounds reduce the ability of his character to control Potential. Accordingly, when a character is injured and loses 3 or more cards from his Play hand, the player must discard from his Potential hand as well. As the character subsequently heals, the player may draw up his Potential hand as his Play hand increases and the requisite in-game time passes.

Example

An uninjured Knight with a fully charged Potential hand (4 cards) takes a 3-card wound, dropping his Play hand to 3 cards. Since the player's Potential may not exceed his Play hand, the player must randomly discard 1 card from his Potential hand.

HEALING

If a character receives skilled medical care at the time of his injury, he may heal one card for every face card of the appropriate suit the healer is willing to discard from his Play hand. Face cards drawn to replenish those spent for healing may not then be used for healing those same injuries.

Characters heal naturally at a rate of one card for every three clocks of in-game time; for every three clocks that pass, the player of an injured character can restore one card to his Play hand, up to the healthy maximum of six cards. If the character convalesces under medical attention, he heals at the rate of one card for every two clocks. No plays are required to gain this benefit from healing skills.



Healing skill plays can be made for healing NPCs, battlefield first aid, conducting research or experiments, saving limbs, attaching arcano-electrical prosthetics, attending to a birth, running a hospital or other such challenging medical circumstances.

Magical healing requires the abilities of a character with some form of healing Rain Potential and will immediately restore one Play hand card for every Potential hand card spent by the healer to power his magic. Magical healing may be used more than once on the same character for the same injuries. Like all narrative use of Potential, healing cards are spent randomly (see *Narrative Use of Potential*, below).

Each special effect incurred by an injury — a broken limb, unconsciousness, poisoning, hypothermia — may be magically healed or resolved by spending additional Potential cards.

Example

During a storm, Lia falls from the rigging and lands on the deck. She is knocked unconscious and takes a 4-card wound when her player pulls an Ace as his wound draw. Kir rushes to her side and calls on his Healing Hands Potential. His player randomly discards three cards from his Potential hand: one to restore Lia's mind to consciousness and two to reduce her hand penalty, leaving her with a 2-card penalty.

Non-player characters do not take wounds in the same way as player characters. Their fates — injury, incapacitation or even death — are set during the negotiation of stakes and realized when the winning outcome is included in the narrative. Similarly, healing of NPCs is handled either as a play or with the narrative use of healing Potential.

ATTRIBUTES OUTSIDE PLAYS

Most of the things a character does in his clock-to-clock life do not require plays. Moderators should assume that all characters have basic attributes that allow them to accomplish mundane tasks; the abilities and skills described on their character sheets represent the attributes at which the characters are exceptionally able. Accordingly, moderators should also encourage players to use these attributes to accomplish useful goals and learn valuable information without making formal plays.

Example

A character with Fists of Iron should be able to punch a hole through a wooden door.

A character with Mind Like a Steel Trap should be able to recall the general details of a map he recently studied.

A character with Mechanical Genius should be able to diagnose most machine failures and make minor repairs.

A character with Healing Hands should be able to mundanely tend the sick and injured.

Note that character actions should only initiate plays if the circumstances are particularly compelling or failure would lead to interesting or meaningful consequences.

Examples

Her ship is in port, and Viona is conducting preventative maintenance on the vessel's sphereometer — no play.

One of the passengers Viona and her boat crew are transporting is a spy who has sabotaged the sphereometer Viona is working on — make a play.

Viona is setting a new course and replacing the current leg's lodestone needle with one for the next leg — no play.

Viona's ship is under fire while she is trying to load the tracking needle into the sphereometer so they can follow after the hijacked courier they were escorting — make a play.

NARRATIVE USE OF POTENTIAL

If a character uses Potential as part of the narrative — in a story circumstance that does not merit a play — the player powers that use by discarding a random card from his Potential hand. Playing a card represents the successful use of Potential, and the numerical value of the card determines the narrative potency and relative effectiveness of the character's magic. Using Potential is difficult and even experienced adepts do not always have precise control over the level of power and ultimate effects of their magic.

Example

Byrne has the Rain Potential Flows Like Water at 2 and wants to use it to douse a campfire when he hears someone approaching through the woods. The Knight's player randomly



discards a 10 of Hearts and the fire winks out almost instantly under a large splash of water, with hardly a wisp of steam.

LUCK DRAWS

Players frequently ask questions for which moderators might not have ready answers, like: “is the gun loaded?”, “is there a long rope handy?” or “does the barmaid have a boyfriend?” Moderators might also want to know who the sky dragon attacks first, who gets pitched out of the skiff, or who the courtesan appears to favor. In such cases it is usually fairer, and more fun, to hang the answers on game rules rather than arbitrarily deciding yes, no or who. When such questions come up, moderators are encouraged to call for luck draws.

In Yes/No draws, the moderator and the player asking the question each pull a random card from his Play deck and then compare them. If the player has the high card, the outcome favors the character. If the moderator has the high card, the outcome goes against the character. When selecting from a group, the participants all pull cards and the individual with the highest draw is chosen if the outcome is positive, and the character with the lowest card is targeted if the outcome is negative.

As with play scores, the difference between the values of the participants’ draws narratively describes the degree or magnitude of the relative results when applicable.

Example

A player asks if there is any arc powder in the hold of the derelict freighter because his character wants to make a fire ship out of the ruined vessel. The moderator asks for a luck draw and pulls a 3 while the player draws a Queen. The moderator states that the ship had been carrying a full hold of powder kegs when the storm sent her aground on the skyland.

Moderators are encouraged to use various versions of the luck draw mechanic whenever it seems appropriate to the story or they otherwise wish to add a little randomness to the events.

Example

A ship barely survives a terrible Potential storm and is limping back to port, battered and at half sail. The crew was cruelly tossed about in the blow,

and the moderator asks for luck draws from all the players. He rules that anyone who draws lower than an 8 must draw a minor wound card, and whoever pulls the lowest card must draw a major wound card.

The results of luck draws can also be used to determine narrative elements in given encounters.

Example

The player makes a luck draw to determine how well a captured guard’s uniform fits his character. If the player’s draw is lower than the moderator’s, it is too small. If the values are the same, it’s a perfect fit. If the player’s draw is higher, the uniform is too big. Whether it’s too small or too big to actually wear could be determined by the actual gap in the values.

Moderators can alter the odds of luck draws to simulate more or less likely outcomes. If the result a player seeks is more likely, the moderator can allow him to draw two or even three cards and use the highest in an attempt to beat her one card. If it is less likely, the moderator can draw the extra card or two.

Example

A Knight is hoping to secure explosive rounds for his ship’s bow chaser from the local Guild outpost’s armory. Since it is a small post and a scarce ordinance, the moderator decides to draw two cards — a 3 and a 9 — to the player’s one — a 7. The 9 beats the 7, indicating that the armory is out of the specialized rounds and the character’s gun crew must do without.

Face cards in luck draws have their traditional values, with Aces beaten only by Jokers and ties decided by redraws. No crowning or cache cards may be used in a luck draw, and Jokers do not die or initiate a reshuffle.

CACHE TYPES

Caches are bonus cards that can be added to bids and are described in detail in the [Caches](#) section on page 183.

There are two general types of caches — innate and story. Innate caches are most often associated with special objects or powerful people. They are usually permanent and perpetually available to those using the given item or playing the specific character. Story caches are usually temporary and are associated with unique circumstances or one-off events and may



be available to individuals or to a group of characters as a shared pool.

Caches are limited resources and once spent may only be used again when they replenish. Innate caches replenish only when narratively appropriate — when certain in-game conditions are met — or at the start of each game session. Story caches typically do not replenish and may even expire unused when the circumstances that generated them end or become irrelevant to the narrative.

Example — Innate Caches:

The crew of the STALWART has a long tradition of priding itself on its exceptional skymanship — particularly execution of complex battle maneuvers — so the crew has a 2-card innate cache that can be used whenever fancy flying is essential to the circumstances of the play. This cache only replenishes when the crew have the chance to make sure everything aboard is shipshape and in good repair.

Young Katya was given an antique sphereometer by her navigation professor for being the best student he ever had. Though old, the device is so finely crafted that it increases the range and sensitivity of any needle with which it is equipped, giving its user a 1-card innate cache for use in plays involving navigation. This cache replenishes at the start of every game session.

Example — Story Caches:

A charismatic sky captain just made such an inspirational speech that the moderator decides to grant the characters a 2-card story cache to represent their pre-battle confidence in their leader. The cards can be used by any of the characters but only in the upcoming clash. When the cards are spent or the battle ends — whichever comes first — the cache expires.

Askel is captured by pirates, beaten and left for dead. After he is rescued and nursed back to health, the moderator awards him a 3-card story cache that can be used in any play where winning the stakes would be bad for pirates. Once all 3 cards have been used, Askel has had his payoff and the cache expires.

CACHE TRIGGERS

Every cache has a trigger — the circumstances around a play that allow a player to spend a card from a given cache. Triggers are specific circumstances, activities or events that should be

clearly defined by the moderator when a given cache is assigned to an object or awarded to a character or party.

Example

Appropriate in-game use of the particular item — such as a Relic or experimental device — with which the cache is associated.

Fighting a specific type of foe or individual — pirates, sky dragons, Children of the Dark, a personal nemesis — to which the cache is linked.

Direct actions taken in service to a specific person, group or cause for which the cache was originally granted.

Specific environmental conditions unique to the cache such as traveling in the Dark, being lost in the sky or avoiding hunting predators.

CHARACTER CACHES

Player characters start play with four innate caches: Knight's, Ancestral, Culture and Talent. These caches allow additional characterization and contribute to the prowess for which members of the Guild are famous.

Since Knights of the Explorers' Guild traditionally do not wear standard uniforms or carry identifying papers, their Knights' blades stand as their only identifying badges of authority. They also stand as powerful symbols of unparalleled training, skill and accomplishment — not just in martial prowess, but in mastery of academics, skymanship and elemental Potential. The reassuring heft of her blade offers every Knight a constant reminder of who she is, what she has accomplished and the vows she has taken. The emotional and psychological confidence provided by the presence of her blade gives every Knight character the advantage of a 1-card, innate Knights' cache, which replenishes every session. The unique power of the Knights' cache is that it does not require a specific triggering circumstance and may be used in any play.

If a Knight is separated from her Knights' blade for any reason, not just physically but, more importantly, psychologically, she loses her Knights' cache and may not replenish it until her blade is recovered or replaced.

Note that non-Knight characters do not receive Knights' caches.



PLAYER CACHE GUIDELINES

Caches are derived from special circumstances and are mechanically valuable elements of the game. Their assignment, size and specific triggers are up to the discretion of the moderator and the following examples provide guidance to help in their design.

Innate caches should not exceed 3 cards, with 1 or 2 being the most common sizes. Story caches are usually 1 to 3 cards, but they may be as large as 5 for exceptional circumstances or longer campaigns.

Moderators should assign caches whenever doing so will enhance the narrative, but they should remember that every cache awarded will increase the chance players will win a given play. If the players get too many caches, the story will lose its sense of challenge, so moderators should balance cache number and size against metagame values such as the number of players, the frequency of plays, how difficult they want the adventure to feel and how often they want the players to win.

Example cache assignments and values:

- *An experimental firearm undergoing field trials grants an inherent cache of 2 cards triggered when the weapon is used. The cache replenishes only when a bell is spent carefully dismantling, cleaning, reassembling and recalibrating the gun.*
- *A lucky charm handed down from a doting grandmother grants an inherent 1-card cache to any circumstance where absolute chance plays a role. The cache replenishes only when the character writes a letter home to his nana.*
- *An old, dear instructor from their Academy clocks is murdered when a thief steals a rare book from his personal library. The party's collective anger grants them a shared, narrative cache of 4 cards that can be used in any play directly related to the pursuit of the criminal. The cache expires when the last card is spent or when the murderer is brought to justice.*

Ancestral Cache

Every player character is assigned a 1- or 2-card innate cache that supports their natural affinity for a specific type of Potential based on their ancestry. These caches can only be assigned if a character's Potential is based in that hereditary element and can only be triggered when the character uses Potential in a play. These caches refresh every session and are listed in the nationality section of character creation (see *Nationality*, page 204).

Culture Cache

Culture caches are innate caches available to player characters of specific national backgrounds. They contain 1 card and replenish at the start of every game session. These caches are listed in the nationality section of character creation (see *Nationality*, page 204).

Talent Cache

Every player character is assigned a custom, 1-card innate

talent cache during character generation. These caches are intended to emphasize standout aspects of their backgrounds, personalities or specialties. Talent descriptions and triggers are designed by the player, with the approval the moderator, and they replenish at the start of each game session. These caches allow players to further develop and refine who their characters are and should highlight their character concepts. As with attributes, the more broadly applicable the description of the Talent cache, the more useful it can be.

Example

A player wants her character to be uncommonly stealthy. She designates her Talent cache as Sneaky Bastard and can use the cache in any play that depends on being quiet, unseen or otherwise clandestine.

Another player wants her character to be particularly knowledgeable and well-read. She assigns her talent as Book Worm and can use the cache



in any play that involves books, esoteric knowledge or obscure facts.

Still another player has a character that grew up on a farm and has a way with animals. She picks “Here, Kitty, Kitty” and can use the cache whenever the circumstances of the play involve animals.

OPTIONAL CACHES

Moderators and players are encouraged to work together to create additional, optional caches as part of character generation or ongoing play as fits their stories, interests and play styles. The following examples describe most options:

Flashback Cache

As recommended in the *Academy Flashbacks* section (page 166), moderators should consider using flashbacks in their stories and awarding flashback caches as part of those scenes. Flashback caches are story caches that are triggered whenever past Academy experiences relate to current events in the adventure. They may be directly connected, providing foreshadowing or context for the events of the present story, or they may simply be based on past events that remind the characters of current circumstances.

Example

During an Academy Flashback, the characters’ Dark Survival professor shows them how to crosswire the induction hull on a launch to generate excess resistance and warm the boat so the occupants don’t freeze to death when stranded in the dim realms. Though dangerous for crew and circuit box alike, the moderator awards the players a 2-card story cache that may be used when the play involves survival situations in the Dark.

Equipment Caches

Equipment caches are innate caches assigned to equipment and are triggered when characters use those items in plays. Such caches are most commonly assigned to Relics or other similarly unique arcanoelectrical devices and so are usually only available to characters with access to such artifacts.

Example

Izak has a bundle of extremely fine and complex tools for use in delicate arcanoelectrical repairs. The tools give him a 1-card innate cache that can be used whenever the play involves fixing, modifying or building complex machines or devices.

Narrative Caches

Narrative caches are assigned by the moderator when events in the current adventure provide valuable advantage or information to the characters. Moderators can award narrative caches at any time, but they are typically built into the potential outcomes associated with given plays. Narrative caches are usually story caches but could be innate under the right circumstances.

Example

The characters have been ordered to deliver a diplomat to the mysterious and isolationist Cloud Principality and to provide whatever assistance she requires during her negotiations. In an effort to prepare for the trip, Lujza spends some time in the Scholar’s Library reading up on Cloud. For her effort, the moderator awards her a 2-card story cache that her player can use in any future play involving Cloud culture.

MODERATOR CACHES

Like players, moderators have a collection of innate caches they can add to their plays. Unlike players’ caches, these caches are assigned to various aspects of game play and triggered not by specific circumstances but by the rules of good storytelling. This means that if the moderator believes the drama, tension or excitement should be higher during a play, or if by winning the stakes the story would go in a more interesting direction, he is encouraged to spend the associated cache. Moderator caches replenish at the start of every game session.

The size of the moderator caches depends on the number of players in the given session.

1–3 players = 1 card per cache

4–6 players = 2 cards per cache

7+ players = 3 cards per cache

If asked, moderators must tell players how many cards remain in their caches, and, like players, moderators may only use a single cache card in a given play, regardless of how many might apply.

Setting Cache

The setting cache allows the moderator to emphasize particular aspects of the unique *UPWIND* world — the strange geography, natural hazards, inherent dangers and abundant mysteries. Moderators usually use cards from the setting



cache whenever the nature of the environment itself is important to the play.

Example

- *Avoiding colliding with an unseen skyland while navigating through the Dark.*
- *Trying to swim in armor when unexpectedly pitched into a lake.*
- *Searching for a specific chamber in a newly rediscovered Masters' warren.*
- *Being tossed about in the squalls surrounding the Torrent.*
- *Chasing a bandit through a floating cloud garden.*

Opposition Cache

The opposition cache is assigned to the various opponents characters encounter during play — pirates, creatures or Children of the Dark. This cache is usually tapped whenever the unique behavior, tactics or objectives of the opposition are central to the play.

Example

- *A duel with the pirate captain.*
- *A ship-to-ship battle with a Children of the Dark vessel.*
- *Playing Get with a classmate or Keg against another boat crew.*
- *Disarming an assassin's bomb.*
- *Fending off the attacks of an unidentified denizen of the Dark.*

Plot Cache

The plot cache is assigned to the narrative itself and is used when the moderator thinks added drama, excitement or challenge would make the story better. Like the players' Knights' caches, moderators can use plot caches whenever they choose.

Example

- *Attempting to seduce the royal heir.*
- *Figuring out how to activate the dangerous-looking arcanelectrical artifact.*



- *Rewiring the contacts to the circuit box before the shorting induction hull fails completely.*
- *Navigating the race course at the Ranking Regatta.*
- *Searching the archives for references to the Grand Amplifier.*

CHALLENGE CACHE

The moderator also may assign caches linked to specific circumstances — particularly dangerous missions, exceptionally skilled or clever foes, unreliable ships, mutinous crews or pieces of malfunctioning equipment. Challenge caches are usually story caches and are typically assigned narratively or as part of moderator stakes. These caches represent clear threats hanging over the characters that can color the options and influence the actions of the players in interesting ways leading up to related plays.

Examples

Tamas and his boat crew have been given a mission to ambush some troublesome Child raiders by posing as easy prey: unwary delvers in a worn-out ship. The crew is surprised by the state of the almost derelict ship they are assigned for the ruse, and the moderator reinforces their concerns by assigning the vessel a 3-card challenge cache that he may trigger for use in any circumstance that depends on the skyworthiness of the ship.

A crew of Knights exploring the Twilight Frontier is assigned to survey a section of Rubble Field #88. Since RF #88 is a graveyard of dangerous Masters' technology, the moderator assigns a 2-card challenge cache to the party that can be triggered for any play that involves physical action within the rubble.

Stasya is a young woman from a patriarchal culture that does not allow women to join the Guild. Nonetheless she has disguised herself as a boy and is attempting to compete at a local Novice Festival. Because discovery would mean harsh punishment, the moderator assigns a 1-card challenge cache representing the risk Stasya is taking. The moderator may trigger the cache at any point during the festival.

QUANTUM EFFECTS

Q is a simple system intended to facilitate dynamic, stylistic play driven by narrative description and drama. Its mechanics generate several metagame effects — beyond consequential outcomes — that make playing *UPWIND* different from most roleplaying games.

FASTER PACE

The system lends itself to quick resolution and fast, dramatic pacing. Most notably, combat is as quick as other sorts of encounters, keeping battles dramatic while allowing the story to flow without bogging down in complex combat rules. This faster pacing means that a given session of *UPWIND* will cover much more narrative ground than a similar session of most other roleplaying games. Q therefore requires that moderators have considerably more story content ready for each meeting than they might usually prepare for other games, since even multiple combat encounters can be played through in a fraction of the normal table time. Though each gaming group's style and pace are different, a good estimate is that stories told with Q move about two to four times faster than those told using traditional incremental resolution mechanics.

Moderator preparation is also quick, as non-player characters do not require time-consuming pre-generation. The mechanical aspects of any encounter are handled in gameplay during the negotiation of outcomes and the setting of challenge levels.

HIGH ACTION

Q promotes freeform description of the action, actually depending on the participants to use narrative flair to fill in the details otherwise provided for in more rules-heavy game systems. Knights are heroes across the realms, and their adventures are larger than life. The action is meant to be dynamic, akin to those of favorite anime characters or even superheroes. In fact, it is not inaccurate to describe *UPWIND* as a superhero game in disguise, as the things that Explorer Knights can do are truly supernatural and, given the unique mechanics, truly superpowered.

SETBACKS

In every good story, the characters face significant setbacks — temporary failures that challenge their skills, ingenuity and resolve. In incremental systems, setbacks are usually minor and short term, and so have little effect on the story. Q allows for consequential challenges that can have profound effects on both the story and the characters, making it more fun and interesting



as the players figure out how to overcome them. The results are more engaging character arcs and richer, more satisfying storytelling.

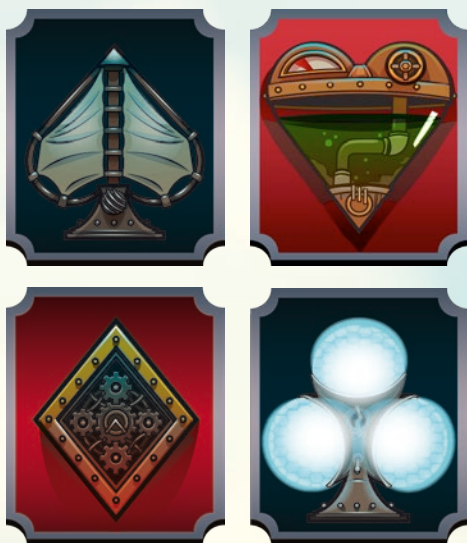
PLAYER AGENCY

Q supports — intentionally encourages — leveraging of the mechanics to create a higher level of player agency than is found in most traditional, incremental games.

The cooperative negotiation of the stakes gives players greater control over the shape and direction of the storytelling. Using this narrative leverage, players can nudge the tale in specific directions by crafting outcomes that lead where they want the story to go.

Agency is also supported by the increased control players have over their odds of success through the selective use of cards rather than random die rolls to determine outcomes. Choosing to play high or low cards at critical times in the narrative gives the players far more control over what happens.

Players are encouraged to push both their characters' attributes and the negotiation of their stakes to the creative limit to gain maximum benefit from their cards. Players should play to their hands' strengths, intentionally focusing on the attributes their current cards support. They are expected to game the system as they try to justify which attributes can be used in a given encounter, thereby influencing the thread of the narrative.



CHARACTER CREATION

STEP-BY-STEP CHARACTER CREATION

1 — Create a character concept — just a simple combination of adjective and noun that serves as a guiding archetype. See below.

2 — Select a nationality, as this determines a number of variables about the character.

- Select an ancestral lineage. Pages 204–205.
- Choose a Potential affinity.
- Note the nation's unique culture cache.
- Choose a character name inspired by the cultural examples.

3 — Generate the character's attributes: 3 Abilities, 3 Skills, and 3 Potentials. Page 205.

- Assign values to the attributes — a level 1, 2, and 3 in each category.
- Link card suits to the individual attributes.

4 — Choose a recruitment path: festival, quota, vouchsafed, or Special Selection. Page 211.

5 — Write a character description: provide a few key details about physical appearance and personality. Page 211.

6 — Create a talent cache: design a custom cache that reinforces or enhances the character's concept and attributes. Page 211.

7 — Design a Relic: build a Relic that compliments the character's concept and attributes. Page 211.

8 — Make a gear list: provide a list noting any specialty, unlikely or unique equipment in the character's possession. Page 212.

1. CHARACTER CONCEPT

Making characters in Q is a simple, fun and creative process that takes only a few minutes. The first step is to come up with a character concept. This gives the player a thematic framework around which to build his character and gives all the participants a measure of party composition, so they can build a coherent and comprehensive character group. Though concepts can be long and detailed descriptions, for the purposes of most stories they need only be simple archetypes: an adjective and a noun. Players are encouraged to imagine their own unique concepts, but it can be just as fun and effective to draw inspiration from favorite book or movie characters.

Sample Concepts:

- Charming swordsman
- Ironfisted sky captain
- Curious scholar
- Inscrutable mystic
- Wealthy dilettante
- Reluctant protector
- Dutiful sidekick
- Cocky pilot
- Weird psychic girl
- Coldhearted warrior

It is useful for the moderator to provide guidance to the players about what kind of adventure he is going to run so that they can make

appropriate characters. Though it might be interesting to play a scholarly type who is sent to the front lines or a battle-ready warrior tasked with recruiting new cadets, it is seldom as fun as playing characters custom-made for the pending story. It is similarly useful for the players to share their character concepts with each other so that the party does not end up with four Arc-wielding soldiers with only combat skills or a bunch of sneaky agents who don't know how to steer a ship.

2. NATIONALITY

Once a character concept is established, the next step is to select a nationality, as the history and culture of each nation generally determines a number of character traits. The details of each nation are provided in the setting section, but the cultural information below is offered here to facilitate character creation. Though players should feel free to mix and match as they wish, they should provide creative explanations for any unusual combinations of ancestral or cultural traits. If a player opts to create a character from one of the *UPWIND* cultures for which information is intentionally left open to interpretation, she should work with the moderator to create appropriate physical traits and caches.

After the DownFall the ancestors of the Kin — the Spark, Torrent, Stone and Gale — were scattered across the skies, eventually giving rise to the Kin nations of the current age. This history of isolation and interbreeding has resulted in each nation of the realms being characterized by dominant physical, Potential and cultural traits.

VERDANT

Ancestral Cache — Verdani represent such a random intermixing of lineages that their Potential affinities are just as arbitrary. Verdani characters of any Potential affinity have a I-card innate cache they may use in any plays involving Potential.

Cultural Cache — Verdani characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of a play involves adaptability or sociability.

Typical Verdant male names include Byrne, Domnall, Ferguson, Kyran and Rowan. Typical

female names include Bree, Ciara, Gittan, Nessa, Pirjo and Viona.

SOVEREIGN DOMINION OF BRIGHT

Ancestral Cache — Because of their mixed Torrent and Stone ancestry, Brightlander characters with Rain or Ore Potential have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Brightlander characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of a play involve faith, spirituality or emotional calm.

Typical Brightlander male names include Abbas, Fayez, Jahid, Nadim, Samir and Walid. Typical female names are Amani, Eshe, Nawra, Thana and Zaida.

FORTRESS DOMINION

Ancestral Cache — Because of their mixed Stone and Spark ancestry, Dominion characters with Ore or Arc Potential have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Dominion characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play touch directly on matters of honor and personal achievement.

Typical Dominion male names include Ade, Clovis, Frederick, Hauke and Oldrik. Typical female names are Adel, Edlyn, Gizi, Kaja, Ulla and Veva.

KINGDOM OF LOFT

Ancestral Cache — Because of their relatively unmixed Spark ancestry, Loftian characters with Arc Potential have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Loftian characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play involve negotiation or persuasion.

Typical Loftian male names include Benito, Celso, Gaetano, Saverio and Tonio. Typical female names are Aria, Bice, Isa, Lia and Zita

THE SOAR REPUBLIC

Ancestral Cache — Because of their relatively unmixed Spark ancestry, Soarian characters



with Arc Potential have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Soarian characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play are related to personal responsibility.

Typical Soarian male names include Alessandro, Cyril, Elek, Jorgen, Luca and Myron. Typical female names are Katri, Lieke, Merete, Stasya and Zina.

THE CLOUD PRINCIPALITY

Ancestral Cache — Because of their uniquely pure Stone ancestry, Cloud characters with Ore Potential have a 2-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Cloud characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play relate to vigilance or secrecy.

Typical Cloud male names include Ambrus, Izak, Lajos, Sanyi and Tamas. Typical female names include Aliz, Ilka, Lujza and Teca.

VAULT

Ancestral Cache — The Vaultish have almost as thoroughly an intermingled ancestry as the Verdani. Accordingly, Vaultish characters of any Potential affinity have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Vaultish characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play involve street-smarts or criminal dealings.

Typical Vaultish male names include Askel, Edvard, Gulbrand, Igor, Peder and Vidar. Typical female names include Anja, Hedda, Marit, Siv and Tine.

THE KINGDOM OF SKYREACH

Ancestral Cache — Because of their mostly Gale ancestry, Skyreach characters with Wind Potential have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Skyreach characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play involve complex or advanced technology.

Typical Skyreach male names include Asger, Espen, Holger, Ib, Per and Ruben. Typical female names include Asta, Grete, Marna, Rakel and Tove.

HORIZON

Ancestral Cache — Because of their mixed Spark and Gale ancestry, Horizon characters with Arc or Wind Potential have a I-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays.

Cultural Cache — Horizon characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play involve bold recklessness.

Typical Horizon male names include Arman, Gul, Navid, Payam and Shahin. Typical female names include Banu, Esta, Laleh, Nima, Simin and Ziba.

THE REGENCY OF DIMM

Ancestral Cache — Because of their uniquely pure Torrent ancestry, Dimmish characters with Rain Potential have a 2-card innate cache they may use when making Potential plays. Because of their recent intermarriages, Dimmish characters with Wind Potential may opt to have a I-card ancestral cache instead.

Cultural Cache — Dimmish characters have a I-card innate cache they can use when the circumstances of the play involve survival.

Typical Dimmish male names include Abram, Evengi, Kir, Stas and Yegor. Typical female names include Alyona, Katya, Nata, Sabina and Varya.

3. CHARACTER ATTRIBUTES

The third step is to generate three sets of starting attributes — abilities, skills and Potential. Abilities represent natural, innate character prowess and aptitudes. Skills represent areas of knowledge and physical proficiency in which the character has specific education, training and practice. Potential represents the elemental magic wielded by all Kin, but most powerfully by the Explorer Knights. For a new character, each set contains three unique attributes.

Unlike most roleplaying games, attributes in *UPWIND* are not selected from lists provided in the text. Instead, players are encouraged to craft their own evocative, custom descriptions that simultaneously describe who their characters are and what their characters can do. The attributes build on character concepts while also defining their capabilities.

ATTRIBUTE DESCRIPTORS

Attribute descriptions can be single words, short phrases or complete sentences. They can be idioms, proverbs, clichés, or quotes from favorite movies, novels, poems, or even song lyrics. The more sophisticated and evocative these descriptions, the more information they provide about who characters are and the more versatile, effective and fun the characters will be in play.

Example

- Strong
- Always Levelheaded
- Able to Tell When Someone Is Lying
- The Joke's on You
- I Aim to Misbehave
- It's a Dangerous Business, Going out Your Front Door
- Keep My Head When All around Me Are Losing Theirs
- It's the Eye of the [Large, Striped, Predatory Cat]. It's the Thrill of the [Violent Confrontation]!

An ability like *Strong* is useful but it is not very interesting and can be interpreted in so many ways; alternatively, the ability *Gentle Giant* implies both strength and size, as well as information about the character's personality and how he relates to and is seen by others. Because the ability describes more than just physical strength, it can be applied to different types of encounters. It can be applied to feats of strength or in combat, but it could also be used when size is an advantage or friendliness, approachability, calmness, kindness or a delicate touch are important.

The following are intended as examples and inspiration for what is possible for attributes, and players are encouraged to choose from these lists if they do not wish to create their own.

Example Attributes

Physical Abilities:

- Tough as Nails
- Fists of Iron
- Sneaky Bastard
- Quick as a Wink
- Nothing Gets by Me
- Cool under Pressure
- Feet Don't Fail Me Now
- Ain't Got Time to Bleed

Intellectual Abilities:

- Wise
- Clever Girl
- Mind like a Steel Trap
- Whose Bright Idea Was This?
- Sharp Sword, Sharper Wit
- Machines Just Speak to Me
- Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Social Abilities:

- Charming Lad
- Born Leader
- Lie like a Rug
- Can't Say No to Me
- Just One of the Boys
- Silver-Tongued Devil
- Soothe the Savage Beast
- Read You like a Book
- What Are You Gonna Do, Stand There and Bleed?
- Air of Destiny
- Can't Help but Trust This Face
- Good Judge of Character

Martial Skills:

- Swordsman
- Crack Shot
- Mama Bear
- Like a Bullet to the Head
- Ain't No Stoppin' Me Now
- Fastest Gun in the Kingdom
- Cut to the Heart of the Matter
- Thrust, Parry, Duck, Dodge



Subterfuge Skills:

- Like a Knife in the Dark
- Silent as a Mouse
- Walk Between the Raindrops
- With Friends Like These
- Always Know Which Way the Wind Is Blowing
- Fast-Talking Fixer

Technical Skills:

- Born Sailor
- Healing Hands
- Booming Orders
- Master of Disguise
- Mechanical Genius
- Gizmos and Wires and Cogs, Oh My!
- Living Off the Land
- No Matter Where You Go, There You Are

Academic Skills:

- Math Wiz
- Who Needs a Compass?
- I Read It in a Book Once
- Student of History
- Science Will Overcome
- Technobabble

Interpersonal Skills:

- Here, Kitty, Kitty
- We Have Ways of Making You Talk
- I Know a Guy
- Haven't Seen You Around Here Before
- Who Can Resist This Smile?
- I Could Sell Water to a Fish

Wind Potential:

- On the Fly
- Blowhard
- Biting Wind
- Windwalker
- Fly like the Wind
- Eyes like a Hawk
- Prescient Visions
- Flygirl

Ore Potential:

- Like a Rock
- Feet of Clay
- Stone-Faced
- Unstoppable Force Meets Immovable Object
- Monster Strength

Arc Potential:

- Thunderstorm
- Lightning Blast
- Burn, Baby, Burn
- Shocked and Appalled
- Now You See Me, Now You Don't
- Fast as Lightning
- Absolute Grace

Rain Potential:

- Hard Rain
- Fog of War
- Make it Rain
- Flow like Water
- Water, Water, Everywhere
- Terrifying Visage
- Force of Will
- Mindreader

EXAMPLE CHARACTER

Starting with the character concept “impulsive young hero,” the player wants to make a character who is high-spirited, energetic, acrobatic and overconfident. He chooses the following starting abilities:

My Enthusiasm Always Gets the Better of Me
You Little Monkey!

They Will Know My Name!

He wants the character to be a skilled sailor, a confident, improvisational fighter and good at hiding, getting away and finding people, so he writes the descriptors:

Hey, Sailor Boy!

Better than a Sharp Stick in the Eye
Which Way Did He Go?



Finally, the player wants the character to be able to actually fly, use Wind as a weapon, conjure golems and interact with the air like a living creature, so he creates the following Wind Potentials:

Flyboy

Blown Away

Invisible Friends

It is important that attributes be both specific and versatile. Attributes that are too generalized — for example *Jack of All Trades* or *Master of Everything* — allow characters to act in almost any circumstances, leaving no reason to ever use their other attributes or room for other characters to play their parts in the story. Conversely, traits that are too specific — for example *Master Calligrapher* or *Avid Coin Collector* — limit the circumstances under which a character may act, restricting her effectiveness.

It is also important to make each character's attributes distinct, with as little circumstantial overlap as possible. For example, a character with the skills *Sword Expert* and *Deadly With a Dagger* would be more versatile if he had *Deadly With a Blade*, and then perhaps *Living Compass* or *Cunning Tactician* as the second skill.

Players should work closely with the moderator to make sure their attribute descriptions are specific enough to maintain their interest and specify the roles of their characters, but broad enough to be applicable in a variety of circumstances.

ATTRIBUTE RANKS

Once a player has described all of his attributes, he must rank them 1 through 3 within each category — abilities, skills and Potential. These scores indicate the relative level of each attribute and the maximum number of cards a player may bid for each attribute during plays.

See the continuation of the impulsive hero example below. If the character is involved in a scrap or wants to intimidate someone with the threat of violence, the player could bid 2 cards with *Better than a Sharp Stick in the Eye*. If he is trying to navigate an airship, or regale someone with a tale of sailing prowess he could bid 3 cards with *Hey Sailor Boy!*

ATTRIBUTE SUITS

The final step in defining a character's attributes is to link each to one of the four card suits. This is done to thematically support the idea of elemental affinities and, more importantly, to add gamesmanship and unpredictability to the process of making plays.

Potential Suits — In Q, each of the four card suits stands for one of the four cardinal elements and every player must choose one of these suits and its corresponding element as his character's Potential affinity. Diamonds represent Ore, Clubs represent Arc, Hearts represent Rain and Spades represent Wind. These cards power their elemental attributes — their Potential — and players should choose their affinities specifically to fit their character concepts and support whatever supernatural powers they want their characters to have.

Example

A character with Ore powers could shape stone at will to tunnel through solid rock or create stone golems to protect the party's camp. A character with Arc powers could throw bolts of lightning or light fires at will. A character with Rain Potential could purify water or shape ice into a lethal blade, and someone with Wind Potential could fill a ship's sails and blast enemies aside.

The elements also hold magical influence over various physical and mental aspects of the Kin themselves, allowing characters to manifest fantastic supernatural powers. Being able to effectively tap these powers is what separates the Knights of the Guild from the common Kin. Ore (Diamonds) holds sway over physical strength, fortitude and health. Arc (Clubs) manifests in action, agility and speed. Rain (Hearts) represents healing, emotion and insight. Wind (Spades) represents thought, intelligence, perception and the senses. Accordingly, characters with a given affinity can manifest supernatural aspects of these corresponding mental and physical traits.

Example

A character with Ore affinity could have a Potential attribute that gives him magically enhanced strength. A character with Arc affinity could have a Potential that gives him supernatural speed. A character with psychic attributes or healing magic has an affinity with Rain, and one with Wind Potential could actually fly.

Non-Potential Suits — The three remaining, non-Potential, suits must also be linked to abilities and skills. It is up to the player which suits are assigned to which attributes, but it is recommended that the three suits be distributed optimally to maximize the chances of having applicable cards for each attribute. This is achieved by assigning one suit to a level 3 ability and a level 1 skill, then assigning a second suit to the level 3 skill and the level 1 ability. The third suit is then assigned to both level 2 attributes.

Example

Continuing with the example of the impulsive young hero, since his affinity is Wind, his Potential suit must be Spades. Given that, his player assigns Hearts, Diamonds and Clubs accordingly:

Abilities

My Enthusiasm Always Gets the Better of Me — 3, Hearts

You Little Monkey! — 2, Clubs

They Will Know My Name! — 1, Diamonds

Skills

Hey, Sailor Boy! — 3, Diamonds

Better than a Sharp Stick in the Eye — 2, Clubs

Which Way Did He Go? — 1, Hearts

Potential

Flyboy — 3, Spades

Blown Away — 2, Spades

Invisible Friends — 1, Spades

Remember that when a player or moderator makes a play, all the cards in his bid — not counting cache or crowning cards — must be of the suit assigned to the attribute he is using to resolve the encounter. This rule is essential to game balance.

Example

Elise is chasing the saboteur through the burning castle, and is using the ability Feet Don't Fail Me Now which she has at level 3, linked to Spades. The player has a full Play hand of 6 cards — the 2 of Hearts, the 6 and Jack of Spades, the 8 and 10 of Clubs and the 9 of Diamonds. Because the ability is linked to Spades and the player has only two cards in that suit, she can play only the 6 and Jack for a score of 16. If the player can figure out how to make the pursuit somehow tricky or clever, the moderator may allow her to use the Jack to crown the play, but without that bonus card she is limited to the 2 Spade cards in her hand, even though her ability would otherwise allow her to play up to 3 cards.

ATTRIBUTE BALANCE

Character attributes and powers can ultimately be anything the players can imagine, because it is intrinsically impossible to unbalance the primary game mechanic. Since the mechanism depends on simply comparing a specified number of cards, even the most extreme sounding attribute is constrained to the number of cards that can be played. A character with *Greatest Intellect in All the Kingdoms* at 3, and another with *Clever Boy* at 3, would be equally matched in a play to resolve a battle of wits.

APPLYING ATTRIBUTE DESCRIPTIONS

There are two advantages to using creative descriptions for attributes. First, they allow players to more evocatively represent the personalities and capabilities of their characters. A character with *Swordsman* is expected to be trained in the use of a blade, but knowing he is the *Finest Swordsman in All the Guild* implies the character is well-trained, disciplined, formidable, renowned and maybe even a good combat instructor.

Second, more evocative descriptions make it easier to apply attributes to diverse plays because they offer broader inspiration and justification for how they might relate to various circumstances. Having a skill defined by just the word “Swordsman” makes it clear that a character is a trained fighter. However, “Finest Swordsman in All the Guild” not only indicates great ability, but it also implies a level of fame and reputation that would allow the character to use the skill in noncombat encounters as well — in circumstances involving intimidation, cooperation and persuasion, or possibly even negotiation, diplomacy or seduction, depending on the specific type of interaction.

It is easy to imagine circumstances in which a character might have more than one attribute that could be applied to a given play; however, players may use only one attribute. In such cases, while the description of how an encounter plays out can acknowledge the narrative contribution of any number of the character’s applicable attributes, mechanically the play must be based on only a single attribute. It is therefore wise for players to construct their characters’ attribute descriptions with as little overlap as possible to maximize, and avoid redundancy in, their capabilities.

Examples

Whose Bright Idea Was This? could be applied when a character needs to resolve an encounter by being clever himself. The character could also use it to interrogate others, identify the culprit during an investigation or perhaps to jury-rig an arcane electrical device — especially one that lights up!

No Matter Where You Go, There You Are could be applied when navigational skill is essential to an encounter. It could be used to deduce where a fugitive is hiding. It could be used when a character wants to portray easygoing nonchalance, or when she wants to detect someone who might be spying on her.

Like a Bullet to the Head could be used literally in situations requiring exceptional marksmanship or lethality, but it could also be used forensically after the fact. It could be applied to encounters when definitive surprise is key to success, or when sudden, forceful or direct intent is essential.

Now You See Me, Now You Don’t could be applied as a Potential to make something supernaturally invisible or disappear. It could describe sleight-of-hand, allow a character to misdirect others or smuggle contraband or it could be used as a form of fast-talk that allows a character to confuse or mislead others.

Like abilities and skills, Potential can be applied as broadly and as creatively as the players are able to justify. With Potential, however, elemental affinities and their specific realms of influence add additional limits on just what a character can do. Therefore, players should be even more thoughtful in how they initially define and subsequently apply their characters’ Potential attributes.



Creative invention and interpretation of attributes is one of the most entertaining aspects of playing *UPWIND*, and it is an explicit expectation that players try to stretch their applicability as far as they can. Constructing and applying attributes in diverse, clever or even sneaky ways is an intentional part of the mechanics and is intended to promote gamesmanship in the interactions between the participants. Conversely, moderators should hold firm when they feel their game's particular levels of suspension of disbelief are at risk of being broken. They should feel free to deny a proposed use of any attribute that does not fit the style of their game or group, regardless of how cleverly or earnestly a player argues. Moderators have final discretion over whether a given attribute can be used to make a given play.

4. NOVICE RECRUITMENT

If the character is an Explorer Knight, the fourth step in the character creation process is to choose the way in which the character was recruited into the Guild. Though of no mechanical purpose, recruitment is a key element of the character's concept and background, providing roleplaying cues, story hooks and context for Academy Flashbacks. The details of these options are described in the section on Explorer Knights, but the essentials are offered here to inform character creation.

NOVICE FESTIVAL

The character was recruited through one of the Guild's many travelling Novice Festivals that work to spread Guild goodwill while scouring the realms for qualified candidates.

VOUCHSAFED

The character was sponsored by a ranking Knight who took on the responsibility of mentorship during her training.

KING'S QUOTA

The character was appointed by the terms of the Convocation Treaty, which allow each member nation to enroll a set quota of novices per cycle. Given the political stakes inherent in having capable countrymen in the Guild, such appointees are generally exceptional.

SPECIAL SELECTION

The least common means of recruitment, this rather vague designation covers any novice recruited for "the good of the Guild" and covers those chosen for specific abilities, backgrounds or Potential, despite possible deficiencies in other, more traditional qualifications.

5. CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

The fifth step is to provide some essential description of the character's physical appearance and personality. This should be as simple or as complex as the character concept or enthusiasm of the player merits, but there should be enough for the other participants to reference in their roleplaying and narrative descriptions.

The characteristic traits of each of the ancestral lineages and the cultures that have resulted from their isolation since the DownFall provide cues for these physical descriptions and are detailed in the section on the *Kingdoms and Cultures* (pages 23–42). Personality traits are unique to the character's concept, and though they are left to individual players to create, the premise of *UPWIND* encourages larger-than-life, archetypal personas.

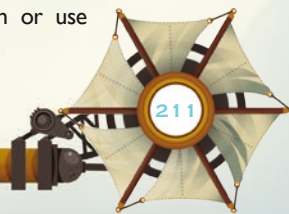
6. TALENT CACHE

The sixth step is to create a talent cache unique to the character that reinforces or enhances the character's concept and attributes. Talent descriptions and triggers are designed by the player, with the approval of the moderator, and these caches replenish at the start of each game session. See the section on *Talent Caches*, page 198 for specific details about the intention and function of these caches.

7. RELIC DESIGN

The seventh step is to design a character-specific Relic. A selection of sample Relics can be found in the *Relics* section on page 97.

Relics are usually unique pieces of arcanotechnology bequeathed to individual Knights based on their proven ability to exploit its particular properties. Though they can be mundane, most were created with or use



elemental magic. They are exceptionally rare and valuable and usually passed from master to apprentice, mentor to student or captain to Knight.

Descriptively and functionally, Relics can be just about anything and are designed cooperatively by the players and the moderator. They should give careful thought to what they design and base it on character concepts. This is a chance to give characters specific abilities, powers and styles that enhance their background stories, intended personalities and roles in the group. The possibilities are limited only by player imagination and provide the opportunity for ingenuity, creativity and a little power-gaming.

Moderators and players should work together to devise appropriate powers and rules for any given Relic, with the understanding that if any ability is subsequently found to be excessive or broken, the effects will be modified.

In game terms, Relics should have four components: Name, Narrative Effect, Mechanical Effect and Activation.

NAME

Naming Relics is traditional, and said names are usually as baroquely functional as the items themselves. As so many Relics are passed from generation to generation it is also common to name them after the most famous Knight or organization to have possessed them, lending many a sense of history. Some Relics, therefore, have storied lineages and have become as famous themselves as the Guild heroes who once used them.

NARRATIVE EFFECT

Relics should have a useful and interesting qualitative effect or ability, one that can be used narratively. They should give their users additional or expanded abilities, powers, knowledge or resources.

MECHANICAL EFFECT

Relics should also have a mechanical effect, one that somehow affects the use or play of specific cards or suits, or provides the character with a specific cache. They could even alter the ways specific cards are used in play — they could change the number, value, suit, hand size, refresh rate, discard rules or similar mechanical features.

ACTIVATION

Relics should also have specifically defined activation conditions — either in-game or as part of the metagame — under which the Relic's effects occur or can be used.

8. GEAR LIST

The final step is to note any specific gear with which the character is beginning play. Note that the Guild typically issues Knights their essential equipment and that they can generally requisition mission-specific gear as needed. The only limits on such requisitions should be those of good storytelling — plot reasons why characters should not have access to a particular item or why they should have to work to acquire the item through game play.

The moderator has final discretion as to whether a character may have a given item and she should keep in mind the intent of the three levels of character resources — personnel, Guild and plot — as she makes those determinations.

CHARACTER RESOURCES

Money is important in most roleplaying games because it is often a goal of adventuring in itself or the means by which characters acquire interesting new equipment and powers. In *UPWIND*, especially when the characters are Explorer Knights, money becomes an element of plot more than practicality or advancement. Most of the characters' needs — equipment, housing, food, petty expenses — are provided for by the Guild, either through the quartermaster or wages. Additionally, most all the magic in the game is inherent to the characters themselves or the Relics bestowed on them or found during their explorations. Buying new powers or magical items therefore really isn't within the scope of the setting.

As a result, the *UPWIND* rules do not specify starting money, wages, equipment prices or service costs. The practicalities of monetary exchange are simplified within the context of the rules, if not the actual narrative of the stories. There are three resource levels in the game, each representing a different kind of potential character expense or asset and a specific aspect of play.



Personal Resources

Personal resources are those required by individual characters and are typically covered by their wages, savings, family money or other personal finances. These include rents or household expenses, food and personal wares, entertainment, casual gambling, gifts, minor bribes and the like. These are things a player can just assume his character has or can buy without keeping track of ingots, hawks or chicks.

Moderators should allow player characters to make whatever personal purchases they wish as long as they are reasonable and do not directly leverage the story. It is assumed that unless it's a matter of plot, whatever a character's income, it meets his clock-to-clock expenses.

Guild Resources

Guild resources represent the benefit of supplies and equipment that are either permanently issued or temporarily assigned to characters by the Guild quartermasters in place of having to purchase that gear themselves. These items include weapons, specialty clothing, armor, tools, spare parts, food and rations, certain arcano-technology, exploration equipment, ship's stores and even ships themselves. Though they are expected to return such equipment in good working order, it effectively belongs to the Knights to whom it is assigned, and they are trusted to use it however it is needed.

Moderators should allow player characters to requisition any equipment or supplies from Guild quartermasters that would be reasonable for them to receive as part of a particular task, mission or assignment. This said, it is often fun to include roleplaying opportunities or even small plays when haggling with cagey old quartermaster NPCs.

Plot Resources

These are resources that somehow impact or leverage the plot or the potential actions of the player characters. They are generally large sums of money on which the plot circumstances, motivation or resolution depend, but to which the characters do not have ready access. These expenses serve as complications or obstacles that the characters must overcome as part of the story. They might include funds to pay a ransom or buy the location of a Masters' cache from a greedy prospector. They might include

recovering a stolen ingot shipment or bribing a Vault politician to give up a bandit hideout.

Plot-based expenses might also include story elements unique to the motivations and goals of individual characters. Perhaps a character is saving money as a dowry for his sister, to pay off a big gambling debt or to buy a tavern to occupy his retirement.

Whatever complications these expenses represent, they should never be a matter of counting up chicks and doves to pay for it. Like all outcomes in *UPWIND*, acquiring enough money — whatever “enough” might happen to be — should always be a direct result of roleplaying, story and plot rather than accounting. Moderators should build the funding of plot-based expenses into the goals of their adventures and the outcomes of plays, allowing characters to achieve or pay for them by events within the narrative.

When it is interesting within the narrative, moderators should feel free to make acquisition of even personal resources a plot-based part of the story — a focus of the game or a secondary challenge for the characters.

If a group opts to play non-Knight characters, the players are opting for characters who do not have the deep resources of the Explorers Guild, so they are likely intentionally limiting themselves. In these cases, the above guidelines still apply, but with a few caveats.

Characters can still purchase whatever personal items are appropriate, but moderators should tighten or loosen the relative purse strings depending upon whether the characters are down and out pirates or well-heeled agents of the Crown.

Non-Knight characters also lose access to equipment issued by the Guild quartermasters. Again, this might not be an issue if they are members of the Skyreach Delvers' Society, but if they are a tramp freighter crew, any major cost becomes a plot expense.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

As characters go through their adventures, they gain experience and their attributes improve. Q models this by giving players





additional cards to add to their characters' current scores, or with which they can train up new abilities, skills or Potential powers.

Players should use the tally bubbles associated with each attribute on the character sheet to keep a running count of how often they make plays with a given attribute, whether they succeed or not, since characters often learn more from setbacks than from triumphs. Every time a player reaches three times the current score of a given attribute, she can add one additional card to that attribute's score, up to the maximum limit of 3. This means that after three uses of a value 1 attribute, the player should increase that score to 2. After six more uses, she should then raise that score to a 3. Note that after each advancement, the tally bubbles should be cleared of marks and reset.

Additionally, every time a character earns a rank increase in this way, the player may edit the words or phrase describing the advancing attribute. This simulates the inevitable refinements in a character's understanding and expansion of her attributes as she becomes more experienced. It allows players to better define their characters based on how they see them or have been playing them, supporting the sense that the character is growing and changing realistically.

These changes are not drastic rewrites — *Master Swordsman* to *Master Brewer* — but should retain their original intent while adding background, scope or nuance. The additions should ultimately say something new about the character and make his capabilities more broadly applicable.

Marks toward advancement should also be earned from plays made during flashback scenes.

Such advancement represents the value of past experience in providing insight and understanding in the present.

Though score advancements top out at 3, players should continue to track attribute uses because refinements to characters attributes continue throughout their lives, and every time an attribute of 3 is used a multiple of nine times, the player may still edit — refine or add to — that attribute's description.

Example

The attribute Swordsman could be upgraded to Uncanny Swordsman, then it could be advanced to Sword Master of the Guild, then Deadliest Swordsman in the Realms, with each edit adding a new level of character development and broader attribute applicability.

Players should also mark any default plays on the designated tracks on their character sheets. After three default draws of any kind — successful or not — a player may add an entirely new attribute of his choosing to his character and give it a score of 1. This attribute must be assigned a suit of the player's choice and may subsequently be used and advanced normally.

When a character earns 3 new attribute ranks the moderator may opt to have the Guild grant the character an additional Blaze of Rank, denoting continued experience and advancement within the Order. The moderator and player should work together to determine just why the Blaze was awarded. The promotion can be granted during play or between adventures, but either way the reason for the Blaze should be noted on the character's sheet under Blazes as a record of her ongoing adventures.



CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT



+ NAME +

+ CONCEPT +

+ AFFINITY +

UPWIND

A ROLEPLAYING FABLE OF LOST SCIENCE,
ELEMENTAL MAGIC AND UNCHARTED SKIES.

DEFAULTS - ○○○ ○○○ ○○○

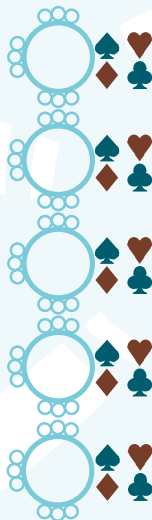
+ NATIONALITY +

+ APPEARANCE +

+ AGE +

+ RECRUITMENT +

+ SKILLS +



+ CROWNING CARDS +

JACKS — TRICKERY, DECEPTION, SUBTERFUGE,
THIEVERY — NEFARIOUS DOINGS

QUEENS — WISDOM, HEALING, COMPASSION, LOVE,
CHARISMA, NEGOTIATION, KNOWLEDGE, DEFENSE —
NURTURING REASON

KINGS — COMBAT, STRATEGY, LEADERSHIP,
NOBILITY, DIPLOMACY — FORCEFUL AUTHORITY

ACES — CROWN ANY PLAY REGARDLESS
OF CIRCUMSTANCES

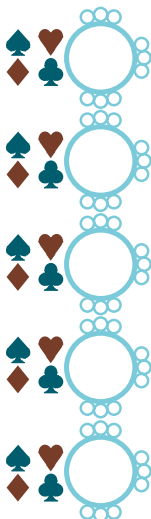
+ ELEMENTAL SUITS +

WIND/INTELLIGENCE & PERCEPTION
ORE/STRENGTH, FORTITUDE & HEALTH



RAIN/EMOTION, INSIGHT & HEALING
ARC/AGILITY & SPEED

+ ABILITIES +



+ POTENTIAL +



+ POTENTIAL DISCARDS +

+ POTENTIAL DECK +

+ POTENTIAL HAND +

✦ CACHES ✦

INNATE	☐	KNIGHTS'
INNATE	☐	ANCESTRAL
INNATE	☐	CULTURE
INNATE	☐	TRIGGER
INNATE	☐	TRAIT
INNATE	☐	TRIGGER
INNATE	☐	TYPE
STORY	☐	TRIGGER
INNATE	☐	TYPE
STORY	☐	TRIGGER
INNATE	☐	TYPE
STORY	☐	TRIGGER
INNATE	☐	TYPE
STORY	☐	TRIGGER

✦ RELIC ✦

NAME

EFFECTS

NARRATIVE

MECHANICAL

ACTIVATION

✦ EQUIPMENT ✦

✦ BLAZES ✦

☐	GRADUATION
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	

✦ CONSEQUENCES ✦

✦ PLAY DISCARDS ✦

✦ PLAY DECK ✦

✦ PLAY HAND ✦

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UPWIND KICKSTARTER BACKERS

YOUR FAITH IN THE UPWIND PROJECT BROUGHT IT TO LIFE,
AND OUR GRATITUDE IS AS BIG AS THE UNCHARTED SKIES.
THANK YOU ALL.

NOVICES

Amanda Bryant
Ben Blanding
Brendell
Brent Barber
Danny Ketzner
Darren Buckley
Doug "Dhoma!" Raas
Eamon Wyler

Jason B.
Jere Manninen
Jon Boylan
Kholan "the Ravenmocker"
Inage'ehi
Kurt Ik
Leron Culbreath
Limitless-Adventures.com

Michael Ramsey
Paul Bachleda
Radagast
Robert Calpo
Role Playing Public Radio
Tasha Turner

APPRENTICES

Aaron J. Schrader
Aaron J. Shelton
Adam & Laura
Adam Manleg
Andre Canivet
Anonymous
Badger
Bert Isla
Brad Osborne
Brett Volz
Chris Reed
Clint Slocum
Colin Thompson
Colin Wilson
Dan Preston
Daniel Strode
David
David Ginsburg w/Tales from the
Fandom podcast
Davis D. Morgan
Derek Guder
Dev

Don Kamillo
Eric Kimball
erietheoddone@gmail.com
Fabian S.
Frank C. Carr
Gandalf I 58
Glenn Butcher
Hein Ragas
Jacob Converset
James Dillane
Jason Carter
Jason Hockley
Jason Martin
Jason Pitre
Joe England
Jorge Coto Bautista "Tiberio"
Kage Guenther
Ken Ringwald
Kenneth Tedrick
Leland Carlson
Malcolm Coull
Mark Griffin
Mark R. Lesniewski
Matthew Gabbert
Matthew Keevil
Michael Hill

Michael Hobson
Morgan Jenkins
N. Trevor Brierly
nhowardaa@gmail.com
Patrick W. Rollens
Peter Lau
R.J. Dennis
Rob Lowry
Robert Bealer
Ryan A. Mannix
Shana L. Horn
Sharbert
Sir Soggy Bottom the Brave
Stefan L.
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Steve Foerster
Stew Skeel
Szabadi DÁvid
Tabitha Moon
The Raden Explorers
Thomas P. Kurilla
Travis Bryant
You Don't Meet In An Inn
Yves SIMON



JOURNEYMEN

A. Aguirre	Greg Benage	mollydomino@gmail.com
Aaron Williams	Happy to support Upwind RPG	MrCyclone
Adam McKinney Souza	Ivan Donati	N.Tanksley
adumbratus	Jack & Henry	Neal Tanner
Albert Nakano	Jamey Minnis	Neil Smith
Alcethenecromancer	Jamie Shaske	Nesox Kalim
Allen Varney	Jane D.	ngreennz
Andrew Lotton	Jason Corley	Nick Bate
Andrew Moreton	Jason F. Broadley	oveIkenobi
Andrew Piseck	Jeb Boyt	paradoja
Andrew Rowe	Jeremy Seeley	Patrice Mermoud
Angie Pettenato	Jerry L. Meyer Jr.	Paul Kutscha
AYUKATA Taka'aki	Jim Moss	Paul Schifferer
Baba Geek Games	John Hildebrand	Phillip Bailey
baradaelin	John "johnkzin" Rudd	Reverance Pavane
Ben Hesketh	John Signorino	Richard Pleyer
Benjamin Verschell	Jonathan Korman	Robert Biddle
Black Eagle	Jordan White	Roberto Mandrioli
Blake Ryan Batman	Kao the Vamp	Samuel Klingensmith
Brandon "Xar" McKee	Keith Mantell	Sascha Klein
Breaze	Kenny Beecher	Scott Henderson
Brendan Sheehan	Kevin G.	Scott Maclure
Captain Crow	Kevin Henley	Scott William & Keith Heyden
Carl L. Gilchrist	Lawjick	Sean Kay
Chad Vicenik	Lester Ward	Silvio Herrera Gea
Charles Chapman	Malcolm Edwards	Simon Brunning
Chris Michael Jahn	Mara Smith	Sir Snugglesworth
Chris Vogler	Marek Benes	Snowball
Christian Caron	Mark Carter	Stephen Rider
Christopher Maloney	Martin Schramm	Steve Abrams
Christopher Peregrin Stilson	Matteo Signorini	Steve Lord
Clancy Cunningham	Matthew J. Entecott	Stuart Skilton
Coman Fullard	Matthieu Blanchard	Svend Andersen
Corey Sulenes	Mauro Adorna	Tadeusz Cantwell
Daniel Sfiligoi	Max Kaehn	Terry L. Gilbert Jr.
Dara McMahon	Megan "Nezumi" Greathouse	Tianlong
Darlene	Michael Beck	Tom Ladegard
David Poulton	Michael P. Charlton	Tomi Pohjalainen
David Stephenson	Michael De Rosa	Trip Space-Parasite
Emily Daniels	Michael Macaulay	Tristan Merrick
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Eric Bright	Michael Schuller	Tyler Brenman
fg hj	Michael Scott Mears	Vincent Arebalo
Francis Mburu	Michele "Snake" Gelli	Warren P Nelson
Fred Schwerdt	Mike Maxson	WVP
Gilbert Podell-Blume	Mitch A. Williams	Yes

AGENTS OF THE GUILD

Dianne Matthaai	Jane Barber (My awesome mom!)	The Chu Family
Jan Lind	Ken Chu	



UPWIND KICKSTARTER BACKERS



EXPLORER KNIGHTS

Aaron Fox
Adam Franti
Adam Thornsburg
Adam Waggenpack
Akos Szederjei
Anonymous
Arthur Challenger Oemke
Brian and Leah Marshall
Bryan Hall-Wood
C.D. Mower
Charlotte Scott
Chris Cirillo
Chris Constantine
Copernicus Crane
Cortney Gerken
Cory Garcia
Crysta Swarts
Dakota P.
Dan Kassidy
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David Dalton
David Larkins
David Turner
Edward MacGregor
Ella Rosemary Romano
Eric Coates

Faelan S.
Floyd & Joan Uthe
Gabe Benensky
Gabe Tanenhaus
Gary Liu
George Pitre
Ian van de Laar
Ignatius Montenegro
J. Harmon
Jaenen
Jbluekey
Jcdellapenna@gmail.com
Jim Heivilin
JJ Maloney
John A. W. Phillips
John D. Burnham
Josh DeVaney
Ken Finlayson
Kevin Marshall
Kyle Mays
Lakshman Godbole
Lily Stadler
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Matt Evans
Matt Houle
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Micah Nielsen
Michael Feldhusen
Nick Kupiec
Oronar
Peter Holthaus
Peter Sampson
Peter Sinkis
Preston Buck
Raphael Bombayl
Relshore
Rich Howard
RLittle
Robert and Amanda Daley
Robin "Cero" Gonzales
Sabrina Klevenow
Scott Neilson
Sean Toland
Shaun Parry
sigriststoneandtile@gmail.com
Stanley Swierzewski
Tanya Beeson
The Freelancing Roleplayer
thomaspiekar@gmail.com
Tyler Arnett
Victor W. Allen
Woody Roberts

KNIGHT CAPTAINS

Adrian Tymes
Aileen Miles
Alan Bahr
Andrew Fitzgibbons
Andy Winham & Christina Lee
Anthony Perkins
Aser Tolentino
Big Al
Brian Strange
Bruce W. Snow Jr.
Charles Myers
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Civ Light
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Eversong
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Guy Garnett
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Jason Italiano
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Knight Captain Joshua Robert
Brooks, First of His Name
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Matthew "Opirian" Tracy
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Nick Anglim
Nick Brooke
Omar Amador
Peter Baldwin
Phillip Stewart
Quentin Bell
Richard Mundy
Robb Minneman
Ron Johnson
Sajaan 9000
Thomas Fritz
timestalker2022@gmail.com
Vladimir FilipoviÄ±
Weird Beard
Will Kohlway



CAPTAINS

Aidedfurball (Alan Howerton)
Chee Lup Wan
David D.

Erich Lichnock
Francis Helie
Rod Holdsworth

Thomas Clayton
Xenos Floop Witch

SKY CAPTAINS

(A)ndrew
Allan T. Grohe Jr. ("grodog")
Benjamin Horning
Brian "Commodore Stargazer"
Whitcraft
Brother Tom
David Futterer
Dr. Donald A. Turner
Hika Ri
Ingrid Emilsson

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HIGH CAPTAIN

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CHILDREN OF THE DARK

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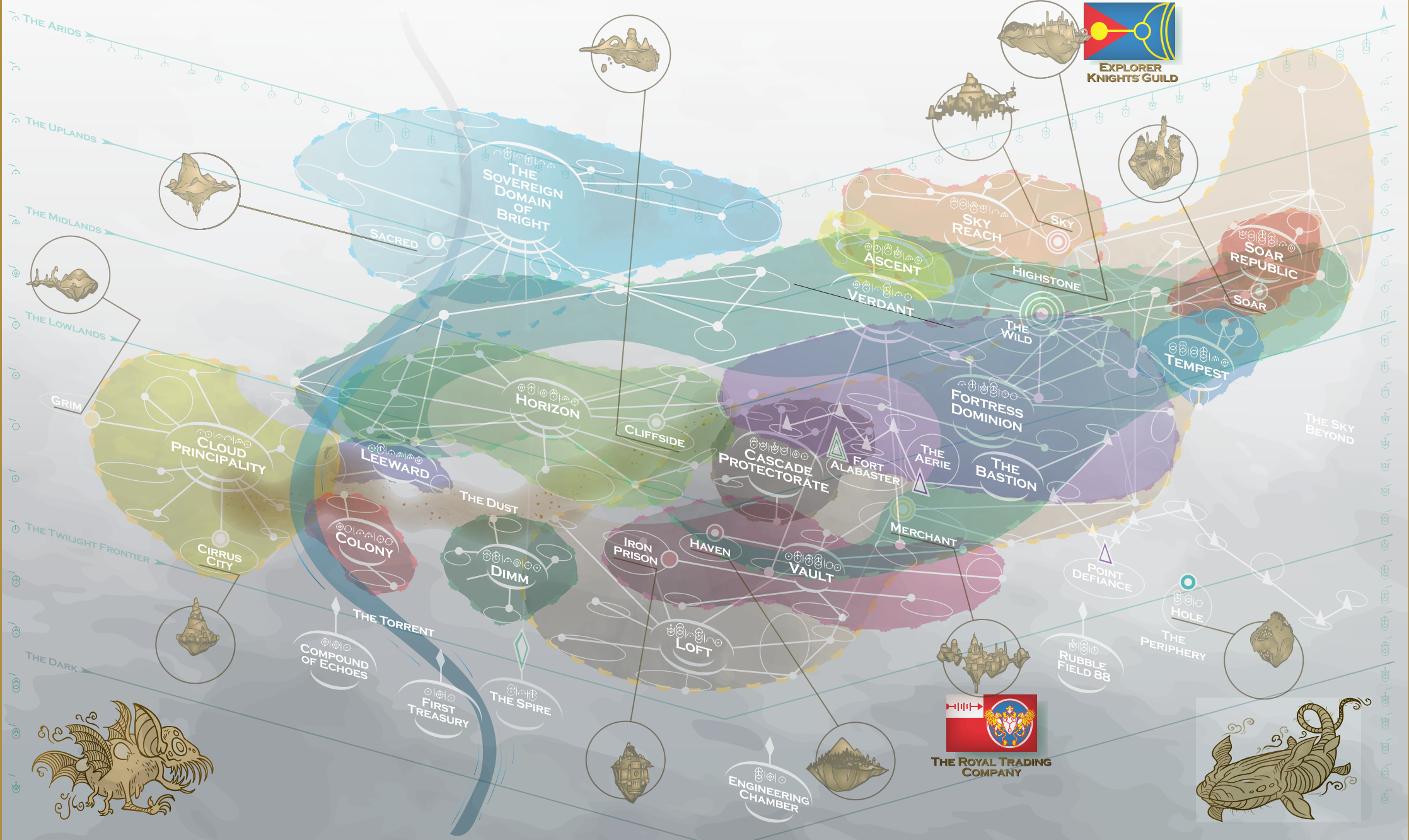
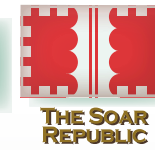
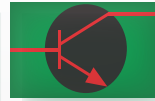
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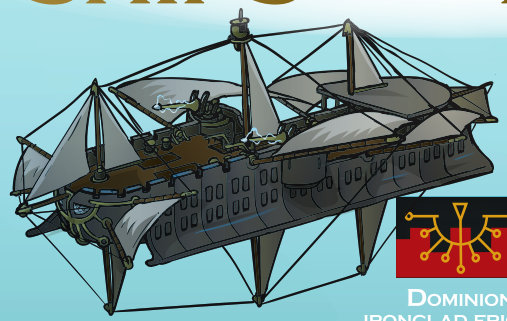
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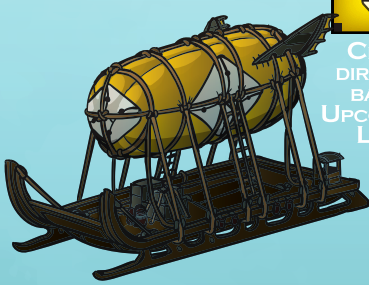
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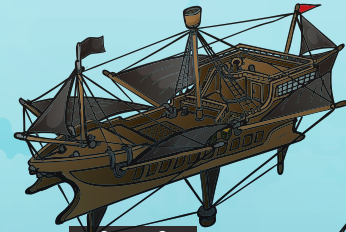
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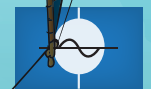
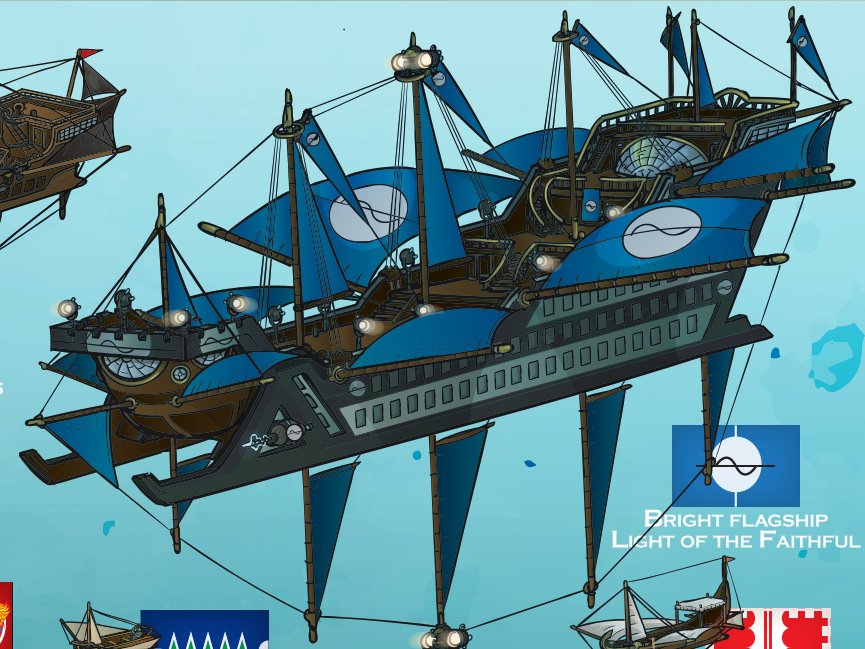
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DEFIANCE



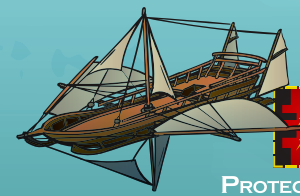
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PIRATE CORVETTE
HARSH MISTRESS



BRIGHT FLAGSHIP
LIGHT OF THE FAITHFUL



PROTECTORATE CUTTER
WIND EAGLE



SKYREACH
GUNBOAT
SUDDEN
ARROW



ROYAL TRADING
COMPANY FREIGHTER
WINGS OF PROFIT

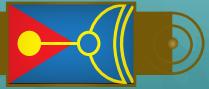


VERDANT
SKIFF



SOAR REPUBLIC
PINNACLE

EXPLORERS' GUILD



WARSHIP
EGS DOMINION



CORVETTE
EGS SWIFT



CAPTAIN'S
LAUNCH



FREIGHTER
EGS UNSTOPPABLE

CHILDREN OF THE DARK



PATROLCRAFT
EARNEST PREDATOR



FREIGHTER
NEEDS BEARER



DREADNOUGHT
DEAD MAKER

THE UNCHARTED SKIES

A fragmented realm of countless islands drifting through a boundless ether.

THE LIGHT

A sourceless glow from the skies above that warms the Kingdoms of the Kin and keeps the Children of the Dark at bay.

THE DARK

A hidden world below — a shadowed dominion of lethal dangers and ancient enemies.

THE WIND

The potent force of elemental power that forever blows from the Dark toward the Light.

THE EXPLORER KNIGHTS

A powerful cadre of scholars, warriors and elementalists who explore the shadows, defend the Kingdoms and defy the Dark.

THE ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY

Arc-powered wonders scavenged from the remnants of the long-vanished Masters of the Wind.

THE TWILIGHT FRONTIER

The shadowed realm of ancient ruins and lost science — the final battleground between Kin and Child.

WELCOME TO THE SKIES OF UPWIND

You are an Explorer Knight. You are unique in all the skylands. That's why the Guild recruited you. You've survived the Academy, honed your Potential and now wield extraordinary powers. You have stalwart crewmates, fleets of skyships, supernatural Relics and ancient technology all at your command. Even so, can you survive your first voyage into the Twilight Frontier? Can you survive your first encounter with the Children of the Dark? Can you protect the Kingdoms in the Light and save civilization?

Upwind is a Studio Ghibli-inspired fable — a Tesla-punk roleplaying game powered by the narrative Q system. The stakes-based, playing card-driven mechanics give every encounter consequences with meaningful, story-building outcomes. With its simple bidding rules, Upwind plays as fast as you can tell your tale.

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